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choose your product ?

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Abstract

Many researches have been done concerning the study of parameters which make people choose or not such product on the market. Concerning food industry, scientists have been involved in the analysis of technical parameters (nutrition, health characteristics) and their perception by the consumer, and in the analysis of psycho-sociological parameters linked with the perception of the product, or emotion associated with food or its environment. Other parameters investigated are suspicion of novelties, adherence to technology or to natural food, enjoyment, necessity. But what about the effect of words from the socio-psycholinguistic standpoint? It seems to be poorly investigated. Some claims: "It doesn't matter how important the brand name is to the company, it's what it means to the public that counts". Concerning the foreign migration of brands (the use of a brand from one country to another), some psychological functions associated with language are weakened in the communication process. If an undesirable link is built between the concept of the brand and another one in the target foreign market, this can come from some communication channels detailed in this study. The weakened psychological functions can be some of the causes, and the undesirable link built through the communication channels is the consequence. It is shown why unexpected links between the brand (or the product name) and an undesirable concept must be looked for in six dimensions (academic, common, popular, rude language, slang, and "no meaning" language), and how an adapted advertisement campaign can enforced the psychological functions associated with language.

Keywords :

agronomy product market marketing food industry perception psycholinguistic linguistic communication language foreign migration brands homonym paronym neograph

Introduction

Many researches have been done concerning the study of parameters which make people choose or not such merchandise, such product on the market. Concerning food industry, scientists have been involved in the analysis of technical parameters linked with nutrition and health characteristics and their perception by the consumer (Van Trijp, H.C.M. & Van der Lans, 2007; Pieniak *et al.*, 2009; Lähteenmäki *et al*., 2010), and in the analysis of psycho-sociological parameters linked with the perception of the product, or emotion associated with food (King & Meiselman, 2010) or its environment (Meiselman *et al*., 2000; Edwards *et al*., 2003). Other psycho-sociological parameters investigated are suspicion of novelties, adherence to technology, adherence to natural food, eating as an enjoyment, and eating as a necessity (Backstroma *et al*., 2004). But what about the effect of words from the socio-psycholinguistic standpoint?

Some literature reviews about the general topic of food preferences confirm that the socio-psycholinguistic approach is poorly investigated (see for example Johns & Pine, 2002). Yet, some studies have shown the influence of words on the acceptance (Di Monaco *et al*., 2004) or the perception of the food taste: the use of descriptive names improves perceptions of foods (Wansink *et al*., 2005), while it shows the limited effects of texts on food labels (Boehl,

2007). Furthermore, with the development of consumption on line, words have acquired a new status (Degeratu *et al.*, 2000).

We shall here be concerned about the influence and consequences induced by short expression, even one word : the brand or product name. We shall be concerned from the psycholinguistic and sociological standpoints (leaving apart the physio-cognitive approach; see for example Possidonia *et al.*, 2002; Crutch *et al.* , 2004).

Studies have shown that meaningful brand names are evaluated more favorably than non-meaningful names, and that the brand names influence evaluations of quality and other product attributes (Kohli *et al.*, 2005).

But is the meaning perceived by the consumer equal to the seller's one? And what is involved when the brand travels from one country to another ?

Some literature shows that it is sometimes very far from the expected result. For example, S. Roy (1998) reports : "The name Coca-Cola in China was first rendered as Ke-kou-ke-la. Unfortunately, the Coke company did not discover until after thousands of signs had been printed that the phrase means 'bite the wax tadpole' or 'female horse stuffed with wax' depending on the dialect." He reports (like others; for example: Haig, 2003) that when General Motors introduced the Chevy Nova in South America, "no va" was understood as "it won't go" and it was difficult to sell the car. Ford had a similar problem in Brazil with the Pinto heard like Brazilian slang for "tiny male genitals".

Haig (2003), analyzing the Ford Edsel flop, explains that one of the parameters going wrong with this car was the name, sounding like "weasel" and perceived as a stupid name. He then provides this advice: "Your name matters. At the most basic level, your brand is your name. It doesn't matter how important the brand name is to the company, it's what it means to the public that counts. If the name conjures up images of weasels and pretzels it might be a good time to scrap it."

As we can see, brand names and their exportation to foreign countries must be done carefully. This study aims to give a model of analysis for the firms and their marketing teams to keep money and time. The model is based on some examples which will illustrate our demonstration.

Some potential mistakes will be highlighted.

Psycholinguistic approach in communication for the brands

The main thing is first to well understand the problem and its dimensions. The problem is to be sure not to ruin the product image by the brand in a foreign country, or, in other words, by the migration of the brand from a language to another.

For this aim, we need to know what are the factors, parameters, dimensions, to be taken into account.

It has been demonstrated that language does not participate in a simple exchange of information in the process of communication, and that this information is not only holder of the information: the vector of information for example, and its mode of use, transmit information between a source and a target. If language (mostly verbal communication, linguistic interactions, acts of language) is recovering from an innate specific capacity, it nevertheless requires the development of a skill and the lexical and syntactic integration of a coding (Chomski, 1972). An internal rationality is highlighted, as well as a language interaction rationality: the subject which speaks has an effect on the world (see the speech act theory, by J.L. Austin, in "How to Do Things With Words?", published posthumously in 1962, and developed by Searle & Vanderveken, 1969 & 1985).
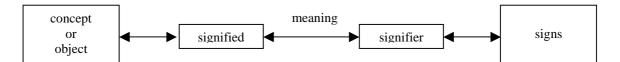
Several models were suggested to explain communication. Shanon and Weaver (1949), then Jakobson (1960), Anzieu (1975) and Anzieu & Martin (1990), highlighted functions

associated with language, and helped to understand its internal and interaction rationalities. Emotive function (or expressive) associated to the addresser (the one who speaks) permits to express the attitude regarding the object of the topic. Conative function refers to the action that the addresser wants to have over the addressee. Phatic function concerns contact and all that maintains the contact between interlocutors (maintaining this contact using terms as «allo?», «sorry?»). Metalingual function (or metacommunication) concerns the message being exchanged; it happens when the interlocutors verify that they are talking about the same thing. Referential function (or denotative) concerns context and develops a dependence of the meaning of the message in context. Poetic function concerns the form of the message. The school of Palo-Alto (see for example: Watzlawick, 1978) offered the approach of language as a behavior, verbal or not, with the postulate that any behavior has a sense, and communication is not an alternation of behaviors but a jointly constructed co-action.

Anzieu and Martin notably pointed out that there exists a symbolic resonance leading to an associative chain of meanings. But meaning can not be the same for each one: although every speaker shares the same situation during the exchange, each one has his own field of consciousness including his own filters which intervene between them. Besides, common situation has not the same weight depending on circumstances: denotative function proceeds in different ways if the interlocutors are in physical presence or if they are in dialogue on the telephone, or else if they communicate by email.
The associative chain of meanings introduced above can be envisaged as an unconscious irrationality. Studies show that, when it exists, this irrationality is not first: it is preceded by a rational and structured process. The process is partly induced by the language itself.
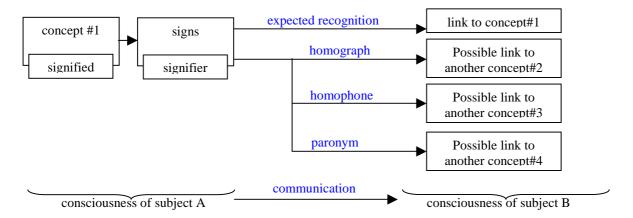
Language is a group of finished elements and goes about things of an endless number of possible utterances. For each language (we mean here: for the language/dialect of each country or region), these elements (or their roots) have an arbitrary meaning, as it was at the very beginning put an arbitrary relationship between a signifier and a signified[1]. Here, the signified is link with the object or the concept to be designated, and the signifier is attached to the signs; the message makes relationship between signifier and signified, and thus, between the objet or concept and the signs. A semantic link is built between the object or concept and the signs. Language, if it can cut itself off from speech, is however implemented first of all by speaking.

Furthermore, different links can exist between words. For two different words with the same meaning or for which the meaning is close to each other, we speak of synonymous. For two words which look or sound like the same, the meaning can be quite different; we here can have paronyms or homonyms. Paronyms (of Greek para=close to, and onoma=word) are words of different meaning but in relatively neighboring forms (ex in French: collision and collusion; ex in English: smooch and smooth). Homonyms are words of different meaning but which are similar by the spelling (homographs, of Greek homo=similar and onoma=word) or by the pronunciation (homophones, of Greek homo=similar and phônê=voice).

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[1] The signifier is the written sign, its phonic component, i.e. the sequence of letters or phonemes.
The signified is the concept or object that appears in mind when the signifier is read or heard. The signified (the mental concept) is not to be confused with the referent (the actual object in the world).

During the process of communication, two subjects will have to use a similar semantic link concerning the shared signs; in this case, the addresser will have the expected recognition by the addressee and they will share the same concept.

But sometimes, it will not be, because the communication channel will be the one of homonyms or paronyms. Signs will be recognized by each subject but associated with different semantic link : they will share similar signs but different concepts.

Those kinds of links are rather interesting concerning the brands: it makes us think about the consequences of a link between the brand concept #1 and a possible concept #2 which would damage the image of the brand. This undesirable link is more likely to happen when one word is used in a foreign language context, it means when a English word, for example, is used in a French sentence, or when a single English word is used in the French context. Concerning the brands, we here shall speak of "foreign migration of brands".

To illustrate the consequences of those links, we shall suggest three examples.
Imagine someone from France writing a report in English, presenting some results and including in the text the sentence : "among those results, the pregnant parameter explaining the deficit can be resumed by the effect of excessive retributions". This would be rather difficult to understand : the French writer just put French words in the text (underlined) which exist in English, with the same spelling but with another meaning. The right sentence would have been : "among those results, the main parameter explaining the deficit can be summarized by the effect of excessive wages". This kind of homograph link refers to "false friends".
Now, imagine someone from England speaking in German with a German about tinned peas in which is added some preservative, but using "preservative" in the discussion rather than the translated word. The German will understand that there is a condom ("Präservativ" in German), inside the peas. This kind of association from a language to another foreign language, of paronym type, is close to the problem of false friends, and due to shared etymology (see for example Chamizo Domınguez & Nerlich, 2002).
Last example for the undesirable homophone link : imagine the company selling the cleaning product named "Blue Water" in west Europe, selling the same product with the same name in Russia. Even if alphabet are not the same for west Europe and Russia, nevertheless, a lot of them read something like "bleevota" instead of "blue water". But this sounds like a Russian word meaning in English "vomit". The marketing team noticed that and found a simple solution : they just inverted the words. So, the product is provided in Russia with the name "Water Blue".

From the psychological standpoint, this possible undesirable links can occur because of academic knowledge of the people and because one or several of the psychological functions associated with language cannot always work correctly. We shall analysis this point in the next section.

As we can see (but every body knows!), language concerns sounds, writings, and paraverbal expression; it uses (or it is) several vectors of communication.
In the case of a message based on the single word, must we call it language? Must we speak of act of language if we accept that the act of language is an act fulfilled by means of the enunciation of words (Ghiglione *et al*., 1993) and is characterized by seven elements (force, illocutionary logic, mode of accomplishment, propositional contents, preparative conditions, sincerity, degree of power of the conditions of sincerity)?
Again we can suggest that in the case a single word as a brand, or in the case of a short expression, some of those elements are not strong enough to produce the act of language.
Vigotski ("Thought and language", 1934/1986, chap VII) noticed that the word, basic unit of language, if it is deprived of meaning is not any more a word. On the psychological standpoint, meaning is a general implementation, a mental concept, and therefore an act of thought. Word is therefore a phenomenon of language but also of thought. The thought proceeds of global representations, while the language is made of discreet elements; thus, there has to exist a process of transition and of transformation unifying thought and language. In this process, meaning serves as mediation: the direct communication between two consciousness is impossible; this communication is therefore indirect by the mediation of the meaning of the thought towards the meaning and then towards the words or writings, and finally attains the other consciousness. This explains the possible ways to go from one consciousness to another, to link one concept inside one mind to another concept inside another mind; even if, despite any expectation, those concepts had not to be linked. By this final proposal, we mean that (as shown above) among the ways, some of them can be wrong regarding to the will of the addresser.

To summarize this section, we can notice that, concerning the foreign migration of brands, some psychological functions associated with language are weakened in the communication process. If an undesirable link is built between the concept of the brand and another one in the target foreign market, this can come from one of the communication channels exposed above (like homonyms or paronyms). The weakened psychological functions can be the causes, and the undesirable link built through the communication channels is the consequence.
Then, it is worth to have a preliminary strong linguistic analysis of the brand inside the foreign context. In the next section, pragmatics will show that this foreign context has several dimensions to be investigated.

Pragmatics approach of the brands, and food industry examples
Let us make a review of the examples we used above to illustrate our topic, and watch a few other ones.

General Motors introduced the Chevy Nova in South America, and "no va" was understood as "it won't go", good joke for a new car.
The Ford Edsel was sounding like "weasel" and perceived as a stupid name.
"Blue Water", in west Europe, has been renamed "Water Blue" in East Europe to avoid to be read as something like "bleevota" meaning "vomit".

Those examples show that the unexpected links occur for the academic and common languages of the target country.

A French chocolate with hazels is called "duplo", in France. Read like that in Russian, it designates the sex of a woman in popular language.
We have seen that the name Coca-Cola in China was first rendered as Ke-kou-ke-la leading to the meaning: 'bite the wax tadpole' or 'female horse stuffed with wax' depending on the dialect.
A Spanish company suggests its very fresh eggs with a tag on the package written in big letters "super huevo". Such a product in Moscow would be read "sooper hoo-iova" which means, in rude Russian language: "super dick".
Those examples show that the unexpected links concern popular language and rude language.

Ford had a problem in Brazil with the Pinto heard like Brazilian slang for "tiny male genitals". We must add here that in some countries, the wars have left some foreign words which are included inside the slang. As for the previous types of languages, slang can provide some unexpected links.

Most of the time, these unexpected semantic links refer to linguistic interferences, and most of the time to a kind of false friends or false cognates. False friends are words in language of different countries which look and sound the same but have a different meaning. False cognates are similar words in language of different countries which seems to have similar linguistic roots but in fact do not. Some dictionaries exist; see for example what is published by the National Textbook Company (NTC Publishing Group). Dictionaries on line are also available.

Other kinds of links can be made, without any semantic basis, but just concerned by signs. It is the case of the French jam "Bonne Maman" (it means "good mummy" in French), which is written in cursive letters on the pots. Russians can then recognize Cyrillic letters and read two words, without any meaning and rather stupid: "vopey matap". We could call them "neographs" as it gives new phonemes which can be read and pronounced as a coherent group of signs, but without any meaning for the moment. It cannot be called "word", since, according to Vigotski (1934/1986), phonemes without meaning are not words.

Some studies have shown how much the brand and name can be important for people when they choose the food, especially for women (see fore example Oakes & Slotterback, 2001). It is thus quite important for the marketing teams to do a straight analysis in the linguistic field. The previous examples show that, in the case of foreign migration of brands, six dimensions of the language have to be investigated :
-   academic language
-   common language
-   popular language
-   rude language
-   slang
-   no meaning

The feedback shows that most of the unexpected linguistic links concerning foreign migration of brands occur when important graphic and phonic differences exist between the signs of the languages. This is the case between east and west Europe, with Roman and Cyrillic alphabet. For example, Cyrillic 'M' is m but Cyrillic 'm' is t; Cyrillic 'H' is n. In such case of foreign

migration of brands, unexpected links due to homophones, paronymes, or neographs have high probability to occur.

This is why, as said in the previous section, a specific care must be given to the psychological functions that will influence the addressee. To illustrate this advice, let us see the example of some breakfast flakes. The American Quakers flakes are provided on the Russian market with the west Europe spelling. Without any advertisement on TV or on radio, "Quakers" could be read "ka-care" by Russians. Because of the advertisement, everyone in Russia (or at least most of the people living in the towns where the product is provided) reads it and pronounces it correctly, or at least, do not read "ka-care"; this would occur without a strong or adapted advertisement campaign. And this is a very good thing for the brand, because "ka-care" looks like a Russian word which designates someone who defecates.
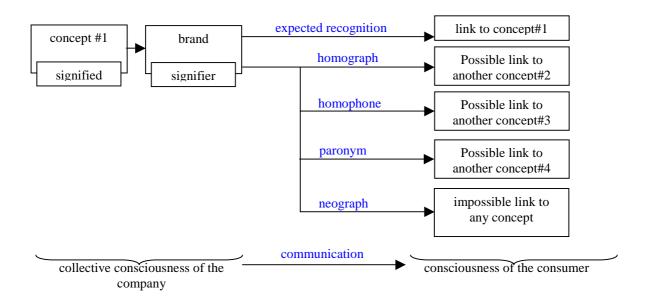
It appears that an adapted advertisement campaign can enforce the psychological functions required to avoid any undesirable links. But, even if the marketing team of a company takes care of all details concerning the advertisements accompanying the brand and the product (the care comes under the metacommunication function, while the advertisements, their patterns and contents come under the emotive, conative and poetic functions), it happens that brand and product are disconnected from the advertisements. This can be due to the fact that some consumers do not have TV, do not buy the magazines chosen by the company, do not listen to the radio, or because the marketing campaign is late compared to the arrival of the product on the market. Then, the links are built by the consumer according to his own experience, knowledge, culture, and feelings. This means that for people of a given country, some variabilities can occur. This can be connected to the kinds of variabilities that are encountered by foreign language learners. Thus, the unexpected links could be induced by the phonological environment or neighboring features marked for formality or informality (Fasold & Preston, 2007; Tarone, 2009).
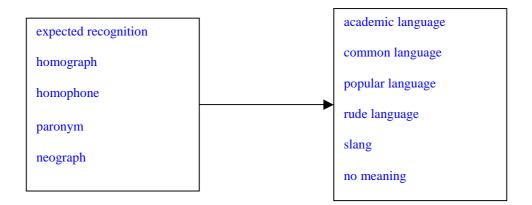
To summarize this section, we can notice that, concerning the foreign migration of brands, unexpected links between the brand (or the product name) and an undesirable concept must be looked for in six dimensions : academic language, common language, popular language, rude language, slang, and "no meaning" language. Besides, the psychological functions associated with language can be enforced by an adapted advertisement campaign.

Socio-psycholinguistic model suggested for the foreign migration of brands
If we have a look at the figure above, and if we add the case of neographs, the foreign migration of brands can be analyzed according to the following method, illustrated on the diagrams bellow:
- A brand or a product name is linked to a concept #1 with which the company wants the consumers to make a link; this brand or product name is the signifier of the concept #1.
- The signifier must give expected recognition by the consumer to be linked with the concept #1; the way to estimate the possibilities for the signifier to be linked with an unexpected concept consists in studying what kind of other communication channels can be used instead of the expected one : homograph, homophone, paronym, neograph.
- For each of those channels, studies must include six dimensions of language: academic language, common language, popular language, rude language, slang, and "no meaning" language.

We can thus obtain a qualitative estimation of the probability for an expected linguistic link to be done between the original concept and an undesirable one.

Then, it is the marketing job to appreciate whether the signifier must be kept or changed, and what kind of advertisement must be done to enforce the psychological functions of the language chosen for the signifier associated the brand or the product name.

Concluding remarks

Among the researches done concerning the study of parameters which make people choose a product on the food market, the present study aims to give a contribution from the socio-psycholinguistic standpoint.

Focusing on the influence and consequences induced by names in the foreign migration of brands (using the brands from one country to another), we have proposed a model to explain some mechanisms of influence, pointed out real or potential weaknesses of the marketing

(illustrated by examples), and suggested a simple model to help to anticipate problems in the target food market.

Of course, this kind of problems do not only occurs in food industry and an enlarged research is in progress. Tables of words could be elaborated to help the marketing teams (which will perhaps be included in Fauquet-Alekhine-Pavlovskaia, 2012). Actually, this kind of analysis of foreign migration of brands would take advantage of a dedicated phonetic multilingual software.

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