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## Hispanic Consumers' Preference for Spanglish in Print and Television Advertisements

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### **Abstract:**

*Hispanics are now the largest minority in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Along with this population growth, greater affluence has occurred. Advertisers are taking notice of these facts and are scrambling to find the most effective way of marketing to Hispanics. Spanglish dialogue use in advertising is an increasingly popular method marketer use in attempts to advertise to Hispanics. The Texas/Mexico border provides a unique opportunity for the study of Spanglish in advertising. The population of the RGV identifies as overwhelmingly Hispanic, 89.1 percent according the U.S. Census Bureau (2006). The population of this region, then, represents the target audience of advertisements that utilize Spanglish dialogue. This study investigated the valence (positive, neutral or negative) Hispanics who live in the Rio Grande Valley hold toward advertisements that utilize Spanglish Dialogue. This study compared preference for Spanglish advertisements against English only advertisements. The study found that participants preferred English advertisements.*

**Keywords:** Advertising, spanglish, Hispanic consumers

### **1. Introduction**

With spending power in the hundreds of billions of dollars, a growing, youthful population, and strong levels of acculturation, the Hispanic market has become important to US marketers. Marketers consider Hispanics to be a niche market. Niche marketing, or advertising to a small, well-defined group has taken the place of mass marketing and is another tactic marketers are utilizing to compensate for the changing face of media (Young & Aitken, 2007, Luna & Peracchio, 2002a). By targeting highly segmented populations, marketers are able to tailor a very specific message to a select group of people. Narrowing the market allows advertisers to create specific messages aimed directly at their target market. Furthermore, with new media avenues, such as the Hispanic-viewer-targeted LATV, marketers can increase the likelihood that their message will reach the audience for which it was intended.

Today, ethnicity is an important criterion advertiser use for fragmenting the market into niches (Holland & Gentry, 1999, Luna & Peracchio, 2005, Young & Aitken, 2007). Due to population size, affluence and media use, the Hispanic population clearly warrants niche market consideration (Karrfalt, 2006). Major corporations such as Kraft, General Foods and others are creating specialized marketing departments to develop advertising specifically for the Hispanic population (Lindsay, 2007).

Ueltschy and Krampf (1997) identified three main approaches for advertising to Hispanics: the "Change the language" approach, the "Nothing different" approach and the "Completely different" approach. According to Ueltschy and Krampf (1997) the "Change the language" approach takes English language advertisements and translates those ads directly into Spanish (Zbar, 1999). The "Nothing different" approach, assumes that Hispanic consumers have the same buying trends and interests as their Anglo counterparts; therefore, due to perceived similarities between the Hispanic and Anglo markets, the "Nothing different" approach makes no change in its advertising to Hispanics. The "Nothing different" approach assumes the advertised message will be received the same by both groups. The "Completely different" approach assumes Hispanics will identify and appreciate ad campaigns that are based on their culture and native language. When marketers use Spanglish in their advertisements, they are utilizing the "Completely different" approach.

Both the "Nothing different" and "Change the language" approaches quickly proved to hurt companies' reputations within the Hispanic community rather than help. By the mid 2000's advertisers understood new tactics, specific for the Hispanic market, would have to be developed.

For many years, Anglo marketers believed they were reaching the Hispanic audience by placing Spanish ads on Spanish television channels. These ads had little connection with Hispanic consumers. Creation of the Spanish language ads

generally followed one of two tactics. One tactic was to create a direct translation into Spanish from a preexisting English commercial (Zbar, 1999). Often times these ads felt impersonal and cold to the Hispanic consumers. Beyond cold and impersonal, some direct translation ads simply made no sense. An example of a humorous but embarrassing attempt at direct translation comes from the Dairy Association in the U.S. In the mid 90's the Dairy Association had great success in the U.S. with their, "Got Milk" campaign. When the Dairy Association decided to expand the campaign to Hispanic consumers, the Association opted for a direct translation of, "Got Milk" into Spanish. Imagine the surprise of Dairy Association executives when told they were asking millions of Spanish speakers: "Are you lactating?" (Tornoe, 2007). As a few marketers made embarrassing mistakes, the industry, as a whole, began to realize that advertising to Hispanics required more than pulling out the old English-Spanish dictionary.

While niche marketing has shown to be effective, the practice is not without its pitfalls (Smith, 2005, Iezzi, 2007, Lafuente, 2008,). Major corporations have created campaigns, which have not only failed to reach the intended niche market, but in some cases have offended said market. Examples of niche marketing failures are, Taco Bells', "Yo quiero taco bell" Chihuahua campaign and RJ Reynold's attempt at marketing cigarettes specifically to inner city African Americans. In both cases the target audience was more offended by the campaign than persuaded to buy the product. According to Wentz (2003), reaching the bicultural market could (and still can) be very difficult and confusing.

Going into the early 2000's, marketers knew they needed to market to Hispanics but the question was still, how? In 2008 companies such as Procter and Gamble, Pepsi Co, T-Mobile and many others have developed Spanglish language ads as an answer to fragmentation of media consumption by American consumers. To capture the attention of Hispanics, marketers have begun to create ads using techniques believed to resonate with the Hispanic population. Advertising in Spanglish is a reaction to the fragmentation of mass media.

Further, Palumbo and Teich (2005) note, "[a]dvertisers must strive to avoid the appearance of misusing ethnic symbols and ruining their credibility as an advertising source" (p. 164). In the rush to produce modern and innovative ads, companies must be careful not to offend the target audience. This is an important consideration when an advertiser creates an ad utilizing Spanglish. Today, marketers can only assume that Spanglish, when employed in an advertisement, is appreciated by Hispanic consumers. To date, there is limited research on consumer perceptions of Spanglish dialogue use in advertisements. Therefore, considering the lack of evidence supporting Spanglish advertising, companies cannot be certain they are not offending rather than gaining potential customers.

Companies realized that direct translation was not the answer to advertising to Hispanics consumers and began concentrating on creating advertisements that were conceptualized, written and acted, entirely in Spanish (Wentz, 2003). While Spanish only advertisements were a move in the right direction, early attempts often missed the mark.

The use of Spanglish in advertisements may provide the tactic necessary to reach the Hispanic consumer. While advertisers believe that Spanglish dialogue advertisements will be preferred over English-only ads by the Hispanic population of this area, little scholarly research on the topic is available. The present study examines the perceptions (positive, neutral or negative) Hispanic consumers living in the Rio Grande Valley hold regarding the use of Spanglish in advertising. This study contends that Hispanic consumers will prefer Spanglish dialogue over English-only advertisements in both television and print delivery modes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Spanglish

Social science has shown that using bilingual dialogue in advertising can create positive associations with the advertised product in the mind of the consumer (Kelly-Holmes & Atkinson, 2007, Hornikx, Meurs, & Marianne, 2007). Two factors work to create that positive association:

- By using the language of the consumer, an advertiser can seem more like the consumer, thus creating a bond (Hornikx et al., 2007).
- Often time's words in one language have deep or symbolic meanings that do not translate exactly into any others. By using the original language of a word, the full impact of its meaning will transfer into an ad (Luna & Peracchio, 2002b).

An example of factor number 2 is, the Spanglish word, "chiflada." The closet translation into English for the word chiflada would be, spoilt or unable to make up one's mind. An imaginary ad using the word may be, "Looking for cars with her is difficult because she is chiflada. Then, we saw the Chevy Malibu and the decision was made!" If the word, spoilt, or the phrase, could not make her mind, were used in place of chiflada the full impact of the ad would be lost on the Hispanic consumer.

The research indicates that, when used properly, bilingual dialogue in an advertisement can create a bonding with the product in the mind of the consumer and an ability to grasp the full meaning of the ad dialogue (Hornikx, et al, 2007). Advertisers have discovered, when advertising to Mexican Americans in Texas, Spanglish is marketing gold (Clark, 2007). Spanglish is effective because not only do Hispanics understand the language but they also appreciate its use (Clark, 2007). In fact, Hispanics often use Spanglish as a bonding mechanism (Nuelp, 2003). Furthermore, this unique dialectic blend of English and Spanish has just recently lost much of the stigma of being the language of the under-educated and uncultured

(Sayer, 2008). Today, many Hispanics at all economic, educational, and acculturation levels use Spanglish in their speech (Clark, 2007).

Spanglish is the unique blend of Spanish and English languages spoken by many US Hispanics (Stavans, 2003). In the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the term, "Tex-Mex," is often used interchangeably with Spanglish. The two words, however, have the same meaning. A blending of both Spanish and English within the same sentence or same word is the key feature of a Spanglish statement (Neuliep, 2003). An example of a Spanglish phrase is, "Tiempo is money." "Tiempo" (meaning 'time' in Spanish) is blended with the English, "is money" to create a phrase which is neither completely Spanish nor completely English. What that phrase has become is uniquely Spanglish.

Spanglish is important to many in the Hispanic culture (Clark, 2007). The dialect is a way for Hispanics to remain connected to their culture. Neuliep (2003) states, "...the hybrid language is an expression of friendship, acceptance and approval" (p. 87). Neuliep goes on to note that Spanglish is the result of people living in two worlds. According to Neuliep (2003), Spanglish speakers generally attend English schools, sporting events...etc., but live in homes and neighborhoods where Spanish is the primary language. As Hispanics, blend the cultures of Mexico and the U.S. into their lives, so to, over time, have they blended the languages.

As noted above, large companies and many advertisers believe that Spanglish dialogue use in advertising is effective when marketing to the Hispanic population. There is, however, little empirical evidence to support that belief. Social science has developed theories that explain why multi-lingual advertisements can be effective.

Convergence in advertising is a technique used the world over (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Convergence occurs when a speaker borrows speech patterns or accents from the addressee. Throughout Europe and Africa, English and French are the most common languages infused with the local language (Luna & Peracchio, 2005). Marketers believe by writing ads that speak in the consumers' home language a bond is built between the advertised product and the consumer. Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) note that there is little empirical evidence that supports these ads as being persuasive. However, with or without empirical evidence, advertisers believe in bilingual advertisements as a method of bonding (converging) with consumers.

Increasingly, US marketers' attempt convergence with the Hispanic consumer living in Texas, more specifically, living in Texas's Rio Grande Valley, by writing Spanglish advertisements (Clark, 2007). This style of marketing should be well received. Research shows that Hispanics of all acculturation levels generally have positive attitudes towards the use of Spanish in advertising (O'Guinn & Faber, 1986, Palumbo et al, 2005). Palumbo et al suggest that, "The Hispanic viewer is aware of the advertiser's respect for their values while simultaneously feeling included in mainstream society" (2005, p.162). However, past studies have focused on bilingual advertising utilizing formal Spanish. The use of Spanglish in advertising remains largely untested.

There is a vast amount of social science literature on the topic of bilingual dialogue as use in advertising (Stayman & Deshpande, 1994, Kates & Goh, 2003, Luna & Peracchio, 2005, Hornikx, Meurs, & Marianne, 2007). Most studies focus on advertising in English and a language other than Spanish. The few investigations that do study English/Spanish bilingual advertising use formal Spanish dialogue. The literature lacks analysis of the acceptance of true Spanglish (the meshing of English and Spanish to create a unique word) in advertising. This study will add to the body of literature by examining Spanglish as the meshing of English and Spanish.

Research has also ignored the Texas/Mexico Border as a location for studying this approach towards advertising. With a growing and affluent Hispanic population, advertisers stand to gain much by understanding how to advertise in this market. The present study examines Hispanic consumers' preference (positive, neutral or negative) for advertisements employing Spanglish dialogue.

This study contends that Spanglish advertisements will be preferred to English only advertisements by Hispanic consumers' in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

## 2.2. Hypotheses and Research Questions

Given the previous indicators that Hispanic consumers will be more positively persuaded by an advertisement that includes at least some Spanglish, the present study poses the following three hypotheses:

- **H1:** Hispanics living in the Rio Grande Valley will have a more positive attitude toward a product advertised using Spanglish dialogue as compared to a product advertised using English only.
- **H2:** Hispanics exposed to print advertisements employing mixed dialogue (i.e., English and Spanglish) will report a more positive perception of the product being advertised than those exposed to print advertisements employing English-only dialogue.
- **H3:** Hispanics exposed to televised advertisements employing mixed dialogue (i.e., English and Spanglish) will report a more positive perception of the product being advertised than those exposed to televised advertisements employing English-only dialogue.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

This study utilized a convenience sample. All participants were students, faculty, or staff members associated with two medium sized universities in South Texas. This study only considered participants identifying as Hispanic<sup>1</sup>. A total of three hundred sixteen subjects participated in this study. Females accounted for 54.7% (n = 173) of the sample and 45.3% (n = 143) of the sample were males. Participants' ages ranged from 18 – 48.

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of 10 conditions. Participants either watched one of four different video ads or read one of six print advertisements. Random assignment was the method used for placing participants within groups.

#### 3.2. Design

A 2 x 2 between subject's experiment design was utilized. The first independent variable was advertising medium (print vs. televised) and the second independent variable was language style used in advertisement (English-only vs. English and Spanglish dialogue).

#### 3.3. Dependent Variable

To measure subjects' perceptions of the advertised product, participants were asked to complete a 5-point rating scale. This scale measured the participants' level of preference for the advertised product. The scales were phrased:

- "This bank is poor quality/ This bank is high quality"
- "I would not join this bank /I might join this bank"
- "This bank is not appealing at all/This bank is very appealing"
- "I would not recommend this bank to a friend/I would recommend this bank to a friend"
- "This bank is mediocre/This bank is exceptional"
- "This bank is very bad/This bank is very good."

The maximum score for the scale was 30 and the minimum score was six. The higher a participant's score on the scale the more favorable was his/her opinion. This scale followed the work of Luna & Peracchio(2005). The questionnaire included an acculturation scale to measure the effect of acculturation on ad preference.

#### 3.4. Stimulus Materials

This study utilized two different video advertisements and three different print advertisements. Ads that were used for both the television condition and print condition were not in circulation in the Rio Grande Valley. The three print ads that fit the study criteria were presented in English (original ad) and for the Spanglish version the original tagline was modified into Spanglish. The two television advertisements had their original English voice-over dialogue and the treatment version had its content translated into Spanglish. The original language for all advertisements was English.

To limit the threats to internal validity due to the advertised product, the ads for this study focused on banks. Banks have shown to hold little cultural significance to Hispanics in the US (Luna & Peracchio, 2005). Banks are used by all Ethnic-groups living in the U.S. and no one group can claim unique, "ownership". Utilizing products that hold no cultural significance to any one cultural group is consistent with Deshpande and Stayman's (1994) work.

"It is expected that an identification effect due to increased ethnic salience should influence credibility most when there is no direct reason to suspect that members of one group have more expertise than those of another on the topic of the message (that is, for example, the advertisement is not for a product for which one ethnic group is generally considered to have more experience and/or knowledge." (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994, p. 63)

Accordingly, six different banks were used as the product(s) being advertised. Six different banks were used in order to ensure that participant reaction was not ad specific. Voice-over dialogue was used in all four video advertisements. A professional television announcer was recruited to voice the dialogue for these ads. The announcer was female who spoke without a Hispanic accent. Ethnicity of the voice talent was not revealed to participants. Hispanics (in general) do attribute more credibility to announcers who sound more like them (Palumbo & Teich, 2005). For this study, however, the advertisement, not the ethnicity of the announcer, was the focus. Therefore, ethnicity of the announcer should not have influenced the results of the study. The announcer voiced both the English and Spanglish versions of the advertisements.

Adobe Photoshop graphic software aided in placing taglines into the advertisements. Graphics and fonts remained identical between pairs of advertisements. Only the script changed between English and Spanglish versions of the advertisements.

#### 3.5. Procedure

Participants for the video advertisements were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. To begin, participants watched the assigned video advertisement twice. After watching the ad, participants completed the questionnaire. Participants were debriefed after returning the questionnaire to the principal investigator.

The questionnaire/treatment packets were randomly assigned to participants. The packet contained consent form, one advertisement (Spanglish or English) and the questionnaire. The principal investigator asked participants to view the ad and then complete the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was returned, the participants were debriefed.

#### 4. Results

This study examined the perception of Spanglish advertising by Hispanic consumers living in the Rio Grande Valley. To test the interaction between advertising medium (print/televised) and language an ANOVA was run. To test consumers' perceptions a series of post hoc t-tests were run for H1, H2, and H3.

**H1:** Hispanics living in the Rio Grande Valley will have a more positive attitude toward a product advertised using Spanglish dialogue compared to a product using English-only advertising. This hypothesis was not supported. A significance relationship, however, was found in the opposite direction. For H1 English dialogue in advertising was preferred over Spanglish, ( $M = 16.25, 13.50, SD = 6.06, 5.88$ ),  $t(4.04), p < .05$ .

**H2:** In print advertising, English mixed with Spanglish dialogue will create a more positive attitude, in the mind of the Hispanic consumer, toward the product being advertised when compared to the same product using an English-only advertisement.

The hypothesis was not supported. Once, again English was preferred significantly more than Spanglish ( $M = 16.04, 12.5, SD = 6.09, 5.68$ ),  $t(4.11), p < .05$ .

**H3:** In television advertising, English mixed with Spanglish dialogue will create a more positive attitude, in the mind of the Hispanic consumer, toward the product being advertised when compared to the same product using an English-only advertisement.

The hypothesis was not supported. Significance was found, however, in the opposite direction. English dialogue was preferred over Spanglish ( $M = 16.59, 15.1, SD = 6.06, 5.89$ ),  $t(1.37), p < .05$ .

#### 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact advertisements presented in English-only verses English/Spanglish dialogue had on Hispanic consumers perception ratings of the advertised product. Three hypotheses were posed. Each of the three hypotheses predicted that Spanglish mixed with English would be preferred. Surprisingly, in each case, the opposite result was found. This study revealed that English-only advertising received significantly higher positive responses than the Spanglish ads. Group members who translated the ads into Spanglish agreed that Spanglish tends to be spoken without conscious thought. That is to say, the words are part of the speaker's everyday vocabulary. Furthermore, Spanglish words are not proper English or Spanish words. So, when a Spanglish word is shoehorned into an advertisement (as discovered in this study), the results can lead to a negative attitude toward the product being advertised.

Conducting the study on college campuses may have affected the results. An understanding of English is required to attend or work at a U.S. college. This study printed all literature, such as consent form, questionnaire, etc., in English. Spanglish, then, could have seemed out of place to the participants. "Out of place" could have translated to wrong in some participants' minds. While Spanglish is gaining acceptance, it still has the reputation as the language of the poor and uneducated. Pulling people out of poverty and educating them are two roles of a university. Many people, who attend or work at the colleges where the study was conducted, are first generation college students who come from impoverished backgrounds. For many participants, the Spanglish advertisements may have represented all they were struggling to rise above. Reveron (2007) illustrates the above point by stating, "Latinos in high school and college are educated in English and live day-to-day in English. It's much more about reaching them from a cultural standpoint, not a pure linguistic one" (p. 2). In the case of this study, the language may have been technically correct but the cultural marker was wrong.

Viewers generally have low involvement with advertisements (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert, 2002). Participants for this study viewed each television ad twice and spent several seconds scanning the print advertisements. Involvement, for participants in this study, was high. In contrast, the same advertisements viewed outside of the study may have received a more positive rating due to lower involvement. Although, it is important to note that involvement with the ad was not tested, this study used guidelines set forth by Yang (2004), who believes his treatment/measurement encourages participants' involvement with the ad to be high. Yang notes that involvement with an advertisement is high when the viewer is actively involved with cognitively engaged in watching the ad (Yang, 2004). High involvement with the Spanglish advertisements bolsters the argument for the previous discussion point. High involvement may have reminded participants of the negative connotations of Spanglish rather than the positive attributes of the advertised product.

Support for H2 was not found. Again, the English-Only advertisement achieved significantly higher positive ratings than the ratings for the Spanglish ad. One possible explanation for this finding is the delivery of the message was visual rather than aural. Reading Spanglish may be less typical than hearing Spanglish. Possibly, seeing the informal words on the written page may emphasize the informality of Spanglish code. This informality may result in subjects evaluating Spanglish as improper or, "wrong."

### 5.1. Limits of Research

A study needs to expand the representativeness of its sample. Non-students as well as students of all ages should have been selected as participants.

The advertisements themselves were limitations. This study utilized English commercials that were already in circulation. Back translations were done to create the Spanglish version of each ad. As noted in the discussion, this is the least effective way of creating a Spanglish commercial. To ensure validity of test results for this study, taglines for both English and Spanglish versions of the ads had to remain unchanged (Except for the addition of Spanglish in one half of the ads).

### 5.2. Topics for Further Research

Spanglish dialogue is still an under researched topic. Therefore, there is much to study. Past research indicates that Hispanics, in general, use and appreciate Spanglish (Clark, 2007). Advertisements in Spanglish, should be viewed more positively than English-only advertisements. Further study on this topic is required to determine the most effective way of infusing Spanglish into advertising. What follows is a brief discussion of topics for further research.

The message source is an important area to consider for continuing study. How do Hispanics want to hear, see, and emotionally feel the Spanglish message? Wilson (2007) states that Hispanics generally prefer advertisements that feature Hispanic actors/spokespersons to advertisements that feature non-Hispanic players. This study believes that source factors are important when advertising to the Hispanic population. An advertisement should create similarity between the product and the consumer (Perse, 2001). This study attempted to create similarity through language not through a spokesperson. Future studies, then, should focus on the spokesperson of the advertisement. Will Hispanic consumers prefer a Hispanic to a non-Hispanic spokesperson? Will voice-over be preferred to an onscreen spokesperson? Are actors preferred to an on-screen spokesperson that is providing a testimonial or direct appeal? How Hispanic consumers who live in the Rio Grande Valley perceive the source of the advertisement will be a critical area for future study.

Demographics are always an important consideration in advertising. Niche markets are created based on demographics. Understanding how various age groups view Spanglish in advertising is an important area for future study. Level of education may affect how Hispanics living in the Rio Grande Valley view Spanglish advertisements. Along with education, future studies may want to consider how consumers at various income levels view Spanglish advertisements. Understanding how demographics affect Spanglish advertisements will clue marketers in on how to write positively received future ads in this genre.

## 6. Conclusion

This study was designed to discover whether Hispanics living in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, prefer English-only or Spanglish dialogue advertisements. Hispanics cultural connection to language and emotional tie to Spanglish led to a hypothesis stating that Spanglish use in advertising would be preferred to English-only. The results of the study indicated the opposite to be true. In fact, English-only advertisements were preferred. These findings, however, should not cause advertisers to shy away from Spanglish. As noted throughout this report, Spanglish is the unofficial language of people who live in the Rio Grande Valley. This study serves as an example, perhaps, of how not to utilize Spanglish in an advertisement. The, "Change the Language," approach to creating Spanglish ads is not the best method for getting a message across.

Rather than shying away from Spanglish in advertising, marketers should conduct further research. Only through deeper study will advertisers discover the most appropriate way of incorporating Spanglish into ad messages.

Clearly, further research in this area is necessary. Effectively advertising to Hispanics has implications deeper than marketing products. Public service announcements and other public messages are increasingly targeted towards Hispanics. Media need to know if Spanglish is an effective way of creating messages for the Hispanic market. If media professionals and marketers are going to sell (product or ideas) to Hispanics, they are going to need to understand how to communicate with this audience.

## 7. Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The term Hispanic covers a diverse group of people who originate from multiple countries and backgrounds. This study concentrates on Hispanics who identify as Mexican or Mexican American and reside in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, as this group is the target market of Spanglish dialogue advertisements (Clark, 2007).

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