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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The impact of linguistic proximity and diglossia on brand name and slogan extension tendencies in the Turkish, Russian and Arabic contexts

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Abstract The impact of linguistic proximity and diglossia on multinational corporations' visual identity extension strategies in multiple sociolinguistically different markets is investigated. Specifically, this study focuses on a sample of *Fortune Global 500* corporations and explores their brand name/slogan extension practices in three distinct linguistic contexts: Turkish, Russian and Arabic. The study reveals that the different levels of linguistic proximity systematically influence brand name adaptation including brand name transliteration, as well as slogan translation and new slogan creation in English. The study also finds that these tendencies non-systematically but significantly vary across the levels of diglossia. Conversely, diglossia systematically influences slogan standardization and new slogan creation in a local language, while the effect of linguistic proximity on these practices is non-systematic.

Keywords Brand · Slogan · Linguistic proximity · Meta-semantics · Diglossia

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Introduction

One of the pivotal topics in research on global marketing is corporate visual identity extension decisions (Schmid and Kotulla 2011; Walters 1986; Jain 1989; Boddewyn and Grosse 1995; Terpstra and Sarathy 2000; Hollensen 2004; Fastoso and Whitelock 2007). The most visible elements of corporate identity from the perspective of consumers are brand name and slogan (Jun and Lee 2007; Erdogmus et al. 2010). These elements are seen as the building blocks of business communication (Quelch 1999; Alashban et al. 2002). The American Marketing Association defines brand name as "the part of a brand that can be spoken which includes letters, numbers, or words" (the AMA 2017). This part of a brand is predominantly represented in writing (Zhang and Schmitt 2001). Slogan, which is also referred to as a tagline, represents "the verbal or written portion of an advertising message [or a brand] that summarizes the main idea in a few memorable words" (the AMA 2017). This study explores the effect on brand/slogan extension of linguistic phenomena such as *linguistic proximity* and *diglossia*. Linguistic proximity refers to the extent to which the phonetic features of a local language in a country under focus is close to those of the base linguistic system, which is English in this study. Diglossia refers to the practices of using two different languages in the same country or community (Ferguson 1959; Hudson 2002), while perceptually treating one of the languages as more prestigious than the other.

Brand name serves as a robust signal of quality across different cultures, much more so than other product elements such as price or other physical attributes (Dawar and Parker 1994). Successful brand names build strong brand equity through enhancing memorability, favorability and preference for products (Aaker 1996). Selecting a proper

Data collection and coding procedure

The study focuses on Fortune 500 Global corporations and their brands/slogans for this investigation. The authors obtained the list of global companies from www.fortune.com. Then, for each company included in this list, they examined whether these companies operate in the following countries: USA or UK (the base linguistic system), Turkey, Russia and the Middle East (e.g., Qatar, UAE or Saudi Arabia). They identified the brand names of these companies from their relevant web pages and social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn were included). The final sample included 149 brands which were present in all markets under focus. Three bilingual raters competent in Turkish–English, Arabic–English and Russian–English were trained to classify the brands and associated slogans according to the provided schedule. The raters had access to the list of the brands and slogans in English. They initially assessed whether a brand and its associated slogan were standardized or adapted in a particular context. For the adapted brands/slogans, these raters identified the type of an adaptation strategy. Thus, the brands/slogans were classified into one of the following groups: dual adaptation, transliteration, translation or creation which represents full adaptation in either the local language or English.

Findings

Table 4 summarizes brand extension tendencies in the three linguistic contexts. The dual adaptation strategy is prominently absent in all cases. The Chi-square goodness-of-fit test statistics for these three groups are significant. Hence, the null hypothesis that the proportion of cases in each group is equal and concludes that there are statistically significant differences in the observed proportions is rejected.

Table 4 shows that the brand adaptation incidence varies in accord with the distance of the host country's alphabetic writing system from English. Evidently, 5.4% of the brands are adapted in Turkey (high proximity), whereas it is 14.8% in Russia (medium proximity) and 62.4% in the Middle East (low proximity). To test Hypothesis 1a, three dummy variables for brand adaptation in Turkey, Russia and the Middle East were created which were labeled as TRba, RUba and MEba, respectively, and then a series of nonparametric tests were performed. The related-sample Cochran's Q test attests that the adaptation rates change significantly as the linguistic context shifts from high to low proximity ($\chi^2C(2) = 124.62$, $p < 0.01$). The examination of each pairwise comparison shows that the difference between the adaptation rates in Turkey (TRba) and the Middle East (MEba) is the greatest ($Z = 10.41$, $p < 0.01$), followed by the difference between RUba and MEba ($Z = 8.70$, $p < 0.01$), and then by that of TRba versus RUba ($Z = 1.72$, $p < 0.10$). As these scores are standardized and thus comparable, it is concluded that the incidence of brand adaptation increases as one moves from the high proximity linguistic context to that of medium proximity and then to that of low proximity. The related-sample McNemar tests support this conclusion. The study finds that there is a statistically significant difference in the proportion of adapted brands in the high (TRba) versus medium (RUba) proximity contexts ($\chi^2_M(1) = 7.68$, $p < 0.01$), whereas the effect becomes stronger when the medium (RUba) and low (MEba) contexts are compared ($\chi^2_M(1) = 53.84$, $p < 0.01$). Focusing on specific adaptation strategies, the results suggest that transliteration is the major means of adaptation which significantly increases as the linguistic context shifts from high to low proximity ($\chi^2_M(2) = 144.26$, $p < 0.01$). No evidence of a significant change is found in brand name creation ($\chi^2c(2) = 3.80$, $p = 0.15$) and brand translation ($\chi^2c(2) = 2.00$,

Table 4 Brand name extension in different linguistic contexts

Proximity to the base linguistic system (i.e., English) Appropriateness of English diglossia	Turkish High Medium		Russian Medium Low		Arabic Low High	
Brand extension decisions	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Original (standardized)	141	94.6	127	85.2	56	37.6
Modified (adapted)						
Transliteration	0	0	15	10.1	91	61.1
Translation	1	0.7	2	1.3	0	0
Creation	7	4.7	5	3.4	2	1.3
Total	149	100.0	149	100.0	149	100.0
χ^2 goodness-of-fit test	$\chi^2(2) = 252.29$***		$\chi^2(3) = 290.81$***		$\chi^2(2) = 80.95$***	

*** $p < 0.01$