

## Chapter 7

# The Effect of Sociolinguism on Advertising Slogans: Language as a Conveyor of Cultural Characteristics

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### ABSTRACT

*The present research intends to check if foreign languages, as cultural conveyors, moderate the characteristics associated with advertising slogans. To understand better how the use of foreign languages can improve the persuasive capacity of ads, three research questions have been established: (1) with what sector of production is the use of foreign languages associated; (2) which characteristics are associated with the foreign language used in advertisements; and (3) what is the relationship between the foreign language used and the image of the firm. In order to answer these questions, the authors have designed an audio slogan translated into three languages: Italian, Turkish, and Russian. The total sample exposed to the slogan is composed of 184 subjects. The conclusions have shown that those firms that seek to communicate a symbolic meaning should select a language that conveys the desired cultural values, thus improving the persuasion already derived from the country of origin.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of market globalization, coupled with the economic integration processes which take place worldwide, highlights the importance of foreign languages as a source of competitive advantage in intercultural trading communications (Cuervo-Cuzarra & Ramamurti, 2017). The use of foreign languages is particularly important for those enterprises and organizations with a global vision of the market. In a global competitive environment, people and organizations that can master relevant languages will enjoy an advantage in matters of trade and exchange at worldwide level (Li & Kalynaraman, 2012; Molinsky, 2007).

The significance of language in professional and businesses relations has been heightened by the development of new information and communication technologies, growth in internet use and the global phenomenon of social networking (Luna, Peracchio, & De Juan, 2003). All of these offer multiple platforms and communication channels, providing access to a worldwide audience.

There has also been an increase in foreign language learning because of the advances made in the education systems of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Nevertheless, just 10 languages are spoken by 50% of the world's population, out of a total of 7,106 living languages that are spoken by 6,200 million people (see Table 1).

In the advertising field, the use of foreign languages is also a major worldwide phenomenon (Grant, Balley, & Ogbuehi, 2017; Hornikx, Van Meurs, & Starren, 2007; Jun, Jeong, Gentry, & Hyun, 2017; Weijters, Puntoni, & Baumgartner, 2017). To attract the audience's attention, advertisers may evoke cultural associations in their ads, or may do so through the brand and its design elements. The impact of this cultural evocation is the main objective for using foreign languages in advertising (Hornikx, Van Meurs, & Hof, 2013; Melnyk, Klein, & Völckner, 2012). In this respect, some authors consider that the target audience's understanding of the content of the language is the least important factor, and that the symbolic meaning of the message it conveys is the main benefit of using the foreign language in an ad (Hornikx, van Meurs, & Hof, 2013; Kelly-Holmes, 2000). Other authors, by contrast, consider that the

*Table 1. Distribution of top 10 world languages by number of first-language speakers*

Ranking	Language	Primary country	Total Countries	Speakers (millions)
1	Chinese	China	33	1,197
2	Spanish	Spain	31	414
3	English	United Kingdom	99	335
4	Hindi	India	4	260
5	Arabic	Saudi Arabia	60	237
6	Portuguese	Portugal	12	203
7	Bengali	Bangladesh	4	193
8	Russian	Russian Federation	16	167
9	Japanese	Japan	3	122
10	Javanese	Indonesia	3	84.3

Source: Lewis, Gary and Fennig (2014)

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