



THE FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVERTISING SLOGANS

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Annotation

Advertising slogans are important aspects in brand development. While slogans are an important part of a company's marketing strategy and branding process, it is important to understand the fundamentals of what slogans are, how they differ from other marketing tools, the various types of slogans, and the final steps towards the treasure of a catchy, creative, and commendable slogan. Slogans are short, memorable phrases used to summarise the attraction of a product to potential clients. Slogans, like the corporate logo, have the power to make or break a brand's image.

A slogan is a brief and indelible phrase that encompasses an offering's appeal. Slogans are always defined as "short and brief". There exists a psychological rationale for this – it is believed that it takes almost **7 seconds to form a first impression**. Therefore, slogans ought to be "short and brief". The next part of the definition terms slogans as an "indelible phrase". This is because slogans are meant to be memorable and catchy. The indelible element may be through the way of a rhyming scheme or humor or pop-culture references.

It has been stated that foreign languages are utilised in advertising largely for their symbolic significance (the prejudices they elicit), and that consumers' knowledge of the foreign language used is consequently secondary importance. The effect of foreign language difficulties in advertising slogans has been studied experimentally, with an emphasis on how difficulty affects appreciation of the slogan. The present study sought to evaluate the effect of difficult versus simple English slogans in product advertising on ratings that went beyond text evaluation. In a within-subjects experimental design, 128 Dutch participants rated six Dutch advertisements with difficult and simple English slogans. The dependent variables included evaluation of the slogan, attitudes toward the ad and product, and purchase intention. Findings showed that the easy English slogans were evaluated better than the difficult English slogans and generally resulted in a better attitude toward the ad and toward the product and in a higher purchase intention. Thus, difficult-to-understand foreign-language slogans were found to have negative effects on ad effectiveness, which extended beyond text evaluation.

In advertising in countries where English is not the native language, advertisers regularly use English (Bhatia 1992; Piller 2003). As Piller (2003, 175) observes, "English is the most frequently used language in advertising messages in non-English-speaking countries (besides the local language, of course)." The Netherlands is one example of a country where English is frequently used in advertising. Of the 325 advertisements in the Dutch edition of *Elle* published in 2004, for instance, 64 percent contained one or more English words (Gerritsen et al. 2007). Since English is a nonnative language for consumers in countries such as the Netherlands, English in advertising may not always be comprehended. In fact, Gerritsen et al. (2010) found that 39 percent of English phrases in print medium ads were not described correctly by participants from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. The question,

therefore, is to what extent comprehension of English in advertisements is important in persuading consumers.

In the Netherlands, consumers may be expected to be relatively highly familiar with English. In education, pupils are taught English from primary school onward and English is compulsory at all levels of secondary schools (Bonnet 2002, 45). Many institutions of higher education offer English-taught bachelors and master's programs (Coleman 2006; Brenn-White and van Rest 2012). In a recent survey, 90 percent of Dutch respondents indicated that they spoke English well enough to take part in a conversation, versus a European average of 38 percent (Eurobarometer 2012, 21). The Netherlands ranks second among 70 countries worldwide in the English Proficiency Index (Education First 2013), based on English proficiency tests. In addition, English is omnipresent in the media. The majority of films and TV series are broadcast in their original English-language version with subtitles (Edwards 2016, 48–51). In advertising, English words and phrases are commonly used both in print media and in commercials on radio and television, while all-English advertisements are also used but less frequently (Gerritsen et al. 2000; Gerritsen et al. 2007; Raedts et al. 2015).

In the literature of foreign languages in advertising, it is often observed that comprehension of foreign-language utterances is of minor importance, because the point of using foreign languages is not to convey the content of the message but the symbolic significance of the foreign language (e.g., Haarmann 1989; Ray, Ryder, and Scott 1991; Piller 2003; 2001; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Kuppens 2010). Piller (2001, 163), for instance, remarks that “even if the audience does not understand the denotational message of the English [...] they will recognize that the message is in English, and they will activate their stereotypes about English.” In this view, a consumer who does not know the meaning of an English word or phrase in an ad will at least recognize that it is English. This recognition is thought to evoke stereotypes about English, which are subsequently transferred to the product advertised. Stereotypical associations evoked by English include notions such as modernity, prestige, international orientation, and sophistication (Kelly-Holmes 2000, 67; Piller 2003, 175; Kuppens 2010, 116–117; Tufi and Blackwood 2010; Potowski 2011; Taylor-Leech 2012; Santello 2015, 4; Manan et al. 2015). Kuppens (2010, 116) observes that advertisements sometimes contain “meaningless words or sentences that only sound English,” illustrating that what matters is not the meaning of the foreign language used in the ad, but the image conjured up by the foreign language.

The literature on the role of comprehension in the persuasion process argues that less understanding leads to less persuasion because a message that is less well understood is appreciated less (Eagly 1974, for a discussion see Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991). The findings of a small number of empirical studies on the effect of comprehension of a foreign language in advertisements seem to support this view. One study showed that the attitude of Dutch viewers toward spoken English phrases in television commercials was predicted by the degree of accuracy of their transcriptions of these phrases (an indirect measure of comprehension) (Gerritsen et al. 2000). Two other studies with Dutch participants revealed that easy French and English slogans were appreciated more than difficult slogans in these languages (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). These two studies also showed that when the French and English slogans were easy, the participants preferred the ads with French and English slogans to ads with Dutch translations of these slogans. For the difficult French slogans, participants had a preference for ads with the Dutch translations of these slogans (Hornikx and Starren 2006). For the difficult English slogans, there were no differences in preference (Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). The studies by Hornikx and Starren (2006) and Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010) used the complexity of slogans (difficult–easy) as a measure of comprehension. In both studies, the relationship between complexity and comprehension was tested in a pretest, which showed that difficult slogans were more frequently mistranslated and were rated as more difficult than the easy slogans. In addition, Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010) showed that the slogans that were more often translated incorrectly and were rated as more difficult were appreciated less. Thus, these two studies indicate a clear link between predetermined complexity and actual and perceived comprehension.

Research on the effect of the difficulty of foreign-language slogans to date has a number of limitations. The only dependent variable measured was appreciation of the ad or of the English used in the ad. Earlier research has shown that attitude toward the ad can affect the attitude toward the advertised brand

(product) and purchase intention (see the meta-analysis in Brown and Stayman 1992). However, the effect of difficulty on attitude toward the product and purchase intention has not yet been investigated. These two variables can be regarded as more direct measures of persuasion than appreciation of the advertisement and of the language in the ad. These variables would seem to be more directly related to the ultimate goal of product advertising: selling the product.

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