

English-mixing in the printed advertisements in Korea.

Yunju Choi

Colorado State University

### Abstract

This research investigates code-mixing between Korean and English in printed advertisements in Korea. A brief overview of code-mixing in China, Germany, India, Russia, and Taiwan is presented. Next, Korean advertisements were examined in the respect of code-mixing, too. For data collection, after searching for images through Korean web portals, 20 brand names and 20 slogans were found and 8 of each were analyzed. English mixing in Korean printed advertisements reflects globalization, well-being based on the naturally friendly environment, social mobility, and high quality of product. The linguistic features are homophones between English and Korean, abbreviation, and Koreanized English that is somewhat different from Standard English.

*Key words:* English mixing, printed advertisement in Korea, Koreanized English

### **Introduction**

Advertising is a form of communication intended to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to purchase or take some action upon products, ideas, or services. It includes the name of a product or service and how that product or service could benefit the consumers, to persuade a target market to purchase or to consume that particular brand. The messages are delivered by brief and compressed expressions based on social, cultural, economical backgrounds of people in a country.

As a trend of globalization, English has become one of the most popular foreign languages used in advertising in many nonnative English-speaking markets. This phenomenon is commonly revealed in the advertisement in Korea. This study aims to explore the effect of English mixing used in printed advertising in Korea where English is used as foreign language. And it focuses on how and why English is incorporated into the local language in the advertisements. Further, it will be studied how the globalization of advertising language influences consumer response to advertising message.

### **Literature Review**

Krishna & Ahluwalia (2008) researched a bilingual context of advertising in which both languages are viewed positively (urban India) and spoken fluently. It focuses on language perceptions rather than on language favorability. According to this analysis, language did not influence evaluations for the local company. For multinational corporations, English emerged as a more effective choice for luxury goods, Hindi led to more favorable evaluations of necessities. Consumers tend to use the perceptual associations of language that are most relevant for evaluating the product category, that is, sophistication (global, cosmopolitan, urban, and upper

class) for luxuries and belongingness (close, personal, friendly, and family) for necessities. The limited participants who are well-educated and fluent both English and Hindi may be regarded as favorable and for whom sophistication might be a desirable brand attribute.

Piller (2001) explored the different types of identities that are constructed in a corpus of bilingual print ads and TV commercials in Germany. Introducing the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, the multilingual narrators and narratees are characterized as authoritative, international, future-oriented, sophisticated, and fun. In order to test the acceptance of or resistance to these identity constructions outside the discourse of commercial advertising, the uses of multilingualism in non-profit and personal advertising are also explored. All these discourses valorize German-English bilingualism and set it up as the strongest linguistic currency for the German business elite.

Ustinova (2006) investigated the role of English in the emerging advertising market in Russia. After allowing advertisements in Russia early 1990s, western-type advertising brought many changes to Russia, and Westernization and Americanization of the Russian language are definitely among them. Multiple languages mixing, predominantly of English and Russian, is observed in three types of TV advertisements: social, service, and commercials. In TV commercials code-switching and code-mixing are a dominant feature. Abundance of English usage in commercials can be explained by utilitarian reasons, as Western firms promote their brand names and logo in English all over the world. There are also social reasons, as English signals novelty, prestige, and high quality products.

Chen (2006) investigated code-mixing between Chinese and English in magazine advertisements in Taiwan. It was found that English is often used to add to the colorfulness and

attraction of an advertisement. Chinese is still the unmarked, normative code choice of written communication in Taiwan. According to this study, the embedding of English often carries extra socio-pragmatic meaning such as attention-getting, modernization, and creativity. As can be inferred from the results of the questionnaire survey, the majority of people have a positive attitude toward the embedding of English in the advertisement.

Lee (2006) studied the construction of linguistic modernity with English mixing in the discourse of Korean television commercials. Specifically, it is concerned with Korean-English bilingual's linguistic construction of modernity as realized in three domains of advertising: technology, gender roles, and taste as cultural form. The findings suggest that mixing English with Korean is a linguistic mechanism for the construction of modernity in contemporary South Korea.

Shim (1999) noted the history of English education in Korea, which focuses on the grammar translation method since the Japanese colonial period. In spite of the request of development of speaking and writing in English in the globalization trend, English instruction and tests are still focused on grammar and vocabularies in Korea.

Educated Koreans now share a common set of English grammar rules and expressions that may be referred to as a 'codified variety of Korean English.' In spite of the popular belief that Koreans learn American English, a substantial portion of what is learned and written in school is different from American English, and this codified variety of Korean English now serves as the EFL standard for English education in Korea.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

For data collection, after searching images through the Korean web portals “Naver” and “Daum”, 20 brand names and 20 slogans were collected and 8 of each were analyzed. The focus was given on brand names, slogans, and messages of advertisement for Korean companies including electronics, beauty products, housing, shopping centers, etc. The language choice for brand name and slogans were investigated to understand the phenomenon of English mixing in printed advertisements in Korea.

TV commercials are not studied in this investigation because they “make use of the combined effect of sound and image and require more sophisticated analytical procedures” (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 10, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 469).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

In this section, I discuss printed advertisements in Korean web portals with respect to English mixing in Korean. I focus on brand names and slogans of Korean companies. Piller (2006) noted that “Slogans, short phrases that accompany the brand name, are meant to encapsulate the identity or philosophy of a brand” (Piller, 1997 as cited in Piller 2001, p. 160).

#### **Brand name**

##### (1) WhoAU

This is a brand name of casual wear for young people. Almost all Koreans read this brand name as “Who are you?” They recognize a vowel as a word, so “A” can represent a Korean pronunciation of “are”, and “U” can stand for “you”. This kind of new English writing can affect young learners’ English spelling acquisition. And using “U” for “you” is common usage for text message these days, too.

##### (2) C.O.A.X.

This is a brand name for young people's casual wear. There is an English word "coax" which means persuade or cajole. It is not clear that the brand name was made to intend the real meaning, many Koreans accept it as an abbreviation of words. The word "coax" also sounds like a Korean onomatopoeia for the sound of being poked. In a sense, the pronunciation of coax deliver fresh and lively image of young people. By the way, there is a famous building called COEX which means Convention and Exhibition. It is a kind of landmark in one of the biggest Korean downtown areas. In this respect, C.O.A.X. can be related to building COEX and deliver its western images, too.

### (3) E Mart

This is one of the biggest marts in Korea. It is like Wall Mart in the U.S.A. which sells various kinds of products from grocery to electronics. The targeted customers cover almost all population in Korea. The brand name "e" means "electronic" in English, this is phonologically noticeable that the sound "e" has same pronunciation "yi" in Korean, which means "this". So this name can be interpreted two ways according to the readers. It can deliver modern image of this market through using 'electronic' or it can be referred to "this mart" to deliver closeness for some people who are not familiar with English words.

### (4) Home plus

This is a name of another big mart in Korea. The stores are located nationwide from big city to remote countryside. The sign of this mall is in English in every store and the sub title Samsung TESCO is attached below it. Home plus is interpreted as "provide something plus to your home". As a local brand, it didn't use mart or market in its brand name, however it delivers the meaning

of shops by using the word home to deliver family oriented culture in Korea. The pronunciation of this brand name is revealed very Koreanized ones as adding vowel at the end of word.

As Piller (2001) commented that,

In many bilingual advertisements, German is relegated to the language of mundane factual information. The factual transmission of boring details (venue, contact information, legal restrictions, etc.) is effected through German, probably because advertisers have some doubts about their audience's proficiency in English. This leaves English to do mainly symbolic work. (p. 180)

#### (5) Seoul Cyber University

This is school name for long distance education through internet instruction. "Cyber" is interpreted into "long distance" or "information oriented" rather than "related to computer or internet" to Korean students. A lot of private foundations opened cyber universities with the name of their university and the number of students are increased. This naming is considered to reflect globalized education trend in Korea.

#### (6) Think Big

It is a company name of home study materials for children. This brand name can be used as noun, as children say "I'm doing Think Big." or "Let's study Think Big." without correct knowledge of brand name and meaning. This brand name is usually used by young children and their parents, it could be one typical name of home study materials containing high expectation of young children.

#### (7) Mr. Pizza



This is a brand name of local Pizza shop in Korea. After the launching of “Pizza Hut” and “Pizza Inn” in Korea in the early 1990s, pizza became popular food for Koreans, especially young women and children. The brand name Mr. Pizza reflects feminine modes in Korea to show the image of a man who is making pizza for his family or friends. A family man is new role model of Korean society which is different from dominant man image in the past.

#### (8) Coffee Bean

It is local franchise coffee shops competing with Starbucks in Korea. Relatively young and working women with high income and academic background are the mainly targeted consumers for this shop. Bean is interpreted to real meaning to the bilingual English speakers to deliver the freshness of their coffee. On the contrary, the pronunciation “bi:n” means empty in Korean words. So some young people make contraction of this brand name as “cupbi:n” which means “empty cup” in Korean. It is considered as one reflection of shorten language preferences of language users and enjoying pun of language within young elite groups.

### **Slogans**

#### (1) Samsung – Global Futuremark

“Imagine New World”, which is a catchphrase in an advertisement in Samsung Engineering & Construction. This phrase is presented biggest letters in the advertisement, and explanation of the picture and messages are followed with smaller letter in Korean. According to Piller (2001) “The implied reader of bilingual advertisements frequently is addressed as someone who wants to shape the future” (p. 165). As a leading company in Korea, Samsung shows the image of Korean dreaming come true to be a world leader both in the economy and industry.

#### (2) Hanwha – EcoMetro 한화꿈에그린월드

### Hanwha—EcoMetro Hanwha Drawing in the Dream World

There are dual meanings of “grin” in this slogan. The word “gri:n” means “draw” in Korean, it has homophone of the word “green”. Therefore this phrase can be interpreted two ways. First, Hanwha is the one you are drawing in the dream. Second, this house has naturally friendly environment. With the increase of interest in environment, the customers of houses search for the eco-friendly as well as convenient and comfort house. As Chen noticed, “All the instances of bilingual punning suggest that using English words to create double meaning is an important function which code-mixing performs in the advertising discourse in Taiwan”(p. 473). As Korean language consists of about 70% of Sino Korean, there are similarity of punning functions of English-mixing in Korean advertisements.

#### (3) Shinhan -- The Bank

Shinhan bank is the biggest bank in Korea now. This bank merged with the Choheung bank which had long tradition in Korea. So the size of finance and number of stores are ranked top in Korea. Shinhan bank uses its slogan as “The Bank” which means the best bank for all of you in financing, service, etc. The word “the” can be signified the fittest, and most appropriate for the customers.

#### (4) Curitel -- so cool (coool)

This slogan can be read by Korean delivering the meaning “cooler” or “coolest” by repeating /o/ many times. Koreans tend to make long vowel pronunciation when they see repeated vowel word like “coool”. Despite “coool” is broken word, it expresses the strong and positive meaning of cool with the repetition of vowel /o/. As Piller (2001) noticed that “The mere fact that the implied readers of the advertisements under consideration are bilingual suggests that they are

addressed not as citizens of the national community of monolingual Germans, but as members of a transnational, international community constituted around common lifestyle choices, common consumption values, and elitism” (p. 163). In the respect of English-mixing in Korea, above middle class consumers show their cosmopolitan attitudes based on globalization.

(5) Anycall – 반짝반짝 빛나는 touch illumination

Anycall—Brightly shiny touch illumination

This phrase consists of translation in part, explanation and adding message with English mixing in Korean advertisement. “Brilliantly shining” is supposed to translate or clarify the word “illumination” in the phrase, and “touch” is added to express the function of high technology.

(6) LG—Excanvas 하라

LG--Do Excanvas

This is an advertisement of the high quality PDP television named as Excanvas which has very new, high technology. This sentence used “do” not “enjoy” or “see” Excanvas. It is considered that the advertisers want to show Excanvas not just as a simple Television, but as product for new lifestyle with multiple functions through visual media. In this respect, this advertisement is intended to encourage social mobility to people in Korea. Piller (2001) analyzed that, “contemporary cultural identities are hybrid, complex, and often contradictory, and the media play a crucial role in their reconfiguration” (p. 153).

(7) FunKia – Finding Soulmate with Soul

Kia Car company uses new slogan “FunKia” to attract young generation customers for their compact cars. Funkia expresses something liberal with the nuance of funk music with liberty, and bohemianism. This phrase repeats the word “soul”, and delivers casual, friendly atmosphere.

## (8) Hera

에이지 어웨이. 빛나는 피부를 위한 뷰티솔루션

Age away, beauty solution for shiny skin.

It is one of brand names in major cosmetic company in Korea. This is originally the name of Goddess in Greek mythology. In Korean advertisement, there is new abbreviation phrase of using this word to represent image of targeted customers.

Housewife, Educated, Reengaging, Active.

Therefore, HERA represents mid-aged women who are wish to develop themselves, and have financial power. According to Lee, “Age appears to be a critical variable in language use patterns in TV advertisements. When commercials cater to older generations, Koreans and/ or Sino-Korean is used, whereas when commercials are geared toward younger generations, English is generally mixed with English” (p. 73).

However, English mixing is more widely used in Korean advertisement which targets to the middle aged customers. It is supposed that now using English is not confined to the younger generation, rather accepted to the middle aged or elders with higher educational and socio economic background. English mixing attitude is becoming increasingly common to above middle aged generations as well as younger generation. Various factors, such as intelligence, career development can influence linguistic construction of modernity rather than age in Korea.

Bhatia (2001) addresses the issues of globalization in advertising and stresses the notion of “glocalization,” which is also extensively discussed by Robertson 1995. Bhatia focuses more on the innovative and creative aspects of mixing, an emphasis which resonates with empirical findings in this study of Korean advertising. The “positive approach” claims that “language

missing in advertising satisfies deeper innovative and creative needs of advertisement writers to create desired effects of persuasion, naturalness, and other socio-psychological effects in their language” (Lee, 2006, p.65. citing Bhatia 2001, p. 197).

### **Conclusion**

Advertising reflects how language is used in contemporary society. Korea is an EFL country where the embedding of English in advertisement often carries socio-pragmatic meanings like globalization, well-being based on eco-friendly environmentalism, social mobility, and high quality of product, etc.

The sentences in the advertisements with English-mixing are shown as Koreanized English which is somewhat different from Standard Korean. Koreans use homophones between English and Korean, punning, abbreviation, and suggesting dual meaning.

The use of English is not always intended for communicating information about products, but is meant for other purposes, for example, to appeal potential buyers with the impression that the products are of good and dependable quality, given the fact that a superior quality is usually automatically associated with the use of English for most Korean people.

This research was conducted on the basis of analyzing data from image in Web Portal Sites. As for further study, gathering surveys or taking interviews from various leveled English speakers can expand the field of this research to clarify the effect of English-mixing in Korea. Because Koreans have quite different English proficiency varies among them, their differences of English understanding can cause different results of purchasing of the advertised products.

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