Global Business Languages

Volume 2 *Cultures and Cross-Cultural Awareness in the Professions*

Article 9

5-21-2010

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Recommended Citation
Birch, Dawn and McPhail, Janelle (1997) "The Impact of Accented Speech in International Television Advertisements," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 2, Article 9.
Available at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol2/iss1/9

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THE IMPACT OF ACCENTED SPEECH IN INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS

For over forty years, marketing academics and practitioners have debated the relative merits and limitations of globalization versus adaptation of international marketing strategies (Agrawal; Elinder; Fatt). The trend toward the standardization of advertising campaigns across western cultures, and the relaxation of foreign content regulations by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, exposes Australian television viewers to an increasing number of foreign-produced advertisements, some of which are narrated by foreign-accented spokespersons.

Research has revealed that, when confronted with a spoken message, the listener evaluates the spokesperson across a number of personality traits and qualities (Edwards 1982; Hovland, Janis, and Kelley). Studies on the impact of various source characteristics on communication effectiveness have been conducted across a range of disciplines and in a diversity of speaking contexts. The vocal characteristics of the spokesperson, including their accent, provide clues to the listener for subjectively assigning personality traits on the basis of ethnic identity (Brown, Giles, and Thakerar). However, the accent of the spokesperson is an aspect of source evaluation that has received limited attention in the marketing literature, and yet one that is particularly relevant within the context of international advertising (Tsalikis, DeShields, and LaTour).

Studies of listeners' reactions to accented English have revealed that speakers with standard accents and non-standard accents are evaluated differently across a range of source characteristics. In the pages that follow, a review of studies that have measured evaluative reactions to accent and other source characteristics on effective communication in the social psychology, linguistics, and marketing literature is provided. The need for further research on the impact of accent in the international commercial context is identified.

Global Business Languages (1997)

The selection of a spokesperson who possesses the appropriate characteristics is important because researchers have found that the characteristics of the source or spokesperson influence the persuasive process (Petty and Cacioppo). Further, in the advertising context, the attitude of the target audience toward the spokesperson in the advertisement impacts on their attitude toward the advertisement itself, which in turn affects their overall brand attitude and purchase intentions for the advertised product (Mitchell and Olson).

Firms that operate in overseas markets must decide whether to adapt their marketing strategies for each country market or standardize their marketing activities across world markets. Keegan determined that firms operating across national boundaries evolve through four stages of corporate development: (1) domestic; (2) international; (3) multinational; and (4) global. Domestic firms primarily focus their efforts on the needs of the domestic market. They may, however, occasionally export excess production in a rather ad hoc manner to overseas markets. The "international firm" adopts an ethnocentric approach to marketing, whereby advertising and marketing strategies are simply extended to foreign markets. Hence, they make no attempt to adapt their marketing mix or accommodate the idiosyncrasies of unique country markets. Essentially, these firms assume the strategies that have proved successful at home will also be effective in overseas markets.

Multinational firms have a polycentric philosophy, which acknowledges the dissimilarities of unique country markets. These firms adapt their advertising campaigns and other elements of the marketing mix for each overseas market. Conversely, the truly "global" firm takes a geocentric approach to marketing, whereby advertising campaigns and the other elements of the marketing mix are standardized on a worldwide basis (Wind, Douglas, and Perlmutter). Hence, global firms focus on the similarities across markets, and adopt a global perspective through all phases of their production and throughout the marketing process.

While Keegan's typology infers that firms operating in international markets progress or evolve through each of the four stages over time, marketing academics and advertising practitioners do not unanimously regard the global company to be the optimal configuration. Rather, divergent views concerning the degree to which firms promoting their product offerings in foreign countries should standardize or adapt their advertising messages are espoused (Agrawal 1993).

The standardized approach to advertising, characterized by the global firm, is supported by Levitt, Elinder, and Fatt. A standardized advertisement ". . . is used internationally with virtually no change in its theme, copy or illustration, except for translation when needed" (Onkvisit and Shaw 43). Hence, across Western or English speaking countries, where translation is not required, the standardized advertisement is used without any change. Therefore, overseas audiences are exposed to a foreign-produced script and/or a foreign-accented spokesperson.

Conversely, the adaptation approach to international advertising requires that the advertising strategy be adapted for each foreign market to accommodate differences in culture (Britt; Green, Cunningham, and Cunningham; Ryans and Fry). Onkvisit and Shaw argue that the theme, slogan, and idiomatic expression of advertisements need to be adapted across markets to facilitate interpretation of the advertising message. Hence, adaptation strategies require that the firm develops a sound understanding of the needs and characteristics of unique country markets, and an appreciation of relevant cultural differences. However, only a limited number of researchers have examined cross-cultural mass communication, and their studies have mainly focused on a single country or compared two diverse cultures (Chao; Kale; Mueller 1987). For example, Mueller (1992) examined the extent to which Japanese advertising has become Westernized or Americanized, Martenson compared American and Swedish advertising on the basis of creative strategies and information content, and Miracle, Chang, and Taylor compared the creative strategies used in American and Korean television commercials.

Kale proposed that effective international promotional strategies require the development of a comprehensive framework for understanding the underlying dimensions of culture. Harvey also identified cultural differences as one of the key variables that should be considered in determining the extent to which the firm should standardize or adapt their advertising. Cultural factors include, among other things, potential consumers' attitude toward imported products and their attitudes toward products from particular countries.

Most studies that have examined the adaptation or standardization of international advertising strategies have focused on the impact of cultural differences on the effectiveness of various creative strategies, such as copy strategy, advertising appeals, and execution styles. These studies have predominantly involved conducting a content analysis of national

and international advertisements and making comparisons to identify differences (Nevett; Unwin). For example, Unwin compared national television and print advertising in Britain and America and found that modes of expression and creative strategies differed significantly across the two cultures. Nevett also conducted a literature search to identify the factors that explain the difference between American and British advertising and found substantial differences in terms of information content, approach, and entertainment value.

The trend toward the standardization of marketing and advertising strategies across national boundaries, and the relaxation of traditional barriers and protective legislation in the Australian broadcasting industry, have resulted in Australian consumers being exposed to an influx of standardized advertising commercials designed to appeal to "homogeneous" world markets. For example, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of commercials on Australian television featuring spokespersons who have American or British accents (Shoebridge).

The vocal characteristics of a speaker, including accent, have been found to provide the listener with salient information by which the source is evaluated, and to exert a powerful influence on those evaluations (Foon; Street and Hopper). Cacioppo and Petty stated:

> The language, dialect and accent used by a speaker are also important determinants of source perceptions, with certain speech style (e.g., standard accents) elevating the valuation of the source across a wide range of dimensions (e.g., competence, dynamics, dominance). (192)

Spoken language identifies the speaker as a member of a particular ethnic or cultural group, and hence the attitude of the listener toward members of that particular group may be generalized to the speaker (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum). Listeners react subjectively to accent by assigning personality traits that reflect the stereotyped characteristics or perceptions of that accent group (Anisfeld, Bogo, and Lambert; Edwards 1982).

Cacioppo and Petty proposed that language variables may also be used to establish how similar the speaker is to the message recipient. For example, Delia found that listeners' perceptions of accent similarity led to more favorable speaker evaluations, and beliefs of attitude similarity,

than did perceptions of accent dissimilarity. Research has revealed that speakers who converge most to the language of the subjects are perceived more favorably (Brown, Giles, and Thakerar). An Australian study found that immigrant males speaking with accented English speech were judged less favorably by Australian listeners than males speaking with a standard Australian accent (Callan, Gallois, and Forbes).

Further, Ryan and Sebastian contend that ". . . variations in listeners' judgments of a person's status and personality are commonly associated with the speaker's accent" (113). Accented speakers are frequently rated to be from a lower social class, to hold less similar beliefs, and to be less desirable as partners than speakers who have the standard accent of the listener. Hence, in the advertising context, a speaker using a similar accent to the audience is expected to be more persuasive than a speaker using a less similar accent (Cacioppo and Petty).

Numerous researchers in linguistics and social psychology have measured the reactions of message recipients a spokesperson using either the standard accent of the audience or a non-standard (regional or foreign) accent. Edwards defines the standard accent as ". . . the one spoken by educated members of society, used in writing and in the media, and supported and encouraged at school . . . standards are the dialects of those who dominate." In British studies, the standard accent is commonly referred to as received pronunciation (RP) or "BBC English." In Australian studies, the standard accent is referred to as the "cultivated" Australian accent, and in American studies the closest equivalent is called "Network English" (Tucker and Lambert).

Lambert categorized the wide range of personality traits on which listeners evaluate speakers into three main groups: (1) competence (e.g., intelligence and self-confidence); (2) personal integrity (e.g., trustworthiness and sincerity); and (3) social attractiveness (e.g., likeability and sociability). Since then, these dimensions have been used by numerous researchers in the study of speech evaluation (Brown, Giles, and Thakerar; Edwards 1977; Giles 1971, 1973). Other researchers have also examined the status (e.g., success and wealth) and solidarity (e.g., friendliness and warmth) of the spokesperson (Brown; Callan, Gallois, and Forbes; Fishman). The solidarity (or bonding) dimension is a combination of the social attractiveness and personal integrity dimensions.

In most studies, spokespersons with standard accents have been found to evoke more favorable judgments on competence and status dimensions

than their non-standard or foreign-accented counterparts (Anisfeld, Bogo, and Lambert; Brown, Giles, and Thakerar; Giles 1971; 1973). Studies conducted by Giles (1971; 1973) in the United Kingdom, revealed that speakers using the standard or received pronunciation (RP) were rated as more competent, self confident, educated, and as presenting better quality arguments than speakers using a non-standard accent or regional accent. In a study conducted by Brown, Giles, and Thakerar, subjects were exposed to recordings of a bi-dialectal male speaker using both the Welsh and the standard British accent (RP). Welsh subjects rated the standard accented (RP) speaker to be more intelligent, just (fair), happy, active, ambitious, and good looking than the Welsh-accented speaker.

A study of Jewish-accented and standard English speakers revealed that both gentile and Jewish subjects devalued the Jewish-accented speaker on height, good looks, and leadership (Anisfeld, Bogo, and Lambert). Lambert et al. found that both French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians reacted more favorably to English speakers than French speakers. In a review of these studies, Edwards explained that the standard accent is a ". . . marker of power and dominance . . . therefore, it is often evaluated more favourably" (1982: 22).

However, many of these studies have also revealed that the spokesperson with the regional accent of the audience was considered to be more humorous, friendly, reliable, generous, good natured, and more talkative than the spokesperson with the standard (RP) accent (Cheyne; Giles 1971). For example, Edwards (1977) and others (Edwards and Jacobsen; Giles 1973; Lambert) found that while speakers with standard accents or dialects were rated more favorable along the dimensions of competence (intelligence, confidence, ambition, and industriousness) and status/prestige (professionalism), speakers with non-standard accents received higher evaluations on the dimensions of personal integrity (sincerity, reliability, and generosity) and social attractiveness (friendliness and warmth). Edwards explained that ". . . the trust and liking apparently associated with regional varieties may be related to conceptions of in-group solidarity" (1982: 25). Hence, these studies have revealed that speakers with a standard accent are rated more favorably in terms of their competence and status, but less favorably on the dimensions of social attractiveness and personal integrity.

Conversely, Berechee and Ball found that Australian subjects rated a spokesperson with a "cultivated" (standard) Australian accent more fa-

vorably than spokespersons with either a "broad" or "general" (non-standard) Australian accent on both competence and social attractiveness dimensions. Brown, Giles, and Thakerar also found that the RP accent rated more highly than Welsh-accented English on qualities reflecting both competence and benevolence. Similar results were revealed by Carranza and Ryan who studied evaluative reactions to Spanish-accented English and standard American accents. In their study, both Mexican-American and Anglo-American subjects rated the English speakers more favorably than the Spanish-accented speakers on status, personal integrity, and social attractiveness.

Tsalikis, DeShields and LaTour conducted a study in the personal selling context that compared the effectiveness of salesmen speaking English with either a Greek accent or a standard English accent. The speakers were evaluated in terms of their effectiveness, and across three source characteristics: (1) competence; (2) personal integrity; and (3) social attractiveness. The salesmen with the standard American accent of the audience were rated more favorably across all three dimensions than the salesmen with the Greek (non-standard) accent. A replication of the study by Tsalikis, Ortiz-Buonafina, and LaTour in Guatemala, revealed that speakers with the standard accent of the audience were also evaluated more favorably across all three source dimensions (competence, integrity, and social attractiveness) than the foreign-accented speakers.

DeShields assessed the impact of a spokesperson's accent on purchase intentions for high and low involvement products. The spokesperson's accent was found to be a significant predictor of purchase intentions, and the spokesperson's credibility was found to be a significant predictor of purchase intentions in both the low and high involvement situations (DeShields). In summary, studies on evaluative reactions to accent have revealed that the spokesperson's accent influences the listener's evaluation of the spokesperson on a range of characteristics including source credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) and source similarity.

A limited number of studies have addressed the impact of source credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) within the marketing and advertising contexts. In a study that examined the impact of a credible source in a buy or lease decision, Gotlieb and Sarel found that ". . . when the source is highly credible, attribution theory suggests that consumers are less likely to discount the message" (257). An experienced or expert source is considered to provide more accurate, credible and important

information with regard to the attributes of a product (McCracken). Conversely, when consumers attribute reporting or knowledge bias to the communicator, the source is judged to be less credible, consumers are more likely to discount the message, and thus the persuasive impact of the message is lessened (Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken; Mizerski, Golden, and Kernan). A highly credible source provides the audience with cues for evaluating the quality of a new brand, whereas a low credibility source ". . . might be viewed as an ambiguous cue of quality" (Gotlieb and Sarel 255).

However, the impact of a highly credible source has been found to be moderated by a number of factors including the degree of perceived risk, the initial opinion of the recipient regarding the position being advocated by the source, and the extent to which the receiver is informed about or involved with the issue (Dean, Austin, and Watts; Harmon and Coney). Other factors that appear to moderate the impact of source credibility are the audience's locus of control, self perception, and the passage of time (McGinnies and Ward).

Source similarity refers to the perceived resemblance between the spokesperson and the audience, and includes similar lifestyles, interests, attitudes, needs, and goals (Belch and Belch). The message recipient is likely to feel that a spokesperson with status, values, interests, and needs similar to their own is more likely to hold similar points of view (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley). Numerous studies have revealed that people tend to be more persuaded by spokespersons who are considered to be homophilous, i.e., similar to themselves (Berscheid; Burnstein, Stotland, and Zander). These studies support the reward theory of interpersonal attraction, which posits that individuals are rewarded with consensual validation by those who share their attitudes (Aronson and Worchel).

Brock examined the relationship between communicator-recipient similarity, communicator expertise, and purchase decisions. The study, which was conducted in the field (the paint department of a large retail store) revealed that a less knowledgeable salesman, who purported to have had a similar experience to the purchaser with regard to anticipated quantity of paint consumption (more similar/less knowledgeable condition), was more effective in influencing the purchaser to switch to a different price level, than was a more knowledgeable salesman who re-

ported his own consumption of paint to be twenty times that of the subject's needs (less similar/more knowledgeable condition).

Researchers have examined the impact of congruity between the target audience and the spokesperson across a range of demographic and behavioral variables including gender, age, education, lifestyle, product related experiences and product usage (Feick and Higie; Woodside and Davenport). Recent research has also revealed that source similarity provides a particularly useful cue for purchase behavior of services when there is substantial variation in consumer's tastes and preferences (Feick and Higie). Hence, a spokesperson in an advertisement who is perceived to be similar to the audience would also be expected to prefer a product or service that has attributes that match the taste and preferences of the audience. Thus he or she is more persuasive than a spokesperson less similar to the audience.

Research has revealed that people from the same culture are assumed to share similar attitudes, preferences, and opinions (Byrne; Simons, Berkowitz, and Moyer). Further, individuals judged similar to the audience in their dialect style and socio-economic class are viewed more favorably than dissimilar individuals (Francis; Harms). For example, Burnstein, Stotland, and Zander found that a deep sea diver with a background similar to that of the audience (raised in the same town) was more influential in affecting the audience's sea-diving preferences than a spokesperson with a different background. Hence, in the international advertising context, cultural differences can be expected to impact on judgments of perceived source similarity.

In summary, a review of studies that have examined evaluative reactions to accent provides some useful insights into the role of the spokesperson's accent in the persuasive communication process. Further, studies that have examined the impact of other source characteristics on persuasion and attitude change, including source credibility and source similarity, indicate that the characteristics of a spokesperson in a television advertisement may influence the audience's attitude towards the advertisement itself. However, the review of the literature reveals that the impact of the spokesperson's accent within the context of international television advertising has not been investigated. Hence, research is required to provide insight into the effectiveness of using standardized advertising campaigns in overseas markets that are presented by a spokesperson with a foreign accent.

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