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WHAT DO WE STUDY WHEN WE STUDY THE USE OF BORROWINGS IN ADVERTISEMENTS?

The use of foreign language elements in advertisements is quite a common practice. Therefore, a large number of publications on this topic comes as no surprise. However, for the study purposes the researchers apply different perspectives and points of reference when it comes to defining what actually constitutes the use of foreign-language elements. The present paper offers a short review of those approaches, showing the discrepancies between various standpoints. It also addresses the methodological difficulties related to the application of clear-cut definitions. Given the variability of standpoints, it is suggested that the issues outlined in the paper need to be taken into consideration before any attempts are made at comparing the results of different studies of the problem.

1. Introduction

It would be very hard, if not impossible, to browse through a newspaper or a magazine without finding commercials applying foreign language elements in the text. The same applies to television advertising spots and (maybe to a lesser degree) radio ads. This is true even if we apply the most restrictive definitions of what constitutes the use of a foreign language. Since such elements are obviously prominent and (as it might seem at first sight) relatively easy to identify, they are a tempting object of linguistic study for many researchers. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that so many publications have appeared, addressing the issue from various perspectives. Out of this multitude a certain selection has been made in order to illustrate the methodological problem alluded to in the title of the present paper. Thus, the basis for the reflections presented below will be the following publications: Baumgardner (2006) and (2008), Bhatia (1992), Chen (2006), Cheshire and Moser (1994), Chłopicki and Świątek (2000), Friedrich (2002), Gerritsen (1995), Gerritsen et al. (2000), Gerritsen et al. (2007), Haarmann (1984), Kelly-Holmes (2000) and (2004), Martin (2002a), (2002b), (2006), (2007) and (2008), Takahashi (1990), Tanaka (1994), Ustinova and Bhatia (2005), Ustinova (2006), Wojtaszek (2004), Zabawa (2004), (2007), (2009a) and (2009b).

Almost all of them concentrate on the use of English in advertisements whose primary language is different. From the global perspective English is undoubtedly the most popular source of borrowings, given its status in the contemporary world. That is why publications focusing on the application of this particular language seem to provide both a sufficient and at the same time a fairly homogeneous perspective for the discussion.

2. The object of the study

The first issue to be addressed is the definition and description of the object of study in the works mentioned above. All of them are concerned with the application of elements imported from external linguistic systems (mainly English) in advertisements published in a local language. The titles of those works are formulated in relatively general terms, so in most cases the authors identify the external elements which are analysed as *English*. Such a strategy is applied in two-thirds of the publications. Sometimes the authors are a bit more specific, when they concentrate on *Frenghish* (Martin, 2007), *English borrowings* (Takahashi, 1990), *English constructions* (Zabawa, 2009a), *English elements* (Zabawa, 2009b), or *loans of English origin* (Zabawa, 2004). When the focus is broader, and more languages are taken into consideration, we find such descriptive terms as *foreign languages* (Haarmann, 1984) or *language fetish* (Kelly-Holmes, 2000), and if the perspective combines the linguistic with the cultural issues we come across *ethnocultural stereotypes* (Haarmann, 1984) or *cultural images* (Martin, 2002a).

Often the name of the language or other descriptive terms characterised above appear within a prepositional *of* phrase, post-modifying a head noun. In four of the titles this noun is *mixing* (Bhatia, 1992; Chen, 2006; Martin, 2002b; Martin, 2008), which makes it the most frequently used descriptive term specifying what actually happens to the foreign elements, together with the word *use* (Baumgardner, 2008; Zabawa, 2004; Zabawa, 2009a; Zabawa, 2009b), which also appears four times. This is followed by *functions* (Bhatia, 1992; Wojtaszek, 2004; Zabawa, 2007), used three times, and single occurrences of *appeal* (Baumgardner, 2006) and *convergence* (Ustinova & Bhatia, 2005). The global perspective is also highlighted in some of the publications by mentioning a number of different languages, or evoked by such phrases as *across cultures* (Bhatia, 1992), *multilingual communication* (Kelly-Holmes, 2004), *multilingual discourses* and *global consumer* (Martin, 2007) or *global imagery* (Martin, 2006).

If the title of the work is not sufficiently revealing, the authors define the object of their study in the body of the text. In doing so they very frequently refer to the descriptive terms proposed by other scholars and provide points of reference against which foreign language elements can be identified. This is often quite indispensable, since such terms as *English*, even if combined with *borrowings*, *constructions*, *elements* or *loans*, are not precise enough, given the fact that the term *borrowing*, for instance, has been defined and divided into sub-classes quite differently by a number of linguists (cf. the discussion in Grzegą (2003) or Zuckerman (2003)). That is why the definitions

and points of reference used by various authors are prone to variability as well. We might suspect, therefore, that the elements studied in the works mentioned above could belong to domains sharing certain common territory, but often with quite fuzzy borders and unusual extensions. The following sections provide some more detailed overview of the problem.

3. Definitions and points of reference

Not all of the publications introduced above provide an extensive definition of the object of the study before the analysis proper is conducted, sometimes the authors make the assumption that theoretical considerations lie outside the scope of their studies and that the identification of borrowings/loans/elements can be more or less taken for granted. However, some of them offer a more detailed discussion before the findings are described.

In Chen's (2006) study two methodological operations are of particular interest. The first one involves highlighting the distinction between code-mixing, code-switching and borrowing, in order to select the first of the three as the focus of the investigation. It is defined as "the intrasentential use of two or more languages or varieties of language" (Chen, 2006, p. 14). Within Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1989), Chen considers the use of English in Taiwanese ads as a marked use of a certain code, which is expected to produce some "other than expected effects" in the recipients of the ads, because the expected norm is the use of Chinese. The other of the two operations is the exclusion from the data of all company and product names (such as ACER, TRAVELMATE, etc.), because, in the author's opinion, they only blur the picture, and it is more interesting to investigate the code-mixing with common words. Particularly this choice has important consequences for the results of the analysis, because such items usually constitute a very large percentage of the foreign language content in ads. In a related study by Hsu (2008) company and product names amounted to 41 per cent of all instances of foreign language use, so their elimination would yield quite different quantitative results. Thus, Chen's (2006) analysis reveals that the top ten frequently used English expressions are *Spa, e, easy, No. 1, VIP, DIY, M, bye (bye-bye), fun,* and *ok*, and noun phrases account for nearly half of all the English expressions used. It was found that English is often used to add to the colorfulness and attraction of an ad. A questionnaire survey was also conducted to find out people's attitudes towards code-mixing in advertising. The results indicate that most respondents view the use of English quite positively.

Another interesting perspective is provided in Martin's (2002a) (2002b), (2006), (2007) and (2008) studies, where she demonstrates how the advertisers manage to circumvent the legal restrictions introduced by the Toubon law or how they create new meanings and senses by ingenious code-mixing. Of particular interest here is the point of reference used for identification of foreign language elements. The Toubon law, named after its proponent, is the most important piece of French legislation protecting the French language from all foreign (especially English) influences and safeguarding

comprehensibility and intelligibility of all texts for the French. Articles 2 and 12 of this act stipulate that equally legible, audible and intelligible French translations must be provided for all foreign language material in print, radio and television advertising distributed in France (Martin, 2007, p. 173).¹ The problem here is related to what exactly constitutes foreign language material and requires legally specified manipulation.

It turns out that the problem is solved in an administrative way by the French government, who have assigned a number of “terminology committees” the task of coining new French expressions to replace English borrowings in various professional domains, including broadcast media and advertising (Martin, 2007, p. 173). The lists of vocabulary items which have been approved are regularly published and must be consulted by the advertisers in the process of copy production. They appear in such sources as the Dictionary of Official French Terms (“Dictionnaire des termes officiels de la langue française”) published by the *Délégation Générale à la Langue Française*, or “Journal Officiel de la République Française” and in the online database maintained by the Ministry of Culture (www.criter.dgflf.culture.gouv.fr). In addition to that, all TV commercials must undergo the process of screening for illegal content before they can be broadcast, by the Advertising Control Bureau (*Bureau de Vérification de la Publicité*). In order to secure approval, French subtitles must be provided for all written and spoken elements identified as ‘English’, i.e. unassimilated borrowings (Martin, 2007, p. 174).

Martin describes three major strategies used by French advertisers to circumvent the legal restrictions imposed on them. The first one involves the exploitation of elements which are exempt from the legal restrictions, such as the brand names and soundtracks, where English elements without translation are free to appear. The second one exploits the copyright law, whereby English elements which are copyright as part of the brand name are also exempt from legal restrictions. Thus, we find such items as *Essilor Airwear® for Optic 2000 eyewear* or *Quadra-Drive® for Jeep automobiles*, and many more (Martin, 2006, pp. 235–6). Finally, the most blatant, in Martin’s opinion, circumvention of the Toubon law takes the form of vast disproportion between the English elements and their French translations, the former appearing in prominent, distinct and large print, with the latter provided in very small font, indistinctive colours and along the vertical inner edge of the page. Such positioning renders them virtually invisible. As Martin concludes, quoting one of the representatives of a French advertising agency, “the funny thing about France is that they [the government] keep making [language] laws and [the French] never stop finding ways to get around them” (2007, p. 174).

Another tendency is represented by the authors who use a selected lexicographic point of reference, e.g. a dictionary. Good illustrations are provided by Gerritsen et al. (2000) and Gerritsen et al. (2007). In order to secure a reliable point of reference the

¹ The complete text of the Toubon law can be found in French, German, and English on the French Ministry of Culture’s website at www.culture.gouv.fr.

authors use an authoritative dictionary, in the case of Dutch it is the “Van Dale Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse taal”. In the former paper the 1992 edition was used, whereas in the latter the 1999 edition served as a point of reference. Thus, in each case the benchmark dictionary was published eight years earlier than the studies. In Gerritsen et al. (2000) the authors do not make any extensive comments on that, but in Gerritsen et al. (2007) a more detailed discussion of the issue is offered. The authors acknowledge that there may be a number of words which have been significantly absorbed by the recipient language since the publication of the reference dictionary, but in order to preserve the consistency of discussion and classification they have decided to treat them nevertheless as instances of English. Especially nowadays, when the language habits change more rapidly than in the past, such considerations are significantly more relevant, which is also indirectly acknowledged by the authors, who decided to devote much more space for appropriate discussion of the problem in their recent publication (Gerritsen et al., 2007, pp. 301–2), in comparison to Gerritsen et al. (2000), where only the name of the dictionary is mentioned.

Baumgardner (2006; 2008), in turn, makes a distinction between “established” English borrowings in Mexican Spanish and those which cannot be described as such. The paper itself does not offer any extensive discussion of the problem, but the author refers the readers to a number of prior publications, where the topic of “established” borrowings was the primary issue. On the one hand, it is quite convenient, because the author does not need to depart from the major topic of the discussion, and a proper reference point is established, but on the other hand, the reader may find it difficult to access the sources mentioned and proper interpretation of the analysis places additional burden on him.

Yet another tendency is represented by Zabawa (2004; 2007; 2009a), who carefully defines the term *borrowing* and presents various classifications thereof, usually distinguishing between lexical, semantic and grammatical types. Contrary to the majority of other publications, which concentrate mainly on the lexical types, Zabawa discusses also the other varieties, albeit acknowledging that in contrast to lexical borrowings they are significantly less frequent. Their inclusion, however, makes the analysis broader in scope. On the other hand, the author does not provide any quantitative data on the frequencies of occurrence or the size of the sample. Instead, the examples which are analysed and classified seem to be chosen by the author in such a way as to exhaust all the typological categories. In this context it is interesting that in each of the titles of his publications Zabawa employs different descriptive terms referring to the English language elements, but when we read the texts it turns out that the categories used in analysis are the same or very similar.

There are also authors who choose not to provide any explicit explanations of the decisions pertaining to the classification of elements under investigation as cases of English, opting for certain implicit assumptions that relevant criteria are sufficiently transparent and may be deduced from the analysis alone. Thus, it appears that in Ustinova (2006) and Ustinova and Bhatia (2005) the criterion of the script is used as the primary marker of the language used. Thus words which are written in the Latin (as opposed to Cyrillic) alphabet are treated as instances of the use of foreign language,

mainly English. However, from a closer inspection of the findings we clearly see that also cases of transliteration were analysed as instances of English use, if these applied to the product names. Similar tendencies have been observed in Chen (2006), Takahashi (1990) and Tanaka (1994), although the things look slightly differently in China and in Japan, due to slightly different writing conventions and the availability of the *katakana* for Japanese advertisers. A detailed discussion of those issues is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.²

In Wojtaszek (2004) we also do not find any explicit discussion of the methodological considerations pertaining to the identification of English language elements, but the analysis reveals that both unassimilated and not fully assimilated items were recognised as such, together with product names and company names. This is consistent with the assumptions of Cheshire and Moser (1994), whose study served as the background and the source of the analytical framework employed by the author.

Chłopicki and Świątek (2000), on the other hand, do not attempt to engage in any theoretical disputes about the types and categories of borrowings, as might be expected, given the book format of the publication. It becomes understandable, however, if we consider its intended readers. It is not directed to linguists, but to general audience, for whom the subtle distinctions between the categories of borrowings are of little relevance. Thus, the text is devoted to an exhaustive analysis of various elements of the English language found in Polish commercials. The authors apply a normative and evaluative approach in the book, pointing to a number of problems caused by advertisers' incompetent application of elements not properly understood or sufficiently reflected upon prior to the composition of the message. They partly absolve the copywriters of the responsibility by referring to the functional perspective of the use of English borrowings, as quite often they are not meant to be thoroughly understood, but merely recognised as symbols of certain claims or values.

4. Summary

It follows from the examples discussed above that any attempts to compare the findings of various authors writing about the use of foreign language elements in advertising should be preceded by careful inspection of the research methodology and the descriptive framework used. The differences might be related to at least three factors, possibly complicating the comparisons:

- reductions applied to the research material to include only the selected items in the analysis – e.g. Chen (2006);
- differences in the way borrowings and foreign language elements are defined and in the reference points applied by the authors;

² For more extended discussions see Huang and Chan (1997), Huang and Chan (2005) and Tanaka (1994).

- different degrees of accuracy applied by the authors in reporting the quantitative data concerning the size of the sample and its representativeness.

The most frequently applied tendencies identified in the present review include the following:

- focusing primarily on lexical borrowings, defined in a way similar to Haugen (1950);
- exclusion from the analysis of foreign language elements which are characterised by a considerable degree of assimilation, as evidenced by:
 - lexicographic sources,
 - legally binding databases,
 - common sense and native-speaker's intuitions of the authors,
 - the type of script used by advertisers;
- inclusion in the majority of publication of sufficiently explicit discussions of the criteria applied by the authors for identification and description of the items under investigation.

In conclusion, the proper attention given to the factors listed above should secure a satisfactory level of descriptive accuracy in any comparisons of the findings. Additionally, increased attentiveness to the intricacies involved in methodological designs of studies should offer us the benefit of broadening our own perspectives and appreciating the skill and expertise of other researchers, opening our eyes to the richness of potential choices on the pathways of scientific investigation.

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