BILINGUAL ADVERTISING IN A MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY

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Abstract

With globalization, advertisers have begun using bilingual advertisements to reach a larger customer base. This paper examines bilingual advertisements in India, where code-mixing is used in both Hindi and English advertisements. It provides samples of these advertisements and discusses the motivation for this marketing strategy.

1. Introduction

One of the effects of globalization has been an increasing use of bilingual advertising. Advertisers now use bilingual advertisements to market their products to consumers. The primary reason is to tap a larger consumer base and reach two different linguistic communities; Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) give the example of the Mexican shopkeeper who justified his bilingual signboard by saying, "I would sell only half, if I did not use English." (p. 517). This quote not only shows the desire to reach a wider customer base but also that English tends to be one of the languages used in bilingual advertising.

Although customer reach may be the primary motivation, bilingual advertising is realized in different ways across countries. One useful framework for examining bilingual advertising is the Concentric Circles model of the spread of English (B. Kachru, 2005). In this model, countries in the Inner Circle use English as their first language, whereas in the Expanding Circle, English is primarily a foreign language. Countries in the Outer Circle, such as India, fall between these two groups because English is "used as an institutionalized additional language" (B. Kachru, 2005; pg. 14).
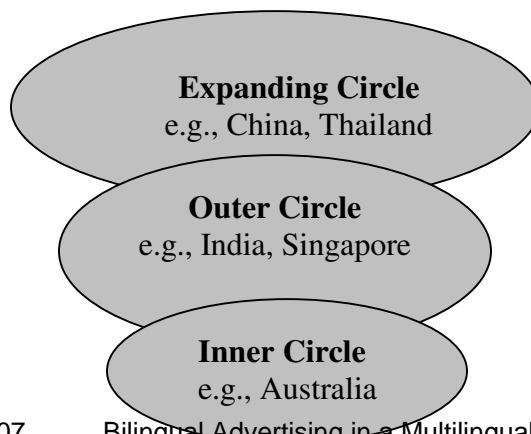
Expanding Circle
e.g., China, Thailand

Outer Circle
e.g., India, Singapore

Inner Circle
e.g., Australia

Figure 1. Three Concentric Circles of Asian Englishes

(B. Kachru, 2005; pg. 14)

Most studies on bilingual advertising have focused on countries in the Expanding Circle, where English is used as a foreign language. The studies examined the use of English in several countries —Ecuador (Alm, 2003), France and Germany (Hilgendorf and Martin, 2001; Martin, 2002a, 2002b; Piller, 2001), Japan (Takashi, 1990a, 1990b, 1992; Wilkerson, 1997), Korea (Jung, 2001; Lee, 2006), Mexico (Baumgardner, 2006) and Russia (Ustinova, 2006; Ustinova and Bhatia, 2005). They found that English words are frequently used in advertisements to convey a modern or cosmopolitan image of the product or company. Figure 2 shows an advertisement for a Japanese product called *Fire Coffee*. English is used for the product name but also for a description of how to make good coffee that is purely decorative.

Figure 2. Advertisement for a Japanese product.

In the Inner Circle, where English is the first language, other languages may be used in advertisements to symbolize stereotypical qualities; this is seen in the studies on advertising in Ireland (Kelly-Holmes, 2005) and Jamaica (Dray, 2003), where English remains the dominant language despite the presence of other languages. In the two studies, Irish and Creole, respectively, are used to convey a regional flavor in the

advertisements. However, in an examination of the use of mock Spanish in US advertisements, Hill (1999) points out that the use of non-English words can be viewed as mocking the culture.

In Outer Circle countries, where English co-exists with other languages, the situation is more complex. On the one hand, English is not the dominant language for a large proportion of the consumer base; in Singapore, there is a large readership for newspapers in Chinese, Malay and Tamil. In this space, English is used to convey a modern impression as in the Expanding Circle countries. On the other hand, there is a substantial consumer base that reads in English and, here, the advertisements are entirely in English as is the case for Inner Circle countries. In such a space, bilingual advertising is usually rare because it is associated with incorrect English and 'poor language'; yet, the presence of other languages besides English ensures that consumers are "English-Knowing Bilinguals" (Pakir (1991).

This paper describes bilingual advertising in India, which is an Outer Circle country. There are two consumer bases for advertising – in Indian languages and in English. First, I briefly describe the work done in the area of advertising in Indian languages, with specific reference to Hindi; I then describe bilingual advertising in English advertisements and examine some reasons why bilingual advertisements have become a popular advertising strategy in India.

2. Code-Mixing in Indian Language Advertisements

In the Indian subcontinent, there is a large consumer base for which English is not the dominant language. If we look at newspaper circulation, Hindi newspapers have the highest circulation (67 million), whereas English is only 27 million. Advertisements targeted at this population frequently incorporate English words, in Bangladesh (Banu and Sussex , 2001) and India (Bhatia, 1987, 1992, 2001, 2006; Bhatia and Ritchie, 2004).

Figure 3 is an advertisement for a medication. The text is predominantly Hindi written in the Devanagari script but English words, such as *tablet*, *cough*, and *fighter*, occur written

in Devanagari.   In addition, the product name, *Kuka*, appears on the bottle and box in the Roman script.

Figure 3. Hindi advertisement

As is the case with bilingual advertisements in the Expanding Circle, this advertisement uses English words to convey a modern impression. However, as Bhatia (1992) points out, this mixing is not confined to English for Indian languages are relatively 'open' and borrow from other languages, including non-Indian languages. Hindi, for example, permits mixing from three languages—Sanskrit, Persian, and English.

3. Code-Mixing in English Advertisements

The second type of consumer base reads material in English but also knows an additional Indian language. Advertisements here have to walk a fine line between incorporating Indian languages and avoiding the stigma of 'poor language'. However, the past decade has seen an increasing use of bilingual advertising in India.

Figure 4 shows the slogan from a lifestyle product.

	Code-mixed Slogan	Hungry kya?
	Literal translation	Hungry are you?
	Meaning	Are you hungry?

Figure 4. English advertisement

Here are some features of this slogan:

- **Code-mixing.** Two languages have been mixed within a single slogan. *Hungry* is an English word, whereas *kya* is Hindi.
- **Matrix Language.** The matrix language is Hindi, with English words inserted. This can be deduced from the word order, which follows Hindi word order, SOV.
- **Script**. The slogan is written in the Roman script.
- **Lack of italics.** Foreign words are usually written in italics but neither of the words in this advertisement is italicized.

This slogan is only an illustration; in the section following further examples of such code-mixing in English advertisements have been listed.

4. Degrees of Code-Mixing in English Advertisements

Code-mixing between English and Hindi has become a common advertising strategy in metropolitan cities in India, such as Delhi. During 2006, I collected data in the form of print advertisements from an advertising and media site called *agencyfaqs!*[1] More than 900 advertisements were examined from the following categories: beverages (100), household products (109), food (63), household durables (262), business products (76), and media (303). With the exception of advertisements for business products, most of the advertisements in the remaining categories used code-mixed slogans.

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1. *English matrix with Hindi words.* The matrix language is English with Hindi words inserted in the Roman script. There are very few examples in this category.

Example:

Ford sells the Ikon car as 'The Josh Machine' ('The powerful machine').

2. *Hindi matrix with English words*. The matrix language is Hindi with English words inserted; however, the entire slogan is written in the Roman script and no words are italicized. This is, by far, the most common type of slogan.

Examples:

- Tata tea : 'Taste kaamyabi ka!'
- Coca-Cola: 'Life ho to aisi!'
- Pepsi: 'Yeh dil mange more'
- Revive starch: 'Super kadak'
- Haldiram's: 'Taste mein naya twist'
- Harvest Gold Bread: 'Bakwaas advertising, First class bread'
- Kissan Ketchup: 'Just lagao. Kuch bhi khao'
- Radio City 91 FM: 'Relax ho jao. City mein kho jao'
- Radio Mirchi: 'Doosri ladki pe maari line, Girlfriend boli "I am fine". Mirchi sunnewaale, always khush'
- Nestle: 'Taste bhi health bhi'
- Nature Fresh oil: 'Khao light, Jiyo life!'
- Himani honey: 'Yehi Asli Honey'
- LG refrigerators: 'Life jum jaaye: Raho healthy, Badho jaldi'
- Godrej washing machines: 'Banaye Life Haseen'

3. *Hindi in the Roman script*. The entire slogan is in Hindi with no English words; however, the slogan is written in the Roman script rather than the Devanagari script.

Examples:

- Tata salt : 'Desh ka namak' and 'Maine desh ka namak khaya hai!'

- BPL: 'Kapda khush to dil bhi khush'

- Bird telephone: 'Dil se bolo'

- Brooke Bond tea: 'Ab Wah Wah Taj!'

- Pepsi: 'Yeh pyaas hai badi'

- Rooh Afza: 'Pyaar ka haath badhaaiye'

- Mother Dairy: 'Achha hai, sachha hai!'

- McKinley: 'Boond boond mein vishwas'

4. *Hindi in the Devanagari script.* The product is advertised in Hindi written in the Devanagari script. This type of slogan is rarely used.

Example:

Mother Dairy advertises their ghee in Hindi written in the Devanagari script, i.e. शुद्ध घी which is 'Shudh ghee' ('Pure ghee')

Some slogans mix not only languages, but also different scripts. For example, Mother Dairy, uses the slogan 'Piyo Pure' which can be transliterated as 'Drink Pure'. On the company website, the slogan is written in the Roman script but on milk booths, it is painted in the Devanagari script.

Slogan in Roman script

Slogan in Devanagari script

Figure 5. Slogan in two different scripts

The Coke slogan combines two scripts in a single slogan (Figure 6). The slogan reads 'Thanda matlab Coke' ('Cold means Coke') but both Roman and Devanagari scripts have been combined in a single slogan.

Figure 6. Two scripts in one slogan.

This mixing of languages and scripts is not confined to advertisements for lifestyle goods but is also used in other sectors. Even a conservative government organization, such as India's largest insurance company, Life Insurance Corporation of India, uses a code-mixed slogan written in the Roman script: "Insurance bhi, Investment bhi" ("Insurance also, investment also").

Figure 7. Code-mixing in advertisement for life insurance.

The trend has caught on with smaller companies that advertise on small billboards with Hindi slogans written in the Roman script: "Standard: Din ho ya raat, Mein hoon apke saath" ('Standard: Day or night, I'm with you').

Figure 8. Advertisement in Hindi written in the Roman script.

5. Reasons for Code-Mixing in Advertisements

In India, the media has recognized the bilingual nature of the population and is exploiting it to reach a wider target audience (Mallikarjun, 2004). However, the motivation for code-mixing differs in Indian language advertisements and English advertisements. In Indian language advertisements, code-mixing is used to convey cultural stereotypes associated with the language (Haarmann, 1989) , which is similar to the situation in the Expanding Circle. To convey a modern impression, English words and the Roman script may be used. However, code-mixing is not confined to English, because the Indian languages borrow from other languages. For example, Persian words are used to convey an impression of elegance and Sanskrit to reinforce traditional attributes (Bhatia, 1992).

In English advertisements, code-mixing is a more recent phenomenon. Until 1993, English advertisements used only English but this changed when multinational companies entered India after liberalization. When Ford tried to sell their cars, their hugely successful slogan was 'The Josh Machine'. Other companies began to follow their example in order to attract consumers. In doing so, they are trying to reach bilingual consumers. An advertising executive explained that if you use English "you may be understood, but not vibed with. That's why all the multinational corporations now speak Hinglish in their ads." (Baldauf, 2004).

In Hinglish, speakers mix Hindi and English; this is the code used among many school and university students in urban centers, such as Delhi. As one student in an English-medium school put it, "Anyone who speaks for a few minutes without using a couple of Hindi words in an English sentence or English words while speaking in Hindi is considered a big bore and outdated" (Pushkarna, 2003). During an interview at an advertising agency, one copywriter explained to me, "This is the way we speak. It's cool. British English is fuddy-duddy."

It is important to note that Hinglish does not necessarily imply that speakers do not know English; when required to do so, they can speak and write accurate English (Viswamohan (2004). As sociolinguists point out, this code-mixing between English and the Indian languages comes from a shift in perceptions of English in India. The English language is not a recent import in India (Y. Kachru, 2006), so it is regarded as just another language in a multilingual country. This view is also shared by David Crystal who said that the younger generation in India is getting over the linguistic colonialism of English. "They're bending and breaking the rules. They're being creative because they're confident. That's evidence that they now feel they 'own' the language rather than are just borrowing it." (David Crystal quoted in Dhillon, 2004). Khubchandani (1996) also points out that in India, English has been de-linked from Western lifestyles, distanced from standard native models, and complemented with Indian languages for intra-group communication. These perceptions about English have created a situation in which people work (and play) with the multiple linguistic resources that are available to them.

6. Conclusion

Code-mixing between English and Indian languages has become a common advertising strategy in India. As Bhatia points out, Indian languages are 'open' and borrow words from other languages, including non-Indian languages, and we now see a similar trend in English advertisements in India.

As the examples in this paper show, code-mixing in English advertisements is highly creative and not a sign of linguistic deficiency. Code-mixing is a marketing strategy that appeals to urban youth in metropolitan cities by using the language they use—a mixture of English and Hindi. For sociolinguists, the shifts in bilingual advertising may provide a more accurate picture of language use than we get from educational and government policies.

Notes

1. See http://www.agencyfaqs.com/

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