Translating Advertising
Painting the Tip of an Iceberg

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Abstract. *Translating advertising copy is like painting the tip of an iceberg. What you see are the words, but there is a lot behind the words that must be understood to transfer advertising from one culture to another. This paper demonstrates that consumer behaviour and the way consumers communicate are heavily dependent on their cultural values. For advertising, one important distinction is between low- and high-context communication, which can help us understand that people categorize the world in different ways. Another important influence of culture is on consumers' needs, motives and emotions. Variations in interpersonal communication styles are reflected in advertising styles. Thus, effective advertising uses a culturally appropriate advertising style. For example, in Europe and Asia these styles are very different from US advertising style, of which rhetoric is an integral part. Another idea which is expanded in the present paper is that the persuasive communication function of advertising is biased toward rational claims. This is the sort of style that can be translated, but translation does not necessarily render such advertising appropriate for other cultures.*

With increased global trade and the emergence of the global company the idea was born that it would be cost-effective to develop all advertising in the home country of the company for use in other countries, either in the English language or translated into many different languages. But it is not only languages that vary across the globe; consumers' needs, and the way advertising appeals to these needs, also do. Recent decades saw a heated debate on how to cope with these differences. In 1983, Harvard professor Ted Levitt published an article entitled 'The Globalization of Markets' in which he argued that consumer wants and needs had homogenized. The assumed causes of homogenization were convergence of national wealth, technology and emerging global media. However, no empirical evidence has yet been presented to support the argument that homogenization of tastes,

needs and motives of consumers across the world has occurred. On the contrary, there is recent evidence of increased heterogenization of consumer behaviour with increased wealth (De Mooij 2003). Although several advertising managers at the time doubted the homogenization thesis and thus the effectiveness of global advertising, the global media committee of the International Advertising Association called global advertising a breakthrough marketing tool. According to its members, "no longer will there be a different advertising campaign for each country and each language of the world" (Keegan *et al.* 1992:20).

At the turn of the century practice had shown that standardized global advertising is not equally effective in all markets. Much of it is wasted in markets where consumer values are different from the values promoted in the advertising message. As a result, the Coca-Cola Company, which had been the prototypical global advertiser, decided in 2000 to get closer to local markets. Coca-Cola's CEO Douglas Daft was quoted as saying: "We kept standardizing our practices, while local sensitivity had become absolutely essential to success" (Daft 2000). Such sensitivity is essential when adapting or translating ads developed in one culture for use in others (Anholt 2000:5):

> Translating advertising copy is like painting the tip of an iceberg and hoping the whole thing will turn red. What makes copy work is not the words themselves, but subtle combinations of those words, and most of all the echoes and repercussions of those words within the mind of the reader. These are precisely the subtleties which translation fails to convey. Advertising is not made of words, but made of culture.

1. Advertising across cultures

According to McCracken (1988:77),

> advertising works as a potential method of meaning transfer by bringing the consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement. The creative director of an agency seeks to conjoin these two elements in such a way that the viewer/reader glimpses an essential similarity between them. When this symbolic equivalence is successfully established, the viewer or reader attributes certain properties known to exist in the culturally-constituted world to the consumer good.

Advertising has developed its own particular systems of meaning. These are by no means universal across borders but are often culturally defined and frequently vary from country to country. This suggests a difference in the way advertising is composed and read: that is, a difference in advertising

codes. It also suggests that where a different language is spoken, there is likely to be a different set of symbolic references, including myths, history, humour and the arts. Any advertisement that does not tap into such references is likely to be a blander proposition than one that does (Becatelli and Swindells 1998). In different cultures people have different *schemata*, i.e. structures of knowledge a person possesses about objects, events, people or phenomena. For acquired information to be placed in memory, it must be encoded according to existing schemata. These schemata are often linked to both a typical language concept and a specific product category (Müller 1998). If the advertising message does not fit the consumers' schema, they will ignore the message, and the ad is consequently wasted.

As well as being viewed as transfer of meaning, in American advertising theory advertisements are also viewed as persuasive communication, of which rhetoric is an integral part. The persuasive communication function of advertising is biased toward rational claims and a direct address of the public. All elements of advertising, words and pictures, tend to be evaluated on the basis of their persuasive role in the sales process. This is the typical approach of the culture of origin of advertising theory, the United States. Although in other cultures sales will also be the ultimate goal of advertising, the role of advertising in the sales process is often different. In Asian countries, for example, the role of advertising is to build a relationship between the company and consumers. An indirect approach serves that purpose better than a direct approach that turns consumers off, instead of persuading them.

As in any communication process, both the advertising message and the schemata of the consumer are influenced by their culture, and it is difficult to transfer advertising to other cultures without understanding how culture operates.

2. Culture

Culture is the glue that binds groups together. Without cultural patterns, organized systems of significant symbols, people would have difficulty living together. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973:44) views culture as a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call 'programs') – for governing behaviour. People are dependent upon the control mechanisms of culture for ordering their behaviour.

Consumers are products of their culture and culture cannot be separated from the individual: it is not a system of abstract values that exists independently of individuals. Neither can culture be separated from historical context. Culture includes shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles and values found among speakers of a particular language who live during the same historical period in a specific geographic region. Language, time and place all help define culture (Triandis 1995).

Cultures can be described according to specific *characteristics* or categorized into *value categories* or *dimensions* of national culture. Dimensions are generally developed from large numbers of variables by statistical data reduction methods (e.g. factor analysis) and provide scales on which countries are scored. Dimensions that order cultures meaningfully must be empirically verifiable and more or less independent. Two categorizations are most relevant for cross-cultural communications, the distinction between high and low context communication and Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of national culture.

2.1 Context and communication

The anthropologist Edward Hall (1976, 1984) distinguished patterns of culture according to context, space, time and information flow. In particular, the concept of context is useful for understanding differences in communication across cultures because it explains the degree of directness of communication. In a *high-context communication* message most of the information is either part of the context or internalized in the person; very little is made explicit as part of the message. Information in a *low-context communication* message is carried in the explicit code of the message. To the observer, an unknown high-context culture can be completely mystifying because symbols, not known to the observer, play such an important role. Thus, high context culture communication is also defined as inaccessible. Low-context communication cultures are characterized by explicit verbal messages. Effective verbal communication is expected to be direct and unambiguous. Low-context communication cultures demonstrate positive attitudes towards words, argumentation and rhetoric, whereas high-context communication cultures can be characterized by symbolism or indirect verbal expression (De Mooij 1998).

2.2 Hofstede's dimensions of national culture

Hofstede (1991) developed a model of five dimensions of national culture that helps to explain basic value differences. This model distinguishes cultures according to five dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-Term Orientation. The dimensions are measured on a scale from 0 to 100. The model is based on quantitative research and gives scores for 75 countries and regions. In the second edition of his book *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede (2001) describes over 200 external comparative studies and replications that have supported his indexes. The dimensions can be used to explain differences in people's needs and motives, communication styles, language structure, metaphors and concepts used in advertising and in literature across different

countries. For those readers who are unfamiliar with the model, a brief description of the five dimensions follows, including examples from literature.

Power distance is the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed unequally. In large power-distance cultures (e.g. France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Russia and the whole of Asia and South America), everyone has their rightful place in society and there is respect for elders and people in authority. There are dependence relationships between young and old, parents and children, and teachers and students. Demonstration of social position is important, so ownership of status objects to demonstrate one's position in society is more important in cultures of large power distance than in cultures of small power distance (e.g. Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia). A good example from literature is the Italian Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi, who is an obedient and dependent child compared with the nephews of Disney's Donald Duck, who are much more independent and less obedient.

In *individualistic* cultures, people look after themselves and their immediate family only and want to differentiate themselves from others. There is a need for privacy. In *collectivistic* cultures people belong to in-groups who look after them in exchange for loyalty. People prefer to conform to the norms adopted by others instead of differentiating themselves from others. In individualistic cultures the person is viewed as an independent, autonomous entity with a distinctive set of attributes, (traits, abilities, motives and values). In collectivistic cultures individuals are fundamentally dependent on each other. The self cannot be separated from others and the surrounding social context. Self-reflection is more common among individualists than collectivists because for the latter their relationships to others are more important than self-knowledge. Hofstede suggested a correlation between collectivism and high-context in cultures. In collectivistic cultures, information flows more easily among members of groups and there is less need for explicit communication than in individualistic cultures. North Americans and Northern Europeans are individualists; in the south of Europe people are moderately collectivist. Asians, Latin Americans and Africans are collectivists.

The fear of loss of privacy is reflected in George Orwell's *1984*. The essence of much drama in western (individualist) literature is an internal struggle within the hero ("to be or not to be"). Chinese essayist Bin Xin has noted that real tragedy has never existed in Chinese literature because the Chinese had hardly any internal struggles with their own mind (Li 2001).

In *masculine* cultures the dominant values are achievement and success. The dominant values in *feminine* cultures are caring for others and quality of life. In masculine cultures status products and brands are important for demonstrating success. Men and women have distinct roles. Feminine cultures have a people orientation, small is beautiful and status is not so important.

The roles of men and women overlap. Examples of masculine cultures include the US, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Mexico and Japan. Examples of feminine cultures include the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Portugal, Spain, Chile and Thailand. Femininity is reflected in the classic *Don Quixote*, in which women are relatively equal to men. A classic example of masculinity is the Italian *Casanova*.

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid them. In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, there is a need for rules, rituals and formality to structure life. Competence is a strong value resulting in belief in experts, as opposed to weak uncertainty avoidance cultures characterized by belief in generalists. In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures people tend to be more innovative and less bureaucratic. Southern and Eastern European countries as well as Japan score high on uncertainty avoidance, while England, Scandinavia and Singapore score low. Strong uncertainty avoidance is reflected in the novel *Das Schloss* (The Castle) by Franz Kafka, in the way the main character K. is affected by bureaucracy. *Alice in Wonderland*, where the most unreal things happen, is a typical work to originate in a culture of weak uncertainty avoidance, namely England. It is also no surprise that the same culture produced the Harry Potter books.

The fifth dimension, *long term orientation* versus *short term orientation*, distinguishes between long-term thinking and short-term thinking. Other elements include pragmatism, perseverance and thrift. This dimension distinguishes mainly between Western short-term oriented and East Asian long-term oriented cultures. In Europe, the differences are small but in some cases significant. The Netherlands and Norway score relatively high, and Spain scores lowest.

Hofstede's model is particularly useful for understanding consumer behaviour because his country scores can be used for statistical analysis of consumption data, opinions and attitude measures in consumer surveys. Thus, cross cultural differences of the various aspects that drive consumer behaviour and that are used in advertising – needs, motives and emotions – can be explained by these cultural dimensions. Language is a means to express these aspects, but language as such is also defined by culture.

3. Language

The ideal global advertisement is the same everywhere, and in the English language. Behind this ideal is the assumption that worldwide most people know enough English to be able to understand the message. English language understanding, however is overestimated. A second best approach is to translate advertising that is centrally developed, usually in the English language. Advertising, however, is more than words.

3.1 English language understanding

Some companies subtitle English language television commercials, others translate most of the text except for some fragments and pay offs (short statements on what the company or brand stands for) that serve as cues to convey an international image. Yet, the spread of English as a second language tends to be overestimated. Whereas in 2001, 79% of the Danes and 75% of the Dutch said they spoke English well enough to take part in a conversation, only 18% of the Spanish, 22% of the Portuguese, 32% of the French, and 44% of the Germans said they did. Speaking a foreign language correlates with low uncertainty avoidance. Both for the general public and young people, 58% of variance is explained by low uncertainty avoidance.[1] In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, even when people do speak a little of a foreign language, they are reluctant to try because they are afraid to make mistakes.

Furthermore, the consumer often does not have a sufficient command of English to understand a native English or American speaker, which can cause misunderstanding in international advertising. To give just one example, a UK commercial for Bacardi Breezer in spring 2002 was also aired in the Netherlands. It included a reference to a tomcat. The word for tomcat (*kater*) in the Netherlands also means 'hangover' (probably not intended to be communicated as an effect of the alcoholic beverage advertised). In addition, the tomcat in the advert is asked whether he has been chasing birds (= chasing women in English), a wordplay that is beyond the understanding of most people in the Netherlands.

A study by Gerritsen and Jansen (2001) among young people in the Netherlands showed that Dutch young people (14-17 years old) do not know the meaning of many English language words that are regularly used in the Dutch language. Examples include words like *blazer*, *entertainment*, *image*, *research*, *sophisticated*, and *strapless*. The word *blazer* was thought to mean 'remote control' or 'laser pistol', *entertainment* to mean 'working with a computer', *image* to mean 'energy, brains, health, appearance', *research* to mean 'rubbish', *sophisticated* to mean 'ugly, hysterical, aggressive', and *strapless* was thought to mean 'whorish'. A former pay off by the electronics company Philips, "Philips invents for you", was understood as meaning "Philips invites you". The watch brand Swatch used the term *boreproof*, which was understood to mean 'drill-proof'. In another study (Gerritsen *et al.* 1999), respondents were confident that they can understand English, but over half could not write down what was said in the ads and only one third

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[1] Based on data from Eurobarometer Surveys: *Eurobarometer Standard # 55* and *The Young Europeans* (2001), Brussels: European Commission Directorate. http://europa.eu. int/comm/public_opinion/standard_en.htm.

understood the meaning of English fragments in TV commercials. Fa's "The spirit of freshness" was understood as meaning 'the spirit of fitness'. The L'Oreal Studioline copy "style and love for my hair, invisi'gel FX" was decoded as 'style grow of my hair' and 'invisual terrifics'. Seiko's "lifetime precision without a battery" was understood to mean that it 'goes slow'. Thus, English language elements in advertising make advertisements less easily understood than those worded purely in Dutch.

Finally, a survey among 11000 14-49 year old Germans in September 2003 showed that German consumers also understand little of the English language used in advertising. Only 59% of respondents could properly translate McDonald's slogan "Every time a good time". The pay off "Multi Utilities" by the energy company RWE was understood as a reference to the multicultural society. And Esso's pay off "We are drivers too" was translated as 'We are two motorists' (Verbeek 2003)!

3.2 Language and culture

Concepts and ideas in advertising are embedded in the culture in which they originate. Words and sentences elaborated for one culture are not necessarily meaningful for another culture. Western advertising, for example, tends to use efficient value-expressive language to help recognition and memory. Yet some terms that efficiently refer to specific behaviour in one language do not exist in other languages. For example, in English it is possible to combine a number of diverse types of behaviour under the adjectives *artistic* or *liberal*. These devices do not exist in some other languages, for example in Chinese. The separate behaviours referred to *do* exist in China, but there is apparently no encompassing term for them (Semin and Zwier 1997). An item that cannot easily be replaced with a linguistically or conceptually equivalent one in translation most likely expresses culturally significant values that cannot directly be translated into copy for an ad in another culture. One language represents only one cultural framework. Speakers of different languages not only say things differently, they also experience things differently; and the fact that there are rarely direct translations (especially for abstract words) is a reflection of this (Garcia 1998). The ultimate consequence of all this is that the more meaningful advertising is in its source culture, the less translatable it becomes.

Language also reflects the way people communicate with each other. At different language acquisition stages, children do not learn language per se; rather they learn the various patterns and styles of language interaction that enable them to function as competent communicators in different situations. They develop a culture-specific communication style that is, for example, direct and explicit in individualistic cultures or indirect and implicit in collectivistic cultures. Examples of expressions linked with the direct style

include categorical words like *absolutely*, *certainly* and *positively*. By contrast, cultural assumptions of interdependence and harmony require that collectivists limit themselves to implicit and even ambiguous use of words, using modals like *maybe*, *perhaps*, or *probably* (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988). English is the only language in the world that spells *I* with a capital letter. This phenomenon may reflect the fact that the roots of individualism lie in England (Macfarlane 1978). There is no Chinese or Japanese equivalent for the English *I*. In Japanese, different words are used to refer to the self, depending on the social situation, the speaker's gender, age and the other social attributes relative to the listener. The terms reflect status differences, and the speaker usually attempts to elevate the status of the other while reducing his or her own status by choosing the correct wording. Similarly, there are different terms for *you*, depending on the social context (Triandis 1995).

Language reflects values, and the expression of values therefore varies according to the language used. Several studies have shown that forcing bilinguals to complete a test in their second language can often mean that they will express the values stereotypically associated with that language (Giles and Franklyn-Stokes 1989). In a projective test in both languages, the narratives of French American bilinguals were more romantic and emotional in French than in English (*ibid.*). The reverse can happen with respondents who strongly identify with their cultural group. When students in Hong Kong were asked to complete a values test in either English or Cantonese, they expressed more traditional Chinese values in English than in Chinese (Giles and Franklyn-Stokes 1989). Translations can therefore introduce bias in value research. The fact that bilinguals express different values when using different languages is likely to influence the translations of questions, among other things. The existing system of using translation and back translation may not be able to correct for value expression variations. Some questions are simply untranslatable, as is arguably the case with the following two statements that appeared in the original VALS[2] questionnaire in the United States; these could not be translated into British English and were borrowed in their original forms: "I am a born-again Christian" and "I like to think I am a bit of a swinger" (Williams 1991).

3.3 Language structure

Kashima and Kashima (1998), who studied the relationship between pronoun drop and culture, demonstrated how the structure of language reflects cultural

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[2] VALS stands for 'Values and Life-styles', a segmentation system developed by SRI International in Menlo Park, California.

outlook. In some languages – including English – the use of subject pronouns is obligatory: *I* or *you* must be mentioned. By contrast, other languages do not require explicit encoding of subject pronouns, and these words can be dropped by the speaker if he or she deems it appropriate to do so. In some Indo-European languages such as Spanish, personal pronouns are not obligatory, partly because the referents can be recovered from verb inflections. This phenomenon is called *pronoun drop.* Explicit use of *I* signals emphasis. Its absence reduces the prominence of the speaker's person. Dropping the subject pronoun (*I*, *we* or *you*) was found to correlate significantly with low individualism. Thus, languages which license pronoun drop are associated with lower levels of individualism than those that require the use of personal pronouns such as *I* or *you*.

The view that language reflects culture contradicts the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that the structure of language influences culture via perception and categorization. This would imply that people's worldview and social behaviour depend on the structure and characteristics of the language they speak (Usunier 1996). Related to this is the assumption that certain thought processes are more likely to occur in one language than in another because of the structure of the language. One example is the idea that more concrete styles of thought are found in collectivistic cultures, whereas in individualistic cultures thought is more abstract because it is not necessarily linked to the social environment (Semin and Zwier 1997). This view was used to explain why, for example, the Chinese place relatively greater emphasis on concrete attributes when evaluating products than on abstract affective (emotional) aspects (Malhotra and McCort 2001).

3.4 Translating pay offs and brand names

Advertising is a means of developing strong brands. When companies decide to go international, one of the first things they have to consider is how to internationalize their brand name and pay offs. The latter are often kept in English, a practice that results from the western need for consistency . In collectivistic cultures, people are more inclined to adapt their communication to the situation. Examples include "Wanadoo, positive generation" and "Ford Mondeo, designed for living". Earlier in this article examples were given of how such English language statements are often misinterpreted. A literal translation is often not a good solution, precisely because of the inter-dependence of language and culture.

Grammar and writing systems have consequences for perception and memory. For example, Chinese native speakers rely more on visual representations, whereas English speakers rely primarily on phonological representations (verbal sounds). In English, the sound system is used to encode the brand name and facilitate memory recall. Explicit repetition of

words enables consumers to recall the brand name. Examples include "If anyone can, Canon can" and "O$_2$, (pronounced as O two) see what you can do", both used as pay offs in ads in the United Kingdom, as well as in other countries (such as France) where people pronounce the brand name differently and as a result it doesn't rhyme with the rest of the expression. When Western companies translate pay offs, their own focus on sound and pronunciation makes them adapt their brand names to other cultures more vocally than visually. Thus, Motorola is pronounced as *me de lou la* in Cantonese, which means 'nothing to take'. Peugeot's *416* is pronounced the same as *si yi lu*, which means 'die all along the road' in some Southern Chinese dialects (Li 2001).

Chinese consumers are more likely to recall information when the visual rather than phonological memory trace is accessed. Schmitt *et al.* (1994) found that Chinese native speakers were more likely to recall brands when they could write them down than when they generated a spoken response. The authors suggest that marketers, instead of translating Western brand names into Chinese via sound, should enhance the natural tendency of Chinese consumers to rely on visual representations. Visually distinct brand name transcription or calligraphy and logo designs that enforce the written word should prove more effective in China, whereas for English native speakers the sound qualities of brand names should be exploited by the use of jingles and onomatopoeic names (resembling the sound made by the object).

Transferring brand names to other countries can be hazardous. The most frequently mentioned example is that of the Ford Nova, which in Spanish means 'doesn't go'. Naming practices are different among nations and languages, and this includes brand naming practice. For example, Chinese has more homonyms than many Western languages. To translate a Western brand name one has to choose suitable characters among those homonyms. Thus Coca-Cola uses *kekou kele*, which means 'tasty and happy'. Culturally, the Chinese prefer names that express goodwill, while Western names are usually viewed simply as codes to label brands. Chinese brand names tend to have meaning, for example a name like *Liu shen wan* means 'it includes six herbs'. Many brand names encode meanings such as 'lucky', 'gold' or 'good'.

Li (2001) sums up three ways to translate brand names. The first is pronunciation-oriented, without the intention to encode specific meaning. For example, *Nokia* becomes *Nuojiya*, which carries no meaning. The second involves creating a meaningful name like *Coca-Cola*. A good example is *Ericsson*: *Ai* (meaning 'love', 'like to') *li* ('to set', 'establish') *xin* ('trust'). A further example is *Hewlett Packard*: *Hui* ('benefit') *pu* ('popular'). The third strategy is to replace the brand name with another one that possesses the desired attributes. For example, the Finnish machinery brand name *Kone* was changed into *Tong Li* ('general power').

3.5 Language and categorization

How people categorize products and brands should be properly reflected in advertising to make the message understood. The structures of different languages affect categorization and judgement (Zhang and Schmitt 1998). Unlike Indo-European languages, Asian languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean are *classifier* languages. A classifier is a measure that is used in conjunction with numerals (one, two, three, etc.) or determiners (a, the, that, this) and that refers to common physical features of objects, such as shape, size, thickness, length, as well as other perceptual or conceptual properties associated with objects, including 'bendability' and 'graspability'. Classifiers categorize a given object into a larger set of objects and describe classes of objects. As such they are different from adjectives that describe specific instances within a class. Adjectives answer the question "What kind of object is it?" whereas classifiers answer the question "What kind of object is this a member of?". Classifiers are used in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai languages as well as Navajo and Yucatan-Mayan languages. Some languages, such as Japanese, have classifiers that are generally of broader scope than classifiers of other languages (e.g. Chinese). Compared to English native speakers, Chinese speakers perceive objects that share a classifier as more similar than objects that do not share a classifier (Schmitt and Zhang 1998).

In advertising in classifier languages, objects are more positively evaluated when they are combined with a visual cue related to the classifier. An example is the difference in judgement of pictures of 'graspable' objects (brush, cane, umbrella, broom) using the classifier *ba* in Chinese. A picture showing only the object is judged less positively than one showing the object with a hand (Zhang and Schmitt 1998). The classifier system thus has to be exploited carefully since it can have positive and negative effects. For example, a classifier for pipe-like thick objects will lead to positive expectations for lipstick, but a classifier for long, thin objects can lead to negative expectations, implying that the lipstick in question will provide less quantity and will not last long (Schmitt and Zhang 1998).

4. Needs, motives and emotions

Advertising influences consumers partly by giving information but mostly by appealing to needs, motives and emotions. Consumption can be driven by functional or social needs. Clothes satisfy a functional need; fashion satisfies a social need. A house serves a functional need; a home serves a social need. A car may satisfy a functional need but the type of car one chooses can satisfy a social need. Understanding variations in people's needs and motives is important for developing effective advertising.

People's behaviour is not determined only by their needs and motivations, but also by their surroundings, and the context in which they make decisions. People in different cultures can do the same thing for different reasons or motives, and people in different countries may do different things for the same reasons. Many global standard products or product features which are assumed to be culture-free are bought for different reasons across different cultures. A good example is individualized ring tones that were offered by Nokia to Chinese consumers. These are interesting for people of individualistic cultures who want to demonstrate their uniqueness, but not so interesting for the collectivistic Chinese who prefer to be in harmony with the other members of the group (Li 2001).

Differences in sensitivity to certain product attributes and variation in motives for buying can be explained by the underlying cultural values that vary by product category. For example, for mineral water a generic motive is purity; for soft drinks and alcoholic beverages it is status. For cars, motives vary between safety, status, design and being environmentally friendly, all based on different cultural values. Motives for buying can be recognized in the appeals used in advertising. When culturally relevant motives are used in an ad, translating the ad as it stands will not be sufficient, and the appeal itself may have to be adapted.

This also applies to emotions in advertising. The concept of global advertising was based on the assumed universality of basic emotions such as happiness, anger and fear. Much research on emotions has been designed to test the hypothesis of universality. Basic emotions were supposed to be part of the human potential and, therefore, universal. One argument in favour of universal basic emotions is that most languages possess limited sets of central *emotion-labelling* words which refer to a small number of commonly experienced emotions. Examples of such words in English include *anger*, *fear*, *sadness*, and *joy*. Specific English words underpin psychologists' theories of emotion, but we must remember that words for emotions vary from one culture to another. English words often assumed to denote natural basic categories of emotion have no equivalents in some other languages, and other languages provide commonly used emotion words with no direct equivalent in English. Even where there appears to be an equivalent, seemingly equivalent words may cover different concepts. Anger, for example, appears to be natural in western cultures, but even across western cultures the content varies. The American experience of anger is specific to American culture, stressing the expression of one's rights, goals and needs. Anger occurs when these are blocked, and the person has a sense of "I was treated unfairly". By contrast, in collectivistic cultures anger might constitute a different experience because it produces separation and disconnection where connection and interdependence are so important (Markus *et al.* 1996).

Another argument relating to universality is based on research on

recognition of facial expressions. People from different cultures can recognize facial expressions in similar ways. The question is whether it is justified to take facial expression as an index of the presence of emotions, because it is possible that in some societies emotions occur without facial expressions whereas in others facial expressions occur without emotions (Russell 1995). Seeing a facial expression allows an observer to draw a conclusion about a situation, but one specific facial expression is not necessarily connected to one specific emotion. For example, a smile is generally viewed as an expression of happiness. However, seeing a friend can make a person smile, but this does not imply that the person is happy. He or she can in fact be sad or lonely.Facial expressions, then, are only a crude measurement of emotions, and labelling a facial expression is not the same as conceptualizing emotion. Yet, many people in Western cultures implicitly believe that certain categories of emotion are 'natural' and that specific facial actions inherently express these emotions.

In judging other people's behaviour and emotional expression context plays an important role. In particular, in collectivistic cultures people may judge emotional expression differently according to the context or event surrounding the emotional expression. This also applies to emotions in advertising, where the meaning of communication depends on the context. The problem is that operationalizing context is a difficult task, as context does not have a specific, fixed meaning. This aspect of context doesn't facilitate the measurement of teffects of emotional appeals across cultures. A frequently applied approach to measuring the effects of emotional appeals in advertising involves using alternative (mock) advertisements with different textual appeals, keeping the pictures constant – not realizing that a picture can have different meanings across cultures. Since a picture serves as context for the words, respondents are likely to interpret the meaning of the words in line with their different interpretations of the context (De Mooij 2003). So the same picture may lead to different interpretations of the text.

5. Communication styles

Not only do appeals and motives in advertising vary, there are also different communication styles that are reflected in advertising styles. The strongest distinction is between direct and indirect communication. For example, in collectivistic cultures where indirect communication prevails, more metaphors are used than in individualistic cultures. Metaphors of one culture are not necessarily understood in other cultures. A global ad by the Korean LG showing an old man with a baby on a mountain top will be understood in Asia as a reflection of continuity and long-term orientation, but in the US and in Europe the ad is unlikely to be understood in the same way. Similarly, a squirrel in a forest in an ad by Nokia aimed at the Finns symbolized good

reception and free movement in a deep and distant forest. The Chinese understood it as depicting an animal that lives far away from people and completely missed the symbolic role of the squirrel.

The prevailing advertising styles of cultures follow interpersonal communication styles. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) offer the best description of how dimensions of culture explain variations in verbal communication styles. They distinguish between verbal personal and verbal contextual style according to the importance of context. Another distinction is between elaborate, exacting and succinct verbal style. Figure 1 clusters countries according to two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that explain interpersonal communication styles: power distance and uncertainty avoidance.
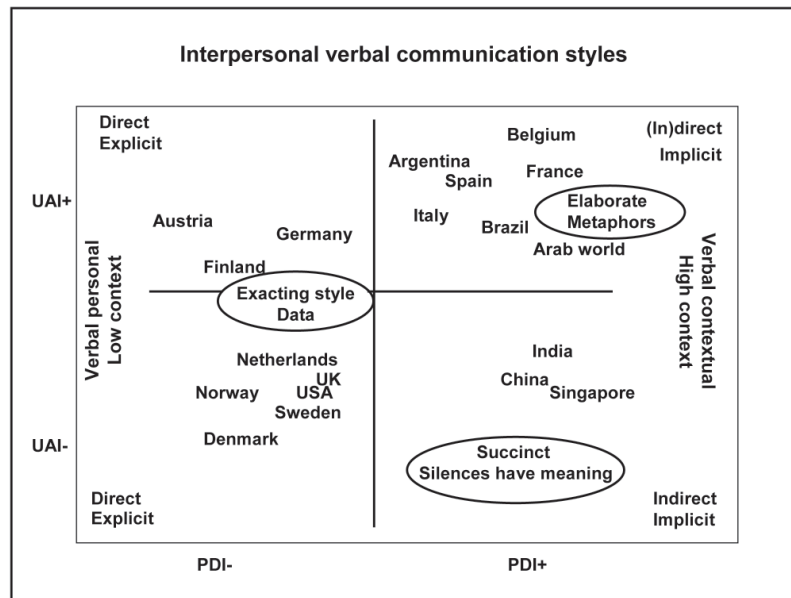

Figure 1. Interpersonal verbal communication styles

Verbal personal style covers individual-centred language that characterizes the cultures in the quadrants on the left. *Verbal contextual style* covers role-centred language found in the cultures in the quadrants on the right. Verbal personal style enhances the 'I' identity, is person-oriented (e.g. in English), whereas verbal contextual style emphasizes context-related role identity (e.g. Japanese, Chinese). The two styles focus on personhood vs. situation or status. Verbal personal style is linked with low power distance (equal status) and individualism (low-context), whereas verbal contextual style is linked with high power distance (hierarchical human relationships) and collectivism

(high context). Verbal contextual style includes different ways of addressing different people, according to their status (as in Japanese).

Elaborate verbal style refers to the use of rich, expressive language. *Exacting* or *precise style* is a style where no more and no less information than required is given. *Succinct* or *understated style* includes the use of understatements, pauses and silences. Stretches of silence carry meaning. High-context cultures of moderate to strong uncertainty avoidance orientation tend to use the elaborate style. Arab cultures draw on this elaborate style of verbal communication, using metaphors, long arrays of adjectives, flowery expressions and proverbs. Low-context cultures of weak uncertainty avoidance (e.g. USA, UK) tend to use an exacting style. The succinct style is found in high-context cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Japan).

In advertising in individualistic cultures, the direct communication style uses the personal pronouns "you" or "we", whereas in collectivistic cultures the indirect style is preferred, drawing on indirect devices such as symbolism and metaphors. There are, however, variations in indirectness among collectivistic cultures. The Singaporean Chinese, for example, are more direct than the Taiwanese (Bresnahan 1999). This is confirmed in a study by Cutler *et al.* (1997), who examined advertisements from eight different countries (US, UK, France, India, Japan, Turkey, Taiwan/Hong Kong, and Korea) and measured the use of a direct, personalized headline in which the public are addressed by "you" or "your".

5.1 Mapping advertising styles

Applying the concept of interpersonal communication styles to advertising, the position of various countries can be mapped out as in figure 2. Advertising styles in the lower and upper left hand quadrant are associated with individualistic cultures of small power distance. Advertising style is *direct explicit*, and *personal*. The uniqueness of the person or the brand, and the importance of identity and personality are reflected in this style. These advertising styles are typical of the US and the countries of northwest Europe, which show a preference for direct and explicit forms of communication such as the personalized 'lecture' style in advertising. This is the type of advertising in which an identified presenter endorses the product. Ads are carefully directed to focus on the personality of the endorser.

In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, positioned in the upper left hand quadrant, advertising is more *serious* and *structured*. The execution of the visuals will be detailed, often including demonstration of how the product works. This is the style of Germanic cultures, where visuals are more exact and more information and data are provided than in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures. In the weak uncertainty avoidance cultures of the lower left hand quadrant, where ambiguity is tolerated, more humour is used in

advertising. In the masculine cultures (US, UK), known personalities or celebrities are used to present the product, whereas in the feminine cultures (Scandinavia, The Netherlands) the personality of the presenter is downplayed.
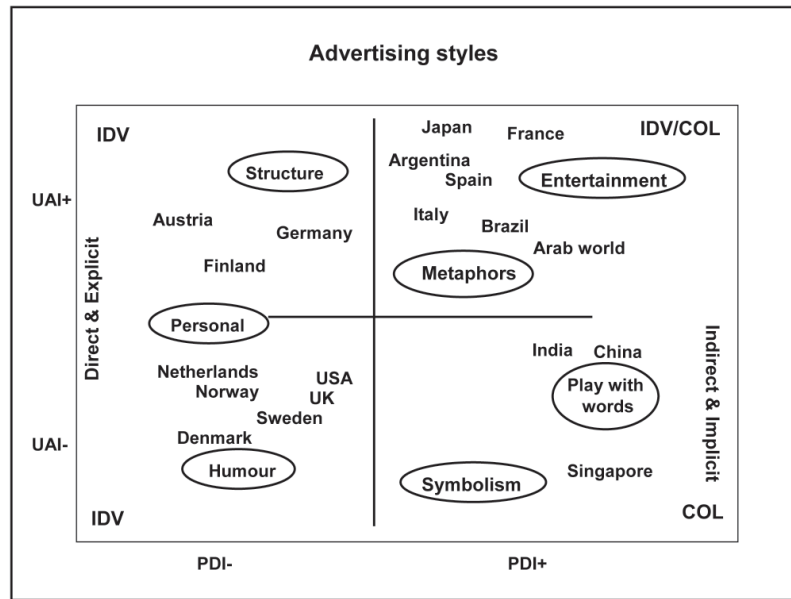

Figure 2. Advertising styles

The two quadrants on the right include direct-implicit and indirect-implicit styles. The upper right hand quadrant covers several styles because it includes cultures that combine high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance with individualism (e.g. France and Belgium), as well as cultures that combine these two dimensions with collectivism (e.g. Spain, Brazil). France and Belgium show a mix of direct and indirect implicit communication styles that express both uniqueness and inaccessibility. *Inaccessibility* is recognized in the frequent references in advertising to other forms of communication such as films, art or even advertising by others. In the other countries communi- cation is *indirect and implicit*, is less likely to offend and thus upholds public face. Meaning is in the context. Communication is subdued and works on likeability, not on persuasion. If celebrities are involved, they are not likely to address the audience directly; they play a more symbolic role, and are simply associated with the product rather than endorse in a direct way. *Visual metaphors* and *symbols* are used to create context and to position the product or brand in its 'proper place', as one would expect in large power distance cultures.

The advertising style of collectivistic cultures of medium to large power

distance and weak to moderate uncertainty avoidance in the lower right hand quadrant must reinforce group norms and help maintain face. *Visuals*, (visual) *wordplay*, and *symbolism* are important in advertising in these cultures, but the audience can be directly addressed. Advertising in Hong Kong, Singapore and India tends to follow this style. These cultures prefer relatively direct modes of communication, which can be explained by low uncertainty avoidance. Chinese consumers like visual as well as straightforward and vivid ads with images (Shuqian 1992). For India, the direct communication style is confirmed by Roland (1988:284), who states that "Indian modes of communication operate more overtly on more levels simultaneously than do the Japanese".

6. Conclusion

Advertising consists of concepts, ideas, copy and visuals. A concept or idea that is relevant for one culture isn't necessarily relevant for others. In some cultures an idea is mainly expressed by visuals, in others by words. Historical-ly, much attention has been paid to advertising copy because of the Anglo-European heritage of advertising practice and theory. This has made people believe that most advertising can be translated. Current knowledge of the influence of culture on people's perception, memory and communication styles is likely to change that belief. If advertising is translated at all, the translator should closely co-operate with the copywriter/art director team and not only translate but also advise about culture-specific aspects of both languages.

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