English in Japanese and Philippine Advertising: 
An Exploratory Comparison 

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ABSTRACT 

The use of English is often presented in advertisements that primarily do not target English-reading clientele in Japan or the Philippines. This paper explores the functionality, characteristics and acceptance of English found in localized promotion. First, various media sources from each country were compared to determine the percentage of promotions that exhibited English and how it was utilized. A survey regarding the acceptance and perception of English in these promotions by the consumer was conducted. In Japan, 96% of the advertisements and 42% of store fronts contained English words. In the Philippines, over 99% of advertisements and store fronts contained English. The survey revealed evidence that English in Japan and the Philippines promotions are well received. In Japan the majority considered the use of the English language as either an exotic marketing strategy for the local consumer or as strategy for how local businesses show globalization. However, in the Philippines the use of the English language was viewed as a way to encourage international investment and attract business into the country. 

Keywords: Advertisement, English, Japan, Philippines, marketing, perceptions, promotion 

INTRODUCTION 

This paper explores the use and acceptance of English in markets in the countries of Japan and The Philippines. The relationship that these countries have with the Western world, specifically the United States, regarding modern industry and marketing has a historically significant beginning with World War II (Danquah, 2005). From this time, each country went through an industrial and a market revolution primarily under the watch of the United States, but their economies have led to very different states in today’s world. The 2010 gross national product per capital (PPP) for Japan was $34,000, while the PPP for the Philippines was $3,500 (CIA, 2012). Despite similar economic rebuilding, there are distinct differences between these two geographically close nations, one of which is their use and acceptance of English. With economic progress came the inevitable influx of foreign products and with it came English. From 1950 to 2010 the percentage of the worlds GDP has expanded from just over 10% to close to 30%. (Maddison, 2008). This rise in purchasing power has made this area remarkable as industrial stars and has given the purchasing power to become markets of interest to sellers as well. Regardless of where Nike® or Coca-Cola®, are seen in the world the product branding is recognizable. Furthermore, the English catch phrases of “Just Do it” by Nike, Inc. or “Enjoy” by Coca-Cola, Inc. are recognized worldwide. The simplicity and cost savings of a single language brand, slogan, and campaign was desirable and did not go unnoticed by these emerging nations. So the intriguing questions became how and why the English language is being accepted in non-English speaking markets and how it lures them to buy. Unfortunately the research into the functionality and effects of English in localized non-English speaking
markets is minimal, eclectic and inconsistent. For example, in 2000 (Gerritsen, Korzilius, VanMeurs, & Gijsbers) research of television commercials in the Netherlands showed that advertisements that used English words and phrases were not well received by the Dutch consumer. While in Brazil, the use of English in marketing was so successful that Brazilian companies were changing their names to sound more English (Friedrich 2000). In the Far East, English has been shown to be well received. In Thailand, beginning in the 1980's (Masavisutet, 1986), English words were used in advertising to make products seem exotic to the local market. This same research found that local companies would make up words that “sounded English” to compete with Western products. In comparison, Korean advertisers are still doing the same, making product and company names that sound English to bring a sense of Western quality to their products. A survey showed that this form of marketing is well received by the local consumers.

**The Market in Japan**

Japan’s corporations have made Japan the second richest economy in the world (Strom, 2001) producing a wealthy consumer base that has historically been very loyal to local products (Fields, Katahira, & Wind, 1999). Many examples of research on the marketing approaches of local and international firms in the Japanese market are available on entering this rich market (Amasaka, 2007; Azuma & Fernie, 2001; Kim 2010). However, extant literature offers little explanation on how, why and at what level English is utilized. This is of particular interest given the economic power of Japan, and the fact that the use of English in this rich market has been described as difficult to enter and remain profitable (Strom, 2001).

**The Market in the Philippines**

The Philippines have one of the longest traditions of international trade and one of the longest histories of any Far East country for allowing foreigners to immigrate to and become residence of their country (Scalise & Guzman, 1995). Today, compared to Japan, the second richest economy in the world, the Philippines have been described as a third world country (Chen, 1997). It has a consumer base from two distinct labor forces, one of the structured “high-pay formal” work force and the other from the unstructured “under the counter paid” labor force that is not reported (Chen, 1997). This suggests that even with the low reported PPP of the country there is still a large market base that attracts international business and marketing.

**The Use of English**

Research to this point has given us four aspects of English to review as to why it is used in these markets: 1) English is the international second language, 2) some concepts are easier to convey in their original English language, 3) English is placed in markets for tourist, not the local shoppers and 4) English is used to convey a country of origin effect. The first, has gained such acceptance that it has its own journal: The journal of English as an international language (Sivasubramaniam, 2012). The second, which claims that certain words or phrases are easier to convey in the original English is shown by research to be widely discussed in forums, such as the critical-thinking-philosophy forum ((Sivasubramaniam, 2012). The third of these, the idea that the local English use is for tourist was discussed in research of Italian markets (Castiglioni, 2009), as well as in general international marketing (DePalma, Sargent, Beninatto, 2006). Finally, the country of origin (Han, 1989; Aiello, et. al., 2008; Martin, Lee, & Lacey, 2011) has been shown as a localized and international marketing factor.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Exploratory research demonstrates that usage of signs, billboards, and magazines are common in these two markets. These are common outlets for advertisements. Therefore this will be the starting point for the evaluation of the use of the English language in these two markets. The second part of the research will delve into the acceptance by the consumer of the English used in these advertisements.

Proposed Motivations for Businesses Using English in Promotions

Evidence indicates that East Asian consumers may view English use in signage as exotic and very desirable (Masavisutet, 1986). To gauge the consumer acceptance and comprehension of the English language, four topics were developed. The first of these topics “English is the international language” is presented to determine the extent of the consumer’s acceptance of English as the international language.

1. English is the international language.
2. Common phrases from the news and movies are easier to write and say in English.
3. This country has many foreign visitors and tourists. Mixing English into local marketing is done for them.
4. English is the exotic language of the West and it is used as a marketing strategy.

Participants were asked to provide a written response to following questions:
5. Why do you think English is used in advertisements in this country?
6. Why do you think English is used around the world in marketing?

METHODS

Research Design - Study One

Purpose and Scope - This was an exploratory study of Japanese and Filipino advertisements. The purpose of the study was to canvass various media sources (magazines, outdoor business signs and storefronts), to determine the percentage of promotions that exhibited English and how it was utilized (e.g., company name, brand name or catchphrase). This was a multistep exploratory study that compared the use and acceptance of English in advertisements in Japan and the Philippines. First, various media sources from each country were compared to determine the percentage of promotions that exhibited English and how it was utilized. Then, a survey was administered that explored the acceptance and perception of English in these promotions by consumers.

Media Sources - The following media sources were assessed for advertisements:
The advertisements from 30 magazines published over a two year period (May 2007 - May 2009 for Japan and April 2008 – April 2010 for the Philippines) were collected from each country. The choice of genres of these magazines included fashion, economics, business, automotive, and graphic design. These magazines were chosen based on what was most available in the two markets.

A total of 200 advertisements posted on storefronts, billboards, and signs were photographed and analyzed in the downtown area of the capital city and one secondary city of each country, Tokyo and Fukuyoka in Japan, and Manila and Makati in the Philippines.

Procedure - For the magazines, all advertisements were tallied. The advertisements with English were highlighted and the totals were categorized based on the following functionalities: company name, product name, company logo, catchphrases, endorsement, action words, location, or event.

The assessments of the signs and storefronts were conducted from May 1 to May 5, 2009 in Japan
and from April 16 to April 21, 2010 in the Philippines. The city central areas of each city were chosen because they were not regarded as a tourist destination, and thus, any English wording found in advertisements was less likely to be a consequence of a local English-speaking presence. Two hundred public displayed advertisements were randomly photographed with a digital camera in each city from foot or a bus window. They were analyzed for the use of English in the company name, products, or services provided and for any slogans, phrases or other remarks using English.

**Research Design - Study Two**

**Purpose** – The purpose was to explore consumer perceptions of the rationale for using English in Japanese and Filipino advertising.

**Variables** – The survey was translated into Japanese by a native Japanese speaker and given in English in the Philippines.

The survey presented the items listed under Proposed Motivations for Businesses Using English in Promotions above. Directions for the participant to mark if the strongly agree, somewhat agree, are neutral, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

Demographics included: Participant age, sex, native country, country of residence, level of education attained, and years of working experience.

**Procedure** – Participants were from two different shopping malls located adjacent to universities in each country. In Japan both shopping malls were in Fukuoka. In the Philippines both shopping malls were in Manila. It was communicated that participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were offered assorted candy from a basket for filling out the questionnaire. Categorizing of the open ended questions was performed by the researcher and one translator. The responses were categorized based on the use of key words or phrasing the responses.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY ONE**

**Japanese Advertisements** - Within the 30 Japanese magazines 1,598 advertisements were reviewed, of which 1,391 (96%) used English. Specifically, English was used in the following contexts:

- 71.7% communicated the company name in English
- 44.4% communicated the product name in English
- 42.4% had a separate company logo written in English
- 22.0% used English catchphrases
- 10.6% gave the endorsement of a star or another organization in English
- 10.8% used English in action words (e.g., “climbing”, “running”)
- 2.0% gave a location in English
- 0.6% told of an event in English

In Japan, almost three quarters of the company names and close to half of the product names are presented in English. This indicates the international and local marketers perceive value in the name well over other uses of English in this market. Of the 200 storefront photographs analyzed, 42% used English in some form. More specifically, English was used in the following manners:

- 44% storefronts displayed their company name in English
- 41.5% wrote the primary products they carried in English
- 32.5% used English in a catchphrase of some kind
- 3% posted events (e.g., sales) in English
**Philippine Advertisements** - Within the 30 Filipino magazines, 1257 advertisements were reviewed, 1256 (99.9%) of which used English. More specifically, English was used in the following contexts:

- 98.6% communicated the company name in English
- 99.3% communicated the product name in English
- 99.0% had a separate company logo written in English
- 99.8% used English in catchphrases in English
- 11.5% gave the endorsement of a star or another organization in English
- 43.0% used English for action words (e.g., “climbing”, “running”)
- 36.1% gave a location in English
- 1.9% told of an event in English

With close to 100% usage of English across advertisements, the Philippines’ advertisements appear to resemble closely that of the United States. Of the 200 storefront photographs analyzed, 98% used English. Specifically, English was used in the following manners:

- 96% storefronts displayed their company name in English
- 64% wrote the primary products they carried in English
- 89% used English in a catchphrase of some kind
- 8% posted events (e.g., sales) in English

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY TWO**

The results of the demographics and the four survey questions are presented in table 1. Results of the written answer questions are presented in Tables 2 through 5.

| Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the survey in Japan and the Philippines |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| **Participants:**      | **Japan**               | **Philippines**          |
|                        | 112                    | 82                      |
| Sex:                  | 41.5% male, 58.5% female | 43.6% male, 57% female  |
| Average age and range:| 34 years and range 18-83 years | 24 years and range 16-52 years |
| Percentage Local:     | 80% Chinese, 10% Filipino, 10% other | 100% |
| Average education:    | 3rd or 4th year college students (XX% | 3rd or 4th year college students (46.1%) |
| Average work experience: | 1 1/2 year (range 0 to 45 years) | 3 1/2 years (range 0 to 45 years) |
| “English is international” | 84.1% | 88.4% |
| “English is easier”    | 18.3% | 74.1% |
| “English is for tourists” | 40.2% | 73.2% |
| “English: exotic”      | 57.3% | 77.1% |

Demographically the Japanese consumers surveyed are on average 10 years older and have 8 ½ more years of work experience than the average Filipino consumer. These age and work differences, in addition to culture, could help explain the differences in the results between the Japanese and the Filipinos.

**Japanese Survey** - The results show that participants from Japan agreed that English is the international language and that it is used as a marketing strategy. The question of “English is for tourist?” was split closely between agreement and disagreement. The Japanese participants did not view reading English as easier. The written responses to the two open ended questions were grouped in to six general
categories as presented in the following tables. The first question was regarding the use of English in
advertisements in Japan. The most common response (Table 2) centered on that fact that English is the
global language. This was followed by the responses that companies are trying to appear globalized and
English is used to convey luxury. This insight to the thinking of the Japanese consumer should be kept in
mind as advertisers approach this market.

Table 2: English in Japanese Advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Why do you think English is used in advertisements in Japan?”</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think English is used in advertisements in Japan/Philippines?</td>
<td>Total respondents (out of 74)</td>
<td>Percentage respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English looks more luxurious (e.g., cool, sophisticated, trendy, stylish)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is the global language</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies are trying to look more globalized (conveying globalization)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach tourists</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese is too complicated/ Filipino languages are too complicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g., it is simple, natural, stays in memory longer, unique, more expressive)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second question was in regard to why English is used around the world in marketing. The
combination of the English is the “global language” and the “to reach a wider audience” group encompass
74% of the responses.

Table 3: Japanese View of English in World Advertising:

"Why do you think English is used around the world in marketing?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why do you think English is used around the world in marketing?</th>
<th>Total respondents (out of 67)</th>
<th>Percentage respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English is the global language</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be globally competitive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to reach a wider audience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows a “cool” or “modern look” for the advertising</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier for business</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g., “don’t know” and that it is “an aspect of value”)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in Japan generally view English as the international language and that it is used as
a marketing strategy. They are accepting of its use, but marketers should be aware that the majority of
Japanese consumers view English as a marketing strategy. The Japanese respondents generally viewed
English as a means to attract the local customer or that the local companies are using English as part of a
global campaign. One example of this use of English by local businesses is in the automotive industry.
Company names and vehicle models are displayed on Japanese cars in English in Japan. This was
observed without exception during the study. For example, the Honda Accord or Toyota Corolla for cars
and the Yamaha V-Max or the Suzuki GSXR for motorcycles, all had English company names and vehicle
models. This is an example of local companies using English as a means to show that they are large
global organizations that market their products to the West.

The Philippines Survey -73.2% to 88.4% of the participants in the Philippines agreed with all four
statements in items one through four (Table 1). The written responses to the two open ended questions
were grouped in to six general categories as presented in the following tables. The first was regarding the
use of English in advertisements in the Philippines. The most common response (Table 4) centered on that fact that English is the global language. This was followed by the belief that English is used to attract tourists. Furthermore, 8% of the participants had an underlying belief that English was used extensively in the Philippines to attract foreign business and investment.

Table 4: English in Philippine Advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why do you think English is used in advertisements in Japan?</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents (out of 74)</td>
<td>Percentage respondents</td>
<td>Total respondents (out of 91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English looks more luxurious (e.g., cool, sophisticated, trendy, stylish)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is the global language</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies are trying to look more globalized (conveying globalization)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach tourists</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese is too complicated/ Filipino languages are too complicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g., it is simple, natural, stays in memory longer, unique,)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second question was in regard to why English is used around the world in marketing. The combination of the English is the global language and the “to reach a wider audience” group encompass 87% of the responses. The Philippine respondents added that English is simply easier for the businesses to use compared to translating into local languages.

Table 5: Philippines View of English in World Advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why do you think English is used around the world in marketing?</th>
<th>Total respondents (out of 88)</th>
<th>Percentage respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English is the global language</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be globally competitive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to reach a wider audience</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows a “cool” or “modern look” for the advertising</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier for business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ( “to increase international trade”)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in the Philippines strongly agreed with all four statements on why English is used in their market. The most common explanation was that English is the “global language.” Responses that inferred English as a common second language or used for international communication were categorized under "global language" (Riley, 2010). The use of Billboard marketing is a relatively new concept in the Philippines (De los Reyes & Santos, 2006) and the most common spoken language in Manila, Tagalog, was only seen on 3% of the signs. This is contrasted by the use of English on 99% of the signs. This shows the overall acceptance and the extent to which the market is saturated with English in the Philippines. The common theme here is that the local consumer is accepting of English, but they have a sense that it is not directed to them, but toward foreigners.
COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION: JAPAN AND PHILIPPINES

No significant difference was found between “English is the International language” and “English is an exotic marketing strategy”. In the belief that English is easy to understand and that the primary use of the language is for tourists, Japan and the Philippines diverge. As shown in chart 1, 74.1% of the participants surveyed in the Philippines agree that common phrases from the news and movies are easier to write and say in English. This view is only held by 18.3% of the Japanese, the majority of the Japanese participants disagreed with this notion. This could easily be based on the fact that the Philippines have between 120 and 175 languages and dialects (McFarland, 1993), while, Japan has one unified language. What is of interest here is that English in local marketing is accepted, but for very different reasons. Advertisers should use this information to stay in favor with the local consumers of these markets. The Japanese should be reassured that the marketers are not trying to deceive them with English, as the Japanese consumer is very aware of the use of English as a marketing strategy. The Philippine consumer is accepting of the use of English but, feel it is not directed to them. The local Philippine consumers may be better served with English marketing that does not appear to be directed at the foreign or tourist population.

![Chart 1: English is easier to understand](image1)

As shown in chart 2, 73.2% of the participants surveyed in the Philippines agree that mixing English into local marketing is done for tourists. No participant in the Philippines disagreed with this notion. However, this view is only held by 40.2% of the Japanese, while 31.7% disagreed.

![Chart 2: “English is for tourists”](image2)
CONCLUSION

The results show that the level of English used in each market is generally accepted and effective in the local markets. However, there are completely different mind sets as to why it is in their markets and who it is actually there for. The Japanese respondents generally viewed English as a means to attract the local customer or that the local companies are using English as part of a global campaign. This is contrasted by the Philippine participants that view the use of English in the advertising and in their culture as a means to attract foreign tourism and investment. In either respect, marketers can feel confident in incorporating English in Japanese advertisements and presenting advertisements completely in English in the Philippines.

REFERENCES


