

Master thesis:

Intensifying language and language choice in advertising: consumers' response in the Netherlands and Romania

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Abstract

For marketers it is important to know how to increase the effectiveness of messages. Intensifiers can increase the persuasiveness of messages (Bankhead, Bench, Peterson, Place & Seiter, 2003; Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). However, the intensity of an advertisement can be perceived differently in a foreign language (Puntoni, De Langhe & Van Osselaer, 2009). The Markedness Model suggests that English in advertising evokes associations and thus influences the attitude (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Myers-Scotton, 1983). So far, there has been no research comparing a Western European country with an Eastern European country with regard to the language choice and intensifiers in advertising. Therefore, the effect of the use of intensifiers in a product advertisement in the native language versus in English on the consumers' response of Dutch and Romanian consumers was researched.

A mixed design experiment was used to measure the Dutch and Romanian consumers' evaluations of advertisements. No significant differences between the nationalities, language intensity and language of the advertisement were found with regard to the attitude towards the advertisement and the purchase intention. However, the results suggested that the advertisements without intensifiers resulted in a better attitude towards the product. The Dutch participants also had a more positive attitude towards the product than the Romanian participants did. Furthermore, the Romanian participants had a more positive attitude towards the product when the advertisement was in English. Although the Romanian participants assessed their English proficiency higher than the Dutch participants did, a higher self-assessed proficiency did not result in a bigger difference in the consumers' response between the advertisements. A higher symbolic value of English resulted in a significantly more positive consumers' response. Although the attitude towards the product of Romanian participants was higher in English than in Romanian, for both countries the native language can be used for toothpaste advertisements, whereas the use of English in advertisements might depend on the proficiency level of the entire country.

Keywords: Netherlands, Romania, language intensity, English in advertising, Markedness Model, consumers' response

Preface

Handing in this thesis marks the last part of my Master's programme and my time as a student. I have learnt a lot and have enjoyed it very much. First of all, I would like to thank my sister, who introduced me to a lovely new country with its open and kind-hearted inhabitants. She also helped me get into contact with Romanian colleagues and friends, who helped me with translations and approaching prospective participants. Thank you all so much for this! Also a very big thank you to all the students and friends in Romania and in the Netherlands who participated in this research. Furthermore, I want to thank my friends and family for their support during this last period.

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1. Introduction

An important question for marketers is how a message should be conveyed in order to reach the best result. For marketers persuasiveness of a message is of critical importance, however, it is difficult to establish how the ultimate persuasiveness can be reached, as this depends on multiple different elements of a message. Research showed that for example the context (De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Anckaert, 2002), the credibility of the source (Pornpitakpan, 2004) and the channel (Mohr & Nevin, 1990) influence the persuasiveness of the message. The choice of words (Villar & Krosnick, 2011) and the language in which the message is conveyed (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008) are also important factors that influence the effectiveness and persuasiveness of a message, and which should be taken into consideration. This study will focus on the choice of using English as foreign language versus the native language and the use of intensifying language in advertising.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Language intensity

Communication can be intensified by multiple factors. Facial expressions, table-thumping, illustrative material and intensity of both the voice and the language itself are factors named by Bowers (1964) that should intensify communicative messages. The factor involved in this study, language intensity, has been defined by Bowers (1963, p. 345) as: “the quality of language which indicates the degree to which the speaker's attitude toward a concept deviates from neutrality.” Both Bowers (1963) and Craig and Blankenship (2011) state that language intensity is distinguished by its emotionalism and its extremity. Craig and Blankenship (2011, p. 2) used the difference between “she didn’t like him” and “she detested him” to demonstrate the degree of emotionalism and ascertained that the latter phrase is not only extremer, but also shows more emotion of the speaker or writer. Language intensity can be positive (the movie was spectacular) or negative (the movie was horrible). A negative statement is perceived as extremer and therefore has higher intensity than the positive opposite according to Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001). As this research is about product advertising, it will only focus on positive intensifiers.

Renkema (1997) uses lexical, semantic and stylistic intensifiers as typology for intensifiers. They each have at least four subcategories. Renkema further classifies these subcategories by giving explanations. Examples of lexical intensifiers are “very” and “frequently” and they are often recognizable by the fact that they are expendable. The characteristic of a semantic intensifier is the replaceability by another, less intense or strong,

word; for example “big” instead of “huge”. The most common stylistic intensifiers are (partial) repetitions, comparisons and metaphors (Renkema, 1997).

Every language has intensifiers. However, the type of intensifiers that are used and the frequency in which they are used, can differ between languages and between users of a certain language. According to Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and Tagliamonte (2008) the intensifiers that are frequently used in the English language change consistently, but coexist with earlier intensifiers. The research of De Haan and Van der Haagen (2012) studied the difference in the use of English intensifiers between native English writers and Dutch English writers. Although native English writers knew more intensifying adjectives, the research showed they used fewer intensifiers, which is in line with the results of the research from Recski (2004), who researched a Dutch corpus along with a Finnish, French, Spanish, Brazilian, Czech and Polish corpus. Manea (2013) researched how intensifiers in the English and Romanian language differed and were alike to facilitate learning English as a foreign language for Romanians. He found that semantic intensifiers are the most common intensifiers in both the English and Romanian language, compared to lexical intensifiers.

Next, the effect of these intensifiers on readers and listeners and whether there could be a difference in perception of these intensifiers when they are used in a non-native language in comparison to the use in the native language, will be discussed.

2.2 The effect of intensifying language

The effect of language intensity in the native language has been researched with different types of stimuli. Research has shown that intensifiers have a positive effect on attitude change in persuasive messages (Bankhead, Bench, Peterson, Place & Seiter, 2003; Hamilton & Stewart, 1993), have a positive effect on the intention to sign a petition in editorials (Craig & Blankenship, 2011), they resulted in a higher response rate of an email survey (Andersen & Blackburn, 2004) or had a negative effect on the effectiveness in speeches (Bowers, 1963). Hosman (1989) found that in written speeches, intensifiers are only powerful in the absence of hesitations and hedges. Intensified language is also related to the credibility of the source. Low credible speakers resulted in a greater attitude change with low intensity language according to the findings of Burgoon, Jones and Stewart (1975), and low credible newsprints reduced persuasiveness when they used high intensity language in the research of Hamilton, Hunter and Burgoon (1990). On the other hand when there is a match between the level of intensity the participant would normally use and the level of intensity in the persuasive message, this led to an increased credibility of the source and a decreased arousal in the

research of Aune (1993). In addition, Greenberg (1976) suggested that the language intensity increased the perceived aggressiveness of a sentence.

Blankenship and Craig (2011) considered the use of powerless and powerful speech, and linguistic intensity as linguistic styles on the basis of previous research and noted that there is a lack of cross-linguistic research. As countries have different linguistic roots, cultures or history, there could be differences in the way linguistic intensity is perceived. The current research will address the difference in the effect of language intensity in advertisements in the Netherlands and Romania. As far as we know, there is no research about the effect of intensifiers in Romania. There are a few researchers who focussed on the effect of language intensity in the Netherlands. Burgers and De Graaf (2013) did two experiments on the effect of intensified language in news articles on Dutch adults. Although in both experiments there was a higher perceived language intensity in the intensified news articles, in the first experiment intensifiers had a negative effect on the appreciation, while in the second it had an indirect positive effect on appreciation and newsworthiness. Burgers and De Graaf explained this finding by the difference in the topic of the news item (introduction of a ban versus information about a rise in number of diabetics) and the credibility of the source, which is in line with the research from Hamilton et al. (1990). Furthermore, the research from Van Mulken and Schellens (2012) showed that intensifiers in review articles made the articles more intense, but they were also perceived as more subjective by Dutch participants.

Like this research, one other research has studied intensifiers in advertising in particular in the Netherlands. Hornikx, Pieper and Schellens (2008) researched the effect of intensifying language in claims of cosmetic products on Dutch female participants. Three different types of claims were used: intensified, weakened and numeric claims. Numeric claims are statements supported by statistical facts. Although the intensified and weakened claims did not affect the persuasiveness, numeric claims did in fact make the claims more persuasive according to the female participants. Nonetheless, the current study will only focus on intensifying language.

The last mentioned researches do not give a conclusive overview of the effect of intensifiers in the Netherlands either. The researches all used a different type of text as stimuli and found different results. In the case of Van Mulken and Schellens (2012) intensifiers had an intensified positive effect, whereas the research from Hornikx et al. (2008) did not find an effect of intensifying language. Burgers and De Graaf (2013) found mixed results in their two experiments of news articles with different topics and degrees of credibility of the source. The current study will try to give a clearer view of the effects of intensifying language in

advertisements in the Netherlands as well as in Romania. The succeeding question is whether there is a different effect of intensifying language when the message is in English or in the native language. The next section will discuss the implications of using English instead of the native language in advertising and the possible interaction with intensifying language.

2.3 Language choice and intensifying language in advertising

Puntoni, De Langhe and Van Osselaer (2009) researched the effects of language choice (foreign language versus native language) in advertising. The results showed that the participants from multiple nationalities and with different degrees of fluency of multiple non-native languages, perceived the advertisements in their native language as more emotional and the text had stronger emotional connotation in the native language than in the foreign language. However, De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes and Van Osselaer (2011) concluded that participants are more likely to respond with a more intense emotion in a non-native language than in their native language.

Hence, the language choice in advertising is important for marketers, as this influences the way an advertisement is perceived. In a globalizing world, international or multinational companies have to choose whether they want to standardise or localise their advertising campaigns in other countries. A globalised marketing strategy implicates the standardisation of the product, the promotion, the channel structure and the price according to Zou and Cavusgil (2002), whereas a localized advertising campaign would result in a different marketing strategy for each country in which the company operates. Zou and Cavusgil (2002) established a positive relation between a global marketing strategy and the global market performance. According to Harris (1994; 1996), a lack of management skills or financial resources at subsidiaries are reasons for global companies to choose standardized advertising campaigns. However, total standardization in advertising remains rare and evidence that standardization is financially beneficiary seems to be absent.

A standardized marketing strategy would mean advertisements in the same language in every country, for example English, whereas in localized marketing, the advertisements could be in the local language. The Markedness Model from Myers-Scotton (1983) makes a distinction between unmarked (expected) and marked (unexpected) languages. Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) applied this model to advertising and claimed that unmarked languages are processed literally and the focus is therefore on the content, whereas the marked language emphasizes on the language and therefore evokes associations to this language. In the case of advertising with a standardized marketing strategy, English could be a marked language if this

is the non-native language of the reader. The reader's associations of English are therefore important. The attitude towards a language has been assumed to predict the attitude towards an advertisement (Gerritsen et al., 2000; Kelly-Holmes, 2000; Santello, 2016). Associations of English are for example sophistication, modernity and internationality (Bhatia, 1992; Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Piller, 2003), while a native language associates to belongingness (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Other examples of associations of English in advertising, were that English was young and dynamic (Gerritsen et al., 2000). For advertising the attitude towards the language that is used in the advertisement refers to the symbolic value of a language (Kelly-Holmes, 2000). The aim of using a certain language is to create a positive brand and product image, due to the symbolic value of this language.

While most researches about the effect of language in persuasive communication in Europe focus on only one country (e.g. Gerritsen, Korzilius, Van Meurs & Gijssbers, 2000; Hornikx, Van Meurs, & De Boer, 2010; Planken, Van Meurs & Radlinska, 2010) or multiple countries in Western Europe (e.g. Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2010; Gerritsen et al., 2007; Gerritsen et al., 2010; Puntoni et al., 2009), there has been less research comparing a Western with an Eastern European country, like in this study the Netherlands and Romania. Research, comparing Western European countries, showed few (Gerritsen, et al., 2007; 2010) to no differences (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2010) between the countries with regard to the perception of the product advertisements using English versus the native language. It would be interesting to see whether this difference is bigger in a comparison between a Western and an Eastern European country, taking their historical differences, like the communistic influence, into account (Phillipson, 1994). In Poland for example, Planken et al. (2010) found that the Polish participants perceived few significant differences between six advertisements of different products and countries of origin. Only one product in the advertisements was perceived as significantly more modern in English than in Polish (Canadian shoe manufacturer). Furthermore, one English advertisement had a significant positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement (Swiss watch brand) and one English advertisement (English designer label) had a negative effect on the purchase intention, in comparison with the same advertisement in Polish.

The results of Micu and Coulter (2010) with Romanian participants showed more significant differences between the used advertisements in the native language versus foreign language. Their results indicated that the use of English in advertisements of multinational brands had a positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement. Their results suggest that a local brand advertisement should only use English if the advertisement relates to the

consumers' values. The researchers explained this finding by the markedness of English and showed that the participants indeed associated English with "globalness" and perhaps therefore the advertisements were perceived as more western. Western products are indeed perceived more positively than eastern products, especially by people in developing countries like Romania, according to the researches (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp & Ramachander, 2000; Bilkey & Nes, 1982) mentioned in the article of Micu and Coulter (2010). The results from the research of Gerritsen and Nickerson (2010) showed that for Dutch consumers the use of English in product advertisements did not influence the attitude towards the text. For effective advertising, Gerritsen and Nickerson advised using the native language, which is in line with Gerritsen et al. (2000), who showed that Dutch participants had a negative attitude towards English in commercials.

Hence, for Romania the use of English in advertisements resulted in a positive attitude, at least for multinational brands, whereas in the Netherlands there was no difference between English and Dutch advertisements. The next section will discuss the differences between the Netherlands and Romania with regard to the use and proficiency of English.

2.4 Difference in use of English as foreign language in the Netherlands and Romania

Differences between the two countries that are researched in this study, with regard to their historical and linguistic background, and the background regarding customs, could result in differences in the perception of advertisements. The Dutch and Romanian language both have different roots, namely a Germanic language, like English, for the Netherlands and a Romanic language for Romania. The extent of integration of the English language is not as high in Romania as in the Netherlands, since in the Netherlands 90 percent of the people are able to speak English, compared to 31 percent in Romania (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012). In both countries English is the foreign language that most people are able to speak apart from their native language (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012). The English proficiency is very high (72,16) in the Netherlands and high (58,14) in Romania on a scale from 1 to 100 (EF English Proficiency Index, n.d.). The Business English proficiency is lower in both countries, namely intermediate for the Netherlands (7.03) and basic for Romania (5.72), ranging from beginner (1) to advanced (10) (Business English Index, 2013).

Since the Romanian Revolution and the overthrow of the communistic regime, the English language has become more integrated in Romania (Phillipson, 1994). Ivan (2013) claimed that especially in education there is a rise in the importance of foreign language proficiency in Romania. The younger population are increasingly interested in learning new

languages. Another increasingly common way to get in touch with different languages is the internet. A reason why English is less integrated in Romania could be the internet access. In the Netherlands 93,2 percent of the population has internet access, compared to only 54,1 percent in Romania (EF English Proficiency Index, n.d.). In both the Netherlands and Romania, there is an increase in the use of English in advertising (Gerritsen et al. 2007; Seitz & Rozzouk; 2006). However, the mentioned articles show that the use of English is more common in Dutch advertising than in Romanian advertising. According to Seitz and Razzouk (2006) English in advertisements in Romania is mostly limited to business to business and electronics advertisements.

Taking the last mentioned differences between the Netherlands and Romania with regard to the use and proficiency of English, and the previously mentioned results of Puntoni et al. (2009) with regard to the increased perceived intensity when the language proficiency is higher, into consideration, the following was hypothesized:

H1: The self-assessed English proficiency will be higher for the Dutch participants than for the Romanian participants.

H2: A higher self-assessed English proficiency predicts a bigger difference in the consumers' response of English advertisements with versus without intensifiers.

Considering previous research about positive associations towards English, and research that indicated that a positive symbolic value of English could lead to a more positive evaluation of an English advertisement (Gerritsen et al., 2000; Kelly-Holmes; 2000; Santello, 2016), the third hypothesis of this study was:

H3: A higher symbolic value of English predicts a more positive consumers' response of English advertisements among the Dutch and Romanian participants.

In this study, the following research question was addressed:

RQ: To what extent does the use of intensifiers in a product advertisement in the native language or a foreign language influence the consumers' response of Dutch and Romanian consumers?

The consumers' response was operationalized by means of the attitude towards the advertisement, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention. The three dependent variables combined, formed the general evaluation of the advertisement.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

This research contained a 2 (language of advertisement: English or native language (Dutch and Romanian)) x 2 (language intensity: intensifiers or no intensifiers) x 2 (nationality: Dutch or Romanian) mixed design. The language of advertisement and the nationality were between subject variables and the language intensity was a within subject variable. The participants were Dutch or Romanian students and were asked to evaluate the advertisements with questions in their own native language. Therefore each participant saw two advertisements, namely one advertisement containing intensified language and the other one without intensified language, both either in their native language or in English.

3.2 Materials

This research used one single item stimuli, namely a toothpaste advertisement. Although the Gross National Income per capita is higher in the Netherlands (\$48.260 USD) than in Romania (\$19.020 USD) (EF English Proficiency Index, n.d.), toothpaste is a product that is a necessity product for the participants (higher educated young people) in both countries. In both countries, it is used similarly and being sold in supermarkets and pharmacists for a comparatively same price and both countries have an open market economy. Toothpaste belongs in a cheap product price category with low involvement.

The brand name of the advertisement, Bilvi, was a fictional brand name, with no existing brands with that name and no toothpaste brands with similar brand names. Multiple native speakers were asked whether the name Bilvi was pronounceable in Dutch, Romanian and English and whether the brand name was not perceived as odd. The advertisement was based on multiple existing Dutch and Romanian advertisements. A picture of a Dutch toothpaste tube was photoshopped to remove the information on the tube and add the brand name and overprint. Afterwards the toothpaste tube was added to the advertisement. The two advertisements with and without intensifiers were the same with regard to the colours, the images and the brand name. The same font and font sizes were used for every advertisement. The text of the advertisements was slightly longer in the three advertisements with intensifiers. The advertisements contained lexical and semantic intensifiers based on Renkema (1997). The lexical intensifiers were the cause of the longer texts. The other elements (e.g. images, colours, brand logo) were intentionally not too distracting, in order for the

participants to mainly pay attention to the (intensified) text in the advertisement (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). All six advertisements can be found in Appendix A.

The two Dutch advertisement texts were the original texts. Then, the texts were translated in a triangular way. The Dutch texts were translated to English, by a native Dutch speaker of English, and the translations involving Romanian, were done by a native Romanian speaker.

A control question in the questionnaire was used to ascertain the manipulation with regard to the intensifiers in the advertisements. The participants were asked to rate how well they thought both the advertisements displayed the qualities of the product on a 7-point Likert scale. There was a significant difference between the advertisement with versus without language intensity ($t(155) = -2.55, p = .012$). The advertisements with intensifiers ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.65$) displayed the qualities of the product slightly better than the advertisement without intensifiers ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.63$).

3.3 Subjects

A total of 126 Dutch participants and 164 Romanian participants started the questionnaire. Ultimately, 95 Dutch and 82 Romanian participants completed the questionnaire. Among the 95 Dutch participants 18 participants studied or had studied at a university of applied science and were eventually excluded from the study in order to improve the reliability and comparability. Three Romanian participants were excluded from the study, since they had a different nationality or educational level. Consequentially, all of the Dutch and Romanian participants studied or had studied at a university. This resulted in a total of 77 Dutch participants and 79 Romanian participants who were included in the analyses.

The different versions of the advertisements were allocated at random to the participants by the online survey program Qualtrics, which led to 37 Dutch participants seeing the Dutch advertisements, 40 Dutch participants seeing the English advertisements, 41 Romanian participants seeing the Romanian advertisements and 38 Romanian participants seeing the English advertisements.

36 Men and 120 women filled out the questionnaire. The chi-square revealed that the participants were evenly distributed between the versions with regard to gender ($\chi^2(3) = 1.31, p = .726$). The participants had an average age of 22.86 ($SD = 2.95$), ranging from 19 to 32. The participants were not equally distributed with regard to age ($F(3,152) = 3.80, p = .011$). According to the post-hoc test (Bonferroni) it could be concluded that the Dutch participants who saw the English advertisement ($M = 23.90, SD = 2.41$) had a higher age than the

Romanian participants who saw the advertisement in their native language ($M = 22.05$, $SD = 3.27$).

3.4 Instruments

A Qualtrics survey was used to measure the attitude towards the advertisement, the attitude towards the product, the purchase intention, the self-assessed English proficiency and the symbolic value of English. The explanations in the questionnaire and all the questions were in the native language of the participants. The attitude towards the advertisement, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention measured the consumers' response. The three dependent variables combined had a good reliability of advertisement evaluation ($\alpha = .86$). Therefore, tests were run also with advertisement evaluation.

Additionally, the tests were run for the dependent variables separately. The attitude towards the advertisement was measured using scaled based on Maes, Ummelen and Hoeken (1996). Six bipolar items on a 7-point scale were used: *interesting* vs. *uninteresting*, *appealing* vs. *distant*, *inviting* vs. *uninviting*, *engaging* vs. *boring*, *personal* vs. *impersonal* and *varied* vs. *monotonous*. The reliability of the attitude towards advertisement of the Dutch ($\alpha = .83$) and Romanian participants ($\alpha = .94$) was good, as well as the overall reliability of the instrument ($\alpha = .89$).

The attitude towards the product was measured using scales based on Sweeney, Soutar and Johnson (1999). Attitude towards product had three items on a 7-point Likert scale (*trendy*, *innovative*, *old-fashioned*) and two bipolar items on a 7-point scale (*very good* vs. *very bad*, *high* vs. *low quality*). Although the reliability of the attitude towards the product for the Romanian participants was adequate ($\alpha = .74$), the reliability for the Dutch participants was not ($\alpha = -.44$), consequently the overall reliability of the attitude towards the product was poor ($\alpha = .49$). Therefore, the item *old-fashioned* was deleted, which resulted in a sufficient reliability ($\alpha = .75$).

The scales that were used to measure purchase intention were also based on Sweeney et al. (1999). The purchase intention had two items on a 7-point Likert scale: *I would consider buying this product* and *I definitely want to buy this product* ($\alpha = .19$ for the Dutch participants; $\alpha = .76$ for the Romanian participants) with an overall reliability of $\alpha = .63$. As a result one item for this instrument had been excluded. Rossiter and Bergkvist (2009) and Bergkvist and Langner (2017) recommended using single-item measurements for purchase intention among other instruments. Although Rossiter and Bergkvist (2009) concluded that the purchase intention measurement had to cover the entire spectrum from certainly not

buying a product to certainly buying a product, the second item of this study came closest to their recommendation. Therefore only the item *I definitely want to buy this product* was used to analyse the data.

The self-assessed proficiency was a control variable to measure whether the proficiency influenced a possible difference in the perception of the advertisements in English. The scales from Flaitz (1993) were used to measure the self-assessed proficiency of English with regard to reading, writing, speaking and listening on a 7-point semantic scale: very poor, poor, a little bit, sufficient, good, very good and excellent. The overall reliability of the self-assessed proficiency of English was good ($\alpha = .91$), as well as for the Dutch ($\alpha = .91$) and Romanian participants ($\alpha = .93$) separately.

The symbolic value of English was measured with seven items from different researches. The participants were asked whether they found English modern, international (Bhatia, 1992; Piller, 2003), young, dynamic, (Gerritsen et al., 2000), a symbol of urban growth (Graddol, 2006), a prestige marker and a sign of technological superiority (Martin, 2002). All the items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with an overall reliability of the symbolic value of English of $\alpha = .83$. For the Dutch and Romanian participants, the α was .85 and .82 respectively.

3.5 Procedure

The questionnaire was created with the use of the online survey program Qualtrics and was sent online to prospective participants in the Netherlands and Romania. The Dutch participants were approached via Facebook in the personal network and in a Facebook group for seeking participants. The Romanian participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire by posting a request on personal Facebook pages and by emailing students of the University of Bucharest. The participants were able to fill out the questionnaire between 18 April 2017 and 28 April 2017. All participants filled out the questionnaire anonymously. No incentive was given.

The posts and emails contained a short message mentioning the questionnaire being a part of a master's thesis, the time it would take to fill out the questionnaire and the link to the Qualtrics online questionnaire. The link led to the welcome page of the questionnaire. The introduction mentioned that the participants would see two advertisements and that they were supposed to fill out questions for each advertisement. They were told that the questionnaire would take approximately 10 minutes to fill out and that they would remain anonymous. After the introduction page, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the versions. The

participants were then asked to carefully look at the advertisement and read the text thoroughly. They would not be able to return to the advertisement.

The order in which the participants saw the advertisements (with or without intensifiers first) was randomized in order to increase reliability. In between seeing the two advertisements and the corresponding questions, the participants had to do a small assignment as a distractor. The participants had to look two times at two different images for 15 seconds to spot the differences between the two images. After 15 seconds they were automatically directed to the next page with the question how many differences they had spotted.

3.6 Statistical treatment

All statistical analyses were carried out by means of IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 21). The purchase intention item old-fashioned was the only item that needed to be recoded.

In order to answer the research question, mixed design repeated measures analyses were conducted with within subject factor, language intensity, and between subject factors, nationality and language.

For every test assumptions have been checked. Considering the fact that the Box's M test to test equal variances-covariance between the four groups, was significant ($p < .001$) for the advertisement evaluation and the purchase intention, SPSS randomly selected Dutch and Romanian participants to be excluded in order to create equal groups. Three Dutch participants who saw the English advertisements, four Romanian participants who saw the Romanian advertisements and one Romanian participant who saw the English advertisements were excluded to ensure that every group consisted of 37 participants. This resulted in a total of 74 Dutch and 74 Romanian participants who were included in the tests that were run for advertisement evaluation and purchase intention. After the exclusion of the participants the Box's M test for advertisement evaluation and purchase intention were still significant ($p < .001$). However, Field (2009, p. 604) stated that: "as a general rule, if sample sizes are equal then disregard Box's test."

A t-test was used to measure whether there was a difference between the Dutch and Romanian participants with regard to the self-assessed English proficiency and the English symbolic value. A linear regression analysis determined to what extent the self-assessed English proficiency predicted the difference of the consumers' response of the two English advertisements and to what extent the English symbolic value predicted the attitude towards

the advertisement, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention of the English advertisements.

4. Results

Since the three dependent variables measured the same construct, namely advertisement evaluation, first the results of advertisement evaluation will be reported. Then, the results of the three dependent variables, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product and purchase intention will be reported separately. Lastly, the results of the variables of the hypotheses, self-assessed English proficiency and English symbolic value, will be addressed.

4.1 Advertisement evaluation

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the advertisement evaluation of the Dutch and Romanian participants for the different language intensities (with or without intensifiers) and the different language versions (native language and English). The Levene's tests of Equality of Variance of Error Variances suggested unequal variances across groups ($p = .005$, and $p = .004$), therefore to state significant results only outcomes with a p-value below .001 were dealt with as significant results. A Shapiro Wilk test also showed that the data was not normally distributed between all versions. This was the case for the Dutch participants who saw the Dutch advertisements, the Dutch participants who saw the English advertisements and for Romanian participants who saw the Romanian advertisements ($p < .05$). Therefore, the results needed to be interpreted with caution.

The repeated measures analyses with within subject factor language intensity and between subject factors nationality and language of the advertisement showed no stringent significant main effect of language intensity ($F(1, 144) = 3.18, p = .077, \eta^2 < .022$), of nationality ($F(1, 144) = 1.88, p = .172, \eta^2 = .013$), nor of the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = 1.85, p = .176, \eta^2 = .013$) on the advertisement evaluation. Moreover, there was neither a significant interaction between the language intensity and the nationality ($F(1, 144) = 3.32, p = .070, \eta^2 = .023$), between the language intensity and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = .40, p = .526, \eta^2 = .003$), nor between nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = .86, p = .349, \eta^2 = .006$). Lastly, the repeated measures analyses showed no significant triple interaction between the language intensity, the nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = .51, p = .475, \eta^2 = .004$).

Table 1. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for advertisement evaluation of participants (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

Nationality	Language of ad	Ad without intensifiers	Ad with intensifiers	<i>n</i>
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Dutch				
	Native language	3.38 (.72)	3.26 (.72)	37
	English	3.52 (.84)	3.26 (.85)	37
	Total	3.44 (.78)	3.26 (.78)	74
Romanian				
	Native language	2.94 (1.29)	2.94 (1.32)	37
	English	3.32 (1.13)	3.32 (1.23)	37
	Total	3.13 (1.22)	3.13 (1.28)	74
Total				
	Native language	3.16 (1.06)	3.10 (1.07)	74
	English	3.42 (1.00)	3.29 (1.05)	74
	Total	3.29 (1.03)	3.20 (1.06)	148

4.2 Attitude towards the advertisement

In order to see whether there were differences between the advertisements and the nationalities with regard to the attitude towards the advertisement, the attitude towards the product and the purchase intention, the dependent variables were also reported separately. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the attitude towards the advertisement of the Dutch and Romanian participants for the different language intensities (with or without intensifiers) and the different language versions (native language and English). A Shapiro Wilk test showed that the data was not normally distributed between all four versions ($p < .05$). Therefore, the results needed to be interpreted with caution.

The repeated measures analyses with within subject factor language intensity and between subject factors nationality and language of the advertisement showed no significant main effect of language intensity ($F(1, 152) = .06, p = .806, \eta^2 < .001$), of nationality ($F(1, 152) = .61, p = .437, \eta^2 = .004$), nor of language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .70, p = .405, \eta^2 = .005$).

Furthermore, there was neither a significant interaction between the language intensity and the nationality ($F(1, 152) = .58, p = .448, \eta^2 = .004$), between the language intensity and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .75, p = .387, \eta^2 = .005$), nor between

nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .14, p = .706, \eta^2 = .001$). Finally, the repeated measures analyses showed no significant triple interaction between the language intensity, the nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = 1.26, p = .263, \eta^2 = .008$).

Table 2. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for attitude of participants towards the advertisement (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

Nationality	Language of ad	Ad without intensifiers	Ad with intensifiers	<i>n</i>
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Dutch				
	Native language	2.91 (1.13)	2.89 (1.08)	37
	English	3.18 (1.29)	3.12 (1.35)	40
	Total	3.05 (1.21)	3.01 (1.22)	77
Romanian				
	Native language	2.85 (1.53)	2.78 (1.48)	41
	English	2.81 (1.34)	3.02 (1.45)	38
	Total	2.83 (1.43)	2.90 (1.46)	79
Total				
	Native language	2.88 (1.34)	2.84 (1.30)	78
	English	3.00 (1.32)	3.07 (1.39)	78
	Total	2.94 (1.33)	2.95 (1.45)	156

4.3 Attitude towards the product

Secondly, the Dutch and Romanian participants were asked to evaluate the product to measure their attitude towards the product. Table 3 shows the means and the standard deviations of the attitude towards the product of the Dutch and Romanian participants for the different language intensities (with or without intensifiers) and the different language versions (native language and English).

The repeated measures analyses with within subject factor language intensity and between subject factors nationality and language of the advertisement showed a significant main effect of language intensity ($F(1, 152) = 18.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .110$). The attitude towards the product in the advertisements without intensifiers ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.96$) was higher than the attitude towards the product in the advertisements with intensifiers ($M = 3.29,$

$SD = 1.22$), irrespective of the nationality of the participants and the language of the advertisements.

Moreover, there was also a significant main effect of the nationality of the participants ($F(1, 152) = 4.83, p = .437, \eta^2 = .031$). The Dutch participants ($M = 3.81, SD = .57$) perceived the product more positively than the Romanian participants ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.06$), irrespective of the language intensity and the language of the advertisement.

However, the main effect of language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .52, p = .472, \eta^2 = .003$) was not significant. Furthermore, neither the interaction between the language intensity and the nationality ($F(1, 152) = 3.81, p = .053, \eta^2 = .024$), nor the interaction between the language intensity and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .61, p = .436, \eta^2 = .004$) was significant.

Table 3. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for attitude of participants towards the product (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

Nationality	Language of ad	Ad without intensifiers		Ad with intensifiers	
		M (SD)		M (SD)	n
Dutch	Native language	3.94 (1.01)		3.56 (1.08)	37
	English	3.67 (1.08)		3.31 (1.31)	40
	Total	3.80 (1.05)		3.43 (1.11)	77
Romanian	Native language	3.07 (1.36)		2.85 (1.38)	41
	English	3.51 (1.57)		3.45 (1.19)	38
	Total	3.48 (1.28)		3.14 (1.32)	79
Total	Native language	3.48 (1.38)		3.19 (1.29)	78
	English	3.59 (1.11)		3.38 (1.15)	78
	Total	3.56 (1.96)		3.29 (1.22)	156

On the other hand there was a significant interaction between the language of the advertisement and the nationality of the participants ($F(1, 152) = 4.66, p = .033, \eta^2 = .030$). A one-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant effect of the language of the advertisement on the attitude towards the product for the Dutch participants ($F(1, 75) = 2.56, p = .114$). The one-way ANOVA with the data from the Romanian participants revealed a

significant effect of the language of the advertisement on the attitude towards the product ($F(1, 77) = 4.62, p = .035$). The attitude towards the advertisement was higher when the advertisements were in English ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.00$) than when the advertisement were in Romanian ($M = 3.07, SD = 1.07$).

The repeated measures analyses for the attitude towards the product showed no significant triple interaction between the language intensity, the nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 152) = .35, p = .555, \eta^2 = .002$).

4.4 Purchase intention

The final dependent variable was the purchase intention. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of the purchase intentions of the Dutch and Romanian participants for the different language intensities in the advertisements (with or without intensifiers) and the different language versions (native language and English). The Levene's tests of Equality of Variance of Error Variances suggested unequal variances across groups ($p = .020$, and $p = .004$), therefore to state significant results, again only outcomes with a p-value below .001 were dealt with as significant results. A Shapiro Wilk test showed that the data was not normally distributed between all versions. This was the case for the Dutch participants who saw the Dutch advertisements, the Dutch participants who saw the English advertisements and for Romanian participants who saw the Romanian advertisements ($p < .05$). Therefore, the results needed to be interpreted with caution.

The repeated measures analyses with within subject factor language intensity and between subject factors nationality and language of the advertisement showed no stringent significant main effect of language intensity ($F(1, 144) = 6.66, p = .011, \eta^2 < .044$), of nationality ($F(1, 144) = 1.45, p = .228, \eta^2 = .010$), nor of language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = 1.45, p = .228, \eta^2 = .010$) on purchase intention. Moreover, there was neither a significant interaction between the language intensity and the nationality ($F(1, 144) = .69, p = .407, \eta^2 = .005$), between the language intensity and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = 5.38, p = .022, \eta^2 = .036$), nor between nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = 2.19, p = .141, \eta^2 = .015$). Lastly, the repeated measures analyses showed no significant triple interaction between the language intensity, the nationality and the language of the advertisement ($F(1, 144) = 1.01, p = .316, \eta^2 = .007$).

Table 4. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for purchase intention of the participants (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

Nationality	Language of ad	Ad without intensifiers	Ad with intensifiers	<i>n</i>
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Dutch				
	Native language	2.97 (1.36)	2.65 (1.21)	37
	English	3.11 (1.84)	2.38 (1.62)	37
	Total	3.04 (1.61)	2.51 (1.43)	74
Romanian				
	Native language	2.62 (2.62)	2.86 (2.25)	37
	English	3.81 (2.38)	3.03 (1.61)	37
	Total	3.22 (2.17)	2.95 (1.94)	74
Total				
	Native language	2.80 (1.58)	2.76 (1.80)	74
	English	3.46 (2.14)	2.70 (1.63)	74
	Total	3.13 (1.90)	2.73 (1.71)	148

4.5 Self-assessed English proficiency

The participants were asked to rate their own English proficiency on reading, writing, speaking and listening to determine whether there was a significant difference between the Netherlands and Romania and whether a higher self-assessed proficiency resulted in a bigger difference in the consumers' response of English advertisements with versus without intensifiers (*H1* & *H2*). Table 5 shows the means and the standard deviations of the self-assessed proficiency of the Dutch and Romanian participants. With respect to the difference in self-assessed English proficiency between the Dutch and Romanian participants, the independent sample t-test showed that there was a significant difference ($t(154) = -2.63, p = .009$). The Romanian participants perceived their own English proficiency higher ($M = 6.08, SD = .81$) than the Dutch participants ($M = 5.72, SD = .87$) did, which resulted in the rejection of hypothesis 1.

Table 6 shows the results of the regression analyses with self-assessed proficiency as predictor and the difference between the consumers' response of the advertisement with intensifiers versus without intensifiers as dependent variable. A linear regression showed that the self-assessed English proficiency was not a significant predictor of the difference between the advertisement with intensifiers and the advertisement without intensifiers with regard to

the attitude towards the advertisement ($F(1, 76) = .05, p = .824, \beta = .03$), the attitude towards the product ($F(1, 76) = .79, p = .378, \beta = -.10$) and purchase intention ($F(1, 72) = .03, p = .862, \beta = .02$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 5. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the self-assessed English proficiency of the Dutch and Romanian participants (1 = very poor, 7 = excellent)

Nationality	M (SD)	n
Dutch	5.72 (.87)	77
Romanian	6.08 (.81)	79

Table 6. Regression analysis for self-assessed proficiency as a predictor of the difference in attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product and purchase intention between the English advertisement with intensifiers and the advertisement without intensifiers

	Attitude towards the advertisement ($n = 78$)			Attitude towards the product ($n = 78$)			Purchase intention ($n = 74$)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	-.21	.61		.53	.43		.46	1.69	
Self-assessed proficiency	.02	.10	.03	-.06	.07	-.10	.05	.28	.02
R^2			-.01			.01			-.01
F			.05			.79			.03

Note: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

4.6 English symbolic value

Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations of the symbolic value of English according to the Dutch and Romanian participants and table 8 shows the results of the regression analyses with symbolic value as predictor and the consumers' response as dependent variable. An independent samples t-test showed that there was no significant effect of nationality on the English symbolic value ($t(154) = -.64, p = .819$). As there was no significant difference between the advertisement with intensifiers and the advertisement without intensifiers, the linear regression analyses was performed for the advertisements combined. The linear regression showed that the English symbolic value explained 11% of the variance in the attitude towards the English advertisements ($F(1, 76) = 8.89, p = .004$). If

the symbolic value goes up from low to high, the attitude towards the English advertisements goes up with .32 *SD* ($\beta = .32, p = .004$).

Table 7. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for the English symbolic value of the Dutch and Romanian participants (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

Nationality	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Dutch	5.01 (.97)	77
Romanian	5.11 (.88)	79
Total	5.06 (.92)	156

Since the repeated measures analyses showed a significant difference between the advertisement with intensifiers and the advertisement without intensifiers and a significant difference between the nationalities, the linear regressions was performed for the advertisements and nationalities separately. The linear regression showed that the English symbolic value was not a significant predictor for the attitude of the Dutch participants towards the product for both the English advertisements without intensifiers ($F(1, 38) = 1.38, p = .247, \beta = .19$), nor with intensifiers ($F(1, 38) = 1.40, p = .244, \beta = .19$). The linear regressions showed that the English symbolic value was also not a significant predictor for the attitude of the Romanian participants towards the product for the English advertisement with intensifiers ($F(1, 36) = 3.91, p = .056, \beta = .31$). However, the linear regression showed that the English symbolic value explained 13% of the variance in the attitude of the Romanian participants towards the product in the English advertisements without intensifiers ($F(1, 36) = 5.54, p = .024$). If the symbolic value goes up from low to high, the attitude towards the product goes up with .37 *SD* ($\beta = .37, p = .024$). Moreover, for all the groups combined, the linear regression showed that the English symbolic value explained 8% of the variance in the attitude towards the product in the English advertisements ($F(1, 76) = 6.94, p = .010$). If the symbolic value goes up from low to high, the attitude towards the English advertisements goes up with .29 *SD* ($\beta = .29, p = .010$).

For purchase intention, like for attitude towards the advertisement, the linear regression analyses was performed for the two advertisements combined, since there was no significant difference between the two advertisements. The linear regression showed that the English symbolic value explained 9% of the variance in the purchase intention of the English advertisements ($F(1, 72) = 6.90, p = .011$). If the symbolic value goes up from low to high, the purchase intention goes up with .30 *SD* ($\beta = .30, p = .011$).

Altogether, the symbolic value was a significant predictor of the attitude towards the advertisement and the purchase intention. Although separated the symbolic value only predicted the attitude towards the product in the English advertisements without intensifiers for the Romanian participants, for all groups combined the symbolic value was a significant predictor. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 8. Regression analysis for English symbolic value as a predictor of attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product and purchase intention of the English advertisements

	Attitude towards the advertisement (<i>n</i> = 78)			Attitude towards the product (<i>n</i> = 78)			Purchase intention (<i>n</i> = 74)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>
(Constant)	.64	.81		2.32***	.51		.98	.90	
English symbolic value	.48 **	.16	.32	.26*	.10	.29	.47*	.18	.30
<i>R</i> ²		.09			.07			.08	
<i>F</i>		8.89**			6.94*			6.90*	

Note: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

5. Conclusion & discussion

In this section the research question will be answered and possible explanations for the results will be given, by linking the results to the literature. Secondly, the hypotheses with regard to English language proficiency and English symbolic value will be discussed. At last, limitations of this research and recommendations for future research will be examined and practical implications will be considered.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the difference between Dutch and Romanian citizens with regard to their perception of language choice and language intensity in advertisements (*RQ*). Main findings of this study show no significant differences between the Dutch and the Romanian participants, between the advertisements with versus without intensifiers, nor between the advertisements in the native language versus in English, with regard to the advertisement evaluation in general, and the attitude towards the advertisement and the purchase intention separately. With regard to the attitude towards the product, this study did find significant differences. The attitude towards the product was higher in the advertisement without intensifiers than in the advertisement with intensifiers. The Dutch participants also perceived the product more positively than the Romanian participants did.

Furthermore, the interaction showed that, although there was no difference in the Dutch perception of the advertisements in the two languages, the Romanian attitude towards the product was higher when the advertisements were in English than when they were in Romanian.

Since this study is the first to research the effect of language intensity in Romania, it is difficult to explain the findings regarding the lack of differences between the advertisements with versus without language intensity according to the Romanian participants, when it comes to the attitude towards the advertisement and the purchase intention. However, the lack of difference according to the Dutch participants with regard to the attitude towards the advertisement is in line with the findings of Burgers and De Graaf (2013), who also found a difference in the perceived language intensity, whereas this resulted in a negative effect of the appreciation in one experiment and an indirect positive effect in the second experiment. The manipulation check of this study did in fact find that the advertisement with intensified language did display the qualities of the product significantly better than the advertisement without intensified language, but this did not result in a significant difference in the attitude towards the advertisement. Hornikx et al. (2008) also did not find a significant increased persuasiveness as a result of the use of language intensity in cosmetic claims. An explanation for these findings could be that participants are resilient to intensifiers, which makes intensifiers not an effective marketing tool. It should be noted though, that the product category used by Hornikx et al. (2008), cosmetics, and the product category used in this research, dental hygiene, are related. Hence, the ineffectiveness of intensifiers in these researches do not necessarily mean an ineffectiveness of intensifiers for all other product categories.

Previous research also found no significant difference between the use of the native languages versus English in advertisements with regard to the attitude towards the advertisement (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2010). Micu and Coulter (2010) found that the use of English in advertisements of multinational brands had a positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement for Romanian consumers and that a local brand should only use English if the advertisement related to the consumers' values. The Markedness Model of Myers-Scotton (1983) applied by Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) to explain the effects of language choice in advertising, does indeed state that English could be a marked language and therefore relates to the associations with that language, such as sophistication, modernity and internationality. As a result there are at least two possible explanations why there was no significant difference in

attitude between the English and Romanian advertisements. Either the brand was not perceived as a multinational brand and did not relate to the consumers' values, therefore English was not perceived as the right choice of language. This would indicate that there was no congruence between the English brand, Bilvi, and the English language. Another explanation is given by Rozin, Berman and Royzman (2010), who stated that English is more likely to be unmarked when positive statements are used. As the advertisements only used positive intensifiers, this could be the case for this study.

The finding of this study that the use of intensifiers and the choice of native language versus English did not significantly affect the purchase intention is in line with the research from Planken et al. (2010). They also only found a significant difference with regard to the purchase intention in one out of six advertisements. The purchase intention for this advertisement was higher when the advertisement was in the native language (Polish) than when the advertisement was in English, whereas there was no significant difference for the other five advertisements. This indicates that purchase behaviour is difficult to influence.

The finding of the significantly more positive attitude of Dutch and Romanian participants towards the product in the advertisement without intensifiers, is not in line with most previous studies. Previous findings show a positive relation between the language intensity in persuasive messages and attitude (e.g. Bankhead et al., 2003; Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). However, negative effects have also been found (Bowers, 1963; Burgers & De Graaf, 2013). A possible explanation for the negative relation between language intensity and the attitude towards the product could be that the advertisements with intensifiers were perceived as aggressive. Although Greenberg (1976) did find a correlation between language intensity and perceived verbal aggressiveness, the research did not establish what the effect of the perceived aggressiveness could be on the attitude towards a text or in this case an advertisement. Van Mulken and Schellens (2012) also noted the relation between language intensity and subjectivity. The high language intensity in the advertisements could have led to a subjective evaluation of the product in the advertisements, and thus a more negative attitude towards the product.

The Dutch participants also perceived the product more positively than the Romanian participants did. A possible explanation for this difference could be that according to Petrovici, Marinova, Marinov and Lee (2007) and Marinov, Petrovici and Marinova (2008) Romanians have a negative attitude in general towards advertising. The latter research also suggested that this negative attitude is especially apparent among men, elderly consumers and

higher educated people. Although the majority of the participants in the current research were women and they were all young adults, the participants were indeed highly educated, which could explain the difference between the Dutch and Romanian participants with regard to their attitude towards the product in the advertisements. Although this study used a gender neutral product, toothpaste, the fact that the majority of the participants were female, could have influenced the result.

Lastly, the interaction showed that there was no difference in the Dutch perception of the advertisements in the two languages, whereas the Romanian attitude towards the product was higher when the advertisements were in English than when they were in Romanian. Although there was no significant difference with regard to the attitude towards the advertisement, the difference between the Dutch and the Romanian participants regarding the attitude towards the product are in line with the results of Micu and Coulter (2010) and Gerritsen and Nickerson (2010), mentioned earlier. An explanation could be that, although the advertisement was not perceived as international or global by the Romanian participants, the English text did result in an international or global perception of the product. However, this was not measured in this study and therefore this explanation cannot be validated. The fact that there was no difference between the two languages in the advertisement according to the Dutch participants is in agreement with the conclusion of Gerritsen and Nickerson (2010) to use Dutch in advertising, because the use of English did not influence the attitude.

The second aim of this research was to establish the role of the proficiency in English and the symbolic value of English with regard to the perception of the English advertisements. Finding showed that the Romanian participants assessed their English proficiency higher than the Dutch participants (rejection *H1*). However, a higher self-assessed English proficiency did not result in a bigger difference in the perception of the English advertisements with versus without intensifiers (rejection *H2*). The findings showed that the perceived symbolic value of English did significantly predict the attitude towards the English advertisements, the attitude towards the products in the English advertisements and the purchase intention of the toothpaste in the English advertisements (acceptation *H3*).

The first finding was contradictory to what was hypothesized, namely a significantly higher self-assessed proficiency of the Dutch participants. The self-assessed English proficiency was very good for both the Dutch and Romanian participants, which supports the proficiency levels according to the EF English Proficiency Index (n.d.), which rated the proficiency in the Netherlands very high and in Romania high. Nevertheless, the self-assessed

English proficiency of this study is much higher than the ratings from the Business English Index (2013). Ivan (2013) and Phillipson (1994) already stated a rise in the importance and use of English in Romania, which is supported by the high proficiency of the Romanian participants. This could mean that the proficiency level has increased over the last years. The Romanian participants are likely to have learnt English during their education and therefore they assess their English proficiency as high. However, the results of this study should not necessarily support the conclusion that the English level in Romania is higher than in the Netherlands. First of all, because self-assessed proficiency is not the same as actual proficiency. Secondly, because especially the Romanian participants are not representative of the Romanian population. The Romanian participants are mainly from the capital of Romania, Bucharest, and they are also all highly educated. Although the Dutch participants are also highly educated, they are from more regions in the Netherlands. Internet access, among other factors, remains a crucial way to get into contact with English and the Romanian population have less access to internet (EF English Proficiency Index, n.d.). Internet access is more common in urban areas than in rural areas. Therefore the Romanian participants from Bucharest could assess their English proficiency as higher because they compare themselves with Romanian citizens from other regions, ages and educational backgrounds.

An explanation for the lack of increased perceived difference between the English advertisements with versus without language intensity when the self-assessed English proficiency is higher, is that the participants did not perceive a big difference between the advertisements in general. Only the attitude towards the product showed a significant difference between the advertisements with versus without intensifiers.

The general symbolic value of English was positive and therefore in accordance with previous results that English is perceived as modern, international, global (Bhatia, 1992; Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Piller, 2003), young and dynamic, (Gerritsen et al., 2000) and other associations. The results showed that the perceived symbolic value of English did significantly predict the attitude towards the English advertisements and the purchase intention of the toothpaste in the English advertisements. At first, it was measured whether the symbolic value predicted the attitude towards the products in the English for the nationalities and versions of the advertisements (with/without intensifiers) separately. The symbolic value was only a significant predictor of attitude towards the product in the advertisement without intensifiers for the Romanian participants. An explanation could be that separately the *n*'s were too small to have significant results. The four versions combined showed that the English symbolic value was a significant predictor of the attitude towards the product. These

results are in line with the assumptions made in previous research (Gerritsen et al., 2000; Kelly-Holmes, 2000).

However, although the English symbolic value according to both the Dutch and Romanian participants was high, there was only a significantly higher attitude towards the product in English for the Romanian participants, compared to the native language. All the other dependent variables showed no significant difference between the English advertisements and the advertisements in the native language. An explanation could be that the use of English is no longer unexpected. Previous research suggested that English is frequently used in advertising in the Netherlands (Gerritsen et al., 2007) and is becoming more common in Romania since the fall of the iron curtain (Seitz & Razzouk, 2006). Therefore the use of English would no longer be marked and as a result does not evoke the associations. Accordingly, the use of English did not result in a different consumers' response than when the native language was used, because the participants only evaluated the content (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008) and the content was the same in the advertisements.

5.1 Limitations and future research

There are several limitations of this study and the current study also raises more questions, which could be researched in the future. First of all, no significant results were found for the general advertisement evaluation. Significant results were not found until the advertisement evaluation was divided into its original three factors; attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards product and purchase intention. This should be taken into consideration before conclusions can be drawn from the results. For example the item old-fashioned was used in the analyses for advertisement evaluation, but was subtracted in the analyses for attitude towards the product due to an insufficient reliability of the instrument. There were multiple assumptions violated. A more homogeneous group would be beneficial in future research.

Although this research builds on the Markedness Model, it is not clear yet whether English was a marked language for the Dutch and Romanian participants. English advertising is becoming more common and therefore English might lose its markedness. Advertisements mostly include positive statements, which could result in the loss of the marked status of English according to Rozin et al. (2010). The product also plays a role in the applicability of the Markedness Model. Toothpaste is not necessarily considered as an international product and is a low involvements product, which could have resulted in different findings than previous research. However, according to Seitz and Razzouk (2006) English in

advertisements in Romania is mostly limited to business to business and electronics advertisements, which would indicate that English was unexpected for the Romanian participants. In this case English could be an unmarked language for the Dutch participants and a marked language for the Romanian participants. Future research could include control questions to determine whether English was expected or not in the advertisements and whether the brand was perceived as international.

This study is the first study to combine the factors of language intensity and language choice in one research concerning the consumers' response of advertisements. No interaction between the factors was found, which could indicate that the language of the advertisement does not influence the perception of intensifiers. However, in order for the participants to pay attention to the text in the advertisement, the advertisement itself remained simple, with regard to images, colours and fonts. This resulted in an advertisement, which might not be representative to other advertisements in the Netherlands and Romania. Although the manipulation check did show a significant difference between the two advertisements, the difference was only small, which could have been the reason that there were only few differences found between the two advertisements with regard to the consumers' response. In addition, the brand used in the advertisement, Bilvi, was a fictional brand name. Future research could include a pre-test to make sure that the advertisement draws the attention to the text, but remains a realistic advertisement at the same time. Future research could also investigate the differences between different product types. Other researches also included the comparison between luxury and necessity products, which could result in a different perception of English in advertisements (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Another option for future research is to add another version of the advertisement to the existing advertisements, which mixes the native language and English in the advertisements.

A fourth limitation of this research is that the participants were not representative of both the Dutch and Romanian population. Although the Dutch participants were from more regions in the Netherlands, the Romanian participants were mostly from the University of Bucharest. More precisely, many students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures were asked to fill out the questionnaire. These students could have had some preliminary knowledge of what could have been the goal or subject of the experiment. The participants were also all between 19 and 32 and were studying or have been studying at a university. This also means that insight into the differences between ages, between educational backgrounds and between living surroundings, is missing. An explanation for the high self-assessed English proficiency was that the participants were all university students or graduated from a

university; however, research into the self-assessed proficiency of other participants groups remains absent. Marinov et al. (2008) found that Romanian women had a more negative attitude towards advertising than men. More research would be needed to ascertain what the influence of gender is on the perception of advertisements with language intensity in the native language versus a foreign language in both the Netherlands and Romania. In order to have a representative participants group, a more equal amount of male and female participants in general is preferable.

The lack of scientific literature regarding Romania, mainly with regard to language intensity, but also language choice, made it difficult to compare the results to previous literature and explain the results that were found. Although this study has tried to gain insight into the perception of language intensity and language choice in advertising, there is still much research needed in order to get a clear view. This study is the first research to compare a Western European country to an Eastern European country by combining the factors language intensity and language choice in advertising. More Eastern European countries still remain absent in scientific research concerning language intensity and language choice in advertising among other persuasive communication. Moreover, comparisons between multiple Eastern European countries remain under researched (Blankenship & Craig, 2011). The researches about language intensity, concerning the Netherlands and other countries, still do not give a clear insight into the effect of language intensity. Different types of texts and different products in advertisements have been used, which results in the inability to draw general conclusions.

This research only focusses on language intensity. Bowers (1964) pointed out that illustrative material was also a way to increase communicative intensity in for example advertisements. Future research could make a clear distinction between the intensity of the text in the advertisement and the intensity of visual components. Illustrations draw more attention than text according to Pieters and Wedel (2004), and could therefore be a major factor in the intensity of the advertisement. Other factors that could be investigated are message discrepancy and source evaluation. These factors are also mentioned as factors to influence attitude change as a result of language intensity by Hamilton and Stewart (1993).

Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and Tagliamonte (2008) already pointed out that the use of intensifiers changes constantly. New intensifiers are used and the level of intensity of words can vary across time. Therefore results of research today do not necessarily mean that in the future the same results would be found. Longitudinal experimental research could clarify whether the change in the intensifiers that are used on a common basis, also means a change

in the way those intensifiers influence attitudes towards advertisements. This study also used two of the three intensifiers mentioned in the typology of Renkema (1997). Stylistic intensifiers could result in different outcomes and would be interesting for future research.

5.2 Practical implications

The answer to the question of how a message should be conveyed in order to reach the highest persuasiveness, will likely never be found. Even when the answer seems to be formulated, this will become ordinary and will no longer work for advertising. This study already gave the impression that English might no longer be a marked language in advertising, in contradiction with previous assumptions (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008), but already suggested by Rozin et al. (2010). In the current globalizing world it seems conceivable that English might surpass the native languages in advertising, if the use of English in advertising continues to increase at the current rate (Gerritsen et al. 2007; Seitz & Rozzouk; 2006).

Very few significant results were found in this study. Hence, it will not be possible to indefinitely recommend either using intensifying language or not, and adopting a standardized or localized advertising strategy in the Netherlands and Romania. Intensifiers in toothpaste advertisements need to be used with caution. However, according to the findings of this study there is no difference between the use of intensifiers in the native language and the use of intensifiers in English as a foreign language in toothpaste advertising. Although the attitude towards the product of Romanian participants was higher in English than in Romanian, the effectiveness of the use of English in advertisements in Romania might depend on the proficiency level of the entire country. In this case, using Romanian in toothpaste advertisements would be a safe choice. For the Netherlands there seems to be no difference between the use of English and Dutch. However, the recommendation of Gerritsen et al. (2000) and Gerritsen and Nickerson (2010) to use the native language could also be the safe marketing strategy for dental hygiene advertising. The product type, the difference between a national or international brand and the target group should always be taken into consideration when it comes to the choice of language. Future research is still needed to bring into light the possible effects of language intensity and language choice in advertisements.

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