

The relationship between the appreciation and the comprehension of French in Dutch advertisements

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1. Foreign languages in advertising

Several authors have observed that foreign languages are frequently used in advertisements in the United States (Petrof 1990), Europe (Gerritsen 1995; Piller 2003), South America (Ovesdotter Alm 2003), and Asia (Haarmann 1989). A foreign language is foreign in the sense that it is not the official language of a country, such as German in Mexico or Spanish in Norway. The use of such foreign languages is strategic, since it is supposed to enhance the persuasive impact of an advertisement. Consider the example of *Aqua d'or*, a Danish mineral water. The English translation of this brand would be 'golden (,d'or' = French) water (,aqua' = Latin)'. The company presumably chose this foreign brand name because this name is supposed to be more appealing to the potential customer than its Danish equivalent. If there is one popular foreign language, it is definitely English, which is used nearly all over the world (Bhatia 1992). Cheshire/ Moser (1994) calculated that 31% of the Swiss print advertisements in their corpus contained English. Gerritsen (1995) wanted to determine the frequency with which English was used in print advertisements in a corpus of European newspaper and magazines. English was found on 6% of pages containing advertisements in Italy, and for Spain this was 7%. For other countries the percentages were higher: 19% for Germany and for the Netherlands, and 22% for France. In Piller's (2000) study of German television commercials, 49% of the television commercials contained a combination of English and German. Even higher percentages were found in France (from 53 to 58%; Hilgendorf/ Martin 2001), Sweden (59%; Riutort 2002 as cited in Ovesdotter Alm 2003) and Ecuador (62%; Ovesdotter Alm 2003).

The frequent use of the English language in advertisements all over the world has been explained in a number of ways. These reasons are discussed in Section 1.1. Subsequently, we discuss the reasons for using foreign languages other than English (1.2). As we will see, one of the reasons is the sym-

bolic meaning of foreign languages. In Section 1.3, we propose a model of how the process of symbolic meaning association could work. The first part of this paper will end with a discussion about this symbolic meaning (1.4). In fact, some researchers have claimed that the literal meaning of words or sentences in a foreign language is not important (e.g., Kelly-Holmes 2000), whereas others have shown that this literal meaning seems to matter (e.g., Cheshire/Moser 1994). In the second part of the article, we present an empirical study that was set up to examine whether the appreciation of the use of a foreign language is affected by its comprehension.

1.1 The use of English as a foreign language in advertising

There are several reasons why companies choose to use English in their advertising campaigns in countries where it is a foreign language. One of these reasons is a financial one (De Mooij 1994; Jain 1993): it is less expensive to keep the English words or slogan (standardization) than to invest in translated versions in different countries (adaptation). The advertising agencies that Gerritsen et al. (2000) interviewed also regarded such translations as too expensive. If a company can afford such costs and decides to have the English versions of their advertisements translated, another problem arises: translatability. In fact, the second reason why companies may be hesitant to adapt their advertising copy is that sometimes there is not a real translation (Gerritsen, et al. 2000; Overdotter Alm 2003; Sella 1993). There is no Dutch equivalent, for instance, for the English word 'airbag'.

There are still other, more strategic, reasons why English is used in advertising campaigns in non-English-speaking countries. One of these strategic reasons for the use of English in advertising in such countries is that it may stimulate potential readers to pay attention to the message: the attention reason (see, e.g., Gerritsen, et al. 2000; Overdotter Alm 2003; Piller 2001). Attracting attention is an important first step in the persuasion process. If people do not see a commercial message, they simply cannot be persuaded by it. The number of commercial messages that people are confronted with every day is large. As a consequence, people only have time for a small proportion of these messages. Advertising agencies and marketers therefore try to influence our mental selection process, so that their work catches our eyes.

Furthermore, English is used in advertising in order to create an international image for the brand and the company: the image reason (Gerritsen, et al. 2000; Overdotter Alm 2003; Piller 2001, 2003; Sella 1993). With English, the company behind the advertisements tries to position itself as a global player in the world economy. The use of English is said to give the company an international and contemporary orientation.

1.2 The use of other languages in advertising

As we already indicated, English is used frequently in advertising in many countries where it is not an official language. Other foreign languages are also used, but to a lesser extent. In Piller's (2000) study of foreign languages in German television commercials, for example, 70% of the commercials in the corpus contained another language next to German. Of those advertisements, 70% were English / German, whereas only 8% were French / German and 6% were Italian / German. The two main reasons for using languages other than English are the reasons that we have already discussed: attention and image. Drawing attention with the Italian language in Germany, for instance, is potentially effective, as the Italian language only rarely occurs in German advertising. The attention reason applies equally to the use of English and other foreign languages. As far as the image reason is concerned, however, there appears to be a difference between English and other foreign languages (Hornikx/ Starren/ Van Heur 2004; Piller 2003). English is not usually associated with a particular country but with its status as a world language (Piller 2003), whereas other languages seem to be used because of their associations with the countries in which they are spoken. We come back to this difference after we have explained how foreign languages other than English are used to create a positive image.

Piller (2003) gives a historical overview of research on foreign language use in advertising. She argues that studies first concentrated on borrowings and loanwords (1900 – 1980). After that period, there has been a shift in the study of foreign language use from isolated words to words in discourse. One of the first discourse studies was Haarmann (1989), who investigated the use of European languages in Japanese advertising. Languages such as English, French, German, and Spanish proved to be frequently employed in advertising

in Japan. Furthermore, these languages appeared not to be used arbitrarily, but their use seemed to depend on the type of product that was advertised. French, for instance, was popular for products such as watches, cars, bags, and perfume. As most Japanese cannot read European languages, let alone comprehend them, these languages must have another, symbolic meaning. French, for instance, seemed to be associated with concepts such as allure, elegance, taste, and attractiveness (Haarmann 1989: 11).

1.3 A model of symbolic associations of foreign languages in advertising

It is still an open issue as to how the process of symbolic meaning association works. Two interesting contributions have been made by Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005), and Piller (2001). In this section, we discuss these contributions by integrating them into a new model of symbolic associations of foreign languages in advertising. This model combines the perspective of the companies that create multilingual advertisements (Kelly-Holmes 2000, 2005), and the process of creating of symbolic meaning from the receiver's perspective (Piller 2001).

Imagine that a French perfume brand decides to use French in an advertisement for several European countries. According to Kelly-Holmes (2000: 71), whether this decision is actually taken and whether it is a good or a bad decision, depends on a „cultural competence hierarchy” (see the left-hand side of Figure 1). Such a hierarchy determines what kind of products a country is ‚allowed’ to produce. The link between ‚France’ and ‚perfume’, for instance, might be the kind of link that most Europeans recognize. The products and competences that have been assigned to countries seem to be „based on our most deep-rooted conceptions and perceptions about [these countries]” (Kelly-Holmes 2000: 71). Through all sorts of information and contact, we adopt these links between countries on the one hand, and products, services, competences, and qualities on the other hand.

A message using a foreign language consists of a reference to a product or a service (e.g., a perfume), a foreign language utterance (e.g., ‚Le feminin absolu’), and – more or less implicitly – certain competences (e.g., elegance, style). If there is no fit between the country, the product, and the competence, it is likely that the use of the foreign language will harm the persuasive effect of

the advertisement. Kelly-Holmes (2000) gives the example of the German car manufacturer *Audi*, which uses its original German slogan in the UK: ‚Vorsprung durch Technik‘. In this example, the fit between Germany, cars, and technical competence seems straightforward. By contrast, a German brand of desserts does not use its German slogan abroad, apparently because ‚Germany‘ and ‚desserts‘ are not a logical combination (Kelly-Holmes 2000). Making desserts is not considered as a German competence, regardless of the quality and taste of the particular dessert that is advertised. Kelly-Holmes even speaks about „language fetish” when she refers to typical cultural products that are regularly used in the original language in advertising, such as ‚kaas‘ (cheese; the Netherlands), ‚Bier‘ (beer; Germany), and ‚parfum‘ (perfume; France).

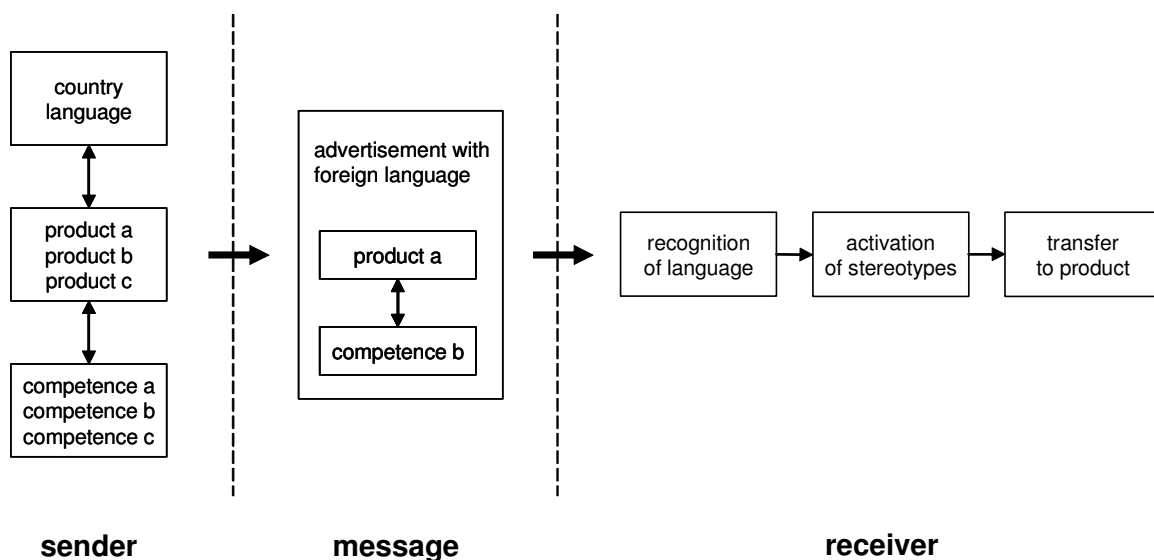


Figure 1: Symbolic associations of foreign languages in advertising from sender to receiver (based on parts of Kelly-Holmes 2000, 2005; Piller 2001)

The thought processes of the receiver of the advertisement are represented at the right-hand side of the model (see Figure 1). A receiver of an advertisement with a foreign language will first have to recognize the language that is used. The receiver will then refer to stereotypes of the country and of its inhabitants. Finally, these stereotype associations are said to transfer to the product. In our example, if French people are considered charming and elegant, the perfume will also be regarded as charming and elegant (Piller 2001). It is important to emphasize that this process has not been tested empirically. We

will come back to this model and the puzzles that remain to be solved in our final discussion.

In Section 1.2, we briefly indicated that the image reason for using English is different from that for using other languages. As Piller (2003) argues, the use of English differs from other languages both quantitatively and qualitatively. As was already pointed out, English is much more frequently used as a foreign language in advertising than other languages. From a qualitative perspective, English is not used in the same way as other languages. Foreign languages other than English are used to associate the recommended product with ethno-cultural stereotypes about the country where those languages are spoken, regardless of whether the country of origin of the manufacturer is the country that is hinted at. However, it is „only in a comparatively small number of cases that the use of English in advertising in non-English-speaking countries works in a way similar to the use of other languages and indicates an ethno-cultural stereotype” (Piller 2003: 175). This does not mean that English is never used to evoke associations related to England or the United States. English is sometimes used to refer to British class (e.g., *Jaguar*), the myth of the American West (e.g., *Marlboro*) and to the youth culture of urban ghettos (e.g., *Tommy Hilfiger*) (Piller 2003). In the majority of cases, however, English is used to evoke an international, modern image and not to arouse associations with England or the United States (Piller 2003).

An unspoken assumption in studies of foreign language use and appreciation in advertisements is that, if the symbolic associations are valued positively, then the product or service that is advertised will be valued positively as well. Two remarks can be made here. First, it is not yet known what associations people actually have with foreign languages and whether these associations are indeed mainly positive. Second, in research which stresses the symbolic values of the use of foreign languages in advertising – the symbolism perspective – the literal meaning of the utterance in the foreign language plays an insignificant role. In fact, the idea of a symbolic value of foreign language use seems to go hand in hand with the conviction that the actual meaning of foreign utterances, such as ‚Le feminine absolu’, is not relevant anymore. Given the assumption that people will retrieve positive connotations, an advertisement is said to benefit from the use of foreign words regardless of whether the people

who see the advertisement comprehend it or not. However, it does not seem illogical to hypothesize that people may appreciate the advertisement less when they do not understand what they read. In the next section, therefore, we compare the symbolism perspective with empirical studies that suggest that the literal meaning and the understanding of foreign languages do have an impact.

1.4 Foreign languages in advertisements: symbolic or literal meaning?

Eastman/ Stein (1993) talk about „language display” to indicate that foreign languages in advertising do not only communicate meaning (denotation) but also associations about the speakers of the foreign language (connotation). A number of researchers stress that only the symbolic function of a foreign language is important and not the literal meaning of the foreign language utterance (e.g., Haarmann 1989). Haarmann formulates this hypothesis, because the Japanese in his study simply cannot understand words in French, German, or English. As a consequence, these foreign languages need to have a symbolic function or their use would be pointless. Haarmann’s (1989) analysis of the Japanese has also been extended to other countries. Piller (2001) and especially Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005) have emphasized the symbolic function of foreign languages in advertising in Europe. Piller (2001: 163) argues that for the process of evoking meanings (see the right-hand side of Figure 1), the literal meaning of a foreign language is of minor importance. Kelly-Holmes (2000) is even more pronounced. In her cultural competence hierarchy, she focuses on the symbolic value of languages: „The language appears to achieve value independently and this value is not the product of its communicative value, but rather of its symbolic value in the process of intercultural advertising communication” (2000: 71). Such a symbolic value is said to be „the product of intercultural, social, political, economic, historical and linguistic relations between different countries” (2000: 71). If only the symbolic value of foreign languages is important, the level of comprehension of the foreign language does not matter very much. Kelly-Holmes (2000: 70) argues that this is the case: „It is clear from the use of language in intercultural advertising that in-depth and familiar knowledge of the foreign language is neither displayed by the advertiser nor assumed on the part of the advertisee”. An interesting example of this was given by Martin (1998). In interviews with French advertising copywriters, she

found that musicians are sometimes asked to write nonsensical English lyrics for French advertising. As the French audience often does not understand English, those lyrics only have to sound like English.

It seems that the use of foreign languages in advertising evokes associations with (symbolic) connotations of those languages. However, some researchers have claimed – either with or without empirical evidence – that the denotational message of the foreign language utterance, the literal meaning, also plays a role. In the rest of this section, we compare the purely symbolic viewpoint of researchers such as Haarmann (1989) and Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005) with research that suggests that the literal meaning should not be neglected. For advertising copywriters it is interesting to know whether they can pick any word or sentence in a foreign language (cf. the copywriters in Martin 1998) or whether they also have to take into account the meaning of that word or sentence.

Our critique on the symbolism perspective focuses on the question as to whether the understanding of foreign language utterances is important for their effectiveness. We first discuss the study that was probably the first to investigate the persuasive effect of foreign languages in advertising, namely Petrof (1990). He studied the effect of foreign languages in advertisements on attention and attitude. Two different groups of American students were exposed to an advertisement, either in English or in French. The participants had to fill in a questionnaire asking them what they remembered of the advertisement, what their attitude towards the advertisement and product was, and if they wanted to purchase the product. This questionnaire was filled in immediately after exposure to the ad, and one day later. The results showed that participants who had received the French version could better remember the advertisement (in terms of colours and brand for instance) than participants who had received the English version. Petrof suggests that this may indicate that the French version was more successful in attracting the attention of the participants than the English equivalent. Furthermore, participants who had received the French version had a more positive attitude towards the ad than participants in the other condition. There was no difference in purchase intention between the two groups. Petrof concluded that the use of foreign languages in advertising may enhance its persuasive effect. He further

suggested that, if the foreign language utterance is too difficult to understand, this lack of understanding may also have a negative impact on persuasiveness.

This suggestion has found support in other studies involving different methodologies, namely an interview (Ovesdotter Alm 2003), a corpus study (Cheshire/ Moser 1994), and an experiment (Gerritsen, et al. 2000). Ovesdotter Alm (2003) interviewed a number of advertising executives in Ecuador about the reasons for using English in advertisements. These executives argued that English should not be used if there are reasons to doubt the target group's comprehension of the foreign language. Other support for the role of the meaning of the foreign language utterance comes from Cheshire/ Moser (1994). They concluded that the comprehension of English words must play a role for the receiver, because English that was found in their corpus of magazines was relatively easy to understand for Swiss. About 67% of the English words that were used were found in an elementary dictionary of English for French learners. Also, the use of puns – such as 'Paradice' for ice cream where there is a phonetic similarity between 'ise' of paradise and 'ice' – was very limited. Thus, although English is certainly used as a cultural symbol in Switzerland, its literal meaning also plays a role. Finally, Gerritsen et al. (2000) probably provided the clearest evidence for the suggestion that the understanding of foreign languages in advertisements influences the persuasive impact of those advertisements. They investigated the appreciation and the comprehension of English slogans in six Dutch commercials that had been broadcasted on Dutch television. They found a linear relationship between the commercials' appreciation and comprehension: the appreciation for the use of English increased when comprehension was higher. However, this study was not specifically set up to investigate the relationship between the appreciation and the comprehension of English.

The study has two characteristics that hamper an effective investigation of this relationship: the selection of English as a foreign language, and the comprehension of the English slogans. First, the relationship between appreciation and comprehension of foreign languages is better answered through the selection of a foreign language that is not so well understood by the Dutch as English. In fact, the comprehension of English is likely to have influenced the appreciation for the slogans in Gerritsen et al. (2000). Second, the English slo-

gans were not systematically chosen because of the ease or difficulty with which they are comprehended. In order to examine the relationship between comprehension and appreciation, it seems useful to have foreign language utterances that are either relatively easy or difficult to understand.

The discrepancy between studies of the symbolism perspective (e.g., Haarmann 1989; Kelly-Holmes 2000, 2005), and studies which indicate a link between comprehension and appreciation on the other (e.g., Ovesdotter Alm 2003; Cheshire/ Moser 1994; Gerritsen, et al. 2000), calls for further study. Operationalizing the use of foreign languages as the use of French in a Dutch context, we have formulated the following research question: what is the relationship between the appreciation and the comprehension of French in Dutch advertisements?

2. Method

In order to answer the research question, an experiment was set up to investigate the comprehension and the appreciation of French slogans in Dutch car advertisements. We first discuss the pre-test and the material that was developed on the basis of that test. We then present the design of the experiment, the participants' characteristics, and the questionnaire. We end with describing the procedure and the statistical analyses that were used.

2.1 Pre-test

A pre-test was carried out in order to ensure that the experiment included three French slogans that were relatively easy to understand and three French slogans that were relatively difficult to understand. Seventeen slogans were presented to 27 Dutch participants. Some slogans had been used in actual advertising campaigns; others were taken from drafts for advertising campaigns by a Dutch advertising company. The participants were asked to select five slogans that they thought they did understand and five slogans that they did not. All ten slogans had to be translated. This translation served as the true measure of comprehension. The three slogans that were best understood were 'Bon voyage' ('Have a nice trip'), 'Bonne route' ('Have a nice trip'), and 'Beaucoup de plaisir' ('A lot of pleasure'). The three most difficult ones appeared to be

,Accélérateur d'avenir' (,Accelerator of the future'), ,Sécurité routière' (,Road safety'), and ,Offre exceptionnelle' (,Exceptional offer'). These six slogans were used in the experimental material.

2.2 Material

All participants were presented with a series of six advertisements. Each advertisement contained a different French slogan (e.g., ,Bon voyage'), a simple image of a car, an indication of the type of car (e.g., ,*Citroën C3*'), the brand logo, and the brand slogan (e.g., ,Only a *Citroën* drives like a *Citroën*'). Both relatively affordable (a *Citroën C3*, a *Peugeot 206*, and a *Renault Clio*) and relatively expensive cars (a *Citroën C5*, a *Peugeot 607*, and a *Renault Vel Satis*) were chosen, so that the appreciation of the slogan would not be affected by the cars' price and prestige. In the second part of the experimental booklet, participants were given six pairs of advertisements. Each pair contained a French advertisement (which participants had just seen and judged), and a Dutch version of the same advertisement.

2.3 Research design and participants

The experiment had a within-subject design, as each participant was asked to judge not only one advertisement, but six advertisements. In order to avoid the influence of brand and type of car, and an order effect, six versions of the experimental material were developed. Each participant was presented with each of the six slogans and each of the six cars, but in each version the combination of these two elements was different (see Table 1). In each version, the position of each car and each slogan in the series of six was different too. Twenty people per version participated in the experiment (120 in total). Of them, 54.2% were male ($n = 65$), and 45.8% female ($n = 55$). The average age of the participants was 38.60 years ($SD = 13.78$), and ranged from 18 to 65. The participants in the six versions did not significantly differ in the gender distribution ($\chi^2(5) = 5.40$, $p = .37$), nor in mean age ($F(5, 114) = 1.33$, $p = .26$).

| version | ad1 | ad2 | ad3 | ad4 | ad5 | ad6 |
|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | C3 eas1 | 206 dif1 | Clio eas2 | 607 dif2 | Vel eas3 | C5 dif3 |
| 2 | 206 dif2 | Clio eas3 | C3 eas2 | Vel eas1 | C5 dif1 | 607 dif3 |
| 3 | Clio eas1 | C3 eas3 | 206 dif3 | C5 dif2 | 607 dif1 | Vel eas2 |
| 4 | 607 eas2 | Vel dif3 | C5 eas3 | C3 dif1 | 206 eas1 | Clio dif2 |
| 5 | Vel dif1 | C5 eas1 | 607 eas3 | 206 eas2 | Clio dif3 | C3 dif2 |
| 6 | C5 eas2 | 607 eas1 | Vel dif2 | Clio dif1 | C3 dif3 | 206 eas3 |

Table 1. Distribution of cars and slogans over the six versions of the questionnaire (ad1 = 1st advertisement; C3 = *Citroën C3*, C5 = *Citroën C5*, 206 = *Peugeot 206*, 607 = *Peugeot 607*, Clio = *Renault Clio*, Vel = *Renault Vel Satis*; eas1 = 1st easy slogan, dif3 = 3rd difficult slogan, etc.)

2.4 Questionnaire

The comprehension and the appreciation of the slogans were measured with the instruments that proved their reliability in Gerritsen (1996), and Gerritsen et al. (2000). Participants were asked to evaluate the French slogans on eight five-point Likert scales (with items such as 'functional' and 'stylish') directly after each of the six advertisements. A mean score for appreciation was measured per advertisement. The appreciation scale was highly reliable; it scored between $\alpha = .81$ and $\alpha = .87$, dependent on the slogan. The comprehension of the slogans was measured through the question 'What do you think is meant with the French text in the advertisement?'. Answers were classified as correct ('road safety' for 'sécurité routière'), partly correct (e.g., 'safe'), or incorrect (e.g., no answer given).

After the first part of the experiment, participants were given the second part, which contained six pairs of advertisements. One single question was asked after each pair: 'Which advertisement do you think is the best?'. Participants

were thus forced to select either the Dutch version or the French version. The booklet ended with questions about gender, age, highest level of education, number of years of French language education, and experience with the French language (e.g., through holidays or day trips). Just as with gender and age, there were no significant differences between the six versions in education level ($\chi^2(10) = 9.15, p = .52$), number of years of French education ($F(5, 114) < 1$), or experience with the French language ($\chi^2(5) = 2.01, p = .85$).

2.5 Procedure and statistical analyses

The questionnaires were given to individual participants or to participants in small groups. The whole procedure took about 10 minutes. Per slogan, the mean appreciation and the mean comprehension were calculated. For the first part of the questionnaire (evaluation of six individual advertisements), an ANOVA with repeated measures was used. For the second part of the questionnaire (preference per pair of two advertisements), we used a non-parametric binomial test.

3. Results

Unsurprisingly, the six slogans were not equally well understood (Friedman $\chi^2(5) = 245.83, p < .001$). In fact, the comprehension of the slogans corresponded with the pre-test: the easy slogans were better understood than the difficult slogans (see Table 2). The general appreciation of the six slogans was positive: they scored on average 3.22 ($SD = 0.60$) on a five-point scale (1 = negative, 5 = positive).

In order to determine the relationship between the appreciation and the comprehension of the French slogans, the mean appreciation score of the three easy slogans ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.69$) was compared to that of the three difficult slogans ($M = 2.99, SD = 0.66$). The easy slogans were better appreciated than the difficult slogans ($F(1, 119) = 62.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$).

| type | slogan | comprehended (%) | appreciation |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| easy to understand | Bon voyage | 85.8 ^a | 3.62 (0.77) |
| | Bonne route | 79.2 ^a | 3.35 (0.81) |
| | Beaucoup de plaisir | 77.5 ^a | 3.37 (0.83) |
| difficult to understand | Offre exceptionnelle | 52.5 ^b | 2.92 (0.82) |
| | Sécurité routière | 38.3 ^b | 3.15 (0.75) |
| | Accélérateur d'avenir | 15.8 ^c | 2.89 (0.76) |

Table 2. Comprehension and appreciation of the slogans (slogans with a different superscript differ significantly in the percentage of participants that comprehended the slogan; level of significance $p = .001$)

Next, the influence of comprehension on the preference for the French or Dutch slogan was investigated. Most of the participants (75.3%) chose the Dutch version when the French slogan was difficult. A small majority of the participants (55.8%), however, preferred the French version to the Dutch version, when the slogans were easy to understand (see Table 3). This means that the comprehension of the French slogan had an impact on the preference for the language of the slogan in the advertisement.

| slogan | preference for French | preference for Dutch |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Bon voyage | 71.7* | 28.3 |
| Bonne route | 50.8 | 49.2 |
| Beaucoup de plaisir | 45.0 | 55.0 |
| [mean for easy slogans] | 55.8 | 44.2 |
| Offre exceptionnelle | 30.0 | 70.0* |
| Sécurité routière | 17.5 | 82.5* |
| Accélérateur d'avenir | 26.7 | 73.3* |
| [mean for difficult slogans] | 24.7 | 75.3 |

Table 3. Preference for the Dutch or the French slogans in percentages (significant differences between preferences are indicated with a *; level of significance $p = .001$)

4. Conclusion and discussion

The advertising strategy of using foreign languages is a common one. Foreign languages are often used to attract the attention of potential readers or

viewers and to evoke associations that will hopefully enhance the persuasive effectiveness of the advertisement (see, e.g., Gerritsen 1995; Piller 2003).

The experiment that was reported on in this paper investigated the effect of such slogans in automobile advertisements. The specific goal of the study was to examine the relationship between the comprehension of such slogans and their appreciation, because two opposing views on this topic exist in the literature on the use of foreign languages in advertisements. On the one hand, researchers such as Haarmann (1989) and Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005) stress that foreign languages in advertising have a purely symbolic function. Foreign languages evoke specific associations that people are said to transfer to the product and brand that are advertised. Only the symbolic value of foreign languages is important. The level of comprehension of the foreign language does not matter very much. On the other hand, some studies have suggested that the comprehension of foreign languages may be important (e.g., Cheshire/Moser 1994; Ovesdotter Alm 2003). Gerritsen et al. (2000) provided evidence for a relationship between the comprehension and the appreciation of a foreign language. English slogans were more appreciated when they were better understood. Whereas this study was not set up to test this specific relationship, the current experiment focused on slogans in the French language that were pre-tested to be easy or difficult to understand.

The results show in the first place that comprehension of the French slogans plays a role, since the easy slogans were more appreciated than the difficult slogans (cf. Gerritsen et al. 2000). Second, we hypothesized that the French slogans would have a symbolic meaning, if they had an additional value compared to the Dutch slogans. This seemed to be the case. When the slogans were difficult to understand, the participants clearly preferred the Dutch slogan to the French one. However, when the slogans were understood, the participants showed a slight preference for the French slogans. In conclusion, the French language seemed to carry both a symbolic and a literal meaning. The proposition of Haarmann (1989) and Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005) that foreign languages in advertising are a form without a function thus should be qualified.

This experiment has only shed light on a small aspect of the study of the effectiveness of foreign languages use in advertising. We argue that there is much research to be done. We will give a few examples on the basis of the

right-hand side of the model of symbolic associations of foreign languages in advertising presented in Figure 1. Most of the building blocks and steps of which the model is composed have not been tested empirically. First, it is not yet known what associations people exactly have. Does the use of French indeed evoke associations of femininity (Kelly-Holmes 2000; Piller 1999), elegance and taste (Haarmann 1989)? Next, are those associations only positive, as Piller (1999) suggested, or may people also have neutral and negative associations when they hear or read a foreign language in advertising?

The current study shows that the comprehension of a foreign language utterance is a factor determining the effectiveness of an advertisement containing that utterance. When people understand an utterance in a foreign language, its literal meaning may become important. In that respect, one may ask to what extent foreign words need to have a positive association like 'happiness' or 'freedom' in order to be effective. More empirical research needs to be conducted in order to gain understanding of the appreciation of foreign languages in advertising.

Acknowledgements

We thank Bart van Heur for his valuable contributions, Frank van Meurs for his helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and Jack van de Burger and Leon Engels for their support in the preparation of the experimental material.

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