

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 8 August 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Abstract

English has become a popular language for business specifically in countries like Malaysia and the Philippines. Such popularity shows that the economic value of English in Southeast Asia continues to rise as compared to the local languages. Consequently, the use of English as a marketing strategy and the naming of retail establishments has flourished and attracted both big and small businesses. This paper examines the names used and the reasons for using English as a marketing strategy and naming of businesses notwithstanding the fact that most customers do not have English as their first language. Thirty participants including the shop owners and consumers in Malaysia and the Philippines were interviewed. Prospective customers were asked if the use of English has affected the choice of the retail unit that they use. A qualitative approach was used in the data gathering and analysis.

Keywords: Marketing, business naming, Malaysian English, Philippine English

1. Introduction

Language plays an important role in business naming and marketing. It serves as a tool to market the product or service to potential consumers. Business names provide information about the business or establishment and may eventually influence the consumers to purchase the products and services. Names of businesses give the consumers an idea about the products and services offered. In other words, it can be a marketing strategy in promoting the products and services offered. This means that business naming can be a form of advertising.

Business naming requires an appropriate and specific language to describe the business. Catchy

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

and trendy names help to market a business. Appropriate choice of a language in naming a business may benefit the business in the long run. Some examples are the use of names that are easy to remember, and reflect the business' mission and vision. Inappropriate choice of words may eventually adversely affect the marketability of a business.

Language cannot be separated from business because it is used to name businesses. In fact, in multilingual countries, business naming can be complex. Selecting the language to be used is important as potential consumers speak two or more languages. Some names in other languages may result in negative perceptions of the products or services being offered. It is important to choose a suitable language in naming a business because this could affect the success of the business. The name must be easy for customers to remember and must attract the attention of consumers. In fact, some businesses become popular because of their names. Currently, brandable business names are names that are simple, easy, and at times include nonsense words which are easy to remember. Some examples are Amazon, Google, and Microsoft.

With globalization, marketing has become an important business strategy. One common strategy is to advertise the products or services to provide people an idea what the business is. Advertising is essential because it has a major function which is to persuade the consumers (Cook, 1992; Gass, 1999; Geis, 1998). Therefore in advertising, a language is needed in order to achieve the advertisers' goal to promote a business (Goddard, 1998; Geis, 1998; Han, 1991; Vestergaard & Schoder, 1985; Zhang, 2001).

In societies where English is used as a second language and the local language as the first language, the use of English language is preferred to name business. Bhatia (1987, 1992, 2001) argues that English is used, among other things, to produce a favorable psychological effect upon targeted audiences. This is evident particularly in countries which had been colonized by the West and where a colonial mentality at times exists. Such a mindset suggests that whatever is foreign is considered better as compared to any local products or services. In the Japanese context, Haarmann (1984, 1989) and Takashi (1990, 1992) explain that the use of the English language satisfies the Japanese people's desire to associate with a modern and cosmopolitan identity. The English language carries a modernized identity. This means business names can help consumers to portray a specific identity.

Masavisut, Sukwiwat, and Wongmontha (1986) examine the cultural power that English expressions have in Thai advertising messages. The English language does not only attract consumers but it has become a strong and powerful language in the business context. In fact, English in French advertising is generally considered a symbol of modernization, efficiency, and/or reliability (Martin, 1998; Martin, 2002). If a business is named in English then it immediately creates an impression that it is modern, efficient and reliable. The use of the English language carries influential cultural images because the language is used in powerful countries like the United States. Such linguistic stereotypes have greatly influenced businesses particularly in the Asian region.

The powerful influence of English in business has been studied widely by many scholars such as Alm (2003) who has examined English use in Ecuadorian commercial context, Friedrich (2002) examines English use in Brazilian advertising, Jung (2001) studies English use in Korean advertising, Larson (1990) looks at English use in Swedish advertising, and Piller (2001) investigates English use in German advertising. These researchers conclude that the use of English is a marker of modernity, internationalization, and/or superiority. These studies provide

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

helpful insights into the ever-increasing penetration of English in the media throughout the world. They also highlight the phenomenal symbolic value of the English language.

With the emergence of bilingual societies, the use of either local or foreign languages to name a business so as to advertise has become a trend. The media today has recognized the importance of catering the bilinguals. Consequently, language options are being provided for people who belong to other linguistic groups (Holland & Gentry, 1999; Lee & Tse, 1994). Business owners today are more creative in naming their businesses in ways that will attract consumers from different linguistic backgrounds. The use of code switching has become a trend in marketing particularly in advertisement which includes the insertion of foreign and local words resulting in a mixed-language message (Grosjean, 1982).

The issues of language choice in business naming and marketing have become a major concern of many businesses in multilingual countries like Malaysia and the Philippines. As a result, this paper examines the language choice and naming of businesses as a marketing strategy in Malaysia and the Philippines.

1.1 Language Background of Malaysia and the Philippines

Malaysia is a multilingual and multicultural society consisting of various ethnic groups such as Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minority groups. Due to linguistic diversity, English plays a crucial role among Malaysians. English is the second most important language in the country and is taught as a subject from the first year of primary school. Although, it has been superseded by Bahasa Malaysia as the country's national language particularly in the administrative and educational purposes, the use of English is widely used in some public sectors, such as diplomatic services and courts (Asmah, 1992 as cited in Venugopal, 2000).

Currently, Malaysian English is nativized and shares certain linguistic features with Singaporean English (David & Dumanig, 2008). The separate educational system and language policies of the two countries have contributed to linguistic differences and have resulted in the creation of a Malaysian sociolect or speech variety. Venugopal (2000) explains that Malaysian English displays some distinguishing features of simplification and reduction of a non-native variety, as well as the effects of localization of an acculturated variety. It can be said that Malaysia has started developing its own variety of English. The outer circle is norm developing (see Kachru's 1992 three-circled model of Englishes).

Similarly, the Philippines is also a multilingual country in which Filipino is the national language and English is another official language. These two official languages are used in education and government. Having two official languages makes the Filipinos bilingual or multilingual. Most Filipinos speak at least two languages and people in the provinces speak three or more languages. Aside from their own local language, they also speak Filipino and English. Due to the high demand for English in the Philippines it has become the native language of some Filipinos (Crystal, 2003) particularly those families that stay in highly urbanized areas like Manila and other big cities in the Philippines. English in the Philippines is widely used in various domains such as education, print and broadcast media, and business and has become the country's lingua franca in urban areas.

English functions as a second language and plays an important role in education and employment. Proficiency in English counts in achieving a good academic record because English

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

is used as a medium of instruction in private institutions. Proficient speakers of English enjoy more benefits and in contrast less proficient speakers are somewhat disadvantaged.

2. Methodology

This paper used the qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing the data. Thirty (30) participants including shop owners and consumers in Malaysia and the Philippines were interviewed. The participants were working adults whose age ranges from 23 to 40 years old. The interviews focus on the issue of language choice, business naming and marketing. All interviews were transcribed and the reasons for the choice of language used for naming a business was analysed.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings show that shop owners and consumers in Malaysia and the Philippines prefer English as the language for naming a business.

3.1 Language Choice in Business Naming

In Malaysia, naming the shops in English is preferred by shop owners and consumers. The findings show that out of 15 participants, 13 prefer an English name, 1 prefers the local language and 2 prefer the use of mixed languages i.e. English and other local languages. In the Philippines, out of 15 shop owners and consumers interviewed, 11 participants prefer English business names. However, 2 Filipinos prefer local business names and another 2 prefer mixed languages like English and Filipino or other local languages.

The findings reveal that both shop owners and consumers in Malaysia and the Philippines prefer English as compared to any other languages. It is observed that the use of English for multilingual speakers is more attractive. Two participants mentioned:

“for me, English business name does matter.”

“for me English,,,,, *kasi hindi lahat ng buyers ay naka intindi ng Filipino....(because not all buyers understand Filipino)*”

The preference for English is perhaps understood as it is widely spoken in these two countries. However, it can be a complex issue as not all Malaysians and Filipinos can speak and understand the English language. It can be said that the multilingual setting of these two countries can be a reason why shop owners choose English to name their business.

3.2 Reasons for language choice

Malaysia and the Philippines reveal similar reasons for choosing English in business naming and marketing. Business owners and consumers prefer the English language because it is easy to understand and remember, social status marker, product of colonial mentality and reflects quality.

English is easy to understand and English is widely spoken in Malaysia and the Philippines. In the interviews conducted, the participants explained their reasons for choosing English.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

“Kun Bisaya ang imo business name, di makasabot an mga tagalog or foreigner (If you use Bisaya (language spoken in the Philippines) as your business name, Tagalog speakers and foreigners could not understand)”

“Mas dali masabtan (easier to understand).”

“English is an international language and understood by many.”

Apart from being easy to understand, English words can be easily remembered as the language has many short words as compared to Filipino, Malay and other local languages in Malaysia and the Philippines. Memory recall is essential in business naming. The easier the name to remember, there is a possibility that consumers will remember the name and eventually purchase the goods of that particular business. The participants mentioned;

“Pero dali masulti ug mahinomduman (easy to say and remember)”

“Sama sa dali ra litokon-pila ra ka syllables (easy to say – only a few syllables)”

“English has shorter words to recall than in Malay”

The use of English in business naming may reflect the social status of the speaker. In Malaysia and the Philippines, English is widely spoken by most people who underwent proper education and most of them are in the middle or upper class. In some societies where English is not widely spoken, it has become the language of educated people. The participants emphasize that;

“Higher income bracket man an target market (Higher income earners are the target market)”

“English is spoken by educated people”

English in Malaysia and the Philippines was brought by the colonial masters such as the British and Americans. This means that the English language is a legacy from the West and has become the common language in business in these two countries. The use of English is attributed to the British and American influence in Malaysia and the Philippines which also leads to the development of colonial mentality. Such a mentality dictates that anything that is labeled in English or anything that is foreign is perceived to be the best. As a result, any English brand, product or business is perceived to be the best as compared to other products. Certain stereotypes are linked to the use of English in business naming. Consequently, the use of English in business naming in Asia has increased.

The participants view of using English in business naming might be due to an impact created because of the colonial mentality. This mentality infers that what is foreign is much better as compared to what is local.

“Maybe because of influence of the Americans...”

“Filipinos are influenced by the Americans and feel that American products are better than the Philippine products.”

“I think the colonial mentality exists in business naming.”

“A feeling that anything that sounds foreign particularly in English is much better”

“It can be in Greek or Latin... would still make the same amount of impression an English name would do..”

People’s colonial mentality leads to the association of English with quality. This means that if English is used to name a business, quality products or services are expected. Consumers will immediately perceive that establishments with English names may have more chances of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

offering better services and products than others. This is evident from the participants' views of using English in business naming.

"It has high quality rather than naming it locally."

"Quality maybe yes."

"There is quality in the name."

"*Mas may quality ang dating ng English (English name has a quality in it)*"

Since quality and English go together, consumers are attracted with businesses that have English names. When English is used to name a business it is associated with being modern and trendy.

"Of course.... especially *kung English ang name ng store ay maganda pakinggan.*.,(if the store is named in English, it sounds pleasing)"

"English is more catchy and trendy."

"English names have more appeal than the local names"

"It sounds more attractive than the local."

"It's not healthy but unfortunately that's how society works here in Malaysia.."

The findings reveal that English dominates in Malaysia and the Philippines. It has become a powerful language in the business sector. Consequently, it is labelled as the business language.

3.3 English Language Hegemony in Business

English possesses certain power and authority and this is also essential in business. In order to compete and excel in the local market, English is in marketing. The hegemonic power of the English language has attracted businessmen to name their businesses in English. This would mean that if businesses are named in English then they have the control, authority and superiority. This is evident when the participants mentioned that "English equates quality and businesses named in English sound reliable than the locally named businesses."

The power of English has created certain stereotypes about businesses that are locally named. The mindset of consumers has been controlled by the stereotype that English business names provide better quality, standard, and reliability. Locally named businesses are perceived to be of low quality, standard, and reliability. Such stereotypes have made English even more powerful in the business sector.

4. Conclusion

The findings reveal that English business names are preferred by Filipino and Malaysian business owners and consumers. They choose English because it is easy to understand, easy to remember and reflects the social status of the consumers. English is also identified as a product of colonial mentality, reflects quality, appeals to consumers, more reliable, known all over the world and is more attractive to local owners and consumers. Consequently, the use of English in business naming has benefited several businesses in Malaysia and the Philippines. It is therefore expected that the use of English in business naming will continue to flourish in these two Southeast Asian countries.

References

- Alm, C. (2003). English in the Ecuadorian Commercial Context. *World Englishes* 22 (2):143-58
- Bhatia, T. (1987). English in Advertising: Multiple Mixing and Media. *World Englishes* 6 (1):33-48
- Bhatia, T. (1992). Discourse functions and pragmatics of mixing: Advertising across cultures. *World Englishes* 11/2:195-215
- Bhatia, T. (2001). Language Mixing in Global Advertising. In: Edwin T. (ed.) *The Three Circles of English*. 195-215. Singapore. UniPress
- Cook, G. (1992). *The Discourse of Advertising*. New York. Routledge
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- David, M.K. and Dumanig, F. (2008). Nativization of English in Malaysia and the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Linguistics* 39, 67-79
- David, M. K. (2003). Functions of Code Switching in Malaysian Courtrooms. *Multilingua* 21, 1-24
- Friedrich, P. (2002). English in Advertising and Brand Naming: Sociolinguistic Considerations and the Case of Brazil. *English Today* 18 (3). 21-8
- Gass, R., John S. (1999). *Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining*. Boston. Allyn & Bacon.
- Geis, M. (1998). Advertising. In: Jacob M. (ed.) *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*. 13-5. Amsterdam. Elsevier
- Goddard, A. (1998). *The Language of Advertising: Written Texts*. London. Routledge
- Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life With Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Cambridge
- Haarmann, H. (1984). The Role of Ethnocultural Stereotypes and Foreign Languages in Japanese Commercials. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 50:101-21
- Haarmann, H. (1989). *Symbolic Values of Foreign Language Use: From the Japanese Case to a General Sociolinguistic Perspective*. New York. Mouton de Gruyter
- Han, Y. (1991). *The Language of Newspaper Advertising in Chinese*. Doctoral Dissertation. Ohio State University
- Holland, J., Gentry, J.W. (1999). Ethnic Consumer Reaction to Targeted Marketing: A Theory of Intercultural Accommodation. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(1), 65-78.
- Jung, K. (2001). The Genre of Advertising in Korean: Strategies and "Mixing". In: Edwin T. *Language in India* www.languageinindia.com
11 : 8 August 2011
- Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.
Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

(ed.) *The Three Circles of English*. 257-75. Singapore. UniPress

- Kachru, Braj B. (1992). *The Second Diaspora of English*. In *English in Its Social Contexts: Essays in Historical Sociolinguistics*. Edited by Tim William Machan and Charles T. Scott. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 230-252.
- Larson, B. (1990). Present-day influence of English on Swedish as Found in Swedish Job Advertisements. *World Englishes* 9 (3). 367-9
- Lee, W., Tse, D.K.(1994). Changing Media Consumption in a New Home Acculturation patterns among Hongkong Immigrants to Canada. *Journal of Advertising*, 23(1), 57-70.
- Martin, E. (1998). The Use of English in Written French Advertising: A study of Code-switching, Code-mixing, and Borrowing in a Commercial Context. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 28(1). 159-84
- Martin, E. (2002). Cultural Images and Different Varieties of English in French Television Commercials. *English Today* 18(4). 8-20
- Masavisut, Sukwiwat, and Wongmontha (1986). The Power of the English Language in Thai Media. *World Englishes* 5 (2), 197-207.
- Piller, I.(2001). Identity Construction in Multilingual Advertising. *Language in Society* 30.153-86.
- Takashi, K.(1990). A Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Borrowings in Japanese Advertising Texts. *World Englishes* 9(3). 327-41
- Takashi, K.(1992). Language and Desired Identity in Contemporary Japan. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 3(1).133-44
- Vestergaard, T., Schröder, K. (1985). *The Language of Avertising*. New York: Basil Blackwell
- Zhang, H. (2001). An analysis of TV Advertising Language across Cultures. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 31(2)187-211
- Zhang, H. (2002). Bilingual creativity in Chinese English: Ha Jin's *In the Pond*. *World Englishes*
- Venugopal, N. (2000). *Language Choice and Communication in Malaysian Business*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

=====
Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D.
Lecturer
University of Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
fdumanig@yahoo.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines

Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.
Professor
Honorary Fellow Chartered Institute of Linguists
Head of Section for Co-Curricular Activities, Elective Courses by Other Faculties and TITAS
(SKET)
Staff of Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University of Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
mayadaid@yahoo.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 8 August 2011

Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D., & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.

Language Choice and Naming of Businesses as a Marketing Strategy: Focus on Malaysia and the Philippines