

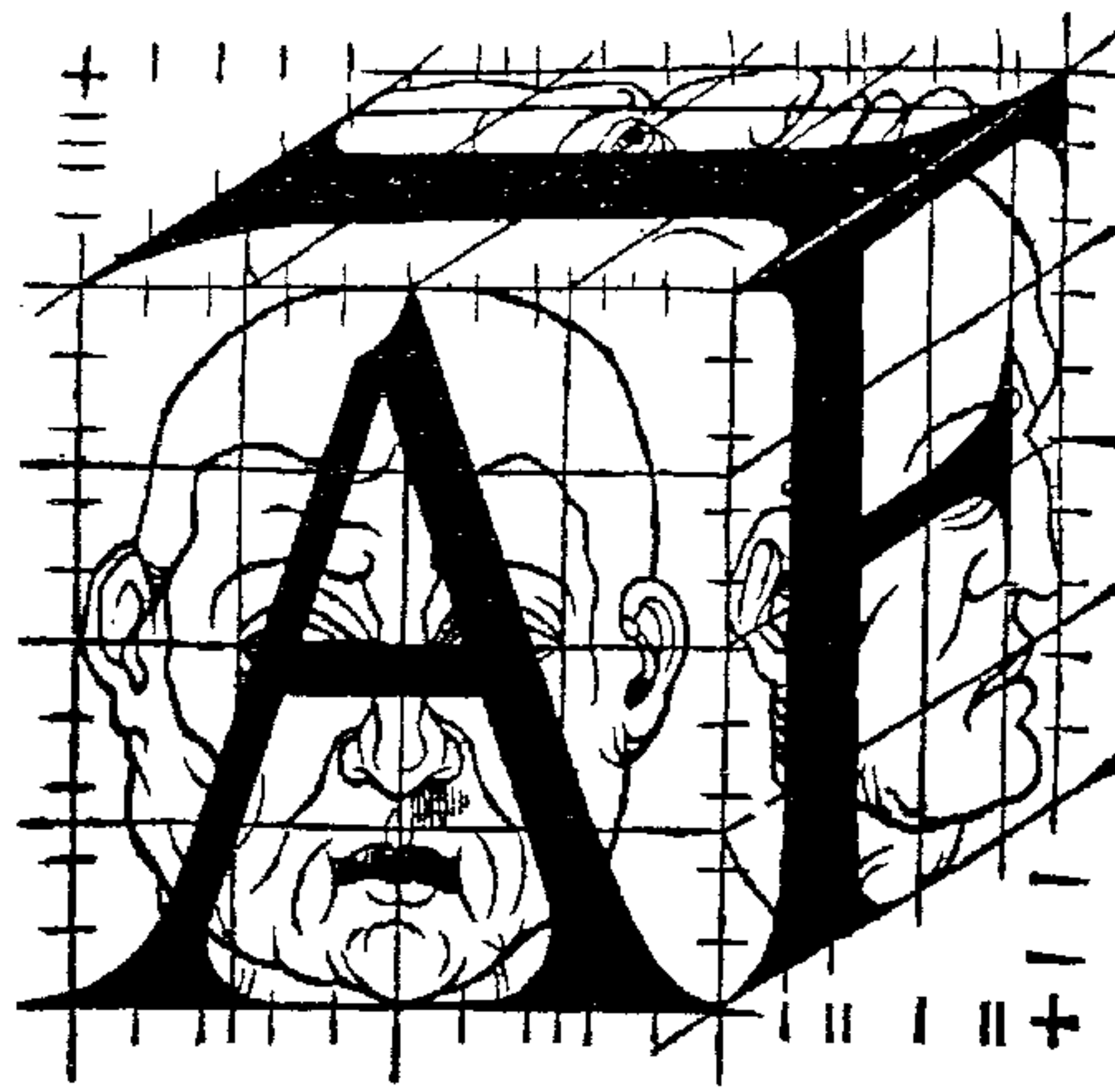


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

*Discursive Practices and "Textual"  
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Communication:  
Processes and Practices,  
Rhetoric and Heritage*

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In copertina, immagine tratta da: Geoffroy Tory, *Champfleury. Au quel est contenu l'Art et Science de la deue et vraye Proportion des Lettres Attiques, qu'on dit autrement Lettres Antiques, et vulgairement Lettres Romaines proportionnees selon le Corps & Visage humain*, (Paris : 1529).

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**Reasons given by Dutch makers of job ads  
for placing all-English, partly English  
or all-Dutch job advertisements  
in Dutch newspapers: an interview-based study**

Job advertisements in the Netherlands frequently contain English words and are occasionally even completely in English (e.g. Korzilius *et al.* 2006). The reasons given in the literature for the use of English in job advertisements in non-English-speaking countries are based on the analysis of anecdotal examples by scholars and writers in the media (e.g. Larson 1990; Watts 2003). Bhatia (1993: 12) points out that, in addition to researchers, “specialist informants also have an important role to play in the description, analysis and clarification of genres”, since genre practitioners have knowledge of a genre that non-practitioners do not have. While a number of studies have asked makers of product advertisements for their reasons for using English (e.g. Gerritsen *et al.* 2000), no such empirical data are available for makers of job ads.

In the literature, a distinction is made between symbolic and non-symbolic reasons for the use of English and other foreign languages in advertising (e.g. Hornikx/Starren 2006; Kelly-Holmes 2005). An example of a symbolic reason is the prestige-enhancing effect of English. An example of a non-symbolic reason is that English words are used because they are shorter than equivalents in the local language. Some authors have suggested that symbolic reasons are more important than non-symbolic reasons to account for the use of foreign languages in product advertising (e.g. Kelly-Holmes 2000).

This study aims to determine the reasons genre practitioners, Dutch job ad makers, give for choosing Dutch, English or a combination of these two languages in job ads (for this distinction, see e.g. Cheshire/Moser 1994). Following e.g. Kelly-Holmes (2005) and Hornikx and Starren (2006), it aims to establish whether these reasons are symbolic or non-symbolic. Following Bhatia (1993), this study also aims to determine to what extent the job ad makers gave reasons that had not been suggested by non-practitioners in the literature on English in job and product advertising.

Twenty-seven interviews were held with Dutch job ad makers: ten with writers of all-English, nine with writers of partly English and eight with writers of all-Dutch job ads. The ads had appeared in various Dutch national and local newspapers. In the interviews, the job ad makers were asked open-ended questions about the reasons for their language choice. Interviewees' remarks were analysed using an approach common in qualitative research. They were labelled (e.g. as 'prestige' or 'international target group') and categorised as symbolic (suggesting qualities or characteristics that were not objectively observable, e.g. international status of the organization) or non-symbolic (referring to aspects that would be objectively observable, e.g. conciseness, attracting attention). The final categorisation was established by a team of three raters. Reasons mentioned by a majority of respondents were considered 'dominant' reasons (cf. Lewis *et al.* 2006).

The results showed that the reasons given by the job ad makers for using English or Dutch were a mixture of symbolic and non-symbolic reasons. A combination of both symbolic and non-symbolic reasons was mentioned by a majority of the individual interviewees who had placed an all-English ad and by all those who had placed an all-Dutch job ad. Only a few of the interviewees who had placed a partly English advertisement put forward both types of reason, while the majority mentioned solely non-symbolic reasons. None of the respondents gave only symbolic reasons for placing an all-English, partly English or all-Dutch job advertisement. This shows that non-symbolic reasons were more prevalent. This finding contrasts with suggestions in the literature

that symbolic reasons for using English in advertising are more important than non-symbolic reasons (e.g. Kelly-Holmes 2000).

A number of symbolic and non-symbolic reasons were found to be dominant. A dominant symbolic reason for placing an all-English ad was that it signals the importance of good communication skills in English. A dominant non-symbolic reason for placing an all-English ad was that the ad's target group was international. There were no dominant symbolic reasons for using partly English ads, since each symbolic reason was mentioned by only one respondent. A dominant non-symbolic reason for using English terms in partly English ads was that these terms were commonly used in the sector in which the organisation operated. A dominant symbolic reason for placing all-Dutch ads was that, unlike English terms, Dutch terms were not "exaggerated". A dominant non-symbolic reason for placing an all-Dutch ad was that Dutch was the language of communication in the organisation.

One third of the reasons given by the job ad makers were not found in earlier publications. A number of these would seem to involve considerations that could only occur to people who are actually involved in writing the job ad (e.g. lack of time as a reason for placing an all-English ad) and who have an intimate knowledge of the possible readers of the ad (e.g. the use of Dutch instead of English terms in an all-Dutch for a job in the care sector because they were considered to be more comprehensible to a secondary target group, elderly people) and the linguistic practices in the sector in which the organisation operates (e.g. an all-English ad was placed because English was common in the sector). These findings underline the importance of getting text producers' perspectives on text features (cf. Bhatia 1993).

In conclusion, the present study has shown the value of investigating practitioners' viewpoints to complement media and scholarly treatment of text features, in this case language choice in job advertising. On the one hand, it has confirmed the relevance of earlier suggestions regarding reasons for the use of English or Dutch in job ads. On the other hand, it has provided novel insights: it has uncovered a considerable number of reasons not mentioned in previous work.

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