English in advertising and brand naming: sociolinguistic considerations and the case of Brazil

PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

A study of commercial names that extends *ET*'s on-going discussion of 'shop-sign English' and similar phenomena from Europe and Asia into Latin America

A LARGE body of literature describes the use of English loanwords all over the world. When it comes to developing nations, one of the most common explanations for such a phenomenon is the superiority attributed to what is foreign, especially when business and advertising are involved. This view is found, for example, in Masavisut *et al.* (1986), a study of English and advertising in Thailand:

> 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 or posters. The English brand name gives these products credibility and implies superior standards of production. (204)

However, this reason alone does not explain the use of English throughout Kachru's Expanding Circle, since many of the countries within it are not "less affluent nations". In addition, it does not explain why, although products of countries such as Germany and Japan are largely recognized for their reliability and credibility, one is unlikely to encounter many products named with Japanese or German loanwords.

This article discusses the phenomenon of English loanwords and advertising using the case of Brazil as a scenario. It exemplifies the many motivations that lead to the incorporation of English into the world of business and advertising, and argues for a comprehensive view of this phenomenon, balancing external and internal forces contributing to the use of English.

The relevant literature

There have been many contributions to the discussion of English and advertising in different parts of the world and the motivations for such use. A somewhat intuitive notion that borrowings are a developing-country phenomenon, in an attempt to approximate the culture and language of some developed nations, has permeated the discussion. However, Bhatia (1992) argues against a developed/developing-country dichotomy:

> The pattern of mixing, even multiple mixing, is not a phenomenon restricted to the languages of the developing nations which are undergoing a process of modernization. European languages such as French, Italian and Spanish also reflect the same pattern to some extent.

PATRICIA FRIEDRICH holds a Ph.D from Purdue University. She specializes in sociolinguistics and ESL/EFL. Her main research interests include English in South America, language attitudes, the politics of English, varieties of English, language contact, and the history of English. She is currently a Professor of English at Universidad del Salvador in Argentina where she is conducting fieldwork in World Englishes.

21

Not only this, but what is more interesting is the fact that some languages, such as Japanese and Chinese, which are not very receptive to foreignism, have yielded to influence from English that goes beyond the phenomenon of linguistic borrowing. (195)

When it comes to countries like Japan, Stanlaw (1987) believes that a desire for Westernization becomes part of the reason for English to be used. Berns (1989), who discusses the use of English in the press in Germany, adds to the list of possible motivations a preference for shorter words and a search for precision in the naming of new objects, and Bhatia (1992) provides yet another piece of the puzzle:

Language mixing in advertising must satisfy the innovative needs of advertisement writers to create the desired effects of naturalness and persuasion in their language since there is too much at stake with respect to economic and linguistic (i.e. mutual intelligibility) losses. (196)

Therefore, if one chooses to use a very obscure language that the population of the receiving culture has no access to or no observed attitudes towards, the desired effect will obviously not be achieved. Being a language of wider communication in most parts of the world today, English becomes a viable choice in many environments. Putting it all together, English seems to be in a unique position at present where it is capable of:

● 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 businesspeople all over the world.

Stanlaw (1987:99) shares this view that emphasizes the creative function of English when he says: "It should be mentioned that one important reason for the use of English loanwords is that they provide linguistic tools that individuals can use in personal and highly creative ways." Takashi (1997:12) adds that "it seems inadequate to attribute the high number of English elements which do not fill lexical gaps to the loanword's modern connotation alone." She goes on to argue that it is the ability to catch the audience's attention by using language in an innovative manner that moti-

vates the use of loanwords, particularly in advertising and brand-naming.

These motivations do not seem to be self-exclusive and all of them can apply to English in a lesser or greater degree, depending on the context. However, the one that is the most inclusive of all Expanding Circle countries is the use of English to fulfill the creative needs of advertising. Additionally, I support the view (expressed in Berns, 1990, for example) that, since the majority of Expanding Circle countries do not have a significant body of literature written in English to represent the innovative function of English, it is advertising and brand-naming which end up partially fulfilling this role.

The creative use of English in these areas also demonstrates that, even though in Expanding Circle countries it is generally accepted that the language of the Inner Circle serves as a model, when it comes to people using language they will do so creatively, one way or another (the protests and prohibitions of language purists and protectionist legislators notwithstanding).

The Englishization of business names in Brazil: motivations

The percentage of English-inspired words used for the naming of businesses in Brazil might not be that high. In her study conducted in five Brazilian state capitals, Thonus (1991) found the highest rate of all the yellow-page entries researched to be that of Rio de Janeiro, at a still low 9.75%. However, the study of the kind and shape of such borrowings can yield interesting findings, which I was able to support with my own observations.

Two major groups of borrowings can be identified, as proposed by Thonus and confirmed by my own research. The first group demonstrates a more sophisticated use of English which relies on conscious choices and puns on words, such as naming a pet shop *Hotdog*. This kind of strategy can only be perceived by a portion of the population, given that Brazilians are still to a great extent Portuguese monolinguals. The second group consists of names (many of which result from clipping) that sound like, or are indeed English, but do not intuitively fit the business or brand they represent. This category produces the most bizarre examples, such as a fashion store called "Stroke" (apparently unrelated to fashion) and

Figure 1 'Master Limp' is a cleaning-service contractor, from *limpar* 'to clean'.

a cleaning business called "Master Limp" (a clipping from Portuguese *limpar*, "to clean", which unfortunately produces a completely different effect in English). A similar example is the current and ubiquitous "disk" (an English sounding clipping of *discar*, "to dial") as in "disk-pizza", "disk-taxi" or "disk-farmacia" (meaning services that can be purchased or ordered by telephone).

Thonus rightly states that English naming is mainly a resource to attract the Brazilian "every-person", rather than the international community. The average Brazilian is attracted to and has fallen into the habit of accepting and even hoping for English brand names. Thus, habit can be seen as a fourth motivation for English business-naming in Brazil. Not only have Brazilians come to expect the use of English in advertising, but they have also come to identify English use in that area as part of the shared experience between the Western world and developing countries (see Said, 1993 for an extensive discussion on this aspect). As such, the use of English in advertising becomes part of the local culture and is not even perceived as an extraordinary event by the ordinary layperson.

A particular lexical item which Brazilians have come to expect to find among English borrowings is "center" (rather than Portuguese *centro*, which has been almost uniformly replaced in business names, but not in everyday use). While its incorporation cannot be explained by a gap in the language, a preference for shorter words, and not even any quality associated with its "cuter" sound, an initial association with prestige, followed by its incorporation as part of the local "lingo", seems to account for its frequency in business and brand-naming. That is to say, in some cases, the association of English and prestige can be

what first introduces the lexical item in the language, but what keeps it there is its fast incorporation to the local lexicon, so to speak.

Brazilian Portuguese versus other Romance languages

Part of the literature on borrowings has relied on a hypothesis of lexical gap (Sridhar & Sridhar, 1980, and Bhatia & Ritchie, 1989, for example) to explain why borrowings occur. Evidence against the lexical-gap hypothesis can be obtained through some contrastive examples of other Romance languages. While most of Spanish Latin America has found an alternative to "computer mouse" (*raton*) and shopping mall/center (*centro comercial*, which is also viable in Portuguese) and while computer users in Portugal are *em linha* ("on line"), in Brazil these objects and places are referred to with the respective English terms. Although they theoretically have a Portuguese equivalent, these terms are true borrowings in the sense that they have been totally assimilated phonologically and morphologically and are well known among Portuguese monolinguals. Their respective pronunciations are /mausi/ and /ʃopi/ and their plural forms *mouses* and *shoppings*. Likewise, "light", "diet" and "delivery" could easily be replaced by *leve*, *dietético* and *entrega*, but they are not. The former have supplanted the latter in brand-naming and advertising. As explained by Bhatia (1992), lexical items such as "light" and "diet" have, in Romance languages, changed positions with the noun they qualify. In phrases such as *Coca-Cola light* or *Guaraná diet*, their position conforms to the placement rules of the receiving language. Though *Coca-Cola leve* and *Guarana dietético* would be viable substitutes for the use of loanwords, they are simply not used. All

these arguments go to disprove that a borrowing is motivated simply by a lack of an adequate term in the local language.

Kachru (1994) also disagrees with the premise of loanwords simply filling in lexical gaps. He explains that "English continues to contribute lexical stocks to various languages for other reasons, too, and thereby hangs the tale of attachment to the language" (p. 141). As other reasons besides lexical gaps that may motivate borrowing, he names an apparent "neutrality" of English (especially when it comes to multilingual contexts) and a perception that English is an effective code of communication (even if there are no intrinsic linguistic characteristics that justify such a perception).

There is still another category of English words in business names, advertising and the media that when investigated turn out to be locally generated to fill in the gaps in the local language. Takashi (1997) refers to these terms as *pseudo-loanwords*. Such is the case of *outdoor*, which in Brazil means "billboard". The anthological case of *forró* (from 'for all'), the name of a kind of dance in the Northeast (long incorporated as a real Brazilian Portuguese word) also belongs to this category of locally-generated terms. In these cases, the question that lingers is: If there was a linguistic gap in the language and terms had to be locally invented, why were they not made up in Portuguese? While I will not attempt to provide a definite answer to this question, attitudinal factors seem to be the logical direction such naming points to.

English in the city and in the countryside

Naming in English, though more salient in urban areas, is not exclusively a big-city phenomenon. The photographs which illustrate this section were taken in a much smaller city (population 70,000) in the state of Paraná and show that the English business-name phenomenon has arrived there too.

If any difference can be attributed to the phenomenon of English business naming in major cities and in smaller towns it would have to be the level of complexity of the names. One can speculate, for example – and my observation supports it – that puns and other sophisticated usages are probably more common in big cities while simpler kinds of naming are common in more remote places (such as naming a business "Hollywood" or "Dallas", though the name

Figure 2 The modest shops in this lower-class neighborhood in the countryside.

might have no direct or indirect connection to the kind of business so named). Nonetheless, the choice of English in many campaigns and in certain brand names can be explained by some universal factors described in several cross-linguistic studies.

Kachru (1994) takes the idea of local creativity a step further. According to him, the use of English in the media and in brand-naming yields the enlargement of the stylistic range available for the users of the receiving language, in this case marketers and advertisers, making the language very appealing. Instead of one language, with an already tired set of combinations, one ends up having two codes available, which makes for an entirely new set of possible combinations. The fact that English and not another language is the choice that fulfills such creative needs makes one realize the unique position English holds at the present time.

Advertising

The historical connection between English and advertising is undeniable. As Crystal (1992:86) notes:

Figure 3
A common phenomenon in the countryside: names that do not always relate to the business being named.

Figure 4
A humble sandwich stand and its English name: "Donald Lanches".

Figure 5
Another Brazilian favorite: "self-service" for restaurants and fast-food places with an all-you-can-eat policy.

English in advertising began very early on, when the weekly newspapers began to carry items about books, medicines, tea, and other domestic products. An advertising supplement appeared in the *London Gazette* in 1666, and within a century advertisements had grown in number and in style.

The origins of the Brazilian print media are also very much connected with the English language. Freyre (1948) points out that the first Brazilian newspaper, *Correio Braziliense*, was created in London in 1808. He also points out (in translation) that "the newspaper ads indicate a considerable British influence over the beginnings of typography among us" (p.60)[1]. In addition, it was not uncommon to find ads written in English in 19th- century Brazilian newspapers. Freyre mentions ads for doctors, English teachers, auctions, and goods as being among the most common.

This tradition that links advertising and English continued into the twentieth century. Crystal observes that in the 1950s, for example, the amount of money spent in advertising in the US was far greater than in any other country. Knowing that there is such a close history between the development of advertising and the use of the English language as the medium

of communication with customers makes the current phenomena of English use in advertising throughout the world (be it through English text or loanwords) somewhat more intricate than a deterministic theory such as linguistic imperialism can account for. Align that to the fact that a large majority of advertisement agencies are subsidiaries of American and British agencies, and the perfect environment for the use of English is set.

According to Black (1977:105), US advertising agencies got a hold on the Brazilian market early in the century. In 1930, Walter Thompson was the first, and by 1966 eight US agencies were responsible for 50% of all advertising in Brazil. She further informs us that, by the late 1960s, 99% of Brazil's advertising was sponsored by foreign capital.

Apart from the political consequences, such foreign and mainly American dominance makes the use of English in advertising all the more explicable. However, regardless of what may go on behind the scenes, the use of English in advertising tends to be restricted to single words or short phrases, however widespread.

As suggested by Bhatia (1992, as quoted above), since there is so much at stake in advertising, no one is willing to risk intelligibility. Because the Brazilian population as a whole is not that competent in English, the use of English has to be restricted to causing a positive effect without compromising the understanding of the message.

As with brand-naming, which is discussed by Thonus, the use of English in advertising is more for sight than sound. Therefore its use in the print media is not only more predominant, but also more easily traceable. On television, such use is more restricted, in most but not all instances to the brand names themselves or to background music. In addition, most programs on basic cable channels are dubbed in Portuguese, limiting exposure. Extended cable channels often offer both an English (or other language version) and a Portuguese version showing at the same time on a different channel, and new TV sets come with a command for watching in the original language.

A closer informal look at the ads in fashion magazines in Brazil illustrates the use of

A sample of borrowings found in business naming in Brazilian magazines		
Sample phrase	Gloss	Comments
Acne-aid wash		A face-wash product
Serum concentrado de hidratação intensiva *anti-age*	Anti-age concentrated serum for facial hydration	Skin lotion
Body glisten nightlife		Body-shimmering gel
O efeito *lifting*	The lifting effect	The catchphrase of a skin lotion
Coca-cola *light*		Diet Coke
Bella *hair fashion*		Hair salon
Allegro sandálias *fashion*	Allegro fashion sandals	Fashion = modern
Depilação *laser Epilight*	Laser depilatory Epilight	Depilatory brand
M. Officer		Store (clothing)
Vitalife		Crackers
KeraCare		Haircare product
L'anza *dry hair formula*		Haircare product
Wella Viva *Color*	Wella Live Color	Haircare product
Palmolive Botanicals		Shampoo
Total Bloc		Sunblock
Episol *oil free*		Sunblock
Elysée *Belt*		Massage belt ➽

English in advertising campaigns. Four recent issues of *Nova* (the Brazilian version of the US magazine *Cosmopolitan*), which I examined for examples of English use, had altogether 180 ads, out of which 119 instances of English use were found. (If the ad had two instances of use belonging to the same category, the occurrence was noted only once.) The instances involved one of the following: national and multinational brand names in English (61); English loanwords or phrases used in the text of an ad (46); and the use of English-inspired or English-sounding brand names (12). A list of examples can be found in appendix B.

More important than the number of occurrences of English words are the uses, the desired effects, and the motivations of such use, as pointed out by Thonus. The first aspect that can be noticed with regard to the use of loanwords in these ads is that in very few cases will the term fill a real lexical gap in the language. One of the few examples of real gaps found is the use of the word *stress* (meaning psychological exhaustion), which does not have an exact Portuguese equivalent, or *sham-poo*, which has long been incorporated into the language.

Another characteristic that is easily observed, and is mentioned in Bhatia (1992), is the appropriation of these loanwords into the grammar of the language, particularly noticeable in the case of collocation. In the phrase *o efeito lifting* ('the lifting effect'), used in an ad campaign, the adjective was moved to the position after the noun to follow the syntax of Portuguese. Another example of the same phenomenon is *sistema bleach* ('bleach system'), in the advertising campaign of a clothes detergent promising whiter clothes.

One of the most predominant categories of loanwords is terms for new technology. The ads are full of examples: *CD-player*, *airbag*, *clear-up*, *strips*, *home-banking*, *control timer*, *stress tabs*, *patch*. They are more commonly found in a secondary text of the advertisement, many times describing the features of a product or service, rather than in the central message of the text. Many loanwords describing fashion and items of clothing can also be found in magazines. Not only are they in the ads, but

Sample phrase	Gloss	Comments
Ecran protection extreme		Skin lotion
Desodorante Nivea *Roll-on Sensitive*	Sensitive Nivea Roll-on deodorant	Deodorant
Nivea *Body Splash*		Body splash
Locao em *spray*	Spray lotion	Spray lotion
Shampoo Universal Colors		Shampoo
Ford Focus		Car brand
Frisco *light*		Instant juice
Baileys Irish Cream		Liquor
Xuxa *by* Impala		Nail polish brand
Esthetic Center		Spa
Ace sabão em pó	Ace powder soap	Clothes detergent
Brazil Connection		Beauty products
São Paulo Fashion Week		Fashion Event
Seda *Color* Vital		Shampoo
Forum: *the fragance by* Tufi Duek		Perfum brand
Lightner		Shampoo
Nivea sun: protetor solar *spray*	Nivea sun: sunblock spray	Sunblock
Previous face care		Skin lotion

also very often they are in the articles themselves. Some of the most common are *blush*, *mules*, *body*, *stretch*, and *top*. Sometimes they are also used in puns, as with the article entitled *top secret*, in which blouses, t-shirts and tops in general are features.

The made-up words are usually short and sometimes intended to look "cute". In Masavisut *et al.* (1986, 203), the authors call attention to a similar inclination among advertisers in Thailand to invest in cute English words. They note that, when marketing people are interviewed, they often say that "Thai words sound corny and awkward: Thai words present a traditional image which is not preferred by Thai consumers; and Thai words aren't 'cute'." In the case of Brazil, not only are English words used because they look cute, but words that sound like English are made up in order to look cute. Some of the English-inspired words I have come across in a random review of Brazilian publications are *dap*, *doft*, *zoomp*, and *dicorp*.

Conclusion

This article provides examples of motivations and instances of local creativity in the use of English in advertising in Brazil. Hopefully, they demonstrate that the presence of English innovations is not simply imposed. Local creativity can do better with the availability of more than one code, of more than Portuguese alone. In addition, although English is prevalent, Brazilians also make use of indigenous languages (to make products look natural), of French (to look elegant), of Italian (to appear artistic) and of other languages to achieve other desired effects, and I consider that these are welcome and enriching additions rather than a nuisance to the community in question.

Instead of forbidding borrowings in fields such as advertising, policy-makers should look at ways in which people can be prepared for their encounter with this phenomenon. Nothing is more effective than education in making a population critically alert and empowered to deal with the on-going realities of language contact. ∎

Notes

1 The original Portuguese text of Freyre's remarks is: 'E os anuncios de jornal indicam consideravel influencia inglesa sobre os começos da arte tipográfica entre nós.' It should be noted that the accent marking rules for Portuguese have changed since he made these remarks. The words in quotation whose accent marking has changed since then are: *anúncios*, *considerável*, and *influência*.

2 All photographs in this study are by courtesy of Luiz Mesquita.

References

Berns, M. 1988. 'The cultural and linguistic context of English in West Germany.' In *World Englishes*, 7, 37–49.

—.1990a. *Contexts of competence: Social and cultural considerations in communicative language teaching.* New York: Plenum Press.

Bhatia, T. K. 1987. 'English in advertising: multiple mixing and the media.' In *World Englishes*, 6 (1), 33–48.

—. 1989. 'Bilinguals' creativity and syntactic theory: evidence for emerging grammar.' In *World Englishes*, 8 (3), 265–276.

—.1992. 'Discourse functions and pragmatics of mixing: advertising across cultures.' In *World Englishes*, 11 (2/3), 195–215.

— & Ritchie, W. 1989. 'Introduction: current issues in "mixing" and "switching".' In *World Englishes*, 8 (1), 261–264.

Black, J. K. 1977. *The United States Penetration of Brazil.* Pennsylvania: The University of Pennsylvania Press.

Crystal, D. 1997. *English as a Global Language.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Freyre, G. 1948. *Ingleses no Brasil: aspectos da influência britânica sobre a vida, a paisagem e a cultura do Brasil.* Rio de Janeiro: Jose Olimpio.

Kachru, B. 1994. 'Englishization and contact linguistics.' In *World Englishes*, 13 (2), 135–154.

Masavisut, N., Sukwiwat, M., & Wongmontha, S. 1986. 'The power of the English in Thai media.' In *World Englishes*, 5 (2/3), 197–207.

Said, E. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism.* New York: Vintage Books.

Sridhar S. N., & Sridhar K. K. 1980. 'The syntax and psycholinguistics of bilingual code mixing.' In the *Canadian Journal of Psycholinguistics*, 34:4, pp. 407–416.

Stanlaw, J. 1987. 'Japanese and English: borrowing and contact.' In *World Englishes*, 6 (2), 93–109.

Takashi, K. 1997. 'Japanese bilingual brand names.' In *English Today*, 52, 12–16.

Thonus, T. 1991. 'Englishization of business names in Brazil.' In *World Englishes*, 10(1),65–74.