

**ENGLISH OR LOCAL LANGUAGE IN ROMANIAN ADVERTISING /
L'ANGLAIS OU LA LANGUE AUTOCHTONE DANS LA PUBLICITÉ
ROUMAINE / ENGLEZA SAU LIMBA LOCALĂ ÎN PUBLICITATEA
ROMÂNEASCĂ¹**

Abstract: English is the most frequent foreign language used in international advertising when brands target a global market. This paper aims to examine the preference for English versus Romanian language in advertising texts or slogans, the degree of comprehension of English advertising by Romanian consumers, and the possible significance that language choice may have on consumer behavior and perception of the brand.

Key words: English, Romanian, slogans, advertising

Introduction

Developments in technology that allow companies to sell worldwide and changes in social behavior over the last decades have paved the way to globalization. As far back as 1983, professor Levitt forecast that business would become globalized and that technological progress would impact business at global level: 'A powerful force drives the world toward a converging commonality, and that force is technology. [...] The result is a new commercial reality—the emergence of global markets for standardized consumer products on a previously unimagined scale of magnitude' (Levitt, 1983).

Globalization has led to brands' expansion into new foreign markets and consequently engendered the need for consistency worldwide in terms of language use, logo and content. As concerns the adoption of the most suitable linguistic tool for globalization, previous studies in the field have showed that English is the choice in international advertising, 'the chosen language of global advertisers', 'the most favored language of global media and advertising and its use is skyrocketing' (Bhatia, 2006: 601). Although the dominance of English in all international campaigns is an established fact these days, the business environment still faces a strategic option between standardization versus adaptation approach in international communications. Standardization is about promoting a global corporate image, using the same advertising message, a unique brand language, logo, slogan and campaign in different countries which naturally leads to comfort and substantial cost savings for the company. On the other hand, regardless of the various advantages that standardized advertising brings along, it has attracted widespread criticism and adaptation of the marketing strategies to fit the unique requirements of each local market had to be taken into consideration and evaluated (Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004).

As opposed to the shortcomings of standardization, a different approach was considered in order to fulfill the need for adjustment to the characteristics of each local culture. The adaptation approach is based on cultural studies (Hofstede, 2001) and focuses on the idea that advertising messages that appeal to important cultural values are by far more persuasive as they address local beliefs, tastes, needs and better fit specific market demands.

Among specialists in the field of advertising, communications, linguistics, there is a growing concern and debate about whether to opt for homogeneity or local adjustment,

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whether to use the same message, content, and the same linguistic vehicle or customize it to the local audience and cultural values. Thus, standardization versus adaptation matter in international advertising has engendered a new issue in linguistics, namely English versus local language. Whether a standardized ad or slogan in English better appeals to the target audience than an adapted one in the local language is still a matter of debate. There have been several studies that address the matter of language choice in international advertising, and that assess the preference for English versus local language. In 2007, in a study that analyzed English in print advertising in Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands, Gerritsen et al. found no significant differences in the effectiveness of English language used in ads when compared with ads in the local language, except for one case when the local language was perceived to trigger a more positive attitude towards the brand or product. Other studies have also showed that local language use engenders a better response in advertising than English (Puntoni et al., 2008; Ahn & La Ferle, 2008). Yet, the study of Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) displays a preference for English versus local language: the English slogan was assessed more positively than the Hindi one for a luxury item, while the Hindi slogan for a necessity item was preferred to the English version.

Therefore, the choice of language in global advertising, the preference for English versus local language is not a settled issue yet, but still open to debate and thorough investigation.

Methodology

In the light of the current findings mentioned above, our study proposes to investigate the choice of English versus Romanian language for global brands in Romanian advertising market. Our aim is to assess the attitude and preference of Romanian consumers for English advertising, the degree of comprehension of English slogans, and the presence of English advertising texts or slogans in online media.

Given the objectives of our investigation, we used the questionnaire method for data collection and designed a set of questions for gathering information from Romanian consumers about their choice regarding English or Romanian advertising messages. The study group consisted of Romanian consumers, randomly selected from various fields of activity within Constanta city. The research has been carried out on 100 respondents who accepted to answer our questionnaire. Regarding the gender variable, the majority of respondents were female (72%), and only 28% male participants. Age distribution across our sample varied, with a prevalence of people over 40 years old (38%), while 28% were aged between 20 and 30 years old, and 34% between 30 and 40 years old. All of them were employed, both part-time and full time.

We also selected a number of global slogans in English and asked the respondents to translate them into Romanian in order to evaluate consumers' command of the foreign language. The brands selected belong to food industry (MacDonald's, KFC, and Coca Cola), car industry (Toyota, BMW, Honda, Nissan, Subaru, Hyundai, and Volkswagen), IT and mobile phone industry (Apple, Nokia, and Vodafone). We chose the most popular slogans of well-known global brands in order to ease the recognition process of the brand and its associated slogan. We assumed that in the case of popular slogans the translation from English into Romanian would be generally easier.

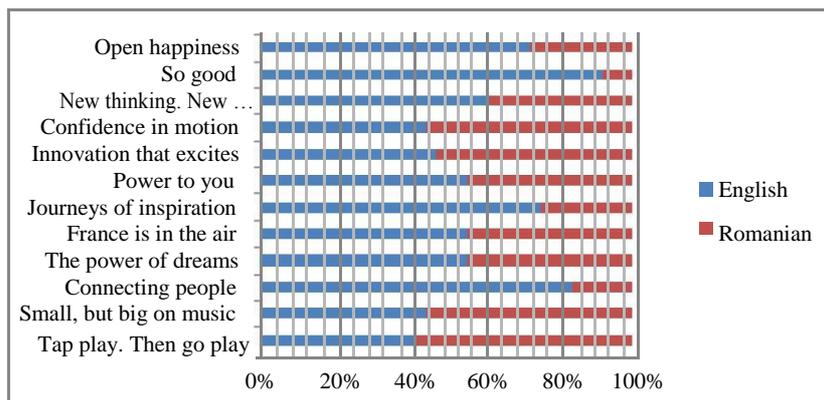
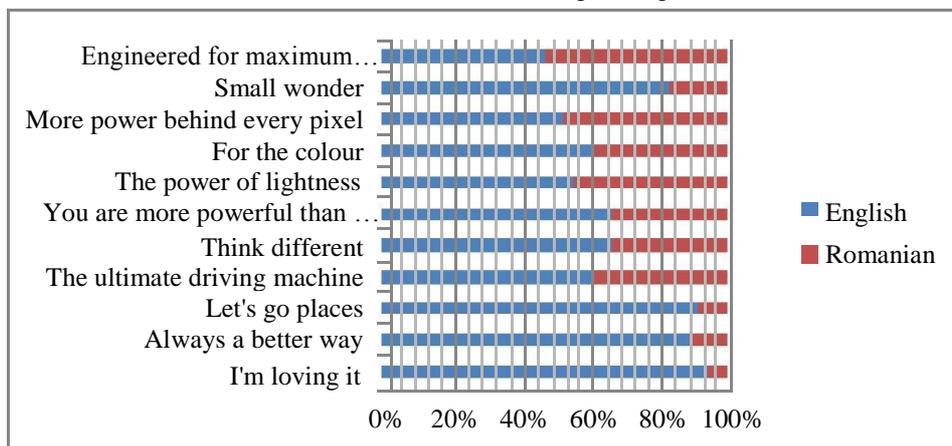
Finally, we investigated the Romanian websites of the brands mentioned above to see whether they promoted the English slogan or a Romanian equivalent, and also the presence of English borrowings in their advertising texts.

Starting from the assumption that we live in a globalized world and bearing in mind Levitt's prediction according to which 'Gone are accustomed differences in national or regional preference', we expect our research to display a preference for English advertising texts, and also a high degree of comprehension of English slogans and headlines.

English versus Romanian in Romanian advertising

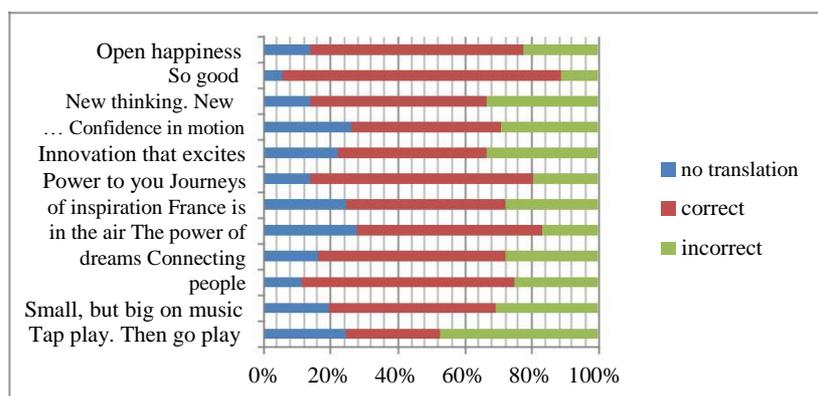
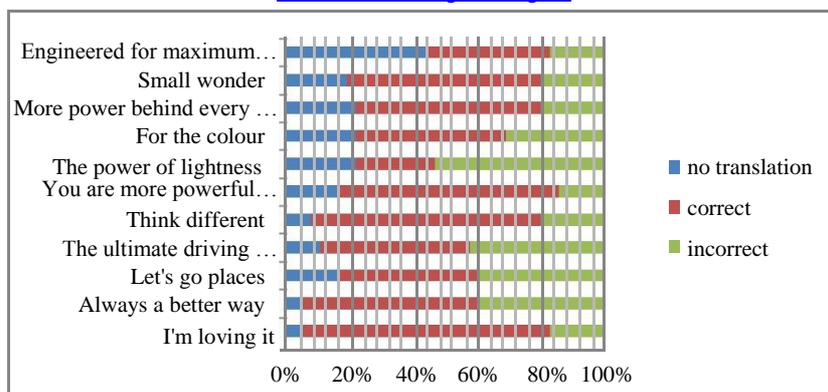
We selected two sets of slogans or headlines used by global brands that advertise worldwide and asked the respondents to choose between the English and Romanian version. Although we expected an obvious preference for the English slogans, responses varied across our sample (see the charts below). Generally, the English version was the main choice when the slogan was easy to understand and did not require advanced proficiency in English. More elaborated slogans in English, involving figures of speech, were not so much appreciated.

Preference for Romanian vs English slogans



As for the degree of comprehension of English slogans by Romanian consumers, we noticed that only very easy and simple slogans were correctly translated (see charts below). In many cases even ordinary words were completely misunderstood, the connotative meanings involved difficulty in translation, and the advertising message was incorrectly perceived. When the noun 'lightness' referred to the condition of something that weighs relatively little, more than 80% of the respondents inferred that the meaning was related to brightness. The past participle 'engineered' was frequently translated as the noun 'engineers' or 'energy'; the adjective 'ultimate' which means the best or most extreme or important was generally translated as the last, maybe because of the Romanian equivalent for 'the last', so the slogan 'The ultimate driving car' was translated several times as 'The last car I drove' or 'The end of cars'. The noun 'journey' was misunderstood in several cases and translated as 'journal', and 'confidence' was mistaken for 'confidential'. The slogans which recorded a correct version in Romanian were: 'I'm loving it', 'Think different', 'So good', 'You are more powerful than you think', 'Open happiness', 'Small wonder', 'More power behind every pixel', 'Always a better way', 'Power to you', 'Connecting people', 'The power of dreams', 'France is in the air'.

[Translation of English slogans](#)



Regarding the representation of the selected brands in Romanian online media, we investigated the Romanian websites of the respective brands and noticed that most of them displayed on their homepage the English slogan (68%), while only 32% of the slogans were in Romanian. We remarked that the content of the Apple website was only in Romanian, slogans included. Websites of car manufacturers generally promoted the English slogan, as well as fast food restaurants like McDonalds and KFC. In the advertising texts we analyzed, English borrowings were more frequent in car manufacturer websites, functioning mainly as attention-getters: showroom, financial services, road assistance, dealer, test drive, newsletter.

On the other hand, exclusive brands such as Bentley or Hilton favor the use of English over Romanian, the entire text of the website being written in English. Thus, the frequent use of English in certain cases may act as a mark of cosmopolitan and international values or the sense of adherence to a high-class group.

Our research did not show a connection between the degree of comprehension of the foreign language and the preference for English or adapted slogans. This finding is in line with previous studies that state that foreign languages, especially English, are used as a symbol and the exact meaning of the advertising text in the local language is not so important (Haarmann, 1989; Kelly-Holmes, 2000, 2005). The foreign language is more appreciated than the local language because of the prestige it evokes, the values or status associated with the inhabitants of the respective country (Hornikx, 2007). There are also voices among specialists that consider that the English language is frequently associated with globalism, technology, prestige, power, etc. (Bhatia, 2001; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). Therefore, we may assume that the use of English versus Romanian in some slogans or advertising texts is closely related to the status of the language and the implications it engenders.

Conclusion

Our findings reveal that English is favored over Romanian in the case of representative or well known slogans or headlines, while Romanian remains the chosen language for larger advertising texts. Generally, advertisers tailor the message for maximum local impact and to better reach their target audience. Therefore, the main language used in Romanian advertising remains the Romanian language, and English slogans, headlines, or borrowings are not significant when compared with the amount of advertising text in the local language. Although advertising texts in English are not prevalent in Romanian media, our respondents displayed a preference for some English slogans which may be related to the theory according to which the language has a symbolic meaning, namely it induces associations with the values and status of the country where it is spoken (Haarmann, 1989).

The degree of comprehension of English advertising texts by Romanian consumers was lower than expected. Proficiency in English is a matter of importance as regards the degree of comprehension of English advertising. The high level of incorrect translations was due to lack of expertise in the English language. Therefore, easy utterances, simple constructions are more likely to reach a global audience, and fulfill at the same time the needs of the local market.

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