

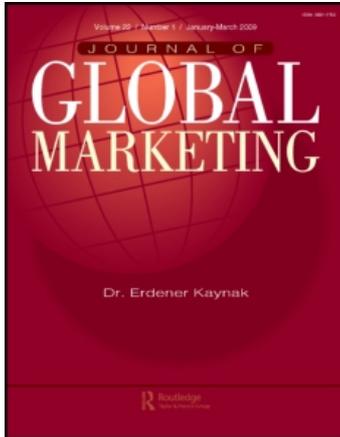
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English in Product Advertisements in Non-English-Speaking Countries in Western Europe: Product Image and Comprehension of the Text

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English in Product Advertisements in Non-English-Speaking Countries in Western Europe: Product Image and Comprehension of the Text

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ABSTRACT. Although English has been shown to be the most frequently used foreign language in product advertisements in countries where it is not the native language, little is known about its effects. This article examines the response to advertisements in English compared to the response to the same ad in the local language in Western Europe on members of the target group for which the ad was intended: 715 young, highly educated female consumers. The use of English in a product ad does not appear to have any impact on image and price of the product, but it does affect text comprehension: the meaning of almost 40% of the English phrases was not understood. These results were the same for all countries involved in the study, irrespective of whether the respondents' (self-) reported proficiency in English is high or low.

KEYWORDS. Product advertisements, English, image, price, comprehension of English

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INTRODUCTION

Among the many different aspects of product advertisements that may determine consumer response, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of language choice (Grin, 1994; Holden 1987), at least compared to the role of other similar variables such as cultural values (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Aaker & Williams, 1998; Dianoux, Kettnerová, & Linhart, 2007; Hoeken et al., 2003; Rustogi, Hensel, & Burgers, 1996) and visual rhetoric (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; McQuarrie & Mick, 2003). The majority of the studies on the impact of language choice in product ads are concerned with the effect of using language A compared to using language B on consumers who are (near) native speakers of both languages A and B. The respondents used in these studies are representative of consumers in bilingual societies such as the Hispanic community in the United States (Grin, 1994; Koslow, Shamdanasi, & Touchstone, 1994; Luna & Peracchio, 2001, 2005; Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008; Roslow & Nichols, 1996), the Korean American community in the United States (Dublish, 2001), or the bilingual Hindi-English community in India (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Surprisingly, despite the fact that foreign languages are frequently used in product advertisements, there have been very few studies to date about the effects of using a foreign language in advertisements on consumers who speak and understand that foreign language at a much lower level of proficiency than a native speaker. Myers (1994), for instance, discusses the use of French, German, Russian, Maori, Dutch, and Japanese in advertisements for native speakers of English, together with the use of English in advertisements for native speakers of Spanish, Dutch, and German, and Kelly-Holmes (2005) gives an extensive overview of the use of foreign languages in advertising in Europe. Although many different foreign languages occur in product advertising, English has been shown to be the most frequently used foreign language (Bhatia, 1992; Martin, 2002; Piller, 2003). It is only recently, however, that researchers have started to study the effect of the use of English in advertisements on consumers who do not speak English as a native language. Experiments by Ahn and Ferle (2008) in South Korea, for in-

stance, indicate that presenting a brand name in English with the body copy message in the Korean language Hangul enhances the recall of the ad and recognition of the brand name and the ad message, much more than when the brand name is presented in Hangul. Puntoni, Langhe, and Osselaer (2009) show that marketing slogans expressed in consumers' native language tend to be perceived as more emotional than the same marketing slogans expressed in English. Much still needs to be done to investigate the effects of using English with a consumer population.

The purpose of the study presented in this article is to gain a better insight into the effect of the use of English in ads in Western European countries where English is not spoken as a native language. As we will show in the next section, English occurs very frequently in product ads all over Western Europe. A survey into the reasons why advertising agencies use English in product ads (see later discussion on reasons) showed that they use English because they believe that the target group understands English and because it will enhance the image and price of the product. That is why we concentrated our study on whether consumers understand the message conveyed in English and what the effect of the use of English is on the product image and price associated with the product advertised, compared with that of the local language.

We first give an overview of what is known about the frequency of occurrence of English in ads in Western Europe and of the reasons given for the use of English in ads. On the basis of these reviews of the literature, we develop and present our hypotheses. Next we describe the methodology used in the study and present the results. Thereafter, we discuss the results in the light of the hypotheses. In conclusion, we give recommendations about language choice for designers of product ads, point out the limitations of our study, and outline directions for further research.

ENGLISH IN PRODUCT ADS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Different studies show that a large number of the advertisements in Europe contain English. Cheshire and Moser (1994), for instance,

found that 31% of product advertisements in two Swiss weekly magazines contained English words and phrases. Similarly, Gerritsen, Korzilius, van Meurs, and Gijbbers (2000) show that one third of the commercials on Dutch television contain English. According to Martin (2002), 30% of the commercials in France feature some form of English, and Piller (2001) claims that 60% to 70% of all advertisements broadcast in 1999 on various German television networks and in two German national newspapers were multilingual and that English was the foreign language that was used most often. Gerritsen, Nickerson, van Hooft, et al. (2007) studied the use of English in product advertisements in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. For each country, ads were collected in six issues of *Elle* in 2004. In total, 2384 different ads were analyzed. In all countries, more than 65% of those ads contained one or more English words. Compared to a similar study a decade earlier (Gerritsen, 1995), the percentage of ads containing English had increased by more than 40%.

The growing occurrence of English in product ads in Europe provides support for observations about the increasingly frequent use of English in Europe. Loonen (1996), for instance, comments, "a language once considered base and worthless now seems to dominate the new Europe" (p. 3). This view is supported by the results of Eurobarometer data collected in all member states of the European Union (EU) in 2005: 38% of the citizens of the 25 EU Member States claimed that they knew English well enough to hold a conversation in English (European Commission, 2006, p. 154). There are wide variations, though, between the different countries: for the Netherlands, this was 87%; for Belgium, 59%; for Germany, 45%; for France, 36%; and for Spain, 27% (European Commission, 2006, p. 13 and annexes D48b).

REASONS FOR USE OF ENGLISH IN PRODUCT ADS

The frequent use of English in advertising in Europe can be seen as a consequence of the standardization approach to advertising. This ap-

proach was propagated by Levitt (1983), who believed in the convergence of consumers' behavior and in the globalization of markets. Onkvisit and Shaw (1987) define the standardized approach as the use of uniform messages with no modifications of headings, illustrations, or body copy, except for translation. An even more standardized approach to advertising is when no translation to a local language is made in either the whole ad or in any part of the ad (for example, in the slogan), such that one language is used worldwide. This extreme standardization is done because it saves translation, adaptation, and registration costs (Jain, 1993; De Mooij, 1994; Walsh, 1991) and because the advertisers believe that the entire world can be approached with the same concept and language.

The attitude toward the classic standardization approach (with translation into the local language) is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is stimulated because standardization might have a positive effect on the global market, as has been shown by Zou and Cavusgil (2002). On the other hand, a number of researchers have argued against this standardization strategy (e.g., De Mooij, 1998, 2001; Kanso, 1992; Zandpour et al., 1994), and it is shown that localization, such as adaptation, has remained popular (Harris, 1994; Kanso & Nelson, 2002; Samiee, Jeong, Pae, & Tai, 2003). Laroche, Kirpalani, and Darnon (1999) demonstrate on the basis of a study of 119 multinational firms that the choice between localization and classic and extreme standardization is also influenced by practical factors such as "(a) the firm's control over international involvement . . . and (b) the quality and availability of local resources" (p. 287).

It is interesting to note that the standardization-localization debate has focused specifically on whether different cultures can be approached with the same advertising themes, appeals, or media; researchers have not been concerned with whether the same language should be used worldwide. Also in global marketing models, such as the Global Marketing Strategy (GMS) by Zou and Cavusgil (2002), no attention is paid to the standardization of language.

As we discussed earlier, language standardization in advertising in Europe occurs often,

and the language chosen is nearly always English. But what is the reason for this choice? Interviews with advertising agencies responsible for making ads that were either completely or partly in English for a target group of non-native speakers of English reveal three underlying motivations for this choice, which are also supported by previous research (Alm, 2003; Geritsen et al., 2000).

- *Linguistic motivations.* A first linguistic reason to use English is that the product is originally from the United States or the United Kingdom and there is no word to describe its characteristics in the target language, or the word in the target language is much longer or more complicated than the English word (Friedrich, 2002; Takahashi, 1990). This holds, for example, for terms related to information technology such as homepage, browser, and screensaver. A second linguistic reason for using English could be that by doing so, the sometimes difficult choice between the formal and informal second person pronoun can be avoided. Most European languages have a formal and an informal second person pronoun, such as the French formal *vous* versus the informal *tu* and the German formal *Sie* versus the informal *du*. Because the informal pronoun is increasingly replacing the formal pronoun in social situations (Brown & Gilman, 1972), people are often uncertain as to whether to use the formal or the informal pronoun. The use of English, which has “you” for both the formal and the informal second person pronoun, solves this problem.
- *English is a global language that is understood by everyone.* English is chosen as a result of the generally held view that English is a global language (Bailey & Görlach, 1986; Crystal, 2003, 2004) and because advertisers believe everyone understands English anyway. De Mooij (1994) states, for instance, “In general, the better-educated throughout Europe, as well as the youth, can be reached with English” (p. 288). She advises, however, that advertisers use relatively simple English for global advertising “with few words and no

colloquialisms, relying heavily on the visual or musical aspects of the message” (de Mooij, 1994, p. 205).

- *Product image.* According to researchers such as Takahashi (1990), Martin (2002), Alm (2003), Piller (2003), Kelly-Holmes (2005), Ustinova and Bhatia (2005), and Shinhee Lee (2006), English is used because it enhances the image of a product. According to them, the use of English has a symbolic meaning; it is associated with a modern, urban, cosmopolitan, and upper class way of life and it increases the prestige associated with a product, and consequently the price that can be charged for it (Friedrich, 2002; Griffin, 1997; Haarmann, 1989). Piller shows that there is a strong tendency to associate the consumers who are described in partly or completely English advertisements in Germany “with all or some of the attributes of internationalism, future orientation, success and elitism, sophistication, fun, youth and maleness” (Piller, 2001). In her view, English is also used to select the target group, along the lines of “If you read English, fine; if not, you are an outsider. Tough luck” (Piller 2001, p. 168). English therefore plays a quite different role than that of the other foreign languages that are used in advertising, since the primary aim in using foreign languages such as French, German, and Italian in advertising is to associate the advertised product with the ethnocultural stereotypes of the speakers of those languages, and therefore to associate those stereotypes with the product advertised (Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Piller, 2003). An ethnocultural stereotype of Italians is, for instance, that they have delicious pasta, and by advertising pasta (partly) in Italian, the advertiser hopes that the target consumer will associate that positive ethnocultural stereotype with the pasta being advertised. Haarmann (1989) found, for example, that the use of French in Japanese advertising was intended to associate the product with “high elegance, refined taste,” and his conclusion is that the target group do not even need to understand the meaning of the French words used, as long as

they are able to identify the word as being French. Piller is brief and to the point in her discussion of the difference between the image that English creates and the image created by other foreign languages: “English is thus not used to associate a product with an ethno-cultural stereotype, but with a social stereotype ... modernity, progress, and globalization” (Piller, 2001, p. 175). A study of the use of English in 2384 ads in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain (Gerritsen, Nickerson, van Hooft, et al., 2007) shows that English was indeed rarely used to form an association with speakers of English such as the Americans or the British (this was the case in only 0.9% of the ads with English). English was used most frequently in ads for products that may be associated with modernity, such as mobile phones and digital cameras, and it was much less often in ads for products such as food and books.

EFFECTS OF ENGLISH ON THE TARGET GROUP: HYPOTHESES

The reasons for the use of English in products ads as discussed in the previous section are given by the organization from which the advertising message originates (the sender of the message). But does the target group interpret the message in the way the sender intends? For example, does the receiver understand the message in English and does the use of English lead indeed to a more modern image of the product and as a result a willingness to pay a higher price than would be the case with the use of the local language?

Although the advertising agencies believe that the target group for the ad will fully understand the English texts due to the fact that English is a global language, this is not a given. The perceptual basis of reference is different for native speakers than for non-native speakers, and this might hinder the understanding of the message conveyed (Kaynak & Mitchell, 1981). Myers (1994) states, for instance, that it may be wrong to assume that English words have exactly the same effect when they are read in

a non-English-speaking country. Evidence for this can be found in Piller (2001), who reports that in German advertisements with English, the body and the factual information (contact details, declarations) are in German. Piller concludes that this is because organizations doubt the English proficiency of the German audience and they therefore produce certain parts of the text in German. Similarly, a study carried out in 1994 in the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Spain showed that only 41% of the young and highly educated respondents who were included in the study were able to give an indication of the meaning of the English used in the extracts presented to them (Gerritsen, 1995, 2004). An experiment with partly and completely English television commercials (Gerritsen et al., 2000) revealed a similar result: only 36% of the Dutch respondents were able to correctly indicate the meaning of the text. Since these studies indicate that it is anything but certain that the target group of the ads with English will understand the message conveyed in English, we will test whether the advertising agencies are correct in assuming that the target group understands the English text of an ad (H1).

H1: All consumers are able to give an accurate indication of the meaning of the English text of advertisements in English.

The second question is whether the advertising agencies' assumption about the image-enhancing effect of the use of English in product ads is in fact true. Does the receiver of the advertising message associate a product advertised using English more with modernity and luxury and consequently with a higher price than if that same product is advertised in the local language? This leads to hypotheses 2 and 3.

H2: Products presented in advertisements with English are associated more with modernity than the same products presented in advertisements in a local language.

H3: Products presented in advertisements with English are considered to be more expensive than the same products presented in advertisements in a local language.

We have shown in here that there are variations between the different European countries in their knowledge of English. The most recent Eurobarometer study (European Commission, 2006, p. 12) indicates that there are large differences between Western European countries as to whether a respondent is able to hold a conversation in English. The hierarchy is as shown in (1).

- (1) Netherlands (87%) > Belgium (56%)
 > Germany (45%) > France (36%)
 > Spain (27%)

Therefore, it is also to be expected that there will be differences between the countries in the comprehensibility of the English text in the ad (H1) and in the image that the use of English projects (H2 and H3). It can be assumed that the higher the percentage of people in a country who are able to hold a conversation in English, the better will those respondents be able to understand the message conveyed through the English text of an ad, and the less effect will the use of English have on image and price of the product. This leads to H4 and H5.

H4: The higher the percentage of people in a country who are able to hold a conversation in English, the better the English text of an advertisement will be understood.

H5: The higher the percentage of people in a country who are able to hold a conversation in English, (a) the less the product advertised using English will be associated with modernity and (b) the less expensive the product will be considered to be.

METHOD

Area of Research and Respondents

The study was carried out in five Western European countries within the European Union: Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. Because Belgium has a Dutch-speaking region and a French-speaking region, experiments in Belgium were performed with two

groups: Dutch-speaking Belgians and French-speaking Belgians. These five countries were chosen because there are wide variations in the proficiency levels of English among them (Berns, 1995; European Commission, 2006; Graddol, 1999). Since we expect that differences in the status of English may also be reflected in differences in the effect of English in ads (H4 and H5), it seemed appropriate to study countries in which the status of English was believed to be dissimilar.

The respondents were 715 women studying at a university in a town or city: 120 in Dutch-speaking Belgium (Antwerp), 120 in French-speaking Belgium (Brussels), 120 in the Netherlands (Nijmegen), 120 in Spain (Barcelona), 116 in France (Paris), and 119 in Germany (Duisburg). The number of respondents was based on a statistical power of 0.99, a medium effect size of 0.25, and an alpha of .05 (cf. Cohen, 1992).

None of the respondents were studying (foreign) languages. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 25 ($M = 21.8$). Especially female students were chosen as respondents as they could be considered as representative of the target group of *Elle*, the magazine from which we took our product advertisements (see later). *Elle* is a glossy magazine for higher educated women, between the ages of 18 and 49, who belong to higher social classes (<http://www.geeinternational.com/eng/mediakit/Elle/ElleMediaKit.pdf> retrieved January 27, 2010; Wikipedia). Sixty percent of the respondents said that they read *Elle* regularly.

Materials

We selected three advertisements for our study that ran simultaneously across the five countries 6 months before we carried out our experiments. Two of these advertisements were completely in English, Absolut Vodka (vodka) and Bulgari (perfume), and one was partly in English and partly in the local language, Smart forfour (car). The English versions of the ads are shown in Appendix A. The research team worked together to produce equivalent test items in Dutch, French, German, and Spanish for the original English texts, and the translation and back-translation method was used to ensure as

close a match as possible (Hoeken & Korzilius, 2003). Appendix B shows a manipulated ad in the local language for each campaign.

Instrumentation

All questionnaires were in the local language of the respondents: Dutch, French, German or Spanish. In the comprehensibility part of the questionnaire (H1), the respondents who saw the original English versions were asked to provide a meaning in context, but not a literal translation, for each of six phrases (H1). The phrases concerned are displayed in Table 1. The team of researchers then met to decide for each individual phrase whether the description given could be considered appropriate. We differentiated between correct and incorrect indications of the meaning and we took a purposefully flexible approach. If a respondent for example had described the meaning of *fragrance* with the word for *perfume* or *eau de toilette* in the local language, we considered the description as correct, but if she had used the word for *feeling* or *sparkling* in the local language, we considered it as incorrect (cf. Table 4 in Discussion for more examples).

To know whether the use of English in an ad has an effect on the *image* of the product that is advertised, as related to modernity (H2), we presented respondents with a set of three adjectives (*trendy*, *innovative*, and *old fashioned*) and asked them to complete a 7 point scale (1 = agree completely to 7 = disagree completely).

The answers to *trendy* and *innovative* were re-coded so that 1 stood for *old fashioned* and 7 for *modern*. To find out whether a product advertised in English would be considered as a more expensive product than one that was advertised in the respondents' own language (H3), respondents had to indicate the price of the product on a 7-point scale where 1 = very cheap and 7 = very expensive.

Design

Our experiment was a between-subject design for the part that investigated the impact of English on the image of the text and price of the product advertised: half of the respondents, equally divided among the different countries, completed the questions for the English version of the advertisement, and half for the manipulated version in their local language. Only those respondents who were presented with the ads in English were asked to provide a meaning of the English text. This was because previous research has revealed that respondents do not provide serious answers if they are asked to provide a meaning for text phrases given in their own language (Gerritsen, Nickerson, van den Brandt, et al., 2007).

Procedure

The order of questions in the questionnaire was as follows: image, comprehensibility, and personal details. First, all questions about image for all the three ads were answered; subsequently all questions about comprehensibility were answered. The order of the ads in the questionnaire was varied to reduce any carryover effects. The questionnaire was administered to female respondents (as described earlier), either in classrooms or in workspaces in the corridors of the universities. The respondents completed the questionnaires individually in the presence of one of the researchers.

Statistical Analysis

For every scale where Cronbach's α was at least adequate (.70 or higher), we calculated the composite means of the items. This was the case for all the three ads for image

TABLE 1. Brands and Six English Phrases Used in the Study

Brand	English phrase
Bulgari	Contemporary Italian jewelers The new fragrance for women
Smart Forfour	Eyecatcher Open your mind
Absolut	This superb vodka was distilled from grain grown in the rich fields of southern Sweden Our vodka has been produced at the famous old distilleries near Åhus in accordance with more than 400 years of Swedish tradition

(trendy, innovative, and old fashioned). Because all the scales were interval scales, 2 (Version: ad with English or ad without English) \times 6 (Country: Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain) analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were used to test whether ads with English were associated with a different image and price than ads without English (H2 and H3) and whether the countries in our study differed from each other in these respects (H5).

Because cultures may differ in the way in which they use the extremes of a scale (Herck, Poortinga, & Verhallen, 2004; Hoeken & Kozilius, 2003; Johnson et al., 2005), all ANOVAs were performed with both standardized and raw data. There were no differences in results between the two sets of analyses, so we report here the analyses of the raw data. Statistically significant interactions were explored using simple main effects analysis using a Bonferroni correction.

Chi-squared tests were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the countries in the actual understanding of the six English phrases (H4). The criterion used for statistical significance (α) was .05 for all tests.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the actual comprehensibility (H1) of the six phrases: the meaning of 39%

TABLE 2. The Actual Comprehensibility of the Six Phrases in English

	Indication of the meaning given correctly	Indication of the meaning given incorrectly
Dutch-speaking Belgium	189 (52%)	171 (48%)
French-speaking Belgium	238 (66%)	122 (34%)
France	232 (69%)	104 (31%)
Germany	177 (49%)	183 (51%)
The Netherlands	238 (66%)	122 (34%)
Spain	233 (65%)	127 (35%)
Total	1307 (61%)	829 (39%)

of the phrases was not described correctly. Chi-square tests showed that there were significant differences between the countries [$\chi^2(5) = 5.1331, p < .01$]. There appeared to be significant differences between Dutch-speaking Belgium and French-speaking Belgium [$\chi^2(1) = 3.82, p < .01$], France [$\chi^2(1) = 19.91, p < .01$], the Netherlands [$\chi^2(1) = 13.82, p < .01$], and Spain [$\chi^2(1) = 11.08, p < .01$], between French-speaking Belgium and Germany [$\chi^2(5) = 21.17, p < .01$], between France and Germany [$\chi^2(1) = 28.35, p < .01$], between Germany and the Netherlands [$\chi^2(1) = 21.17, p < .01$], and between Germany and Spain [$\chi^2(1) = 17.76, p < .01$]. The hierarchy between the countries in actual comprehensibility of the six phrases (H4) is as shown next in (2).

$$\begin{aligned} (2) \text{ France (69\%)} &= \text{Netherlands (66\%)} \\ &= \text{French-speaking Belgium (66\%)} \\ &= \text{Spain (65\%)} > \text{Dutch-speaking} \\ &\quad \times \text{Belgium (52\%)} = \text{Germany (49\%)} \end{aligned}$$

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the answers to the questions that investigated whether the use of English in an ad has an impact on the image of the product that is being advertised (H2) and whether a product advertised in English would be considered as a more expensive product than one that is advertised in the respondent's native language (H3).

Table 2 shows that whether English is used in an ad does not have any significant impact on the image of the product advertised (H2) and the price associated with the product (H3). No significant differences between the countries were found in the effect of the use of English on either image (H5a) or price (H5b).

CONCLUSION

To investigate whether the senders of the ad, the advertising agencies, are correct in their assumption that the English text of ads is understood by the target group, we tested H1 (all consumers are able to give an accurate

TABLE 3. Use of English and Image of the Product Advertised

	Ads with English, <i>M(SD)</i>	Ads without English, <i>M(SD)</i>	Main effect for version with English versus version in the local language
Image innovative ^a			
Bulgari	4.00 (1.38)	4.17 (1.39)	$F(1, 698) = 2.63, p = .10$
Smart	5.26 (1.50)	5.46 (1.26)	$F(1, 701) = 3.69, p = .06$
Absolut	4.14 (1.40)	4.21 (1.37)	$F < 1$
Image price ^b			
Bulgari	5.24 (1.21)	5.07 (1.26)	$F(1, 692) = 3.39, p = .07$
Smart	5.12 (1.33)	5.04 (1.04)	$F < 1$
Absolut	4.75 (1.21)	4.73 (1.15)	$F < 1$

^a1 = Old fashioned, 7 = modern.

^b1 = Cheap, 7 = expensive.

indication of the meaning of the English text of advertisements). This hypothesis was not confirmed. The respondents' actual comprehension of the English texts of the ads was low: in 39% of all cases, the respondents were not able to indicate the meaning of the English phrases (cf. Table 2).

The makers of advertisements also use English because they believe that it gives the product advertised an aura of modernity and luxury and that they can therefore charge a higher price. In order to investigate whether the use of English has such an effect on the target group, we tested H2 (Products presented in advertisements with English are more associated with modernity than the same products presented in advertisements in a local language) and H3 (Products presented in advertisements with English are considered to be more expensive than the same products presented in advertisements in a local language). The findings of our research (cf. Table 3) show that both these hypotheses were not confirmed, at least not for our respondent group of highly educated young women, the target group of the ads. For all three ads, and across all six of the investigated areas in Western Europe, our respondents did not view products advertised using English, as more modern (H2) or more expensive (H3) than products that were advertised using only the local language.

There were differences between the countries in their actual comprehensibility of the phrases (H4). The comprehensibility was significantly higher in France, the Netherlands,

French-speaking Belgium, and Spain than in Dutch-speaking Belgium and Germany (cf. 2 in Results). If we compare our findings (2) with the findings of the 2006 Eurobarometer data (1), which were based on whether respondents thought they were able to hold a conversation in English, then we see that H4 (The higher the percentage of people in a country who are able to hold a conversation in English, the better the English text of an advertisement will be understood) is not confirmed.

- (1) Netherlands (87%) > Belgium (56%)
> Germany (45%) > France (36%)
> Spain (27%)
- (2) France (69%) = Netherlands (66%)
= French-speaking Belgium (66%)
= Spain (65%) > Dutch-speaking
Belgium (52%) = Germany (49%)

There were no differences between the countries in the effect of the use of English compared to the effect of the use of the local language on either the modernity associated with the product (H5a) or the price perceived (H5b)

DISCUSSION

The finding that 39% of all English phrases were not understood at all by our respondents (H1) confirms the results of earlier studies (cf. Gerritsen, 1995, 2004; Gerritsen et al., 2000).

TABLE 4. Respondents' Interpretations of English Phrases in Ads

Brand	English phrases	Respondents' proposed contextual meanings
Bulgari	Contemporary Italian jewelers	Seductive Italian jewels Co-operative Italian jewelers That the perfume can be seen as a timeless Italian
	The new fragrance for women	The new feeling for women The new refresher for women The new preference for women
Smart Forfour	Open your mind	Gives more insight
Absolut	From grain	From grapes
	Our vodka has been produced at the famous old distilleries near Åhus in accordance with more than 400 years of Swedish tradition	That the vodka is a simple product and therefore is good

The findings of the study presented here show that respondents were sometimes very far from the mark in their comprehension of the ads. In Table 4, we give some of the most notable examples of this. In cases such as these, it is clear that the message conveyed by the English text has not at all been understood.

We can conclude from the results of our study that English is less well understood in non-Anglophone Europe than advertising agencies believe. One could argue that this lack of understanding is of little consequence, because an ad aims at more than just communicating a text message; for example, it is designed to raise consumers' awareness of the product or the brand name. Furthermore, consumers will generally be unaware that they have not understood a text, and the chance is therefore small that the use of English will lead to irritation and a negative attitude toward the ad or the product (McQuarrie & Mick, 2003). On the other hand, however, as Pieters and Van Raaij (1992) have demonstrated, the consumers' correct understanding of the message is usually a prerequisite for the ad to achieve the desired communicative effect. Our findings would suggest that at least some consumers are not being reached effectively by the advertising texts designed to persuade them to buy.

The result that the use of English compared to the use of the local language did not have any impact on either image (H2) or price (H3) of the product in all six of the investigated areas in Western Europe is not in line with the

observations mentioned in the section Reasons for Use of English in Product Ads or with the results of the experimental study of Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008), who found that Indians who are fluent in both Hindi and English associated the use of English in advertising with sophistication and the use of Hindi with closeness and belongingness. They even suggest that the use of the local language instead of English is likely to backfire if it is used in the domain of luxury items. This difference between India and non-Anglophone Europe in association with English in ads is most probably due to the difference between India and non-Anglophone Europe in the status of English. Although English is the official language in India in certain social areas such as the Parliament and the Supreme Court, it is only spoken as a first, second, or third language by about 10% of the population (Wikipedia, 2010). In other words, far fewer people relative to the entire population are able to understand English, particularly at lower-income levels where access to English medium education is also likely to be low, and English may therefore be associated with products that are simply beyond the reach of the non-English-speaking population. English is still viewed as the privileged or elite language by many people in India, whereas this is not the case in Europe.

According to our study, there is no relationship between whether a respondent can correctly indicate the meaning of the English texts in our experiment and the level of their reported knowledge of English (H4). However, in

comparing the ranking for reported knowledge of English in (1) in the Conclusion section with the ranking for ability to indicate the meaning of the English texts in the ads (2), one should bear in mind that these hierarchies are based on very different data. In the first place, there is a difference in background between the respondents in (1) and (2). The Eurobarometer data include data taken from the entire population (men and women, all age groups, all educational backgrounds, all social classes, etc.), whereas (2) includes data only from highly educated young women, the target group of the ads. This might explain why the differences between the countries in (1) are much greater (87% versus 27%, or a 60% difference) than in (2) (69% versus 49%, or a 20% difference). It is plausible that respondents at lower levels of education will differ more from each other across the different countries in terms of their English language proficiency than will respondents at higher levels of education. In addition, there is a difference between reported knowledge of English (1) and actual knowledge (2). Actual knowledge is mostly much lower than reported knowledge (Gerritsen, 1996, 2004; Gerritsen et al., 2000): the percentages in (2) are also lower than in (1).

The assumption that the higher the percentage of people in a country who are able to hold a conversation in English, the less effect on image and price associated with the product the use of English will have was also not confirmed (H5a and H5b). Our results suggest that there is no relationship between the variation in English language proficiency levels within a European consumer population and their associations with image and price associated with the product presented in advertisements with English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of our experiments, we can conclude that the inclusion of English in advertisements in non-Anglophone Europe increases the chances of the consumer misunderstanding the message (H1) and it does not have a more positive influence on the image (H2) and price of the product (H3) compared with the same advertisement in the local language. The reasons for

using English in product ads outlined in previous literature—and by advertising agencies (see Reasons for Use of English in Product Ads)—could not be substantiated. This is an indication that the use of English as a global market strategy in non-Anglophone Europe is less successful than has previously been suggested.

Although the findings of previous studies suggested that there should have been major differences between the countries in our study in the knowledge of English (Berns, 1995; European Commission, 2006; Graddol, 1999), our investigation showed few differences between the areas investigated in the comprehension of phrases of English texts (H4) and no differences in the effect of using English instead of the local language on image and price of a product (H5a and H5b). For advertisers, this would suggest that with regard to language choice, they can employ one advertising strategy across all the European countries included in our investigation. The question remains, however, as to which strategy to use: language adaptation (using the local language) or language standardization (using English)? On the basis of our current knowledge of the effect of English in advertisements on the target group of the ad, the following assessment can be made.

A first advantage for using a *language adaptation strategy* is that an ad in the local language is probably more effective, because the use of English appears to have a negative effect on the consumer's ability to understand the text. A second advantage is that an ad in the local language arouses more emotions than an ad in English (Puntoni, Langhe, & Osselaer, 2009). A final advantage is that—at least in non-Anglophone Europe—the use of the local language does not have a more negative impact on image of the product advertised and the price associated with it than the use of English.

An advantage for using a *language standardization strategy* could be that there is some evidence that brand names in English are better recalled than brand names in the local language (Ahn & Ferle, 2008). This may only be the case, however, for languages that use a different script, as was the case in their study between English written in the Roman alphabet and the Hangul script in Korean. Further research is necessary

to establish whether the participants recalled the brand name in English better than the brand name in Hangul because of the English words or because the script was different from the Korean script.

In summary, there seem to be advantages and disadvantages both to pursuing a language adaptation strategy and to pursuing a language standardization strategy using English. For target consumer groups who are less educated than the highly educated young women who participated in our study, it seems even more likely that the use of the local language rather than English will increase the effectiveness of the ad. Additional research is necessary to investigate this point.

In case advertisers still want to advertise in English in non-Anglophone Europe, for example because of the financial reasons mentioned earlier, they should realize that they cannot trust blindly figures about knowledge of English such as presented in the Eurobarometer studies. They should test whether the English text is understood among representatives of the target group.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is one of the first studies investigating the effect of the use of English in ads in Western Europe. For that reason, it has a number of limitations that can be used to underpin suggestions for further research. A first limitation is that we only investigated the effect of English in product ads in Western Europe and not in Eastern Europe, where the use of English has expanded widely after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, most notably in advertising (Ustinova & Bhatia, 2006). Since the history of English in the Eastern part of Europe is very different from that in the Western part of Europe, where there was an enormous increase in the use of English following World War II (1945), it is plausible that the use of English in ads will have a different effect in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

A second limitation of our study is that only higher educated women were involved in the ex-

periments. This choice was because the ads we used for our experiments specifically targeted this group of women. It remains of interest, however, to investigate whether our findings can be extrapolated to other social groups. Since we can assume that our respondents' English language proficiency is relatively high (see earlier), it is to be expected that people with lower levels of English proficiency will be less able to describe the global meaning of the English phrases. It could therefore be the case that if consumers are not able to understand the English text at all, then this will have an impact on the image and price associated with the product advertised. Further research into this is necessary, including a corpus-based study to establish whether the advertisements included in magazines targeted at less-educated groups do indeed contain English.

In this study, the effect of the use of English in print ads was investigated, but it has been shown that English also occurs frequently in commercials in non-Anglophone Europe (Gerritsen et al., 2000; Martin, 2002; Piller, 2001). It would be useful to investigate whether spoken English has the same effect as written English in terms of comprehension and effect on image and price associated with the product advertised. Moreover, spoken language offers the opportunity to investigate the effect of different "varieties" of English. Gerritsen et al. (2000) found, for example, that in the majority of commercials that were broadcast in the Netherlands, English with a heavy Dutch accent was used. The question is, however, as to whether the variety of English chosen has impact on the effect of the ad. Do members of the target group, for example, understand English with a heavy Dutch accent better than standard British or American English, and does Dutch English have a different impact on the image and price of the product than a native variety of English? In other words, if English is used in commercials in non-Anglophone countries, should a localized variety of English be used or a native variety? If a native variety does not have a more negative impact than a localized variety, then which native variety should be used? What is, for instance, the effect of commercials with a standard American variety compared with the same commercial with a

standard British variety in both Anglophone and non-Anglophone Europe?

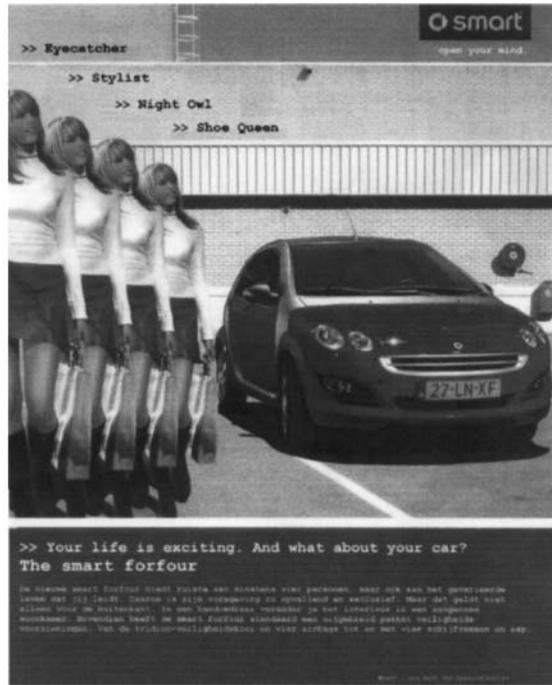
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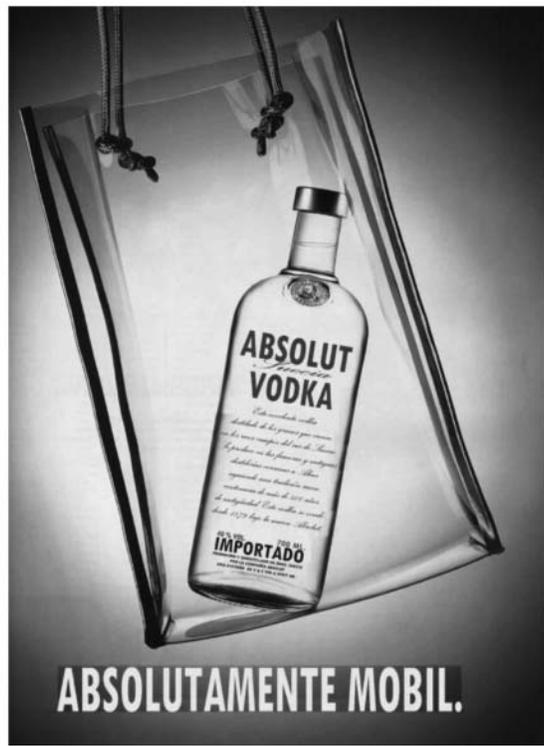
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APPENDIX A. The Original Versions of the Ads With English. (The real test items had a much higher quality, were larger, and were in full color.)



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APPENDIX B. Examples of Manipulated Ads in the Local Language for Each Campaign. (The real test items had a much higher quality, were larger, and were in full color.)



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