

# Addressing the Consumer in Standardised Advertisements:

## Linguistic Cues in French and Finnish Technology Products' Advertising Texts

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### ABSTRACT

The complexity of the challenges in global marketing communications which concern technology products arise from e.g. geographical variations, trends in globalisation and the evolutionary changes of technologies. In response to this complex environment multinational companies need to find a balance between adaptation and standardisation to achieve effective advertising. We explore linguistic cues used to address the consumer in standardised advertisements of technology products in France and Finland. The advertising texts are studied with the theory of enunciation, which takes into account the communication situation and textual organisation. Furthermore, we elaborate what the linguistic cues imply as linguistic strategies in standardised advertising. The corpus indicates that, despite standardised product information and images, consumers are approached via dissimilar linguistic means in different cultural settings, revealing a differing relationship towards technology.

**Keywords:** theory of enunciation, advertising text, standardisation, linguistic strategies, France, Finland

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### INTRODUCTION

The popular hypothesis has been that international markets are converging, as globalisation makes national markets more homogenous and eliminates cultural variety (Tomlinson, 1991). However, recently there have also been suggestions that a more diverse and complex cultural mixing and merging is taking place in the form of cultural borrowing, such as 'orientalization', which emphasises but does not redefine culture (Pieterse, 1995). Further, empirical studies have confirmed that cultural background has even more effect on the behaviour of local national markets as economic development and homogenisation proceeds due to globalisation (e.g. de Mooij 1998). There are also driving forces of creolization in local markets, i.e. a product acquiring its local meaning in diverse cultural contexts (Howes, 2000). Consequently, as economic progress increases, consumers seem to be more able and more willing to fulfil their individual needs, and these needs are deeply influenced by shared cultural values.

Multinational companies operate in varied national markets; therefore they face contradicting forces of homogenisation and divergence. International interdependence increases the importance of understanding and communicating effectively with people from other cultural and ethnical backgrounds (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984). Multinational companies need to find a balance between

local adaptation and global standardisation in order to achieve effective advertising. The issue of standardisation and adaptation is in essence about intercultural communication – about the ability to communicate a meaningful message to heterogeneous local markets representing various cultural settings. Standardised advertising can be seen as an alternative to the high costs of localised advertising for different markets, as well as a means to maintain a coherent global corporate image (e.g. Agrawal, 1995, Laroche et al., 2001). Nonetheless, standardisation includes the risk of not corresponding to the values of these diverse markets (Watson *et al.*, 2002).

In addition to spatial divergence in international markets, the varied local markets themselves evolve through different customer segments according to the life cycle of a technology product, with its own technological evolution. These customer segments vary significantly in their characteristics (e.g. Moore, 1999, Rogers, 1995). Marketing communications and advertising messages, among others, should differ for the different customer segments along the evolution (e.g. Mohr, 2001). The total complexity of the global standardisation-adaptation issues arises from temporal evolutionary changes in combination with geographical variations and trends in globalisation.

In existing research, language has been considered one of the means to construct a localised advertising message (Agrawal, 1995). The previous linguistic studies of advertisements have considered, for example, argumentation (e.g. Adam and Bonhomme, 2003) and the use of adverbs and personal determiners (e.g. Garric, 1996, Smith, 2004). In the earlier studies, however, it has been demonstrated that there is a gap between understanding the use of language as a part of global marketing and its actual implementation (Melewar and Saunders, 1999:593). Therefore, current literature on standardisation issues does not consider linguistic structuring of the message itself in a technology context.

In response to this above research gap our study concentrates on how linguistic cues in standardised advertisements are employed in French and Finnish advertising texts of technology products. We contemplate the meaning of linguistic cues as strategies to address the consumer. The theoretical frame for the linguistic study of the advertisements consists of the theory of enunciation (*'Théorie de l'énonciation'*) which is partly grounded in discourse analysis (Benveniste, 1974, Culioli, 1991, Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980, Maingueneau, 1994, Maingueneau, 2000). The theory of enunciation combines the communication situation and textual organisation, resulting in a rich and meaningful analysis of advertisements. The study reveals that linguistic cues may acquire different meaning when addressing the consumer in standardised advertisements in different cultural settings.

## **BACKGROUND FOR THE RESEARCH**

The adoption of technology products goes through various phases comprising differing customer segments from innovators and early adopters to the early and late majority and finally laggards (e.g. Rogers, 1995). When the evolutionary trajectory has achieved mass market status, producers of technology products have to increasingly face price pressures (e.g. Moore, 1999) and therefore standardisation and adaptation issues in their marketing efforts become even more crucial than in the early phases of technology evolution. At the same time, however, marketing has to be kept locally responsive. However, a simple translation to the local language is not sufficient, as it is not only the languages that vary but also consumer needs, and the way advertising appeals to these needs (de Mooij, 2004). Therefore, linguistic means are one of the ways companies can tackle standardisation-adaptation issues in their global marketing and advertising effort.

Advertising is a form of social communication which reflects a society's culture, as well as the values and norms embedded in it (Neelankavil et al., 1995:55). As target markets vary, so do its cultural contexts as well as the customer segments in relation to the technology life cycle. Advertising differs for the early segments, compared to the mass market stage later in the technology adoption (e.g.

Mohr, 2001). The above factors, among others, pose a need for variations to the advertising message in the international setting. The importance of language as a part of an effective advertising message has been acknowledged in international advertising literature (e.g. Neelankavil et al., 1995, Hite and Fraser, 1990, Melewar and Saunders, 1999, de Mooij, 2004). Thus, an advertising text can be seen as one way to enhance the responsiveness of standardised messages to local needs via linguistic means.

The previous linguistic studies of advertisements have considered diverse levels of analysis. Garric (1996) studied the use of adverbs as discursive strategies in advertising. Smith (2004) focused on personal pronouns and possessive determinants in Russian and English advertising texts. Crook (2004) investigated the concept of overt versus covert communication in advertising. Gardner and Luchtenberg (2000) discussed the diverse forms of reference present in German and Australian advertising posters and how the reference is made meaningful in the texts. Adam and Bonhomme (2003) traced the various aspects of argumentation in advertising. In addition, prior research combining advertising and language in an international setting has considered, for example, brand creation, translation matters, and the use of foreign words in global and local markets (Francis et al., 2002, Hong et al., 2002, Melewar and Saunders, 1999, Neelankavil et al., 1995, Zhang and Schmitt, 2001). However, there is no consideration of the totality of linguistic structuring of the advertising message itself.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory of enunciation is a French stream of discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 1996). The first writings around the linguistic problem of enunciation were elaborated by Emile Benveniste in the middle of the 1950's (Maingueneau, 1976:7). It has later been developed into multiple directions by e.g. Culioli (1991), who concentrated on concepts of enunciative operations, Ducrot (1980), who concentrated on the integration of enunciative phenomenes into linguistic semantics; and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980), who focused for example on the notion of subjectivity in language. The main interests of the theory concern the articulation of the subject, modalities and deictic features (i.e. participants, time and place), as expressed by its central concept, utterance (Maingueneau, 1996). As a contrast to a phrase, an utterance always carries an oral or written communicative intention (Perret, 2000). The theory of enunciation approaches utterances as a discourse which combines the communication situation and textual organisation. These two cannot be separated, as the textual structure is a sum of its discourse genre, the emerging social setting and the medium of diffusion (Maingueneau 2000).

A significant part of advertising focuses on the interrelationship constructed between the advertiser and consumer, i.e. the addresser and the addressee. Every utterance, written or oral, includes an addresser that enables us to constitute the other, the addressee (Maingueneau, 2000:86). The relationship between *I* who enounces the utterance and *you* destined to receive the message is produced only by and within the situation of enunciation (Benveniste, 1982:82). In the context of our study, the addresser refers to the advertiser, i.e. the company delivering the technology product. The addressee refers to the potential consumer portrayed in the advertisement. We will use the terms "addresser" – "addressee" when referring to a specific utterance in the advertising texts; the terms "advertiser" – "consumer" will be employed when we consider the linguistic strategies in a larger situational context of advertisements. With linguistic strategy we refer to a conscious or non-conscious choice on the addresser's behalf to choose one linguistic operation over another in a communication situation constrained by restrictions, rules or norms (Charaudeau, 2002).

The interrelationship between the addresser and the addressee becomes concrete by different moods (*'modalité'*), which can be defined as the relationship the addresser maintains with his/her own utterance and its content (Maingueneau, 1994:145). In this study we consider mood in its larger syntactic sense as covering utterance types (Hakulinen and Karlsson, 1995), and as a more general

aspect of modality ('*modalisation*') (Maingueneau, 2002). According to Benveniste (1982:84) there are three fundamental moods: declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Maingueneau (1994:55) adds "exclamation" to the moods.

The declarative utterance is the most common mark of the presence of the addresser in an utterance (Benveniste, 1982:84). The addresser makes him/herself present in the text from a committed view-point to a neutral statement. The principal role of the interrogative utterance is to produce an answer (Benveniste, 1982:84). In the case of advertisement texts, it is possible to use the term "dialogue trap", where the addresser of the advertisement itself makes both questions and answers (Adam and Bonhomme, 2003:37-38). The imperative utterance implies a vivid relationship between the addresser and the addressee (Benveniste, 1982:84). Imperative utterances can only express the present tense, and with the reflection of the present tense they therefore situate the addresser directly with the addressee into the scene of the moment of utterance (Maingueneau, 1994:55). Complementary views concerning the tense reflected by the imperative utterance have also been presented; Palmer (1986) considers the imperative as mirroring the future. Therefore, as the actual situation of enunciation is the source of utterance, we emphasise imperatives in relation to the present tense while simultaneously referring to a future action. Exclamation communicates forward the addresser's influence on the utterance. It always emphasises the sentiment of the sender and adds to one of the three other moods (Riegel, 1997:390).

## METHODOLOGY

In essence we wanted to address the link between technology and societal environment by studying how advertisers of technology products represent their offerings to consumers. In order to keep our research focused we strictly limited our data temporally, context-wise and content-wise.

Temporally we considered advertisements representing products that have achieved mass markets in their life cycle. At this point it is not simply a question of informing consumers of the existence of such a product or its features, since most consumers would possess at least a minimum knowledge regarding the product's functions and properties. Therefore, in this specific phase some consumer segments are in need of detailed knowledge, while other segments can be targeted with more emotional messages attached to the actual usage of the product. Thus the advertising message is often twofold selling the moment of usage with its emotional content in addition to the technical product. With this temporal limitation we could restrict the effects of variables which might influence the advertising message stemming from differing evolutionary phases of the adoption of technological products.

Context-wise we selected our corpus to include French and Finnish advertisements in order to include in our research the necessary diversity to study differing cultural contexts but at the same time keeping other variables which might influence the advertising content (like economic and political differences) *ceteris paribus*. The advertisements were chosen on the basis of the similarity of the brand, product and advertising images in order to control the standardisation of the advertisements. Therefore, our research design combines a diverse cultural context and standardised marketing.

Even further, we limited content-wise our selection of advertisements to consider only a few products from one company. The products were in their mass market adoption phase. The product and the company names have been replaced with 'PRODUCT' and 'COMPANY', respectively. The advertisements that we chose for the corpus were products for picture and video capturing and printing. We selected advertisements that represented both digital cameras and printers together. These products are used in combination, and their advertisements are more likely to illustrate the actual moment of using them rather than merely presenting the products. This facilitated concentration on the cultural representation of the moment of usage rather than an emphasis on the

product. Creolization which attributes the product its local meaning should be manifested in this moment entangling product into the cultural context. In this instance with creolization we refer to its anthropological meaning, rather than the convergence of two languages. Therefore, our final corpus consisted of three pairs of visually identical French and Finnish advertisements which represented both capturing and printing products in the same advertisement.

The French advertisements were collected from two magazines, *L'Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which are weekly periodicals covering a wide array of current societal issues. The Finnish advertisements were obtained from magazines with more specific topic areas: *Helsingin Sanomat kuukausiliite* (a monthly review of societal phenomena), *Talouselämä* (financial), and *Tekniikan Maailma* (technical). Still the magazines can be considered as sharing partly the same target audience in the sense that the French periodicals also cover topics on finance and technology, which are more present in the Finnish corpus as such, in addition to societal issues. The texts in original advertisements have been translated to English for the purposes of this study by the authors. While every attempt has been made to translate the content of the advertisements accurately, the main objective is to show the stylistic and cultural differences of the texts. The corpus has been analysed for its use of personal pronouns and its different moods as well as for the role of the consumer in the different advertisement scenarios. We reflect on the meaning of linguistic cues as strategies to address the consumer.

## RESULTS

The advertisements of the three pairs of matching products are pictorially identical while the way in which the consumer is addressed in the texts varies in the two cultural settings. The French advertising texts use the personal pronoun, as it is grammatically obligatory, but the formal you ('vous') is used instead of the informal you ('tu') to address the consumer according to social conventions. The Finnish advertising texts use the informal you ('sinä') either explicitly, by using the personal pronoun in addition to the conjugated verb, or implicitly, by using only the conjugated verb since the use of the personal pronoun is not grammatically necessary in Finnish. The constant use of the formal you ('vous') is manifested in all the three French advertisements (1a, 2a, 3a). The examples also reveal that in Finnish the personal pronoun of the informal you ('sinä') is not used in the advertising texts of the corpus even though it would be a possibility. As a linguistic strategy, in the French advertisements the use of personal pronouns referring to the consumer enables the addresser to position the addressee in the moment of declaration and in the act of uttering in the advertising. In Finnish, the omission of the personal pronoun indicates a neutral way of addressing the consumer. The employment of 'sinä' would indicate on the advertiser's part a more intense relationship with the consumer. Even a more neutral way of addressing the consumer could be impersonal constructs, using for example passive voice, but these are linguistically different structures which do not create a relationship in the same sense.

The marking of possession differs in the French and Finnish languages. In French possession can be determined by a possessive pronoun or the genitive construction "*de + noun*", which is comparable to the English "of + noun". Finnish uses in addition to the possessive pronoun the possessive suffix according to the person in question attached to the object of possession (Hakulinen and Karlsson, 1995:128). The omission of the possessive pronoun is not considered false, and the use of only a possessive suffix is adequate. The use of possessive pronouns is a common strategy in French advertisements, whereas the Finnish examples do not manifest any occurrences of the possessive pronoun, only of the possessive suffix *-si*, which stands for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular. The French corpus does not manifest occurrences of the construction "*de + noun*". The absence of possessive pronouns is not apparent in the translated examples, but can be seen in the original texts (*cf.* Appendix 1). In the French advertisements the use of possessive pronouns enables the addresser to communicate

to the addressee the knowing and understanding of the addressee's situation. As a linguistic strategy the use of possessive pronouns in the French advertisements facilitates the offering of an individualised solution for the consumer. With the possessive pronouns the advertiser shows that it is not a question of any object whatsoever, but the consumer's specific one, as in example 1a, where the advertiser determines all the objects as belonging specifically to the consumer: *'You can of course print your pictures by connecting directly to a 'COMPANY' printer. In addition, the 'PRODUCT' software allows you to share your photos and your footages or to use your camcorder as a webcam.'* Thus, their function is to build a close relationship between the advertiser and the consumer. The use of the possessive suffix is common in Finnish, but remains more neutral compared to the actual possessive pronoun. In the Finnish advertisements this lack of use of the linguistic strategy communicates a concentration on facts and respect for the physical distance between the advertiser and the consumer.

The addressee, the potential consumer, is not only portrayed in the advertising texts by the personal determinants, but also by varying the role of the actor. Example 1a and 1b manifest differences in the roles attributed to the French and the Finnish addressee. The French consumer in the advertisements rarely uses the product in a concrete way. Although, as an example 1a depicts the addressee who is meant to use the product: *'You can of course print your pictures by connecting directly to a 'COMPANY' printer.'* Otherwise the advertisements mostly depict a product that allows the addressee to fulfil all of his or her needs: *'With the 'PRODUCT' you can have everything!'* In contrast, the Finnish consumer has a more restricted role as the actor using the product in the advertisement. Example 1b describes what the addressee can do with the product *'You can easily print the pictures by connecting the camera to a 'COMPANY' direct printer. With the camera you also get the 'PRODUCT' software. With it you can use your camera as a webcam and give photos and videoclips to your friends.'* The actual purpose of the product is depicted more clearly to the addressee in Finnish advertisements such as *''PRODUCT' is everything you need for taking pictures,'* contrary to the French-like exclamation above *'With 'PRODUCT' you can have everything!'* In French advertisements the advertiser offers a service or favour rather than explicitly bringing the product forward, thus disguising the product and its usage. As a linguistic strategy the camouflaging of the product is further reinforced by leaving the consumer with an implicit role. In Finnish advertisements, the consumer's usage of the product brings the product to the forefront and at the same time emphasises the consumer as the actor operating the product.

#### Example 1a

'PRODUCT' Digital camcorder, translated from the French text.

#### EVERYTHING IN ONE IMAGE.

You want a digital camcorder or a digital camera? You need a webcam? With 'PRODUCT' you can have everything! 1.33 millions of pixels for the perfect quality of video and picture. Optical zoom of 16x and a stabilizer for fixing details and for optimal focusing. You can of course print your pictures by connecting directly to a 'COMPANY' printer. In addition, the 'PRODUCT' software allows you to share your photos and your footages or to use your camcorder as a webcam. In short, with the 'PRODUCT' you control all the pictures.

(Original French text in *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2003)

#### Example 1b

'PRODUCT' Digital camcorder, translated from the Finnish text.

#### DIGITAL CAMCORDER FOR ALL PICTURE TAKING.

Are you considering purchasing a digital camcorder or a digital camera? 'PRODUCT'. It is as well a digital videocamera, a digital camera and a webcam. With the help of 1,33 megapixel CCD chip you get brilliant moving footage and still photos. The 16x optical zoom and the picture stabilizer guarantee a precise, non-shaky and detailed image. You can easily print the pictures by connecting the camera to a 'COMPANY' direct printer. With the camera you also get a 'PRODUCT' software. With it you can use your camera as a webcam and give photos and videoclips to your friends. 'PRODUCT' is everything you need for taking pictures.

(Original Finnish text in *Helsingin Sanomat kuukausiliite* 2003)

The declarative utterances are used in both French and Finnish advertising texts by the advertiser communicating statements about the usage and the moment of usage to the addressee as exemplified by 2a: *'it is enough to connect directly your 'PRODUCT' to the printer 'PRODUCT', even without passing through a computer'*. The French advertisements rely less on the use of declarative utterances, compared with the Finnish ones. The French advertisements rely only to a limited scale on the use of declarative utterances when making statements to the addressee. In the Finnish advertisements the use of declarative utterances as a linguistic strategy can be seen as a neutral, direct way of convincing the consumer of the products' attributes.

The interrogative utterance is, first of all, used to reach a dialogue with the consumer in the advertisement. The use of interrogative utterances in general is more frequent and marked in the French advertisements compared with the Finnish ones. Especially in the French advertisements, the advertiser tries to communicate with the consumer with the help of a dialogue constructed around interrogatives. In the French advertisements the interrogatives, as a linguistic strategy, enable the addresser to pose questions and suggest an answer or a solution to a problem – the product of the advertisement, such as in example 2a: *'What is the most direct link between a superb photo shoot and a pro quality print? – A simple cable!...'*. Interrogatives as a strategy can be used to formulate a dialogue trap, as illustrated in example 3a where the questions and answers are formulated as an alternation of interrogative and exclamation utterances: *'Connecting directly to the new printer 'PRODUCT' enabled by 'PRODUCT' technologies and obtaining a print comparable to those of a photo laboratory? Of course you can! – Without a computer and without leaving your home!'*. In French advertisements the dialogue is presented as if the consumer was the one posing the questions and the advertiser was there to reassure the possibly-hesitating consumer. The abundant use of interrogatives may guide the consumer to the desired direction. In Finnish advertisements the rare use of interrogatives concentrates on facts about the product and the moment of usage. As a linguistic strategy the omission of interrogatives communicates integrity towards the consumer and reinforces the image that the advertiser is building truthful propositions for the consumer.

#### Example 2a

'PRODUCT' and printer 'PRODUCT', translated from the French text.

#### A PHOTO LABORATORY AT HOME.

What is the most direct link between a superb photo shoot and a pro quality print? A simple cable!... For this, it is enough to connect directly your 'PRODUCT' to the printer 'PRODUCT', even without passing through a computer. Thanks to the technology of 'PRODUCT', with seven separate ink containers and 2 picoliter microdrops of the 'PRODUCT', you'll gain pro quality A4 prints in only 37 seconds, ones like you have never seen before! Direct printing 'COMPANY': real teamwork!

(Original French text in *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2004)

## Example 2b

'PRODUCT' and printer 'PRODUCT', translated from the Finnish text.

DIRECT PRINTING. MAKE YOURSELF TOP LEVEL PHOTOS.

You require a lot from your camera, so why not from your printer, too. The 'PRODUCT' prints photos of an unparalleled high-quality. The seven colour 'PRODUCT'- photo system and the minuscule 2 picoliter drops guarantee a result sharp as a needle point. In addition, the A-4 full colour picture prints out at full tilt, in only 37 seconds. Combine the digital 'PRODUCT' camera to the printer and you will immediately have professional quality pictures at hand.

(Original Finnish text in *Talouselämä* 2004)

The essential role of the exclamation utterance in the advertisements is to highlight the point of view of the advertiser, i.e. the company behind the product. Examples 1-3 manifest a different use of exclamations in French and in Finnish. The French advertising texts rely vigorously on exclamations, whereas the Finnish advertising examples do not manifest a systematic use of exclamations. The addresser may seek for a vivid contact to the addressee with exclamations such as in example 3a: 'With 'COMPANY', everything that you can do is crazy amazing!'. Example 3a illustrates that exclamation can be used to emphasise the affirmation made by the addressor concerning the easiness of the usage of the product. All the interrogations by the addressee are answered encouragingly by the exclamation '*Of course you can!*' In the French advertisements the constant use of exclamations reinforces the presence of the advertiser, as if she were in front of the consumer, in order to approach the consumer in a more personalised way. As a linguistic strategy in the Finnish advertisements the lack of constant use of exclamations enables the advertiser to remain more discrete and avoid possible extravagance.

With the help of imperatives, the addresser can approach the addressee in a direct and personal way in the advertising text. The imperative utterances are used in the advertisements of both languages. When expressing the present tense, the imperative utterances as a linguistic strategy manifest a purpose to create an impression of immediacy to the consumer. However, the French and the Finnish advertisements use imperatives for different purposes. The imperative utterances in the French advertisements are rather used to depict the general context attached to the moment of the usage, or the resulting end-state of usage, than to the actual usage of the product, as exemplified in 3a: '*Shift directly from the digital camcorder to the photo album.*' or '*Decrease the distance between your imagination and the photos.*' As regards the Finnish advertisements, the imperatives share the same purpose of illustrating the ulterior result, as in example 3b: '*Follow the path from imagination to image.*' But in addition, the imperatives are used in Finnish advertisements as a pure order relating to the use of the product, such as in example 3b: '*Make yourself top level photos.*'

## Example 3a

'PRODUCT' digital camcorder and 'PRODUCT', translated from the French text.

SHIFT DIRECTLY FROM THE DIGITAL CAMCORDER TO THE PHOTO ALBUM.

With 'COMPANY', everything that you can do is crazy amazing!

Printing photos directly from the digital camcorder 'PRODUCT'?

Of course you can!



Obtaining photos of extraordinary purity and definition of 2 million pixels?

Of course you can!

Connecting directly to the new printer 'PRODUCT' enabled by 'PRODUCT' technologies and obtaining a print comparable to those of a photo laboratory?

Of course you can! – Without a computer and without leaving your home!

Decrease the distance between your imagination and the photos.

(Original French text in *L'Express* 2003)

Example 3b

'PRODUCT' digital camcorder and 'PRODUCT', translated from the Finnish text.

**DIRECT PRINTING. FROM A DIGITAL CAMCORDER STRAIGHT INTO YOUR OWN PHOTO ALBUM.**

Now you can print top quality photos directly from the 'PRODUCT' digital camcorder. You don't need any computer whatsoever in between. The 2.23 megapixel CCD-cell of the digital camcorder guarantees the magnificence of your normal size photos down to the smallest detail. When you print photos in the minuscule size of only a 2-picoliter drop size offered by 'PRODUCT' printer with its dazzling printing accuracy of 4800 dpi, and you use 'PRODUCT' or 'PRODUCT' technology you are able to obtain professional photos in your own home!

Follow the path from imagination to image.

(Original Finnish text in *Tekniikan Maailma* 2003)

## CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Fundamentally our aim in this paper is to address the link between technology and society by studying how advertisers of technology products represent these products to consumers with different linguistic means. Language acquisition and learning takes place in a diverse cultural context at the same time as the acquisition of culture. Thus, language is both a reflection of culture and also a part of the socialisation process, when the rules and norms of a culture are learned at a very young age. However, people themselves are often unaware of the influence of culture on behaviour in general, and on communication in particular (Gudykunst and Kim, 1997). The advertisers should be aware of this ignorance and use appropriate and meaningful language in the cultural representations of their advertising messages.

The technology products considered in this study are partly reflections of current societal developments, as people are relying more and more rely on technology in their everyday lives, in both work and leisure. The offerings of information technology products coincide with the needs of the modern individual as technology allows individuals to share sensations and emotions, while overcoming the former barriers of time and distance. All the products under study allow the sharing of immediate collective moments, as represented in the advertising texts. The new information technology products help the hypermodern individual to feel less alone and to cope with the complexity and uncertainty attached to his environment (Moati, 2005).

The results of the study show the differing stance the French and Finnish advertisements pose in relation to technology. The Finnish advertisements maintain a direct relationship to technology, while

the French advertisements manifest an instrumental relationship through a depiction of services the technology has to offer. In addition, the Finnish advertisements illustrate consumers doing something, while the French advertisements emphasise consumers having something. The French characteristics are highlighted in the advertisements which present the technologies as omnipotent solutions.

The role attributed to the consumer in the French and the Finnish advertisements accentuates their divergent relationships with technology. The French advertisement creates an impression of the product acting on behalf of the consumer offering services. In its extremity the service gives the impression of solving all of the consumer's possible problems and reassuring the totality of the solution offered. The consumer is positioned in texts into a larger context, thereby reinforcing the individual's need to position him/herself in desired environments. Therefore, in the French advertisements the product's usage is masqueraded.

By contrast, in the Finnish advertisements the consumer is given a distinctive role as an active user of the product. In the advertising texts the consumer's usage of the product brings the product to the forefront. The product builds the moment of usage and establishes a connection between the advertiser and the consumer. Therefore, the moment of usage is emphasised as a concrete event; the product information reinforces the product as something to be used by the consumer.

The significance of the moment of usage and its interpretation in our analysis is further underlined with the difference in the use of personal determinants in advertisements. Firstly, the consumers are attributed different characteristics in relationship to the products. In the French advertisements the constant use of the personal and possessive pronouns changes the technology product into something familiar and part of everyday life for the consumer, thus depicting the moment of the usage. The Finnish use of the possessive suffix in all advertisements shares the same function but does not stand out without the actual possessive pronoun. The product acquires most of the attention in the Finnish advertisements. Further, the neutral tone of the advertisement is reinforced in the Finnish advertisements by the omission of personal determinants. By contrast, in the French advertisements, despite the formal *You* used, the advertiser succeeds in coming closer to the consumer while at the same time maintaining a respectful attitude towards the addressee.

The varying uses of moods create distinctively characteristic contexts for the French and the Finnish advertisements. The French advertisements seek to engage the consumer in a dialogue with the advertiser. This is carried out mainly by the constant use of interrogatives and also by exclamations which seek a reaction from the consumer. In the French advertising consumers are confronted in a more indirect manner than by directly enunciating pure factual statements. Consequently, the French advertisements use exclamations to reinforce advertiser's presence in advertisement to approach the consumer and catch his/her attention.

On the contrary, in the Finnish advertising texts, the consumer is approached in a more direct way, in the sense of the simplicity of the moods. The advertisements employ direct commands or instructions on how to use the product. Dialogue is rarely used in the Finnish advertisements; the addresser concentrates on facts concerning the product. The advertiser uses a direct way of communicating the message expressed mainly by declarative utterances. In the Finnish advertisements this is a direct way of attempting to convince the consumer of the products' attributes.

As a conclusion, the general context created by technology and its linguistic representation in advertising text enable us to build contextual linkages between technology, the societal environment and the individual. With the above interpretations we are able to derive insight on how technology is perceived in different societal contexts. The study, however, includes several limitations. Firstly, the corpus constitutes a restricted number of advertisements from only one company under a limited period of time. Secondly, methodologically our study covered only limited aspects of the theory of

enunciation. Additionally, our geographical scope was limited to two countries and we included in our analysis only textual organisation and not pictorial considerations.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Despite the above limitations we can find multiple avenues for future research based on our study. The linguistic study gives tools to unravel the meanings behind the advertising texts and draw conclusions concerning similarities and differences in how technology is perceived in different cultures. In addition, the theory of enunciation could be used in the elaboration of standardisation – adaptation issues in international marketing and especially advertising.

Future linguistic analysis could be extended to cover exhaustively the theory of enunciation, i.e. the totality of the deictic features, the epistemic and deontic aspects of modality, and the construction of the context itself as built by advertisement and advertiser. Also, an in-depth conceptual analysis is needed concerning the linguistic strategies in advertising texts. The results emerging from the linguistic analysis should be further elaborated into a deeper analysis of cultural communication styles.

In addition, future research could be widened to examine if the standardised advertisements reflect real cultural communicational differences expressed by language or merely mirror a conventionalised advertising rhetoric and its expressions. Also an important future research avenue would be to study the socialisation process in detail and its possible effects on different cultural manifestations in advertising texts.

In a larger research context, linguistic analysis offers business and technology management a method of analysis to study the representation of technology in society. Longitudinal studies combining technology evolution and linguistics cross-nationally would deepen the understanding of the co-evolution of institutional environments and technology.

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## Appendix 1. The original advertising texts

### 1a 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL CAMCORDER

Vous avez envie d'un caméscope ou d'un appareil photo numérique? Vous avez besoin d'une webcam ? Avec le 'PRODUCT', vous pouvez tout avoir ! Capteur 1,33 millions de pixels pour une qualité vidéo et une image parfaite. Zoom optique 16x et stabilisateur pour une restitution des détails et une mise au point optimales. Vous pouvez bien sûr imprimer vos images en vous connectant directement sur une imprimante 'COMPANY'. En plus, le logiciel 'PRODUCT' vous permet de partager vos photos et vos séquences vidéo ou d'utiliser votre caméscope comme une webcam. Bref, avec le 'PRODUCT', vous maîtrisez toutes les images !

(*Le Nouvel Observateur* 2003)

### 1b 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL CAMCORDER

#### DIGITAALINEN VIDEOKAMERA KAIKKEEN KUVAAMISEEN

Harkitsetko digitaalisen videokameran tai digitaalikameran hankkimista ? Valitse 'PRODUCT'. Se on sekä digitaalinen videokamera, digitaalikamera että nettikamera. 1,33 megapikselin CCD-kennolla saat loistavaa liikkuvaa kuvaa ja stillkuvia. 16x :n optinen zoom-objektiivi ja kuvanvakaaja takaavat tarkan, tärinättömän ja yksityiskohtaisen kuvan. Voit tulostaa kuvia helposti kytkemällä kameran "COMPANY" -suoratulostimeen. Kameran mukana saat myös 'PRODUCT'-ohjelmiston. Sen avulla voit käyttää kameraasi nettikamerana sekä antaa valokuvia ja videoklippejä myös ystäviesi katsottavaksi. 'PRODUCT' on kaikki mitä tarvitset kuvaamiseen.

(*Helsingin Sanomat kuukausiliite*, 2003)

## 2a 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL, 'PRODUCT'

## LA QUALITE D'UN LABO PHOTO A DOMICILE

Quel est le lien le plus direct entre une superbe prise de vue et un tirage pro ? Un simple câble !...  
Pour cela, il suffit de connecter directement

votre 'PRODUCT' à l'imprimante 'PRODUCT', sans même passer par

un ordinateur. Grâce à la technologie 'PRODUCT', aux 7 réservoirs d'encre séparés et aux micro-gouttes de 2 picolitres de la 'PRODUCT', vous obtiendrez en 37 secondes seulement des tirages a4 qualité pro comme vous n'en avez jamais vus ! L'impression directe 'COMPANY' : un vrai travail d'équipe !

*(Le Nouvel Observateur, 2004)*

## 2b 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL, 'PRODUCT'

## SUORATULOSTUS. TEE ITSE HUIPPUTASON KUVAT.

Vaadit kameraltasi paljon, miksi et myös tulostimeltasi.

'PRODUCT' tulostaa ennennäkemättömän laadukkaita kuvia. Seitsemän värin 'PRODUCT'-valokuvajärjestelmä ja pienen pienet 2 pikolitrin pisarat takaavat neulanterävän lopputuloksen. Lisäksi A4-täysvärikuva tulostuu vauhdilla, vain 37 sekunnissa. Yhdistä tulostimeen digitaalinen 'PRODUCT' -järjestelmäkamera ja saat ammattitason kuvat heti käteesi.

*(Talouselämä, 2004)*

## 3a 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL CAMCORDER, 'PRODUCT'

## PASSEZ DIRECTEMENT DU CAMÉSCOPE À L'ALBUM PHOTO.

Avec 'COMPANY', c'est fou tout ce que vous pouvez faire !

Imprimer directement vos images depuis le caméscope 'PRODUCT'?

Bien sûr, vous pouvez !

Obtenir des photos d'une pureté et d'une définition extraordinaire de 2 millions de pixels ?

Bien sûr, vous pouvez !

Vous connecter directement à la nouvelle imprimante 'PRODUCT' grâce à la technologie 'PRODUCT', et obtenir des tirages comparables à ceux d'un laboratoire photo ?

Bien sûr, vous pouvez ! – sans ordinateur et sans sortir de chez vous !

RÉDUISEZ LA DISTANCE ENTRE VOTRE IMAGINATION ET L'IMAGE.

*(L'Express 2003)*

## 3b 'PRODUCT' DIGITAL CAMCORDER, 'PRODUCT'

## SUORATULOSTUS. VIDEOKAMERASTA SUORAAN VALOKUVA-ALBUMIISI

Nyt voit tulostaa huippulaadukkaita valokuvia suoraan 'PRODUCT'-videokamerasta. Et siis tarvitse väliin minkään sortin tietokonetta. Videokameran 2,23 megapikselin CCD-kenno takaa, että normaalikokoisista kuvistasi tulee häikäisevän tarkkoja pienintä yksityiskohtaa myöten. Kun tulostat valokuvia 'PRODUCT'-tulostimen tarjoamalla pienenpienellä 2 pl:n pisarakoolla sekä huikealla 4800 dpi :n tulostustarkkuudella ja hyödynnät 'PRODUCT' – tai 'PRODUCT'-teknologiaa, saat ammattitaitoiset kuvat omassa kodissasi !

KULJE POLKU KUVITELMISTA KUVIIN.

(*Tekniikan Maailma* 2003)

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