Chapter 1
A Review of Psycho- vs. Socio-Linguistics Theories:
An Application to Marketing Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers an overview of the key socio-psycholinguistic theories and their application to the marketing sphere. Among the models examined, of particular note are the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 1999), the Revised Hierarchical Model (Kroll & Steward, 1994) and the Conceptual Features Model (De Groot, 1992). Examining these three models in particular, we review the key concepts of Code-switching, Cultural Frame-Switching and Foreign Language Display, which have been widely used in the marketing and consumer behavior disciplines. The chapter also puts forward potential future lines of research in linguistics and its application to marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural contacts occur when people communicating with each other have different mother tongues, which constitute vehicles for cultural values. According to Lewis, Gary and Fennig (2014), there are currently 7,106 living languages world-wide, spoken by over 6,200 million people as their first language (L1) – albeit just ten languages account for 50% of the world's population (see Table 1). The three most widely spoken languages used as L1 (that is, the mother tongue) are Chinese, with 1.197 million speakers, Spanish, with 414 million speakers, and English, with 335 million. Notably, some of the languages pertaining to the most powerful countries (taking G8 as a reference) do not feature among the most commonly spoken world-wide. German, for instance, is in 12th place, while French and Italian are in 14th and 21st place, respectively (Lewis et al., 2014). It is also worth noting that the four countries with the greatest volume of commercial exchange world-wide (export and import), namely

China, the United States (US), Germany and Japan, speak different languages (WTO, 2013). This means that the economic and commercial relations between these countries and all other countries must rely on a second language, – normally English – although Chinese, German and Japanese also play a key role in international trade. According to Graddol (2000), at the beginning of this decade a total of 750 million people spoke English either as L1 or L2 (second language). In 2014 this figure is estimated to have risen to around 1,370 million (Internet World Stats, 2014). In his work *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon,* Kachru (2005) affirmed that in India and China there were over 500 million people speaking English as a second language (L2).

The phenomenon of the globalization of markets is highlighting the need to use language as a source of competitive advantage. Individuals and organizations that dominate foreign languages will have an advantage in terms of being able to participate in trade and exchange on a world-wide level (Li & Kaly-anaraman, 2012; Molinsky, 2007).

The importance of language in both personal and commercial relationships has been made all the greater thanks to the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Internet boom seen in recent decades has heightened the relevance of languages, with the boundaries between countries and markets becoming blurred, and marketers and consumers increasingly adopting multilingual communications. The relative order of importance of the different languages is different in the online context: English is in the top position, being used by 800 million Internet users, followed by Chinese with 649 million users and Spanish with 222 million. Thus, the total percentage of Internet users who speak English as either L1 or L2 represents 28.6% of the total number of Internet users world-wide (Internet World Stats, 2014) (see Table 2).

As many authors have asserted, it is culture that designs language and its grammatical and semantic structures (Singh, 2002). This constitutes an interesting line of research for website content managers and marketing managers with regard to being able to differentiate their communication strategies in line with the type of cultural values associated with the language in which website content is processed.

Hence this chapter seeks to provide an overview of the most widely-used psycho-sociolinguistic theories in the marketing field, and to examine the different strategies developed around each of them (namely code-switching, foreign language display and cultural frame-switching).

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

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

Source: Lewis et al. (2014)

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