Special Session Summary  Language Processing, Affect, and Cognition: Word and Sentence Structure  Effects ACross Languages

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While language is ubiquitous in marketing and advertising, consumer research on language processing is still in its infancy. This session examined different aspects of how the structure of language influences the effectiveness of brand names and advertising copy. The study of language processing is crucial to understand the influence of advertising and brand naming on both affect and cognition. The research presented here aims to provide an appreciation of the effect of language structure on cognition and persuasion, particularly when targeting linguistically diverse markets.

The three studies by Yorkston and de Mello opened the session investigating the linguistic structure of brand names. Their research extends previous research on the linguistic features of brand names (e.g., Zhang and Schmitt 2001) by examining the influence of gender on brands. The studies suggest that it is not only important to consider the properties of the brand name itself (e.g., familiarity, gender), but that gender congruity between the brand and its product class must also be considered when designing brand names.

The study by Lerman also investigates the structure of brand names. The author considers the role of a brand’s linguistic components on brand attitudes and other measures of brand processing. In particular, the results suggest that familiarity of brand morphemes (the smallest meaning units in language) impacts brand name preference. Lerman’s research has profound implications for brand name development.

The five studies by Luna, Peracchio, and Lerman investigate language at a different level. While the other two presentations focused on morphology (meaning creation within a single word or brand name), this paper examined language in sentences, and suggest that sentence structure in a slogan (i.e., its syntax) also impacts affect and cognition, especially when consumers are paying attention to the language of the ad.

Each of the presentations had a cross-linguistic dimension which is relevant to the growing diversity of consumer markets. Lerman explained that morphemic familiarity has opposite effects for native and non-native speakers. Yorkston and de Mello showed that different languages (i.e., Spanish and English) assign gender in different ways to brand names, not necessarily following the linguistic norms used to assign gender to other nouns. Luna, Peracchio, and Lerman suggested that there are structural and social constraints governing the use of mixed-language ads, a practice increasingly used in ethnic and cross-over marketing.

The contributions for consumer research are manifold. Each of the presentations is firmly grounded on linguistic theory and contributes to the small but growing corpus of research on psycholinguistics in consumer research. Also, while brand research has often focused on the nature of the psychological associations to a brand, it has often neglected how linguistic factors may influence brand name success. Additionally, the presentation on codeswitching provided a framework for researchers interested in this widespread practice, not only in ethnic marketing but also in cross-over advertising, targeting mainstream consumers.

“In Sex Sells? The Effects of Gender Marking on Consumers’ Evaluations of Branded Products Across Languages”

Eric Yorkston, University of Southern California
Gustavo de Mello, University of Southern California

Brand names identify and distinguish products and are often considered the single most valuable asset a corporation possesses. Names can work together with the package graphics to communicate the product’s position and image. A brand name can be designed to convey excitement, elegance, exclusiveness, and other qualities that influence the consumers’ perceptions and attitudes. Good brands can evoke feelings of trust, confidence, security, strength, durability, and status. The brand name chosen for a new product can affect the brand’s image, shape brand-knowledge structures, and play an important role in brand-equity formation.

In many cases brand names provide information about the product explicitly through the semantic meanings incorporated in the brand name (e.g., Windex is a product to be used upon windows). It is also possible for brand names to implicitly cue attitudes or information toward the brand through structural factors of the name itself. For example, the phonetic sounds comprising a name can influence attribute perceptions or even trigger cultural stereotypes (LeClerc, Schmitt & Dubé 1994; Yorkston 2004).

In this paper, we examine gender markers, an inherent aspect of language that implicitly affects both brand attitude formation and brand encoding. Languages assign objects to different gender classes. Members of a gender class then systematically modify other parts of speech, such as pronouns, articles, adjectives, and verbs. Depending upon the language, gender is assigned by using either semantic or formal rules. In semantic gender classifications, the meanings and properties of the object determine a word’s gender. In a formal gender classification, the properties of the word instead of the properties of the represented object determine the gender. Therefore, in language, gender can act both as a classification scheme for objects as well as the agreement cue for an object’s referents.

Our objectives in this paper are three-fold. First, we examine the theoretical basis for the gender classification of brand names in language. We demonstrate that brand names do not acquire gender in a similar manner to objects in a language, but instead acquire gender similarly to how an individual’s name would acquire gender. Second, we demonstrate the effect that a brand name’s gender can have upon consumers’ judgments of a brand in a product class. Third, we provide evidence suggesting that gender (dis)agreement between brand names and products affects encoding and storage of the product’s information. Stated simply, we investigate some of the consequences a gender system may have on attitude formation and brand name encoding in a brand context. In addition, we examine how the differential role of gender across languages can moderate these effects.

In Study 1, we examine the role gender classes play in product evaluations in English, a language with a semantic assignment system. English has a relatively weak gender system (i.e. there are very few semantic rules and very little agreement across parts of speech). We show that consumers readily break from the structured rules and assign non-neutral genders to both product classes and to brand names. Further, the interaction of these gender assignments...
can affect judgments about the product wherein consumers bestow higher evaluations upon products with congruent genders between product class and brand name. Even more interestingly, English speakers demonstrate a remarkable flexibility in the manner in which they break the rules of gender assignment. While product classes follow semantic assignment rules, the assignment of gender to fictitious, meaningless brand names appears to follow formal assignment rules.

In Study 2, we extend the analysis of the role gender classes play in English. Using the insights garnered from Study 1, we more systematically examine how gender markers affect product evaluation. We demonstrate that when the formally assigned gender of the brand name is congruent with the semantically assigned gender of the product class, individuals have more positive attitudes and elicit higher purchase intentions toward the brand. In addition, we provide support for our hypothesis that the primary purpose of semantic gender systems is to provide cues regarding object meaning and not to facilitate language processing. There is little direct evidence of processing interference caused by brand name/product class gender incongruencies.

Study 3 replicates the procedure of our second study, this time with a population where the primary language is Spanish, a language with a formal assignment system. Since product classes may have differing formal and semantic gender classifications in Spanish, we examine how these two classifications interact with a brand name’s assigned gender. We find that while gender is formally assigned to objects in Spanish, the gender of brand names is semantically assigned in congruence to the product class. Additionally, it is this congruency that has the greater effect upon a brand’s evaluation. We also report the counterintuitive finding that gender effects upon brand evaluations appear to be weaker in Spanish than in English, even though Spanish possesses a stronger gender system (i.e., words are more often assigned via specific rules and more parts of speech agree with an object’s gender). We posit that since formal gender systems rely less upon semantic meanings in gender assignment, and evaluating a product and brand name relies heavily on a brand’s associated meanings, gender associations are less likely to be applied to brand evaluations in a formal system. Finally, we demonstrate that gender matching plays a significant role in brand name encoding. Not only are there significant differences in recall based upon product gender/brand gender congruency, but mismatching brand name and product gender inhibits brand name recognition.

This research expands upon the recent literature that demonstrates the importance of examining individual linguistic components when developing a brand name. Additionally, by examining this cross-cultural phenomenon, we present an interesting example of how multi-national companies must not only be concerned with explicit cultural differences, but also with an implicit understanding of the language when taking their brands across borders.

“You Say Tomato and I Say Tomato: Native and Non-Native Language Processing of Novel Brand Names”

Dawn Lerman, Fordham University

The translation of brand names poses challenges to marketers operating internationally. One often-cited example is the marketing of the Chevy Nova in Mexico, where “no va” means “it doesn’t go.” However, such challenges are not limited to brands marketed across countries. For example, Spanish-speakers within the United States may have made the same association. Of course, bilingualism complicates the issue. Depending on the language system used to process the name (i.e., Spanish or English), the Nova name may or may not have evoked negative brand associations among Spanish-English bilinguals. The purpose of this paper is to investigate such language influences by comparing brand name evaluations of monolingual versus bilingual consumers.

Consumers draw on language knowledge stored in the lexicon to process brand names. When the Hydrovive brand of shampoo was first introduced in the United States, for example, English speakers were able to draw on their knowledge of phonemes (i.e., sound) to read and pronounce the name and their knowledge of morphology to make associations to the name (i.e., hydro relating to water or moisture and vive relating to life). Even when names are non-words that are not composed of known morphemes (e.g., Exxon, Xerox), consumers may apply their lexical knowledge to pronounce the name and perhaps derive some meaning from the name based on phonetic symbolism (Klink 2001). Research suggests, however, that consumers are unlikely to apply their lexical knowledge to highly novel verbal stimuli (Durso and Shore 1991). Thus, English-speaking consumers might have been reluctant to try to say “Haagen Dazs” aloud when this brand was first introduced because the name includes an umlaut and the letter combinations violate English word formation rules.

Whereas novel brand names can only activate lexical knowledge of a single language for monolinguals, they may activate lexical knowledge of more than one language for bilinguals. Although fluent bilinguals process words in their non-native language directly (as opposed to using corresponding words in their native language; Chen and Leung 1989), they should be able to draw upon this broader language knowledge when it may be helpful to do so. Presumably, then, they should have greater linguistic flexibility in processing brand names than do monolinguals. This flexibility is evident in the supposed ease of learning a third language once having learned a second language (Oldin 1989).

Linguistic flexibility among bilinguals is made possible through language transfer, or more specifically, substratum transfer. Substratum transfer refers to the influence of the native language on a subsequently learned language (Oldin, 1989). Although the effects of substratum transfer are most evident in pronunciation (Thomason 1981), such transfer also occurs at the morphological level (Ard and Homberg 1983). While substratum transfer can certainly aid brand name processing, the potential also exists for it to hinder processing. The consumer’s pronunciation of the brand name may, for example, diverge from the norm among native speakers of that language (Oldin 1989). The resulting mispronunciation often results from the activation of phonological codes according to the grapheme-phoneme (i.e., spelling-sound) correspondences of both the target language and the native language (Brysbaert, Van Dyck, and Van de Poel 1999). Non-native speakers may also hear phonemic contrasts when none exist in that language or miss such contrasts when they do (Liberman, Harris, Hoffman, and Griffith 1957).

In this study, an experiment is conducted to examine the use of lexical knowledge among native (monolinguals) and non-native (bilinguals) English-speakers in the processing of novel brand names and the effect of such knowledge on brand name evaluations. Brand name novelty was manipulated by exposing respondents to one of two novel brand names, a novel name composed of English language morphemes and a novel non-morphemic name. It was hypothesized that an interaction between morphemic (un)familiarity of the name (morphemically familiar, morphemically unfamiliar) and language background (monolingual, bilingual) would exist.

Consistent with expectations, the results revealed stark differences between native and non-native English speakers in perceptions of and attitudes toward morphemically familiar and unfamiliar brand names. Overall, the results indicate a clear advantage of morphemically familiar names over morphemically unfamiliar
names among native speakers whereas the reverse generally appears true for non-native speakers. For example, among native speakers, morphemically familiar names appear more distinctive and more likeable but no easier to pronounce than morphemically unfamiliar names. In contrast, morphemically unfamiliar names appear to perform better than morphemically familiar names on distinctiveness, attitudes, and purchase intentions among non-native speakers.

The differences in perception and attitudes among native and non-native speakers present additional challenges for companies operating in bilingual communities. Previous research suggests that the use of a consumer’s native versus non-native language in advertising can influence attitudes toward the ad and toward the corporate sponsor (Koslow, Shandasani, and Touchstone, 1994). The present study offers evidence for such (non)native language effects on perceptions of and attitudes toward both the brand name and the brand. The managerial implications of these differences are discussed along with a number of alternative courses of action that marketers may consider depending on the language background of their target market.

“A Theory-Based Examination of Language Switching in Advertising to Bilingual Consumers”
David Luna, Baruch College
Laura Peracchio, University of Wisconsin
Dawn Lerman, Fordham University

Bilingualism is an important phenomenon considering that most of the world’s population speaks more than one language (Grosjean 1982). The lack of research explicitly addressing how bilinguals process marketing messages is therefore surprising. In this paper, we address the practice of switching languages within an utterance (codeswitching) and, in particular, within advertising slogans, as many ads do when they target ethnic markets. For example, a recent advertisement for Latina magazine read: “Looking great doesn’t have to cost a fortuna.” In Spanish, the word “fortuna” means “fortune.” In this case, the advertiser appears to believe that the word “fortuna” will be more compelling than “fortune” among a Latino audience.

Our research will examine whether codeswitching in advertising is an effective practice, and what variables may influence its effectiveness. Study 1 investigates the effect of structural (grammatical) constraints on attitude toward codeswitched slogans. Studies 2-5 examine the effect of social factors on attitudes toward codeswitched ad slogans.

As a theoretical base for our studies, we utilize Myers-Scotton’s (1993) model of codeswitching. The model hypothesizes that there are structural, or cognitive/grammatical, constraints that dictate when codeswitching can be implemented by the speaker. These constraints constitute a “grammar” of codeswitching which describes the correct and incorrect ways of mixing languages. In addition, the model suggests that there exist socio-psychological variables that influence whether speakers will choose to use codeswitching or not. These variables could include the attitude that speakers have toward a specific language and the use of codeswitching in general.

In study 1, we examined the grammar of codeswitching. That is, we attempted to uncover the effect of syntactic (sentence structure) factors on message evaluations. We developed eight advertising slogans containing either correct or incorrect code switches according to the rules set forth by Myers Scotton (1993). We also manipulated type of processing during exposure. For that purpose, we had respondents engage in either data-driven or conceptually driven processing (Roediger 1990). We hypothesized that if they were in the data-driven mode, they would notice the code-switched word and they would be affected by structural constraints. If they were in the conceptually driven mode, they would ignore or not pay attention to the code-switched word and they would not be affected by structural constraints. This type of processing effect should be manifested in more (negative) elaboration on the slogans themselves and a higher likelihood that grammaticality effects would be manifested in the data-driven condition (Chaffin 1997; Elias and Perfetti 1973). The negative elaboration in the data-driven condition should result in worse slogan evaluations in the grammatically incorrect version of the slogans. In the conceptually driven condition we hypothesized that slogan grammaticality would have no effect on slogan evaluations. The findings of our experiment confirmed our expectations, showing that grammaticality of codeswitching only influences slogan evaluations in the data-driven condition. Process and memory measures provided support for the evaluation results.

In studies 2-5, we examined the social factors influencing attitudes toward codeswitched slogans. We manipulated the language that was most salient in the slogans. Minority-to-Majority slogans began in the Minority language (in this case, Spanish) and switched midstream to the Majority language (English). This provided salience to the Majority language, since it contrasted with the language being processed at that particular time. Majority-to-Minority slogans began in the Majority language and switched midstream to the Minority language, providing salience to the Minority language.

Study 2 found that, in codeswitched slogans, the attitudes associated with the salient language influence consumers’ attitudes toward the advertised product. When the Majority language was made salient (Minority-to-Majority slogans), the slogans resulted in higher evaluations than when the Minority language was made salient (Majority-to-Minority slogans). We call this the codeswitching direction effect. Thought protocols confirm our theorizing that the Majority language is associated with more positive concepts (progress, education, integration,…) than the Minority language, which tends to be associated with marginalization, discrimination, and a feeling of inferiority (also see Koslow et al. 1994).

Study 3 manipulates attitudes toward the majority and minority languages. We find that the codeswitching direction effect is eliminated when bilingual consumers are exposed to materials emphasizing the positive aspects of the Minority language. These results suggest that the codeswitching direction effect is indeed caused by attitudes toward a particular language. Studies 4 and 5 manipulate attitudes toward the practice of codeswitching and attitudes toward a specific codeswitching direction. We find that those factors also moderate the codeswitching direction effect. These results suggest the existence of language schemas –associations that individuals have toward specific languages. These language schemas influence consumers’ perception of materials written in different languages.

Our research validates Myers-Scotton’s (1993) model in an experimental setting (the original model was derived through observed discourse analysis) and extends it to language comprehension in advertising. Our results represent a step forward in the understanding of language in advertising to bilinguals. In particular, we uncover structural and social constraints in the use of codeswitching in advertising, a practice increasingly used by U.S. advertisers targeting ethnic markets. We also provide some practical guidelines for advertisers considering the use of codeswitched ads.
REFERENCES


