THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES AND THE OTHERS:
NATIONAL CLICHÉS IN ADVERTISING

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In our paper, we shall look at a number of advertisements in various European media (especially British written press and TV) in the late eighties and early nineties featuring any mention of other European countries. Our purpose will be to see, through a brief look at European press and TV, what is the view countries have about one another and about themselves as reflected in advertising, a kind of discourse that must echo the ideology of its audience if it aims to persuade them, and which to a large extent may yield a more complete picture about people's opinions than the Eurobarometres.

Our starting point may be a paper by Snyder et al. (1991), interestingly called "Advertising and Cross-Cultural Convergence in Europe, 1953-89" (which we shall refer to as the Snyder corpus), according to which magazine advertisements in the Netherlands, France, UK and Germany showed a marked tendency to include the nationality of products, whereas little (if any) pan-European notions were detected\(^1\); this is in direct contradiction with the

\(^1\) We shall concentrate on the text in advertisements, although signs of identity may also be present in the pictures, the music or elsewhere in the ad; for example, the same study focused on a number of clues indicating "foreignness", such as Eiffel Towers, celebrities, Dutch clogs and the like.

frequently stated idea, even by international advertising agencies themselves, that Europe is becoming a single entity.

In this respect, Galliot (1955: 313) has pointed out that there are two opposing feelings in the human mind: the more or less explicit desire to regard oneself as superior to the others and somewhat confused but undoubted tendency to admire what comes from abroad. Before this dilemma, the options available (Snyder et al. 1991: 442) are the following:

a) to play up national pride in advertisements by showcasing domestic symbols and using local language and expressions;

b) to use the foreignness of a product as an appeal to quality and exoticism;

c) to ignore national references and create a neutral advert, and

d) to use globalism or regionalism as an appeal in itself.

The same authors (1991: 444) have mentioned, amongst other factors determining the option we are concerned with (i.e. the use of foreign images) the social level of the addressee; it seems that the so-called “international sophisticates” and “semi-sophisticates”, middle to high-income consumers aware of foreign products and ideas, and also that food, drinks, toiletries and soap tend to feature international images, whereas an ethnocentric consumer will react in disdain; this is in contrast with Domzal et al. (1995), who state that the ideal public for this kind of campaign is non-elite monolingual audiences. In addition to this, Snyder et al. found that some countries seem more open to foreign advertisements: in the US and Israel studies showed that foreign adverts were not effective, whereas the nationality of products did not matter in Egypt and, strangely enough considering what is said, France.

As for the text itself of the ad, there are cases in which not even the slogan is translated, which makes it the ideal vehicle for the introduction of anglicisms into all languages (Felip 1989). In these cases we should forget all our personal obsessions with purity in the target language, and consider that the maintenance of the original or not will depend on fashion and the kind of product, for if the country of origin offers a number of connotations, the use of the language of origin allows advertisers to convey such connotations in a brief, easily recalled way, for advertising dwells on the positive side of the stereotypes of each country.

Also, as we mentioned before, there are plenty of foreign elements whenever social prestige is either sought or identified. In the case of French, in addition to the “female atmosphere” (Díez Arroyo 1994), the introduction of foreign words supports the notion of an expensive, imported product (both associated to the upper classes, and therefore desirable). Such connotations have made French the ideal language for fashion and toiletries, whatever the country and the kind of addressee (Pentilla 1962: 42); for instance, Whiteley and Chung (1989: 304) quote advertisements for the perfume Paris in Women’s Journal with French captions and the Eiffel Tower, although the formula is applicable to other products related to the vague idea of fashion and “glamour” as in the slogan used in Britain (Greven 1982: 201) for an alcoholic drink: “When you drink Dubonnet the whole world’s French.”

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1 Some countries have always been famous for their tendency towards patriotism: Roberts (1976: 70) reminds us that “The British managed to inject a note of patriotism into virtually everything: the Americans managed chauvinism with automobiles like Dime Flyer vying with Washington and Lincoln.”

2 This impressionistic idea, as suggested by linguists, is confirmed by copywriters, who admit that nationality is synonymous with quality, as in German cars or Swiss chocolates.
In the field of automobile advertising, there are also instances in which the original atmosphere is maintained, especially when the sales proposal is based on the prestige of the country of origin (although it also constitutes a useful attention-getting device favouring better recall). The most representative campaign in this case is that of the Audi range in the United Kingdom, based on the German slogan “Vorsprung durch Technik” (“Progress through technology”). The way this message is received by English speakers has little to do with the real meaning of Vorsprung, for the mere fact that the words are recognizable as German is enough when the language is a sign in itself, although the clear meaning of Technik is also useful.¹

In a similar way to the effect achieved by the Patés Panzani advertisement analyzed years ago by Barthes (1964: 41), which underlined the Italianness of the product as a sales argument in France, in such a way that the message in Italy would be meaningless, also the word Vorsprung, which does mean “progress” in German, has a different meaning for an English person, for its original meaning has given way to a rather vague idea of “Germaness” (to such an extent that spelling or diction mistakes, quite frequent in advertising copy, are irrelevant):

signifier: Vorsprung durch Technik

original sign: _______________________________________

signified: “Progress through technology”

¹Another example of the usefulness of original, transparent sentences, is the “Uno. La pasione” caption for Fiat.

In fact, the original meaning is no less irrelevant; as Bayley (1986: 93) points out, nobody would imagine that the slogan actually comes from Nazi propaganda, as does the Volkswagen trade name (“the people’s car”). According to him, the slogan is an attempt to “germanize” the word Audi (which is, after all, Latin, and sounded Italian to the English ear), as proves the fact that, at the beginning of the new image campaign, the Vorsprung durch Technik slogan was completed by a seemingly obvious “...as they say in Germany”. A year later, the German image was further exploited in TV commercials in Britain, in which a German showman told the typical “Waiter, there’s a fly in my soup” joke with English subtitles, followed by the unavoidable references to recyclable materials (a typically German obsession), and at the end there was a reminder of all previous adverts (“Vorsprung durch Technik... as you’ve probably heard before”).

However, such a spectacular example of German being the symbol of technology and reliability is becoming a sort of unwritten rule; the commercial for the Rover Fastback in Britain was shown in German with English subtitles (in England nennen sie es Fastback), and in the USA driving a Volkswagen was described as Fahrengrünen; in general, Snyder et al (1991: 453) mention an increase in the use of foreign languages in their corpus from 11 percent in 1953 to 41 percent in 1986.

It must be observed that, although sometimes a product chooses to be surrounded by the aura of a certain country with no apparent
motivation (such as the Chrysler Le Baron, which has nothing to do with France, or the examples we shall quote later of Portuguese products), the most usual thing is to find words which refer to the country of origin, either in the name of the product (Alfa 164 Lusso, Citroën AX GT Sportif), or in advertising copy:¹

including the new Audi 100 Turbo [...] 135 mph when cruising the autobahns.

Wunderbar, you say. (Volkswagen Diesels)

Umwelt Diesel. (Volkswagen Diesels)

"Ch'án! Ch'án! Ch'án!" as we say in Japan. Attention! Attention! Attention! (Toyota Carina)

Sometimes there are even attempts at internationality, as befits a manufacturer like Volkswagen, for whom all Europeans should have the same rights (to buy, that is), as featured in the Spanish caption “¿Y por qué no hemos de tener las mismas oportunidades que en Europa?”:

Any torque? Mais oui.


The handling. Any sharper? Cerio.

What, more generous? Claro que si. (Volkswagen Golf)

On other occasions, long-established borrowings are used; these items are used as transferred signs, provided they continue to be perceived as foreign words (usually due to their “exotic” connotations):

- Italianisms:

  So a Tipo, even when cornered con molto brio hardly rolls its body. (Fiat Tipo)

  Brio n. (bri’òk) liveliness, energy or spirit (origin Italian). How true. (Fiat Uno Brio)

  ...nothing goes with quite as much gusto as the Tempo. Even though the price is moderato, features aren’t. (Yugo Tempo)

- Gallicisms:

  Chic at the price. (Fiat Uno)

  The chic 205 is highlighted by the bright yellow bumper inserts. (Peugeot Diesels)

  Its chic styling could be yours for a deposit of £1250... (Fiat Panda)

  Without compromising ride comfort, he designs a multi-link rear suspension, developed from our Z1 sportscar. Touche. (BMW)

  The BX Rendezvous. You couldn’t ask for more. (Citroën BX)

  At market prices that’s a mere 6 kilos of truffles. Bon appétit. (Renault Clio)

In the same way borrowed terms need not mean the same in the language of origin as in the context into which they are translated, the usage of the prestige of each country also depends on the abstract value of “Germanness”, “Frenchness” or “Italianness” in other European countries, that is, of the view one country has about the others. Asterix, for instance, is the symbol of French pride.

¹ In a number of cases, the use of foreign items leads to witty multilingual puns, such as Perrier’s “Eau, I say” in Great Britain or Prunusganda in Switzerland.
against foreign invaders and influences, but it may be used in Britain for French cars because the comic has enjoyed great success (in our opinion, thanks to an exceedingly creative translation).  

In the case of automobiles, we may observe a number of reputations that have become the core of the transferred meanings. English, which functions everywhere as a guarantee of quality, is associated in the world of cars to class, tradition and grandeur, as we may see in these examples from Rover advertisements in Switzerland:

Rover 827: Un coupé d’une classe à part pour “happy few”.

Si la nouvelle Rover 827 arbore un sigle riche en tradition, elle s’affiche aussi par des lignes que vous ne croiserez pas à tous les coins de rue.

La classe, ça ne trompe pas.

Categoria media con un tocco di classe in pitt.

Mehr Klasse als Mittelklasse.

We may also mention here the advertisements for Mini Cooper in Switzerland. As it is considered a typically British car, the advertising agency chose to give out stickers in English, in such a way that the signifier, the external form (the language) became the main signified. Of course, the sentences chosen were easy enough to be remembered, either due to their monosyllabic simplicity (“Think small. Be great” or “Yes Sir, that’s my baby”),

or because they reproduce the titles of songs or films (“Forever Young”, “On the Road Again”, “All you need is Love”, “Love me Tender”, “The Never Ending Story”).

The mention of the USA is associated to adventure and to the American Way of Life when it comes to tobacco and clothing, but also to demanding environmental laws:

Jeep. The American Legend.

Some of our cars have already overtaken California’s 1999 environmental requirements. (Saab)

The case of Germany is interesting, for the image of this country has managed to overcome the memories of previous wars, and it usually has positive connotations, mostly associated to technology and, lately, ecology (in fact, Peris et al. [1993:141] found evidence that the best perceptions of workmanship in Spain and Britain are for products manufactured in Germany):

Seat: ingeniería alemana a su alcance.

German road tests, as you'd expect, are noted for their thoroughness and efficiency. (Audi 100)

Sweden has two kinds of associations: safety (created by Volvo cars) and endurance (due to Swedish weather):

Even a dummy can recognise which is Sweden’s safer car. (Saab)

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1See Campos, M. (1992), “Las dificultades de traer el humor de Astérix Le Gaulois-Asterix the Gaul-Astérix el Galo”, Babel/AFLAL, 1 (1992), 103-123. Of course, the cliché varies from one country to another; in the first French commercial for After Eight, in 1991, a little tribute to Asterix could be seen in the punchline “Et ne dites pas ‘ils sont fous ces Anglais’, pas avant d’avoir goûté des After Eight”.

1As is widely known, the iconic use of English is a must to maintain the so-called “American flavour”, as we can see in advertisements published in Spain, such as “Levi’s jeans & jackets” (El País), “Come to Marlboro Country” (Diario 16), “Hondas Come Ride with Us” (El País) and countless others.
names associated to tourism and leisure (Ibiza, Málaga, Marbella, Toledo, Alhambra, Córdoba), while the inside is described as thoroughly German in its technology ("Seat: ingeniería alemana a su alcance"), in such a way that an interesting hybrid creature is offered, the "Seat Ibiza System Porsche", featuring the best of both worlds, that is, German technology under the Spanish sun.

The fact that Seat also sells its vehicles in Spain itself under the same name brings us to the issue of how effective clichés are when they are used within the same country. We frequently come across first person plural cases, which talk about "us":

Gli italiani vanno matti per le donne e per le automobili veloci e questo è il motivo per cui le sposano.

Strangely enough, in many cases the persuasive strategy coincides with the clichés of each country, or at least with the traditional image which is seen from abroad; this might suggest that, although we refuse to accept what is said about us, the fact that these campaigns do work proves that we are ready to identify with our distorted picture and act accordingly. This can be seen in advertisements for the Fiat Tipo in different European countries, where the same product is sold via completely different appeals: in Italy the car is associated to daytrips with friends, in Germany to technology, and in Ireland to extremely low prices.

Nevertheless, it is not always positive messages that are given about other countries, and the changing fortunes of some nations in the international sphere must be carefully considered before launching a campaign. For example, an advertisement extolling the virtues of an item just because it was made in Switzerland made in 1992, might not be welcome in 1997, after the Swiss have been...
accused of being the keepers of Nazi gold. However, the best illustration is provided by the case of Europe; in Spain it is frequent to see advertising copy playing on Europe as a good thing, which is also present in Britain in the late eighties, as in Fiat calling themselves “Europe's driving force”, or other cases:

Of course, since the United Kingdom is an integral part of Europe, these terms are also available during your journey in this country. (Mercedes)

In a united Europe of the future, your greatest advantage over your competitors will be flexibility. (Mercedes-Benz Trucks and Vans)

And give the extra backing of our new Inter-Euro Service, a free 3 year breakdown and recovery service that works right across Europe.

One thing Europe seems to agree about. (VW Golf)

Nissan Primera. The performance car for a country called Europe.

Not least is the knowledge that at last you can drive a European quality car built precisely as the designer intended. (Rover 800)

However, sometimes negative images can be suggested in order to allay the fears of prospective buyers. In the case of Europe, which deserves perhaps discussion in itself, the pan-European image has come to mean something undesirable in Britain and elsewhere, as shown by the otherwise inexplicable change in trade name from “Eurodisney” to “Disneyland Paris”, and examples like this, from the 1991:

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have seen that what we buy are not products, but commodities, that is, objects whose referent is not only a car or a perfume, but a set of values and previous ideas; when a Honda car is advertised through a sentence like “You never thought you’d be deserting Bavaria for Honshu”, what is sold is no longer a product, but the possibility to travel to exotic places and change our lives. Thus, the fact that we purchase a product from a certain country may be influenced by artistic, ideological, cultural or any other reason, and this may lead to copywriters using the general image of a country to associate it with their products, either through direct reference or through the use of a foreign language.

It is frequently the case that we complain that advertising does not tell the truth, in that it resorts to established ideas, or cliches, and has little or no interest to prove whether they have a truth basis. However, this kind of criticism disregards both the purpose of advertising copy (to maximize purchases) and the way persuasion works; in the same way that the choice of newspaper is determined by ideological questions, advertising may not steer away from its audience’s ideas and preconceptions, lest buyers should not recognize themselves in the message. In this respect, the evidence shows that we are still far from the ideal picture of a supposedly united Europe, where it should be presumed that cliches in advertising have been eliminated.

\*A further example, which can be added to the case of Proton cars we quoted earlier, is the reference to Korea in a Daihatsu advertisement: “OK, but at the end of the day, these Korean jobs…” “Daihatsu? They’re Japanese. The same people who made the Fourtrak.”
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El Discurso Artístico en Oriente y Occidente: Semejanzas y Contrastes

VOLUMEN I

UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO
Servicio de Publicaciones
El Discurso Artístico en Oriente y Occidente: Semejanzas y Contrastes
El Discurso Artístico en Oriente y Occidente: Semejanzas y Contrastes es el resultado del IV Congreso Internacional que se celebró en la Universidad de Oviedo en marzo de 1997 en el que se profundizó en la idea del discurso artístico desde perspectivas tan plurales como son las dos grandes áreas culturales del mundo, Occidente y Oriente. Con respecto a los tres Congresos anteriores se aumentó la dimensión nacional y nos introdujimos de manera clara en el área internacional, algo que creemos ha repercutido en el número y nivel de las ponencias presentadas. En este camino nos seguiremos moviendo para Congresos posteriores.

El producto lo tiene la lectora o el lector en sus manos, resultado que profundiza en todas las Ciencias Humanas desde una perspectiva interdisciplinar, en principio, culturalmente distante, algo que va a ser útil para sentar los fundamentos básicos de lo que ya puede considerarse como una profundización en el estudio del discurso artístico, puesto que lo que deseamos es que, estos volúmenes, lleguen a ser necesarios en el caso de que se vaya a estudiar el discurso artístico en general y dentro de las semejanzas y oposiciones entre Oriente y Occidente en las grandes áreas de las Humanidades.

Todas las ponencias reunidas en estos dos volúmenes tratan de los puntos de encuentro y de distanciamiento entre diversas áreas de conocimiento que nos hablan de las posibles semejanzas y contrastes entre las diferentes disciplinas que se encuadran en el capítulo de las Ciencias Humanas y de las posibles concomitancias que puedan existir entre materias humanísticas con deseos de transculturalidad. En ninguno de los artículos aparece rigidez alguna en lo investigado y consecuentemente en lo expuesto sino que, por el contrario, cada idea parece abierta a ser completada con otra (s) en ese afán, que parece se va logrando, por desarrollar lo que se entendería realmente por...
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