Global English infiltrates Bulgaria

JEFFREY L. GRIFFIN

Following his article 'Global English invades Poland' (*ET*50, Apr 97, Vol 13.2), the author explores the comparable impact of English on advertising in a second Eastern European nation

GLOBAL ENGLISH continues its unchecked spread, not only as the second language of choice for more people than any other, but also as an infiltrator whose words creep into the fabric of other languages through such avenues as film, television, popular music, the World Wide Web, advertising and youth culture.

The influence of English in Eastern Europe has burgeoned in the post-Communist era. Russian, once virtually obligatory as a second language in the Eastern European countries that made up the Soviet bloc, is no longer the foreign language of choice. From the Baltic to the Black Sea, English is increasingly studied. The impact of English extends beyond the classroom. English words and phrases, thrust into people's consciousness by the powerful forces of Anglo-American popular culture, frequently pepper the speech of Eastern Europeans, particularly the young, show up in newspapers and magazines, and appear on shop signs and in other manifestations of public life.

In October 1999 and May 2000 visits to Bulgaria, I was struck by the presence of English in a country where the language is still not widely known. English is not uncommon in shop signs and billboards in Sofia. *Maxi Burger*, *Sportswear: The New Shock*, *Daily Bar Sunny*, *New Fashion Dimension*, and *Pretty Shop* are a sample of signs in central Sofia. At the American University in Bulgaria, an elite private university, the next generation of Bulgaria's business and political leaders is being educated entirely in English. A prestigious private secondary school in Sofia, the American College in Sofia, also uses English as the principal language of instruction. English-language television networks such as CNN, Eurosport, MTV, TNT & the Cartoon Network, and VH1 have a strong presence in the lineups available to satellite and cable households. English is not, however, limited to those media outlets. Its words and phrases also show up in Bulgarian-language magazines and newspapers and on television.

Bulgaria, Europe, and global English

The official language of Bulgaria is Bulgarian, the South Slavic language of the country's main ethnic group, which comprises 83% of the population[1]. With about 9 million speakers[2], Bulgarian is one of the 300 largest of the world's 6,000 languages[3]. Bulgarian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, as do Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian. Bulgarian is not, however, widely spoken outside the country, and that means

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that Bulgarians who travel for business or pleasure or who have extensive contact with foreign visitors to Bulgaria have a great incentive to learn a foreign language. In the post-Communist era, English has increasingly become the foreign language of choice. In that regard, Bulgarians are showing the same preference as people elsewhere in the world. English, the mother tongue of some 380 million people, is spoken as a second language by some 850 million to 1.35 billion others – i.e., a third of the world's citizens speak English (McCrum, 2001). The world needs a lingua franca, and English fills the bill. As a journalist in the British daily *The Independent* observed:[4]

> Some 85 per cent of the world's Internet webpages are in English. English is the most common language of intercontinental telephone communication, book production and broadcasting. It is the language of academia, of the military, and of air-traffic control. And it has not yet stopped growing. By 2050, over 90 per cent of the world's population may be speaking the same language as you.

A Eurobarometer survey conducted in December 2000 found that 56% of people in the 15 European Union countries speak English (*Eurobarometer Languages*, 2001). Of the 56%, 40% speak English as an acquired language, while 16% are native English-speakers. Furthermore, three-quarters of those surveyed indicated that knowing English was useful.

In Eastern Europe the increased profile of English since 1989, when the domino effect of democratization began to transform the region country by country, has been particularly dramatic. Before that time, English was neither widely studied nor spoken in the Warsaw Pact countries. By mid-1998, however, English was studied by half of the students in general high schools in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States[5]. It will take a generation before the full effect sets in. A 1997 study of the language ability of Europeans found that just 6% of people in the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries, excluding Russia, could speak English. "But things are changing fast," said the article[6]. That may be, but it is worth noting that Bulgarians typically start their language study relatively late by European standards – around age 11, while the norm is ages 8 to 10[7].

The impact of English cannot be measured solely by the number of people who study it but must be gauged in the other ways its presence is felt around the world – for example, how it infiltrates everyday speech, in advertising, and the media. Germany is one European country where English is looming large[8]:

> DEUTSCHE Bank is 'Leading to Results', Volvo is 'for life', Nokia is 'connecting people' and Toshiba urges customers to 'choose freedom'.
>
> There is nothing unusual about such advertising slogans except that they are directed at a German-speaking population where there is growing irritation at creeping anglicisation of the language.
>
> English linguistic imports dominate in show-business, with its 'comeback performances' and 'standing ovations', business and advertising with their 'appointments' and 'events', and in youth culture where it is simply 'cool' to be 'sexy'.

Such "Denglisch" leaves many Germans confused and prompted the interior minister to push for a language law as in France. The politician who is leading this drive, Eckhart Wertebach, says it is needed to protect German from extinction[9]. According to Wertebach, German "is being abandoned thanks to a growth in Americanisms. Older, less educated people, and foreigners living in Germany who don't speak English, are excluded." Wertebach's movement may benefit from broad support – a poll indicated that 53% of Germans oppose the use of English words.

French authorities face an uphill battle in trying to keep English at bay. France's language purity law allows English to be used in advertising but requires that a French translation be provided[10]. In 2000, the broadcasting regulator ordered six advertisers to pull their campaigns because the translations were too small.

Similarly, concerns about the implications of the rising torrents of English coursing through Polish culture prompted the Polish government to pass a new language purity law that took effect in May 2000[11]. The law requires Polish translations of foreign-language material in advertising and mandates that all products sold in Poland have Polish labels, among other provisions.

Some concern on the Bulgarian government's part about the influence of English may be inferred from Bulgaria's membership in La Francophonie, the Francophone Community, a French-sponsored organization described by *The Times* of London as "the chief weapon in France's crusade to slow the English-language steamroller that threatens to obliterate the

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language of Moliere and Victor Hugo".[12] La Francophonie provides financial benefits to poorer countries that become members.

The growing influence of English is just one manifestation of Westernization in Eastern Europe. *Newsweek*[13] portrayed the upwardly mobile offspring of communism, who enthusiastically embrace Western values and who see globalization as "a passport, a laptop and the right to order all the Western books and music they want over the Internet." The article described a closing East-West culture gap and noted, "Everywhere in the East, the benchmarks of success are Western."

Background to the enquiry

Little quantitative research has focused on the use of English in advertising in non-English speaking countries. Neelankavil, Mummalaneni and Sessions (1994) looked at the use of foreign language in print advertisements in popular consumer magazines in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Their content analysis of 543 advertisements in 11 magazines found that 74% had some foreign-language words – and nearly all foreign words in the ads were English. The researchers performed a logit analysis to assess what marketing factors influenced language choice in the advertisements. The resulting model indicated that language choice was primarily dependent on the type of product being sold and the country the product was being marketed in. The greatest use of Western language in ads was found in personal care products sold in Hong Kong. The logit analysis indicated that the use of Western language was not significantly related to the product's country of origin or target audience.

In an earlier study, I examined (Griffin, 1997) the use of English in Polish magazine advertisements. All display ads in 12 popular Polish consumer magazines, chosen to represent different genres, were coded. More than 88% of the 346 advertisements contained at least one English word. Looking across the 346 ads, an average of 8.5 English words was used per ad. Half of the English usage was categorized as arbitrary, while half was marginally justifiable because of the context – for example, being part of a company name, appearing on the product packaging in a photo used in the ad, or being part of the contact information for the maker or seller of the product.

In a content analysis of ads airing on a national TV network in the Netherlands, Gerritsen *et al.* (2000) found that one-third were partly or completely in English, with the lion's share of those (95%) partly in English. About one-fifth of the words in such ads were English typically. The authors further conducted experiments to see how participants felt about the use of English in ads and what their level of comprehension was. Study participants were shown six of the ads using English from the content analysis, and after each were asked to evaluate the ads according to a succession of adjectives. Gerritsen *et al.* found that participants had a rather negative attitude toward the English in ads used in the study. A probe of the participants' understanding of the English used in the six commercials found that 82% claimed to understand the English in the ads, but in fact just 36% could explain what was meant by the English. Similarly, although 76% said they could translate the English from the ads, just 44% could actually do so. The authors concluded that the study's findings challenged assumptions by advertisers that the use of English in a commercial enhances the product image and that everyone in the Netherlands understands English.

Method

The present study parallels the earlier study that the author carried out on Polish magazine advertisements. The main research questions addressed are how commonly and extensively is English used in Bulgarian ads, what advertisers use English in their ads, what types of products or services are being advertised in ads including English, and what is the context of the English use.

A content analysis was carried out of all display advertisements in eight popular Bulgarian consumer-oriented magazines. The magazines were selected by a Bulgarian academic in consultation with several magazine vendors in central Sofia. The vendors were asked for the most popular title in the following 11 categories: auto, business, computer, home, men's lifestyle, news, sports, entertainment, travel, women's fashion/glamour, and women's lifestyle. A stipulation was that all issues be from October 1999. No magazines existed or were available in the computer, news or travel categories. The eight magazines chosen were *Avto Zhurnal* (auto); *MIT* (business); *Idealen Dom* (home); *M Klub* (men's lifestyle); *Szampioni* (sports);

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Telewizia & Radio (entertainment); *Eva* (women's fashion/glamour); and *Za Zenata* (women's lifestyle).

The unit of analysis was an individual advertisement. Each display ad in the eight magazines was coded. Key variables were whether the ad contained any English words written with non-Cyrillic characters and, if it did, the total number of English words in the ad. English words and phrases were coded according to the context of their use – whether they were part of a company, brand or product line name; whether they appeared in the product packaging in a photograph used in the ad, or whether they were part of the contact information provided. Other variables included magazine title, magazine category, publication frequency, page the ad appeared on, size of the ad, advertiser, product or service being advertised, and product or service category.

Ads were jointly coded by the author and an Eastern European native fluent in two Slavic languages – Polish and Russian – although not Bulgarian. While it would have been infinitely preferable to have a native Bulgarian fluent in English as a coder, none was available and, given the setup of the study, that was not essential. Words rendered in the Roman alphabet leap off the page in publications printed in Cyrillic, and the study focuses on the usage of English words rendered in the Roman alphabet. With her knowledge of Slavic languages and liberal use of a Bulgarian-English dictionary, the coder was able to read the ads with minimal difficulty.

Only English words rendered in the Roman alphabet were coded, which points only to the most egregious English infiltration into Bulgarian. If a word was English, whatever its etymology, it counted as an English word. If in doubt about whether a word was English, the author consulted *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. Abbreviations for English words, such as *co.* for *company* were counted.

Results

The eight magazines contained 199 display advertisements, an average of 24.9 ads per magazine. *Idealen Dom* had the greatest number of ads, with 51, followed by *Avto Zhurnal* (35), *MIT* (34), *M Klub* (33) and *Eva* (30). The other three magazines contained very few ads: *Za Zenata* (10), *Szampioni* (5) and *Telewizia & Radio* (1). Looking across the magazines, the greatest number of ads fell into the home and garden category (24.6%), followed by vehicle (19.6), media (12.6), personal care (10.1), clothing and shoes (5.5), health care (5.0), alcohol (4.0), shops, stores, restaurants and bars (4.0), jewelry and watches (3.0), camera, computer and electronics (2.0), food and non-alcoholic beverages (1.0), travel and holiday (1.0), and tobacco (1.0). No ads fell into the banking, finance and insurance category. Ads not fitting into one of the aforementioned categories accounted for 5.0%, while for 1.5% it was unclear what was being advertised.

Just over two-thirds of the advertisements – 67.8% – contained English words written in non-Cyrillic characters. Of those ads, the number of English words ranged from 1 (22.8%, n=31) to a whopping 261 (0.7%, n=l), but the mean was 8.46. Of the 1151 English words written in Roman characters in the ads, more than three-quarters (76.7%) can be marginally justified because they were used in the context of a company, brand or product name, as part of the product packaging as displayed in the ad, or as part of the contact information. The flip side is that nearly a quarter of all English words used in the ads serve no such role.

Cross-tabulations were performed to see if there was any relationship between whether advertisements contained English words written in the Roman alphabet and the variables of magazine, product or service category, and ad size. There was no significant relationship between magazine and whether advertisements contained English, but both product-service category ($\chi^2=26.314$, df=14) and ad size ($\chi^2=11.170$, df=4) were significant factors ($p<.05$).

English words in non-Cyrillic were ubiquitous in the following five categories: jewelry and watches; food and non-alcoholic beverages; alcoholic beverages; camera, computer and electronics; and travel and holiday. Each ad in those categories contained at least one English word. English words were present in 90% of personal-care ads and 80% of health-care ads. Next came ads for which the product or service category could not be determined (67.8%), ads for vehicles (64.1%), home and garden (61.2%), media (60%), other (60%) and clothing and shoes (54.5%), shops, stores, restaurants and bars (37.5%) and tobacco (0%).

English words were most prevalent in full-page ads (77.3%), followed by ads that were at least a half-page but less than a full page (74.2),

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and those that were more than one full page (71.4%). There was a sharp dropoff for smaller ads. Of those that were at least a quarter-page but less than a half-page, 54.1% contained English, while 52.8% of ads less than a quarter-page had English words rendered in the Roman alphabet.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to see whether, for ads containing English words, the mean number varied significantly according to the magazine, the size of the ad or the category of the product or service being advertised. The overall number of English words contained in ads varied significantly by product/service category ($F=1.629$, $p<.05$) but not by magazine or ad size.

Similarly, a one-way ANOVA was performed to see whether the mean number of English words that were used in a justifiable context varied significantly by magazine, ad size or the category of the product or service being advertised. The incidence of English words considered justifiable varied significantly by ad size ($F=1.762$, $p<.05$), but not by magazine or product/service category.

Discussion

This study shows that English plays a profound role in Bulgarian advertising, underscoring the pressing question of what meaning Bulgarian consumers take from these English-laced ads. The findings are very similar to those of my earlier study in Polish advertising. The majority of the English appearing in the Bulgarian ads has been tagged as justifiable because of the context, but much of that English usage fails to hold up to scrutiny. For example, one category of justifiable usage is company contact information. Logically, a foreign advertiser's address may contain words such as P.O. box, street, etc. However, most instances of English that fell into this category were for concepts that could be rendered into Bulgarian – for example, fax, e-mail, GSM – but for which English has taken hold.

Three ads exemplify justifiable use of English. All are from Western companies and offer no egregious use of English:

- An ad for Yves Saint Laurent's women's fragrance Baby Doll appears in fashion magazine *Eva*. The ad contains no Bulgarian; in fact, it contains no words other than the brand name, Baby Doll Paris, atop the ad and Baby Doll on three bottles of the fragrance. This approach enables the advertiser to duck the linguistic issue and potentially utilize the same ad in multiple markets.
- Similarly, an ad for Ballantine's Scotch whisky, which appeared in *M Klub*, contains no copy at all – just a photograph of a couple

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dancing in a club and a picture of a bottle of Ballantine's with the company name and logo underneath. English does appear in the ad, but only on the bottle label.

- An ad for the Cussons Imperial Leather line of soaps appears in *Eva*. The pro-duct brand name is English, and it would not make marketing sense to change it. The ad contains photographic images of the various soap products, and English words are visible on the product packaging.

All the English used is reasonable. That's not to say that the preponderance of English words is not baffling to the average Bulgarian. A second set offers examples of English words and phrases peppering Bulgarian ads in more arbitrary ways. An ad for the Cussons men's fragrance Graphite appears in *M Klub*. While the product line itself carries an English name, the slogan is rendered in English as well – *the New Graphite Oceanic*. The ad does not rely entirely on English; it opens and closes with a phrase of Bulgarian copy, so the languages co-exist on an equal footing.

In a curiously minimalist Levi's ad appearing in *Eva*, the words *Fall '99*, surprinted over an eerie night photo of a hulking old American car, serve as the only copy. This could easily be rendered in Bulgarian using Cyrillic characters. It is hard to imagine that the word *Fall* imbues the advertiser with any mystique or prestige.

Prestige, of course, can be an important attribute to use in selling expensive watches, and the Longines ad appearing in *Avto Zhurnal* equates elegance with English. The ad is dominated by the English slogan *Elegance is an attitude*. The Longines ad includes French as well as English. Under the company logo, in smaller type, appears the phrase *L 'elegance du temps depuis 1832*. No Bulgarian appears in the ad other than in the listings of where someone can buy these watches.

Similarly, an ad promoting Tissot watches in *Za Zenata* is dominated by the slogan *Trust only in true values*. The watches are noted as being part of the *T-collection*, and the English phrase *Swiss watches since 1853* appears under the Tissot logo. Bulgarian words are relegated to a phrase used in conjunction with the company name Julliany and in the information about where the watches can be bought.

Danzka uses the English phrase *Vodka on Metal* to sell its Danish vodka in an ad appearing in *MIT*. Granted, other than the preposition, there's little for a Bulgarian to decipher – Bulgarians use the words vodka and metal also – but the phrase could be easily rendered in Bulgarian rather than in English.

A non-English speaking Bulgarian would be much more in the dark with the ad for Net Is that appears in *MIT*. The ad is entirely in English. Four disparate arms are depicted above the word *collision*, while four joined arms appear over the word *connection*. To the left of the pictures is the phrase *high tech*, while *high touch* appears to the right. The phrase *structured cabling systems* is to the right of the company's logo. All of the contact information is written in English as well. One would expect *MIT* to have a higher percentage of readers acquainted with English, given its business and finance focus, but a non-English speaking native would have to have an extraordinary

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grip on the language to be able to decipher the English in this ad.

Bulgarian media whose ads appeared in the sample seem particularly fond of using English to establish their identity. While it is not surprising that a youth-skewed rock station might want to cash in on English's cachet with youth, it is unfathomable how a classical music station can benefit from such a tactic. *MIT* contains an ad for *Classic FM Bulgarian Radio*. While its listeners may be highly educated, one wonders if they are truly impressed that a radio station in their own country sees fit to position itself so clearly in the Anglo-American cultural stream.

While this study focuses on how English permeates Bulgarian magazine advertisements, we can note that the editorial content of such magazines is also colored by the use of English in headlines, captions and body copy. For example, one *M Klub* article runs under the headline *Callgirls*, while the story is illustrated by a drawing of a woman whose back side is draped with a sign bearing the letters *for sale*. An article about motorcycling in *M Klub* offers a mixed Bulgarian-English headline that incorporates the English phrase *Live to Ride, Ride to Live*. An article in sports magazine *Szampioni* runs under a mixed English-Bulgarian headline that begins *Black & White*.

This study provides clear evidence that English is pervasive enough in Bulgarian advertising that Bulgarian consumers without at least a rudimentary knowledge of English are at a severe disadvantage. One can only speculate about the long-term consequences for Bulgarians of this barrage of English. Certainly, one effect will be to further entrench English as a second language. The volume of English appearing in Bulgarian ads demonstrates that knowledge of English is increasingly vital for the country's citizens in order to make informed choices. ■

Notes

1 U.S. Department of State, 1999
2 *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2000
3 Davis, 1999
4 Sweet, 1999
5 *The Week in Germany*, 1998
6 *The Economist*, 1997
7 De Laine, 2001
8 Sharma, 2001
9 McCrum, 2001
10 Landau, 2001
11 Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2000
12 Bremner, 1999
13 Miller, 2001

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