

## English Shop Signs and Brand Names

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### Abstract

The present study tries to investigate the people's attitude to the use of English words in TV commercials, brand-naming and shop signs in Iran and specifically in Tehran where due to the fact that it is the capital, more English might be used for the sake of foreigners. The widespread use of English shop signs and English brand names for recently produced goods drove the researchers to investigate peoples' attitude as consumers from two aspects of age and education. To reach the research goal, a questionnaire was devised and distributed to 100 people at random selection probing their attitudes while considering two factors of age and education. The result of the research will mostly benefit sociolinguists and business marketers.

**Key words:** age, education, advertising, brand-naming, shop signs, globalization

### 1. Introduction

A large body of research has been conducted on the impact and use of English in advertising, brand-naming, media, and TV commercials of many countries round the world aiming at explaining the reasons and consequences of this phenomenon. It goes without saying that English is taught and spoken as either the foreign or second language, all around the world, and it ties to "rich literary heritage, high degree of language modernization, considerable international standing, or the prestige of its speakers" (Kloss 1966, pp.143-144). According to the statistics presented by Crystal (2003, p.6) "a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English and this figure is steadily growing", however, Crystal (2003) continues that globalization of a language is not much connected to the number of people who speak it but to the economic, cultural and technological power of that language.

In Iran, foreign language use is restricted in the mass media especially on television, which holds the highest number of the media users. Encouraging people to use Farsi equivalents of English words in their everyday language and speech, Persian Academy of Language and Literature, as one of its main duties, has the responsibility of finding appropriate substitutes for English words and announcing them to the society after which those Persian equivalents would be utilized instead of those English words in the mass media. This policy has been successful in familiarizing people with the newly coined equivalents to some extent and Iranians even use some of them in their daily communication although that is not the case about some of the equivalents which have not appealed to people or people consider them strange and not easy to utilize. Nevertheless, despite all these efforts on behalf of the government and the Persian Academy of Language and Literature to find and encourage Persian equivalents, people widely use English words in brand names and shop signs in Iran.

This study investigates Iranians' attitudes towards English use, whether in words or

alphabets, in brand naming and shop signs from two aspects of age and education, which, per se, were classified into four categories. Considering the variable of age, the attitudes were probed from the viewpoints of adolescents, the young, the middle-aged, and the elderly. Similarly, the variable of education was divided into four ranges of under diploma, diploma, bachelor, and master. A questionnaire was prepared and distributed to 25 people in each category. Therefore, 100 persons participated in the experiment. Chi-square was employed to analyze the collected data. The findings reveal no significant relationship between age, education, and attitude. However, meticulous analyses of the results unfold noteworthy information in this regard.

## **2. Review of the literature**

Fairclough (2001) believes on the interconnection of common sense, power, and naturalization. He claims that when members of a society have a general understanding of an ideology and no one puts it under question, the ideology becomes common sense, which is in connection to power relations and builds a subculture. It, further, passes the process of naturalization (Fairclough, 2001: pp71-74).

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the issue of English use in advertising and the related causes and consequences in many countries. Martin (2002), for instance, conducted a research in France where the use of English imagery and language is quite pervasive, along with French subtitles, in TV commercials. She mentions globalization, competitiveness or superior technology and certain life style as the motives. She also asserts that French advertising specialists use English lyric songs as “mood enhancing strategy” (p.17).

A study is conducted in South Korea as well by Shinhee Lee, who examines English mixing in TV commercials and focuses on identity construction and globalization. Lee argues that when globalization is advertised in locals a phenomenon called “glocalization” takes place where there is a mixing of, for example, English and Korean language, the same thing that happens in Indian English language (Lee 2006: p.65).

Griffin (2004) studies the written English, “as an invader” (p.3) in the streets of Rome.

In a similar study in Milan, Ross (1997) found that in some blocks half of the signs were in English concluding that it was not because of English as an International language but because of the fact that it seems “attractive and fashionable”.

Griffin (2004) asserts that the strikingly wide use of varied range of English words on window shops, doors, or shop signs is obvious in the streets of Rome and that it signifies that English is mostly used for commercial purposes and for either informing the non-Italians or giving a universal image of what is advertised.

Additionally, in another research conducted in Bulgaria, Griffin (2001) maintains that the effect that English leaves should not be examined by the number of people who study it but by the way its impact is perceived by people or the way it penetrates the everyday speech. Griffin (2001) alludes to two examples of German and French authorities who try to “keep English at bay” (p.55).

In Slovenia, Mezek (2009) points out that people are concerned about the influence of foreign language on the local language, particularly in the field of economy. In her study, she finds that 58% of advertisements utilize English while only 23% of street advertisements are only in Slovene. She, later, suggests that since this tendency is inevitably growing the possible solutions to protect the national language seem to be restricting laws regarding the use of foreign languages and enhancing people’s sense of national identity.

Masavisut et al (1986), in a study about English use in advertisements of Thailand,

attributes the use of English to economy saying that:

People of less affluent nations tend to perceive products of more developed and more affluent nations as superior. Having realized the consumer's attitudes towards the products with foreign brand names, Thai manufacturers tend to use English words in their strategic marketing, whether in newspapers, television, radio, billboards, signs, and posters. The English brand name gives these products credibility and implies superior standards of production (cited in Friedrich, 2002, p.21).

However, Bhatia (1992) maintains that the phenomenon of code-mixing is not only specific to developing countries, which are experiencing modernization, but also is prevalent in developed countries such as Japan, Germany and France.

Ustinova and Bhatia (2005) hold the opinion that the frequent use of English in advertising can be owing to the fact that linguistic creativity and innovation originates from English, which plays a crucial role in figurative language utilized by advertisement writers (cited in Bulawka, 2006).

Gao (2005), conducting research on bilingual advertising in China, asserts that English is employed as a means of persuasion since it is able to affect people positively creating an appealing attitude towards the product. Moreover, just like Shinhee Lee, Gao (2005) believes that English code-mixing in advertisements conveys the construction of a modern identity for people.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

One hundred people participated in the experiment answering the devised questionnaire. Twenty-five were considered for each range of age and education. The selection of participants was random, i.e. the researchers went to different shops, schools, universities and tried to include people of different regions in Tehran.

#### **3.2. Instrument**

To reach the goal of the study, the researchers devised a 20-item questionnaire on Likert scale with two options for the answer, either "Agree" or "Disagree". Twenty items were selected in that through piloting the researchers found that the length of the questions played an important role in encouraging the respondents to participate in the experiment which could be partly due to being less-time-consuming and more feasible for those environments where time mattered such as schools and universities. In addition, middle-aged and old participants did not welcome answering longer list of questions and were less patient than teenage and young respondents were.

The choice of two options in the Likert scale was in part due to the previous reason, i.e. including three more options such as "quite disagree, neutral and quite agree" for each item made the questionnaire look bulky and lengthy which led many people to refuse to participate. Second, again via piloting, the researchers realized that including more options resulted in so vague findings that the researchers could not speculate the overall viewpoint of the respondents regarding the issue. However, the final version with two options for the Likert scale yielded more interpretable results.

Since people's attitude is examined from two aspects of age and education, prior to the

items, respondents were asked to choose their age range and degree of education. Four ranges were considered for age: 13-19, 20-39, 40-59, 60-above attributing to adolescents, the young, the middle-aged, and the elderly respectively. Similarly, four ranges were selected for education degrees i.e. under diploma, Diploma, Bachelor, and Master. To preserve participants' privacy, they were not required to include their names, address, or telephone number.

People's attitude is examined from two points of view, that is to say, they were asked, through different types of wordings, whether they approved of English, or Persian names for products and shop signs. Ten items of the questionnaire are allocated to this aspect. The other items center on whether the respondents prefer the Persian brand names and shop signs to be written in English or Persian letters. The items were jumbled after construction. Since the questionnaire addresses people with varied educational backgrounds, at different ages, it was written in the respondents' mother language, i.e. Persian.

### 3.3. Data analysis

To analyze the results of the survey, Chi-square was conducted using SPSS to explore any significant differences between age and attitude. The relationship between education and attitude was also investigated separately.

### 3.4. Results and Discussion

Chi-square was run to probe the relationship between participants' age and their attitude towards the choice of English or Persian brand-naming and of English or Persian alphabets to write Persian words on products or shop signs.

"Minimum expected cell frequency", which means that the cells should have at least five frequencies, is one of the assumptions of Chi-square. As displayed in Table 1, this assumption is observed and all cells have more than five frequencies.

The Pearson Chi-square has the value of 13.31 (Table. 1), with an associated significance level of 0.14 at 9 degrees of freedom. Since the value of 0.14 is larger than the 0.05 level of significance, it can be concluded that our result is not significant, i.e. there is not a significant relationship between age and people's attitude.

*Table 1. Chi-Square Tests for age factor*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.314 <sup>a</sup>	9	.149
Likelihood Ratio	13.722	9	.133
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.249	1	.134
N of Valid Cases	200		

Based on Table 2, English brand-naming is most popular among teenagers with 32.3 % of total and as we move to upper ranges of age, the popularity gradually reduces, with the elderly least approving of it. There is exactly an opposite tendency for the choice of Persian words for brand-naming. That is, Persian words have the least popularity among the teenagers (13.2%) and its steadily increasing rate continues among the young (23.7%), the middle-aged (28.9%) and the elderly (34.2%) who mostly approve of it.

*Table 2. Group Age Cross tabulation*

		Age				Total
		13-19	20-39	40-59	60-above	
English words	Count	20	16	14	12	62
	Expected Count	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	62.0
	% within Group	32.3%	25.8%	22.6%	19.4%	100.0%
	% within Education	40.0%	32.0%	28.0%	24.0%	31.0%
	% of Total	10.0%	8.0%	7.0%	6.0%	31.0%
Persian words	Count	5	9	11	13	38
	Expected Count	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.5	38.0
	% within Group	13.2%	23.7%	28.9%	34.2%	100.0%
	% within Education	10.0%	18.0%	22.0%	26.0%	19.0%
	% of Total	2.5%	4.5%	5.5%	6.5%	19.0%
English letters	Count	17	13	10	8	48
	Expected Count	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0	48.0
	% within Group	35.4%	27.1%	20.8%	16.7%	100.0%
	% within Education	34.0%	26.0%	20.0%	16.0%	24.0%
	% of Total	8.5%	6.5%	5.0%	4.0%	24.0%
Persian letters	Count	8	12	15	17	52
	Expected Count	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.0	52.0
	% within Group	15.4%	23.1%	28.8%	32.7%	100.0%
	% within Education	16.0%	24.0%	30.0%	34.0%	26.0%
	% of Total	4.0%	6.0%	7.5%	8.5%	26.0%

Another point to consider is the comparison between the choice of English words and Persian words in the same age range. There is a considerable difference between these two percentages for the adolescents, i.e. English brand-naming has the popularity of 40%, with 10% of teenagers liking Persian brand-naming. Among the young, the superiority is still with English brand-naming (32% over 18%) but the percentage difference is lower than the teenagers'. The same tendency is observed among the middle-aged with much lower difference, that is, 28% prefer English brand-naming and 22% prefer Persian brand-naming. Interestingly, so far with steadily decreasing percentage difference, the superiority has been with English brand-naming, however, the tendency changes for the elderly who prefer Persian to English brand-naming, 26% in support of Persian and 24% favor English one.

Regarding the choice of English or Persian alphabets for Persian words, again there is a descending tendency for English alphabets with the teenagers favoring it most (35.4 %) and the elderly the least (16.7%). Similarly, an ascending trend exists for the Persian alphabets with

teenagers liking it least (15.4 %) and the elderly approving of it most (32.7%).

34% of the teenagers support the choice of English letters for Persian words with 16% preferring Persian letters. For the young also the choice of English letters is superior although the percentage difference is remarkably lower compared with the teenagers (26% over 24%). Nonetheless, the middle-aged and the elderly have different attitudes in this regard. 30% of the middle-aged prefer the Persian letters while 20% support English letters and the percentage difference is even more for the elderly, 34% of whom favor Persian letter and only 16% liked the English alphabets for writing Persian words.

*Table 3. Chi-Square Tests for education*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.928 <sup>a</sup>	9	.281
Likelihood Ratio	11.123	9	.267
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.217	1	.270
N of Valid Cases	200		

Again in this test, “minimum expected cell frequency”, which means that the cells should have at least five frequencies, is one of the assumptions of Chi-square. As displayed in Table 3, this assumption is observed and all cells have more than five frequencies.

The Pearson Chi-square has the value of 10.92 (Table. 3), with an associated significance level of 0.28 at nine degrees of freedom. Since the value of 0.28 is larger than the 0.05 level of significance, it can be concluded that our result is not significant, i.e. there is not a significant relationship between education and people’s attitude.

*Table 4. Group \* Education Cross tabulation*

		Education				Total
		under diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	
English words	Count	18	15	18	13	64
	Expected Count	16.0	16.0	16.0	16.0	64.0
	% within Group	28.1%	23.4%	28.1%	20.3%	100.0%
	% within Education	36.0%	30.0%	36.0%	26.0%	32.0%
	% of Total	9.0%	7.5%	9.0%	6.5%	32.0%
Persian words	Count	7	10	7	12	36
	Expected Count	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	36.0
	% within Group	19.4%	27.8%	19.4%	33.3%	100.0%
	% within Education	14.0%	20.0%	14.0%	24.0%	18.0%
	% of Total	3.5%	5.0%	3.5%	6.0%	18.0%
English letters	Count	16	15	13	7	51
	Expected Count	12.8	12.8	12.8	12.8	51.0

	% within Group	31.4%	29.4%	25.5%	13.7%	100.0%
	% within Education	32.0%	30.0%	26.0%	14.0%	25.5%
	% of Total	8.0%	7.5%	6.5%	3.5%	25.5%
Persian letters	Count	9	10	12	18	49
	Expected Count	12.2	12.2	12.2	12.2	49.0
	% within Group	18.4%	20.4%	24.5%	36.7%	100.0%
	% within Education	18.0%	20.0%	24.0%	36.0%	24.5%
	% of Total	4.5%	5.0%	6.0%	9.0%	24.5%

Based on Table 4, English brand-naming is most popular among participants who are under diploma and who have bachelor degrees with the same percentage of 28.1%. It is less popular with those who have diplomas (23.4 %) and even less popularity exists among master holders (20.3%). The opposite trend exists for Persian brand-naming i.e. under diplomas and bachelors have the same percentage of 19.4% which is the lowest, the next upper percentage belongs to diplomas (27.8%), and finally Persian alphabet is most popular among the master holders (33.3%).

Comparing the percentages in the same range of education, the under diploma and bachelor holders both prefer English words to Persian ones with the same percentage (36% over 14%) and with a profound difference. For those who hold diplomas, the superiority is still with English brand-naming (30% over 20%) although both the percentage of people and the difference with percentage of Persian brand-naming has reduced in comparison with the two previously mentioned groups. 26% of master holders have supported English words while 24% of them, has favored Persian brand-naming. The difference has considerably reduced.

The popularity of using English alphabet for Persian words has a descending tendency as education is concerned, i.e. it appeals most to under diploma (31.4%), then the diploma (29.4%), next the bachelor (25.5%) and least to the master holders (13.7%). Regarding Persian alphabet, under diplomas, diplomas, bachelors and masters have respectively the percentage of 18.4%, 20.4%, 24.5%, and 36.7%; therefore, an ascending rate exists in support of Persian alphabet for Persian words. That is to say, as the level of education increases, people prefer Persian words to be written in Persian alphabet rather than English ones.

To consider the results in each range of education, there is a noticeable difference between the choice of English letters and Persian letters among under diplomas, which is obviously in support of English alphabet. However, this difference reduces as the level of education increases although among diploma and bachelor holders the popularity is still with English letters. For diploma holders the difference reduces to 10% and for bachelor holders to only 2%. A distinct difference lies between the choice of Persian letters and English ones, in support of Persian alphabet (36% over 14%) for master holders.

The overall findings mark the strong appeal of English use in brand-naming and shop signs for adolescents and the young and that the attraction wanes gradually less among the middle-aged and considerably among the elderly. Considering the observed pattern in age, the stronger national identity and patriotism could be the causes for the way the elderly have replied. This is in line with Shinhee Lee's argument who asserts that "age turns out to be a critical variable" (2006, p.62). On the other hand, in the questionnaire of this study, those participants

who have favored English words and alphabet have mostly associated them with prestige, attraction, elegance, modernity, being eye-catching and selling more, which to some extent supports the Friedrich's opinion on the reasons of English use in advertising and brand-naming:

- Symbolizing modernity
- Being accessible enough to be intelligible
- Having linguistic properties (such as size of words) which make it attractive
- Having a connotation of Westernization
- Providing extra linguistic material, to quench the creative thirst of advertisers and business people all over the world (2002, p.22).

Regarding the variable of education, as the level of education rises the enthusiasm for the use of English fades. The analytic mind and point of view of well-educated respondents who consider the deeper layers of a phenomenon could be one of the possible causes.

### 5. Conclusion

Based on this study and other enormous numbers of studies conducted on this issue, the widespread utilization of English in the media of advertising, brand naming, and shop signs of non-English speaking countries seems to be a growingly inevitable tendency. Strengthening people's common sense of national identity, implicitly apprising them of consequences of such phenomenon, raising the knowledge and command of their mother language by introducing and using pure national words, which could be used as brand names, could preserve the variety of languages and their idiosyncratic characteristics round the world. This must be considered as a main duty of the language academies around the world and especially in Iran, whose rich literature and lexicon is even unknown to many Iranians.

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