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**[Title]** English in French Commercial Advertising: Simultaneity, bivalency, and language boundaries

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**[Running short title]** English in French Commercial Advertising

## English in French Commercial Advertising: Simultaneity, bivalency, and language boundaries

### Abstract

In recent decades, sociolinguists have begun to challenge the traditional view that multilingualism is fundamentally composed of discrete systems known as ‘languages’. Supporting the assessment that languages are not bounded entities but sociocultural and ideological constructions, this article explores commercial advertisements in France, which are subject to language policies assuming that ‘French’ is easily separable from ‘foreign languages’. Employing the Bakhtinian-influenced notion of *bivalency* developed by Woolard (1998), the article argues for a special consideration of mixed-language advertising in France, rooted not only in linguistic form, but also in the specific contextual tension produced by the socio-political statuses of French and English. The resulting creativity challenges the monolectal assumptions within French language management, indicating a clash of segregational language ideology with integrational language practices. The article further argues that this language mixing is bidirectional, as advertisements may both erase and emphasise the assumed boundaries between codes.

*Dans des décennies récentes, la sociolinguistique commence à disputer le point de vue traditionnel que le plurilinguisme se compose de systèmes discrets connus comme des « langues ». Conforme à la position que les langues ne sont pas des entités bornées mais des constructions socioculturelles et idéologiques, cet article examine la publicité commerciale en France, elle-même sujette aux contraintes exercées par la politique linguistique pour laquelle « le français » est facilement séparable des « langues étrangères ». Au vu du concept Bakhtinien de la bivalence conçue par Woolard (1998), l'article maintient une considération*

*spéciale de la publicité plurilingue en France, enracinée non seulement dans la forme linguistique, mais également dans la tension contextuelle spécifique produite par les statuts sociopolitiques du français et de l'anglais. La créativité qui en découle met au défi les suppositions monolectales dans la gestion de langue française, ce qui indique un conflit entre l'idéologie ségrégationniste de langue et ces pratiques plus intégrationnistes. L'article propose que ce mélange soit bidirectionnel, car les publicités sont capables d'effacer ainsi que de souligner les frontières entre les codes.*

**Key words:** Multilingualism, French, advertising, simultaneity, bivalency

**Running title:** English in French Commercial Advertising

**Word count:** 9354 + 7 photos = 10054

## 1. INTRODUCTION

France is a nation which has seen over four-hundred years of political efforts to dismantle its linguistic diversity. As widely noted elsewhere (see Adamson, 2007; Ager, 1999; Judge, 2007 for overviews), the consistent pursuit of language policies designed to privilege French by limiting the use, visibility, and status of other languages has resulted in a dominant national language ideology, which is both enshrined in the Constitution (whose second Article recognises only French as the language of the Republic) and maintained by many of those living within its boundaries. This article explores language in commercial advertising, which emerged as a key battleground for French protectionists in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Building on existing conceptualisations of language mixing on signs, it discusses a number of printed commercial advertisements photographed in April 2015 on the streets of Toulouse in southern France. The examples are taken from a larger corpus used to explore functions of multiple languages across different domains in the linguistic landscape (Amos, 2017). The signs discussed in this article are not intended to be representative of any particular trends in France or beyond; rather they exemplify particular cases of multilingual advertising, a domain whose importance for language contact is long-established (e.g. Bhatia, 1987, 1992, 2001; Heller, 2003; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). The examples reference the importance of advertising both as an attention-getter for consumers (Martin, 2002), and as a signaller of a particular brand of language contact in which code boundaries are both blurred and emphasised simultaneously. Despite the legal mechanisms designed to limit the visibility of foreign languages in French advertising, the examples illustrate that advertisers violate linguistic and legal norms by integrating non-French linguistic features in creative ways. Although commentators remain keen to stress the hostility of French language laws towards English (Saulière, 2014; Wright, 2016), this article argues that the legislation regulating language use in the public space is ineffective, since it assumes an absolutist view of

language which is not applicable to the multilingual forms exemplified in many advertising texts. Moreover, drawing on the Bakhtinian conditions of linguistic simultaneity and the related notion of bivalency (Woolard, 1998), it is suggested that the discourse of language protectionism in France itself may influence multilingual creativity, ever-present in the background of the variable language hybridity on display in the landscape. It is moreover argued that this hybridity is bidirectional, as language mixing has the power both to erase and emphasise the boundaries between French and English.

## **2. ADVERTISING AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN FRANCE**

Any exploration of language mixing in French advertising must be contextualised within the discourse of language management that has characterised European French language politics for centuries. The most relevant piece of contemporary legislation regarding language in advertising in France is the *Loi n° 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française* ('Law n° 94-665 of 4 August 1994 relating to the use of the French language'), commonly referred to as the *Loi Toubon* after then-Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon. It has not escaped some that the name forms an ironic pun with the phrase *tout bon* ('everything is correct'),<sup>i</sup> and indeed its second, third, and fourth articles underline the protection of this status quo in advertising copy, as well as in the public space (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1994, my translation):

[Article 2] In designation, supply, presentation, use, the description of the degree and conditions of assuring goods, products, and services, as well as in invoices and receipts, the use of French is mandatory. The same conditions apply to all written, spoken, or audio-visual advertising.

[Article 3] All inscriptions or announcements erected or created on the public highway, in an open space, or in public transport, and targeted for the information of the public, must be formulated in French.

[Article 4] In all cases where notices, announcements, or inscriptions include one or several translations, the presentation of French must be as legible, audible, or intelligible as the presentation of foreign languages.

The law was the culmination of Toubon's view that 'Anglo-Saxon countries are deploying considerable efforts... to conquer new territory for their language' (Grigg, 1997: 373). Representatives of the *Académie française* and then-President François Mitterrand similarly characterised English as a tool of domination and contempt, with the power to 'reduce' French to a provincial dialect, whereas France's national language was described as being 'to our intellect what air is to our lungs' (*ibid*: 371). Though Articles 2 and 14 provided for the exception of registered brand names which could be presented unmodified, the law attempted to ban the use of untranslated foreign terms in all economic, social, and intellectual areas of life. Immediately, a number of advertising agencies resisted, arguing to France's Constitutional Council that this severely reduced advertising potential, and that the law was more akin to ideology management than consumer protection, which had been the condition on which it was passed (Martin, 2008: 52). By July 1994, the Council had overturned significant elements of the law on the basis that such regulation violated the constitutional protection of free speech. As Grigg (1997: 374) notes, the Council was particularly hostile to the suggestion that government departments could produce lists of approved words, which it argued diminished the 'natural enrichment' of French by foreign terms. This led to widespread scepticism in the media over whether language in a free society could ever be

controlled, with the newspaper *Le Monde* summarising: ‘watered down, the law becomes essentially a set of principles without any great regulatory effect. The use of French becomes compulsory ... but nobody will be able to say what is French and what is not (*Le Monde*, 1/8/94 in Grigg, 1997: 374).

By 1996, a number of amendments had been made to Toubon’s initial bill. The most crucial was that translations between foreign texts and French need no longer be ‘parallel’ (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1996: 4259). Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.3 then added to the exceptions previously only represented by trademarked brand names and slogans, stating that ‘terms resulting from the application of international convention’ and ‘certain specific products known by most of the public’ were also acceptable (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1996: 4258-4259). *Le Monde*’s scepticism appears vindicated here, since this arguably permits a great number of terms which belong to so-called international ‘advertising English’ (Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer, 2010; Nickerson and Camiciottoli, 2013; Ruellot, 2011). In addition to contradicting the philosophical position of the original law and the Culture Ministry’s claim of ‘one word for each thing, each nation, each reality’ (Ministère de la Culture, 2018), the notion of ‘international convention’ is remarkably vague, as any transnational borrowing arguably fits this description.

As noted elsewhere (Martin, 2006, 2007; Nelms-Reyes, 1996), although organisations such as the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* (or DGLFLF; ‘General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France’) and the *Commission d’enrichissement de la langue française* (CELF; ‘French Language Enrichment Commission’) have, as of 2019, recommended more than 7600 neologisms and French adaptations of ‘foreign’ terms – publishing them through the legal bulletin *Journal officiel de la république française* and websites such as *FranceTerme* (belonging to the Ministry of Culture) and the pages of the *Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel* (‘High Audio-



visual Council'), as well as in a series of online magazines entitled *Vous pouvez le dire en français* ('You Can Say it in French') – advertisers remain largely unperturbed by the threat of sanctions. This ambivalence was well summarised by one of Martin's (2006: 241) advertising agency interviewees:

The funny thing about France is that they keep making [language] laws and [...] [the French] never stop finding ways to get around them.

French print advertising thus represents a linguistic landscape that is highly creative, and in the case of some marketing agencies, both conscious of and indifferent to the State's insistence on language governance. As the examples discussed below demonstrate, the lack of precision about what constitutes 'English' or 'French' renders these laws almost unworkable. Moreover, the widespread awareness of legislation that aims to limit the visibility of English and other languages has arguably become a key factor in the linguistic tensions that characterise print advertising in France, and thus is an important consideration in analysing the creativity and variation on display in the advertising landscape.

### **3. PROBLEMATIZING MULTILINGUALISM**

On the surface, the examples discussed in this article constitute good representations of the situation as described by *Le Monde*, namely that being able to tell 'what is French and what is not' is not an obvious – and nor perhaps a useful – undertaking. This is generally because adverts tend to operate on the fuzzy boundaries of globalised English and French, drawing on the 'reservoir' (Van Elteren, 1996: 69) of international English markers that non-English-readers are deemed likely to understand and, in some cases, incorporating features of French in order to aid comprehension for the assumed French monolingual audience. Bearing in

mind established taxonomies concerning general multilingual categorisation on public signage, most notably within linguistic landscape studies (e.g. (Backhaus, 2007; Reh, 2004), Woolard's (1998) notion of *bivalency* offers a framework useful for the specific context of print advertising which, as further explained below, tends to rely on various forms of localised wordplay. Bivalency builds on the Bakhtinian understanding of simultaneity, which rejects the 'either/or' binary of multilingualism, instead understanding language forms as a 'both/and' that is 'not a mere wavering between two mutually exclusive possibilities but a real simultaneity of contrasting elements in tension' (Bakhtin, 1981: 281 in Woolard, 1998: 4). Bakhtin (*ibid*) argued for a number of simultaneities possible within language mixing, among them hybridity – 'the mixing... of two linguistic consciousnesses'; heteroglossia – 'that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide'; and polyglossia – 'the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system'. Sanchez-Stockhammer (2012) emphasises the creativity that results from simultaneity, explaining how so-called 'multilingual' forms are often new entities in their own right, created from existing languages and sharing 'certain features with each of its sources *but which is not purely compositional*' (my emphasis). In their 'polylinguaging' paradigm, Jørgensen *et al.* (2011) similarly argue that 'language A plus language B' is not a viable conceptualisation of 'real-life' multilingualism, maintaining that multilingual instances are better analysed in terms of linguistic features that are socioculturally attached to certain named languages, rather than these languages in their entire forms. This and related arguments (see Pennycook (2017) for an overview) have a common ancestor in the integrational linguistics of Harris (1998), which argues that orthodox linguistics has taken a number of language myths for granted, including the notion that segregated, autonomous, systemic, and rule-bound 'languages' exist as anything other than ideological constructs. As argued elsewhere (Dailey-O'Cain, 2017; see also Heller, 2007), the view that the constituent

elements of multilingualism remain entirely separate risks dismissing the embedded nature of linguistic encounters in real-world conditions. Adding to Blommaert & Backus' (2011: 4) description of these embedded forms as constructed from individuals' personal linguistic repertoires, Jørgensen, et al. (2011: 29) posit that what language users 'actually use' are features of named languages as combinative semiotic resources, 'not language, varieties, or lects'.

Woolard (1998: 7) suggests that bivalency occurs within 'words or segments that could "belong" equally, descriptively, and even prescriptively, to both codes.' Heller (1994: 167) had previously identified such a situation among English-French bilingual schoolchildren in Toronto, some of whom were reported as 'speaking both languages at once'. Elsewhere, Alvarez-Cáccamo (in Woolard, 1998: 15) reported that certain individuals in Galicia could 'speak Galician in Spanish'. Shell's (1993) explorations of language contact, again in Quebec, provides further weight to the application of simultaneity to analyses of written signs, arguing that certain bivalent nouns and adjectives mediate the multilingual relationship of English and French. Examples he gives include *danger* ('snow and ice fall from roof DANGER *fonte de neige et de glaçons*') and *maximum* ('vitesse MAXIMUM *speed*'). Bivalency, as well as simultaneity more broadly, is especially important in the analysis of French-English advertising in France because of the politicised nature of language management. Heteroglossia as described by Bakhtin (1981: 281 in Woolard, 1998: 4) indeed captures the opposing nature of the discourses present in multilingual signage: while the state nominally acts as a 'centrifugal' force, attempting to keep other languages away from French, sign-writers regularly supply a 'centripetal' force by trying to bring languages together. This results in questions about both the roots and the new beginnings of bivalent words as they cross language boundaries. Holquist (1993: 135) describes this in terms of contestation, concluding that simultaneity is always mediated by politics. This interpretation certainly

applies in the French case, where the visibility of the state-identified ‘self’ (i.e. French) and ‘other’ (i.e. English) represents the Bakhtinian two consciousnesses, which – despite policies assuming the contrary – fuse to form a linguistic simultaneity that can no longer only be described in terms of its separate constituent parts.

There has been interest in exploring these and related features of language in commercial advertising since at least the 1980s. Much of this work (e.g. Bhatia, 1987, 1992, 2001; Cheshire and Moser, 1994; Gerritsen, Korzilius, van Meurs, and Gijsbers, 2000; Griffin, 1997; Kelly-Holmes, 2005) reports on the presence of English in non-anglophone places, identifying it as a linguistic trait of globalisation. At the same time, scholarship on the commodification of language has explored some of the symbolic motives for using foreign languages in advertising (Heller, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Such critical engagements with advertising language are founded in part on a long history of marketing and communications research, dating back to at least the 1960s (e.g. Bolinger, 1980; Cook, 1992; Leech, 1966; Vestergaard and Schrøder, 1985). More recent investigations have tended to focus on the emblematic impact of English as a pair-language with local majority languages, where its use is variously described in terms of prestige and style (Haarmann, 1989; Ross, 2008), modernity (Heller, 2003; Kasanga, 2010), creativity and humour (García Vizcaíno, 2011; Mettewie, Lamarre, and Van Mensel, 2012), success and sophistication (Piller, 2001, 2003), fetish (Kelly-Holmes, 2005, 2000), and wealth (Dimova, 2007; Rowland, 2016). Scholarship discussing multilingual advertising in France offers similar conclusions, citing domains such as cosmetics, fashion, motoring, food, and technology alongside symbolic linkages with sophistication, modernity, Americana, wealth, humour, and sex appeal (Bhatia, 1992; Chécric, 1995; Gerritsen, Nickerson, Van Hooft, Van Meurs, Nederstigt, Starren, and Crijns, 2007; Martin, 2002, 2007, 2008; Ruellot, 2011). It has generally been argued that, as elsewhere, such associations are achieved through visual

linkages to North American and English landscapes (Bhatia, 2001; Flaitz, 1993; Martin, 2006), music (Hasebrink, 2007), and film and television (Hilgendorf, 2013); though Ruellot (2011) notes a recent shift towards France-associated products, particularly cosmetics and food (see also Martin, 2002). However, although the motivation remains to use English as an attention-getter (Martin, 2002) and as a marker of positive association (Cheshire and Moser, 1994), the generally low level of English competence expected of the target audience means that advertisers frequently rely on the incorporation of French elements to maintain comprehensibility. Such a phenomenon was immortalised in the 1960s by Etienne (1964) as ‘franglais’; the related term ‘Frenglish’ has also been used (Bostina-Bratu, 2010; Martin, 2007; Ong, Ghesquière, & Serwe, 2013), their interchangeability capturing well the diversity of implication and interpretation when elements of both languages are mixed. The focus of many studies of multilingual advertising has thus been the transnational symbolism of English, although it is worth referencing Martin's (2014) exploration of morpho-syntactic hybridity in French online advertising, Vettorel's (2013) study of orthographic, phonological, and morphological English in Italian advertising, and García Vizcaíno's (2011) structural and phonological analyses of Spanish/English advertising produced by the airline *Vueling*. As well as addressing key symbolic and socio-political questions, this article makes a further contribution to analyses of formal aspects of language mixing on advertising signs.

#### **4. ENGLISH IN FRENCH ADVERTISING**

Many multilingual adverts in France use design features such as text size, positioning, colour, and asterisks to distinguish holistically between languages. As demonstrated around the world, such signs often target non-French-reading audiences, particularly in the tourism context (Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau, 2009, 2015; Heller, Jaworski, and Thurlow, 2014; Heller, Pujolar, and Duchêne, 2014). Many of these signs make a clear distinction between

French and non-French sections, embodying the interpretation of languages as discrete and separable, a misconception perpetuated by the discourse of language management in France. However, advertising places greater emphasis on attention-getting (Martin, 2002; Ruellot, 2011; Vettorel, 2013), which tends to integrate rather than segregate the languages on display. Non-French features are thus often merged into the official standard within single-word or phrase slogans. This includes established lexical borrowings which are likely to be understood by much of the target audience, as well as semantic, lexical, and phonological hybrids glossed within French structures. The examples below represent useful applications of the notions of simultaneity and bivalency, particularly within the context of a language policy which aims to decide where the line between ‘French’ and ‘foreign languages’ lies in terms of the linguistic landscape.

**Figure 1. *Jean Claude Aubry* poster (cropped section: *Brushing* text) (Boulevard de Strasbourg)**





Figure 1 illustrates a sign photographed in the window of the *Jean Claude Aubry* hair salon in central Toulouse. The sign features a number of services on offer inside, two of which – *brushing* and *shampooing* – are established English borrowings. Both words feature in the online versions of two of France’s most established and important dictionaries, *Petit Robert* and *Larousse*, and neither is listed by *FranceTerme* as requiring a French equivalent. These are perhaps archetypal examples of accepted borrowings which, although imported from English and/or elsewhere, are now established within European French vocabulary. More interesting from the perspective of simultaneity is the inclusion of the slogan *happy days*, also visible in a number of other slogans including *KMJAYS* (figure 2) and *Duck Days* (figure 3).

**Figure 2. *KMJ*DAYS discount sign (Rue de la Pomme)**



**Figure 3. *Duck Days* discount signs (Rue Lafayette)**





A surface analysis of these items may conclude that they are English, as both ‘days’, ‘duck’, and ‘happy’ have basic equivalents in French which are unused here. Indeed, ‘happy’ is listed by *FranceTerme* as English under the entry for ‘happy hour’ (for which the suggested equivalent is *la bonne heure*). *Happy hour* is regularly used by bars and cafés offering reduced prices for one (or sometimes more) hours early on in the evening in order to attract business, yet despite the existence of cognates such as *apéro* and *5 à 7*, *happy hour* remains common throughout France and beyond. While ‘happy’ thus remains associated with price reductions in both English and French, the association of ‘days’ with this idea remains rooted to French. These signs indeed exemplify a growing trend in France to signal sales periods with the word ‘days’, often qualified by ‘happy’ as on the *Jean Claude Aubry* sign or – as on the *KMJ* and *Chevignon* signs – with references to specific brands.<sup>ii</sup> Indeed, the confidence with which advertisers diversify ‘days’ suggests that it achieves simultaneity both with a well-known English lexeme and with a reasonable expectation that French-readers will recognise its intended meaning. This captures the essence of Martin’s (2006: 241) interviewee who remarked on advertisers’ propensity to ‘get around’ language laws: although neither the *Chevignon* nor the *KMJ* sign offers any French equivalent to ‘days’, the criteria of the 1996 amendment to the *Loi Toubon*, stating that French and foreign meanings need not be ‘parallel’ (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1996: 4259), are arguably met by the explanations of the price reductions given in standard French below the slogans. This depends on the interpretation of ‘parallel’, of course, and whether it refers to literal, morpho-syntactic equivalence only (in which case *50% sur une sélection d’articles* (‘50% off selected items’) is not a valid translation of ‘Duck Days’), or to a broader sense of semantic transferal (in which case arguably it is).

Figure 4. *Loving Dad, Loving Day* discount sign (Rue d'Alsace-Lorraine)<sup>iii</sup>



The pervasiveness of ‘days’ is further exemplified in the poster reproduced in figure 4, which advertised a Fathers’ Day competition launched on *Facebook.com* by the French clothing chain *Jules* (Jeux Concours Fb, 2013). Not only does ‘day’ indicate the sales event; in this case it also performs a function of alliteration (Guidère, 2000; Jakobson, 1960) with ‘dad’ and a direct reference to Fathers’ Day. This part of the advert is supported extra-linguistically by the visual gloss (Martin, 2007) of the image of the father and baby. In addition to its possible inclusion in the metaphorical ‘reservoir’ of global English features imagined by Van Elteren (1996: 69), the notion of ‘repeated exposure’ (Ruellot, 2011: 8) is relevant for ‘day’, in that its recurring appearance across the advertising landscape may encourage its familiarity among French readers, thus enhancing memorability of the brands and their sales periods (Luk, 2013) and reinforcing consumers’ self-perceived knowledge of English (Vettorel, 2013). However, whilst Ruellot (2011) considers this a characteristic of all loanwords, it is possible to argue that the term has evolved further since its establishment in French. Though the text also constitutes standard English, the reference of ‘day’ to a longer period

(sometimes weeks or months) represents what Woolard (2007) refers to as ‘strategic bivalency’, in that the simultaneity of the lexeme ‘day’ is itself mobilised in the ideological erasure of the language boundary between English and French. This embodies both Bakhtinian understandings of polyglossia and hybridity, in that a ‘French’ semantic consciousness operates alongside an ‘English’ lexical one. The emplacement of the sign in a majority French-reading setting is, however, key to this situation, since the sense of a sales period or competition would likely be lost on an audience in the UK, for instance, where ‘day’ would probably be interpreted more literally. The semantic extension of ‘day’ is thus self-referential: the sign engages with the widespread use of English lexemes in advertising contexts and simultaneously creates a second, more specific association with a sales period. It is significant to note that this duality is available only to readers who understand ‘day’ in the French commercial context. Rather than discuss any incursion of ‘English’ into ‘French’ signage – as characterised by the language policy – it is perhaps more accurate, therefore, to describe this process in terms of context-based or, to borrow from Blom & Gumperz (1972), as situational simultaneity. In this case, the reinterpretation of a bivalent term as both an English attention-getter and a local variant of French English, in order to signal a Fathers’ Day sale period within one three-letter word.

Figure 5. *Duck Me* Menu (cropped section: *Hot Duck* text) (Rue de Rémusat)



Localisation of this sort has been widely explored in advertising contexts (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2004; Ustinova and Bhatia, 2005; Ustinova, 2008), and is further present in the signage of the *Duck Me* restaurant (figure 5). Differing from the lexical cross-overs discussed above, this sign testifies to a phonological overlap, manifested both in ‘duck me’, referencing a vulgar minimal pair in English, and in the slogan ‘fast good’. By modifying the phrase ‘fast food’, this challenges the assumed link between ‘fast’ and low quality. This construction is certainly

marketable in France, where *fast food* is an accepted and widely-used borrowing. Lexically and semantically, the pun also works in standard English, of course. However, much like ‘day’, the phrase contains a feature which is particularly meaningful for a French-reading audience, namely, the realisation of ‘good’, which under French phonological norms may be intended as /gu:d/, the middle vowel sound replicating that realised in ‘food’. Reminiscent of Martinez’s (2015: 611) analysis of *Dogtor Cat*, the ‘duck’ of ‘hot duck’ (see cropped image in Figure 5) may similarly be realised as /døg/, as [k] is often substituted with [g] by French users, perhaps hinting at wordplay with ‘hot dog’. Although the lexical features of texts at *Duck Me* are borrowed from English, therefore, the phonological crossovers (Luk, 2013: 243) rely on knowledge of French to achieve the full impact. Martin (2006: 198) discusses similar juxtapositions of French and English features in *HOT Couture*, where the English ‘hot’ resembles the French realisation of *haute*, and *n’eau stress*, which similarly plays on the English ‘no’ and the French for water, *eau*. As García Vizcaíno (2011: 167) argues, such combinations achieve attention by breaking the reader’s expectations of what appears to be a monolingual lexical presentation. Analysis of such a cross-modal ‘frenchification’ (Ruellot, 2011: 11) of English requires us to think carefully not only about the boundaries of the languages, but also about readers’ understandings of these boundaries. This is particularly important in the context of multilingual advertising, where connotational signs – previously referred to as ‘coded icons’ by Barthes (1977) and labelled ‘symbolic hieroglyphs’ by Haarmann (1986, 1989; see also Ong, Ghesquière, and Serwe, 2013) because they require little linguistic competence – are routinely privileged over denotational texts. To borrow Martin’s (2007: 170; see also 1998, 2002, 2007, 2008) phrase, these points offer evidence that, despite the apparent surface use of English, French elements within these constructions remain, albeit in a more covert way, ‘very much intact’.

## 5. LOCAL ENGLISH(ES)

The combinative selection of features which privilege the local language has been described as ‘frenchification’ (Ruellot, 2011: 11), or as García Vizcaíno (2011: 167) and Martínez (2015: 609) remark, as a form of English ‘domestication’. It has been hypothesised that explanations for this generally lie in a lack of ability in standard English on the part of the sign-writer (Vélez-Rendón, 2003), or in an intentional intertextual reference to the ‘Englishness’ of international advertising, designed to be recognised and appreciated by the target audience (Kuppens, 2009). The examples given so far demonstrate that the ideological construction of French as a fixed collection of words and grammar that are entirely separate (and separable) from those of English provides the basis for language mixing signs to stand out. In other words, the adverts are successful attention-getters because they contradict the state view that French should exist separately to English. Returning to the façade of *Jean Claude Aubry*, such a challenge to the dominant ideology is visible in the slogan *relooking expert*, which appears several times below the business name on white awnings outside the salon, indicating expertise in achieving a new ‘look’ for its clients’ hair. The syntax of *relooking expert* appears to follow the norms of standard English, since the gerund precedes the noun (standard French would require the words to be reversed). Morphologically, both the prefix ‘re-’, the suffix ‘-ing’, and the noun particle ‘look’ are standard English, as is ‘expert’. However, *expert* is also standard French, and *look* is an accepted borrowing commonly used in the contexts of style and fashion. Therefore, although on the surface the phrase points towards simultaneous bivalency as described by Woolard (1998), its interpretation may privilege L1 French readers, for whom non-standard adaptations of English lexemes are not unusual. As with ‘days’ above, *relooking* would likely not be understood in the UK, even if the contextual situation (i.e. a hair salon) were the same. Despite *FranceTerme*’s identification of *relooking* as foreign (it suggests *conseiller/ère en*

*image*, ‘image advisor’, as an alternative), however, it is clear that the construction has experienced significant input from French and relies on this to speak to French-readers. This indicates a process of multilingual construction that is bidirectional: on the one hand, *relooking expert* erases the perceived boundaries between English and French; on the other, it emphasises specific points of language contact. This binary is key to their success as adverts, since potential consumers are led both to consume the amalgamation and understand a divergence from linguistic norms.

A similar parallel is produced in the signage of the toy modelling shop *Idéal Models*. As with *relooking expert*, the lexical similarities with its standard French equivalent – in this case *modèles idéaux* – represents a significant overlap between the languages. However, in terms of syntax (i.e. the adjective preceding the noun), orthography (deleting the grave accent and the second ‘e’ in *models*), and morphology (omitting the gender and number agreement in *Idéal*), the phrase appears as something other than French. This means that, although likely to be understood easily by French readers, the sign maintains a degree of Englishness. These syntactic, orthographical, and morphological crossovers evidence Woolard’s (1998) bivalency; however they also represent the specific linguistic points at which French and English contact can be detected.

**Figure 6. *I vélo Toulouse***



Such a simultaneous approach to boundary signalling is similarly illustrated by the advertisement shown in figure 6, which references the 500km of cycle paths in and around Toulouse. The advert was printed and displayed around the city by the local authority *Toulouse Métropole*, in conjunction with its management of cycleways and the bicycle rental scheme *VélÔToulouse* (Mairie de Toulouse, 2018). Above the italicised slogan reading *500 km de réseau cyclable dans l'agglomération* ('500km of cycle paths in the city and the surrounding area'), the principle text reads *I [bicycle] Toulouse*, referencing the form of the iconic *I love NY* campaign launched by New York State in 1977 (New York State Library,



2013). Whereas the New York sign (and many iterations since) uses a stylised red heart in place of the word *love*, this poster replaces the text with the image of a bicycle. This both highlights the central message of the advert and reflects the importance attached to visual design within city branding (Lau and Leung, 2011: 131). The bicycle appears in red, suggesting both a reference to a love heart and to the city's red and black branding colour scheme. From a comprehension standpoint, the sign requires either prior knowledge of the *I love NY* design or the subsequent *I [heart] [x]* trope, or knowledge of the standard English first person pronoun *I*. Arguably, even if ignorant of these, the message is clear to French readers: the image, the word *Toulouse*, and the slogan below indicate that cycling is possible and encouraged within the city and its environs. Penetration of text by image is likewise discussed by Martin (2012) in relation to French Mercedes adverts; Jaworski (2015: 75) further argues that such signs visualise a trajectory of recontextualization of prior cultural and linguistic material – in this case the reincarnation of “love” as a bicycle. Also referencing Jakobson's (1960) discussion on form, Kiparsky (1981: 11) emphasises the power of such a process in achieving a ‘recurrence of equivalent linguistic elements’. The equivalence here is maintained by the pronoun *I*, the red bicycle, and the city name. Yet, a significant divergence in form also occurs: when verbalised by a French-reader, the sign is likely to produce *I vélo Toulouse* – where *vélo* is a standard contraction of *vélocipède* (i.e. ‘bike’), as well as an anagram of the English word *love*. The sign thus operates on both imagery and textual levels, where features of English and French are combined to create a sign that represents both recurrence and divergence from the standard form ‘I love [city]’, referencing a subtle simultaneity with English in the process. As with other examples discussed in this article, this contributes to a variety of one language that is enhanced by knowledge of another.

**Figure 7. *My jean is my boyfriend!***



The final example, given in figure 7, featured in a nationwide advertising campaign run by the French clothing chain *Jennyfer* for the 2015 Spring season. Here, the lexeme *jean* represents a modification of the English ‘jeans’ assimilated with a feature of standard French: namely that leg garments are grammatically singular. This applies both to direct loanwords such as *jean* (‘jeans’) and *short* (‘shorts’), as well as to non-English-root words such as *pantalon* (‘trousers’). Here, the commonly accepted French *jean* is used, despite the specific allowance made for ‘jeans’ in the 1996 amendment to the *Loi Toubon* (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1996: 4259). The preference for *jean* over *jeans* reflects that the former has become the accepted term for denim trousers in European French. This is further supported by its inclusion in the asterisked translation, where ‘my jean’ is presented as *mon jean*. However, in this case the two *jean* are marked by their identical presentation in both the source and translated texts. On the one hand, this achieves a visual likeness which would be less powerful if the English read as ‘jeans’. On the other, it achieves a pun in French, where the homonym *jean* refers both to a garment and a male forename (here linking to *boyfriend* | *mec*). That this happens through an overt manifestation of bilingualism – a foreign phrase ostensibly ‘translated’ through the common asterisk technique (Martin, 2008) – challenges the linguistic hierarchy on the sign. For, although English is often positioned as the primary

text before the asterisk, this example performs the reverse. Considering the notion of ‘bilingual winks’ described by Mettewie, Lamarre, and Van Mensel (2012; see also Lamarre, 2014), which describes the covert use of English features within ostensibly ‘French’ signs, one might identify this as a form of ‘monolingual wink’. In Mettewie and colleagues’ discussions, a multilingual construction is embedded within an otherwise monolingual word, such as the (French) meaning ‘cutie pie’ and the (English) realisation of /ʃu:/ within the shoe shop name *chouchou*. *My jean is my boyfriend!* | *mon jean c’est mon mec!*, however, represents the opposite: an overt translation, signalled by an asterisk, carries a covert preference for the target language over the source language, as the pun is achieved in French only. This means that, as similarly concluded for García Vizcaíno’s (2011: 167) analysis of English in Spanish airline adverts, the humour works locally, despite the presence of ostensible foreign units.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Imagination abounds in the ways in which advertisers mix features together, which may result in both the erasure and emphasis of the boundaries between French and English. The advertisements discussed in this article were drawn from a larger survey of some 16,564 signs conducted across four French cities (Amos, 2017), in which English was recorded across 78 domains as diverse as architecture, dance, horticulture, gambling, sex, and theatre. Advertising *per se* was not a discrete category in the sign taxonomy, and thus it is not possible to draw out more specific quantitative trends for the lexical, phonological, and semantic processes of language mixing described in this article. Such a study would offer a valuable overview of patterns of mixing across different fields, and may shed further light – as has been the focus elsewhere (Bhatia, 1987; Chécari, 1995; Martin, 1998) – on the

motivational factors in feature selection, or the extent to which certain strategies are considered more or less successful in achieving advertisers' aims.

What these examples do show, however, is that while English is described generally as a global *lingua franca* in advertising (House, 2003; Nickerson, 2005; Nickerson & Camiciottoli, 2013; Ruellot, 2011; Tomei, 2017), its use is non-standard and crosses over (Rampton, 1998) into what we think we know as French. This is well demonstrated by the advertisements illustrated here, whose texts combine and overlap features of both English and French simultaneously. This suggests on the one hand that aspects of English are entering French and modifying the way French-users interpret their language; on the other it reveals a process of assimilation, where specific conventions of French apply even to words or phrases which may at first appear bivalent with English. As others have shown (e.g. Martin, 2002), this violation of linguistic norms impacts significantly on the attention-getting potential of the advertisements.

The examples discussed here illustrate that bivalency is able both to erase and highlight perceived boundaries between codes, which makes the interpretation of meaning potentials complex and subject to variation. Pennycook (2017: 269) notes that there are many terms recently suggested in sociolinguistics to capture this form of 'linguaging', along with a proliferation of prefixes (trans-, poly-, metro-, pluri-). Rather than risk the over-generalisation of catch-all terms, however, it is arguably preferable to consider how emergent data can contribute usefully to our understanding of the forms of language already articulated by terms such as simultaneity. Woolard's (1998) 'bivalency' represents one such development in this direction, although phrases such as *duck days* indicate that lexical bivalency may not always be realised semantically. The points of transfer revealed by the adverts discussed here are variously lexical, semantic, morphological, and phonological, which makes for a multimodal 're-tooling' (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004: 543) of English that moves beyond the traditional scope

of studies of multilingualism. These new multi-levelled ‘word-making principles’ (Halliday, 2003) transcend the boundaries of standard languages, even though their components are often drawn from the ‘reservoir’ (Van Elteren, 1996: 69) of linguistic features associated with global English.

While advertising English is routinely described as connotational rather than denotational (Ong et al., 2013; Ruellot, 2011; Seargeant, 2011, 2012; Vettorel, 2013), these examples suggest that French is powerful enough to extend the semantic range of some of its imported terms. The examples indeed attest a contrast between language as it is understood by language policy, and language as it is practised and experienced in the landscape. This is most obvious in the assumption of the *Loi Toubon*, and its enforcers such as *FranceTerme*, that language selection can be defined at the word level. As Piller (2016) points out, this ‘monolingual way of seeing’ does not account for contact points below the lexical level, which is where constructions such as *relooking expert* operate. As such, language mixing in advertising reflects a feature of simultaneity as interpreted by Holquist (1993): namely that the competing notions of segregational language ideology and integrational language practice are visible simultaneously, and that this relationship is reliant on the specific socio-political contextualisation of English and its status in France.

Following Lamarre’s (2014: 137) application of Sommer’s (2004) bilingual aesthetics to the Montréal landscape, the testing of this relationship may indicate a desire to ‘irritate the state’. We might add that the status quo is an additional target, since many individuals’ imagination of language has been shaped by the same state narrative at which advertisers like to poke fun. Such ‘slyness of contestation’ (Lamarre, 2014: 139) is certainly the intended effect of *Duck Me*, whose signage plays with linguistic decorum and propriety as well as with the notional boundaries of the languages themselves. As such, it can be argued that although the *Toubon Law* represents an unrealistic view both of language and language governance, it

also represents an opportunity for many multilingual adverts to stand-out, providing the normative backcloth of bounded French onto which advertisers project an alternative linguistic unboundedness.

If, as *Le Monde* speculated in August 1994, the outcome of legislation such as the *Loi Toubon* is that ‘nobody will be able to say what is French and what is not’ (Grigg, 1997: 374), advertising in the linguistic landscape represents one channel through which to analyse this tension. It is a strength of sociolinguistics that, instead of attempting to force a consensus on the boundaries of named languages under globalised conditions, researchers continue to focus on what people are actually doing with linguistic resources, rather than on defining with any great certainty which ‘language’ is being used at any given time. As Blommaert and Backus (2011), Makoni and Pennycook (2006), and others remind us, languages are best understood as socially constructed phenomena shaped by the repertoires of users, rather than as fixed collections of words and grammars. Such a view may – particularly for those outside language scholarship – require a leap of faith, since, to echo Lamarre’s (2014: 148) words, viewing language mixing in this way asks us to ‘escape from under the weight’ of language norms. Necessarily, and as others have shown (Hornikx et al., 2010; Luna and Peracchio, 2001; Malinowski, 2009; Vingron, Gullifer, Hamill, Leimgruber, and Titone, 2017), further study of the ways normative definitions of bounded languages perpetuate requires some exploration of the interpretations of texts and signs. In this article, language legislation has been used to demonstrate a broad view that persists in France about language boundaries, namely that French and English are separable and that words categorically ‘belong’ to one language rather than the other. In order to explore this further, research into the views of the broader readership is needed. Informal discussions with passers-by and shop employees during the photographing of these signs, for instance, indicated that language mixing continues to be interpreted segregationally. In other words, people tend to understand

multilingualism as one language alongside (rather than within) another, citing symbolic linkages with sophistication, cosmopolitanism, and success that English allegedly brings to French. As one passer-by remarked of the English in *Duck Days*, *c'est pour faire la classe, quoi !* ('it just adds a bit of class!'). Such a view appears to support Etienneble's (1964) famous description of 'franglais', which maintains that, although surrounded by French, English elements used in language mixing remain culturally and emotionally rooted to the Anglo-Saxon world. However, as that part of the world becomes ever more globalised, and features of English and its many varieties diffuse into multilingual media, it would be reductive to describe all instances simply as a worldwide case of language invasion. This is because the appropriation of English features represents as much an enriching of French as an invasion of it. Beyond the attempts of government-backed bodies to manage this process, corpus and data mining tools offer further potential to explore this from the perspective of language users. Google's N-Gram Viewer (<https://books.google.com/ngrams>), for example, indicates that *relooking* has become more common than *brushing* since 2005 across the literature surveyed, which may or may not have an effect on its linguistic interpretation, and therefore on its distribution and impact in the advertising domain.

Whether this means that the limits of French are expanding, or merely that the language is evolving under the influence of others is not solely a linguistic question, however. Following Harris's (1998) integrational argument, Makoni and Pennycook (2006) suggest that languages need to be 'disinvented' before they can be scrutinised for what they truly are (see also Yngve, 2004). This article indicates that such disinvention is not reserved for sociolinguists, but is borne out by authors in the linguistic landscape, who are expanding the repertoires of brands and consumers by blending features of named languages in inventive ways. Advertisements are thus a useful data source for analysing multilingualism not in terms of root languages, but as the result of a creative process that transcends formal

boundaries, throwing light on an important period of evolution for what many continue to describe as ‘French’.

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<sup>i</sup> My thanks go to the anonymous reviewer who drew my attention towards this happy (or unhappy, depending on one’s point of view) coincidence.

<sup>ii</sup> Interestingly, the editors pointed out to me that *Bay Days* can be found to signal sales periods on English signage within the Canadian department store chain *The Bay*. Contrastingly, to the best of my knowledge, UK English has yet to use ‘days’ in this way, and so my interpretation in Toulouse is of a bivalent lexeme that has implications in local French which diverge from standard UK English.

<sup>iii</sup> Image originally photographed in Toulouse in 2015; here reproduced for clarity from <http://ledressingdeleelo.blogspot.com/2013/06/concours-jules-pour-la-fete-des-peres.html>.



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