

## Effects of Difficult and Easy English Slogans in Advertising for Dutch Consumers

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### ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that foreign languages in advertising are primarily used for their symbolic significance (the stereotypes they evoke), and that, therefore, consumers' comprehension of the foreign language used is of secondary importance. Experimental research into the effect of the difficulty of foreign languages in advertising slogans has focused on the influence of difficulty on appreciation of the slogan itself. The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of difficult versus easy English slogans in product advertisements on evaluations extending beyond text evaluation. In a within-subjects experimental design, 128 Dutch participants evaluated six Dutch advertisements with difficult and easy English slogans. The dependent variables included evaluation of the slogan, attitudes toward the ad and product, and purchase intention. Findings showed that the easy English slogans were evaluated better than the difficult English slogans and generally resulted in a better attitude toward the ad and toward the product and in a higher purchase intention. Thus, difficult-to-understand foreign-language slogans were found to have negative effects on ad effectiveness, which extended beyond text evaluation.

In advertising in countries where English is not the native language, advertisers regularly use English (Bhatia 1992; Piller 2003). As Piller (2003, 175) observes, "English is the most frequently used language in advertising messages in non-English-speaking countries (besides the local language, of course)." The Netherlands is one example of a country where English is frequently used in advertising. Of the 325 advertisements in the Dutch edition of *Elle* published in 2004, for instance, 64 percent contained one or more English words (Gerritsen et al. 2007). Since English is a nonnative language for consumers in countries such as the Netherlands, English in advertising may not always be comprehended. In fact, Gerritsen et al. (2010) found that 39 percent of English phrases in print medium ads were not described correctly by participants from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. The question, therefore, is to what extent comprehension of English in advertisements is important in persuading consumers.

In the Netherlands, consumers may be expected to be relatively highly familiar with English. In education, pupils are taught English from primary school onward and English is compulsory at all levels of secondary schools (Bonnet 2002, 45). Many institutions of higher education offer English-taught bachelor's and master's programs (Coleman 2006; Brenn-White and van Rest 2012). In a recent survey, 90 percent of Dutch respondents indicated that they spoke English well enough to take part in a conversation, versus a European average of 38 percent (Eurobarometer 2012, 21). The Netherlands ranks second among 70 countries worldwide in the English Proficiency Index (Education First 2013), based on English proficiency tests. In addition, English is omnipresent in the media. The majority of films and TV series

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are broadcast in their original English-language version with subtitles (Edwards 2016, 48–51). In advertising, English words and phrases are commonly used both in print media and in commercials on radio and television, while all-English advertisements are also used but less frequently (Gerritsen et al. 2000; Gerritsen et al. 2007; Raedts et al. 2015).

In the literature on foreign languages in advertising, it is often observed that comprehension of foreign-language utterances is of minor importance, because the point of using foreign languages is not to convey the content of the message but the symbolic significance of the foreign language (e.g., Haarmann 1989; Ray, Ryder, and Scott 1991; Piller 2003; 2001; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Kuppens 2010). Piller (2001, 163), for instance, remarks that “even if the audience does not understand the denotational message of the English [...] they will recognize that the message is in English, and they will activate their stereotypes about English.” In this view, a consumer who does not know the meaning of an English word or phrase in an ad will at least recognize that it is English. This recognition is thought to evoke stereotypes about English, which are subsequently transferred to the product advertised. Stereotypical associations evoked by English include notions such as modernity, prestige, international orientation, and sophistication (Kelly-Holmes 2000, 67; Piller 2003, 175; Kuppens 2010, 116–117; Tufi and Blackwood 2010; Potowski 2011; Taylor-Leech 2012; Santello 2015, 4; Manan et al. 2015). Kuppens (2010, 116) observes that advertisements sometimes contain “meaningless words or sentences that only *sound* English,” illustrating that what matters is not the meaning of the foreign language used in the ad, but the image conjured up by the foreign language.

The literature on the role of comprehension in the persuasion process argues that less understanding leads to less persuasion because a message that is less well understood is appreciated less (Eagly 1974, for a discussion see Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991). The findings of a small number of empirical studies on the effect of comprehension of a foreign language in advertisements seem to support this view. One study showed that the attitude of Dutch viewers toward spoken English phrases in television commercials was predicted by the degree of accuracy of their transcriptions of these phrases (an indirect measure of comprehension) (Gerritsen et al. 2000). Two other studies with Dutch participants revealed that easy French and English slogans were appreciated more than difficult slogans in these languages (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). These two studies also showed that when the French and English slogans were easy, the participants preferred the ads with French and English slogans to ads with Dutch translations of these slogans. For the difficult French slogans, participants had a preference for ads with the Dutch translations of these slogans (Hornikx and Starren 2006). For the difficult English slogans, there were no differences in preference (Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). The studies by Hornikx and Starren (2006) and Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010) used the complexity of slogans (difficult–easy) as a measure of comprehension. In both studies, the relationship between complexity and comprehension was tested in a pretest, which showed that difficult slogans were more frequently mistranslated and were rated as more difficult than the easy slogans. In addition, Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010) showed that the slogans that were more often translated incorrectly and were rated as more difficult were appreciated less. Thus, these two studies indicate a clear link between predetermined complexity and actual and perceived comprehension.

Research on the effect of the difficulty of foreign-language slogans to date has a number of limitations. The only dependent variable measured was appreciation of the ad or of the English used in the ad. Earlier research has shown that attitude toward the ad can affect the attitude toward the advertised brand (product) and purchase intention (see the meta-analysis in Brown and Stayman 1992). However, the effect of difficulty on attitude toward the product and purchase intention has not yet been investigated. These two variables can be regarded as more direct measures of persuasion than appreciation of the advertisement and of the language in the ad. These variables would seem to be more directly related to the ultimate goal of product advertising: selling the product.

A second limitation is that previous research on the effects of difficult foreign-language slogans has focused on expensive products only, that is, cars (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) have shown that the effect of English versus native-language

**Table 1.** Results of the pretest for price and luxury perception (1 = expensive, 7 = cheap; 1 = luxury product, 7 = necessity product).

Product	Price		Luxury perception	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fruit	5.20	0.93	6.29	1.13
Bread	5.80	0.90	6.47	1.02
Chocolate	4.29	0.89	5.04	1.08
Detergent	3.90	1.10	5.30	0.98
Vodka	3.30	1.15	2.55	1.04
Automobile	2.86	0.85	3.57	1.03
Perfume	3.15	0.96	2.76	1.05
Smart phone	2.98	0.82	2.35	1.10

slogans can be influenced by the type of product advertised. For ads featuring a luxury product (chocolate), the effect was different than for ads featuring a necessity product (detergent). It would therefore seem relevant to investigate the effect of the difficulty of foreign-language slogans in ads for cheaper and less luxurious products than the cars in the ads in the earlier studies.

In view of the limitations in previous research, the aim of the present study was to determine the effect of easy and difficult English slogans in advertisements for relatively cheap products, using variables that are more direct measures of persuasion than those used in earlier studies: attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Therefore, our first research question was:

RQ1. What is the effect of difficult versus easy English slogans on evaluation of the slogan, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product and purchase intention?

In addition, we compared the effects of English slogans to the effects of native-language (Dutch) translations of these slogans. Earlier research (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010) has shown that the effect of difficult versus easy foreign-language slogans also manifests itself in a difference in preference for ads with foreign-language slogans as compared to ads with Dutch translations of these slogans. Therefore, our second research question was:

RQ2. What is the effect of difficult versus easy English slogans on the preference for ads with English slogans versus Dutch translations of these slogans?

## Method

In an experiment, native Dutch participants rated Dutch advertisements for chocolate with difficult and easy English slogans. They subsequently indicated their preference for ads with the English slogans or ads with Dutch equivalents of these slogans.

## Material

On the basis of three pretests, six difficult and easy slogans were selected for six advertisements for chocolate.

In the first pretest, a product was selected that was not too expensive and not too luxurious. In this pretest, 28 respondents (50% female; age  $M = 30.56$  years,  $SD = 14.18$ ; education ranged from primary school to university) indicated their luxury perception and estimated price for the following eight products: automobile, bread, chocolate, fruit, perfume, smartphone, detergent, and vodka (based on Krishna and Ahluwalia 2008; Gerritsen et al. 2010; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). Respondents rated the products on three 7-point semantic differentials: “expensive–cheap” (Gerritsen et al. 2010); “a luxury product–a necessity product”; “luxury for everyone–necessity for everyone” (Krishna and Ahluwalia 2008). The scores showed that chocolate was regarded as a product that was positioned between a necessity and a luxury product (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations of pretest participants' evaluations of the difficulty of the slogans used in the main experiment (1 = difficult, 7 = easy) and percentages of correctly translated slogans.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Percent correct translations	Dutch translation used in the second part of the experiment
<b>Easy slogans</b>				
Makes mouths happy	6.00	1.18	90	Maakt monden gelukkig
Share something special	6.36	0.81	95	lets speciaals delen
So much chocolate, so little time	6.27	0.90	95	Zo veel chocolade, zo weinig tijd
Total	6.21	1.17	93.3	
<b>Difficult slogans</b>				
A palatable confection and most nourishing	1.36	0.67	5	Een smakelijke lekkernij en zeer voedzaam
Sophisticated silliness	3.18	1.21	5	Gedistingeerde gekheid
I don't drown my sorrows; I suffocate them with chocolate	3.36	1.35	10	Ik verdrink mijn zorgen niet, ik verstik ze met chocolade
Total	2.71	1.08	6.67	

In the second pretest, 20 native speakers of Dutch (50.0% female; age  $M = 28.98$  years,  $SD = 14.52$ , range 18–58; education ranged from primary school to university) evaluated 18 English slogans as difficult or easy. The slogans were a mix of existing slogans and slogans created by the researchers. The difficult slogans contained English words that are relatively infrequent and have no Dutch cognates (following criteria in Cheshire and Moser 1994), such as *palatable*, *accompaniment*, and *sophisticated*. Respondents rated the difficulty of the slogans on a 7-point scale (1 = difficult, 7 = easy) and translated the slogans. The three slogans that were translated correctly most frequently ( $M = 93.33\%$ ) and were considered easy ( $M = 6.21$ ) and the three slogans that were translated correctly least frequently ( $M = 6.67\%$ ) and were considered difficult ( $M = 2.71$ ) were selected for the main experiment. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for perceived difficulty and the percentages of correct translations for the slogans selected.

Based on the pretests, six advertisements were designed for various fictitious chocolate brands. Besides the English slogans, every advertisement contained a Dutch brand slogan such as “Musketiers, just how you want it” (see Table 3 for all brand slogans). In the advertisements, each English slogan was accompanied by a different picture (see appendix).

In the third pretest, 24 native speakers of Dutch (66.7% male; age  $M = 23.00$  years,  $SD = 6.16$ , range 17–41, education ranged from medium-level vocational education to university) evaluated six pictures for chocolate on attitude toward the picture, attitude toward the product and purchase intention (items based on Hornikx and Hof 2008). *Attitude toward the picture* was measured with five 7-point semantic differentials following the statement “I think this picture is”: “not nice–nice”; “engaging–boring”; “not original–original”; “not attractive–attractive”; “interesting–not interesting” ( $\alpha = .93$ ). *Attitude toward the product* was measured with three 7-point semantic differentials following the statement “I think the product in this picture is”: “not nice–nice”; “not attractive–attractive”; “high quality–low quality” ( $\alpha = .94$ ). *Purchase intention* was measured with three 7-point semantic differentials following “This product”: “I never want to buy–I certainly want to buy”; “I do not recommend to my friends–I recommend to my friends”; “is really something for me–is really nothing for me” ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Repeated-measures analyses showed no differences among the pictures in attitude toward the picture ( $F(5, 19) = 2.43, p = .073$ ) and purchase intention ( $F(5, 19) = 1.62, p = .204$ ), but did reveal differences in attitude toward the product ( $F(5, 19) = 3.05, p = .035$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed that the attitude toward the product for only one of the six pictures was lower than for one other picture (Bonferroni,  $p = .034$ ). As differences between

**Table 3.** Brand slogans used in the advertisements in the experiment.

Puur, een klasse op zich [Pure, a class of its own]	Choco, een gegarandeerde kwaliteit [Choco, guaranteed quality]
Musketiers, net hoe je het wilt [Musketiers, just how you want it]	Violet, de lekkerste [Violet, the tastiest]
Amandelvreugde, chocolade voor iedereen [Almond Joy, chocolate for everybody]	Witte ridder, een van de pure genoegen van het leven [White knight, one of the pure pleasures of life]

**Table 4.** Distribution of brand slogans and English slogans over the advertisements in the six versions of the questionnaire.

Version		Ad 1	Ad 2	Ad 3	Ad 4	Ad 5	Ad 6
1	Brand	Brand 2	Brand 4	Brand 5	Brand 1	Brand 3	Brand 6
	Slogan	Easy 1	Diff 1	Easy 2	Diff 2	Easy 3	Diff 3
2	Brand	Brand 4	Brand 5	Brand 2	Brand 3	Brand 6	Brand 1
	Slogan	Diff 2	Easy 3	Easy 2	Easy 1	Diff 1	Diff 3
3	Brand	Brand 5	Brand 2	Brand 4	Brand 6	Brand 1	Brand 3
	Slogan	Easy 1	Easy 3	Diff 3	Diff 2	Diff 1	Easy 2
4	Brand	Brand 1	Brand 3	Brand 6	Brand 2	Brand 4	Brand 5
	Slogan	Easy 2	Diff 3	Easy 3	Diff 1	Easy 1	Diff 2
5	Brand	Brand 3	Brand 6	Brand 1	Brand 4	Brand 5	Brand 2
	Slogan	Diff 1	Easy 1	Easy 3	Easy 2	Diff 3	Diff 2
6	Brand	Brand 6	Brand 1	Brand 3	Brand 5	Brand 2	Brand 4
	Slogan	Easy 2	Easy 1	Diff 2	Diff 1	Diff 3	Easy 3

Note. Brand 1 = Choco; Brand 2 = Puur; Brand 3 = Violet; Brand 4 = Muskietiers; Brand 5 = Amandel vreugde; Brand 6 = Witte ridder; Easy 1 = "Makes mouths happy"; Easy 2 = "Share something special"; Easy 3 = "So much chocolate, so little time"; Diff 1 = "A palatable confection and most nourishing"; Diff 2 = "Sophisticated silliness"; Diff 3 = "I don't drown my sorrows; I suffocate them with chocolate."

pictures were limited to a difference on one variable for one pair of pictures only, the six pictures were included in the main experiment.

### **Combinations of English slogans and Dutch brand slogans**

In the first part of the experiment, participants evaluated six advertisements with English slogans and Dutch brand slogans. There were six versions of the questionnaire containing advertisements with different combinations of English slogans and Dutch brand slogans, to prevent order effects (see Table 4). Analysis of variance with repeated measures with version as between-subjects factor for all dependent variables (see Instrumentation section) showed that there were no order effects (all  $p$ 's > .067).

### **Dutch translations of English slogans**

In the second part of the experiment, participants indicated their preference for advertisements with English slogans (as they were used in the first part of the experiment) compared to identical advertisements with Dutch translations of these slogans. The slogans were translated as literally as possible while maintaining parallelism (see Table 2 for the translations).

### **Participants**

In total, 128 Dutch participants evaluated the easy and difficult English slogans in advertisements for chocolate. The mean age was 36.6 ( $SD = 13.92$ ; range 11–77); 57.8 percent were female. The education level ranged from primary school to university; most participants (60.3%) had completed higher vocational education or university. Participants assessed their proficiency in English as above average ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ , which was significantly higher than 4, the midpoint of the scale,  $t(125) = 11.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There were no differences in age ( $F(5,121) = 1.61$ ,  $p = .162$ ), gender ( $\chi^2(5) = 4.83$ ,  $p = .437$ ), educational level ( $\chi^2(20) = 17.50$ ,  $p = .621$ ), and self-assessed proficiency in English ( $F(5, 120) < 1$ ) among participants who saw the six versions of the material.

### **Design**

The experiment had a within-subjects multmessage design. In the first part of the experiment, participants evaluated six advertisements with three easy and three difficult English slogans. In the second part of the experiment, participants indicated their preference for an ad with an English slogan (as used in the first part of the experiment) or for an ad with a Dutch translation of that slogan, for six pairs of

advertisements. The design was based on Hornikx and Starren (2006) and Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010).

### **Instrumentation**

Participants evaluated the ads on the following dependent variables: perceived difficulty of the slogan, appreciation of the slogan, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention. They also indicated their preference for ads with English slogans versus Dutch equivalent slogans.

*Perceived difficulty of the slogan* was measured with three 7-point semantic differentials (based on Maes, Ummelen, and Hoeken 1996) following the statement “I think the slogan is”: “easy–difficult”; “incomprehensible–comprehensible”; “complicated–simple” ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

*Appreciation of the slogan* was measured with four 7-point semantic differentials (based on Holbrook 1981) following the statement “I think the slogan is”: “not nice–nice”; “bad–good”; “ugly–beautiful”; “unattractive–attractive” ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The semantic differentials for perceived difficulty and appreciation of the slogan were presented in mixed order.

*Attitude toward the advertisement* was measured with five 7-point semantic differentials (based on Hornikx and Hof 2008) following the statement “I find this advertisement”: “not nice–nice”; “engaging–boring”; “not original–original”; “not attractive–attractive”; “interesting–not interesting” ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Attitude toward the product* was measured with five 7-point semantic differentials (based on Hornikx and Hof 2008) following the statement “I think this product is”: “not nice–nice”; “engaging–boring”; “not original–original”; “not attractive–attractive”; “interesting–not interesting” ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Purchase intention* was measured with three 7-point semantic differentials (based on Hornikx and Hof 2008) following “This product”: “I never want to buy–I certainly want to buy”; “I do not recommend to my friends–I recommend to my friends”; “is really something for me–really nothing for me” ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Preference for English or Dutch* was measured with a question with two options: “Which ad do you prefer?” (Ad 1, Ad 2) (based on Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). For six pairs of ads, participants indicated their preference for an ad with an English slogan or the same ad with an equivalent Dutch slogan.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants provided biographical data such as gender, age, and highest completed education. They also self-assessed their proficiency in English (“Do you speak/understand/write/read English”) on four 7-point semantic differentials that ranged from “bad” to “good,”  $\alpha = .96$  (based on Luna, Ringberg, and Peracchio 2008).

### **Procedure and statistical tests**

The questionnaire was administered using an online tool (Thesistools). Participants were invited to take part in the experiment through convenience sampling. Invitations were sent to friends, family members, and acquaintances of the third author. Participants were also asked to distribute the questionnaire among their friends, acquaintances, and so on.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were informed that the study was about advertisements, that they would see six ads, and that they would be asked to evaluate these ads using 7-point rating scales. They were asked to look at the ads carefully. Completing the questionnaire took about 10 to 15 minutes.

The effect of easy and difficult slogans was analyzed with repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) (followed by Bonferroni post-hoc tests), *t*-tests, and nonparametric binomial tests.

## **Results**

### **Manipulation check, difficulty of slogans**

An analysis of variance with repeated measures for perceived difficulty of the slogan with *difficulty* and *slogan* as factors showed a main effect of difficulty ( $F(1, 120) = 367.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .75$ ), but also an interaction effect between difficulty and slogan ( $F(2, 240) = 40.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$ ). As can be seen

**Table 5.** Means and standard deviations for perceived difficulty of slogan and appreciation of slogan (1 = easy, 7 = difficult; 1 = low evaluation, 7 = high evaluation).

	Perceived difficulty			Appreciation		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Easy slogans						
Makes mouths happy	5.20 <sup>a</sup>	1.46	124	4.37 <sup>a</sup>	1.68	128
Share something special	5.31 <sup>a</sup>	1.29	125	4.60 <sup>a</sup>	1.30	125
So much chocolate ...	5.06 <sup>a</sup>	1.40	125	4.55 <sup>a</sup>	1.39	126
Total	5.19	1.38	125	4.51	1.46	126
Difficult slogans						
A palatable confection ...	2.08 <sup>b</sup>	1.11	124	2.59 <sup>b</sup>	1.25	125
Sophisticated silliness	3.37 <sup>c</sup>	1.56	124	3.86 <sup>c</sup>	1.69	126
I don't drown my sorrows ...	3.55 <sup>c</sup>	1.43	123	3.85 <sup>c</sup>	1.58	126
Total	3.00	1.37	124	3.43	1.51	126

Note. Means with different superscript letters differed significantly from each other.

in Table 5, the easy slogans were perceived to be easier than the difficult slogans, but one of the difficult slogans (“A palatable confection and most nourishing”) was evaluated as significantly more difficult than the other two difficult slogans (Bonferroni correction,  $p < .001$ ).

### Appreciation slogan

An analysis of variance with repeated measures for appreciation of slogan with *difficulty* and *slogan* as factors showed a similar pattern as for perceived difficulty of the slogan. The effect of difficulty was significant ( $F(1, 122) = 118.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .49$ ), but there was also a significant interaction between difficulty and slogan ( $F(2, 244) = 18.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$ ). As can be seen in Table 5, the easy slogans were evaluated better than the difficult slogans, but one of the difficult slogans, “A palatable confection and most nourishing,” was evaluated significantly worse than the other two difficult slogans (Bonferroni correction,  $p < .001$ ).

### Attitude toward the ad

An analysis of variance with *difficulty* and *slogan* as factors showed that advertisements with easy slogans were rated higher than ads with difficult slogans ( $F(1, 105) = 39.29, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$ ), but there was also a significant interaction ( $F(2, 210) = 15.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$ ). Table 6 shows that the ad with the difficult slogan “A palatable confection and most nourishing” was rated lower than ads with other slogans (Bonferroni correction,  $p < .001$ ). There were no differences in attitudes toward the ad for the other slogans.

**Table 6.** Means and standard deviations for attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the product (1 = negative, 7 = positive).

	Attitude toward the ad			Attitude toward the product		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Easy slogans						
Makes mouths happy	4.01 <sup>a</sup>	1.54	128	4.92 <sup>a</sup>	1.40	128
Share something special	3.86 <sup>a</sup>	1.48	126	4.59 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.42	124
So much chocolate ...	4.14 <sup>a</sup>	1.44	128	4.73 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.44	127
Total	4.00	1.49	127	4.75	1.42	126
Difficult slogans						
A palatable confection ...	2.74 <sup>b</sup>	1.40	125	3.65 <sup>b</sup>	1.52	125
Sophisticated silliness	4.00 <sup>a</sup>	1.55	125	4.88 <sup>a</sup>	1.36	126
I don't drown my sorrows ...	3.73 <sup>a</sup>	1.53	110	4.43 <sup>c</sup>	1.45	127
Total	3.49	1.49	120	4.32	1.44	126

Note. Means with different superscript letters differed significantly from each other.

**Table 7.** Means and standard deviations for purchase intention (1 = low, 7 = high).

	Purchase intention		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Easy slogans			
Makes mouths happy	4.51 <sup>a</sup>	1.43	126
Share something special	4.22 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.44	127
So much chocolate ...	4.50 <sup>a</sup>	1.47	127
Total	4.42	1.45	127
Difficult slogans			
A palatable confection ...	3.55 <sup>b</sup>	1.55	125
Sophisticated silliness	4.48 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.40	125
I don't drown my sorrows ...	4.16 <sup>c</sup>	1.47	127
Total	4.05	1.47	126

Note. Means with different superscript letters differed significantly from each other.

### Attitude toward the product

An analysis of variance with *difficulty* and *slogan* as factors showed that the products in advertisements with easy slogans were rated higher than products in ads with difficult slogans ( $F(1, 120) = 29.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$ ), but that the interaction was also significant ( $F(2, 240) = 39.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$ ). For the ads with easy slogans, there were no differences in product attitude. For each of the ads with difficult slogans, the attitude toward the product was different. The product attitude for the ad with the slogan “A palatable confection and most nourishing” was lower than for the ads with the other five slogans (Bonferroni correction,  $p < .05$ ) (Table 6).

### Purchase intention

An analysis of variance with *difficulty* and *slogan* as factors showed a main effect for difficulty ( $F(1, 121) = 26.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ ). Purchase intention was higher for ads with easy English slogans than for ads with difficult English slogans. The interaction between slogan and difficulty was also significant ( $F(2, 242) = 31.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$ ). Purchase intention was lower for the product with the slogan “A palatable confection and most nourishing” than for the products in ads with the other slogans (Bonferroni correction  $p < .001$ ; Table 7).

### Preference for ads with slogan in English or Dutch

The number of ads for which the participant had a preference for the English slogans was added up for all slogans (ranging from 0 to 6). When the English slogans were easy, participants more frequently preferred advertisements with an English slogan than when the slogans were difficult ( $t(127) = 5.46, p < .001$ ). For the group of easy slogans as a whole, participants preferred more ads with English slogans than ads with Dutch slogans ( $t(127) = 5.11, p < .001$ ). On average, 66.7 percent of the participants preferred ads with easy English slogans to ads with Dutch equivalents. Specifically, participants preferred ads with two easy English slogans: “Makes mouths happy” and “Share something special.” With respect to the group of difficult slogans as a whole, participants had no clear preference for ads with English or Dutch slogans ( $t(127) = .43, p = .666$ ). However, for the difficult English slogan “A palatable confection and most nourishing” participants preferred the ad with an equivalent Dutch slogan (see Table 8).

### Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to determine the effects of difficult versus easy English slogans in Dutch advertisements. The findings indicate that comprehension plays a role in the evaluation of advertisements. Easy English slogans were better understood and generally led to a better evaluation than difficult English slogans. Easy English slogans were better appreciated than difficult English slogans. For the other

**Table 8.** Preference for ads with English or Dutch slogans in percentages.

	Preference for English (%)	Preference for Dutch (%)
Easy slogans		
Makes mouths happy	73.6 <sup>***</sup>	26.4
Share something special	72.0 <sup>***</sup>	28.0
So much chocolate ...	54.5	45.6
Total	66.7	33.3
Difficult slogans		
A palatable confection ...	19.4	80.6 <sup>***</sup>
Sophisticated silliness	63.2 <sup>**</sup>	36.8
I don't drown my sorrows ...	63.7 <sup>**</sup>	36.3
Total	48.8	51.2

Note. Asterisks indicate a significant preference for English or Dutch as tested with a binomial test: \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

dependent variables (attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention), it was found that one of the difficult English slogans, “A palatable confection and most nourishing,” was rated lower than all the other slogans. For two of the three easy slogans and two of the three difficult slogans, participants preferred ads with English slogans to ads with Dutch translations of these slogans. However, for the difficult slogan “A palatable confection and most nourishing,” participants expressed a preference for the ad with the Dutch translation of the slogan.

These findings are consistent with those of previous empirical studies, which showed that comprehension of English phrases in TV commercials predicted participants' evaluation of these English phrases (Gerritsen et al. 2000), that easy English and French slogans were evaluated better than difficult English and French slogans, and that ads with easy English and French slogans were preferred to ads with Dutch equivalents of those slogans, while there was no difference in preference for advertisements with difficult English and French slogans (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010). It can therefore be concluded that a foreign language such as English is more than just a symbol. Contrary to what is argued in many theoretical discussions about foreign languages in advertising (Haarmann 1989; Ray, Ryder, and Scott 1991; Piller 2001, 2003; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Kuppens 2010), it is important for consumers to understand the advertising message expressed in the foreign language. This finding is in line with the view in persuasion theory that a message that is understood less well is appreciated less (Eagly 1974; Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991).

The contribution of the present study to insights about the importance of the difficulty of foreign languages in advertising is twofold. First, the study shows that comprehension of a foreign language not only influences the attitude toward the language used (as previously demonstrated in Gerritsen et al. 2000) and the appreciation of the slogan and the ad (as previously demonstrated in Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010), but also attitude toward the product and purchase intention. In doing so, the present study shows that the effects of the difficulty of the foreign language are not limited to attitude toward the text and the advertisement, but extend to the underlying objectives of the use of a foreign language in advertising: creating a positive attitude toward the product and increasing the intention to purchase the product. The second contribution of the present study is that it showed that the negative impact of difficulty of the foreign language applies not only to advertisements for an expensive product such as a car (Hornikx and Starren 2006; Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer 2010), but also to advertisements for a relatively inexpensive product such as chocolate in this study.

Based on the findings of the current study and the findings in Gerritsen et al. (2000), Hornikx and Starren (2006), and Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010), it seems advisable for advertisers to ensure that the foreign languages they use in their ads are easy to understand for potential consumers. This could be achieved by pretesting the comprehensibility of the expressions in the foreign language advertisers intend to use among consumers that are representative of the target audience of the ads.

Our study has several limitations. Some restrictions relate to the materials used in the study. First, comprehension of the slogans in the main experiment was not measured as actual comprehension but

as perceived difficulty, which is an indirect measure of comprehension. Only the pretest examined the extent to which participants were able to translate the slogans. In the main experiment, participants were only asked to indicate how difficult they considered the slogans to be. However, the pretest results indicated that the slogans that were rated as difficult were also most frequently translated incorrectly. A similar link between perceived difficulty and accuracy of translation was found in Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010).

A second limitation relating to the materials was that the slogans in our experiment were characterized not only by differences in difficulty, but also by differences in rhetorical aspects, such as alliteration and parallelism. Both the easy and the difficult slogans contained alliteration and parallelism. Alliteration, for example, was clearly evident in the easy slogan “Share something special,” and in the difficult slogan “Sophisticated silliness.” Parallelism was found in the easy slogan “So much chocolate, so little time” and the difficult slogan “I do not drown my sorrows; I suffocate them with chocolate.” However, the difficult slogan “Palatable confection and most nourishing” lacked both alliteration and parallelism. The finding that this slogan scored lower on all dependent variables than the other slogans may therefore be attributable not only to the difficulty of the slogan but also to the lack of rhetorical aspects present in the other slogans. A final limitation of the material is that the effect of difficulty of the slogan was only investigated for ads featuring one type of product, namely, chocolate.

A further limitation of our study relates to the measuring instrument. This study only compared the effect of English versus the native language of the consumer for preference for the ad, but not for any other dependent variables.

Finally, our study was limited in that our participants were from a country where familiarity with English and English language proficiency are relatively high, as was pointed out in the introduction. In many other countries, consumers may more quickly experience English as difficult, which may consequently influence their evaluations of the English used in advertising. On the basis of the findings in the current study for Dutch consumers, this influence may be negative in that consumers with a low proficiency in English will perceive most of the English in advertising they encounter as difficult and hence as less attractive. On the other hand, comprehension may not play a part at all for consumers with low English proficiency, in that for them English only has symbolic value (e.g., Haarmann 1989; Ray, Ryder, and Scott 1991; Piller 2003, 2001; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Kuppens 2010). For this group of consumers, the actual meaning of the English texts in ads may be less important than the values that English stands for, such as, sophistication or modernity (Kelly-Holmes 2000, 67; Piller 2003, 175; Kuppens 2010, 116–17; Tufi and Blackwood 2010; Potowski 2011; Taylor-Leech 2012; Manan et al. 2015; Santello 2015, 4).

Future research should aim to remedy the limitations of the current study. The effects of difficulty of a foreign language should be investigated using ads for a variety of products. Future research should also control for rhetorical effects such as alliteration and parallelism in different slogans. Consumers' preference for foreign language versus native language in advertising should be tested in an experiment with a between-subjects design measuring attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product and purchase intention, not only for ads with easy and difficult English slogans, but also for ads with translations of these slogans in the consumers' native language. Given the high level of English proficiency of the participants in the present study, similar studies should also be conducted in countries where English proficiency is low.

The present study is based on the assumption that lower comprehension of a message leads to lower persuasion (Eagly 1974; Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991). However, this is not the only possible role that comprehension can play in persuasion processes. Another approach argues that lower comprehension of a message triggers peripheral rather than central processing (e.g., Hafer, Reynolds, and Obertynski 1996; Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991). This would mean that when a message is more difficult due to the use of a foreign language, peripheral cues (such as attractiveness of the spokesperson) would make an ad more persuasive than the quality of the arguments used. Future research should aim at determining whether foreign-language expressions that are more difficult to understand indeed lead to peripheral rather than central processing of an advertising message.

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## Appendix: Examples of advertisements used in the main experiment.

Easy English slogans

1. Makes mouths happy



**Puur** Een klasse op zich

2. Share something special



**Amandel vreugde** Chocolade voor iedereen

3. So much chocolate, so little time



**Violet** De lekkerste

Difficult English slogans

1. A palatable confection and most nourishing



**Musketiërs** Net hoe je het wilt

2. Sophisticated silliness



**Choco** Gegarandeerde kwaliteit

3. I don't drown my sorrows; I suffocate them with chocolate



**Witte ridder** Een van de pure genoegens van het leven