

The brand language brief: A pillar of sound brand strategy

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Abstract

When carefully planned, language can be a strategic tool for managing a brand's communication to target customers and for building brand equity. This paper explains how and why managers should conduct a brand language audit — a comprehensive inventory of the many and varied linguistic devices used by brands in the category — and then use the findings from the audit to develop a brand language brief. The brand language brief is like a blueprint for crafting a distinctive language for a brand. It ensures that a brand's language aligns with a brand's overall communications strategy; it guides development of the language that will be deployed throughout all of the brand's marketing initiatives, including brand naming, claims, advertising, packaging, sales promotion, and even face-to-face and online interaction at the point of purchase. The authors argue that a strong brand language brief will help bring attention to a brand's message, enhance message comprehension and memory, convey the desired brand personality and contribute to the formation of sustainable relationships with consumers. A brand language strategy will be a driving factor in a brand's marketplace success.

Keywords

brief, strategy, marketing communications, brand language

BRAND LANGUAGE AND BRAND LANGUAGE STRATEGY

Language — at least careful use of it — is a strategic tool for managing a brand's communication to target customers and for building brand equity. Ideally, a brand's use of language aligns with its overall communications strategy, resulting in coherent communications across all channels to its target consumers. Strategically sound and consistent language can help bring attention to a brand's message, enhance message comprehension and memory, convey the desired brand personality and contribute

to the formation of long-term relationships with the brand by consumers. This paper discusses the mechanics of planning and crafting a blueprint for brand language called the brand language brief, a tool first introduced in the book *The Language of Branding*.¹ The development of a brand language brief is an important step in strategically managing a brand's language, and a brand overall, in a selling environment where competition is more sophisticated than ever. The rationale for crafting a formal strategic brand language document is simple: by codifying the approach to a

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brand's language, the brand management, creative and tactical teams will all be literally on the same page, helping to ensure a brand's voice is consistent with the overall aims of the brand's marketing. Moreover, a brand language brief provides a mechanism for ensuring accountability. Briefs are important not only for directing creative efforts but also for evaluating them by the marketing team. If a company runs an ad that does not contain the features outlined in the advertising brief, it risks failure.²

Creating a brand language brief requires a systematic process. Managers must first conduct a comprehensive brand language audit, which means taking an inventory of the linguistic devices used in marketing communications among a set of competitive brands. Once the brand language audit is complete and the results thoroughly reviewed and understood by the marketing team, the task of producing the brand language brief may begin. Executed properly, the brand language brief ensures that a brand's language aligns with its overall communications strategy. It guides linguistic development that will be deployed throughout all of the brand's marketing initiatives, including brand naming, claims, advertising, packaging, sales promotion, and even face-to-face and online interaction at the point of purchase. Given all of these touchpoints, a brand language strategy will be a driving factor in a brand's marketplace success.

A BRIEFING ON BRIEFS

Marketing communications typically require a disciplined document or set of documents called briefs that specify what is to be communicated, to whom, why and how. Briefs are crafted for advertising, media, promotions, marketing research and other marketing initiatives. They are informed by an understanding of the marketplace, including competitive strategies and tactics, and target consumers' culture, habits, practices and emotions, along with the marketer's objectives, corporate philosophy, experience and, sometimes, their budget. Briefs are essential documents that ensure that all team members are aware of the brand's strategic direction and executional parameters as they move towards development and implementation of marketing initiatives. A good example for illustrative purposes is perhaps the most well-known kind of brief, the advertising creative brief.

Advertising agencies and their clients use a creative brief as a blueprint for development of a single advertisement or an overall advertising campaign; the brief serves to direct and inspire art directors, copywriters and other creative executives to channel their efforts towards a strategically sound solution that addresses the client's brand challenges. Table 1 illustrates the primary components of a representative advertising creative brief. A creative brief will often open with a statement regarding the objective of the advertising

Table 1 Components of an advertising creative brief^a

Advertising objective
Target consumers' demographic, psychographic and cultural/graphic profile
Insights about the target consumer
Positioning or selling proposition for the brand that sets it apart from competition
Promise that the advertising must make to the consumer
Support for the promise that provides a reason to believe it is true
Tonality of the advertising (eg serious or playful)
Mandatories (visuals, claims, selling lines, etc.) that must be included in the advertising

^aCreative briefs vary widely among advertising agencies; these are the essential components.

to be developed. This will include the business problem, issue, opportunity and/or goal that the advertising needs to address. The aim may be to increase market share in a geographical area, win share from a specific competitive brand, introduce a new product, announce a sales promotion or reposition the brand in the marketplace. Specific communications objectives such as increasing brand awareness are also conveyed. The creative brief then describes the target consumer from demographic, psychographic and, sometimes, cultural or culturalgraphic perspectives and outlines insights about target consumers' behaviour, attitudes and sentiments that are based on marketing research. Also often included in the brief is the current brand positioning, a succinct statement on the brand's image and primary benefits that will help distinguish it in the marketplace. The central components of a creative brief include the brand promise that is to be made to consumers and the primary reason that consumers should believe that promise, which will motivate them to buy a brand over its competitors. Finally, the brief contains sections on the tonality of the advertising (eg serious or playful) and mandatory executional guidelines that note, for example, whether a package must be featured in a certain way. A brief will not specify details for creative approaches per se; these are within the purview of the advertising agency's creative team.

BEFORE THE BRIEF: THE BRAND LANGUAGE AUDIT

Before crafting the brand language brief, the marketing team should conduct a brand language audit. This entails taking a comprehensive inventory of the many and varied linguistic devices in use in a brand's marketing communications, as well as

an inventory of those used by all of the brands with which it competes in the marketplace. Including competitive brands in the audit reveals the degree to which and how brands are using language to differentiate themselves and where opportunities to differentiate via language exist. The audit specifies the linguistic devices and identifies the messages that those devices will send to consumers about the brand. As an example, contrast the advertising copy from two competitors in the banking industry, beginning with ING Direct (now Capital One).

ING Direct

Example 1:

The Orange CD

Great Rate, Guaranteed Return and No Market Risk.

Example 2:

The Orange Mortgage

Save Thousands in Closing Costs.

In the ING Direct ads, the definite article 'the' introduces the advertised product. When considered within the context of other possible word choices (eg an, our), the word 'the' suggests strength (in the context of an established product) and exudes confidence, both seemingly important to communicate, especially in the early days of Internet banking. The word 'the' also puts the word 'orange' in the middle, between it and the word 'CD' or 'mortgage', suggesting centrality and providing rhythm.

Advertising copy for E-Trade exemplifies a different approach:

E-Trade

It's easy, it's extraordinary, it's E-Trade
Be locked and loaded.

Like the ING Direct copy, the E-Trade copy has a rhythm to it, but the rhythm is

achieved through sound: assonance, or the repetition of vowels in the first example, and alliteration, or the repetition of consonants in the second example. Whereas the ING Direct copy uses the definite article ‘the’ to convey establishment and strength,

E-Trade uses semantics. Here, the words ‘locked and loaded’ suggest power and control. Another way of suggesting power and control is through full capitalisation of the brand name, which is how the name appears on the website.

The Simple Yet Sumptuous Sound of Soup, Salads and Sandwiches

The UK-based quick serve sandwich shop Pret-a-Manger uses simple yet powerful phonetics in combination with crisp simple visuals to convey a message about their readily available yet wholesome food offerings. The alliteration achieved by repetition of the /s/ sound in spring, salad, summer and soups brings a light-hearted rhythm to the copy and fits with the brand’s values.

BRAND LANGUAGE AUDIT COMPONENTS

A brand language audit should incorporate multiple aspects of language, most particularly:

- **Semantics and Pragmatics:** Dictionary, implied and figurative meanings. This includes the use of metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification and word blending.
- **Syntax:** Sentence structure and the order of words. Syntax includes paragraph structure and flow.
- **Phonetics:** Sounds and their symbolism as well as the use of alliteration (ie the repetition of consonants) and assonance (ie the repetition of vowels).
- **Punctuation:** The standard marks and signs used in writing to separate words into sentences, phrases and so on in order to clarify meaning. Punctuation includes all aspects of written language other than letters (capitalisation, use of spaces, indentation, etc.) and serves to provide structure and organisation. It can also function as a signal, comparable to a pause, stop or change of tone of voice in speaking. Punctuation also serves an aesthetic purpose when represented visually.

Other language components might include:

- **Rhythm:** Beat or regular recurrence of accent or stress.
- **Imagery:** Concrete representation of sense impression or feeling.

Conducting a brand language audit is a valuable exercise for benchmarking against the competition and identifying opportunities to differentiate a brand in the marketplace through language. Marketers focusing on the language of their brand should conduct research on how language is used in their category to identify the content and impact that particular linguistic choices have on brand messages and consumers’ perception. Research should also be fielded once the brand language objective is defined and refined. This is best done early in the process of building the brand language brief.

BUILDING THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF

Similar to an advertising creative brief, a brand language brief is a blueprint, but in this case it provides direction for development of the language to be used in all

Table 2 The brand language brief

Component	Content
Objective	What language must convince the customer to believe and feel — and do.
Target	Demographics, psychographics and cultural factors that impact language processing.
Linguistic consumer insight	Research-based or an intuitive leap that describes culturally driven linguistic requirements for connecting with target consumers.
Tone of voice	How the language of the brand reflects the positioning of the brand, its personality. Should it be friendly, ironic, serious, young, mature and so on?
Executorial considerations	How/where the language will be used (in print, online, television, etc.). Mandatory style requirements, inclusion of specific selling lines and so on.

of a brand's marketing communications, including advertising, public relations, direct marketing, social media, sales promotion and more in order to achieve integrated marketing communications. A brand language brief helps determine which types of linguistic devices are considered to be on-brand and which are not. Importantly, a brand language brief must align with the broader brand communications strategy and build upon, or at least be consistent with, other brand communication briefs (eg the advertising creative brief) (Table 2).

THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF IN DETAIL

Objective: The first section of the brand language brief identifies what the brand language should be designed to achieve. The language may need to convey a certain image or motivate the customer to feel or act in a particular way.

For example, the words *grande*, *venti* and *Frappuccino* on the Starbucks menu help to build an image of European sophistication. In the case of Nike, the brand language objective might be to motivate and inspire individuals to meet personal challenges — whether physical or mental — and be the best athlete they can be and is captured by the well-known tag line 'Just Do It'.

Sometimes the brand language objective is specific to a particular advertisement or communications campaign, and it must relate to the ad or campaign objective. If, for example, the objective of an advertisement is to build or increase awareness, then the brand language objective might be to capture attention. There are a variety of ways to use language to capture attention, which will be addressed in the section on executorial considerations.

Target: This section of the brief specifies the demographic, psychographic and

The Guitar Center

A target market's category expertise would help determine whether and how technical specifications should be communicated. The Guitar Center's target includes guitarists who seek equipment that can be described only in technical language. Their website, www.guitarcenter.com, references electric guitar effects foot pedals that provide overdrive, chorus, compression, phaser/pitch shifter, digital delay and loop. Most consumers have no idea what these descriptions mean, but electric guitar players in the market for new sounds will be enticed by them.

cultural factors that impact how customers will process the language used by a brand. This includes the *meaning* customers are likely to derive from language about the brand, about appropriate usage of the brand, about users of the brand and, if appropriate, about the company advertising the brand and how customers are likely to derive such meaning.

For example, the demographic variable of education may relate to a customer's

reading level and vocabulary. A widely used rule of thumb is that copy should be written at or below the average customer reading level. Since the average American reads at an eighth grade reading level, this means the language used should be somewhere between a sixth and eighth grade reading level, depending on the medium (eg social media versus traditional print advertising). This lower level minimises cognitive effort, thus making it easy for

Literacy in the United States

According to a 2013 OECD report, the percentage of US adults who do not reach Level 3 literacy is 46.2 per cent. Level 3 literacy means being able to understand and respond appropriately to dense or lengthy texts, including continuous, non-continuous, mixed, or multiple pages. They understand text structures and rhetorical devices and can identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information and make appropriate inferences. They can also perform multi-step operations and select relevant data from competing information in order to identify and formulate responses.³ This has obvious and profound implications for how we design the linguistic structure and content of our marketing communications.

people to comprehend and process the message quickly.

Some individuals, however, like to engage in cognitive effortful tasks — they enjoy thinking — whereas other individuals avoid such tasks. Psychologists term this individual difference 'need for cognition'.⁴ Need for cognition is an important variable in marketing because it impacts a person's motivation to process a persuasive message and affects the kind of message that he or she will find persuasive. According to what psychologists refer to as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, or ELM, individuals with a high need for cognition tend to focus and reflect on message arguments and are persuaded by the quality of those arguments. Such individuals are likely to read more advertising copy and process more abstract messages.

In contrast, individuals with a low need for cognition tend to focus on peripheral elements of an ad — for example, the background music or celebrity endorser — and transfer their thoughts and feelings about those elements to the advertised brand.⁵

Need for cognition varies from person to person. Research has, however, shown that it correlates with a number of demographic variables such as education and age. Education trains people to think, and is thus positively correlated with need for cognition. Research also suggests that even among well-educated individuals, need for cognition may be a dynamic factor that changes over time. Specifically, Spotts⁶ found that age-related declines in cognitive ability reduce need for cognition.

The target market's language background is another important element. More than half of the world's population is bilingual and, according to the American Census Bureau, 21 per cent of the American population speaks a language other than English at home.⁷ Understanding what language(s) a customer speaks and where, when and with whom he speaks that language is important. A common mistake marketers make is to assume that just because the customer has a first language that is different from the 'mainstream' language, advertising and packaging directed at that customer should be in their first language. Research by Koslow, Shamdasani and Touchstone⁸ demonstrates why this can be a faulty assumption. They found that while Spanish language advertising can signal solidarity with Hispanic consumers, advertising exclusively in Spanish decreases affect towards the advertisement. The authors reason that advertising exclusively in Spanish may arouse insecurities about language usage.

Lerman, Maldonado and Luna⁹ shed some light on this issue in their work on acculturation. They point out that a minority individual's preference for one language

over another is an essential feature of both the acculturation process and the classification of individuals as assimilated, segregated, integrated or marginalised. An ability to act on that preference, however, requires a certain level of language proficiency. To the degree that the target market interprets the use of the minority language — Spanish in the case of the Hispanic or Latino market — as unnecessary, customers may interpret its use to ensure that the market understands the message. This would be the case when the Spanish is unrelated to the product or brand, or its specific use.

One way to appeal to a bilingual market in a more natural way is through code-switching. Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two languages or varieties of language in the same conversation, commonly appears in the speech of bilinguals. While the mechanics of incorporating code-switched language into advertising copy would be an executional consideration, marketers should specify in this part of the brief any code-switching that is natural for the target market. That would include how and where they code-switch and with whom.

Code-Switching in Advertising: The Impact on Persuasion

In one study, Luna and Perracchio¹⁰ found that the direction of code-switching — that is, switching from the majority language to the minority language or vice versa — matters. In an initial study, they found that minority language slogans switching into the majority language (eg Spanish switching to English in the United States, for example) result in greater persuasion than majority language slogans switching into the minority language. In a follow-up study they found that these effects are reversed when associations with the minority language are positive.

In other research, Luna, Lerman and Peracchio¹¹ investigated the importance of grammatically correct code-switching. They found that grammatically incorrect code-switching can reduce the persuasiveness of an advertisement but only when consumers are highly focused on the surface features of language, as would be the case when a slogan contains alliteration or rhyme. When consumers are focused on the ad meaning, breaking the rules of code-switching does not impact persuasion. This suggests that advertisers incorporating code-switching in the ads may want to avoid using phonetic devices in their copy unless and until they have mastered the grammar of code-switching.

Consumer Insight: The consumer insight section of a brand language brief is more specific than the broad insight that informs an overall brand strategy. An insight in the brand language brief might specify a culturally informed linguistic approach such as a strong sense of cultural identity that is expressed in language so that the language used ‘speaks’ to the target audience effectively.

Connecting to the Spanish-speaking market in the United States provides a good example. As might be expected, Spanish is widely spoken among first- and second-generation immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. According to a Pew Research Center study, Spanish remains widely used among the third generation for the purposes of daily activities (eg listening to music or watching television). This does not necessarily, however, mean that marketers should communicate to Spanish-speaking Americans in Spanish. As mentioned earlier, research by Koslow et al.¹² found that all-Spanish ads can negatively affect consumers’ attitude towards the advertisement. Moreover, the choice of using Spanish in US-based advertising is fraught with challenges because of the many varieties of Spanish, including Mexican Spanish, Puerto Rican Spanish, Cuban Spanish, Dominican Spanish, Salvadoran Spanish and Guatemalan Spanish, among others. Each of these variations has its own unique features and vocabulary. A study by Toribio,¹³ for example, found that Dominican Spanish has its own phonological and morphosyntactic innovations and with that ‘enjoys a considerable measure of covert prestige, as a symbol and enactment of national, group, and individual identity’ (p. 1133). This feeling of unique cultural identity is not peculiar to Dominicans. In the Pew Research Center study cited earlier, 69 per cent of US-based Latinos surveyed said that Latinos in the United States have many different cultures,

whereas only 29 per cent agreed that Latinos in the United States share a common culture.¹⁴ Distinct cultural identities within general ethnic or cultural categories is a phenomenon found globally.

Tone of Voice: This section of the brand language brief articulates the character or attitude the brand’s language will convey. In brand communications, tone of voice is as important as the content of a message. Any given message can be expressed multiple ways. Tone of voice refers to the brand’s attitude or the feelings it expresses through the many types of communication media in which the brand appears. Tone of voice embodies and expresses the brand’s personality and values.¹⁵ Tone of voice is, in a sense, the expression of the brand identity or personality through the language that the brand uses (eg how the brand would speak if it were a person).

Because tone ties in closely with a brand’s positioning and its personality, it is an important element in building the brand story. Building the story requires developing a tone of voice for expressing the brand that is:

- Believable to those familiar with your brand
- Compatible with the personality that prospects and customers expect from your brand
- Consistent with the nature of your brand

The energy drink Monster Energy utilises the tag line ‘Unleash the Beast’ that appears on the brand’s website and in its advertising. Language from the product page on the website (www.monsterenergy.com/us/en/products) is consistent with the nature of a high-powered, youth-targeted energy drink: ‘Tear into’; ‘meanest energy drink’; ‘big bad buzz’; ‘powerful punch’. There is no question about who and what Monster Energy is; the tone is clear.

Tone of voice is a function of particular word choice as well as a variety of linguistic devices such as metaphors, rhymes and punctuation. Creating a credible, compatible and consistent tone requires that marketers choose their words carefully and use linguistic devices wisely. Returning to the examples of ING Direct and E-Trade, Table 3 shows how a variety of linguistic devices serve to create an overall tone and message about the brand.

Executorial Considerations: This section of the brand language brief covers

how and where the brand's language will be used (print, online, television, etc.), ways it will reflect or enhance visual images and media-related considerations and constraints (venues for specific languages, restrictions on word choices such as profanity or slang, etc.) and mandatory components. Executorial considerations will also include guidelines for the various linguistic elements, such as semantics, syntax, phonetics and punctuation. Within these categories, guidance for word choice and sentence structure will be delineated.

Table 3 Crafting tone of voice: examples from online banking

	Semantics/Words	Syntax	Phonetics	Punctuation	Tone/Brand Message
ING Direct	Power of definite articles. Strategic positioning of words. Short words. No pleasantries. Puns.	Simple, few verbs	Repetition of hard powerful sounds; alliteration	Minimal. Only when necessary	Clean, new, different, modern, uncomplicated, democratic
E-Trade	Power; abstract words.	Phrases and sound bites	Assonance, alliteration	Minimal	Strong, controlled, efficient

An Outdoor Ad for ING Direct

An outdoor ad for ING Direct touts 'Money Mitosis'. Mitosis refers to the process in which a cell duplicates its chromosomes to generate two identical cells. The word offers ING Direct a unique way to communicate that at ING Direct: You can expect your money to grow.



Figure 1 An outdoor ad for ING Direct

Consumers need not know the definition of mitosis for the ad to capture their attention. Moreover, they need not know the exact definition even to understand the content of the message, as long as they have some idea that it refers to growth. Still, mitosis may have been a risky choice because it is very low frequency.

Word Choice: Most languages are sufficiently rich that when marketers want to convey an idea or feeling, they have a large choice of words they might use. For example, the word *happy* has many synonyms, including *glad*, *delighted*, *content*, *merry*, *joyful* and *cheerful*. In addition to differing slightly in connotation, each of the words differs in terms of its frequency of occurrence within a language. Happy and glad are what linguists refer to as relatively high-frequency words, whereas *merry* and *joyful* are lower-frequency

words. High-frequency words are those that are used on a regular basis in written and/or aural speech, and low-frequency words are those that people know but rarely encounter. Observational research shows that people tend to use the same words over and over despite having learned many more. In fact, it has been estimated that an educated person's vocabulary amounts to 20,000 words, of which only 2,000 might be used in a week. People know many more words than they use.

A Billboard for Manhattan Mini Storage

In its outdoor advertising, Manhattan Mini Storage explained that the word *Storãg-istã*, a term that the company created in an effort to encourage trial of their services, was created by combining the word 'storage' with the commonly used Spanish suffix *ista*. The novelty of the word motivates consumers to read the ad to find out what it means. The two accents add to the novelty while also evoking a sense of sophistication.

Figure 2 A billboard for Manhattan Mini Storage

The discrepancy between word knowledge and word usage offers marketers an opportunity to find relatively novel yet meaningful ways to talk about a brand. This is because readers and listeners do not expect to encounter low-frequency words, and so when they do, they tend to take note of them. Linguists may refer to this as ‘popping out’.¹⁶ From a marketing and branding perspective, low-frequency words (eg in advertising copy) capture attention and thus help build brand awareness. They often have vivid imagery, which can help tell the brand story, thus helping connect brands to consumers. They can also help make brands more memorable. The reason: consumers will likely elaborate on (think more about) the message, which will help them encode it in their minds in a way that leads to more efficient retrieval from memory and greater *uncued* recall. In addition, unusual words, if repeated or rehearsed multiple times, will also lead to greater cued recall or recognition later on.

When using low-frequency words, it is important that not only has the consumer been exposed to the word before, but also that the meaning of the word is accessible. For example, there exist a variety of words traditionally used in the banking industry (eg *increase*, *savings* and *deposit*). Selling phrases like *increase your savings*, *expand your reservoir*, *boost your reserves* and *sweeten your stash* communicate the same message content but do so very differently. From the military-sounding *boost your reserves* to the soft, hip sound of *sweeten your stash*, each phrase suggests something different about the brand, including the brand’s personality, the experience that one could expect to have at and with that bank and more. One expression may resonate well with a certain kind of consumer, whereas a different phrase will resonate better with another kind of consumer. Other

low-frequency word options for a variety of terms typically used in the banking industry include:

- Increase: Grow, expand, swell, beef up, amplify, sweeten, bloom, flourish, puff up, boost
- Savings: Cache, arsenal, store, reserves, reservoir, riches, stash, treasure
- Smart: Astute, brainy, clever, masterful, enterprising
- Amount: Gob, scads, oodles, heap, chunk, pile, flock, bulk, whole enchilada
- Build: Frame, shape, construct, fashion, forge
- Goal: Ambition, mission, target
- Reach: Realise, actualise, sew up, grasp, snag, live

The lexical category of words (eg nouns versus verbs) will also influence consumers’ reactions to a marketing message. For instance, Meng, Luna and Czellar¹⁷ show how verbs can lead to consumers’ immediate action, instead of delaying a choice. Verbs result in a tone of voice that is more assertive and action-oriented.

Sentence Form and Function: Style or tone can also be achieved through variations in sentence form and function. Generally speaking, sentence form is an issue of syntax. For example, are the words ordered in a way that forms a statement or a question? Function refers to what the sentence is meant to achieve. For example, is it intended to solicit an answer or maybe change a behaviour? One interesting and useful aspect of language is that the same function can be accomplished by different types of sentences.

A case would be a situation where a person is attempting to concentrate on something he or she is reading but having a difficult time focusing because other people in the room are being very loud. Or, perhaps someone is enjoying tea at the

home of a friend and would like another cup. In either of these scenarios, the person would request that the noise be kept down or to be given another cup of tea. The person has a choice from among four sentence forms as to how to frame the request:

- A declarative sentence is a sentence in the form of a statement.
- An interrogative sentence is a sentence in the form of a question.
- An exclamatory sentence is a sentence in the form of an exclamation that typically expresses powerful feelings or emotions.
- An imperative sentence is a sentence in the form of a command.

In all four cases, words are used intentionally. In the noise and tea scenarios, the intention is to make a request — for less noise or for more tea. Each of these requests can be framed as a declarative sentence, an interrogative sentence, an exclamatory sentence or an imperative sentence. Sample sentences for our two scenarios appear in Table 4. These sentences differ, not just in structure, but also in the effect on the hearer.

Marketers can use sentence form and function in order to capture attention and help establish a tone that helps build the brand story. Structurally, the headline in the advertisement from ING Direct (see Figure 3) asks a question; it also serves an offer — an offer to make the target consumer richer. This statement can also be read as a promise, a promise that the ING

mortgage will make the consumer richer. In another advertisement, ING Direct asks, ‘Ever checked your bank statement and smiled?’ In both cases, the copy serves to draw consumers in and encourages them to imagine a brighter future when dealing with banks. The result is greater involvement in the advertisement and a more memorable message than would likely be achieved by declarative statements such as ‘Our mortgage will make you richer’. In fact, such declarative statements could backfire by opening the door for consumers to question the claim or make counterarguments.

Other manipulations of syntax can achieve a variety of tone of voice outcomes. For instance:

Active Versus Passive Voice: People normally think in the active voice. It is the most direct, efficient way of thinking. For example, a study by Bradley and Meeds¹⁸ examined some of the implications of Chomsky’s Transformational Grammar.¹⁹ One of the central claims of Transformational Grammar is the distinction between deep and surface structure of language. Deep structure is how the mind organises a thought, and surface structure is how people later express it. Thus, one can utilise many different linguistic surface structures to express one deep structure thought. For instance, people could use the active voice or the passive voice. The passive voice, according to Bradley and Meeds,²⁰ represents a more complex surface structure than the active voice. They found that slogans with moderate syntactic complexity resulted in greater recall

Table 4 Sentence forms

<i>Declarative</i>	<i>Interrogative</i>	<i>Exclamative</i>	<i>Imperative</i>
You are making far too much noise. I would love another cup of tea.	Could you keep the noise down? Is there any more tea in the pot?	What terrible noise! How I would love another cup of tea!	Be quiet. Pour me a cup of tea, please.

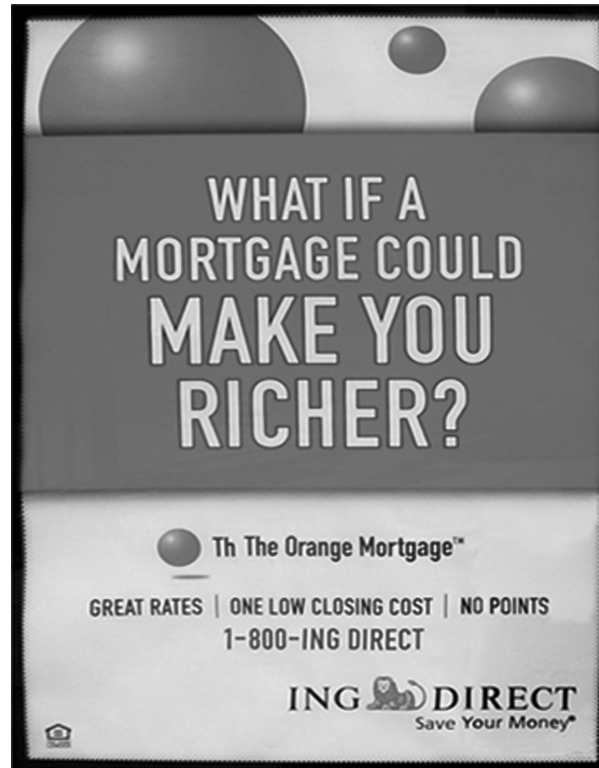


Figure 3 An ad for ING Direct

and attitude towards the ad than both low-complexity and high-complexity slogans. With regard to tone of voice, the active-voice sentences fit a straightforward brand with a direct personality. Passive voice syntax would be most fitting for an introverted or introspective brand.

Complex Versus Simple Sentences: A complex sentence embeds one or several relative clauses within it. Similar to active-voice language, simple sentences result in a tone of voice most fitting direct, action-oriented brands.

CREATING AND MANAGING THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF

Because the brand language strategy is so central to a brand's identity and communications and will be executed across several

organisational domains, development of the brief should entail input from all of a brand's stakeholders. This includes the creative teams that are responsible for crafting the specific language of the brand. In an organisation with a brand management structure, where different brands have different identities, development of the brand language brief would be led by the brand manager who would seek counsel from company colleagues representing a variety of departments along with advertising, promotional and packaging agencies. The brand manager, as the visionary and steward of a brand's identity and messaging, must provide clear direction to the full team and manage the development process from inception through the final selection of the language that will represent the brand to its target consumers.

The special role of the advertising agency.

Although the language strategy for a brand should be outlined initially by the marketer and while the brand's language transcends advertising, advertising is often the most visible, or audible, use of language that consumers will encounter. The brand's advertising agency, usually the most creative resource a marketer has at hand, should actively contribute to the brand language brief, and all the work that the advertising agency produces on behalf of the brand must reflect the content of the brief. The marketing manager must be certain to provide clear initial direction to the ad agency and be closely involved with the agency's brand language contributions to ensure they are on strategy.

THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF AND MARKETING STRATEGIES

A brand's language strategy entails a widely agreed upon and subsequently enacted set of decisions made by marketing executives. For this reason, the brand language brief must connect to the following marketing strategies:

Advertising and Other Core Communications

Strategies: This is perhaps the most straightforward application of a linguistic strategy. Advertising, public relations, digital and social media agencies are tasked with using language to promote the brand and create relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Brand strategists and creative directors need to be briefed on the language strategy of the brand to ensure that promotional

efforts are consistent with the brand's linguistic identity. The brand cannot speak differently in different contexts. Its identity must span all communication venues. This is why a brand language brief must link closely to an advertising creative brief.

Pricing Strategy: The terms 'two-buck Chuck', 'dollar menu', or 'million-dollar Porsche', which refer to the price of the product, have certain associations to a brand. Often, the pricing strategy of a brand refers not to the cost or tangible benefit of the brand but to the consumer's expectations given the brand's positioning and personality. The pricing approach must consider how a particular pricing strategy will be communicated — that is, the language that will be used to tell consumers about it.

Distribution Strategy: The linguistic elements of the brand (sound, morphology, syntax and suprasegmentals) should be consistent with a given distribution outlet. Customers would not expect the same language at Costco as that at an upscale wine store. In the case of a wine store, the typical language used by the retailer should be based on rich narratives, a discussion of the wine's provenance, tasting notes and so on (see the screenshot from Astor Wines, in Manhattan). On the other hand, a price club would provide matter-of-fact language, describing the wine in plain terms (see the screenshot from Sam's Club). Each outlet provides different ways of using language, which infuse the brand with a distinct personality in consonance with the store's personality (Figures 4 and 5).

Astor Wines, NYC: Buono B., Malbec —
2011; approx. price \$8.

Tasting Notes

The Buono B winery started in the last century when two Italian islanders (one from Sicily, the other from Ischia) settled in Mendoza. This malbec spends 5 months in concrete tanks then old wood barrels. The resulting wine is spicy, full of ripe black fruits and tannins. An excellent match with lamb burgers.

About the Producer

Mendoza, Argentina Casa Sancte Petre, producers of Buono B wines of Mendoza, Argentina, has been in existence since 1988. This is a family business with 82 hectares of vines in high elevation sites, an average of 980 meters altitude. A combination of factors make Mendoza, particularly the higher areas, ideal for viticulture. Warm, sunny days and cool nights allow grapes to ripen more slowly,...

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Figure 4 Wine description at Astor Wines

Sam's Club (Chateau St. Jean — Cabernet
Sauvignon)

Item Details	Ratings & Reviews	Shipping & Warranty	Additional I
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These wines use classic winemaking techniques that accentuate generous fruit, balanced with richness and complexity.

Figure 5 Wine description at Sam's Club

THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF AS A GUIDING AND A LIVING DOCUMENT

The brand language brief provides guidance to the marketing communications

team regarding how to express a brand's identity to target consumers. Care must be taken in the formulation of the brief so that it reflects the overall strategic direction and

marketplace aims of the brand, the brand's personality and history, consumer culture and buyer expectations. Because a brand language brief is designed to provide direction for the language in advertising, sales promotion, pricing and other marketing initiatives, all brand stakeholders must reach agreement during the codification of the brief and be certain to abide by the 'rules' in the document. Moreover, marketplace conditions change; competitive strategies and tactics and target consumers' habits and practices are not frozen at the time the brand language brief is crafted. Consequently, the brand language brief may need to evolve as well. Throughout the life cycle of a brand, the brand language brief must be a living document that reflects both the enduring essence of the brand and changing marketplace conditions. Active management of a brand's language requires keeping current on how language is used within a target market and by society in general, and generating insights about how language reveals changing thoughts, feelings and behaviour in a brand's category.

THE BRAND LANGUAGE BRIEF AND BRAND LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

Brand managers who choose to embrace strategic brand language management should take the following steps:

- Begin with the brand's overall strategy as a foundation for building a brand language brief.
 - Conduct a brand language audit.
 - Listen closely to how target consumers use language, and understand the cultural context of their language use.
 - Include brand linguists on the marketing planning team when possible.
 - Craft a brand language brief that is agreed on by all important stakeholders.
- Tap creative resources for imaginative brand language development.
 - Test brand language communication with consumers using qualitative and quantitative research.
 - Develop a dictionary that contains the words and phrases that capture the brand's essence, and update it as meanings change.
 - Stay vigilant on protecting and improving brand language, and never lose sight of how a brand's language defines and projects a brand's identity.

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