Daniel Picard

Jackhammers and Alarm Clocks:

Perceptions in Stereo

Commercial bilingualism in Québec has prompted ingenious responses to the convergence of English and French, notably in regards to the grammatical structure and the nomenclature of brand identification. Fueled by politics and economy of message, a duality of perceptions has resulted from the necessity to communicate with both linguistic groups. In this paper, I discuss Canada's two official languages and classify their contact with each other in the world of brand identities. What these languages must accomplish in the business world and the new perceptions that result from the contact between the two languages are also discussed. As the aesthetics of graphic design and linguistic duality merge, I submit my own theory of contact between three elements—the two languages and the participants.

When we wake up to both the rattle of a jackhammer and the jingle of an alarm clock, we experience the merging of two sounds in the consciousness and the complex chain of decisions we make as we perceive them. At the very moment of waking, the mind elicits immediate perception-based responses. The sounds heard at that point in time are first recognized; a familiar image is evoked; a choice is made either to engage or to ignore the image; then interaction with the sounds ensues. The usual action is to turn off the alarm since its purpose has been fulfilled. The sound of the jackhammer continues beyond our control. One could say that the two items heard together are perceived as an *alarm clock in stereo*. This article is not about jackhammers or alarms. Rather, these items are metaphors for two very different languages in that they represent two linguistic codes "ringing" simultaneously. As each item generating the sound serves a different purpose, so too does each language serve its own audience.

The example of an alarm clock in stereo demonstrates three elements of mental activity at work: familiarity, selection and control. When our senses are alerted, we discern which sound is familiar to us. We select the sound to interact with, and we make a decision whether we can influence our senses further by exercising control over what we perceived. The subject of this mental activity could be observed as being the contact between two items, the fixed surface, plane or level upon which they converge, and the person experiencing the convergence. As in sound, the simultaneous "ringing" of two languages has a point and place where the languages come in contact, as well as a reader/viewer.

In written language, as in sound, there is not a great deal of difference in the mental effort involved in perceiving the two kinds of sensory input. The mind does not pause and determine that it must decode a dual message. The example of two sounds waking someone is much like what happens when two languages are seen in a single

context. However, while two languages may appear in direct, physical contact with each other, they are not always grasped entirely or equally well, for one language may be deliberately and repeatedly ignored. For a unilingual person living in a bilingual society, familiarity with and selection of a language are a daily occurrence that arises each time the individual comes in contact with a bilingual package label, sign or company name. When the languages are recognized, the viewer/reader questions his or her command of both languages. A decision is then made to pursue the language selected. For the language mentally rejected, the activity stops at the stage of the linguistic message, for its visual presence does not cease.

Now that language contact has reached a stage of relative maturity in terms of graphic design in Canada and in particular Québec, the country abounds with variations on perceptions strewn across every aspect of daily life. The strengthening or dilution of consumer perceptions in a bilingual context shows that the contact between English and French is an integral part of the identification of brand and company names in Canada.

Canada: A Case Study

In Canada bilingual identification is a long standing tradition and in fact predates the policy of two official languages. The evolution of legislated bilingualism, since the "innocent" beginnings of two convergent languages, has been affected by more than a mere desire to target one language minority or another. At present, the value of communicating a message in both languages has been seized upon by the business community as an indispensible means to relate to potential clients of both cultures.

Finding a bilingual corporate or brand identity, requires a delicate balancing act. It involves how to reach the desired audience; as such, it encompasses politics, geography and culture, as well as considerations of

money, time and memory retention. In Canada, graphic designers live and breathe issues of bilingualism because they work in a two-language environment. For a linguistically lively scene such as Canada and in particular Québec, the principal actors in this drama tend to be federal and provincial language legislation.

A graphic designer working in Québec knows that French appears first and English second on most documents published in that province. In the rest of Canada, the opposite tends to be true. To complicate the issue further, the provincial government of Québec legislates the exclusive use of the French language content in both the public and private sectors. In the private sector, federal legislation is reserved for only information on products concerning health and safety. The federal government primarily reserves language legislation for the public sector. The documents and other print paraphernalia produced in this sector set examples of different formats for the treatment of bilingual visual messages. The internal guidelines produced by CN (Canadian National Railroad), a state run corporation, say that CN's written public statements must be in both English and French in almost all cases, so that the corporation can be seen as a good corporate citizen with respect to federal official languages legislation.[1]

Whatever the intent of language application, the results inevitably come into many forms of contact—ranging from the subconscious to physical contact occurring around us. First, there is contact *between* the two languages interacting with each other. Second, there is contact of the two languages with the surface, plane, level or environment where they will interact. Third, there is the contact between that surface or plane and the person involved. Consequently, there is contact between the different perceptions which the same information elicits. Finally, each of these categories may operate as a direct or indirect version (as will be explained further). This paper will venture to go beyond writing in stereo in brand identity by focus-

ing on contact that is based on connotations evoked imagery and sentiment.

Brands

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is defined as

> *a name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.*[2]

The term *brand* can refer to a company or corporate name, a slogan, the name of a product as it appears on a label, or it can identify a particular service provided by a company. Brand names facilitate identification of a product, a service or an entity—

> *A brand is a simple thing: it is in effect a trademark which, through careful management, skillful promotion and wide use, comes in the minds of consumers, to embrace a particular and appealing set of values and attributes, both tangible and intangible. It is therefore. . . much more than merely a label. To the consumer, it represents a whole host of attributes and a credible guarantee of quality and origin.*[3]

> *The art of successful branding lies in selecting and blending (a tangible and intangible brand mix of values relevant to consumers) so that the result is perceived by consumers to be uniquely attractive and influential on the purchasing decision.*[4]

Great care is taken to study the audiences to whom brands are destined. Before a product is launched or a name or slogan is coined, extensive market research is done. Then the task of image building follows to ensure the brand's influence. Through consistent exposure and

figure 1 **Mr. Clean *in French, English and Swiss applications.***

careful management, the mix of values associated with the brand becomes the foundation of consumer respect for it—a concept known as *brand equity.*

Preserving brand equity in a linguistically divided community like Québec can be achieved not only by language but also by graphic design. Color, form, typography and materials work in conjunction with language elements. In *figure 1,* three *Mr. Clean* bottles are shown, each from a different country—the United States, Switzerland and Canada. Reflecting each country's different language practices, each label receives its own particular visual treatment. Owned by the same company, Proctor and Gamble, the same product appears in very different linguistic and political environments, yet manages to convey the same message regardless of the linguistic situation of the country involved. In the United States, *Mr. Clean* is just *Mr. Clean,* in Switzerland the same product is called *Meister Proper* and in Canada it is a combination of *Mr. Clean* and *Monsieur Net.* All the languages transmit the intent of the product to the consumer. Regardless of the typographic difference in each country's version, the basic design carries the brand across language barriers by using

the combination of a bald-headed man supported by a circular element, a sparkle, similar proportions of red, yellow and green, as well as the bottle shape. All these remain constant while the languages change. Thus, due to the different linguistic situations it is important to have constant support elements to elicit and retain brand equity. How does this relate to bilingualism? Operating with publics in separate countries, the design in the above example reveals that the label used in Canada is the only one that has two languages in direct contact. Yet, when one compares all three labels, one can see that elements on another level are in contact. After seeing the similarities between bottles, it is clear that due to language difference, one's perception of a brand has come into contact with that of other brands.

Hypothetically, if Americans unable to understand German shopped in Switzerland for a cleaning product, their perception of the aforementioned elements would allow them to select and purchase the old familiar brand. Recognition of color and icon is easy because these have not perceptually changed—only the language has changed. Therefore, we are dealing with a larger principle of languages in indirect contact. The American and Swiss brands are such examples. They are in contact on the level of perception. On the other hand, the Canadian label alone involves the representation of two languages in direct contact because convergence occurs in the same visual image. Within Canada, a multitude of combinations such as these is part and parcel of everyday life. They cannot be avoided; Quebeckers and Canadians do not literally read bilingualism in graphic design—they experience it directly as communicated by bilingual formats. Bilingualism is everywhere in the environment and is a part of the daily experiences of consumers interacting with the information which surrounds them.

In this case, two concepts support *perceptions in stereo*. As Humboldt explains, true thinking consists of

separating and combining language elements. He states that language gives form to mental activity by enabling man to articulate through the sound form of language (i.e., vocalized words in one's mind) sensory inputs into manipulable concepts. According to Humboldt,

And only in this way can the passive reception of experience be fused with the subjective phenomenon of "inner mental activity." Consequently, how we make sense of our experiences and view the world around us is dependent upon the articulated structure that our language makes available to us. Language is the medium by which man synthesizes objective experiences with subjective mentality.[5]

Humboldt concludes by saying that language enables us to understand our experiences. Is not understanding the foundation of formed perception and perception the result of analysis? In this case, when two languages do converge on a level, the participant is experiencing two forms of sensory input, which eventually results in contact between two perceptions. The second concept is

the way that a people analyze their experiences, construct concepts and combine concepts in the formation of thought is a reflection of and is itself determined by (albeit indirectly) their national/racial "character." Thus, mental individuality of a nation determines the sort of language it has, and that language consequently fashions the way its peoples "think, perceive and understand reality."[6]

The two founding European nations of Canada were the French and English. Propagated by language, the two resulting mentalities from each group provide fertile ground for perceptions in stereo.

Another pivotal concept is that of *information retrieval.* Contact between two languages or perceptions need not be done directly, as on the same surface. It can occur on the level of compared perceptions by calling

upon a remembered experience and combining this with an experience actually taking place. Indirectly, these perceptions are in contact in the physical world; directly, they are in contact in the mental world through evoked memory. Where understanding takes place, a new way of thinking accompanies a new language—thoughts come into contact and create thinking in stereo.

Nomenclature

In commerce, nomenclature is a valuable tool used to harness, evoke, connote or elicit perceptions. The intent of giving a brand name in business is to create a relationship between a name and an audience so that a set of distinct perceptions is attributed to the name. The objective is that this name represent certain attributes and, as a result, cause a shift in mental disposition to *identify* a specific product or service. The paramount function of an identity is to *differentiate* one product or service from another, thereby allowing a consumer to recommend, specify or reject a brand. Identification is the hallmark for recognition and recognition is the foundation of the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

There are many kinds of brand names. Some appear simply as a family name, as in *Heinz*. Others are descriptive such as *Nutrasweet*. Still others are metonymic in nature like *Via*, Canada's federally-run national passenger railroad, which has associations with travel. Some names such as *Esso* and *Kodak* are free standing and call little attention to their language of origin or the specific culture that produced them. What goes into the creation of a brand name? Every conceivable linguistic and literary association or structure is a part of the brand-making process. Compound words, onomatopoeia, homonyms, acronyms, initials, abbreviation, agglutinations and etymologies are all active contributors. Phonetics can be used to obscure the politics of language usage while maintaining the same

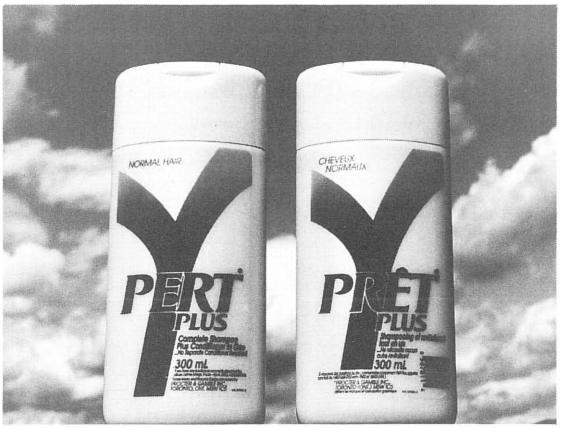


figure 2 **Pert *in English and French applications are examples of* coadjuvant *bilingual contact.***

perception in both languages. A product with a spelling such as *Magik* works as a clever alternative to the orthographic norms of *magique* or *magic*. Spelled thus, a brand successfully avoids audience alienation. Reconstructed versions of Latin names are also very popular.

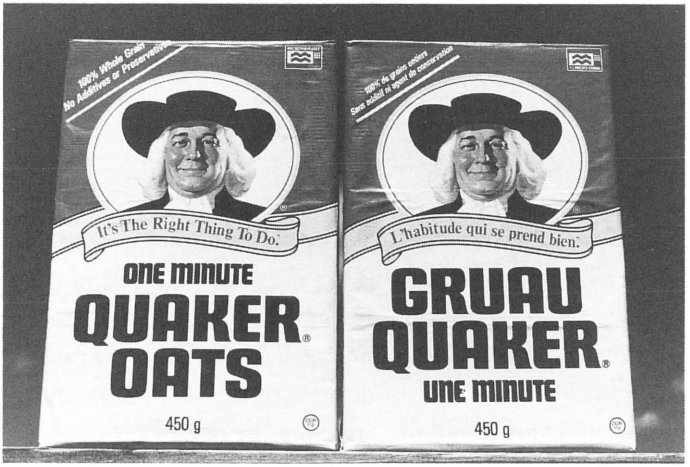
In terms of examining a corporate name, there are two halves—the generic part and the specific part. The generic portion distinguishes the nature of the brand from commercial designations such as service type, activity or product type. The generic is usually the qualifier of the specific. The specific is usually the distinguishing element in the name, such as proper names, toponyms, evocative names, letter combinations, acronyms or fanciful expressions.

As evidenced by the graphic treatment of a product label, such as *Pert* (*figure 2*), it would be unrealistic to believe that all brands are identified by only a specific. The graphic design can totally obscure the predominance of the specific by visually treating the typography of both names with equality. In the case of *Ivory Snow* detergent (*figure 3*) called *Ivory Neige* in French, *Ivory* remains the same in both languages whereas in French, it could have

become "*Ivoire.*" The syntax follows the English model and the generic name is the only word that shifts to the other language. Yet, typographically, both names are treated the same in an attempt to obscure and equalize an incorrect translation and non-French syntax. This kind of graphic design betrays purely linguistic considerations and norms.

In the case of *Quaker Oats* (*figure 4*), the French version actually respects French usage and syntax. The

Ivory Snow ***in the French application*** *figure 3*



Quaker Oats ***in the English and French applications.*** *figure 4*

typography impeccably conforms to a strong graphic system—thereby avoiding the extra mental activity required to decode poor grammar.

In name generation, certain rules of thumb are dictated by commercial needs. These criteria have to be taken into account if a well considered name is to be found. (If there is more than one language, each of these criteria should still apply.) Inevitably, branding in two languages promotes contact between the same naming considerations for each language involved. As a result, much consideration is given to creating a name that will transcend thinking in stereo by being phonetically and grammatically uncumbersome in both languages. More often than not, two separate names must co-exist in order to best communicate the desired intent to both linguistic groups.

In the case of *Pert* shampoo (*figure 2*), the product is labeled with a different brand name on each side of the bottle. In English it is designated *Pert* and in French it is called *Prêt*. Since the two names are not in contact on the same side of the bottle, consumers must turn the bottle around to see the brand name in the preferred language. This action leads to indirect contact between the two languages. The unique element of shelf display dynamics is also a factor in promoting duality at the point of purchase. Sometimes, the product sides alternate in the shelf display from French to English to French in an undulating visual pulse.

At the heart of this duality are names that evoke the salable characteristics of the shampoo in each tongue. Previously coined for an English market long before it faced any international challenge, *Pert* visually and phonetically elicits images of perky, wash-and-go, bright and quick by the very nature of its brevity, and its similarity with perk. On the other hand, when the English brand is examined from the point of view of a francophone mind, *Pert* looks much like the French *perte* (loss). Obviously, the possible connotation of hair loss is a catalyst for

creating a new name in French. Much to the brand's favor, *Prêt* is a slightly scrambled version of the exact same letters that carve out mentally the same visual shapes as the English version. As an added plus, *Prêt* in French signifies "ready," which is similar to the the English meaning.

It can be said that nomenclature is based on the nuance of both cultures' perceptions, definition, understanding and language parameters. Name generation is a collection of invisible and subconscious nuances that bridge a gap to a visual/print communication world—labeling the invisible with form, typographic style, scale, color, etc., in expressing those very nuances. This collection can be called the *meta-label.*

Seeing Double

A consumer *sees* a label and *perceives* the meta-label. A purchasing decision is customarily based upon recognition of one name. The thought processes involved in recognizing that name are relatively simple and rapid. They bring about a decision made by saying "*yes, I recognize*" or "*no, I do not recognize.*" On the level of the meta-label where this mental activity is occurring, the process of recognition is clouded by additional mental activity if two languages are involved: "*. . . yes, I recognize this is English. . . continue. . . but reject the French because I can't read it as well. . .*" Another thought of an Anglophone could be "*. . . oh, here is the French equivalent of this English brand, interesting how it was treated . . . where is the rest of the English information?*" A bilingual individual might think "*. . . oh, interesting comparison between these two names. . . they called it something different in each language. . . I know what this English version means in French and it doesn't mean the same in their French version. . . why is that?. . .*" In the case of identifying a corporate name in another province, where the participant's preferred language is no longer seen in

the same version as the one associated with the original perceptions, it is generally acknowledged that this identity is for *them* and not *me*—"them" clearly signifying the other culture. As a result, a new element of intrinsic alienation is introduced to the mental activity.

Mental activity progresses from the original yes-no decision to take the form of comparison, and may lead to rejection of one half of the product's linguistic identity. Questions may even arise about perceived inequalities and discrimination. This tendency toward split recognition may encumber what should be a rapid decision. To articulate these thoughts may sound exaggerated, yet to the inexperienced purchaser in a bilingual setting, these thoughts do occur. To the citizen who lives in a dual language environment, they tend to be more subdued or almost nonexistent.

However, in the world of perception, we know that subconscious thoughts are of paramount importance to connotation; in fact they are more important than blatant expressions since the mental activity involves associations. An overt expression involves little mental activity and thus affords little possibility for extended decoding. In advertising, much is done to disguise pressure to purchase by inducing complex pleasure-based mental activities that will increase the length of the attention span.

The question arises: Should there be two logos for two culturally diverse audiences, or one logo for one common brand identity? Should a brand project a split personality from one common source? Though it can be argued that bilingual identities add a new dimension and an element of intrigue in brand-naming, splitting an identity is generally counterproductive, for it is divisive. There is a fine line between communicating the bilingual message and impeding communication. Because the two languages share the same writing system and alphabet, the visible differences, at first glance at least, may appear greatly reduced. However, when combined inside "eye catching

sunbursts" on products which double the original intention of a single message, e.g., "new" to "new/*nouveau*" the effectiveness of the message has been reduced by nature of its stereophonic presentation. Effort now becomes an issue when languages are in direct contact, side-by-side. How do marketers capture two publics without offending them? As in the *Pert* example, one way is to display the different languages on opposite sides of the products' packaging.

There are no clear-cut answers to this dilemma of duality. Much is driven by market research and focus groups, ostensible cross-sections of the consumer population. To amplify the scenario, the federal government promotes "equal prominence"[7] of both languages in many categories that affect federal branding, regulation of print media and signage—an example which marketers seem to interprete widely. However, there is no legal restriction in Québec or in the rest of Canada that forces one to bilingualize a brand name. Still, equal prominence carries with it a margin of interpretation that is driven by fear of public rejection. This is the apparent motor of market researchers. As a consequence, the interpretation of equal prominence, though not mandatory, extends to brand names themselves.

In addressing a potential audience, a brand name need not be linguistically responsible, and it certainly does not have to describe everything about the product. Nor does it have to be bilingual to sell to both publics. Many products are sold in Québec that have only English brand names. With the power of market research to determine nomenclature, a false sense of security is created in rallying two publics around two uniquely tailored brand names. In attempting to capture a sense of belonging, to what extent will bilingual brand names succeed in rallying consumer loyalty instead of competing for equal attention from different publics? In advertising, impact and repetition are principles for success, but to what extent do they

figure 5

Tilex *in a bilingual English and French application is an example of* independent *naming*

become a twisted redundancy that negates the impact of a brand name? In the example of *Tilex/Tuilex* (*figure 5*), the meta-label is in direct confrontation with itself since both names are in close physical proximity with each other on the same side of the bottle. The only difference between the two languages is that a "u" was integrated for the French-speaking public. Stroke of linguistic genius? Perhaps, but less praise for the visual treatment of this genius.

The Market

People in Canada and Québec know they have a fundamental right to be served in either language when it comes to government services. New American movies coming to Québec are dubbed into French from the original English version before they are released simultaneously to theaters. The element of "the other language" is always there, to the point that it has created an *Echo Culture* where duality of language is so deeply engrained in all its forms that

people have come to expect and accept duality. Language and politics have a very close relationship in Québec. Due to the fact that it is culturally isolated within a larger English North American continent, it is a very protectionist province and extremely concerned with its linguistic longevity.

Nomenclature in Contact

In order to analyze the bilingual milieu that surrounds the consumer, one can set up specific categories to classify the different forms of contact occurring between the two languages. For example, in bilingual brand names, two major groups of these categories surface.[8]

In the first group, there is a lively collection of name types that seek to address the two linguistic audiences. Termed the *naming system* or nomenclature (*table 1*) this first group includes exclusive naming considerations destined for usage in two languages. The second group involves the *dissemination of the naming system* (*table 2*). This group is concerned with the type of contact resulting from the form of visual presentation.[9] Also, a *support information* group exists in brand identity, responsible for the propagation of the identity in the various media.[10]

Contact between two languages occurs in the actual words of the naming system. This explains why there is some overlapping of categories (*tables 1* and *2*). This overlap is determined by the point at which the two languages come into contact. At times, the name bears the full weight of linguistic duality. When it does so, it is disseminated to an audience that already has two inherent perceptions in contact embodied in the name. In the second group, linguistic duality is shifted to the visual dissemination of the name(s).

In explaining the *naming system,* one must consider the brand name as the primary identifier of the item in question. Depending on how the brand name is treated,

Table 1

Naming System for Bilingual Usage

Class	Name Example	What it is	Characterization
fixed	Joy	Detergent	A brand name consisting of either a pronoun, or a unilingual word not intended to be altered when used in the context of another language
independent	Post-it note/ Notocollant Tilex/Tuilex	Notepad Cleanser	Names coined independently in each language inventively translate the intent of the same product, name, business or service
obscured	Canadi>n Magik STCUM	Airline Cleanser Transit co.	Words deliberately and cleverly obscured to render interpretable in either language and to accommodate two publics
integral	CrownLife/CrownVie Mister Donut/ Monsieur Donut	Insurance co. Donut shop	Both languages are integrated as one word or name by combining translations of parts of the name
translated	Public Works Canada/ Travaux publics Canada	Government department	Names or phrases literally translated from one language to another in their respective grammatical systems and having little inventiveness
transparent	Air Canada	Airline	Words that do not apparently prefer English or French, but are spelled exactly the same and are phonetically acceptable in both languages
trace	Purolator courier/ Purolator courrier Metropolitain Life/ La Métropolitaine	Courier service Insurance co.	A name carrying a strong visible trace of the other language by being slightly modified in spelling and conforms to a strong graphic system

Source: © Daniel Picard, Majuscule Design 1992

Table 2

Type of Bilingual Contact Resulting from Presenting the Naming System

Class	Name Example	What it is	Characterization
phyllotactic	Gare Windsor Station	Train station sign	Two languages simultaneously attached by mutually sharing and stemming from one common noun, pronoun root or free morpheme
shadow	Post-it note/ Notocollant Public Works Canada/ Travaux publics Canada	Notepad Government department	A translation represented visually, conceptually and linguistically, and placed in the immediate vicinity of the first language read
obscured	Canadi>n Magik STCUM CIBC	Airline Cleanser Transit co. Bank	Words deliberately and cleverly obscured to render interpretable in either language and accommodate two publics
integral	CrownLife/CrownVie Mister Donut/ Monsieur Donut	Insurance co. Donut shop	Both languages are integrated as one word or name by combining translations of parts of the name
transparent	Air Canada	Airline	Words that do not apparently prefer English or French, but are spelled exactly the same and are phonetically acceptable in both languages
coadjuvant	Pert/Prêt Lakeshore Rd./ Bord du lac	Shampoo Road sign	Contact takes place only with the aid of the participant's intervention by mentally joining two physical surfaces or environments
autonomous	Shoppe's Drug Mart/Pharmaprix; Answering your call/ des gens de parole	Drugstore Chain Tagline clause	Language contact based on information retrieval through memory recall or association and supported by a common graphic system

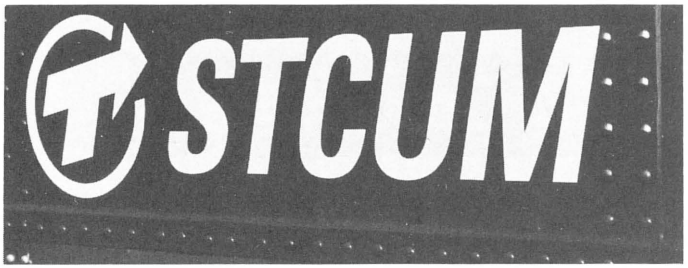
Source: © Daniel Picard, Majuscule Design 1992

figure 6 ***The* Canadi>n *logotype is an example of* obscured *bilingual contact***

one can distinguish seven categories or ways of identifying an item for two linguistic publics. The first category is that of *fixed* names (*table 1*). The detergent *Joy* (not illustrated) exemplifies this category since the name itself remains unchanged on a label that otherwise makes use of both languages. The brand name is fixed, rather than being translated to "*Joie,*" thereby avoiding equal representation of a value already so strongly conveyed in English.

The second category is that of *independent* names. These are names coined independently in each language and inventively translate the intent of the same product, name, business or service. For example, the *Post-it* note brand (not illustrated) is called *Notocollant* in French. Notocollant is coined from two words that evoke the same intent of its linguistic counterpart. *Note* combined with *collant* evokes "notesticker" for a francophone public. Further, with the exception of the preceding "n" sound, *Notocollant* sounds like *autocollant,* which means self-adhesive.

Third, there is the *obscured* name. These names are a combination of a variety of treatments that are deliberately and cleverly obscured in order to make them understandable in either language. Whichever element in a name distinguishes the two languages is the object of an intentional "erasure." This can occur in many forms. For the brand *Canadi>n* (Canadian Airlines, *figure 6*), a letter is omitted and replaced with a graphic. (Canadian is spelled



The* STCUM *logotype is an example of* obscured *naming *figure 7*

Canadien in French.) Drawing upon the gestalt principle of closure, the graphic replaces and obscures the distinguishing vowel that would signify either language, thereby succeeding in being legible in either language without showing a preference for one linguistic group over the other. In the brand name *Magik,* the morpheme "*magi*" remains intact. The English "*c*" and the French "*que*" are discarded and replaced with a "*k*" that speaks inoffensively to both cultures. For the transit company, *Societé de transport de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal,* an acronym was chosen in an attempt to economize space. Branded *STCUM* (*figure 7*), single letters can be read individually, pronounced in French and English, and at first glance, draw no inference to a particular meaning behind each separate letter.

The fourth category is that of the *integral* name. This is a tricky class that, at times, demands more linguistic license. For example, in the name *Crown Life Insurance Company,* both languages are integrated into one word. By combining translations from parts of the name of the English model, *CrownLife* (*see figure 8*), the French version becomes *CrownVie* (*see figure 9*). This is one of the more aggressive forms of visual code-switching[11] neatly compressed into one word. The name could perhaps have been called "*CouronneVie,*" representing a hypothetical translation of *La Compagnie d'assurance-vie de la Couronne.* Whether they originate from head offices

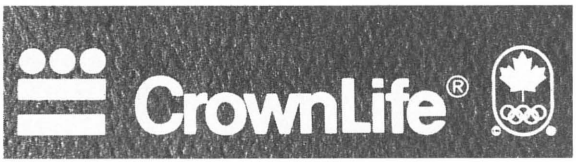


figure 8 ***The* CrownLife *logotype is an example of both* integral *naming and bilingual contact***

figure 9 ***The* CrownVie *logotype is an example of* integral *naming and bilingual contact***

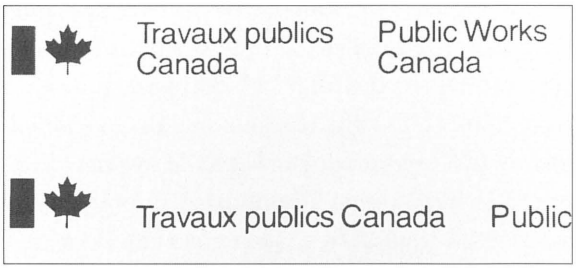


figure 10 ***This official bilingual Canadian document is an example of* translated *naming and* shadow *bilingual contact***

in the United States or from Canadian institutions, many brands have had a long history of consumer recognition in English before it was decided to address a French-speaking audience. For insurance companies, there is a deeply engrained tradition of popularizing names by abbreviating them to X Life or The X. *MetLife, The Prudential, The New England* and *CrownLife* are all now synonymous with an insurance company name. This specifically English-language tradition has no ready equivalent in French grammar. For *CrownVie,* it is not the complete name that was translated, but rather, the English linguistic

tradition. If you are a unilingual anglophone, it could prove difficult to pronounce *Crown Vie*. The same goes for the brand *Monsieur Donut* for *Mister Donut* (not illustrated).

The fifth category is that of the *translated* name. Such names are popular with the Canadian government in its interpretation of equal prominence. Translated names are probably the least creative, but depending on how they are disseminated, they can prove to be very effective. An example of this would be the department of *Public Works Canada* (in French called *Travaux publics Canada, figure 10*).

The next category is that of *transparent* names. These words or names have no visible trace of or preference for either language, since they are spelled the same and are phonetically acceptable in both languages, for example *Air Canada* (not illustrated). For both cultures, the issue of language sensitivity is reflected in the corporate name, by appearing linguistically neutral.

The final category is that of *trace* identities. These are names carrying a strong visible trace of the other language due to a slight modification of spelling while still conforming to a strong graphic system. As demonstrated by the courier service *Purolator Courier* (*figures 11* and *12*), we see there is a minimum change in the visual appearance of the identity in both languages. *Courier,* in English is spelled *courrier,* as is done in proper French. Any inclination to preserve French syntax and identify the name as "*Courrier Purolator*" has been overridden for the sake of brand uniformity. The modification is carried by a strong graphic system. In trace identities, it is possible to be totally illiterate in one of the two languages, and still easily recognize a brand name in the language with which one is not familiar. This is particularly helpful for unilingual travelers. For *Metropolitain Life* (not illustrated), which becomes *La Métropolitaine,* the strong presence of the graphic system combined with the sheer volume of the

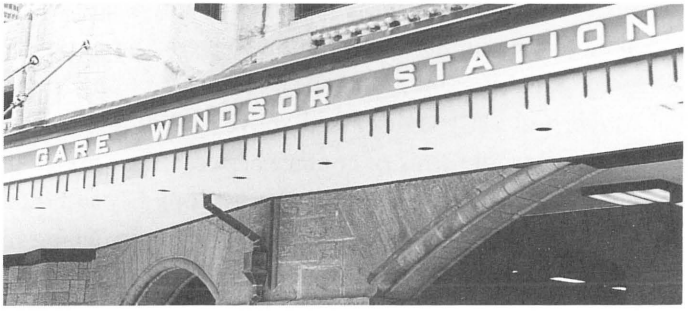
figure 11 **Purolator Courrier, *the French application, is an example of* trace *naming***

figure 12 **Purolator Courier, *the English application***

name, dwarfs any altered elements in the brand name and does not detract from a uniform perception of the brand.

As mentioned earlier, the second group of categories concerns the *dissemination of the naming system* (*table 2*). The focus of this group is on how two perceptions are made to converge through the display of the seven different name types and how the participant is engaged by that information. It is in this group that two languages, represented by brand nomenclature, come into a state of direct contact with each other, which may cause recognition anxiety[12] and a chain of other events associated with perceptions in stereo. In this group, all seven new categories graphically display in various combinations the seven categories of the first group.

Windsor Station (*figure 13*), a commuter railway terminal in Montréal, displays a sign that illustrates the first type of contact. This is the *phyllotactic* category,



The* Gare Wndsor Station *signage is an example of* phyllotactic *bilingual contact *figure 13*

named for its disposition of three elements, as in a biological model.[13] In this case, the message becomes *Gare Windsor Station*. The two languages are simultaneously attached on opposing sides of the specific part of a name and are as interdependent as leaves on a stem growing from the same center. There is an inherent characteristic that French and English modifiers can revolve around a fixed name, given that both languages have diametrically opposed syntaxes. Phyllotactic contact is frequently used in short messages to increase the impact to a wider public in a brief time frame. The design can be larger and still address two audiences without repeating the message.

In the next category, the same brand name repeated once exemplifies names in *shadow* contact. In this class, a translation is represented visually, conceptually and linguistically equal to the brand name. Usually, it appears within close proximity to the brand name. *Translated, independent* or *trace* names can all be actively presented to a participant in this way. *Figure 10* is a perfect example of the government's visual presentation of its organizations. In the case of *Post-it* note branding, *independent* names appear together on the same surface but as a shadow of the other name by mimicking all of its visual characteristics.

Third, the *obscured* class is not only a nomenclature issue of the naming system but also a contact issue in terms of its visual presentation. The examples of *Canadi>n, Magik* and *STCUM* discussed above cannot be dismissed as eliminating all forms of contact between the two languages. To understand this, we must look beyond our normal understanding of contact between two languages. In this category, names come into contact only in a participant's perceptions. This is indirect contact. Due to the fact that these names are linguistically neutral, the contact between the two languages is not apparent visually. But few brand names are just seen since other sensory input takes place in recognizing a brand. For example, a brand name is frequently heard on the radio or on television. Given the strong linguistic presence of both cultures, a Canadian cannot avoid hearing names in the other language when passing through a province where it is spoken. When scanning the radio dial or channel-hopping, unilinguals will hear a brand pronounced during a commercial in a language other than their mother tongue; they may even see the logo in that version. There is a constant awareness of the other language because it is geographically, sociologically, culturally and politically available to all citizens whether they are unilingual or bilingual. Obscurity only serves the visual sense in this category, and it does so well. Yet it does not obscure aural perceptions. Nor does obscurity standardize perception when an acronym based on one language, such as *STCUM* is discussed on an English newscast and is referred to as the *MUCTC* (Montreal Urban Community Transit Corporation). Since perception is inherently linked with identity, we can say that in the multi-media application of brand identity, if we examine all sensory input involved in identification, perceptions are inevitably in stereo.

The next category, which could be called *integral,* as it appears in the naming system, is, by default, the most overt form of contact. It takes the form of both direct and

indirect contact. Not only do the two languages converge in the name itself, but they converge on the perceptual level—as a result of the dissemination as two names with minor spelling variations. Like the last category, associations with each language version of the brand names converge perceptually. *CrownVie* and *CrownLife* demonstrate this form of contact (*figures 8* and *9*).

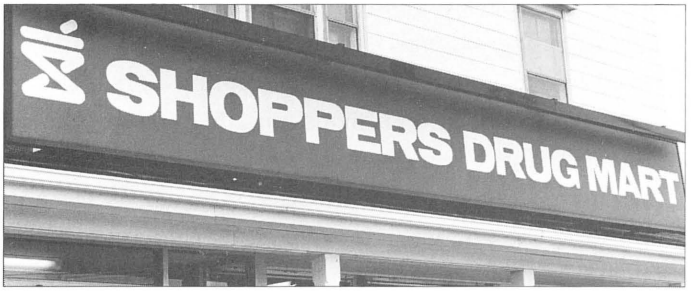
Another category originating from the naming system is the *transparent* class. With a name like *Air Canada,* linguistic neutrality does not totally escape perceptions in stereo. Like the obscured class, it is subject to aural input and as a result places the brand name in indirect contact. Even though the two languages are invisible to the participant, both were clearly considered in the coining of the name in order to accommodate the two linguistic groups. The result is a clever solution with two languages in transparent contact with each other.

The sixth type of contact could not occur without the primary role of a participant. In the *coadjuvant* category, contact between the two languages occurs only through the participant's intervention. Two material surfaces or environments are mentally joined on the level of perception. *Independent, integral, translated* and *trace* identities are all represented by this category. Here contact is to be understood on an abstract level. There are two languages with a participant between them. The participant assists in the bringing together of both languages by either physical intervention or by uniting two languages that may surround him or her. For example, the *Pert* shampoo bottle is labeled in French on one side and in English on the other. An Anglophone may pick up the French side bearing *Prêt,* but unable to read it, turns it around to the *Pert* side. This physical act of turning around the bottle is the way in which the participant joins together two word identities. Another example of coadjuvant contact is bilingualism physically surrounding the participant. This may occur in the form of separate unilin-

gual signs with *translated* or *independent* names within the visual range of the participant. It is clear, however, that within that visual range, both of the signs are in contact linguistically despite their physical separation and their different information. For example, in Pointe-Claire, a suburb of Montréal, there is a road sign displaying *Lakeshore Road* in English. As one drives past each street corner on this road, the name alternates repeatedly from *Lakeshore Road* to *Bord du lac*. To a non-native traveler, this must cause anxiety. If we were to call this traveler a participant, the continuous trajectory along the road forms the platform upon which the two word identities are joined.

The final example of contact also occurs indirectly. This can be defined as *autonomous* contact, since it is based on information retrieval through memory recall or association. Autonomous brand names are supported by a common graphic system and employ *independent, integral, translated* and *trace* names. The difference between this class and coadjuvant contact is that instead of assisting in joining the awareness of two languages, the participant may not even be aware there is another brand name that exists elsewhere in another language. Brands do exist autonomously in different geographic regions where demographics and language regulations make it necessary to have separate brand identities. Only at the moment of awareness of the other autonomous brand name do perceptions indirectly come into contact. Jean-Paul Sartre, in discussing the concept of the image, quotes Bergson in his book ***Matter and Memory.*** "An image can exist without being seen; it can be present without being represented."[14] Speaking of association, Sartre continues to cite Bergson,

> "*perceiving is remembering*". . . *in interpreting perception not in a pure sense but as representation in the present, one must admit two things, of which the first is: where the* ***image*** *does not carry with it the mark of its past*



The* Shopper's Drug Mart *signage is an example of* autonomous *bilingual contact *figure 14*

The* Pharmaprix *signage is an example of* autonomous *bilingual contact *figure 15*

---

origin and reveals itself as of the present—or ***perception*** *reveals itself essentially as an image derived from the past . . . we see between the image-memory—fragment of the past incarnated in a mobile chart of the present, and perception, mobile chart of the present where is incarnated a past memory. . .*[15]

Thus, the platform where the two brand names converge occurs in the mind through information retrieval. A brand must already be known in one language before it can come into contact through association with its other version. Take for example a *Shoppers Drug Mart* (*figure 14*) sign on Prince Edward Island, where all of the stores are branded in the same language. A citizen of the island may travel to Québec and find that *Pharmaprix* (*figure 15*), the

French name, elicits a hint of familiarity because of the similar graphic systems. Through association with the visual system, contact between perceptions is made. Perhaps no association is made initially by those who are less observant. Yet at the moment they become aware of the difference, contact has occurred. The names are in fact very different, and when translated, they do not match. Québec could have chosen to call "*Pharmaprix—Pharmacie Shopper's,*" which would have been an integral name that could have preserved brand equity on a national basis. As is, the identities are divided, and much effort would be needed to draw an association due to the diversity of names. However, as independent names do, they are coined to translate intent—so *Pharmaprix* means "Pharmacy price."

Autonomous contact is not limited to brand names alone, but also includes corporate slogans. Appearing in separate print media, the bilingual corporate slogan is also a brand. The intent is translated not word for word but creatively, so as to adhere strictly to graphic standards—as in the Bell Canada example, *Answering your call,* (not illustrated) where in French, the meaning translates as "people of their word." Notice that the pun is lost on "call," a valuable verbal asset for a telephone company slogan. *Answering your call* is a statement evoking an active and reliable posture, whereas *Des gens de parole* evokes a third party sense of reliability. Given that slogans must be brief and provoke the most impact from a few carefully selected words, it is difficult to translate word for word and maintain the same number of words in two very different grammatical systems like French and English. In this case, a sacrifice is made in semantics in order to adhere to the system. A bilingual person may understand the puns of both language versions. In which case, we could say that a bilingual person may act as an excellent platform for uniting two perceptions that come into contact with each other.

The* CIBC *English signage is an example of* obscured *bilingual contact *figure 16*

The* CIBC *French signage *figure 17*

Implications

In speaking of the forces that shape brand duality, we must not overlook *recognition* as the catalyst that first initiates the perception. As Umberto Eco explains,

> *A recognition process occurs when an object or given event that is produced naturally or through human intervention (intentionally or unintentionally), is interpreted fact by fact by a recipient as the expression of a given content, whether through a correlation with a foreseen code or a correlation established directly by the recipient.*[16]

Since the two languages discussed here are expressions in themselves, the contact of these expressions is certain to confuse recognition if explicit duality is promoted. Yet other forces are intrinsic to a bilingual Canada. Complex political legislation does in fact have much to do with

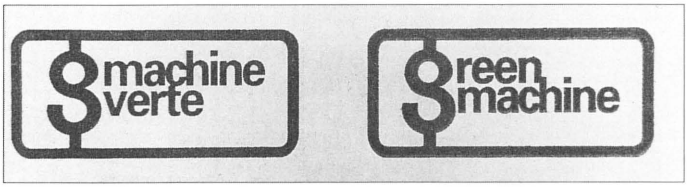
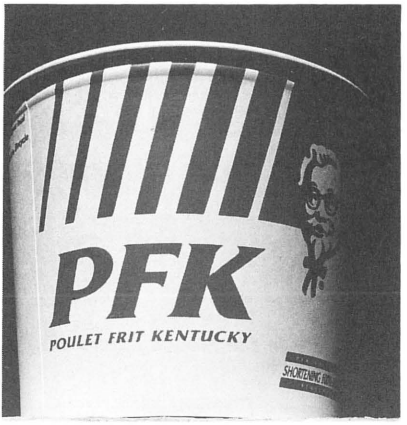


figure 18 ***A comparison of the French and English logotypes for an ATM***

propagating the duality of brands. Poor translation or the translation of another language's own private characteristics often leaves the second brand name with something to be desired. A tendency to standardize the graphic design of brand names has resulted from globalization of products and services, sometimes at the cost of linguistic accuracy. Ignorance of legislation over the display of language and incomplete linguistic analyses are also contributors to the array of perceptions in stereo. Finally, since we are speaking of the business world, brands converge on the same surface to save money. Having two publics to target costs twice as much.

Taking into account these forces, a successful example of duality could be the *CIBC Banking Centre* (*figures 16* and *17*), which becomes *Centre bancaire CIBC*. Despite the autonomous display of signs in either Ontario or Québec, we find that *CIBC* (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) could have become "*BCIC*" (*Banque canadienne Imperiale du commerce*) in Québec. However, the use of an acronym is much more effective in retaining total brand equity in the identity. The same could be said to a lesser extent of the Canadian television network *CBC* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, not illustrated). In Québec, the acronym becomes *SRC* (Société Radio Canada). If it were not for the graphic system, these two identities would be totally unacceptable. Brand equity in the full names originally composing each separate acronym severely restricts a radical departure from each name—in the hope of making the overall corporate identi-



PFK *is the French application for Kentucky Fried Chicken* *figure 19*

ty uniform for the two distinct audiences. Much is asked of a reader unfamiliar with acronyms like *SRC*. They should be used with caution. Jacques Barzun states,

> *For practical purposes in our cluttered organizational life, when we want to refer to institutions, causes, business and political groups, it is always possible to do without initials or acronyms.*[17]

Going beyond the list of acronyms that are common knowledge including those of one's hobby or profession, is, he states, "an unwarranted assault on the powers of memory and association, a civil wrong against the willing, attentive reader."[18]

Some translations are atrociously bad. In *figure 18,* the Toronto Dominion Bank elects to use a rather vernacular brand name for its automatic teller. Coined *green machine,* and spelled with a deformed dollar sign that has undergone a complete graphic metamorphosis, the French version is called *machine verte.* No Francophone who respects his or her language could excuse such a literal translation. Once again, a tradition or trait from English was translated, rather than the intent. However, the orga-

figure 20 **Télésat *in the French application***

nization's French-only out-of-bank machines seem to fare better in principle by using *guichet express*—incorporating the hybrid symbol g/$ (not illustrated).

Probably the worst case of flagrant disregard of the French language community is that of Kentucky Fried Chicken's solution (*figure 19*). *KFC,* the acronym based on the English name, has the right to be so named. *PFK* (*Poulet Frit Kentucky*) is one of the latest victims of global marketing. The French language has its own traditions and vernacular word treatments, which this company completely disregards. It is common knowledge in Québec that the original vernacular abbreviation for Kentucky Fried Chicken is *du Kentucky.* Such as, "*ce soir, je vais aller chercher du Kentucky.*" (Meaning, "tonight, I'm going to get some KFC.") The emotional distance that has been imposed by a rather insensitive approach to this brand could not be measured by any focus group study. Yet, the distance is certainly perceived despite the guise of graphic uniformity. Moreover, a small sampling of francophones revealed that the brand evokes images of John F. Kennedy.

Figure 20 reveals the compromise that a graphic designer has made in attempting to make a brand name transparent. *Telesat* integrates the acute accents in the letterforms as if they were too overtly French, so that the brand may be used as is in English. Yet another telecom-

munications company, *Teleglobe,* has chosen capital letters, a solution that is acceptable to some linguists, in an attempt to make the brand identity transparent.

Faithful translations also contribute to perceptual duality. *First City Trust* (not illustrated) is branded *Trust First City* in French. There is not a hint of French in this name, yet the syntax is impeccable for a French brand name. For at least one of its audiences, this is probably one of the few circumstances in which a company is the beneficiary of a slogan built into its name!

The vast application of two languages in contact, especially in the private sector, has saturated visual communication and consumer perception in Canada. The resulting decoding effort is a complex interwoven chain of decisions aided by the associative abilities of a participant. We have seen that bilingual contact in brand identity also occurs through a sort of cross-referencing of the "other version" of a brand name.

The motive of language in a commercial context will always be to seduce and inform. Shaped by the extraneous forces that surround this motive, the duality of identities can be refined with the proper effort. In the management of perception, code-switching, defined as ". . . a way of maintaining access to both networks without having to take on the responsibilities associated with full membership in one or the other. . .,"[19] can be used to project strategic ambiguity on a commercial or political level. As has been described here, brand identification is a glorified version of code switching on a grand scale. As a result, perceptions tend to merge incidentally. A traveler's perception of a brand's variants in Ontario or Québec is no different than a hand held bottle with two nomenclatures.

To reduce dual perceptions, we do not have to cut back to one language. But eliminating perceptual and linguistic equality for the unrepresented linguistic group does not sacrifice a product's persuasive qualities. We must examine the para-identifiers supporting the name. For

example, the detergent *Joy* is a tangible, physically controllable product on a store shelf, perceivable to the consumer as a dishwashing detergent presumably by its position among its competitors and the distinctly identifiable form of the bottle.

We cannot assume that a strong graphic system will always be a successful, flexible linguistic instrument for two brand names. Not all citizens are sensitive to the visual nuances that are meant to be invisible in presenting a brand name. In the case of *Mr. Clean,* where an icon, presented as a constant, is combined with a variable, such as a brand name, the scale of the constant and the variable determines the recognition factor. If the icon has little visual effect or no brand equity, much will rely on the linguistic variable, as in the *Shopper's Drug Mart* brand. That is where the two perceptions will be irrevocably divided. If the icon transcends the presence of an otherwise changing language, then the brand identity will have a higher recognition factor, as in the case of *Mr. Clean.*

In the context of two separate language audiences, one must examine the motive of the brand identity. Its function is to identify and convey the inherent values acquired over time. Should one establish a separate identity for each cultural group? If so, a cohesive dual brand identity should be comprised of mutually similar connotations of its component languages. Also, it is important to ensure that if two names are used, both of them represent and respect the values of the two distinct cultures. The ideal is to minimize the levels of mental activity in the act of recognition. In advertising, a mere notion can be sold with the right delivery—that is where another dimension of language enters. Advertising campaigns can serve as the nuance-loaded linguistic vehicles of products or services.

If a product is to be marketed worldwide, then research should be more thorough and design should better support language flexibly or transcend it altogether. We have seen that language legislation can divide, isolate or

multiply perceptions. It is the vernacular which has shaped language, as it has always been a cradle for new ideas and terminology that later becomes official.

Dual identities also work to strengthen brand loyalty as there is an element of intrigue in perceiving various components of a brand's linguistic identity. In the creation of brand names, care should be taken to avoid falsely rallying two linguistic audiences by creating two names. A language can still be respected with moderation when it is not forced into another language's grammatical and lexical systems. The key to the interpretation of a name is translating not only words but also the intent in order to fully capture a brand's best attributes. Perhaps what is yet to come is a new age of linguistic sensitivity when language will not be compromised by brand nomenclature.

Notes

[1] Public Affairs and Advertising. 1990. *Two-language Communications at CN.* Montreal: Canadian National Railroad.

[2] Sacharow, Stanley. 1982. *Symbols of Trade.* New York: Art Direction Book Co., 19.

[3] Interbrand Group plc. 1992. *World's Greatest Brands.* London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 6.

[4] Interbrand, *World's Greatest Brands*, 9.

[5] Quoted in Harris, Roy & Talbot J. Taylor. 1989. *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought.* London: Routledge, 158.

[6] Harris, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought,* 159.

[7] Commissioner of Official Languages. 1988. *Official Languages Act.* 4th Supp. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 18.

[8] Many of the examples listed and illustrated here could be placed in other categories since some carry a combination of these to different degrees. However, the examples selected are not isolated cases and appear frequently enough to be selected, by their primary attributes, to form their own classification.

[9] We call an information consumer or viewer a participant. In language contact, an information consumer is a participant in the interaction between him or herself and the languages involved.

10 The mere size of this group is an entire subject unto itself.

11 "Code-switching is defined as the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation, without prominent phonological assimilation of one variety to the other." Monica Heller, ed. 1988. *Codeswitching—Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives.* New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 157.

12 Recognition anxiety encompasses all the mental activity involved in interpreting the multiple perceptions of a given item, in the quest of associating recognizable values to that item.

13 The arrangement of leaves on an axis or stem.

14 Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1989. *L'Imagination.* Paris: Quadridge/PUF, 43. My translation.

15 Sartre, *L'Imagination,* 57.

16 Eco, Umberto. 1992. *La Production des signes.* Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 72. My translation.

17 Barzun, Jacques. 1986. *A Word or Two Before You Go. . .* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 148.

18 Barzun, *A Word or Two Before You Go. . .*, 147.

19 Heller, *Codeswitching—Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives,* 87.

Lance Hewson has been a lecturer in English at the Université Paul Valéry since 1982, where he supervises undergraduate courses and postgraduate seminars in translation and also works as a professional translator, specializing in technical fields. The majority of his research has involved the French and English languages, but he also works on texts in Croat and German. His most recent publication, co-authored with Jacky Martin, is ***Redefining Translation. The Variational Approach,*** published by Routledge. He is currently working on a project in the field of translation criticism.

Lance Hewson
Université Paul Valéry
BP 5043 Montpellier
France
Visible Language 27: 1/2