

Language use in the South African advertising industry: a survey of advertising agencies in a multi-cultural society

The commitment to multilingualism in the South African Constitution is not reflected in any formal regulation of language use in the advertising industry. Rather than external regulation by government, control in the industry is achieved by a long tradition of self-regulation. This article reports on a questionnaire investigating the industry's response to multilingualism. With reference to the work of Klein and De Mooij, among others, the authors then discuss the factors contributing to the present state of affairs in the South African marketplace.

Taalgebruik in die Suid-Afrikaanse reklame-industrie: 'n oorsig van reklame-agentskappe in 'n multikulturele gemeenskap

Die Suid-Afrikaanse grondwet se verbintenis tot veeltaligheid word nie weergegee deur middel van enige formele regulering van taalgebruik in die advertensiewese nie. Eerder as die eksterne regulering van die advertensiewese deur die regering, maak die industrie gebruik van 'n tradisie van selfregulering wat lank reeds bestaan. Hierdie artikel lewer verslag oor die bedryf se benadering tot veeltaligheid wat deur middel van 'n vraelys ondersoek is. Aan die hand van die werk van onder andere Klein en De Mooij bespreek die outeurs die bydraende faktore tot die huidige stand van sake binne die Suid-Afrikaanse teikenmark.

The objective of this study is to consider the nature of language use in the planning and execution of advertising campaigns in South Africa. Multilingualism is entrenched in the South African constitution, but the question at hand is whether this entrenchment translates to the advertising industry in terms of policy, client briefs, and the in-house language capabilities of the advertising agencies themselves. The level of entrenchment of multilingualism in the South African advertising industry was gauged by conducting a survey of advertising agencies. The questionnaire administered was divided into four coding sections corresponding to the four broad themes inherent in the problem: the individual respondents' language training and professional language preferences; in-house and governmental language policies and regulation of language as understood by the individual respondents; the individual respondents' understanding of multilingualism as a social responsibility of the advertising industry at large and the use of language and the incidence of multilingualism in the South African advertising industry as perceived by the individual respondents in their capacity as advertising professionals.

"Predominantly English-speaking countries account for approximately 40 percent of the world's total gross domestic product" (Fishman 1999: 26). Fishman also emphasises that globalisation, regionalisation, and localisation are concurrent movements, which implies that this study must acknowledge the opposing forces at work in discordant multicultural and multilingual societies in the developing world, forces especially vulnerable to the imperialist influence of commercialism on the local marketplace.

The primary focus of this study is therefore the presence or absence of multilingualism in the South African advertising industry, which must contend with a linguistically and culturally fragmented society and a global advertising trend towards unilingualism, with English becoming the *de facto* language of the marketplace. No serious academic discourse on the subject of globalisation in the marketplace is possible without a nod to the post-modernist interpretative methods of the globalisation activist Naomi Klein. Klein's scholarship, based in critical theory, is crucial to this article. Due to the author's preference for a descriptive methodology that acknowledges the unavoidable sub-

jectivity in critical writing, Klein's stream-of-consciousness approach will also be used.¹

1. Background

The commitment to multilingualism in the South African Constitution is not reflected in any formal regulation of language use in the advertising industry. Rather than external regulation by government, control in the industry is achieved by a long tradition of self-regulation.² Also, as Roger Sinclair (1997: 66) notes, the emphasis in South African law is rather on preventing "control", "limitation" and "restriction" of the advertising industry: "In fact, there are only two direct references to general advertising practice in South African law," and neither makes reference to language in advertising.

The same is true for the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) Transformation Charter (2000). The relevant passage on the recognition of the uniqueness of the "soul of the nation" reads:

We shall use our strengths to promote pride in the South African Brand. The industry can contribute to the transition by promoting understanding and appreciation of our diverse cultures, traditions, histories, abilities and disabilities.

Again, no mention is made of the unique multilingual cultural make-up of the "South African Brand".

- 1 "It is often said disparagingly that this movement [or critical approach to scholarship] lacks ideology, an overarching message, a master plan. This is absolutely true, and we should be extraordinarily thankful [...] It is to this young movement's credit that it has as yet fended off all of these agendas and has rejected everyone's generously donated manifestos, holding out for an acceptably democratic, representative process to take its resistance to the next stage" (Klein 2000: 457-8).
- 2 The self-regulation of the South African advertising industry has recently come under attack from the government for the tardiness of the transformation process in the industry. In response, the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) released the Draft ACA BEE Scorecard on 24 November 2004 in an attempt to convince government of its commitment to transformation and to possibly stave off any attempts at formal regulation of the industry. More formal regulation of the industry might also affect the present non-regulation of multilingualism in the industry (cf <<http://www.acasa.co.za>>).

Yet, the very existence of eleven official languages in South Africa makes it impossible not to attempt to account for language in advertising, as Sinclair (1997: 39) explains:

South Africa is a multilingual country with eleven official languages and most products are sold to a range of consumers whose home language could be, among others: English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa or Venda. Clearly a writer is not expected to be proficient in all the languages. But a recognition [*sic*] that all ideas will have to be rewritten, indeed preferably reconceptualised, in at least one other language is basic to advertising development in this country. In fact few, if any, writers, however proficient they are at speaking and even writing the other language or languages, are able to write convincing advertising copy in any language but their own. The reason is that advertising copy must be written in the everyday idiom of the community and, unless one lives a language, the nuances are often missed.³

Despite the absence of any overt mention of language in the above contexts, the implicit presence of language in the understanding of culture cannot be denied, as De Mooij (1998: 52) has pointed out: "There are two ways of looking at the language-culture relationship: Language influences culture, or language is an expression of culture". The advertising industry in South Africa, and around the world, is therefore confronted by two important facets of the interaction between language and culture: language as a unique conveyor of a message and language as an indicator of specificity and identity in culture. Either way, the effects of language cannot be ignored. It is nevertheless often underplayed, because in the South African advertising industry's consideration of demographics and culture, language and race are still indelibly and unfortunately linked.⁴

But this is not the only reason for the lack of emphasis on language in this context. The globalisation of the marketplace and the consequent shift of emphasis in the global-local paradox from a people-driven to a

3 The worrisome lack of emphasis on language specificity as a cultural symbol, despite its obvious importance, is best explained by De Mooij (1998: 55): "Language is much more important than many international advertisers realize. It is common knowledge among those who are bi- and trilingual that copy carrying cultural values is difficult to translate. Monolingual people generally do not understand this [...] the values included in the words cannot be translated, and linguistic equivalence is thus not easily attained."

4 Cf Moerdyk 2004: 6.

product-driven approach (De Mooij 1998: 5) will also be considered as an important influence on the present state of affairs.

2. The industry response to multilingualism and regulation

To base this study on the implied bias towards multilingualism expressed by the government and the Constitution would present a skewed picture (especially in the absence of formal regulation), as the reality of how regulation, or the lack thereof, is played out, varies greatly from situation to situation. The use of language is also far less diverse than is anticipated by the Constitution. As no clear guidelines (except perhaps some of the in-house variety) exist at present to regulate multilingualism in advertising, it was considered necessary to consult the industry on the matter of multilingualism in advertising.

2.1 Research questions

In the absence of any formal regulatory guidelines, a questionnaire was designed based on the set of questions listed below, identified as crucial to the study of multilingualism in the industry.

- What level of language regulation currently exists in the advertising industry?
- Should formal language regulation be developed for the South African advertising industry, given the statutes on the status of languages as described in the Constitution of South Africa, 1996?
- Do advertising companies have in-house regulations on the choice of language and/or multilingualism?
- What determines the language of a marketing campaign and/or advertisement?
- Is a choice of language allowed to feature in a client's brief?
- What is the decision-making process involved in the choice of language for an advertising campaign?
- How is social responsibility (in the South African context) viewed by the advertising industry, especially in the context of the language statutes enshrined in the Constitution?

2.2 Methodology

An open-ended, self-administered questionnaire based on the research questions was compiled. It was intended as a descriptive instrument to spearhead the initial exploration of the matter at hand in order to delimit the research area for future empirical research.⁵

Determining the number of advertising agencies in South Africa proved somewhat problematic as inconsistent information was received from various sources. We decided to rely solely on the website Bizcommunity.com,⁶ for a population of advertising agencies as it is a noted source of information on the business community of South Africa. E-mail was chosen as the method of distribution for reasons of expediency, which meant that only advertising agencies with e-mail addresses could be included in the study. The population eventually consisted of 75 advertising agencies operating in South Africa. All could be reached by e-mail, as per the information provided by the website.

Purposive systematic random sampling (with a starting point of 14 and an interval of 6), without replacement, was used to acquire a sample size of 45, acceptable for a pilot study. A distribution list was compiled, together with a polite, clear, concise covering letter, including instructions, to accompany the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections dealing respectively with general information on language proficiency and preferences, language policies and regulation, perceived social responsibility, and the perceived role of language and multilingualism in advertising. The general information section gathered data on the mother tongue, language proficiency, preferred business language, highest qualification, and language training of the respondent. Section two dealt with policies on language and language regulation, as perceived by the respondent's agency and the industry, as well as with the role of the client and the brief in determining the choice of language for a campaign. Section three addressed the perceived social responsibility of the advertising industry, while section four focused on questions pertaining to the perceived role of language and multilingualism in advertising. Respondents were asked

5 Cf Wimmer & Dominick (2000) for additional information on the mass media research methodology followed.

6 Cf <<http://www.biz-community.com>>.

for their views on language favouritism, the spread of various languages in advertising, whether multilingualism is viable in advertising, and whether it could or should be regulated.

As the questionnaire comprised 28 open-ended questions, the researchers had reservations about the possible response rate, and expected below-average returns. An e-mail survey is in this context considered to be a derivative of the mail survey, which implies an average return rate of between 10 and 40% (Wimmer & Dominick 2000: 177). The actual response rate was 33%, well within the average, rather than below, as had been expected.

Television advertising on the SABC 2 channel of the public broadcaster was also monitored. This channel is home to news broadcasts in a number of the official languages (seSotho, XiTsonga, TshiVenda, Afrikaans, and so on) and the placement of advertisements in ad breaks during prime time and during newscasts in indigenous languages was analysed in terms of language and content. The researchers were interested in whether the advertisements screened during the language-specific news bulletins were more linguistically representative.

A total of 255 spots were screened during prime time on SABC 2 during the period of analysis (Wednesday 17 November 2004 to Friday 19 November 2004). A clear distinction was drawn between advertisements and previews of other programmes on the channel. The number of ad breaks was coded, while the number of advertisements and previews combined gave the total number of spots. The advertisements were coded in terms of the product, brand, type of advertisement, implied promise, language, and cultural identities present.

This analysis confirmed in most instances what had been established by means of the questionnaire and forms the basis of a follow-up article.⁷

2.3 Results

The questionnaires were coded, the data computed and the results tabulated. English, unsurprisingly, proved to be the predominant mother tongue and the preferred professional language of most of the respond-

7 Cawood & Du Toit, "Identity and the emergence of South African advertising esperanto: an interdisciplinary approach to multilingualism and the visual in advertising and information copy" (under consideration).

ents. The majority of agencies (53%) had no in-house language policy, while in most cases (41%) the client would determine the language of the campaign and/or advertisement and indicate the preference in the brief (53%).

When an advertisement is reproduced in multiple languages, translation (67%) — rather than re-conceptualisation — is the predominant method. 81% of respondents thought the advertising industry had a social responsibility towards society, while 92% thought that advertising agencies should be more socially responsible, and 53% considered multilingualism to be part of an advertising agency's social responsibility. Most respondents (87%) regarded language as very important in reaching the target audience, although 35% acknowledged that English tended to be favoured above all other languages. Nevertheless, 53% of all respondents thought that multilingualism was adequately reflected in South African advertising. A very small majority (Yes 36%; No 28%) considered the promotion of multilingualism in advertising feasible, while 69% acknowledged that more official languages should be represented in the advertising industry. The overwhelming majority (77%) disapproved of any formal regulation of multilingualism, while one respondent even likening it to censorship. The preferred method of promoting multilingualism was self-regulation (79%).

From the results, support for greater language representation in advertising was clearly evident, although respondents also indicated their strong opposition to the imposition of any regulation by government.

It was, however, the practical considerations raised by the respondents that proved particularly insightful in relation to the choice of language in advertising campaigns. Most respondents (91%) stated that it is the medium that determines the choice of language. This raises the question whether advertising practitioners are to be held responsible for the lack of multilingualism in the industry. The limited choice of media and the socio-economic circumstances and demographics that determine the choice of media for target audiences need more attention. Regional and culture-specific media could be the answer, but this suggestion requires further consideration by all role-players, including government, and falls outside the parameters of this study.

The content analysis exposed a clear preference for English in advertising on SABC 2, a multilingual channel of the public broadcaster.

During the period of the study, 181 advertisements were coded, of which 79% were exclusively in English. This ratio is clearly supported by the respondents to the questionnaire, of whom the majority (93%) identified English as their professional language of choice in the advertising industry. Interestingly, these same respondents also indicated that English was their mother tongue. Based on the strong correspondence between the mother tongue and the professional language, the predominance of English might be assumed to be simply a question of capacity, which could be addressed by recruiting a more linguistically diverse student body to study for a career in the industry. The lack of language diversity in the advertising industry is acknowledged by the advertising professionals themselves, hence the initiation of endeavours such as the SABC/Vega Ulimi Lwami language centre established in Cape Town and Durban in May 2006 in order

to start creating advertising that has been conceptualised in African languages and based in true South African cultural context — advertising that rings true with the target audience, is not simply a direct translation from English, and doesn't perpetuate stereotypes or patronise its audience (Bizcommunity.com 2006).

From the questionnaire, it was evident that, far from being a simple matter of ignorance and lack of interest on the part of advertising professionals dismissing South Africa's language diversity, the issue was far more complex. Several contributory factors, including financial constraints (imposed by the client), the limited choice of medium and the diverse socio-economic nature of the target market, resulted in English being the predominant language of choice. This situation is exacerbated by globalisation in the marketplace and the resultant global perspective of many advertising campaigns. It should also be emphasised that to take multilingualism seriously in the South African advertising context might prove extremely costly. At the moment, lack of funding, the belief in English as the language with the best indiscriminating reach, and the lack of multilingual expertise are the most serious — and very real — impediments. In the words of one of the respondents: "A marketer/advertiser is going to try their utmost to reach objectives, target markets, media types. How do you treat 11 languages in 30 seconds?" Great care should therefore be taken in determining the regulatory road forward.

2.4 The exception to the rule

The only significant initiative taken to date by the South African advertising industry to revive and build language diversity is the Pendoring competition for excellence in Afrikaans advertising. No similar initiatives existed for any of the other official languages until mid-2005, when Pendoring in partnership with the Communication and Advertising Forum for Empowerment, launched a new category “with the focus on all indigenous languages, with the exception of Afrikaans” (Pendoring 2005). Pendoring is therefore the exception that proves the rule, rather than an example of the advertising industry taking multilingualism seriously, or considering it viable. On the contrary, “many role players and decision makers believe that it’s sufficient to only advertise in English” (Pendoring 2005).

Pendoring is a ten-year old, highly successful initiative established to highlight and reward advertising in Afrikaans. The initiative is the brainchild of language organisations such as the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (ATKV), the media (including Radio Sonder Grense [RSG], *Rapport* and Media24) and the Kopieskrywersforum (KSF), a forum for copywriters in Afrikaans. The initial role-players thus comprised a conglomeration of groups with a special interest in promoting Afrikaans. The initiative to date is not representative of a move towards multilingualism on the part of the South African advertising industry at large. The competition covers the entire spectrum of the media from magazines and newspapers, TV and radio, to direct marketing. Annette Nel, chair of KSF, described the initial objective of Pendoring in 1994 as “To promote good Afrikaans in advertising”.⁸ But, according to Nel, the “language battle” is now a thing of the past and Pendoring’s objectives have to change accordingly. She suggests that Pendoring must shift from the promotion of Afrikaans language excellence in advertising to the promotion of advertising excellence in Afrikaans: “We want to show this particularly English industry that our ADVERTISING [*sic*] standards (not only our language standards) are high enough [...] to compete with the rest of the world”.⁹ Achieving this, Nel argues, will

8 “Om goeie Afrikaans in reklame te bevorder” (Nel 2004: 14).

9 “Ons wil vir dié baie Engelse bedryf wys dat ons REKLAMEstandaarde [*sic*] (nie net taalstandaarde nie) hoog genoeg kan wees om met dié van die res van die wêreld te kan meeding” (Nel 2004: 14).

ensure recognition for Afrikaans in the predominantly English advertising industry of South Africa, and thus result in more commissions.

As Nel's comments confirm, Pendorring's backers did not intend and still do not perceive this initiative as having penetrated the South African industry at large in terms of an emphasis on multilingualism. Pendorring can thus not be considered a serious contender as an industry initiative for the establishment of a multilingual advertising environment.

3. Globalisation, multilingualism and the local marketplace

In the increasingly global, unilingual marketplace, matters of multilingualism in advertising cannot be addressed without acknowledging the quandary confronting most advertising campaigns: how to repackage an often homogenous product for a culturally, economically and linguistically diverse target audience. It seems that globalisation and multinational branding strategies in advertising campaigns are paying lip service to culture-specific and/or language-specific marketing.

Addressing the lack of multilingualism in South African advertising, therefore, also has to take into consideration the lack of cultural and language diversity in the industry itself — a topic currently under discussion in parliament and addressed by the ACA BEE Scorecard of 24 November 2004 (2004). It has already been established by our questionnaire that to refer to the advertising community in South Africa as “multilingual” is in many respects a misnomer. The language preference seems to be singularly geared towards the English constituency, with the assumption that even where English is the third or fourth language of the prospective South African consumer, his/her desires and behaviour are primarily determined and articulated in English: “The fact that many South Africans do not understand English and that an ad's message frequently gets lost, is not always considered” (Pendorring 2005). In other words, it is argued that English has the broadest reach and is therefore the most cost-effective advertising medium.¹⁰

10 CAFE (Communication and Advertising Forum for Empowerment) views the mother tongue as being the most effective means of communication with a specific target group. CAFE Board members Kaibe Mollo and Nonjabulo Hlengwa comment: “Millions of rands are annually being spent on advertising and it makes for

This brings into play the other important trend across national borders: despite claiming demographic sensitivity, the advertising industry in South Africa and around the world has become worryingly focused on seeing the world as a global (unilingual) marketplace. The perception that English is the language of broadest reach and the global environment of the market activity, are inextricably linked for the South African advertising industry, hence the particular difficulties in addressing the issue of multilingual advertising, despite constitutional endorsement. In other words, broader international trends and the influence of multinational clients have to be considered in evaluating the status, feasibility and nature of language regulations in the industry. The results of the present state of affairs in advertising worldwide are best illustrated by means of concrete examples.

3.1 Advertising a lifestyle

The lifestyle advertisement is a great example of the predominance of the West in the global marketplace and there is no doubt that Western marketing strategies dominate the South African advertising culture, as is the case in most English-speaking countries around the world.

The 1980s saw a significant change in the aim of these advertisers: there was a move away from product information and towards an almost exclusive emphasis on the brand name (Klein 2000: 6). The early 1990s brought a “new consensus”: “The products that will flourish in the future will be the ones presented [advertised] not as ‘commodities’ but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle” (Klein 2000: 20). The Western approach emphasises those attributes of the product or brand that set the prospective user apart from others, as De Mooij (1998: 149) explains:

In Western theories, another distinction is between the actual self and the ideal self. People will buy products that are compatible with their self-concept, or rather that enhance their ‘ideal-self’-image.

This approach has given rise to the lifestyle advertisement, beloved of cigarette manufacturers and, in recent years, beer companies. To illustrate the global nature and influence of this type of advertisement, two television advertisements may be compared: one Canadian, one South African.

sound business sense to make sure that the ads are understood by the people they are targeted at” (Pendoring 2005).

3.1.1 *The Rant*

This advertisement¹¹ became so popular when first aired in 2000 in Canada that it was used by the Canadian Heritage Minister, Sheila Copps, as a focal point in her address to the International Press Institute in Boston on 1 May 2000. The topic of her address was: “American culture: the people’s choice or a form of imperialism?” In the middle of this seminal speech on choice in publishing, Ms Copps (2000) said:

I’d like to take a moment to show you what is currently running as the most popular television ad in Canada. It’s a beer commercial, and it’s so popular that the *Boston Globe* calls it, and I quote, ‘An overnight sensation. Taped and shown in bars, filling magazines at hockey games, performing live in movie theatres, Canadians have gone foot-stompingly, flag-wavingly crazy.’ A columnist at the *Globe* also called the ad ‘anti-American rant,’ and went on to say that Canada is like Belgium or Ecuador, a nice enough place but not very important.

In the advertisement a shy, self-effacing young Canadian man enters onstage and recites the following text with growing confidence, with a Canadian flag waving in the background. This is all done against the background of a rousing rendition of Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1* of 1902,¹² and accompanied by loud applause from an imaginary audience:¹³

- 11 The client: Molson Canadian Beer; the agency: Bensimon Byrne D’Arcy (Toronto, Canada).
- 12 Space does not allow for a discussion of the emotive influence derived from music and the integral importance of background music in the communication of any message (and often language-specific text). Although a well-known piece of music may be used without words (as in this instance), the prospective audience will be put in mind of the emotive quality of the lyrics as a further enhancement of the message. Here Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1* is used and will immediately evoke the English (as opposed to British) patriotism of the accompanying lyrics (by AC Benson) that make this song (*Land of Hope and Glory*) a regular at every Last Night of the Proms. The accompanying colonial connotation is ironic given the Canadian content of the message of this advertisement, but ties in well with the implied homogenisation of the global product and thus represents a good example of the effects of the colonisation of the marketplace. Cf Fowles (1996: 131-136) and De Mooij (1998: 59) for more information on the relevance of music in advertising.
- 13 The advertisement may be accessed at <<http://www.videoclipstream.com/akamai/therant/rant.html>>.

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Hey. I'm not a lumberjack, or a fur trader.
And I don't live in an igloo, or eat blubber, or own a dog sled.
And I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada, although I'm certain they're really, really nice.
I have a Prime Minister, not a President.
I speak English and French, not American. And I pronounce it 'about' not 'a boot'.
I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peace keeping, not policing. Diversity, not assimilation. And that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.
A touque is a hat! A chesterfield is a couch! And it is pronounced 'zed': not 'zee' — 'zed'!
Canada is the second largest land mass! The first nation of hockey!
And the best part of North America!
My name is Joe!! AND I AM CANADIAN!!!
Thank you.

Ms Copps (2000) continued:

The popularity of this ad raises a very serious point. Some people believe that culture is simply a commercial good allocated by the private sector and free markets. And when you are the world's cultural juggernaut, at best this can pose serious challenges for other nations.

Nonetheless, what Copps failed to recognise was that this advertisement also posed serious questions. It plays into the more sinister movement in brand building by advertising: the product (beer) is not presented as a commodity, but as a concept. The brand is presented as a lifestyle. The danger when this kind of presentation of lifestyle resonates with claims of identity and culture is that the brand (and thus indirectly the advertising industry) starts to prescribe to its market what are acceptable markers of culture and identity. As Naomi Klein (2000: 115) explained, free trade, accelerated deregulation and the reality of the global marketplace have raised new questions:

What is the best way to sell identical products across multiple borders?
What voice should advertisers use to address the whole world at once?
How can one company accommodate cultural differences while still remaining internally coherent?

Her answer is ominous: "... force the world to speak your language and absorb your culture" (Klein 2000: 116). The other solution for global advertisers is "diversity" marketing:

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Rather than creating different advertising campaigns for different markets, campaigns [can] sell diversity itself, to all markets at once [...] As culture becomes increasingly homogenized globally, the task of marketing is to stave off the nightmare moment when branded products cease to look like lifestyles or grand ideas and suddenly appear as the ubiquitous goods they really are. [...] By embodying corporate identities that are radically individualistic and perpetually new, the brands attempt to inoculate themselves against accusations that they are in fact selling sameness (Klein 2000: 117-8).

Diversity marketing is the option chosen by the South African lifestyle advertisement selected for discussion.

3.1.2 *Worldwind*

To represent the South African version of the lifestyle advertisement a recent ad for Castle Lager may be considered.¹⁴ The brand is owned by SAB Miller (the second-largest brewery conglomerate in the world):¹⁵

[This advertisement] dramatises the growing realisation of a young, South African man, as he travels across the globe, that 'there is no country in the world as good as South Africa and no beer in the world as good as Castle Lager'. The visual style is rapid in pace and rich in detail. 'It's as if the lead character shot his entire experience on a video camera then edited the film into an action packed 75 seconds of highlights (Advertising News 2004).¹⁶

This advertisement portrays cultural pride in South African diversity by displaying diversity around the world (nine countries), rather than by means of the male lead (a South African), who speaks English (the global language), but with a very particular vernacular in order to sound culturally authentic. The only diversity and cultural pride in this ad is found in the world through which the narrator supposedly travels. And only by experiencing the diversity in the geography and culture of others does the observer realise his own, which is reduced

14 The client: SAB Miller; the agency: Ogilvy (Johannesburg, South Africa).

15 It is also important to emphasise that SAB Miller's strongest competitors for the South African market share are not another brand of beer, but cell phone companies and the national lottery. This is important because it means that SAB Miller's market includes the lower sectors of the economic spectrum, the only area of the marketplace which our questionnaire respondents were prepared to acknowledge was better served by language-specific marketing communications.

16 The advertisement may be accessed at <<http://www.marketingweb.co.za/adchat/348944.htm>>.

to: “I’m hot, I’m thirsty. I’m a South African and only one thing can satisfy my thirst”. This is a clever subversion of the call for pride in South African cultural diversity (the so-called “rainbow nation”). Uni-lingualism is the sticking-point. The advertiser suggests that, while culturally diverse, language is not an issue. And we are asked to accept this along with a particular lifestyle and a particular beer. Although Castle Lager and its advertisers are therefore claiming to have “broken the mould” of the traditional beer advertisement (Penstone [sa]),¹⁷ the analysis above clearly shows that the more things change, the more they remain the same in the homogenisation of the marketplace.

3.2 *A little goes a long way*

The most extreme form of avoiding language issues while giving a nod to the reality of our culturally diverse South African society is a recent television advertisement for Sunlight dishwashing liquid.¹⁸ This may best be discussed with the following background in mind. Louis Seeco, South African marketer and advertiser, had just completed a research trip to rural South Africa in 2003 for a book that he was thinking of calling “The forgotten market”. In an interview with SAfm’s Jeremy Maggs, he described some of his experiences:

Jeremy: So what, then, is the relationship between that consumer — that forgotten consumer — and the brand?

Louis: I think a lot of consumers find these brands and they create an identity for these brands that a lot of marketers are not aware of.

Jeremy: Give us an example.

Louis: I’ve been to homes where they would use ... A good example I always use is the dishwashing liquid Sunlight. And in my view they could actually go and buy something else — an equivalent — more cheaply. But people say, ‘Well, I use this because it’s thicker, and I think it will last me longer. I don’t have to use too many drops to get the same effect’, and therefore they’ll buy a more expensive brand rather than a cheaper one.

Jeremy: So there is an understanding, then, of brand quality?

17 “... this spot is nothing like the Castle commercials of old. Gone are the back-slapping, beer-drinking, braai-ing, hand-on-heart South Africans, neatly racially mixed to display some politically-correct demographic. Gone too is the signature song, and with it that schmaltzy, patriotic feeling that’s become so much a part of Castle’s advertising over the years” (Penstone [sa]).

18 The client: Unilever; the agency: Lowe Bull (Durban, South Africa).

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Louis: Absolutely.

Jeremy: Which marketers would dismiss.

Louis: A lot of us would have thought the cheaper versions would find a place in a lot of these homes, but I can tell you that your cheapies don't have a place out there. Branding is important. Packaging is important (MEDIA@SAfm 2003).

According to Integrated Marketing Information, 67% of urban taxi commuters are regular users of dishwashing liquid, "(therefore) making them an ideal target market for the Sunlight dishwashing liquid brand message". The response was astonishing:

Initiative Note Bene assigned ComutaNet to place the communication inside 750 taxis and brand the exteriors of 210 Mega taxis. Running for a year, the campaign [was expected to] generate over two million opportunities to be seen by taxi commuters every month and, with 78% of these commuters being personally responsible for household purchases, this campaign is set to bring the sales in for Unilever (ComutaNet 2002).

The Consumer Watch survey done in 2004 by the Alternative Consultancy research company confirmed the success of this campaign, "... revealing strong brand loyalty and positive attitudes towards advertising in local townships" (ComutaNet [sa]). These results, it should be emphasised, were achieved without the benefit of TV as the primary advertising medium.¹⁹

More recently, a television advertisement for Sunlight dishwashing liquid was launched. Obviously, the branding team did not want to alienate the core constituency of predominantly black taxi commuters. This segment of the market traditionally holds very little appeal for advertisers, as sub-economic circumstances are assumed and this segment normally does not wield enormous economic power. This market is also likely to be linguistically fragmented and not likely to speak or understand English well.

The advertisers overcame this problem in a TV ad that obviously also had to appeal to the economically empowered with access to tele-

19 "Responses regarding advertising in their communities included: 'it is a very professional way of reaching people', 'entertains, educates and gives information', 'through advertising we often see new products or improvements that we want to try' and 'there are many people around informal settlements who don't have TV, so without community advertising they wouldn't see these ads'" (ComutaNet [sa]) [emphasis added].

vision, by extrapolating the target audience to a female audience of “housewives, responsible for the purchase of the household dish-washing liquid”.²⁰ This advertisement:

... tells the story of a little boy who goes out to fetch a teaspoon of Sunlight dishwashing liquid for his mother. Carefully guarding the teaspoon of Sunlight, he journeys back to his home, through fields, over fences and across rivers, eventually arriving home with not a drop spilt. As he hands the teaspoon over, there is a knock at the door and standing outside is another child with a teaspoon, asking for some Sunlight. The mother gives him half of the teaspoon measure she has (Schonborn 2004).

The advertisement is entirely devoid of speech,²¹ but nevertheless laden with a rich subtext that is easily grasped by the audience. Although the heart-warming nature of the storyline appeals to all sectors of the market and to the intended female audience in particular, the implicit reinforcement of a Western colonial image of Africa and Africans, at the expense of the primary target market of this ad, is a concern.

On the surface, however, it looks simple, quaint and a successful way to avoid the perceived financial outlay and reconceptualisation problems involved in a multilingual advertising campaign. (This, however, was never part of Unilever’s original intention in conceptualising a language-free advertisement for Sunlight dishwashing liquid.) Our prediction is that many more companies will follow this route in all media, in an attempt to deal with aspects of language diversity in target audiences, without running the risk of having to reconceptualise their campaigns. Despite lifestyle claims of cultural diversity, the branding trend in advertising is in favour of a one-size-fits-all approach; it makes economic sense.

20 Antony Segal of Unilever was kind enough to agree to an e-mail interview with Stephanie Cawood on this commercial who was responsible for this advertisement (2 March 2005).

21 “The advert was initially conceptualised to have a voice-over element although after qualitative testing we decided that the intended voice-over did not add anything to the commercial (and the storyline was understood well enough without it). The intended voice-over was of the boy asking the Gogo [grandmother] for some Sunlight and his mother thanking him for it (Segal interview 2005).

The irony is, unfortunately, that when marketers like Louis Seeco (MEDIA@SAfm 2003) refer to the “forgotten market”, their greatest concern turns out to be language:

Well, what I've found is that language is a huge barrier. There's an understanding [...] It's as though some marketers believe that as people progress, as their income increases, they speak English like Louis, and listen to English radio stations, and they have forgotten that there are many African language stations out there that have a huge impact on those families. And I think we need to get those messages out there in the languages that people understand, and the cultures or the values that are reflected in advertising must be what people understand.

4. Conclusion

Despite the provision for multilingualism in the South African Constitution, very little application of the principle is found in the advertising public, para-statal, and private sectors. This is borne out by findings on multilingualism and government:

The South African Constitution favours multilingualism but governmental practice suggests the opposite. Like so many other African countries, South Africa is moving towards de facto unilingualism (Deprez *et al* 2000: 9).

The same is currently true for the self-regulating South African advertising industry. The problem is how to arrest the current trend. Should it be arrested? And if so, is regulation an option in a South African industry which is proud of its self-regulating history?

There are valid concerns to be raised in pursuing a regulated policy of multilingual commercial discourse. Certain matters have to be negotiated responsibly in determining and interpreting the present state of affairs:

- Multilingual service capacity

The creation of an expectation of service in the language in which the advertisement is presented. This is similar to a concern raised in a study conducted by the Canadian Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages on Linguistic duality in commercial advertising and sponsorships (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2003).

- The question of preference
Should it be a balancing act with advertisements in all languages? Or multilingual advertisements? Will colloquialisms or trendy vernaculars do the trick?

- Translation directly from English

It is clear that translation does not address the requirements of cultural specificity in advertising. Reconceptualising a campaign in eleven languages would be cumbersome and not economically viable. Incentives from government, also advocated by the Canadian study, might prove the only option (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2003).

Advertising professionals in South Africa are extremely aware of the reality of a multilingual South African society *vis-à-vis* the demands of the global environment of their clients' products. Language-specific advertising is however extremely dependant on medium and culture and in many instances English is still the commercial language of choice. This is particularly true for the print media, where newspapers in languages other than Afrikaans and English are rare to non-existent. Exceptions include regional radio broadcasts and the adaptation of culture-specific visuals to transcend language barriers and circumvent language specificity. But the latter seems to play into a worrying global trend towards cultural prescriptivity and the "spiritual" homogenisation of the target audience (Klein 2000: 21). If the South African Government chooses to enforce greater multilingualism, this should be done circumspectly and with great sensitivity to the history of self-regulation in the South African advertising industry. In the words of one of our respondents: "Government regulation equals restriction of creativity and we have enough of that".

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