Advertising to Bilingual Consumers: The Impact of Code-Switching on Persuasion

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Building on a sociolinguistic framework, our research explores the impact of code-switching on the persuasiveness of marketing messages. Code-switching refers to mixing languages within a sentence, a common practice among bilingual consumers. We investigate how responses to different types of code-switched messages can provide insight into bilingual consumers' persuasion processes. A pilot study reveals a code-switching direction effect such that minority-language slogans switching to the majority language result in greater persuasion than majority-language slogans switching to the minority language. The effect is attributed to the salience of the code-switched word in the slogan. Study 1 explores this code-switching direction effect in more detail and shows that when associations toward the minority language are positive, the code-switching direction effect is reversed.

Approximately 20% of consumers in the United States consider themselves bilingual (U.S. Census Bureau 2000) and approximately two-thirds of the world's children grow up in bilingual environments (Walraff 2000). Bilinguals' language selection in a particular situation is charged with social meaning and reflects how they perceive themselves and how they want to be perceived by others (Gee 1996; Miller 2000). Yet, consumer researchers have devoted little attention to issues of bilingual information processing and persuasion (Usunier 1996; although see Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone 1994; Luna, Peracchio, and de Juan 2003).

One marketing strategy thought to influence bilinguals is the use of code-switched messages. Code-switching refers to the insertion of a foreign word or expression into a sentence (e.g., into an advertising slogan), resulting in a mixed-language message. Code-switching is a linguistic practice employed by bilinguals around the world. Bilinguals use and encounter code-switching in a variety of everyday interactions and situations (Grosjean 1982), including advertising. For example, an ad targeting U.S. Latinos in *Hispanic* magazine used code-switching when it asked: "Twenty million hijas are covered by AFLAC. Is yours?" In Spanish, the word "hija" means "daughter."

This research utilizes a sociolinguistic framework based on the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton 1993a, 1993b). The Markedness Model was developed to account for the production of code-switched speech. We extend the model to the perception (not the production) of code-switched messages. The Markedness Model is applicable to code-switching between any two or more languages, given that it has been validated in a myriad of languages. Our empirical research focuses on English-Spanish code-switching among U.S. Hispanics because of the abundance of theoretical literature examining those two languages and its relevance in the United States (Benson 2001; Koslow et al. 1994).

Our research provides evidence that code-switched slogans activate language-specific associations that include attitudes toward and thoughts about a particular language. Thus, when a slogan code-switches, the code-switched language term becomes salient, or marked, and activates attitudes and associations related to the code-switched language. If those attitudes are negative, negative language-related slogan elaboration will ensue, resulting in lower product evaluations. A pilot study finds support for this claim, and study 1 shows that attitudes toward a language determine the impact of code-switching.

THE MARKEDNESS MODEL

Myers-Scotton's (1991, 1993b, 1999) Markedness Model attempts to explain the social motivations of code-switching by considering language choice as a way of communicating desired or perceived group memberships and interpersonal relationships. An individual's choice of language signals a specific social identity and/or belonging to a particular community. Individuals switch languages, or insert code-

TABLE 1

STUDY 1: SLOGANS

Keyword	Product type	Slogan
1. Kitchen	Coffeemaker	In my kitchen I would never make coffee with any other coffeemaker.
2. Bride	Camera	What a beautiful bride! Take her picture with the best camera . . . Ours.
3. Rate	Bank	To find the best rate in the market, come and talk to us about our bank accounts.
4. Size	Clothing store	We have your size! In our store you will find the best assortment of men's and women's clothing.

NOTE.—Example of the slogan versions: Majority-to-minority: In my cocina I would never make coffee with any other coffeemaker. Minority-to-majority: En mi kitchen nunca haría café con ninguna otra cafetera.

switched elements into their speech, when they want to communicate certain meanings or group memberships. A code-switched element becomes marked because of its contrast with the language context created by the rest of the utterance. A marked element is generally recognized as communicating a specific intended meaning.

The linguistic term of markedness is analogous to perceptual salience. An object or part of a message is salient when it stands out from its immediate context, from the perceiver's prior experience or expectations, or from other foci of attention (Fiske and Taylor 1984). Thus, if an individual is processing information in one language and the message switches one word to a different language, that code-switched word will be made salient, or marked in linguistic terms, because it stands out from its context.

Consider an advertising message that uses code-switching. When individuals direct their attention to the code-switched word, they will activate the language schema to which that word belongs and become aware of the social meaning carried by that language. They will elaborate on those associations, and the valence of those associations will influence product evaluations. In other words, the language schema associated with the code-switched term is subject to a high degree of elaboration because of the markedness of the term (Johnston et al. 1990).

CODE-SWITCHING AND LANGUAGE SCHEMAS

The term majority language (vs. minority language) denotes the language spoken by the group that holds the political, cultural, and economic power within a country. Majority languages tend to be associated with more positive features than minority languages (Grosjean 1982). A reason for this effect is that the negative attitudes of the majority group toward the group without power and prestige are adopted in part or in whole by this group and are often amplified to such extent that members of the minority group downgrade themselves even more than they are downgraded by the dominant group. Indeed, in some extreme cases, the minority group's attitudes toward their language are sometimes less favorable than the majority's attitudes. This phenomenon has been observed consistently in such diverse

countries as the United States, Canada, Peru, Singapore, Switzerland, and Israel (Grosjean 1982).

In the United States, when comparing English to Spanish, previous empirical research supports the conclusion that U.S. Hispanics tend to perceive English as the language of integration (Clachar 1997; Gumperz 1982) and greatest vitality (Barker et al. 2001). On the other hand, Spanish tends to be associated with a lower socioeconomic status and therefore can activate feelings of inferiority (Barker et al. 2001; Haarmann 1986; Koslow et al. 1994; Platt and Weber 1984). In other words, English can be considered the majority language and Spanish the minority language.

We suggest that majority-to-minority code-switching makes the minority language term of a slogan salient, or marked. In turn, this leads to the activation of the minority culture and language schemas, which include negative associations toward the minority language. Elaboration on those associations then results in lower product evaluations. Thus, there should be a persuasion superiority of slogans written mostly in the minority language and switching midstream to the majority language (minority-to-majority slogans) over slogans switching from the majority language to the minority language (majority-to-minority slogans), even when minority-to-majority slogans are written mostly in the minority language. We call this asymmetry in product evaluations "the code-switching direction effect."

> **H1:** Slogans switching from the majority language to the minority language (majority-to-minority slogans) will lead to lower product evaluations than slogans switching from the minority language to the majority language (minority-to-majority slogans).

We hypothesize that language schemas include evaluations of the language itself, or attitudes toward a language (AL), and that AL drives the code-switching direction effect. When attitudes toward the minority language are negative, as is generally the case, negative elaboration will ensue if the minority language is made salient by the code-switch in majority-to-minority slogans. This will result in lower product evaluations than if the majority language is made salient by minority-to-majority slogans. However, when attitudes toward the minority language are positive, even if the mi-

TABLE 2

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

	Pilot study	Study 1
Spanish proficiency[a]	4.17	4.34
English proficiency	4.39	4.30
Use of code-switching:[b]		
Reading	3.67	3.91
Speaking	4.53	3.99
Language use:[c]		
At home	3.06	3.40
At work	2.61	2.34
With friends	3.09	3.05
Watching TV	2.83	2.46
Computed average	2.90	2.83
Ethnic idenfication[d]	5.74	6.32
Mean age	32	30
Spanish learned first (%)	81	74
Spanish learned:[e]		
At school (%)	59	52
From friends and/or family (%)	91	86
In the community (%)	47	47
English learned:		
At school (%)	81	90
From friends and/or family (%)	75	64
In the community (%)	63	48
Percent with high school diploma or equivalent (%)	87	85
Percent of females (%)	56	74
Percent born in the United States (%)	78	38

[a]In all studies, paired t-tests revealed that respondents' Spanish and English proficiency scores were not significantly different (p's > .25).
[b]Use of code-switching was rated on a seven-point scale, where higher scores indicate higher use of code-switching.
[c]Language use was rated on a five-point scale, where 1 indicates only using English and 5 indicates only using Spanish.
[d]Ethnic identification with self-reported ethnic group(s) was rated on a seven-point scale, where higher scores indicate higher identification.
[e]When asked where they learned their languages, respondents could check more than one option.

nority schema is activated by majority-to-minority slogans, negative elaboration on the slogan language will not take place. In such a case, because attitudes toward the minority language are positive, there will be a reversal of the code-switching direction effect.

> **H2:** For individuals with positive attitudes toward the minority language, majority-to-minority slogans will lead to higher product evaluations than minority-to-majority slogans.

A pilot study compared minority-to-majority to majority-to-minority slogans, testing hypothesis 1. Table 1 includes the slogans used in the study. Respondents were exposed to a total of four slogans, all in the same code-switching direction. Slogan order was varied. Within each code-switched slogan, there was one word whose language was different from the rest of the slogan.

Following procedures used in bilingual research, the dependent measures were available in Spanish and English, and respondents were given the choice of completing them in either language. All materials (slogans and questionnaires) were originally written in English and translated using the method of back-translation (Hui and Triandis 1985).

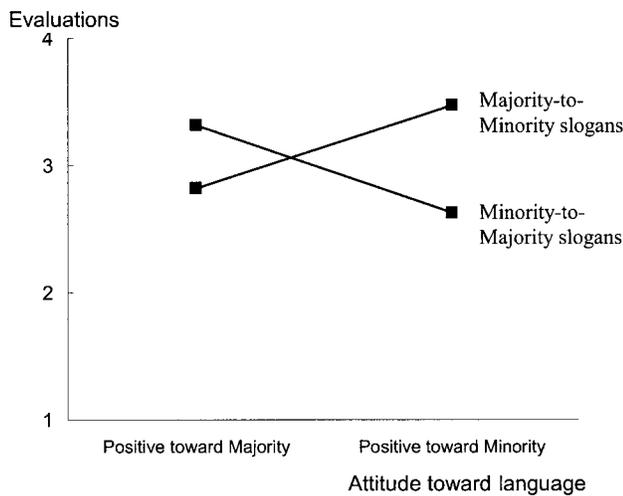After exposure to each of the slogans, respondents eval-

uated the featured product. Evaluations were obtained on six five-point scales labeled "poor quality/high quality," "not appealing at all/very appealing," "I would not buy it/I might buy it," "I would not recommend it to a friend/I would recommend it to a friend," "mediocre/exceptional," and "very bad/very good." Higher ratings were more favorable. The items were averaged to form an evaluation index ($\alpha = .96$). Respondents also completed a thoughts protocol.

Thirty-two fluent Spanish-English bilinguals of Hispanic origin participated in the study. All respondents were either foreign-born or first-generation Hispanic-Americans. Table 2 includes a summary of the demographic and language-related measures collected in this study.

Slogan and code-switching direction did not interact (F's < 1), so the dependent measures were averaged across the four slogans. Majority-to-minority slogans received less favorable ratings than minority-to-majority slogans ($M = 2.95$ vs. $M = 3.40$; $F = 6.90$, $p < .01$). This finding provides preliminary support for hypothesis 1. We analyzed a measure of the number of thoughts related to the minority culture (e.g., "this ad is for Latinos," "like in Puerto Rico," and so on) divided by the total number of thoughts written by respondents, and submitted to an arcsine transformation. This measure of minority culture-related thoughts showed

FIGURE 1

STUDY 1: EVALUATIONS

Evaluations

Majority-to-
Minority slogans

Minority-to-
Majority slogans

Positive toward Majority   Positive toward Minority

Attitude toward language

that respondents recorded a higher proportion of minority culture-related thoughts in the majority-to-minority version than in the minority-to-majority version ($M = .18$ vs. $M = .01$; $F = 4.81$, $p < .05$). This suggests that majority-to-minority slogans activate minority-culture associations (the minority schema).

Respondents' proportion of language-related thoughts to their total number of thoughts (submitted to an arcsine transformation) provides insight into the nature of associations in the minority language schema. The majority-to-minority condition elicited a significantly higher proportion of negative thoughts about the slogan's language than the minority-to-majority condition ($M = .23$ vs. $M = .00$; $F = 5.56$, $p < .05$). This finding suggests that Majority-to-Minority slogans encourage negative language-related thoughts, resulting in decreased persuasion. It also supports our theorizing that the minority language schema activated by the code-switch includes negative associations, which lead to negative elaboration. This effect suggest that negative associations to a language can lead to lower product evaluations when that language is made salient. Study 1 explores this idea in greater detail.

STUDY 1

Study 1 manipulates Attitudes toward a Language (AL) to examine whether the code-switching direction effect indeed results from negative associations included in the minority language schema (hypothesis 2). Our reasoning will be validated if the code-switching direction effect can be eliminated by a manipulation that encourages positive associations to the minority language.

Method

Design.   A between-subjects experiment was conducted in which two factors were manipulated: direction of code-switching (majority-to-minority or minority-to-majority) and AL (positive toward the majority language or positive toward the minority language). English was designated as the majority language and Spanish as the minority language. Attitudes toward a Language was manipulated by having respondents read mock newspaper articles before exposure to the experimental materials. In the positive toward the minority (majority) language condition, the mock articles presented the results of fictitious research showing that Spanish (English) was a language that Hispanics should know and speak. The respective headlines were "Spanish Language is Very Important" and "English Language is Very Important." After reading the articles, respondents completed three reading comprehension items to ensure that they understood the main message of the article. All respondents answered these items correctly.

The validity of the AL manipulation was assessed by asking respondents at the end of the experimental session to complete two seven-point scales assessing their perceived importance of the Spanish language. The responses to these scales were averaged and show that respondents in the positive toward the minority language condition perceived Spanish to be more important than respondents in the positive toward the majority language condition ($M_{\text{positive toward minority}} = 5.90$ vs. $M_{\text{positive toward majority}} = 5.15$, $F(1, 71) = 4.65$, $p < .05$). With the exception of this manipulation, all experimental procedures were identical to the pilot study.

Respondents.   A total of 70 fluent Spanish-English bilinguals participated in the study. Key demographics were similar to the pilot study's respondents (see table 2). All respondents were either foreign-born Hispanics or first-generation Hispanic Americans.

Results

The interaction of switching direction and AL was significant with respect to evaluations ($F = 14.08$, $p < .001$). A significant code-switching direction effect emerged in the positive toward the majority language condition ($F = 3.79$, $p < .05$). In the positive toward the minority language condition, there was a reversal of the code-switching direction effect. Majority-to-minority slogans resulted in higher evaluations than minority-to-majority slogans ($F = 11.47$, $p < .001$). These results support hypothesis 2 and our theorizing that the salience of the code-switched word leads to attention to its language, which prompts elaboration, the valence of which is determined by respondents' AL. The results do not support the alternative explanation that our manipulation of AL might have led respondents to attend to the language of the slogans prior to the code-switch. In such a case, respondents would have preferred slogans writ-

TABLE 3

STUDY 1: TREATMENT MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ALL MEASURES

	Positive toward majority		Positive toward minority	
	Majority to minority	Minority to majority	Majority to minority	Minority to majority
Product evaluations	2.82	3.32	3.47	2.63
	(.31)	(.66)	(.75)	(.84)
Proportion of minority culture-related thoughts	.15	.01	.10	.15
	(.22)	(.04)	(.15)	(.18)
Proportion of negative language thoughts	.25	.09	.08	.18
	(.23)	(.16)	(.12)	(.21)

NOTE.—Standard deviations are in parentheses.

ten mostly in the language favored by the manipulation. Figure 1 and table 3 represent these findings.

The minority culture-related thoughts measure resulted in a significant interaction of switching direction and AL ($F = 5.43$, $p < .05$). Majority-to-minority slogans led to a higher proportion of minority culture thoughts than minority-to-majority slogans in the positive toward the majority language condition ($F = 5.39$, $p < .05$). The positive toward the minority language condition led to an activation of minority culture-related thoughts for both majority-to-minority slogans and minority-to-majority slogans ($M = .10$ and $M = .15$), eliminating the code-switching direction effect in the positive toward the minority language condition ($F < 1$). That is, the minority culture schema was activated any time that either the AL manipulation or the slogan made the minority language salient/marked to respondents. Figure 2 depicts these results.

There was also a significant interaction for negative language thoughts ($F = 7.69$, $p < .01$), revealing a code-switching direction effect in the positive toward the majority

language condition such that majority-to-minority slogans resulted in more negative language thoughts than minority-to-majority slogans ($F = 5.41$, $p < .05$). In the positive toward the minority condition, there was no code-switching direction effect ($F = 2.41$, $p = .13$). Further, AL had an influence on majority-to-minority slogans such that negative elaboration on the slogan language decreased significantly in the positive toward the minority condition compared to the positive toward the majority condition ($F = 5.99$, $p < .05$; see fig. 2). Together, the thoughts measures suggest that, although majority-to-minority slogans activated the minority culture schema in both AL conditions, a positive attitude toward the minority language resulted in less negative elaboration on the language of majority-to-minority slogans, leading to more favorable product evaluations. In other words, activation of the minority-culture schema does not necessarily hurt evaluations, but a negative attitude toward the minority languages does, along with the ensuing negative elaboration.

The results of this study in the positive toward the ma-

FIGURE 2

STUDY 1: THOUGHTS MEASURES
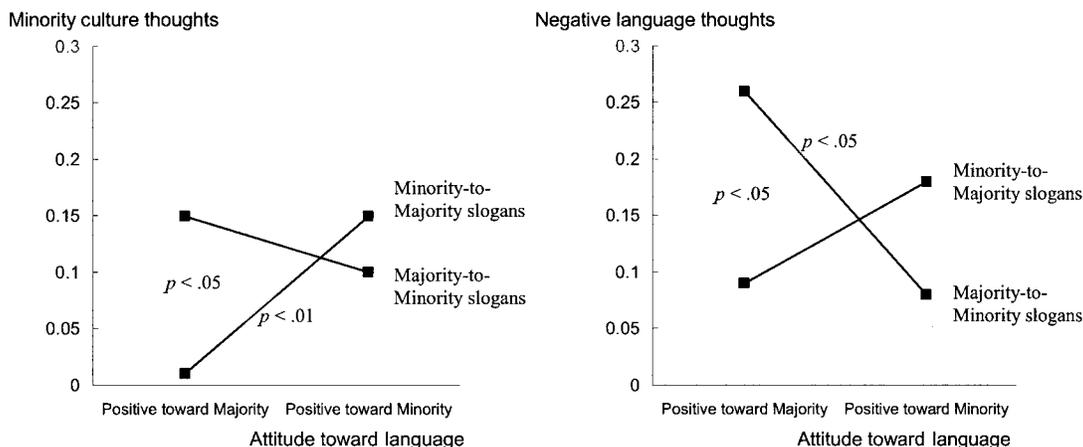
NOTE.—Only significant simple contrasts are indicated.

jority language condition replicate the pilot study. Finding similar results both under a manipulation of AL and without such a manipulation suggests that our respondents generally hold a more positive attitude toward the majority language than toward the minority language. The results of study 1 confirm that a negative attitude toward the minority language motivates the code-switching direction effect.

CONCLUSION

We offer a theory-based empirical examination of bilingual code-switching. This article contributes to both consumer and sociolinguistic research. It provides consumer researchers with an awareness of the communicative role of language choice, the notion of language schemas, and the phenomenon of code-switching and the social constraints on its use. From a sociolinguistic perspective, we extend the Markedness Model, which had previously examined how bilinguals produce code-switched utterances in naturalistic speech through post hoc discourse analysis. Our research extends the Markedness Model to the perception of written code-switched text in an experimental setting. A cognitive explanation is also offered in our application of the model: the code-switched language term inserted in a message provides perceptual salience or markedness, motivating bilinguals to direct attention to the switched expression and leading to elaboration on the code-switched language's schema, which includes attitudes toward that language.

This article offers preliminary evidence on the impact of code-switching in advertising. Little research exists on bilingual consumers. This is surprising given the demographic trends revealing the increasing importance of this population. Future research must examine language switching in more depth and test additional moderators of the effects found in our research.

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