

Bilinguals' Creativity in the Use of English in China's Advertising

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1. Introduction

English has now reached virtually every corner of the globe (Crystal 1997). With the practice of the opening-up policy initiated by the Chinese government in the late 1970's, English defeated all other foreign languages in fighting for the linguistic market and consequently became the most popular foreign language in China, knowledge of which promises, among other things, job opportunity and upward social mobility. Furthermore, as Pride and Liu (1988) observe, based on the amount of English used in the Chinese media, the degree to which Chinese policies favor English, and the favorable attitude toward English by the general public, English may be regarded as a second language in China, ranking only second to Chinese.

According to the recent documentation on English in China (McArthur 1992, Zhao and Campbell 1995), currently China has approximately 200 to 300 million speakers of English, although they use it with various degrees of proficiency. This is the largest number among countries in the Expanding Circle (Crystal 1985). In China, English is used in both international and intranational domains. This paper examines the use of English in one of the intranational domains – Chinese-English bilingual advertisements. In so doing, it demonstrates that English is used not only to convey information about advertised products, but also, perhaps more importantly, to help achieve the goal of persuading audiences to purchase them. The paper proposes that such linguistic practice bespeaks Chinese-English bilinguals' linguistic creativity.

This paper first reviews earlier research on the use of English in bilingual advertising in the context where English is not a native language. It then provides the theoretical framework for this study. In the following, based on communication theories of persuasion and sociolinguistic theories of language and identity, the paper analyses how English use helps to achieve the goal of persuasion, which exemplifies Chinese-English bilinguals', in this case bilingual copywriters', creativity. The paper ends with a discussion of the significance of this study and the direction for further research.

2. Earlier work on English use in bilingual advertising

With advertising becoming more and more persuasive in, and also an integral element of, contemporary society, research on advertisements grows progressively important. One of the most prominent functions of advertising is persuasion (Cook 1992, Gass and Seiter 1999, Geis 1998), which is realized through various strategies exercised by copywriters. Language use in advertising plays a significant role in helping to reach the goal of sales promotion (Geis 1982, Goddard 1998, Han 1991, Vestergaard and Schröder 1985, Zhang 2001). With its enormous symbolic value, the English language has been frequently used in bilingual advertising in places where it is not a native language to achieve the goal of persuasion.

Bhatia (1987, 1992, 2001) examines the use of English in Asian advertising. He argues that English is used, among other things, to produce a favorable psychological effect upon targeted audiences. Haarmann (1984, 1989) and Takashi (1990a, 1990b, 1992) study the use of English in Japanese advertising. They argue that using English satisfies Japanese people's desire to associate themselves with a modern and cosmopolitan identity. Masavisut, Sukwiwat, and Wongmontha (1986) investigate "the cultural power" that English expressions have in Thai advertising messages. Martin

(1998a, 1998b, 2002a, 2002b) argues that English in French advertising is generally considered as a symbol of modernization, efficiency, and/or reliability. In addition, it carries with it influential cultural images. Elsewhere, Alm (2003) examines English use in Ecuadorian commercial context, Friedrich (2002) and Thonus (1991) examine 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 also conclude, among other things, that English use is a marker of modernity, internationalization, and/or superiority.

These studies provide 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. However, these works stop at sociolinguistic analysis and fail to bridge it with communication theories. For one thing, these studies have not demonstrated the mechanism by which the symbolic value of English and its associated cultural images function as an effective means of persuasion. Consequently, the persuasive role attributed to English is not quite convincing in these studies. In light of the communication theory that the power of persuasion depends on the interaction among three different elements – ethos, pathos, and logos (Garver 1994), this paper attempts to remedy this inadequacy. More importantly, unlike aforementioned works, this study has been conducted within the framework of bilinguals' creativity (Kachru 1986a). The paper proposes that the strategic use of English by Chinese-English bilingual copywriters represents their linguistic creativity.

3. Theoretical framework

According to Kachru (1986a:20), the concept of bilinguals' creativity denotes "those creative linguistic processes which are the result of competence in two or more languages." Also according to Kachru (*ibid.*), bilinguals' linguistic creativity is usually involved with two things: 1) a discourse that features two or more languages, in other words, codeswitching or code-mixing, and 2) verbal strategies for various sociological, psychological, and attitudinal reasons. This paper examines bilingual copywriters' use of English in China's advertising discourse, mostly in the form of Chinese-English codeswitching, for the purpose of favorably influencing targeted audiences' attitudes towards the advertised products so that they may be persuaded to purchase them. Also according to Kachru (*ibid.*), there are three approaches to the study of bilinguals' creativity – linguistic, literary, and pedagogical. This paper addresses the issue from the linguistic perspective.

4. English use as a strategy of persuasion

It is difficult to define the target of persuasion; social psychologists (e.g., Murchison 1935) distinguish among attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Attitudes are feelings about something, beliefs refer to the information that a person has about something, and behaviors are the actions that are, in one way or another, related to both attitudes and beliefs (Murchison 1935). According to Murchison (*ibid.*), attitudes are usually the target of persuasion, given that they are able to direct and even permit predictions of behaviors. If this is true, advertisements must be capable of influencing or, if necessary, changing the attitudes of potential consumers towards advertised merchandise if they are to succeed in persuading people to buy the product. In other words, they must be able to secure favorable attitudes towards the marketed product from the "narratee" (Goddard 1998). Then how can English use help to achieve this objective?

According to Garver (1994), the power of persuasion depends on the interaction among three different factors: 1) ethos, which refers to the speaker's personal traits, 2) pathos, which refers to the audience's emotions and state of mind, and 3) logos, which denotes the content of a message (the terms ethos, pathos, and logos themselves are the creation of Ancient Greek philosophers). The use of English in bilingual advertising positively affects each of these three factors. In other words, it helps to secure audiences' favorable attitudes towards the promoted product.

By the very fact that narrators of advertising messages know English, an attractive identity is being constructed for them, which helps to make their personal traits (ethos) appealing to "narratees." Given that language use is always a reflection of multiple voices and that both speakers and hearers are

present in a discourse (Clark and Holquist 1984), English use in advertising constructs audiences as those who have knowledge of English. In this sense, various attractive identities are also being created for these audiences. This, in turn, positively affects the state of mind and attitudes of “narratees” (pathos) towards the advertised commodity. Finally, English is mostly used in association with appealing messages. Therefore, English-associated contents of advertising messages (logos) appear attractive to “narratees.” As a result, the use of English in bilingual advertising serves as a powerful strategy of persuasion.

5. Language and identity

Sociolinguists and critical linguists (e.g., Cameron 1995, Tracy 2002), among scholars in other disciplines, hold that language is oftentimes not only used as a means of information communication, but also as a major tool in the process of social construction. With the assumption that linguistic behavior is social practice, many linguists (e.g., Eckert 1989, 2000, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982, Harvey and Shalom 1997, Myers-Scotton 1993) argue that language is an instrument of identity construction. In other words, to a great extent, the relationship between language use and social identity is constitutive.

For instance, Eckert (1989:vii) notes that on certain occasions, the choice of a certain linguistic code has “social symbolic significance,” and consequently it is associated with “the expression of social identity.” Furthermore, Eckert (2000:41) observes that “the individual’s engagement in the world is a constant process of identity construction”; in other words, people are continuously negotiating their “meaning in the world.” Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) also argue that people’s choice of a language style may have symbolic values and interpretive consequences. Meanwhile, they hold that social identities are largely “established and maintained through language” (p.7).

5.1 *The data*

The advertisements analyzed in this paper are from a corpus of one hundred and thirty-six Chinese-English bilingual advertisements, which were collected from both the electronic and the print media. The sources of the corpus are five Chinese web sites – <http://www.sina.com.cn>, <http://www.sohu.com.cn>, <http://www.263.net>, <http://www.163.net>, and <http://www.chinaren.com>, and five Chinese magazines – <<中国青年>> (‘China Youth’), <<中国国情国力>> (‘China National Conditions and Strength’), <<今日中国>> (‘China Today’), <<人民画报>> (‘China Pictorial’), and <<大众电影>> (‘Popular Cinema’). Articles on both these web sites and in these magazines are written in Chinese almost exclusively, whose intended readers are Chinese people, although these articles are also accessible overseas. Most of the online advertisements were collected in December 2001, with a few also collected in April 2002. Magazine advertisements were collected from issues published in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

For the purpose of representing maximally authentic advertisements, if possible, all the typographical features in the original advertisements are retained in the examples below. Moreover, Chinese characters are used in the specimens, with a gloss in English provided right below the Chinese text and free translation below the gloss. However, in order to save space, the layout of some of the sample advertisements has been modified. Also out of the same consideration, the samples analyzed do not each represent a complete advertisement, particularly if the original advertisement is lengthy. In this paper, the use of English is defined as the inclusion of English or English-like texts, be they on the lexical, phrasal, or sentential level, in a Chinese-English bilingual advertisement. These texts not only appear in the main body of an advertisement, but also in the logo, the company’s name, the brand name, or the company’s web site.

5.2 *Data analysis*

This study identifies and discusses six different social identities that may be constructed through the use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertising. The identification here is not intended to be

exhaustive but illustrative. The categorization is not meant to be categorically exclusive. The targeted audiences of these advertisements are assumed to be of, at least, three different groups: 1) well-off Chinese professionals who are mostly between twenty-five and forty, 2) young people who are still in college or who just graduated from college, and 3) high school students. Most of the advertisements examined in this study advertise for luxury apartments, communications tools, credit cards, airline services, online services, training classes, or cosmetics.

5.2.1 *An internationally oriented identity*

Piller (2001:153) notes that in the contemporary society, the once dominant “political identities based on citizenship” are gradually shifting toward “economic ones based on participation in a global consumer market.” In other words, as a result of the ever-increasing globalization, an internationally oriented identity becomes the vogue, which is oftentimes admired and sought after. This is also true in China, especially among those young-to-middle-aged, educated, and/or affluent Chinese who mostly live in the big cities. The advertisement in (1) exemplifies this trend. It not only features the use of the English abbreviation “HR,” but also the modifier “国际” (‘international’). Such a design implicitly associates knowledge of English with the image of being internationally oriented.

(1) 国际 HR 专家 协会 主席 主讲
 international -- expert society chairperson lead the lecturing
 ‘The chairperson of the International Human Relations Experts Society leads the lecturing.

国际 HR 职业 资格 证书 我 值得 拥有
 international -- profession qualification certificate I worth own
 It’s worthwhile for me to have the Certificate of the International Human Relations Professional Qualification.’

(<http://www.sina.com.cn>, December 22, 2001)

The advertisement in (2) below, which advertises the Pacific Credit Card issued by China’s Bank of Communications, is also characterized by the use of English expressions on the one hand, which in this case is not limited to English lexicon, and the indication of the audiences’ internationally oriented social identity on the other, which is suggested by the expression “Global Finance.”

(2) Best Bank Awards 1999 Global Finance
 -- -- -- -- -- --
 (Bank of Communications) has won the award of the best bank in 1999. It provides

Bank of Communications Best Bank in China
 -- -- -- -- -- --
 services of global finance. It is the best bank in China. With one card from the Bank of

一 卡 在 手 消费 不 愁
 one card Preposition hand consume not worried
 Communications in hand, you needn’t worry about having no money to spend.’

(《<<今日中国>>, 2000:1)

5.2.2 *A successful or success-oriented identity*

A successful or success-oriented social identity is also constructed by the Chinese advertisement that embeds English usages. Just as the construction of an internationally oriented identity, the construction of an identity of success is partially accomplished through the use of success-related words or phrases as well. In (3), an advertisement for a luxury apartment complex, the phrase “有骄人成就的优雅人士” (‘a leisurely and refined person with enviable achievements’) portrays

someone who is very successful. The use of the English word “home” implies that the successful narrator and “narratee” have knowledge of English.

- (3) 公寓 与 公寓 是 不同的, home 与 home 也 是 不 一样的,
apartment and apartment be different -- and -- too be not same
'... One apartment is different from another. One home is not the same as another either.

作为 一个 有 骄人 成就 的 优雅 人士, 当
as one have proud accomplishment Auxiliary elegant person when
Being a leisurely and refined person with enviable success, when your home is visited by a

你的 home 被 来客 初次 造访, 那里 的 环境 会 说话。
your -- Passive guest first time visit there Auxiliary environment can speak
guest for the first time, the environment can speak for itself.'

(《中国国情国力》, 2001:4)

Using the expression “成功,” which exactly means ‘success,’ the advertisement in (4), which advertises a Chinese company, constructs the narrator and the targeted consumer as someone who is success-oriented. In this piece of advertisement, the corporation’s name, which is given in English, is presented right after its name in Chinese.

- (4) 勇于 创新 网际 人 的 信念
brave originality Internet people Auxiliary belief
'Being actively creative is the belief of those who work in the Internet business.

北京网际广告有限责任公司 BEINING INTERNET ADVERTISING CO., LTD
Beijing Internet Ads Co. Ltd. -- -- -- -- --
Let's grow together, harvest together, and succeed together –

我们 共同 成长, 共 有 收获, 共 享 成功
we together grow together have harvest together enjoy success
Beijing Internet Advertisement Co. Ltd.'

(《中国国情国力》, 2001:2)

5.2.3 A fun-oriented identity

On many occasions, the use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertisements is also related to the creation of a fun-oriented identity, which is one of the most attractive alternatives to young Chinese. In (5), the English word “HIT” is used to describe the advertised friend-making gadget, which has a nonsense English-like name “Friengetys.”

- (5) 日本 青年 最 HIT 的 时尚 玩意 Friengetys 教友机
Japanese youth most -- Auxiliary fashionable toy -- friend-making machine
'The most popular and fashionable gadget among Japanese youth – Friengetys friends-making machine.'

(《中国青年》, 2001:11)

The advertisement for the Chinese web site, <http://www.263.net>, in (6) is another sample that constructs the narrator and the “implied reader” (Piller 2001) as being fun-oriented. In this sample, English words, “Capital Online,” are used side by side with Chinese expressions. The idea of being fun-oriented is suggested by such expressions as “乐” (‘joy’).

- (6) 首都 在线 Capital Online www.263.net 自由自在 逍遥 梦

capital online -- -- -- carefree free and unfettered dream
'Capital Online at <http://www.263.net> can help you realize the dream of being leisurely

全家 上网 乐 无穷
whole family go online joy endless
and unfettered. With everybody in the family being able to do things at <http://www.263.net>,
there will be limitless joy.'

(《今日中国》, 2000:7)

5.2.4 A future-oriented identity

Some of the Chinese advertisements that include English texts construct the narrator and the "implied reader" as someone who is future-oriented. For instance, the advertisement in (7), an advertisement for a Chinese telecommunications corporation, constructs the narrator and the "narratee" as someone that is prepared for the "新世纪" ('new century') in which China will join "WTO." In addition, the English name for the Chinese company, "CHINA UNICOM," is given right after the Chinese name, "中国联通."

- (7) 中国联通 CHINA UNICOM 迎接 WTO 新世纪 新联通 新网络
China Unicom -- -- greet -- new century new Unicom new internet
'China Unicom greets WTO. In the new century, new China Unicom will provide new
新服务
new service
Internet and new services.'

(《人民画报》, 2002:1)

The advertisement in (8), an advertisement for a correspondence school, also uses an English expression, "WTO," to construct a future-oriented identity. Although the amount of the text in English is limited in this sample, the intent still holds.

- (8) 读 朝日函授 考 日语 <<托福>> 走 成功 之 路
read *Zhaori* Correspondence take test Japanese TOEFL walk success Auxiliary road
'Enroll in *Zhaori* Correspondence School, take the Japanese TOEFL, and be successful.
北京 申奥 成功, 加入 WTO 在即, 机会 无限,
Beijing apply for the Olympic Games succeed join -- instantly opportunity limitless
Beijing has succeeded in its bid for hosting the Olympic Games. China is soon to join the
... 你 准备 好 了 吗?
you prepare well Auxiliary Question
WTO. Many opportunities are waiting for you... Are you ready?'

(《中国青年》, 2002:1)

5.2.5 A modern identity

The use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertisements is, too, connected with the construction of a modern identity. For instance, in (9), an advertisement for a private institute teaching people to be confident, the English word "case" is mixed with Chinese expressions. Since the expression "case" is most often used by those who work in relatively recently emerging businesses in China, such as international trade or law firm, the use of this word implicitly depicts the narrator and the "narratee" as being modern.

(9) 学 case 拿 积分 冲 大奖

learn -- take credit prepare big prize

‘(You can) learn how to analyze cases, accumulate credits, and prepare for the big reward.’

(<http://www.163.net>, December 24, 2001)

The advertisement in (10) is another example of similar nature, given the fact that currently in China, it is generally those who are considered modern that use wireless services. In this sample, English is used in both the product’s name and its slogan.

(10) 诺基亚 NOKIA CONNETING PEOPLE

Nokia -- -- --

‘Nokia, connecting people.’

(《中国青年》, 2001:21)

5.2.6 A sophisticated and attractive identity

The use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertising is also associated with the construction of a sophisticated and appealing social identity. In other words, in certain advertisements in China, the messages that contain English expressions are about feminine beauty and attraction. The text in (11), which is from an advertisement for the Maybelline lipstick, is a case in point. In this sample, English is used to express the brand name of the product, “MAYBELLINE” and “WATER SHINE,” and the place of production, “New York.” The information of being beautiful is conveyed by such expressions as “美” (‘beautiful’).

(11) 来自 纽约 美宝莲 带给 双唇 全新 水般感受
from New York Maybelline bring both lips all new water-like sensation
‘Maybelline lipsticks from New York give your lips fresh watery feeling.

唇妆 闪亮 新概念 WATER SHINE® 水晶 唇膏
lip make-up shining new concept -- -- water crystal lipstick
Water crystal lipstick is a new concept in terms of making your both lips shining.

MAYBELLINE NEW YORK 美 来自 内心 美 来自 Maybelline
-- -- beauty from inside beauty from --
Beauty comes from inside. Beauty comes from Maybelline.’

(《中国国情国力》, 2001:2)

The text in (12), which is from an advertisement for perfume, also features the use of English on the one hand, and the message of being beautiful and attractive on the other. In this example, English is used for the name of the Chinese product and also in the logo. The message of being beautiful is again communicated through the use of the word “美” (‘beautiful’). The information of being attractive is communicated through the use of expressions such as “诱人” (‘attractive’).

(12) 距离 之 美 似有 还 无 欲语 还 休。
distance Auxiliary beauty seem to have still no want to speak still stop
‘The beauty of distance... (The mysterious beauty and glamor) is difficult to describe.

明艳, 诱人 倚近..... 无法 靠近 亦 不可 抗拒
shining and beautiful attract approach unable approach too unable resist
It’s shining and fresh. It’s attractive... You cannot get any closer. Neither can you back

Distance (笛诗) 香水。DISTANCE parfum for women.
 -- Dishi perfume -- perfume -- --
 away. Dishi, perfume for women.'

(《今日中国》, 2000:3)

5.3 Further discussion

In the use of English either to directly express or in connection with a certain type of message, a social identity is being constructed that is consonant with the content of that message. Stating that a certain advertisement featuring the use of English constructs a certain social identity is not intended to mean that only one identity is being constructed in one advertisement. The fact of the matter is usually the opposite. In other words, instead of a single social identity, multiple identities are usually being created for both the narrator and the “narratee.” This is all very natural given that one person may assume multiplex social identities even in the same context. For instance, in (2), which is repeated here as (13) for convenience’s sake, not only a future-oriented but also a successful social identity is being constructed, since in China today it is generally only those who are financially successful that own credit cards.

(13) Best Bank Awards 1999 Global Finance

-- -- -- -- -- -- --

(Bank of Communications) has won the award of the best bank in 1999. It provides

Bank of Communications Best Bank in China

-- -- -- -- -- -- --

services of global finance. It is the best bank in China. With one card from the Bank of

一 卡 在 手 消 费 不 愁

one card Preposition hand consume not worried

Communications in hand, you needn’t worry about having no money to spend.’

(《今日中国》, 2000:1)

In discussing identity construction for the “narratee” through the use of English, this paper does not claim that the targeted audiences necessarily have knowledge of English. On the contrary, in most cases the use of English is not primarily intended for communicating information about advertised products, but is meant for other pragmatic purposes, for example, to strike potential buyers with the impression that the products are of good and dependable quality, given the fact that a superior quality is usually automatically associated with the use of English for most Chinese people. In other words, just as in other contexts where English is not a native language, in China as well, the symbolic value of the English language plays a significant role in helping advertisements exercise their power of persuasion.

Under these circumstances, even the use of nonsense English-like expressions is possible. This is exemplified by the expression “Friengetys” in specimen (5), which is used to refer to the name of a friend-making machine. The fact that the audiences’ knowledge of English is not assumed also helps to explain why in most advertisements, only English lexical items, instead of sentences completely in English, are used. Otherwise, the problem may arise that information about the advertised commodity cannot be successfully conveyed.

In arguing for the important role of English in constructing favorable identities for both the narrator and targeted audiences, this paper also recognizes the essential part that visual images have played, the analysis of which will require much more space. Since this paper focuses on the examination of the use of English, visual analysis is not included.

6. Conclusion and further research

Compared with earlier studies, this paper provides a more thorough analysis of English as a tool of persuasion in bilingual advertising in the cultures where English is either a second or a foreign language, given that in this study communication theories, particularly the notion of ethos, pathos, and logos, are integrated with sociolinguistic examination. In so doing, this study helps to advance the understanding of the pragmatics of English use in its non-native contexts.

By investigating the use of English as a means of identity construction, this study also sheds light on the complex interaction between language use and identity construction. Identities examined in this paper are not those of ethnicity, gender, or race, which are more or less fixed and hence not easily subject to change. Instead, this paper examines identities that are much more fluid, such as being modern, which cut across the boundary of ethnicity, gender, or race. In the age of globalization and internationalization, the study of such identities is meaningful.

Perhaps more significantly, this study contributes to research on bilinguals' linguistic creativity, in this case, the creativity of Chinese-English bilingual copywriters. These bilinguals capitalize on the special status of English in China and employ Chinese-English codeswitching as a discursive strategy (Gumperz 1982) to serve the purpose of persuasion. Up until this stage, research on bilinguals' creativity focuses on that represented by the creative use of discursive features characteristic of one's native culture in contact literatures (e.g., Kachru 1986b, 1987, Zhang 2002). Meanwhile, although there has been enormous amount of research on codeswitching or code-mixing, few studies examine this linguistic phenomenon from the angle of bilinguals' creativity. Therefore, this study constitutes a relatively new attempt.

In this paper, it is argued that based on the immense symbolic value of English in China and also the type of messages that English is connected with, the use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertising functions as a strategy of persuasion in that it positively affects the ethos, pathos, and logos. However, this is purely theoretical argument, which may be bolstered by empirical research. Therefore, a survey of the real outcome of the use of English in Chinese-English bilingual advertising is necessary in future research to make the argument better grounded.

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