Chapter 45

Codeswitching:
An Alternative Approach to Traditional Communication Methods for Reaching Multilinguals in the Global Marketplace

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to overview the topic of language codeswitching—which refers essentially to the alternation between two languages in communication by bilinguals. The history of codeswitching, motivations for codeswitching, and the use of codeswitching in the media and in advertising are discussed. Further, the appropriateness of using this language style to reach consumers in advertising is also examined in light of language attitudes and general attitudes toward the practice. Greater understanding of how to employ bilingual advertising (such as codeswitching) among an increasingly interconnected world still remains of interest to international and cross-cultural advertisers.

INTRODUCTION

Regarding language in advertising, international and cross-cultural advertisers continue to struggle to find the best language medium through which to reach their target audiences. Levitt's (1983) classic position implies employing a single language in advertising, citing that companies should ignore superficial regional and national differences, treating the world as one homogenous marketplace. More recently, however, the prevailing perspective concerning advertising standardization is that decisions be made on a country-to-country basis (Kanso & Nelson, 2002). Standardization versus localization decisions are usually made in each particular situation with a cost-benefit analysis (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987), since it is expensive to target every ethnic group within a region with an individualized campaign. In particular, Onkivist and Shaw (1987) define the standardized approach as the use of uniform messages without

modification of headings, illustrations or body copy—except for translation. A more extreme example of standardization is when no local language translation is made in any part of the ad (Gerritsen et al., 2010). This rather "extreme" standardization is done not only to save on costs but because the advertisers believe that the entire world can be approached with the same concept and language (Gerritsen et al., 2010).

In contrast, if a localized approach is taken for a language decision, most advertisers would translate the ad entirely into the target country's primary language (with possible exceptions of brand names or slogans). However, another alternative would be to use language codeswitching, which refers (in general) to the practice of alternating between two languages.

Codeswitching is becoming more common as the people grow increasingly bilingual (trilingual, etc.), as it is easier to gain access to media in other languages due to the spread of technology and technological advances in general. This practice is especially growing among the younger generations, as switching between two languages (especially one that has higher status associated with it) may be seen as vogue and modern. Furthermore, codeswitching has been observed in many media communication vehicles (Khosravizadeh & Bagheri Sanjareh, 2011; Chavez, 2002; Si, 2011; Wei-Yu Chen, 2006; Cárdenas-Claros & Isharyanti, 2009; Ustinova, 2006; Dimova, 2012) and its use appears to be increasing.

In sum, this chapter will offer a review of the literature on language codeswitching, including historical and contemporary views concerning its existence and development. A pragmatic/conversation analytic approach is primarily taken in reviewing the background of codeswitching. Per Gardner-Chloros (2009), this approach relies on identifying the meanings brought about by codeswitching in conversations. In this regard, appropriate anthropological examples are provided, as well as the most significant findings among the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic literature. Further, this chapter will explain the current state of codeswitching research in advertising. Some questions that will be discussed include: What are some of the overall challenges of language decisions in a global marketplace? How can codeswitching be an effective option? What are the benefits of using codeswitching in communication? Where does codeswitching appear in the media? How can/do marketers use codeswitching in advertising?

To address these questions, a qualitative research method known as the Funnel Approach is taken to examine topics that progress from more to more narrow in scope--ending with a fuller focus on codeswitching as it relates to adverting. Within these latter sections related to the use and appropriateness of codeswitching in advertising, we offer several propositions that summarize our current understanding respective of the topic addressed. Future research suggestions are incorporated throughout the chapter as well as at the end of the chapter.

BRIEF HISTORY OF CODESWITCHING

The term codeswitching has been written as two words—"code switching" or "code-switching." Though some have differentiated between these terms (Pfaff, 1979), currently the one-word term "codeswitching" is most commonly used to describe the use of two languages within one conversation or text (Benson, 2001). Further, we refer to codeswitching as the grammatical switching between two languages [although arguments have been made that question this idea of grammaticality when it comes to codeswitched speech (see Gardner-Chloros, 2009).] When individuals participate in codeswitching, the main (or "matrix") language serves consistently as the source of the grammatical frame (Finlayson, Calteaux, & Myers-Scotton, 1998), such that codeswitching should follow the grammatical rules of the main language.

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