



THE OVERUSE OF ENGLISH ON INDIAN CONSUMER PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT



This study hypothesizes that the present Indian consumer market is overusing English on consumer products' logo, caption, and directions for use. To test this hypothesis, this study set an objective of assessing the degree of using English on four major types (convenience, shopping, speciality, and unsought) of consumer products. In attaining the aforementioned objective, the study employed *direct observation* and *content analysis* as two primary data gathering tools. The subjects of the study were randomly-selected 55 consumer products. As for data analysis, the study used descriptive statistics. The study revealed several striking facts and findings. Here are the key findings of the study. (i) English proved to be the most widely used language not only for logo and brand-caption but also for instructions of using the products as 93% of products used English. (ii) Most of the popular spice brands like MDH, Everest, etc. go multilingual to advertise their products. (iii) Almost all the FMCG companies and the advertisers use English as well as *Romnagri* (Hindi written in Roman script) to meet the purpose of localization and more importantly globalization of the product.

Keywords: *Consumer Products, Consumerism, Indian Market, Convenience, Shopping, Speciality, Unsought*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although, India is a museum of 1721 languages as per the Census of India (2011), this study hypothesizes that the present Indian consumer market is overusing English on consumer products' logo, caption, and directions for use. Although, the need of using English language in Indian market is more intensified as globalization is the agenda of the time, the future of using regional Indian languages on consumer products is very bleak as Romnagri (Hindi written in Roman script) not only tends to supersede Devnagri but also puts socio-linguistic identity of the nation at stake. To test the aforementioned hypothesis, this study set the following objective.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Assessing the degree of using English on four major types (convenience, shopping, speciality, and unsought) of consumer products for logos, captions, and directions for use.

To attain the the objective set above, the study poses a pertinent research question below.

1.2 QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

What is the degree of using English on consumer products in terms of their logos, captions, and directions-for-use?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the novelty of the research topic, there is a great dearth of adequate literature to be reviewed as very few researchers have shed light on the topic under discussion. It is imperative to mention that neither the field of advertising nor the field of marketing has touched upon the current topic of assessing the degree of using English and other Indians languages on consumer products in India. However, this section inculcates a theoretical premise within which the aforementioned research questions could be addressed with appropriate rationales, hypotheses, and supportive ideas. Some of the literature selected for the review in pertinence to the current study are "Understanding India's culture is key for business" by Smith (2014), "The Conflict between a Strong Brand and Local Language" by Mayflower (2015), "Language as a Consumer Right in India", by Hegde (2016), "Advertising & Marketing in Rural India": Language, Culture, and Communication" by Bhatia (2007), "Global Marketing Guides: India | United Language Group", by Norvet (2016), "The Potential and Benefits

of Language Localization in India" by Recalde (2016), to mention a few.

The great linguistic diversity of India, popularly known as the museum of languages with 1721 languages (Census, 2011), has made it seemingly difficult for both: Indian and multinational companies to penetrate Indian market. However, the Constitution of India, in its Eighth Schedule, has identified 22 official languages written in 11 different scripts. Now, if we look at the use of these languages on consumer products, we find that packaging and labelling regulation in India permits English and/or Hindi mandatorily. To promote Hindi and regional languages on consumer products, the HRD ministry suggested that all goods and products sold in the country, irrespective of where they have been manufactured, may soon have labels and instructions in Hindi and another regional language (Chopra, 2016).

To see the impact of the suggestion made by the HRD ministry, this study made a direct observation of 100 products of four major genres, namely: convenience, speciality, shopping, and unsought) to know which language(s) do they use for the logo, brand, and instructions. It is imperative to give a brief account of all the four types of consumer products as follows.

Convenience product is a consumer product that customers purchase regularly and frequently. Convenience product includes mostly household items like hand soap, laundry detergents, food, magazines, sugar, toothpaste, and personal care products. Speciality product is a consumer product for which customers are more selective and as a result such a product has comparatively high price. Speciality products include items like high-end luxury automobiles, Rolls-Royce cars, photographic equipment, Rolex watches, expensive champagne, etc. In comparison with convenience product, shopping product is purchased less frequently partly because buyers are more concerned about their psychological benefits as it is more expensive. Such a product includes items like briefcases, clothing products, personal services, electronic products, and household furnishings. Unsought products are those products whose purchase is unplanned. Unsought products include items like life insurance, prepared funeral services, thesaurus, etc. (Claessens, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, a quantitative method was adopted as the first and second research questions required gathering quantitative data,

3.2 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study used direct observation and content analysis as two primary data gathering tools. The study used descriptive statistics to analyse quantitative data gathered in response to the research question. The descriptive statistics used only percentile scale to show the degree of using English language used on the consumer products.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings by presenting the statistical figure of using English on four major types of consumer products, namely: convenience, speciality, shopping, and unsought in terms of percentage; secondly, it also presents the degree of using English for three distinct variables namely logo, brand-caption, and instructions separately.

4.1 THE DEGREE OF USING ENGLISH ON CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Answering the research question, the researcher took front and back side photos of 55 consumer products in order to see what language(s) were used for three distinct variables: logo, brand-caption, and instructions for the products. Before we see the degree of language use for the stated three variables, it is desirable to see the degree of using different languages for four types of consumer products.

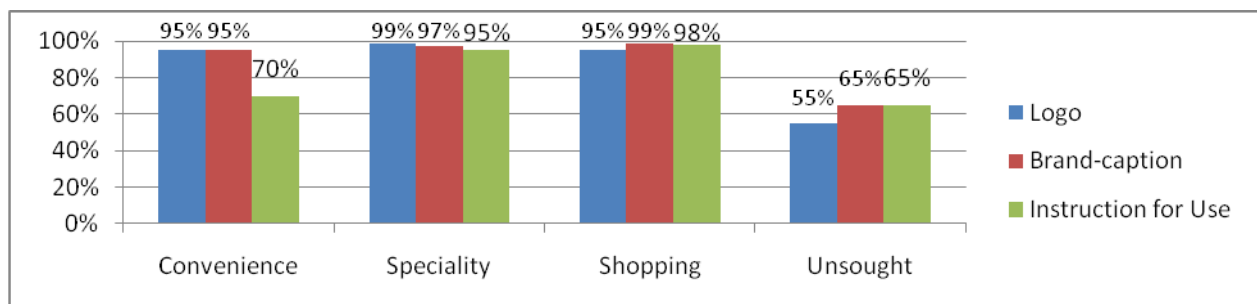


Figure 1: The Degree of Using English for Logo, Brand-caption, and Instructions

Analyzing the bar chart (Fig. 1), ten striking facts surfaced related to the degree of language use.

- English proved to be the most widely used language followed by Hindi not only for logo and brand-caption but also for instructions of using the products as average percentage of products that used English was 82%.
- Natural products of Baba Ram Dev, Shri Ravi Shankar, and other indigenous and Ayurvedic products necessarily use English and Hindi to show instructions-for-use of the products.
- Most of the popular spice brands like MDH, Everest, etc. go multilingual to advertise their products.
- Cosmetic products use necessarily English for logo and specifications.
- This research proved that the use of English language is more than Hindi and other regional languages for marketing and advertising of the products in India and other countries. This finding also proved that the number of non native speaker is more than native speaker because non native speaker knows English that's why they use English language for marketing and advertising.
- Almost all the FMCG companies and the advertisers use English as well as Romnagri to meet the purpose of localization and more importantly globalization of the product.



7. Manufacturing date and Expiry date are always in English.
 8. The degrees of English language used for logo in convenience, speciality, shopping, and unsought products are 95%, 99%, 95%, and 55% respectively; whereas, the degrees of English language used for brand-captions of the same products are 95%, 97%, 99%, and 65% respectively.
 9. The degrees of English language used for instructions-for-use are 70%, 95%, 98%, and 65% respectively which implies that English is again a dominant language when it comes to write instructions-for-use as average percentage of 82% products were found with instructions-for-use written in English.
 10. English (Roman Letter) prevails even to write any Hindi brand name. Such an approach of writing Hindi using English/Roman letter has been termed here Romnagri. The use of Romnagri poses a threat to the Devnagri Lipi.
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5. CONCLUSION

In its endeavor to answer the sole research question, the paper presents ten key findings on the degree of using English for the consumer products' logos, captions, and directions-for-use. It goes without saying that English continues to be the most dominating language in the consumer market of India. Given this scenario, if Indian consumers continue to be tempted to accepting English or Romnagri as marketing lingua franca of India, it would flagrantly contravene the Indian interest and adversely affect Indian culture and identity. Notwithstanding, the debate on the language use remains open from sociolinguistic perspective. To sum up, the time is ripe for the Indian consumers to move on with English by simultaneously preserving the linguistic sanctity of native languages not only for socio-economic growth but also socio-linguistic growth of the country.

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