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Bachelor's Thesis
Foreign language use in slogans

*Dutch consumers' perceived translatability of English
slogans and its effect on comprehensibility and
attitude towards the slogan*

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Abstract

This paper reports a research investigating the effect of translatability on the comprehensibility of a slogan and if this affects Dutch consumers' attitude towards the slogan. In the experiment, 105 native Dutch speakers were shown either translatable or non-translatable slogans and were asked questions measuring their comprehensibility and attitude towards the slogans through an online questionnaire. The main results found that translatable slogans were comprehended significantly better than non-translatable slogans. A remarkable finding was that this comprehensibility did not affect the attitude participants had towards the slogan, which contradicted previous research. These findings indicate that there may be other factors influencing the attitude towards a slogan more than translatability, such as length. The insights gained through this study can be used in the creation of new slogans by companies as they suggest that using a non-translatable world does not necessarily lead to negative evaluations by Dutch consumers.

English is often used by advertisers for countries in which English is not the first language (Piller, 2003). In non-English-speaking countries, English is the language that gets used most frequently in advertisements, besides a country's local language (Piller, 2003). To give an illustration of this, a study by Gerritsen et al. (2007) found that out of 325 advertisements found in Dutch *Elle* magazines published in 2004, 64 percent of advertisements included one or more English words. Furthermore, a study by Raedts et al. (2015) mentioned that English phrases or words are regularly used in advertisements, including print as well as commercials on television or radio. Advertisements that were in all-English were also used regularly but less frequently.

There is a variety of reasons as to why a company would choose to use the English language in their advertising in countries where English is not the native language. One of these reasons has to do with financial decisions. Standardization of an advertising campaign and thus keeping it in the English language, is less expensive than translating the advertising to a country's native language, which would be adaptation. This is supported by a study by Gijbers, Gerritsen, Korzilius and van Meurs (1998). In their research, they interviewed advertisers of ten prominent Dutch advertising companies, who used English in their advertisements. The results of this study showed that one crucial argument for this decision was the fact that translation costs money that can be saved by keeping the campaign in English. De Mooij (2005) stated that adaptation is the only way through which successful marketing can be achieved. Adaptation to a specific market may cost more money, but might bring more success and revenue than a standardized ad (De Mooij, 2005).

Another argument exists in favor of standardization. Companies are able to have more control over their campaign and international activities with standardized advertising (White, 2000). Furthermore, a standardized campaign gives businesses the opportunity to create a similar corporate brand image in international markets that they advertise in. When instruments like the brand's logo, name, and slogan are the same in all countries, this would strengthen their global corporate brand.

The use of English language could potentially be a factor that attracts people's attention (Gerritsen et al., 2000). However, as English is more and more common in advertising nowadays it is unclear whether the use of English still is a way to get through the mental selection process of potential customers. The use of English in advertisements could also have to do with brands trying to create a more international image (Gerritsen et al., 2000). By using English in their campaigns, a company could attempt to be seen as a global player and as more internationally oriented.

Another possible reason for the use of English over a local language is that sometimes there is no direct translation of a phrase in a country's local language (Gerritsen et al., 2000). When an ad gets translated despite there being no direct possible translation of the phrases, this may negatively affect the message and meaning of the ad since it is not exactly the same as the original. Thus, possible points or feelings a company aimed to communicate to its audience may not be conveyed properly.

The question arises as to whether English or the local language is more effective in advertising and what possible consumers would prefer. Are English language advertisements (standardization) more persuasive than local language advertisements (adaptation)? The comprehension of the foreign language could play a role in the degree to which consumers find an advertisement persuasive. The current study focuses on how translatability of a slogan affects Dutch consumers' comprehension of the slogan and if this subsequently affects the attitude they have towards the slogan. Early literature on the comprehension factor in persuasion noted that when an advertisement is understood less well, the appreciation and subsequently the persuasion of this advertisement decline (Eagly, 1974).

The variable 'translatability' in the current study is evaluated based on a psycholinguistic model named the Revised Hierarchical Model (RHM) (Dufour & Kroll, 1995). This model can be used to assess how consumers process advertising messages. It proposes that one has stronger lexical connections when translating a word from their second language (L2) to their first language (L1) than vice versa. Translating words from a second language to a first language is thus supposed to happen faster than translation words from one's L1 to L2. Dufour and Kroll (1995) furthermore explain that when one is just starting to learn a new language, connections are created between the new language and a person's first language. A new word thus gets linked to L1 words and concepts. However, these suggestions made by the HRM depend on the level of fluency a person possesses over their L2. A higher level of fluency in a L2, will lead to a faster and more accurate translation from L1 to L2.

The relation between comprehension and attitude was addressed by a study by Gerritsen et al. (2000). They attempted to measure the attitude of Dutch consumers towards English advertising based on comprehension of the advertisement. The Dutch participants were shown television commercials that contained English phrases and were then asked questions measuring their attitude towards the advertisement. Subsequently, their comprehension of the advertisements was measured. The results found that the degree of comprehension was higher among participants when they were given the full text and when

the phrases were easy to translate. However, even then, only 50 percent of the participants understood what was meant and did not have a positive attitude towards the English use. The findings of this study suggest that English was not understood by the majority of participants and thus not appreciated in advertising in the Dutch market at the time.

This suggestion that higher comprehensibility leads to a more positive attitude was supported by another study. Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010) conducted an experiment to determine whether there is a relation between the degree of comprehension and appreciation of English language slogans in advertisements in the Netherlands. Participants were shown both easy and difficult English as well as Dutch slogans for car advertisements and were asked about their appreciation, comprehension and preference of the slogans. The results of this study showed that the comprehensibility of the English slogan played a role when it came to choosing between the English or Dutch slogan and thus supports the suggestions made by Gerritsen et al. (2000) that higher comprehension leads to a more positive attitude. Participants showed a preference for an easily understandable English slogan over a Dutch one. However, when the English slogans were difficult to understand participants showed an equal appreciation for the difficult English as well as the Dutch slogan.

These suggestions made by the previous studies suggesting that higher comprehensibility leads to more positive attitudes, was further explored for by Hornikx and Starren (2006), who included the French language. This study found slightly different results, indicating that the results on attitude may depend on the language that is used. They also used automobile advertisements but used easy or difficult French slogans and compared these to Dutch ones. The results of this study were similar to the results of Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010). When the foreign language slogans (French) were evaluated as easy to understand, they were preferred over the Dutch slogans. The results for the comparison between difficult French slogans and Dutch slogans, however, differed. Whereas the difficult English slogans were appreciated as much as the Dutch ones, the Dutch slogans were preferred over the difficult French slogans. These results could indicate that the use of English language in slogans is not as risky as using another foreign language in advertising, as the difficult French slogans led to more negative attitudes than the Dutch slogans, while Dutch and difficult English slogans were equally appreciated. This furthermore shows that there are benefits to using a foreign language slogan, which might be taken away when the slogan is too difficult.

The results of both studies furthermore suggest that comprehension indeed plays a role when it comes to appreciation of an advertisement. These results by Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010) and Hornikx and Starren (2006) are not entirely generalizable however, since the advertisements solely focused on automobiles. Showing a specific product with the slogan may influence the results as the attitude participants have towards the slogans may be influenced by the attitude they have towards the product shown. Moreover, Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010), measured difficulty through perceived and actual comprehension (through asking participants for translations), whereas Hornikx and Starren (2006) only used actual comprehension.

The previous studies compared English language slogans with either the local or other foreign language slogans. Even though they included easy as well as difficult English slogans, these easy and difficult English slogans were not directly compared to each other yet. This gap was filled in by a research conducted by Hendriks, van Meurs and Poos (2017). In their experiment they used easy and difficult English language slogans for chocolate. The slogans were classified as either easy or difficult in a pre-test, in which the difficulty was determined based on the translatability. In the main experiment, participants were asked to evaluate slogans based on perceived difficulty of the slogan, attitude towards as and product and purchase intention. The findings of this study support the claim made earlier that comprehensibility influences the degree of appreciation of the advertisements. The findings showed that easy slogans were evaluated more positively than difficult slogans.

The existing research on the effect of the degree of difficulty of English language slogans on their evaluation has a few limitations. The studies by Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010) and Hornikx and Starren (2006) only contained automobile advertisements, which makes the results not entirely generalizable. Furthermore, they compared English language slogans to slogans in a different language. Hendriks, van Meurs and Poos (2017) did compare easy English slogans with difficult English slogans, but this study also contains limitation related to the materials used. In the main experiment that was conducted, the comprehensibility of the slogans was measured indirectly. Participants were only questioned on their perceived difficulty of the slogan. The degree to which they could translate the slogans was only examined in the pre-test, and not during the main experiment. The current study will examine this ability to translate in both the pre-test and the main experiment. Moreover, all the slogans that were used in the study were for fictional chocolate brands only and contained a picture, which could have had some influence on the results. In our experiment, there will be no brand or picture attached, to avoid these influences.

Given the limitations of previous studies, the current study can provide more insights for companies on how to create an effective slogan through which they can maximize their success and brand identity. The study will furthermore explore if translatability makes a slogan harder to comprehend and if this factor should be taken into consideration while creating a slogan for the Dutch market. Therefore, the following research question was designed.

RQ: To what extent do perceived translatability and comprehensibility of an English slogan influence Dutch consumers' attitude towards the slogan?

The first hypothesis was based on previous research by Gerritsen et al. (2000), which found that English advertising phrases that were easy to translate were better comprehended than the phrases that were harder to translate.

H1: Slogans that are perceived as easy to translate, will be perceived as easier to comprehend than slogans that are perceived to be hard to translate.

The second hypothesis was based on findings by Hendriks et al. (2017) which showed that advertisements with slogans that were easy to comprehend were preferred over slogans that were harder to comprehend.

H2: Slogans that are evaluated as hard to comprehend will lead to more negative attitudes than slogans that are perceived to be easier to comprehend.

Method pre-test

Materials

Prior to the experiment, a pre-test was conducted in which the English slogans that were designed to be either translatable or non-translatable were assessed by native Dutch participants. They were asked about the perceived translatability and comprehensibility of the slogans.

For the pre-test, 16 slogans were used in total. Eight slogans were designed to be translatable to Dutch and eight to be non-translatable. As mentioned in the introduction, the translatability was based on the Revised Hierarchical Model (Dufour & Kroll, 1995). Based on this model, we determined that an English (L2) word was considered translatable if a clear and commonly used cognate of the word existed in Dutch (L1). Thus, each of the non-

translatable slogans contained one word for which no clear Dutch cognate exists. The non-translatable slogans were created by searching for non-frequent English words and by checking for direct Dutch translations in multiple online dictionaries to see whether the word had commonly used Dutch cognates. The translatable slogans were created similarly, by searching for frequent words and checking whether they had a clear Dutch cognate.

All slogans were created using an online slogan maker by Shopify ‘Free Slogan Maker’ (2020). For each of the two conditions (translatable or non-translatable), six out of the eight slogans contained an either translatable or non-translatable adjective and two out of the eight a noun. It was made sure that for each of the conditions (translatable or non-translatable), the slogans would be as similar as possible apart from the translatable or non-translatable word, to avoid influence of any other factors, e.g. the meaning of the cognate. An example of one of these slogan pairs is: *For prodigious people* (non-translatable) and *For phenomenal people* (translatable). A full list of the slogans used in the pre-test is given in Table 1, to be found in Appendix 1. The slogans used were not linked to any specific product or brand. However, in order to make our stimuli more realistic and prevent respondents from falsely recognizing a brand, fictional logos were added that were shown next to each slogan. These brand logos were created using Shopify ‘Create stunning logos in seconds’ (2020).

Participants

The pre-test was conducted among 31 participants. Participants were all at least 18 years old and were native Dutch speakers. The mean age was 22.5 ($SD= 3.5$; range= 18-36). 41.9 percent of participants were male and 58.1 percent were female. The highest completed education levels of participants ranged from primary school to master’s degrees. The majority of participants had completed a bachelor’s degree (58.1%), followed by a high school degree (32.3%).

Research design

The pre-test had a between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one out of four possible groups containing random combinations of four translatable and four non-translatable slogans. Respondents were only shown eight slogans instead of all sixteen to prevent having a survey that takes too much time. When a survey is too long, a participant may lose their interest and concentration which could affect the accuracy of the answers. By showing participants both translatable as well as non-translatable slogans, they were able to compare these slogans regarding translatability and comprehensibility.

Instrumentation

In the online pre-test Qualtrics questionnaire participants were asked about several factors. Participants were firstly asked to rate their perceived difficulty of the slogan, which they answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1= difficult, 7= easy). Next, the perceived translatability was assessed based on the questions used to measure comprehensibility by Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010). The first question was: ‘‘Are you able to translate this slogan?’’ (yes/no) and if yes, can you provide a translation on the given blank lines. If participants chose no for this question, they were asked which words they were not able to translate. The correctness of the translations was assessed based on the translations given by the researchers, who agreed on two possible correct translations for each word. Lastly, general questions like age, education and English proficiency were asked. A timer was added to the online questionnaire. By doing this, an indication could be made about how long it would take participants to fill out the questionnaire of our main experiment, that could then be communicated to participants.

Procedure

Participants were contacted by us through online Facebook groups, WhatsApp, email or face-to-face. They were requested to fill out a Qualtrics survey online through which they would answer questions on translatable and non-translatable slogans. Participants were informed that their responses would be stored for at least five years and would be completely anonymous. Moreover, they were informed that their informed consent was secured.

After the pre-assessment was completed, the results showed which slogans were clearly translatable or non-translatable. The four slogans that scored highest on difficulty and for which the least correct translations were given and the four that scored the lowest on difficulty and for which the most correct translations were given, were used for our main experiment. An overview of these slogans and their scores on difficulty and translatability is given in Table 2, to be found in Appendix 2.

Main experiment

Materials

For the main experiment of our study, eight slogans were used in total. The four non-translatable slogans with the lowest number of correct translations and the four translatable slogans with the highest number of correct translations were selected. These slogans can be found in Table 2, which can be found in Appendix 2.

Participants

In total, 105 participants completed the questionnaire of the main experiment. Similar to the pre-assessment, these participants were all at least 18 years old and Dutch native speakers. The mean age was 25.1 ($SD= 10.5$; range= 21-75). Age was distributed equally among the different respondent groups ($F(1,102) = .08, p= .785$). Similar to the pre-test, the majority of participants were women, with 66.7 percent being female and 33.3 percent being male. The highest completed education levels ranged from primary school to master's degrees, with the majority of participants having completed a bachelor's degree (46.7%) or a high school degree (35.2%). Gender ($\chi^2(1) = .08, p = .782$) and educational level ($\chi^2(4) = 5.24, p = .264$) were both equally distributed among the respondent conditions. The English language proficiency of the respondents, which was measured through the LexTale test (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012), showed an average score of 79.98 ($SD= 13.33$; range= 41.25-100). This level of English language proficiency was equally distributed among the different conditions ($F(1,103) = .73, p= .396$). Scores between 60-80% are equal to a B2 CEFR level of English, meaning there was a sufficient level of English language proficiency among the participants (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012).

Research design

Just like the pre-test, the main experiment had a between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to either evaluate four non-translatable or four translatable slogans.

Instrumentation

The first part of the questionnaire was the same as the pre-test, asking questions about the comprehensibility and translatability of the slogan.

Subsequently, participants were asked questions measuring our dependent variable, namely attitude towards the slogan. The questions measuring attitude towards the slogan were based on the methodology of Hendriks, van Meurs and Poos (2017). Similar to their study, attitude was measured using five questions on a 7-point Likert scale containing semantic differentials. Thus, participants were asked the following questions regarding attitude towards the slogan: I think this slogan is: 'not nice-nice'; 'engaging-boring'; 'not original-original'; 'not attractive-attractive' and 'interesting-not interesting' ($\alpha = .81$). The items measuring attitude towards the slogan were then computed into one variable, that was used in further analyses.

Next, a LexTale test (Lemhöfer, K., & Broersma, M., 2012) was included in the questionnaire to measure participants' English language proficiency level. As part of this test, they were shown 63 strings of letters and had to decide whether they thought it was an existing

English word answering with either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The questionnaire ended with demographic questions asking for participants’ age, gender, education and nationality. Lastly, participants were asked whether they use a translation while completing the questionnaire.

Procedure

Participants were contacted face-to-face or through online platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp or email and were asked to complete our Qualtrics survey online. Respondents were randomly assigned to either the translatable or non-translatable condition. They were informed that their responses were anonymous and that their informed consent was secured. Based on the recorded competition time of the pre-test, participants were informed that completing the survey would take approximately ten minutes. They were then shown four slogans and were tasked with answering questions measuring their comprehensibility and attitude towards the slogan, which are described in the instruments section. Lastly, they were thanked for their participation in our study and were informed who to contact in case they had any questions.

Statistical analyses

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine the relation between the translatability of the slogans and the perceived comprehensibility as well as the relation between translatability of the slogans and attitude towards the slogan.

Results

In order to answer the research question ‘To what extent do perceived translatability and difficulty of the English slogan influence Dutch consumers’ attitude towards the slogan?’, two independent samples t-tests were carried out. The first test measured the difference in perceived comprehensibility of the slogan for non-translatable and translatable slogans. Table 3 provides an overview of the means and standard deviations of evaluated comprehensibility for the non-translatable and translatable slogans. The independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between translatable and non-translatable slogans with regard to perceived comprehensibility of the slogan ($t(83.55) = 13.70, p < .001$). Non-translatable slogans ($M = 4.78, SD = 1.10$) received higher scores on comprehensibility than translatable slogans ($M = 2.23, SD = .76$).

Table 3: Overview of evaluated comprehensibility for non-translatable and translatable slogans including means and standard deviation (1= easy, 7= difficult)

	Slogan type	N	M (SD)
Evaluated comprehensibility	Non-translatable	49	4.78 (1.10)
	Translatable	56	2.23 (.76)

A second test was conducted to measure the difference in attitude towards the slogan for translatable and non-translatable slogans. Table 4 shows an overview of the means and standard deviations of evaluated attitude towards the slogan for translatable and non-translatable slogans. The independent samples t-test showed no significant difference in attitude towards the slogan for translatable and non-translatable slogans ($t(88.09) = .39, p = .70$). Translatable slogans ($M = 3.94, SD = .72$) scored slightly higher on attitude than non-translatable slogans ($M = 3.87, SD = .97$), but this difference was not significant.

Table 4: Overview of evaluated attitude towards the slogan for non-translatable and translatable slogans including means and standard deviation (1= positive, 7= negative)

	Slogan type	N	M (SD)
Evaluated attitude towards the slogan	Non-translatable	49	3.87 (.97)
	Translatable	56	3.94 (.72)

Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate to what extent translatability affects the degree to which Dutch consumers comprehend an English slogan and if this affects their attitude towards the slogan. Our first hypothesis was: ‘Slogans that are perceived as easy to translate, will be perceived as easier to comprehend than slogans that are perceived to be hard to translate’. The results showed that non-translatable slogans were evaluated as harder to comprehend than translatable slogans. The first hypothesis can therefore be confirmed. The second hypothesis was ‘Slogans that are perceived to be difficult will have more negative evaluations than slogans that are perceived to be easier’. This hypothesis was not confirmed as the results showed no significant difference for attitude between translatable and non-

translatable slogans. Non-translatable slogans were even evaluated as slightly more positive than the translatable slogans.

All in all, the research question can be answered by saying that translatability does affect comprehensibility, as a translatable slogan was perceived as being more comprehensible. However, this effect of translatability does not influence attitudes towards the slogans. Translatable slogans were evaluated as more comprehensible but not as more positive.

The findings confirming the first hypothesis are in line with previous research by Gerritsen et al. (200), who found that English texts that were easy to translate were evaluated as more comprehensible.

However, the findings rejecting the second hypothesis are not in line with previous studies by Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010), Hornikx and Starren (2006), Hendriks, van Meurs and Poos (2017) and Gerritsen et al. (2000), whose research all found that higher comprehensibility leads to more positive attitudes. Whereas these studies all found that phrases that were easy to comprehend were evaluated as significantly more positive than phrases that were harder to comprehend, the present study did not find a main difference between the two conditions. This remarkable finding could be explained by the fact that other components of a slogan may make it more or less attractive to a potential consumer. Examples of such factors could be the length, the meaning of the words used, rhyme or polarity. It is a possibility that such factors affect one's attitude towards the slogan more than the translatability.

The current study contains a few limitations. Firstly, the words used in the slogans were almost all positive which means the polarity was unequally divided. The polarity of the word may have played a role in the evaluation. Furthermore, whereas participants of the pre-test were shown pairs of slogans in which only one word differed, respondents of the main experiment saw either four translatable or four non-translatable slogans. The different respondents groups were thus not able to compare between translatable and non-translatable slogans, which may have affected the results. However, the conducted pre-test containing pairs of translatable and non-translatable slogans explains our decision for creating these either all translatable or all non-translatable groups as the results of the pre-test proved the differences in translatability within the pairs.

Based on the limitations of the current study, similar research could be conducted in the future that would take into account other factors that may affect attitude towards a slogan like length or rhyme. Research could for example be conducted using slogans that are of the

exact same length or that do not include any rhyme. This way, these factors can be ruled out as possible influences on attitude towards the slogans. Furthermore, future research could aim to use slogan pairs in the main experiment. Providing respondents with comparable material, namely both non-translatable and translatable slogans that only differ on one word, could potentially lead to different and more accurate evaluations. Moreover, it would be interesting for future studies to conduct similar experiments with other respondent groups than Dutch consumers, to see if the results might differ for different nationalities.

The results of the current study support earlier suggestions that translatability affects comprehensibility but does not show that comprehensibility affects the attitude towards a slogan. It contradicts and questions the theory that higher comprehensibility leads to a more positive attitude. The findings thus emphasize the need for further research on this topic to investigate the findings of the existing literature.

This study provides insights for companies on how to create an effective slogan as it suggests that the level of comprehensibility caused by translatability does not affect the attitude towards a slogan. It shows companies that using non-translatable words in their slogans does not necessarily lead to more negative evaluations by Dutch consumers. Thus, translation to a market's local language might not be necessary. However, as these findings are not in line with previous studies, further research investigating the current findings could lead to a more specific advice as other factors (length, rhyme, etc.) could potentially play a bigger role in attitude towards a slogan.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: overview of translatable and non-translatable slogans used in the pre-test

Non-translatable slogans	Translatable slogans
Less gobbledygook, more action!	Less chit-chat, more action!
Get giddy and get ready	Get crazy and get ready
There is nothing like serendipity	There is nothing like luck
For an irenic mind	For a peaceful mind
It's just marvelous	It's just fantastic
For prodigious people	For amazing people
Everything but direful	Everything but horrible
A majestic experience	An impressive experience

Appendix 2

Table 2: overview of slogans selected for the main experiment including the means and standard deviations of the scores on difficulty (1= easy, 7= difficult) and the percentage of correct translations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Percentage of correct translations
Easy slogans			
Get crazy and get ready	1.79	2.08	100
There is nothing like luck	1.96	1.15	100
It's just fantastic	1.26	.47	100
An impressive experience	1.92	1.06	92.3
Difficult slogans			
Less gobbledygook, more action!	4.03	2.20	38.5
Get giddy and get ready	5.28	1.24	0
For an irenic mind	5.41	1.51	5.6
For prodigious people	5.52	1.56	0

