

English mixing in residential real estate advertising in Taiwan: Linguistic devices, socio-psychological effects and consumers' attitudes

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English mixing is becoming more and more prominent in global advertising. As Bhatia (2006: 601) observes, 'with super-branding and hyper-globalization going hand in hand with diversity marketing', English as a universal language 'is the most favoured language of global media and advertising'. Scholars such as Bhatia (1987, 1992, 2000, 2001), Takahashi (1990), Pavlou (2002), Hashim (2005) and Martin (1998, 2002, 2005, 2006), among others, have studied such phenomena extensively. Discourse analysis is the main approach used to describe the use of English in non-Anglophone advertising in most of these studies. On this approach, Martin (1998: 307) makes the following observation:

One of the drawbacks of linguistics-oriented research on advertising is that language specialists seldom confer with members of the advertising profession when analyzing their data. The unfortunate result is that, more often than not, research conducted on advertising material by linguists typically remains limited to surface features of the advertisements themselves, without addressing with any significant amount of detail the creative processes involved in designing an advertising campaign.

Martin (2002: 400) advocates the approach of interviewing marketing specialists when investigating English mixing in advertising, since it reveals these specialists' 'motivations for using code-mixed copy and the effectiveness of this particular approach to advertising'. Martin (1998) interviewed a team of advertising specialists, together with legal experts and budget planners, in an advertising agency in Paris to show how these experts collaborate in contributing to the creative process involved in advertising copywriting in France.

Following Martin's methodologies, the present study investigates the underlying factors involved in the development of Chinese-English code-mixed advertising discourse in Taiwan arising from the creative processes employed by copywriters, by interviewing residential real estate advertising copywriters.

Residential real estate business is largely localized in nature, since all the real estate properties are locally built and target audiences are domestic clients. However, it has been observed that this localized business has recently introduced an international theme by using English mixing extensively in its advertising, as evidenced by the findings of a discourse analysis conducted by Hsu (2000), where 1265 Chinese–English code-mixed print ads and TV commercials constitute the corpus of data. In Hsu (2000), among the ten discourse domains in which products are advertised most frequently in English mixing, nine of them, such as computers and cosmetics, feature technological advancements, internationalism or imports from abroad. The residential real estate business is the only product type that is very local in nature and does not feature any of the above characteristics.

To account for why English mixing occurs extensively in the advertising of such a localized business, this research mainly explores the socio-psychological effects of English mixing conveyed in advertising, and probes the criteria that determine the linguistic forms copywriters employ in mixing English, by interviewing real estate advertising copywriters in Taiwan. In addition, consumers' attitudes towards the language usage in real estate advertising are also addressed.

Methodology

Following Kachru's (1990) definition, English mixing is broadly defined in this chapter as the entailment of transfer of units of English into Chinese at the intersentential and intrasentential levels; the transferred units may be words, phrases and sentences. The corpus of this study is drawn from three sources. The first comprised interviews with six copywriters from five prestigious local companies that specialize in advertising residential real estate properties, conducted from September 2002 to January 2007. Each copywriter's interview lasted from one and a half hours to two hours. Follow-up interviews were conducted with some of them. Following Martin (1998: 309), the following interview questions were formulated, with the third question adapted from Martin's research.

1. What are the socio-psychological effects copywriters intend to convey to consumers via English mixing in ads?
2. What are the criteria that determine copywriters' degree of use of English and the linguistic forms they employ in mixing English?
3. How important is it for the code-mixed text to be intelligible to consumers when copywriters mix English?
4. To what extent does copywriters' proficiency in English affect the linguistic accuracy of their English usage in the advertising text?

Other than interviews, two TV commercials and forty-six print advertisements provided by two of the copywriters interviewed constituted the second source of data.¹ To enlarge the corpus, a third source of data was added. A total of 105 print advertisements containing information relevant to the present study were collected from daily newspapers subscribed to by the author, as well as from posters either coming with the daily newspapers or locally distributed in the neighbourhood by advertising agencies. These print advertisements and posters were collected from April 2002 to January 2007.

Note that the content of this chapter is entirely based on the transcription of interviews with copywriters, except for the third source and the second source of data the advertisers submitted to the researcher and the results of the studies conducted by Hsu (2000, 2006, 2008).

Results

The trendy development of using English mixing in residential real estate advertising

According to all the copywriters interviewed, it has become a trend in recent years to employ English mixing in residential real estate advertising in Taiwan because Western concepts of architecture design dominate the field, although the Japanese style of design is also available.² In order to create an image that the quality of construction in Taiwan is equal to that in Europe and America, many local construction companies use the Western style of architectural design in their construction projects. In particular, to look for inspiration from authentic Western design of properties, delegates of many construction companies are assigned field trips to the United States and Europe to gather information on and samples of architectural designs in the West. The collected information is then passed on to the commissioned architects of construction projects to serve as a reference for their brainstorming in designing. In the process, the actual English terminology used in American architecture is largely borrowed or copied into the residential real estate advertising text in Taiwan in order to attract attention and convey a variety of socio-psychological effects, such as internationalism and authenticity, to the target audience.

Compared with other types of merchandise, such as watches or soft drinks, purchasing a residential real estate property requires more serious consideration, since its unit price is significantly higher—at least two or three million New Taiwan Dollars (about US\$60,000 to \$90,000) for a very low-end product. To motivate target audiences to be interested in advertised properties, copywriters need to provide information concerning detailed characteristics of advertised products, such as the unit price and location of

the property, the convenience of the living environment and the availability of educational institutions in the neighbourhood. To disseminate essential information without creating a language barrier, copywriters use Chinese as the main medium of communication in the advertising text, especially when it comes to key words. English as an international language is also mixed into the advertising text to enhance the attractiveness and authoritativeness of the advertisements, depending on the price and location of the property and the target audience.³

English mixing in product names

For advertised products in general, English product names almost always accompany Chinese product names in the logo. A logo as specifically used by local real estate advertisers is defined as the graphic representation in the layout where Chinese and English product names are usually placed together.⁴ There are normally two ways to render English product names in the logo. First, most of the English product names are spelled out. Some of them are directly translated from their Chinese counterparts—for example, *Sky Villa* (*Tian Shu*) (Figure 10.1), *River View* (*Dazhi Guanhe*), *Taipei Garden* (*Taipei Huayuan*), *Lake De Green* (*Luzhi Hu*) and *Happy Spring Villa* (*Youquan Xiao Zhen*).



Figure 10.1 English product name directly translated from the Chinese.
Source: United Daily News.

Others are copied from Western cultural themes, or from celebrities' names or places, and their Chinese product names are translated either semantically or phonetically. Instances include *Trump Taipei* (*Chuan Pu*), *Camp David in Taipei* (*Daweiing*), *The Mont Blanc* (*Bailangfeng*), *Avenue des Champs Elysees* (*Zhongzheng Xiangxie*), *Waldorf* (*Huaerdaofu-II-Huangjia Tequ*) and *Times* (*Shidai Guangchang*).

Some other English product names are drawn from concepts, such as *Discovery Hill* (*Faxian Zhilu*), derived from the idea of *faxian* 'discovery', *Discover Europe* (*Yishu Zhidu*, 'the capital of the arts') or *The Music of Nature* (*Weiyena Huayuan*, 'the Garden of Vienna'). In terms of linguistic forms, the majority of English product names comprise nouns or noun phrases. Occasionally, verb phrases also make up English product names, such as *Take It Easy*, *Surpass Everything* and *Advance the Rythm [sic] of Life* (Figure 10.2), the Chinese product name of which is *Guojia Jiaoxiangyue2-Mozate* ('National Symphony 2-Mozart').



Figure 10.2 English product name: A verb phrase.
Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

Another type of English product name in the logo is not explicitly spelled out, but is paraphrased as a description of the main features of advertised products. For example (as shown in Figure 10.3), the Chinese product name is *Ziyou Zhiqiu*. Since the advertised property is adjacent to a huge park and a subway station, while describing its main features, copywriters use 'Walking Between the MRT and Park' as its paraphrased English product name.⁵ In another advertisement (Figure 10.4), the English

paraphrased product name, using five key words of unparallel parts of speech, states that the advertised property offers a dazzling, fashionable and ideal home at the lowest price and is a short distance from wherever one wants to go.



Figure 10.3 Paraphrased English product name.
Source: United Daily News.



Figure 10.4 Paraphrased English product name: Unparallel English structure.
Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

However, in many logos both Chinese and explicit English product names co-occur with an English description of the major characteristics of the advertised properties. Figure 10.5 shows such a pattern. In other cases, such English description occurs with either Chinese or English product names. The language usage in the logo will be discussed below in the section on English mixing as graphic design.



Figure 10.5 Bilingual product names and English description.
Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

According to one of the copywriters interviewed, it has become trendy to create English product names in real estate advertising. If no English product name is included in the advertisement, a construction project may seem to be very local, suggesting that the advertised product is located in a very rural and less developed area. Conversely, if an English product name and some English graphic design are used, together with celebrity endorsements, the image of the product can be upgraded, which in turn may give the impression that a product is in fashion and of importance. English product names are thus widely used in real estate advertising. Such advertising tactics used by copywriters in Taiwan are compatible with Bhatia's (2006) observation that 'in the non-English-speaking world, product naming and company naming is the domain for which English is the most favoured language' (2006: 606).

English mixing in high-end products: Socio-psychological effects and linguistic devices

In advertising high-end products to target audience of higher socio-economic status, many of whom may have lived or worked abroad, English mixing is used in print advertisements for two purposes. On the one hand, it is used to convey information about characteristics of the advertised products, such as a special architectural design of the building or facilities provided on the property. On the other hand, it is employed to yield a sense of authenticity, supreme quality, professionalism and internationalism in the advertised properties. Therefore, English architectural terms, English brand names of home appliances imported from abroad and English names of foreign architects designing advertised properties are employed in the body copy.⁶

Professional jargon such as ‘SRC’, an abbreviation for steel elements composited with reinforced concrete to improve the strength of the concrete, and Art Deco, an opulent architectural style, recur in many advertisements. As shown in Figure 10.6, the copywriter not only spells out the jargon of SRC, SC (steel construction), and RC (reinforced concrete), but also compares these three different types of building structure and emphasizes that the use of SC enables the advertised product to be the most earthquake-resistant structure.⁷



最時尚的依靠SC鋼骨

**超越SRC安全標準
才是我們要的！**

最穩固的內在，SC制震鋼骨

「W110」用深入地下48米的壁槽基礎，搭配SC鋼骨強勁結構，加上加州柏克萊力學工程博士—陳福松技師的嚴密審核，專注於二向平面上配置四組偏心斜撐的新式創舉，向上提升整體建物結構體之耐震能力，種種跳脫一般RC、超越一般SRC鋼骨的韌性思考，讓我因為充滿安全感，而更自信光彩！

Figure 10.6 Architectural jargon.
Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

Besides the use of English architectural terms, copywriters use the English brand names of imported home appliances that are furnished in the property in the ad’s body copy to highlight the characteristics of authenticity, internationalism and premium quality of the advertised product. The text in the body copy in Figure 10.7 states that a dishwasher made by BOSCH, imported from Germany, as well as a stove and oven manufactured by SMEG, imported from Italy, are installed in the advertised property to create the socio-psychological impacts of internationalism, authenticity and superior quality.



TOP空間 大安區客廳面寬六米已屬少見，同時擁有北市豪宅頂級配備，更屬難得

【大安遠矚】雙玄關、梯間就像美術館，住家大門以實木裝甲保全子母門設計，搭配德國原裝進口多聯式門鎖；而挑高3米2客廳造就大器視野，6米大面寬低台度落地窗讓視覺無限延伸。舒適用餐空間享受美食，廚房、客廳、餐廳、品味區等動線一點也不浪費；廚房採用歐化廚具，義大利BEST漏斗型排油煙機、義大利SMEG三口爐、義大利SMEG烤箱、德國BOSCH洗碗機...等頂級配備，在大安區很難找得到。

豪華歐式現代廚房現場實景

Figure 10.7 English brand names of imported home appliances. Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

Furthermore, English names of architects designing the advertised property also appear as an endorsement of quality. For instance, in the newspaper advertisement shown in Figure 10.8, not only the name of the architect but also his photograph and autograph show up in the advertisement to guarantee professionalism and the supreme quality of the advertised product.



看到並擁有Hans Hollein作品！
化局長林衡哲，喜出望外！

600~700萬購屋，捷運帶您追求更大更美的家！

萬起買四房兩廳，附價值135~220萬傢俱
大山大水大師鉅作的家！

住宅·今生唯一良機
Hans Hollein大師鉅作
價值70~90萬傢俱裝潢
價值100~120萬傢俱裝潢
價值135~220萬傢俱裝潢

Figure 10.8 A photo of a foreign architect whose name is spelled with the Roman alphabet. Source: United Daily News.

Additionally, to create an image of an authentic Western lifestyle, in many cases copywriters utilize pictorial references of Western cultural images in the background visual, such as an English royal castle, the grand lobby of a European mansion (Figure 10.9), the façade of a huge Roman-style building (Figure 10.10), an American villa or Western architectural landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower.



Figure 10.9 Western cultural image: The lobby of a European-style mansion.
Source: United Daily News.



Figure 10.10 Western cultural image: The façade of a Roman-style building.
Source: United Daily News.

One copywriter provided two cases to illustrate how Western cultural images are employed in the background visual. In designing the background visual of an advertisement promoting a property that incorporates the landscape design of an English garden, to target an audience consisting mainly of upscale celebrities who like to keep a low profile, the copywriter did not consider turning to the luxurious French style, or the metropolitan and financially-oriented New York style, or simply using the pictorial reference of the Buckingham Palace which shows too much royal grandeur. Rather, she chose the more private and secluded Kensington Palace to represent the qualities of the advertised property in accordance with the profile of the target audience.⁸

In advertising another property located by the mountains in Taipei, since the entrance to the grand lobby of the property is designed as a huge greenhouse, the Winter Garden in the World Financial Center in New York City, which is a large greenhouse to provide venues for many notable events in the city, is used in the background visual. Employing pictorial references of these Western architectural designs in the background visual is intended to prompt the target audience's imagination concerning the lifestyle they would enjoy if they own the advertised property. Background visuals containing Western cultural images thus help to enhance the degree of quality and internationalism of advertised properties in consumers' minds.

Other than print ads, TV commercials are occasionally shot to promote high-end products.⁹ The following case illustrates how English can be employed successfully in promoting even very high-end products to boost sales. A case in point is *Dibao*, meaning 'the treasure of the emperor' in Chinese; its English product name is *Palace*. *Dibao* is the most upscale and expensive residential real estate property in Taipei, with a price per square foot of US\$1,028; the smallest apartment of 5,692.8 square feet cost US\$5,852,404 in 2005.¹⁰ This property was designed and constructed by an international team with a leading Japanese architect who applied Western concepts in the architectural design. Due to its astronomical cost and international architectural style, two types of audience are targeted in marketing. The first type is very upscale and well-educated, such as CEOs of high-end corporations with international experience and a global vision, for whom English is the language of communication. The other type consists of the nouveaux riche who, in the copywriter's words, 'do not know English', but do respect and adore the charm of the language.

When a four-year construction project was brought to completion, in order to present the property in the most authentic way and generate the socio-psychological effects of internationalism, professionalism and supreme quality of the advertised product, two TV commercials were shot to appeal to the two target audiences. The first commercial, while visually presenting

the typical European royal palace style of *Dibao*'s domes, arches and Greek-style colonnade, begins with a female chorus singing the background music. Simultaneously, a series of questions are asked in English: 'Is this New York?' 'Is this Tokyo?' 'Is this Paris?' Then later, the response, in Chinese, is given: 'No, this is *Dibao* in Taipei.' Afterwards, a Chinese voiceover states that the enduring craftsmanship of classical architecture possesses a timeless quality and viewers are welcome to visit the newly constructed property. By posing a series of questions in English, such as 'Is this New York?', the interviewed copywriter specifically remarks that he intended to attract viewers' attention and create an impression that the advertised property of *Dibao* was qualified for consideration as an international landmark, like those in New York, Tokyo and Paris.

Soon after this TV commercial was released, it drew a great deal of attention from interested customers. Very soon, a second TV commercial was shot, this time narrated entirely in English. In it, an English-only voiceover repeats the lines 'the palace of beauty', 'the palace of royalty', 'the palace of majesty', 'the palace of freedom' and 'the palace of life', accompanied by a visual presentation of the grandeur of a European-style royal palace, a water dance show and subtitled Chinese translations of the English lines on the screen. According to the copywriter, the English voiceover and the visual presentation were used to create a state of mind in the viewer that the design and the landscape of *Dibao (Palace)* were as attractive as those of the grand museums in Europe and Central Park in New York.

At the same time as these two TV commercials were aired in Taiwan, three print advertisements were concurrently produced. In one of the advertisements (Figure 10.11), the headline 'Brand is the hero' is used to reinforce the image that the exclusive property of *Dibao (Palace)* is the best brand. The copywriter asserts that he employs this headline to highlight not only the characteristics of the advertised product, but also the status of potential owners.

According to the copywriter who created these two commercials and the three print advertisements, these English voiceover commercials successfully drew the attention of many wealthy people and helped to boost sales. After these two TV commercials aired, sales of the advertised property increased 150 percent within a year, compared with the sales made in the previous four years while *Dibao* was under construction, when Chinese was the only medium of communication in the advertising campaign.



Figure 10.11 Print advertisement for *Dibao (Palace)*.
Source: Supplied by copywriter.

English mixing in low-end products: Socio-psychological effects and linguistic devices

When low-end products are advertised, English mixing is generally not used to convey information about various features of advertised products because the building structure and construction materials are ordinary; no home appliances imported from abroad are provided; and advertised properties are designed locally. English mixing in such cases is used to build up an image of ‘a dream house’ and create a sense of familiarity with and easy access to the advertised products in the minds of consumers.

Copywriters interviewed remarked that even though low-end properties are not as costly as high-end ones, the unit price of any low-end property

is at least \$2 million in local currency (US\$60,000). To persuade target audiences that purchasing a property is not such a difficult task, and is in fact more like ‘playing a fun game’, copywriters use the language familiar to the target audiences, namely, easy-to-read English product names and simple English vocabulary.¹¹

Instances of easy-to-read English product names found in the data of this study include *Bingo*, *Magic*, *Magic Mountain*, *So Beauty*, *So Beautiful*, *So Charming So Beauty* (Figure 10.12) and noun phrases such as *Forever Rich Family*. As shown, two of these product names contain ungrammatical usage. Additionally, simple English words and abbreviations such as *VIP*, *lobby*, *lounge* and *spa* repeatedly occur in the body copy (see Figure 10.13 and Figure 10.14).¹² By using such simple and common forms of the English language, copywriters attempt to create the impression that low-end products can also offer facilities found in high-end ones, and that, like real VIPs, potential customers are entitled to all the privileges.



Figure 10.12 An easy-to-read English product name.
Source: United Daily News.

台北e-go 願景特區—歐式景觀花園、名人VIP會館、萬頃自然公園魅力非凡
24小時森林SPA／下樓就可上萬坪大自然綠野踏青，開窗就有芬多精。
最風光的新2房／有視野，有陽光，有鮮氣，台北買不到的第一個案。
365天的五星級渡假行館／精緻細琢歐式庭園、水榭花台、流泉瀑布、上百項多功能戶外及室內VIP、社區總體營造優

特別推薦 自備 **18**萬元起 買麗緻 **2房**

Figure 10.13 Simple English words in the body copy.
Source: China Times.

◆ **地下一樓** 亞馬森洞窟親水世界
◆ 25米亞馬森洞窟泳池、湯姆龍兒童遊戲區、按摩池、三溫暖…
◆ **一樓花園大廳** 地中海風情花園大廳
◆ 挑高9米3地中海夢幻逸廊迎賓櫃檯、水瀑泉園、會客LOUNGE大廳…
◆ **29樓** 霞飛雅宴世界
◆ 皇廷LOUNGE、早餐吧、PARTY WORLD KTV、宴會廳、LULU SPA…
◆ **頂樓** 涵碧風情天際花園，山海河盡臣服腳下
◆ 涵碧風情茶亭、無邊際鏡面水景、水瀑花園、烤肉區…

Figure 10.14 Another example of simple English words in the body copy.
Source: United Daily News.

One copywriter interviewed provided an example of how such a strategy works. In advertising a property where each unit probably has only one internet connection access point, copywriters would name this property *e-Home* (derived by analogy with words *e-commerce* or *e-mail*) to capitalize on potential customers' fantasies and dreams that they really need a property affording them full access to the world of cyberspace. Therefore, easy-to-read product names and simple English vocabulary function to upgrade the quality of advertised products appealing to low-end customers and their dreams of owning property.

Regarding the background visuals in advertisements for low-end products, pictorial references of Western royal castles or Western landmarks are seldom used. The following examples are shown to illustrate how English is employed holistically in advertisements promoting low-end products.

In Figure 10.15, *Magic* is used as an easy-to-read English product name. Although the Chinese headline states that the first Disney type of eco-ocean paradise community is offered in this advertised property on the outskirts of Taipei, no pictorial reference to Disney World is provided in the background visual. Instead, a swimming pool with a Chinese mermaid appears. The easy-to-read English product name *Magic*, the wording in the Chinese headline and the background visual all contribute to the creation of a message that the advertised property will be imbued with the charm of magic.



Figure 10.15 A pictorial reference used for low-end products.
Source: United Daily News.

Figure 10.16 shows that the English product name is *Easy Buy*. It is a nativized English device created by copywriters in Taiwan. This device conjoins the English adjective *easy* with an English verb, where *easy* is utilized for the sake of its translated meaning in Chinese, *rongyi* ('effortlessly and easily'). Thus *Easy Buy* means 'one can buy something easily'. Other instances of this device include *easy select*, *easy touch*, *easy show* and *easy play*. For more discussion of nativized English devices common in advertising, see Hsu (2006). In this figure, placed above the product name of *Easy Buy* is a Chinese-English mixed verb phrase, *qingsong GO*, with the English word *go* appearing in very large print.¹³ *Qingsong* in Chinese also means 'effortlessly and easily' while the English word *go* is homophonous with the Chinese word *gou* ('shopping'). Therefore, both the product name *Easy Buy* and the phrase *qingsong GO* in the logo, particularly with the graphic design enlarging the print size of *go*, create the mood that consumers can purchase the advertised property very easily. One copywriter indicates that, since not much information regarding the features of low-end products can be offered in the body copy, copywriters may employ the strategy of enlarging the print size of key English words to create the desired psychological effects.

真正每坪9萬8
 新東區最美的
 南洋風泳池、
 門前發步路款
 近距北一高與

中華開發
 汐止市橋
 服務專線 /

(貸款條件依個人資格而定)
 90% 貸款 · 自備10% · 漂亮新家馬上搬!

震撼大台北房市的大新聞、緊扣所有購屋者的心臟脈

台北新東區 **NEWS**

Figure 10.16 A nativized English device in a product name.

Source: United Daily News.

In the centre of Figure 10.17 is a headline with Chinese–English mixed words, *yangyang diyi HIGH qilai*, meaning ‘we offer everything of the best quality to make you feel high’. Here, the word *high* is used as a pun. On the one hand, it is synonymous with *gao* (‘high’) in Chinese, referring to the height of the ceiling of the advertised property. On the other hand, it means the feeling of being high.¹⁴ The English–Chinese mixed wording at the bottom of the figure says, ‘Last year one could not get high at a Christmas party or New Year’s party without a property with a high ceiling; this year, this new property with such a high ceiling, along with upgraded interior and exterior designs, will enable one to get high at these parties’. By using simple words such as *high* and *party*, an atmosphere is created that customers are guaranteed spacious room and happiness after they own the advertised property. As shown similarly in the previous figure, in the headline of this advertisement, the English word *high* appears in such huge print, both graphically and linguistically, in order to boost the psychological impact of owning a dream house.

123 FREEDOM OF THE CITY LIFE AND HOUSE
one and couple and threesome all happy together

自由仕

台北市中心唯一·大陸工程品質第一
絕版4米5全新完工

樣樣第一

HIGH起來!

台北市中心唯一「絕版」4米5·果然熱銷一枝獨秀！便利第一、體面第一、享受第一、坪效第一、配備第一·
外加大陸工程品質第一、自備68萬起超值第一·投資自住雙贏、出租轉手利上加利！
越來越多想對自己好一點的菁英爭相搶進「123自由仕」·熱銷狂賣無人能敵！

去年耶誕PARTY、過年圍爐HIGH不起來
今年有了絕版4米5高坪效，從裡到外全面升級！

Figure 10.17 A Chinese–English mixed headline. Source: Poster distributed by an advertising agency.

In the mixed headline in Figure 10.18, *LOW dao buneng zai LOW*, the English word *low* is utilized to create two special functions. First, *low* is a homophone of the Chinese word *lou* ('expose your body'); the usage of this phrase originally means that one has exposed one's body to the extent of sensationalism. In accordance with the language use, a monkey, as the mascot of the advertising project, is exposing its buttocks, yielding a sensationally vulgar image. Second, the translated meaning of the English word *low* is *di* in Chinese. The mixed headline thus reads as *di dao buneng zai di*, 'the price of the property cannot go any lower'. By replacing the Chinese word *di* with the corresponding English word *low*, the phrase of *LOW dao buneng zai LOW* means that the price offered is the lowest possible. This advertisement promotes a low-end property located in Jilong on the outskirts of Taipei, an area that is not so well developed. Consequently, simple and sensationally vulgar language usage such as *lou* ('expose one's body') transformed into the English homophone *low* is employed to attract the attention of target audiences.

The advertisement is a vertical rectangular poster. At the top, the headline 'LOW到不能再LOW' is written in large, bold, black Chinese characters. Below the headline is a cartoon illustration of a monkey sitting and exposing its buttocks. Underneath the monkey is a section titled '月付5500元起 房客升級變房東' (Monthly payment starts at 5500, tenants upgrade to landlords). This section contains several lines of smaller text and a table of pricing options. The table has three rows and three columns: '層一房' (1st floor, 1 room), '層二房' (2nd floor, 2 rooms), and '層三房' (3rd floor, 3 rooms). The first row shows a price of 5500, the second 9500, and the third 11600. Below the table, there are more details about the property, including a small image of a building and a phone number '2690-5388'. At the bottom, there are two large percentage boxes: '1.90%' and '4.95%'. The overall design is simple and uses a mix of English and Chinese text.

Figure 10.18 Vulgar language use adapted in a pun in the headline.
Source: Copywriter.

English mixing as a graphic design

Although English mixing is used to yield a variety of socio-psychological impacts, as discussed earlier, each of the copywriters interviewed agrees that the primary function of English mixing is to serve as a decorative graphic design in the advertising text and background visual. The following discussion further illustrates this usage.

English mixing in the body copy

English words can function as punctuation marks in a series of Chinese characters in the body copy. When target audiences read the detailed information concerning advertised products in the body copy, the square shape of Chinese characters in a long series makes the reading monotonous, boring and difficult to parse at one glance. To create some variety in the visual input for readers, copywriters use English words sparingly in the body copy for artistic visual effects. One copywriter indicates that she would even mix one English word in every ten Chinese characters for visual variation. She provides an example such as *ni jiangyou yige E-HOME de jia* ('you will have a high-tech home'). If such a sentence is written all in Chinese as *ni jiangyou yige gaokeji de jia*, too many Chinese characters make the reading difficult to process at one glance, as illustrated below.

你將有一個 E-HOME 的家
 你將有一個高科技的家

English words thus function as a variation in the visual input. As shown in Figures 10.13 and 10.14, simple English words such as *lobby* and *spa* serve such functions, other than creating the desired socio-psychological impacts.

English mixing in the background visual

In Figure 10.19, the phrase of *FINAL COUNT DOWN* appears in the background visual to urge target audiences to purchase the advertised product while the best price is offered. In other cases, as found in the data of this study, product names of advertised properties such as *i-Taipei* and English words such as *lobby* and *spa* appear in the background visual for an artistic effect.



Figure 10.19 English mixing in the background visual.
Source: United Daily News.

English mixing in the logo

A logo, as previously defined, is the graphic representation in the layout where Chinese and English product names are placed together. Frequently, other than bilingual product names, lines of English words appear alongside the logo, describing the major characteristics of advertised products. In such a situation, English words usually appear in fine print, which no one can read. As mentioned earlier, the main function of these English words in the advertisements is to provide a graphic design, as in the following examples.

In the lower left-hand corner of Figure 10.20 is a logo where *Dream Blog* is the English product name and *Mengxiang Buluoge*, the Chinese product name, is half a translation and half a transliteration from its English counterpart. The copywriter who designed this advertisement remarked that this advertisement was aimed at well-educated young DINK (Double Income No Kids) couples and single people working in the professions of high-end electronic technology, with experience of studying and living abroad, mainly in the United States. Accordingly, she combined the term *blog*, a popular means of electronic communication among young people, with their dreams of living in a paradise, such as an amusement park, in the product name. Furthermore, to communicate with this white-collar audience with experience of studying abroad, many English words appear alongside the logo other than the bilingual product names.



Figure 10.20 Minuscule print size of English mixing in the logo.
Source: Copywriters.

However, these English words are in such tiny print, which cannot be read with the naked eye, that they mainly serve as a graphic design to attract the attention of the audience. Hence the content of the English does not matter so much. Based on a special request made by the author, the copywriter provided the English text:

Section of east district, you will find the meanings of real life and architecture. A wonderful concept to architecture will be come true in this district. Limitless. Welcome 6 outstanding and brilliant persons to enter this honourable [sic] gate ... find the meanings of real life and architecture. A wonderful concept to architecture will be come true in this district.

Seemingly, the English wording is fragmentary, ungrammatical and misspelled (*bonourable*). According to this copywriter, it is more the English form than the English content that plays a prominent role in communicating with the target audience; therefore, grammatical accuracy in English is not a primary concern for copywriters. The interviews with copywriters and the discourse analysis in Hsu (2000) indicate that English wording describing the features of advertised products in the logo is where most English mistakes occur in ads that are promoting low-end products.

Another example is shown in Figure 10.21, which is a magnified version of the logo that previously appeared in Figure 10.17. In this logo, *Ziyoushi* is the Chinese product name, and the English wording paraphrasing the product name is full of grammatical mistakes.¹⁵



Figure 10.21 Small print of English mixing in the logo.
Source: A poster distributed by an advertising agency.

The following are additional instances of ungrammatical English wording alongside various logos, appearing in fine print.

1. Experience a relaxation life view from our spacious community environment, leisure space, and unique facilities. Light reaches overarching sky at night, with magnificent posture stays in hearts forever.
2. What I have got from here is the highest honor. Magnanimity, generosity, and all other eminent qualities acknowledge it as their source.
3. Not a millionaire? Well, in MBA, for an afternoon, you can pretend that you're among the monied by soaking in the sun and sifting your fingers through the sugary sands outside celebrities' obscenely priced homes without having to pay the rent.

As demonstrated by the examples in this study, non-standard English usages abound in product names, headlines and especially logos. Inappropriate usages, such as *obscenely priced homes*, and the ungrammatical structures present in the above three sentences show such tendencies.

In short, even though the English used with the logo is often accompanied by misspellings and verbatim translations of Chinese structure, and may appear in such fine print that no one can read it, copywriters still continue this practice simply because English mixing primarily functions as a decorative design in real estate advertising.

Discussion

Non-standard English usages prevalent in residential real estate advertising

Hsu (2000) notes the same phenomenon in a discourse analysis of 1265 advertisements, of which 121 contain English deviations and misspellings, 83 percent of them coming from newspapers, particularly in the domain of

real estate advertising.¹⁶ The following reasons are offered for why linguistic inaccuracy prevails in real estate advertising, mainly based on interviews with copywriters.

The work structure involved in the business of real estate advertising and the English proficiency of copywriters in this field

First, the prevalence of English deviations is related to the work structure involved in real estate advertising. When a construction company starts a construction project, it will commission a real estate advertising agency to take charge of all the promotional sales and advertising campaign for the project. Unlike other types of advertising agencies commissioned to promote general merchandise, where a team of copywriters, including an executive creative director, is available, a real estate agency would assign the entire advertising project to a duo of a copywriter and a graphic designer.

During the campaign, these two professionals take charge of the following duties. They need to communicate with the construction company and incorporate the company's ideas of advertising into their promotional campaign. Furthermore, they create new advertisements every three months before the project is completed, and promote the project in the mass media, including TV and radio, newspapers and posters distributed with newspapers and in the neighborhood where the construction is undertaken. The ultimate goal of these two team members is to boost the sales of the advertised property. All the campaign costs are carried by the real estate advertising agency alone until most of the units of the advertised property are sold. Only then can the agency earn its commission from the construction company, based on how many units are sold.

Since the copywriter and the graphic designer have to write the body copy, produce graphic designs and deal with so many other matters, when it comes to employing English mixing in advertisements, they often save their labour by using easy-to-read English words, regardless of their accuracy. In addition, due to time and budget constraints, they do not turn to any professional help for proofreading English expressions. Consequently, English wording based on verbatim translations from Chinese sentences abounds in real estate advertising texts, especially those produced by small low-budget agencies.

Apart from the nature of the work, most of the local copywriters lack proficiency in English, and the graphic designers are usually even less-educated overall.¹⁷ Therefore, when mistakes occur, these copywriters are not even aware of them. On the other hand, some copywriters may turn to popular culture for inspiration in their English mixing. They may incorporate into their copywriting and graphic design the popular English

usage on the web and English mixing lyrics favoured by the younger generation to reflect trendy cultural developments. However, the popular English usages they borrow are often ungrammatical.

English mixing primarily serving as a graphic design and mood enhancer

For all the copywriters interviewed, the primary function of English mixing is to serve as a graphic design to create a certain ambiance. Since copywriters assume that no one reads the advertising text closely, especially the logo, what is really written is of no concern to either the copywriter or the graphic designer. All they request of themselves is to write something that is easy to read, to create the desired effects and socio-psychological impacts.

The following case, offered by one copywriter, illustrates how English mistakes are generated during the process of copywriting. To create the belief that one can live like a millionaire by purchasing the advertised property located beside a lake in Southern Taiwan, the copywriter used *Your Majesty* as the English product name. To stress how to approach the state of being rich, *Come across majesty* was produced as the headline. The English sub-headline *Take a life style up from welfare. It is well you come along like a king* comes from the verbatim translation of its Chinese counterpart in the text, *rensheng zhiji, yizhong shenghuo fuongde biaoaxian*.

Commenting on her own design, the copywriter stated that, since local audiences were being targeted, the English words used in the advertising text had to be easy to read and understand. Furthermore, since English mixing primarily serves as a graphic design for getting attention and creating a desired atmosphere, this copywriter does not need any full English accuracy in her graphic usage. For her purposes, English wording is not expected to be decoded word for word by the audience, but is mainly used to create an atmosphere.

This copywriter further explained that using English mixing facilitated the creation of an international flavour for advertised products. When such a value is attached, the unit price of advertised properties can be raised. Though many real estate copywriters are not concerned about accuracy in their English usage, those in upscale advertising agencies still view it as professional to use Standard English, especially when it comes to advertising high-end products.

Consumers' attitudes towards English mistakes in ads

Two studies help to shed some light on the way consumers view English deviations in advertising texts. In a survey conducted with 425 participants of various socio-economic backgrounds (Hsu 2008), when questioned

whether they identified any English errors in advertisements, 41.3 percent of the participants were unable to identify any mistakes, while 37.7 percent identified errors.¹⁸ The inability of such a relatively high percentage of the participants to identify any mistakes seems to point to the public's generally low proficiency in English. When further asked whether the identification of English mistakes may cast any negative impact on these participants' degree of acceptance of advertisements containing errors, 60 per cent of the participants stated that English mistakes did not affect their attitudes toward these advertisements. This study suggests that, due to the public's low command of English, English deviations in advertisements are generally either unidentified or ignored.

In another study, Hsu (2006) investigated consumers' attitudes toward seven patterns of English deviations common in advertising. The public were found to have a tremendous enthusiasm toward English mixing in advertising. However, such enthusiasm was constrained to usage where the English vocabulary mixed was simple and easy to read, such as 'easy go' and 'Give me high'. When lengthy English text consisting of verbatim translation from Chinese was processed, most of the participants failed to comprehend it. However, these participants were unaware that the semantic failure actually stemmed from the serious lack of grammar involved in the survey patterns. Instead, they attributed their failure to their low proficiency in English. Hence, due to their psychological and language barriers, their interest in and comprehension of the long texts were inhibited. For a detailed analysis of these participants' attitudes, see Hsu (2006). Both studies suggest that the general public favours simple English words and that most people are unable to identify, or are unconcerned about, English deviations in the advertising text.

Likewise, the same consumer attitudes were observed by the copywriter who created the product name of *Your Majesty*. In a marketing survey of 3000 potential customers interested in the sales project of *Your Majesty*, the majority did not read all the English wording in the advertisements, but merely focused on the main headline *Come across Majesty* for the desired psychological effects. In other words, they did not pay attention to the English mistakes.

What has been described so far seems to suggest that copywriters conform to the psychological expectations of consumers by using simple English words in the body copy and product names to communicate with target audiences while reserving long strings of English expressions mainly for the logo, to achieve a graphic purpose.

The issue of intelligibility

As far as copywriters are concerned, intelligibility seems to be limited to easy-to-read English product names and simple vocabulary in the body copy or headlines. No intelligibility is expected in long strings of English wording in the logo, since copywriters do not expect anyone to read them. On the other hand, they are not aware that their English wording is unintelligible to native speakers of English, as it actually consists of a word-for-word translation from Chinese.

Martin (1998) observes that in French advertising, copywriters write English-sounding song lyrics to evoke emotions in French consumers, most of whom do not understand English song lyrics. Martin thus concludes that advertising can be effective even if the text is not intelligible.

Similar to the strategy employed by the French copywriters creating the 'gibberish' English-sounding song lyrics (Martin 1998: 313), copywriters in Taiwan create non-standard English expressions by translating Chinese structure word for word into English, regardless of English language accuracy. In both cases, the English usage is intelligible to neither local consumers nor native speakers of English. Both this study and Martin's research suggest that '100% intelligibility is not as important as many would assume' (Martin 1998: 314).

In consequence, due to the combined effects of all the factors discussed above, deviations from Standard English usage abound in residential real estate advertisements in Taiwan.

Conclusion

Since English is so common nowadays in Taiwan, boosted by its status as an international language, English mixing is capitalized on extensively in the advertising of residential real estate properties, a business with a very local nature. English mixing is employed in accordance with Western architecture designs, which dominate the business of residential real estate properties in Taiwan. English mixing is used by copywriters to create a variety of socio-psychological effects. For high-end products, the mixing of English architectural jargon, the English brand names of imported home appliances and facilities, and the English names of architects designing the buildings combine to represent authenticity, internationalism, professionalism and superior quality of the advertised products. Background visuals referring to Western cultural themes and landmarks often appear in such ads.

By contrast, when it comes to low-end products, English mixing symbolizes easy access by the customers to the advertised property and the fulfillment of their dreams. Simple English product names and easy-to-read

vocabulary are employed. Verbatim translation of English wording based on its Chinese structural counterpart occurs frequently.

Most important of all, English mixing serves as a decorative graphic design, an artistic effect, to create desired atmospheres and convey all the intended socio-psychological impacts. Linguistic accuracy thus lies outside the concerns of copywriters. Likewise, the audience is not concerned about the linguistic deviations in ads. Consequently, English deviations prevail in residential real estate advertising in Taiwan.

In sum, like its role in French advertising, English in real estate advertising in Taiwan functions ‘not only as an attention-getter but also a brand image reinforcer, mood enhancer ...’ (Martin 1998: 336). Despite the difficulties involved in interviewing copywriters, such interviews provide firsthand information concerning the motivations behind various copywriting styles during the creative process of designing real estate advertisements, which in turn sheds light on how real estate advertising, as a component of popular culture, reflects the state-of-the-art developmental influence of English in Taiwan.

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Notes

1. The other four copywriters interviewed did not offer the author any of the print advertisements they created for reference after the interview sessions.
2. One of the copywriters interviewed indicated that the practice of using English mixing in residential real estate copywriting dates back to 1997, when copywriters in other fields started to employ easy-to-read English words in advertising high-tech products such as cell phones.

3. Prices of properties can vary considerably, depending on where the advertised property is located, for example, Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, as opposed to rural areas such as Taoyuan. Properties located in Taipei are usually much more expensive than those in other areas in Taiwan.
4. Martin defines a logo as 'a graphic representation of the company...[that] will appear as small icons in the advertisement, sometimes in addition to the company name mentioned elsewhere in the text' (1998: 243).
5. MRT stands for Mass Rapid Transit. It is Taipei's subway system.
6. Some Taiwanese copywriters tend to regard any foreign architects' names spelled with the Roman alphabet as English names, for example, Tadao Ando (a Japanese architect) and Hans Hollein (an Austrian architect).
7. Taiwan is situated in an earthquake-prone area. On 21 September 1999, a devastating earthquake occurred, causing a high number of casualties, building destruction and property loss. Since then, earthquake-resistant structures have been given special emphasis in residential real estate advertising.
8. According to Wikipedia (March 2008), 'Kensington Palace is a royal residence set in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London, England. It has been a residence of the British Royal Family since the 17th century. Until 1997, it was the official residence of the late Diana, Princess of Wales.'
9. Print ads in newspapers are the primary media used in advertising high-end properties located in Taipei. Television commercials are relatively uncommon.
10. According to the online edition of the *China Times* on 9 April 2010, *Dibao's* property value has increased tremendously. The price per square foot was up to US\$1,792 as of April 2010. According to a *China Times* online report on 29 September 2010, *Dibao* was ranked as one of the ten most luxurious residences in Asia.
11. All the copywriters interviewed maintain that simple vocabulary was used due to the perceived limitation of the general public's command of English. If English usages are difficult or lengthy, consumers will fail to understand the meaning of these words and consequently the message conveyed in the advertisements. This observation is confirmed by Hsu (2008).
12. Words such as *lounge* and *spa* are short and easy to read. According to one of the copywriters, *lounge* refers to a room located in the property, where a help-yourself type of bar is installed and residents can enjoy music and coffee. As in the West, this word suggests a sense of elegance in the local context. By contrast, *spa* has acquired a specific local meaning. While *spa* denotes water treatment in a hot or mineral spring resort in the West, in advertisements in Taiwan, it simply refers to a small pool for water treatment, massage and showers, as one of the facilities provided in the property.
13. In illustrating a Chinese–English mixed phrase in this chapter, to avoid readers' confusion between the Chinese and English spelling, the English words are capitalized.
14. *High* is an English adjective frequently used in advertising in Taiwan. According to two interviewed copywriters, it is not synonymous with the feelings entailed by using drugs. It merely represents a feeling of being playful, joyful, happy and excited.
15. During the Korean War (1950–53), Chinese troops were dispatched to join the war. After the war was over, approximately 14,000 Chinese prisoners of war

requested that they be sent to Taiwan of the Republic of China (Free China), rather than the People's Republic of China (Communist China). They arrived in Taiwan on 23 January 1954. To commemorate this special event, 23 January (123) was designated by the Taiwanese government as *ziyouri*, 'the day of freedom'. By referring to this historical event, copywriters use the special date 123 in conjunction with *ziyoushi* ('gentlemen of freedom, with its meaning extended to people of freedom') as the product name of the advertised property.

16. These 1265 ads were collected from newspapers, magazines and TV commercials.
17. Most of the graphic designers in the real estate advertising business graduate from Fuxin Trade and Arts School, where students receive a high school-equivalent education.
18. The survey sample consists of 425 participants coming from forty-two different professions, aged from thirteen to eighty-seven, with levels of education ranging from junior middle school to doctoral degree.

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