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## 5 Linguistic fetish: The sociolinguistics of visual multilingualism

**Abstract:** Linguistic fetish refers to the phenomenon of using languages for symbolic (fetishised) rather than utility (instrumental-communicative) purposes in commercial texts. In such a context, form takes precedence over content, which may or may not be relevant to, or understood by, the target audience. In this chapter, building on and extending my previous work in this area (Kelly-Holmes 2010, 2005, 2000), I explore linguistic fetishization as a sociolinguistic practice, using a range of examples from a variety of media and contexts. The chapter starts by examining current thinking on visual multilingualism in sociolinguistics, before moving on to examine the commodification of such visual language in contemporary consumer culture using the notion of linguistic fetish. I then go on to examine three cases of linguistic fetish in visual multilingualism – the foreign language visual; the minority language visual; and visual English – and attempt an assessment of their sociolinguistic implications.

### 1 Introduction

While visibility is becoming increasingly central to contemporary consumer culture and “marketing as a practice reflects this intense engagement with visibility” (de Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan 2010: 188), considerations and analyses of visual consumption or visual marketing do not generally consider the role of language in this process (cf. for example Schroeder 2006). This is despite the increasing use of language for its visual qualities and or symbolic purposes rather than for communicative or instrumental functions in contemporary consumer discourses such as advertising. Likewise, in the study of language, a preoccupation with its visual materiality is a relatively recent phenomenon. In this chapter, I look at what I term visual multilingualism, namely the use of languages primarily as images, with an analysis that is informed by sociolinguistics, the study of language use in its social context. I start by examining current thinking on visual multilingualism in sociolinguistics before moving on to examine the commodification of such visual language in contemporary consumer culture using the notion of linguistic fetish. I then go on to examine three cases of linguistic fetish in visual multilingualism – the foreign language visual; the minority language visual; and visual English – and assess their sociolinguistic implications.

## 2 Visual multilingualism

While the system of language has long been an object of study, with lexicographers, grammarians and syntacticians attempting to codify and record the relations between words, spellings, structures and meanings, attention to language as a social phenomenon is a relatively new phenomenon. It was only in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that there was a decisive move away from studying language primarily as an objective, inanimate phenomenon to studying it in relation to its speakers, and more precisely to different types of speakers (differentiated by, for example, location, social class, educational background, gender, age) (cf. Spolsky 2009 for an overview here). From this “social turn” in the study of language grew the contemporary discipline of sociolinguistics, which itself has also moved away from its original focus on modernist constructs such as class to consider all dimensions of language in use, including the issue of concern in this chapter, namely visual uses of language.

Probably the most well-known and widespread approach to analysing visual multilingualism is the “linguistic landscapes” approach, developed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and advanced by many scholars since (e.g. Shohamy and Gorter 2009). The concept of linguistic landscape represents an attempt to account for the visual presence of particular languages in the public space as a reflection of and contribution to ethnolinguistic vitality, i.e. the relative strength of these languages in terms of their status and functions as “living languages” within their immediate speech communities and beyond, particularly in minority language spaces and sites of complex multilingualism. The technique involves documenting visual multilingualism (and also monolingualism) by systematically counting the presence and frequency of languages on public signs in various domains. As such, linguistic landscape analysis represented a departure from a focus on text semantics in the study of language use, since content and/or meaning were not initially important, a focus was on the visual presence or absence of particular languages in particular spaces.

The idea behind the linguistic landscape approach was that the visibility of particular languages could reflect their relative position in the sociolinguistic hierarchy, and that a greater visibility of one particular language could send the message that this was the dominant language. Thus, the visibility and visual positioning of particular languages could be used as a way of revealing common-sense ideologies about language(s) that are prevalent in a particular society. As Heller (2008: 518) tells us, “our ideas about language are not neutral; we believe what we believe for reasons which have to do with the many other ways in which we make sense of our world and make our way in it”, and the languages we see around us everyday are considered to be part of this, whether or not we speak them or understand them or even recognise them, beyond an acknowledgement that they are not “our” language. The investigation of visual multilingualism, in

the form of linguistic landscape analysis, can thus be seen to be informed by and contributing to understanding “language ideologies”, which are considered to be “the discourses that attribute value to linguistic forms and practices, along with the processes of constructing social difference and social inequality with which they are associated” (Heller 2008: 518) in contemporary and historical perspective.

A further indication of the power of visual multilingualism is the fact that status planning initiatives in minority language spaces have both responded to and initiated linguistic landscape studies by reversing what is seen to be an imbalance in visual multilingualism and/or monolingualism by introducing legislation which requires that the minority language is printed on public signs in addition to the relevant dominant language (e.g. Wales, Ireland) or that it is to appear on its own (e.g. Quebec). Linguistic landscape studies have not just concerned themselves with the presence and frequency of languages on public signs, but have also focussed on the visual positioning of different languages on the signs, and, again, this notion that the positioning of languages is important has also been taken up by language planners, who now often require that the existing visual hierarchy is reversed by placing the minority language on the top of the sign above the dominant language (e.g. in Ireland, where Irish is placed above English) (cf. Shohamy and Gorter 2009 and Gorter, Marten and van Mensel 2011, for examples of studies). Clearly, then, such approaches represent a concern with the material properties of the printed language, rather than with what is being communicated by the printed language, since, in many cases, the content is the same (e.g. on road signs, where the same place name is given in parallel versions).

Linguistic landscape analyses have developed considerably since the pioneering study of Landry and Bourhis (1997) (for an overview of the development of linguistic landscape research, cf. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). In a recent volume, Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) advocate a move from focusing on the linguistic landscape to considering the semiotic landscape, in order “to emphasize the way written discourse interacts with other discursive modalities: visual images, non-verbal communication, architecture and the built environment” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010: 4). They are interested in “defining landscape as a way of seeing” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010: 4), which is “subject to a number of competing ‘scopic regimes’ or ‘visual subcultures’” (Jay 1998: 4 in Jaworski and Thurlow 2010: 4). This implies that how we see is mediated by social and cultural practices and structures. This also applies to language: in the same way that how we hear language – in terms of hearing and differentiating accents, dialects and other languages – is mediated by cultural practices and social structures, how we “see” another language or variety depends on the particular “scopic regime” to which we are subject; our gaze is dependent on our particular habitus in Bourdieu’s terms (1991). Thus, how we see language is pre-formed and then either reinforced or challenged by the visual multilingualism or monolingualism we encounter on a daily basis – hence the desire by language planners to reverse existing visual hierarchies in order to change language ideologies within the particular habitus.

Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) approach reflects a new focus in sociolinguistics on multi-modality, in recognition of "the essentially multimodal nature of all human meaning making. Multimodality, here, is about recognizing that language is not at all at the centre of all communication" (Iedema 2003: 39). Thus, it is not just changes in our environment, economy and technology, which are leading to greater multimodality, but a recognition of meaning (and of language) as multi-modal. This is quite a radical mainstreaming, since it appears to be taking the focus off language as the immediate object of study. This means on the one hand that our sociolinguistic environment is experienced as increasingly multi-modal while, at the same time, there is also a recognition among sociolinguists that far more linguistic encounters are multi-modal than was previously considered the case in analyses which looked at speech and writing without considering in full the existence, impact and inter-connectedness of other modes, what Iedema (2003) terms "the material and historicized dimensions of representation" (Iedema 2003: 50). Thus, the way a piece of language looks is also a mode of meaning, not just the semantic meaning of what it is referring to (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, 2006).

In addition, the sociolinguistic techniques of studying linguistic phenomena primarily experienced and documented as verbal practices have increasingly been applied to written language also. For example, Eastman and Stein's (1993) concept of "language display", which looks at the conscious use of a language not linked to the ethnic identity of the speaker. Eastman and Stein (1993) argue that language display is in fact most successful where there is limited or even no knowledge of the language being displayed on the part of the speaker. Language display "represents symbolic rather than structural or semantic expression" (Eastman and Stein 1993: 200), with the focus on form rather than content; what is being said, is not important, instead it is the language in which it is being said – this is the effect which the speaker is trying to achieve. Language display, while originally conceived of in relation to oral data, has increasingly been combined with written data in the study of visual multilingualism (cf. Kelly-Holmes (2005), and Coupland (2012) for a recent study of the display of Welsh in the linguistic landscape of Wales). Language display is just one example of the growth of interest in "spectacular" uses of language, in which a variety is begged, borrowed, or stolen by speakers who don't normally claim it" (Sweetland 2002: 515). Where previously, with the focus in sociolinguistics firmly on stable and long-standing oral speech communities, they would have been dismissed as idiosyncratic and insignificant, such practices have, Sweetland tells us, recently become "[...] prized [in sociolinguistics literature] for their value in understanding the social meanings that adhere to language varieties and the many ways in which speakers can put such ideologies to work" (2002: 516). "Inauthentic language" (Sweetland 2002) in the form of, for example, "styling the other" (Bell 1999), "mock" language (cf. Hill 1999), "crossing" (Rampton 1995), and language display (Eastman and Stein 1993) etc. are increasingly being studied as written phenomena and for visual effects rather than just verbal effects.

### 3 Linguistic fetish

The concept of linguistic fetish has been developed to explain multilingualism in economically driven displays, such as marketing and advertising texts. It is important from the outset to acknowledge that all language relations, as highlighted above in relation to linguistic landscapes, to a greater or lesser extent reflect some type of power relations. The local (and global) political economy of language (Gal 1989), the linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991) and other terms have been coined to explain the interrelationship between language choice, language ideologies, and political, social and economic power. Such relations permeate all domains of language use – the school, the government, the media, the university, and even the family – not just explicitly economically driven displays and choices. Thus, while the focus in linguistic fetish is on recognisably market-driven texts, it is important to see linguistic fetish within a wider field of power relations.

Fetishisation involves “the capacity of creating [symbolic] value – a value greater than it contains” (Marx and Engels, 1959 (1894): 392). This leads to a situation where there is “form without content”, (Marx, 1959 (1894): 393), or where form or symbolic meaning take precedence over content or utility. Utility in terms of language can (crudely) be seen in terms of its communicative function, or use as a means of communication between speakers. Where the utility value of the language is not fetishised, then the content, the (semantic) meanings themselves are the essence – rather than the form. In linguistic fetish, the symbolic or visual value of a language takes precedence over its communicative value, and this symbolic value is the product of existing linguistic hierarchies and regimes, ways of seeing. As Heller points out in relation to the commodification of languages in the current era: “[...] the new economy’s valuing of increasingly commodified cultural artefacts and symbolic resources blurs the relationship between political symbols and exchange goods” (Heller 2008: 512)

Linguistic fetish, then, results in a highly refined version of multilingualism, informed by a culturally determined gaze. It is a type of decoration or linguistic colour by numbers, that has everything to do with the producer’s perception of the consumers’ own linguistic culture or habitus, as “visuality is inducted into the service of creating a homogenous cultural perspective” (de Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan 2010: 177). Linguistic colour by numbers describes the very contained, prescribed parameters by which words from other languages are used in advertisements. The choice is driven primarily not by what the word means, but how it looks, and what associations the language may have among target addressees, and how these can be triggered by the appearance of the foreign word. Reflecting this, Harald Haarman (1989) coined the term “impersonal bilingualism” to explain the occurrence of foreign words in Japanese advertising. He concluded that their usage had nothing to do with “everyday” or “real” bi- and or multilingualism in Japan and instead were to do with exploiting symbolic associations of

these languages, which were not widely understood or taught in Japan at the time of his study, would have among the Japanese public.

The commodification of visual multilingualism can be seen as part of a wider process of commodification of the visual: “visuality is crucial to the current economic structures”, and “visual consumption constitutes a key attribute of an experience economy organized around attention” (Schroeder 2006: 6). Jaworski et al. (2003) have analysed the importance of “linguascaping”, which involves designing “the sounds and visual representations of special or unique language codes and varieties (accents, dialects) often used for symbolic purposes” (Jaworski 2003 et al: 3), of tourist destinations to enhance the tourist experience and ultimately add value to it. Thus, language too can form part of the tourist gaze (Urry 2002). This realisation also changes our understanding of language. Jaworski and Thurlow (2011) show how language has become “extra-visual”, while Machin and Van Leeuwen (2003) tell us that language has become a “surface value” as a result of global media genres, which spread homogenous mediascapes with local languages used simply for instrumental functions.

While linguistic fetish emphasizes the distinction between the communicative and the symbolic or between the textual and visual in communication, it is important to remember that this differentiation is somewhat artificial, since most communication consists of both symbolic and communicative aspects. However, as Juliane House (2003) has argued, it can be useful to try to distinguish the use of “language for communication” from the use of “language for identification”, as she puts it. In addition, Wee (2003: 212) also tells us that while “it is obviously possible for one and the same language to be seen as having both instrumentalist and non-instrumentalist functions, [...] it is also important to keep the functions distinct.”. Thus, while accepting the interconnection between use value and symbolic value, between the textual and the visual, linguistic fetish proposes and recognises the primacy of the symbolic in the commodification of visual multilingualism in contemporary advertising.

We will now look at three examples of linguistic fetish. The distinctions between them are slightly artificial, as shall become clear, and they all share commonalities in approach. However, each one highlights a particular dimension to linguistic fetish which is interesting and useful to explore. We will start with the first and most obvious case of linguistic fetish, linked to the discussion above, namely the use of “foreign” languages as visuals; then we will move onto two other cases, the first involving the use of “visual English”. Although English is of course a foreign or second language in most parts of the world, its fetishisation is, it has been argued, a special case that is not linked to a particular ethnosymbolic identity, unlike the use of other languages as visuals. The final case involves the use of minority languages as visuals.

## 4 Foreign languages as visual

The basis for the use of the foreign language fetish, as described above, is the understanding that “an image of language may be structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm” (Bakhtin 1981: 360). Thus, the habitus, in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, of the advertisee is the norm against which foreignness or otherness is measured and against which the “foreign” or other language is understood. It is the blank paper that gets coloured in.

Lawrence Venuti, in his study of translation, argues that the objective of translation is to erase as much as possible of the original context and to domesticate words and concepts for the target audience, particularly in the Anglophone world. The text should appear “seemingly untranslated [by] suppressing the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, assimilating it to dominant values in the target language culture” (1994: 218). In contrast, the use of foreign languages in advertising is not about erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000) of difference, but in fact about the display (Eastman and Stein 2003) and highlighting of difference. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 12) tells us, “we have available the culturally produced semiotic resources of our societies, and are aware of the conventions and constraints which are socially imposed on our making of signs”, and foreign language visuals and their histories are part of those semiotic resources.

Figure 1 shows us a good example of the foreign language fetish in the screen shot of the Stella Artois homepage, which is advertising the launch of Stella Cidre, the Stella Artois brand being better known for its beer. The message of the adver-

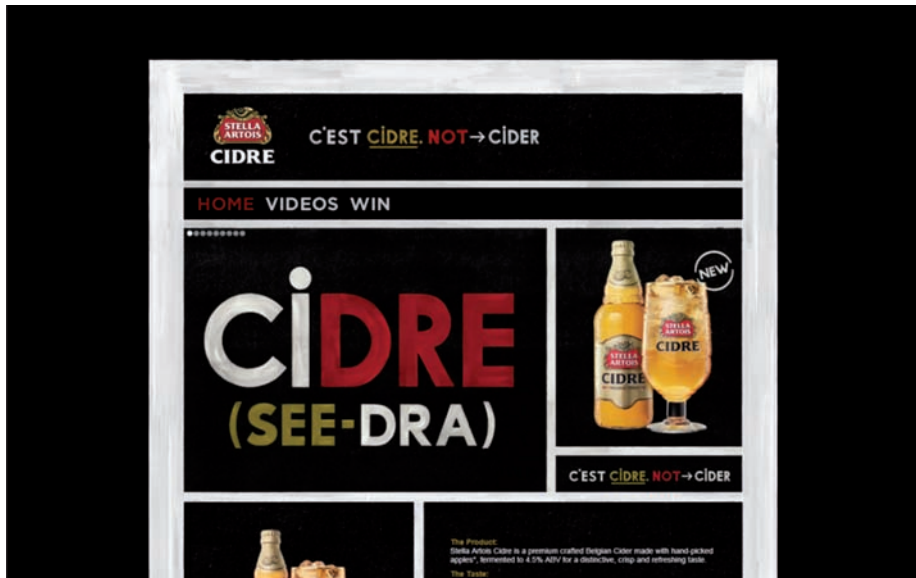


Fig. 1: Homepage of [www.stellaartois.com/cidre/](http://www.stellaartois.com/cidre/).

tisement is that “Cidre” (the French word for cider) is completely different to Cider (the English word), not just linguistically, but also materially – it is a completely different drink. The main vehicle for highlighting this difference is the rendering of the word in French for an Anglophone audience. The slogan of the campaign is “C’est cidre. Not → cider”. It assumes a fairly widespread knowledge of the basics of the French language in the Anglophone world not just as a result of education, but also as a result of a type of “mock” French (like mock Spanish – cf. Hill 1999) spread by the portrayal of the French speaker in mainstream media products in the Anglophone world. The ad also offers a phonetic guide for Anglophones (cidre => see-dra), creating a manifest intertextual (Fairclough 2001) link with travel and tourist guides, where this kind of ethnocentric phoneticisation is a common practice. The ad also assumes the need for this pedantic explanation and domestication, and derives its humour from hyperbolising the ethnocentrism and monolingualism of the Anglophone on the one hand, and the chauvinistic exclusionary tendency of the Francophone, on the other, obsessed equally and pedantically with the particularities of their language and culinary habits. Finally, the link between the visual French and the product are spelled out explicitly: “Stella Artois Cidre is a premium crafted Belgian cider made with hand-picked apples”. So, the instrumental or authoritative message is delivered in English, which further highlights the visual functions of the French language in the ad.

This example shows us how linguistic fetish is all about understanding foreignness from the point of view of one’s own habitus, as part of the culturally available repertoire of signs, to paraphrase Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). The foreign words on display in the text are, in Bakhtin’s words “structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm” (Bakhtin 1981: 360), in this case English. English is the blank canvas on which a little French is painted. The repeated use of ‘Cidre’ serves no instrumental function, since its literal meaning is the same as that of the English word cider; instead its use shows us how, according to Adorno: “foreign words become the bearers of subjective contents: of the nuances. The meanings in one’s own language may well correspond to the meanings of the foreign words in every case; but they cannot be arbitrarily replaced by them because the expression of subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning” (1991: 287).

Stella Artois is utilising a common practice in foreign language fetish, whereby the name of the product in the language of the country of origin “becomes the bearer of subjective contents”, in Adorno’s words. Familiar examples are “Bier” (for German beer); “Auto” (for German cars); “Technik” (for German technology); “Kaas” (for Dutch cheese); as well as all of the French vocabulary that permeates the language of cosmetics (“parfum” etc.) (cf. Kelly-Holmes 2005 for an in-depth discussion of these).

The commodification of languages in the new economy (and in the “new communication landscape” in Kress and Van Leeuwen’s 2001 terms) involves “the



naturalisation, uniformisation, and objectification of social groups (and hence their cultures, their boundaries and their ‘languages’”) (Heller 2008: 505). Linguistic fetish thus allows the “foreign” language to become domesticated in Venuti’s (1994) terms as one of the available resources for sign-making in the habitus.

## 5 Visual English

The contemporary functioning of “visual” English illustrates well the dissolving of cultural, political and semiotic boundaries, as highlighted by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, 2001), which both result from and contribute to the global flows of capital, media, ideas, people and technology and their accompanying instruments of homogenisation (Appadurai 1996), foremost among which are advertising and the English language. English, Kachru (1996) tells us, travels via “channels which bypass the strategies devised by language planners” and turns up in the most unexpected places: in countries which are considered “outer circle” (Kachru 1996), i.e. locations where English usage is the legacy of colonisation and where the language enjoys special status in education, business and many other domains; and, in countries which are considered “expanding circle” (Kachru 1996), where English is learned as a foreign language; in situations where English is well-known and understood; and, in situations where understanding is limited to cultural and educational elites, or younger generations, or is confined to specific domains.

Unlike “foreign” languages, English has come to be ideologised as separate to multilingualism and not indexical of any particular country or “otherness”. Instead, its fetish is that of neutrality, globality etc. Wee (2010: 424) highlights that “a language may ... be considered neutral because it represents the language of an Other”, i.e. it is neutral because it belongs to someone else outside of the habitus in question; however, with English, its supposed neutrality is based on the ideology that it represents the language of no-one and simultaneously the language of everyone: “In the USA and in many other parts of the world, English has become a neutral language, a code that can be used to avoid whatever implications may result from choosing a more identity-laden language” (Callahan 2005: 284). In complex multilingual situations, English has acquired neutral status, even though of course its usage, spread and heritage are far from neutral. So, instead of attempting to fulfil the impossible task of addressing everyone in their own language in for example a country like India, marketers opt for English, thus enhancing its “neutral” status and fitness for this purpose (cf. Kelly-Holmes 2005; Louw 2004; Cheshire and Moser 1994). Louw (2004) describes in detail the move to “neutral” English in commercial discourse in South Africa – a country with an officially multilingual policy – together with the side-lining of the negatively connoted, though widely understood, language of Afrikaans.

Elizabeth Martin (2011) sums up the “display” functions of English as follows: “... superior technology, chic and modern lifestyles, adventure, international and ...

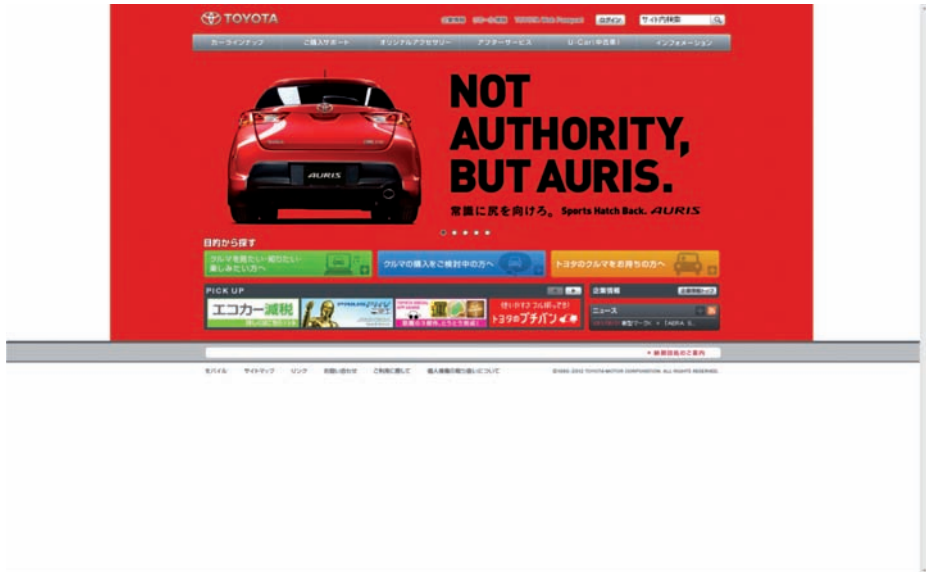


Fig. 2: Toyota's .co.jp site.

the sense of belonging to a “global village” (Martin 2011: 267). The example reproduced in Figure 2 illustrates many of these features. It shows the home page of Toyota's .jp site, i.e. its dedicated site for Japanese customers. Although considered one of the largest global brands, Toyota is Japanese owned and is widely recognised as a Japanese origin brand. In common with many brands that construct themselves as global, Toyota operates a global gateway site ([www.toyota-global.com](http://www.toyota-global.com)), (reproduced in Figure 3) which is available in English, and which is intended to guide consumers into their regional, national or linguistically relevant site. The use of English on global gateway sites has become a common-sense assumption, even for brands which do not originate in English-speaking countries, for many of the reasons highlighted above: English is the neutral choice, the global choice, the language of technology etc. To not have a global gateway site in English, but to have it instead in the corporation's home language (in this case Japanese) or even in another international lingua franca or supercentral language (de Swaan 2001) such as French or Spanish, without an English option would in the contemporary era be remarkable. The use of English in the gateway site reflects a combination of symbolic and instrumental factors: on the one hand the desire to exploit the “global” fetish of visual English, on the other, the desire – and necessity – to exploit the distribution and functioning of English in the world today. Japanese does appear on the site, indicating a link, not to a translated version of the global gateway site, but to the local Japanese site. The use of English on the global gateway site shows the interrelationship between communicative and symbolic functioning, between textual and visual concerns in language choice: English

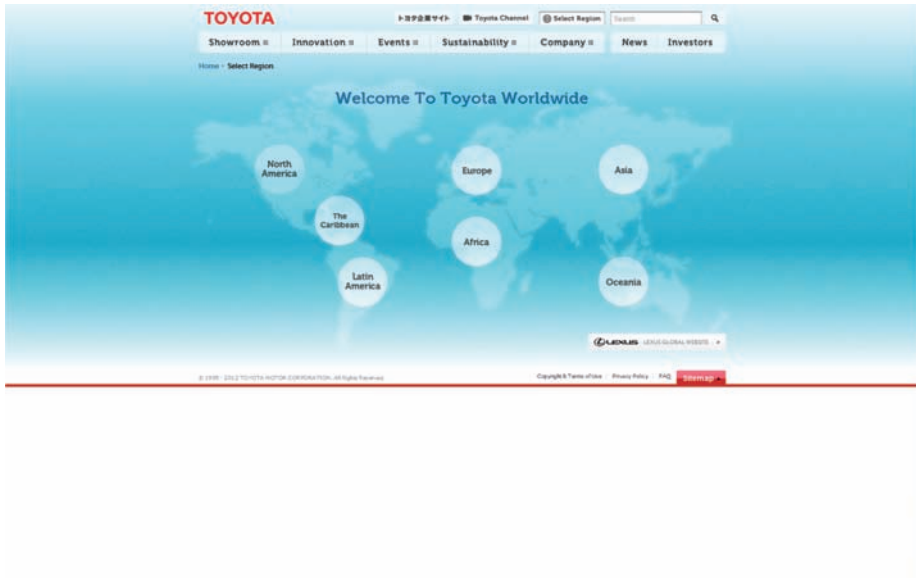


Fig. 3: Homepage of Toyota-global.com.

is present in order to communicate with as many customers as possible; English is also displayed to index the brand's global presence and credibility.

While symbolic and instrumental concerns were reflected in the choice of English for the gateway site, the use of visual English in the .co.jp site, the site for Japanese consumers of the Japanese brand, would appear to be completely driven by symbolic concerns, as illustrated in the slogan accompanying the Auris (“Not authority but Auris”). English appears in a number of places on the site, indexing – in instrumental and symbolic ways – Toyota’s global presence. For example, terms such as “Hybrid”, “Pick Up”, and the homogenising slogan “Find us on Facebook”, create the “global village” feel, alluded to by Martin (2011). The use of English in advertising by a Japanese company for a Japanese market is a good example of visual English and its associated fetishes of globality. Toyota is not just a Japanese brand for Japanese consumers, it is also a global brand for Japanese consumers, and this global credibility is indexed by the visual English, even where the words are not understood. Doulton (2004: 285) cites mass media as the main source of contact with English words in Japan: “nearly all *gairaigo* (Western loan-words) are first introduced to the Japanese public by a very small number of individuals with most Japanese people having never heard or read the word before, and having no role to play in its borrowing. Because of this presumptuous use of foreign words by the media, the meanings of many words used are poorly understood.” As in the case of other expanding circle countries, in Khachru’s terms, in which English is spoken and learned as a foreign language, English comes via “fashion magazines and commercial advertisements of modern technology” (Doul-

ton 2004: 286) and “for the most part, new English expressions are introduced in the media without the audience having the necessary knowledge to understand them.” (Doulton 2004: 287). The presence of English on Toyota’s Japan website is not a reflection of an advertiser trying to service a bilingual community; instead, it is a reflection of an advertiser displaying its globality through the display of English, in Haarmann’s words, it is “impersonal bilingualism”.

## 6 Minority languages as visual

The use of minority languages for their visuality is driven primarily by the quest for authenticity in marketing. Jones et al remind us that “two distinct strategies may be used for claiming authenticity. One is to subject one’s creative voice to the perpetuation of tradition [...] A second route to authenticity [...] is to be original and offer a distinctive approach” (Jones et al 2005: 893). The minority language fetish is clearly an example of the former. We are, Coupland (2003) tells us, in an era that values authenticity, and language – including visual language – is “a means of achieving authenticity” (Coupland 2003: 417). The minority language visual is an example of “language indexing authentic cultural membership” (Coupland 2003: 421). This type of essentialist authenticity is, according to Coupland (2003: 424), “divisive and socio-politically dangerous notion”, but it is one that is frequently utilised in marketing discourses, particularly in the context of tourism. Language indexing cultural membership is of course crucial in all of the examples cited so far, particularly in terms of the foreign language fetish; however, it is particularly pronounced in relation to the display of minority languages in tourism discourses.

The cultural membership here could be in terms of the product or brand itself – the language is indexing the brand’s credibility in terms of a culture that is different to that of the notional addressee of the advertising or marketing message. The language use could also be about positioning the brand and the consumer as having the same authentic cultural membership. Here the issue of the relationship between the symbolic and instrumental functions of the minority language becomes once more blurred, since there may well be comprehension of the content. However, in situations where there are no monolingual speakers of a minority language, which is the case for many of the autochthonous European minority languages (e.g. Irish, Welsh, Breton, Sámi languages), then the choice to use the minority language rather than the majority language is necessarily a marked choice, driven by symbolic rather than communicative imperatives. As Wee points out, distinguishing between instrumental and non-instrumental views of language: “a language is viewed non-instrumentally to the extent that it is seen as forming an integral part of one’s ethnic or cultural identity, and if its existence in a community is justified in terms of its symbolic value in allowing the community members to maintain a sense of identity” (Wee 2003: 211–212).

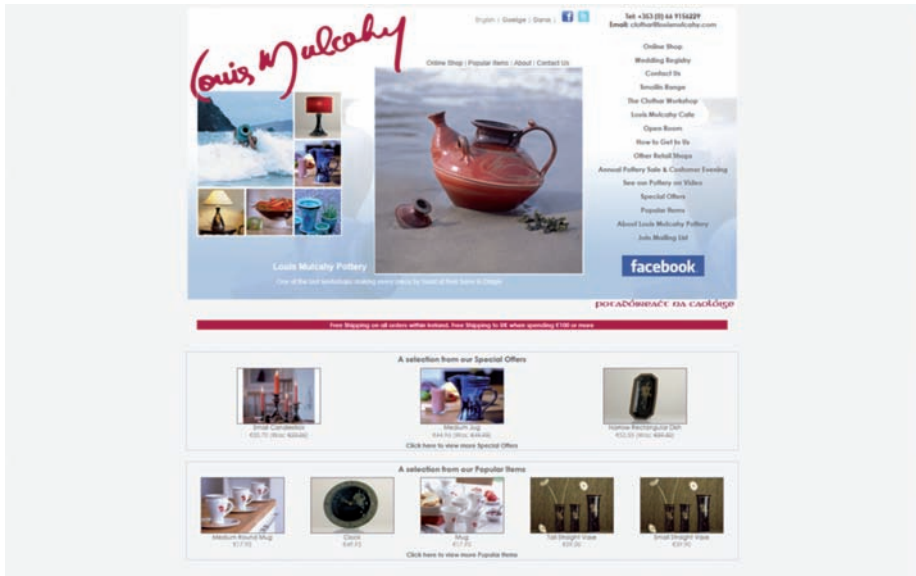


Fig. 4: Homepage of Louismulcahy.com.

In a study of the labelling of souvenirs in the multilingual minority language space of Finnish Sámiland (Pietikinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011), the minority Sámi language was found to work symbolically and visually towards “localizing and authenticating the product”, while the instrumental functions were carried out generally by English or other languages of wider communication (e.g. German or French). Visual Sámi thus becomes part of the multiple modes of supporting and authenticating (predominantly) English language labels. In this case, Sámi operates non-instrumentally and English operates instrumentally, using Wee’s dichotomy. The visual language, here Sámi, needs to be narrated in order to become meaningful, not in terms of its semantic content (i.e. what is actually being said), but in terms of pointing out what language it actually is, like the heading or title for an illustration (cf. Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011).

In Figure 4, we can see another example of what we are calling the minority language visual. It is the homepage of the Louis Mulcahy pottery workshop, located in the designated Irish-speaking or *Gaeltacht* region of Ireland. As can be seen from the website, the Irish language is used in the slogan, located on the right hand side of the page below the Facebook link:

**POTADÓIREACHT NA CAOLÓIGE**

The slogan translates as the “sparrow pottery”. The decision to use an Irish slogan, without an English translation, in this global, high status domain could be seen as a normalizing move which presents Irish as being as fit for this purpose

as any other language, particularly its rival English (see discussion above in relation to linguistic landscapes). However, it can be argued that the position of the slogan and the use of old Gaelic script mark the usage as graphic rather than textual (for a wider discussion of this, cf. Kelly-Holmes 2005). It is irrelevant whether the Irish version is understood. It still enhances the product because it indexes authentic cultural membership for both Irish customers (who can be part of this) and overseas customers (who wish to buy an authentic Irish product)

As well as the slogan for the pottery workshop itself, Irish is used in a number of product names and the Irish words are not marked by italics, thus in paralinguistic terms, they are normalized. However, the usage is generally fetishized (Kelly-Holmes 2005), or functions as a type of linguascaping (Jaworski et al. 2003), since the use of Irish on the front page is limited to a number of tokens, with the main or serious business taking place in English, thus reinforcing the linguistic status quo: the use of Irish here makes sense in relation to the norm, the blank page, which is English, and from which it departs (cf. Bourdieu 1991, Bakhtin 1981).

Driving this type of linguistic fetish is the current context of a language ideological shift from “bilingualism as deficit” to “bilingualism as added value” (Jaffe 2006: 51), and even more than this, a “valorization of multilingualism” at the global level, and the development of global markets for “the expression of ‘authentic’ minority language identities” (p. 51). In the current era, where brands need to be distinctive, visual multilingualism can be part of that distinction. In such a context, a smattering of the language, what Jacquemet (2005) terms “transidiomatic practices” can be enough to add difference and authenticity, no matter how fleeting.

## 7 Conclusion

Visual English, foreign and minority language fetish all confirm the increasing exploitation of the visibility of language in commercial domains, underpinned by “the new communicational landscape” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 46), in particular, the World Wide Web, which “has put a premium on understanding visual consumption” (Schroeder 2006: 5). In this increasingly multi-modal context, it becomes, as seen in the examples above, harder to distinguish visual from textual functions of text. Consequently, it is not surprising that the visual is becoming a mainstream concern, and something few linguists can afford to ignore, particularly since the Web is part of people’s everyday sociolinguistic practices and also a site of growing sociolinguistic inquiry (cf., for example, Androutsopoulos 2006 and Thurlow and Mroczek 2011).

Adorno (1991), writing about language fetish in translated texts, i.e. the deliberate insertion or non-replacement of a foreign word, argued that such practices

add a splash of colour to the otherwise grey, monolingual text and offer the reader temporary release from the monolingual prison. In similar fashion, we could argue that visual multilingualism is a playful practice that enriches and potentially challenges the monolingual's world. However, we are still left with a need to question which languages are displayed, and which ones are not, and what these reveal about deep-seated and common-sense ideologies about languages and speakers.

Finally, it is interesting to note the growth of visual multilingualism, which heightens and exploits linguistic difference in order to differentiate a product or brand, in parallel with a minimising of exposure to “real” multilingualism in the “new communication landscape” of the Web. For instance, as a result of IP address tracking, the archiving of previous language choices and other factors, consumers are increasingly guided through the web in a linguistic “filter bubble” (Pariser 2011), which protects them from being exposed to the “functional” or utilitarian multilingualism of the Web. Consequently, it can be argued, the effects of visual multilingualism are heightened, and the view of the other through an ethnocentric lens is reinforced.

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