

LINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUCCESS OF SILICON VALLEY'S HI-TECH GLOBAL BRANDS

by
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Brand naming is an important domain of language use in modern commercial society and a field of potential pragmatic interest and investigation. Brand naming is a one-way communicative activity in which brand names are created to communicate the right information to the right people in a right manner. This article argues that linguistic characteristics of brand names can help contribute to brand success in two aspects: semantic appositeness and multilingual communication. The article chooses Silicon Valley as a case study to demonstrate how the linguistic characteristics of hi-tech global brand names ensure an effective and relevant communication to consumers on a global basis.

1. The linguistic power of international brand names

What's in a name? When it comes to a brand, it means enormous value. In an age of global economy, building global brand names is the ultimate goal for companies all over the world. Global brand names are the most valuable assets to their owners and are known all over the world, such as Coca-Cola, Ford, Goodyear, Ivory, Levi's, Maxwell House, etc. The success of these global brand names is in part due to the result of a long history of advertising and promotion. It took these brand names a hundred years or so, and several generations, to become household words. Most of them are just surnames of founders, such as Colgate, Cadbury, Heinz, Kellogg's, etc. By brand name criteria¹, they are not 'good' names because they lack the distinctiveness of trademarks, and hence they may not be registered as such today. But because of their long history, persistent advertising, high quality, and correct marketing strategy, they have acquired secondary meanings and become global brand names well known across the world. Of course, there are still many old economy global brand names created by their founders that are very effective in terms of modern brand name criteria, such as Carnation, Kodak, Nestlé, Quaker, Ivory, and Rolex. In fact, some of the names have established the norm of naming similar goods; for instance, Rolex

was followed by Timex and other numerous brand names ending with '-ex', implying 'excellence' (Sebba 1986).

However, there are other types of global brands that have achieved global status in a relatively short period of time, say a few years, a dozen of years, or even one or two years. This is very striking, compared to the old economy global brands that took so long a time to achieve their global market dominance. These brand names mainly belong to hi-tech industries, like the computer industry, telecom industry, information industry, and biotech industry. We are very familiar with Pentium, Celeron, Compaq, Acer, Viagra, Lucent, AirTouch and other hi-tech brand names. The enormous success of these brands can undoubtedly be attributed to the high quality, innovation, timing, and service of the products that they represent, and of course, also to the forceful advertising built around these names. But nobody can deny the desirable linguistic characteristics of these brand names, which contribute to the success of these brands from a linguistic point of view, or at least ensure their effective communicability to consumers, and their global operations in different languages and cultures. The following most recent case shows the linguistic power of brand names.

Viagra is the brand name of a male anti-impotency medicine produced by Pfizer. This medicine achieved great success almost immediately upon its launch in the market, and became a global brand. Of course, there are other reasons accounting for its huge success, but the name helps convey the same positive associations and connotations in different languages. The name was coined by blending 'vigor' and 'Niagara [Falls]', connoting both strength (the meaning of the word 'vigor') and the natural force that is Niagara Falls. Testing in German, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian reveals that the name is very positive not only phonetically, but also in the semantics in these languages. Its sound symbolically conveys a feel of speed, a tone of power, and a resonance of fullness or of roundness, and its meaning can connote strength, vigor, growth, and robustness. This synergy of phonetics and semantics reinforces the connotations of speed, power, and fullness, while adding a suggestive rhythm, and ensures its multi-lingual

communication in major world marketplaces. Viagra, as a name, works².

Viagra and other hi-tech global brand names are implicative and/or suggestive of product attributes and benefits, and work in many different languages. Actually, these names are the creations of professional naming consultants; in a sense, they are the products of another profession. Although a good name cannot ensure the eventual success of a brand, or vice versa (for example, the name Yahoo, allegedly from 'Yet Another Hierarchical Official Oracle', can be easily associated with the 'Yahoos' in *Gulliver's Travels*), undoubtedly, an appropriate, effective, and appealing name can imply or suggest useful information about a product, can impress customers favorably by generating positive associations, and can ensure that the product is free from linguistic troubles. For example, when Unilever changed Monkey Brand into Lux, it gained success almost overnight (Room 1982), something which must be due to the power of the new name; while a negative or even profane brand name will damage the image of product, for example, Reebok's failure of its Incubus women sneakers must be due to a name problem (Hammel 1997).

2. Brand names can be important marketing tools

Unlike personal names that do not tell us anything about a person, brand names are not mere labels identifying products, services, or companies; they can also become powerful marketing tools in communicating correct brand information and establishing a successful brand image. In today's marketing environment, naming a new product is a strategic decision, critical to the eventual success of the product. A brand name is the first level of communication for a company or brand, and it is widely recognized that brand names play a crucial role in marketing products and services and in their acceptance by the public (Charmasson 1988), thus contributing significantly to the success or failure of new products or services (Kotler and Armstrong 1997). Research provides evidence that consumers draw inferences about products, based on the linguistic

characteristics of product names (Robertson 1989). Not only do literal meanings of words or morphemes affect consumers' interpretation of a brand name; the same is true of their phonetic characteristics, as manifested in brand names such as Sharp and Carnation (semantic meanings), Mickey and Marlboro (phonetic characteristics).

A name is the foundation of a brand's success and can be an equity of enormous value. Effective names project the personality of a product, service, or company and can evoke the quality and integrity of what they represent; in this sense, we can (somewhat exaggerated-ly) claim that *Nomen est omen*. Once created, brand names are not easily changed; a linguistically sound and pragmatically appropriate brand name will be a permanent linguistic asset to its owner, whereas a bad one will be a lasting liability. With the development of linguistics, marketing, psychology, and other social sciences, corporate management and consumers both have recognized that besides factors such as quality, service, promotion, etc., the intrinsic linguistic characteristics of brand names are an important and inevitable factor contributing to product success, and their impact cannot be neglected.

3. Linguistic characteristics of brand names contribute to brand communication

Brand names are a special kind of proper names used to identify products, services, and companies and to distinguish them from competing products and services. Etymologically, brand names³ can be created from three sources: proper names (Nike, Shangri-La), dictionary words (Pioneer, Pampers), and coined words or neologisms (Acura, Kotex). Coined brand names can either have no obvious semantic meanings (e.g. Exxon or OMO) or they can have implied meanings (e.g. Hovis or Gatorade). Today, coining has become the prevailing method of creating new brand names; compare the many international brand names that are coined, such as Acer, Formica, Kleenex, Minolta, Panasonic, Pepsi, Sunkist, Tampax (He 2000:297-299).

As a linguistic sign, a brand name has three components: sound (phonetics and phonology), form (morphological and graphic), and meaning (semantics). At each level, linguistic characteristics are available to help namers create linguistically desirable names, and consumers to understand the linguistic nature of brand names and brand naming. Vanden Bergh *et al.* (1987:39-44) studied the linguistic characteristics of 200 successful top brand names; they summarized the linguistic characteristics of brand names in four categories: phonetic characteristics, orthographical characteristics, morphological characteristics, and semantic characteristics. Linguistic characteristics of brand names are very important to both products and consumers. As for products, such characteristics can reveal interesting and relevant information about them; as for consumers, the linguistic characteristics of brand names allow consumers to draw inferences about the advertised products; in addition, they appeal to the customers.

Brand naming is a unilateral, linguistic communication, in which brand names are created to communicate the right information to the right people in a right manner; this is the *Communicative Principle* (Mey 2001:68-71), applied to brand naming. In brand naming, namers try to give the correct and relevant information about products to consumers in a suitable way. Although (as mentioned above) there are different linguistic characteristics that can be employed to make a good brand name and to contribute to effective communication of a brand name, the most commonly used and most important characteristic is semantic, more specifically, semantic appositeness (Vanden Bergh 1987:39-44).

In the present article, the main concern falls on semantic characteristics, of which two aspects are identified and highlighted as the major linguistic contribution to brand success: semantic appositeness and multilingual communication. Semantic appositeness means that a brand name shall be semantically meaningful, and can provide relevant information about the product; for multilingual communication to occur, a brand name must work globally, without negative connotations in other languages. These two aspects, semantic appositeness and multi-lingual communication, are of great importance for a successful

communication, in that they contribute linguistically to the success of brands. To make things more specific, this article chooses Silicon Valley as the place for its case study.

The reasons to choose Silicon Valley are varied and obvious. Brand naming of hi-tech products is somehow different from naming of household products, each having its own peculiar characteristics. Generally speaking, hi-tech brand names are required to be more meaningful and relevant to products, and should preferably contain suggestive or descriptive meaning so as to communicate correct information about the products immediately to the consumers (e.g. Digital, Logitech vs. Dove, Tide). Also, hi-tech products such as computer products are more targeted to world markets than are household products such as soaps; such global considerations make effective linguistic communication of brand names world-wide especially important. Finally, hi-tech brand names are more often coined than chosen from the dictionary and thus involve more linguistic considerations and analysis. Because of the above, global hi-tech brand names form a very suitable corpus for studying the linguistic contribution of brand names in terms of semantic appositeness and multilingual communication. Also important is the fact that Silicon Valley is the paradise of high technology, and the venue of a booming brand naming profession.

4. How Silicon Valley's global hi-tech brands owe their success to linguistics: The Intel story

Silicon Valley is the origin and incubator of global high technology, with numerous renowned hi-tech corporations headquartered there, such as Intel, Apple, HP, Sun, Cisco, 3Com, Oracle, Unisys, and so on. It is the birthplace of hi-tech mega-brands, like Pentium, Compaq, Celeron, Lucent, Agilent, Xeon, PowerBook, Performa, Athlon, Duron, and so on, which are not only icons of American high technology, but also creative linguistic products, generated to meet various requirements in linguistics, marketing, branding, and law.

Intel is a good case in point. Its huge success in the computer industry is to some degree due to its linguistic contributions and the effective linguistic communication of its brand names to consumers. When it was founded in 1967, the founders wanted to use their surnames as a trade name, which would have given Moore-Noyce, sounding like 'more noise'. A more viable name was suggested: Intel, a blend of integrated and electronics, clearly conveying the company's business in addition to implying 'international' (Plansky 1999). Intel's linguistic contribution is best exemplified in the naming of its product: microprocessors. A little chip made by Intel, originally named '386' and subsequently '486', – even if were successfully registered as a trademark – could hardly be transformed into a global brand: such a mere numerical designation lacks personality and distinctiveness and can be easily copied by other manufacturers. Which was exactly what happened when other manufacturers adopted the same numerical designations for their products. This made Intel very angry, and it took the copycats to court. On March 1, 1991, however, U.S. District Judge William Ingram ruled that the '386' designation used by Intel for its microprocessor family was a generic description and therefore did not represent a trademarkable name. A truly unique brand name for Intel's new chips (the so-called 'fifth generation') was needed. Intel wanted this name to be trademarkable, difficult to copy, indicative of a new generation of technology, positive, and globally effective; in addition, it should evoke the notion of 'component'. In all this, Intel's requirements for the new name were geared towards better communication. To realize these goals, Intel hired Lexicon Branding, a Sausalito, California-based naming company, to create the right name for its products. Lexicon generated a total of 3300 candidate names, using naming contest and other methods. After careful and in-depth linguistic, legal, and marketing evaluation, the final name – Pentium – was selected (Keller 1998:B1-B23).

The new name, Pentium, launched in 1992 is an excellent brand name for this particular hi-tech product. Pentium is coined on 'penta', a Greek root meaning 'five', suggesting that this microprocessor belongs to the fifth generation. '-ium' is a suffix usually used in names of chemical elements (such as magnesium or titanium),

implying its componential character by sounding like a chemical substance. David Placek, president of Lexicon Branding, said: 'It's a breakthrough – the first time to use a coined word to name a chip' (Frankel 1997). The new name conveys positive attributes such as quality, state-of-the-art technology, software compatibility, power, and performance to consumers – indeed, 'Pentium' has the 'look' and sound of some precious metal. One would ask oneself whether other names (such as ProChip, Intel-Lect, IntelLigence, or RADAR⁴) would be able to capture the customers' imagination and provide them with the same associations as does Pentium? Intel subsequently developed two other lines of chips, whose brand names – Celeron and Xeon – were also created by Lexicon to highlight the capability and performance of these products, as both names suggest or imply (high) speed. Celeron is based on 'celer', the Latin root for 'swift', while Xeon, by its sound symbolism (the X is pronounced [z], the 'fastest sound in English', according to its namer⁵) also is suggestive of speed.

Of course, the global success of Intel's products, its Pentium, Celeron, and Xeon, is mainly attributable to a number of non-linguistic factors such as technological innovation, product quality, heavy promotion and so on; but this is not the topic of the present article. Nevertheless, the linguistic characteristics of these brand names, as analyzed above, help to ensure an effective communication to consumers, manufacturers, investors, distributors, as well as company employees, the first step to brand promotion and successful marketing. Consciously or unconsciously, these four brand names were created for the purpose of better communication. They are relatively short, simple, easy to remember and pronounce; what's more, they are all semantically or phonetically meaningful and appealing. Their meanings are relevant inasmuch as they suggest useful information about products; besides, they travel well in major languages and cultures without inherent negative connotations or profane meanings.

5. Hi-tech brand naming in Silicon Valley: a linguistically-oriented profession

In itself, Intel's story, as told above, does not suffice to demonstrate the linguistic contribution to brand success; it only serves as an introduction. Below, we will examine in greater depth the function of linguistic characteristics in communicating hi-tech brand names in the area of branding. First, it is advisable to give a brief description of the brand naming scenario in Silicon Valley, so as to better understand the area's linguistically-oriented brand naming.

The mention of Silicon Valley always conjures up the computer industry and the new economy. But few people know that, in Silicon Valley, there exists a flourishing nascent language industry, that of brand naming⁶, characterized by a concentration of naming consultants and naming companies⁷. Thanks to a unique effort on the part of Stanford University in 1951, the area around San Jose, once featuring apricot and cherry orchards, has developed into what is today called Silicon Valley. Since the 60s, many technical experts, including graduates from Stanford University, have established hi-tech ventures in the region. These founders and entrepreneurs generally had technological backgrounds, and were not too concerned about the linguistic characteristics of the brand names they picked; mostly, they chose (their own) surnames, dictionary words, or technical abbreviations. Such brand names are rather arbitrary, without any connection with product attributes, such as HP, a simple abbreviation of two founders' surnames of the company (Hewlett-Packard).

For a long time, brand naming had mainly been a concern of household product manufacturers, while it remained relatively neglected by hi-tech manufacturers, because in the past, hi-tech products were chiefly sold to other manufacturers. With the domestication of hi-tech products, these companies increasingly targeted average people and households as consumers, and started to pursue branding and naming strategies similar to those practiced by the household companies. Marketing computers became like marketing soap; hi-tech products were named and branded to appeal to both industries and average consumers. In fact, brand names have become very critical to hi-tech corporations because while technology is easy to copy, a good name and brand identity are

difficult to mimic. Especially the naming of Pentium in 1992 made the hi-tech industry aware of the vital importance of brand names in the whole corporate branding and marketing strategy, and particularly in Silicon Valley's fiercely competitive hi-tech marketplaces. With so many products introduced every year, brand naming becomes an urgent and indispensable stage in product development. Since hi-tech corporations are not usually staffed with linguistic personnel, they find it difficult and time-consuming to create the right name for their product; also they fear that the internally created names may fail in linguistic respects (as was the case for Chevy Nova).

To avoid similar fates, more companies are turning to product and corporate naming specialists. The naming industry, comprising a handful of boutiques, a few medium-sized firms, and several 'corporate identity' outfits, will bill clients an estimated \$25 million this year. A single name can fetch between \$25,000 and \$100,000 in today's market. (Hammel 1997)

The first naming consultant who saw the big opportunities of brand naming in this area was Ira Bachrach. Formerly an electrical engineer, Ira Bachrach enrolled in the linguistic Ph.D. program at the University of Rochester, New York, in the 1950s on an IBM grant; his research was in the area of morphology. That education and research paid off later in life. After retiring from several other careers, in 1981 Bachrach founded NameLab in San Francisco, the first naming company in California. Since then, many namers with a linguistic background have come to the area. 'The San Francisco area, with Silicon Valley's robust product-driven economy, has the world's most concentrated base of neologists' (Frankel 1997). These neologists either established their small naming firms, or acted as part-time naming consultants, using their linguistic scholarship and knowledge to provide brand names to clients. With the hi-tech industry booming, brand names were in great demand, and as a result, an incipient language industry gradually emerged and grew.

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According to trademark lawyers and executives in the high-tech industry, the surge in less expensive, more powerful technology combined with the expected trademark legislation has made it possible for the naming industry to flourish. (Calvo 1994:B1)

Naming companies are specialized linguistic consultants who supply their clients with linguistic products such as trade names, brand names, and domain names. The process is more or less standardized, and generally includes the stages of brand name positioning, candidate name generation, linguistic analysis, trademark and domain name checking, consumer testing, and the final selection.

Staffed by full-time linguists and trademark researchers, naming companies have found a solid market by steering new products through the shoals of trademark law, international double-entendres and other hazards – plus, of course, coming up with catchy names. Labels like Zima, Acura and Compaq are the products of such companies. (*ibid.* 1994:B1)

The professional naming firms create brand names in a language-oriented approach, where linguistics plays a heavy role in the naming process. As Lexicon founder and president David Placek said: 'Linguistics is a key part of the name-generation process. It is a precise tool to measure the effect produced by sound and spelling patterns' (quoted Gilles 1995). Naming companies are active in Silicon Valley, for example, 65% clients of Lexicon are the hi-tech companies of this area; its brand names include Pentium, DeskJet, PowerBook, Celeron, Xeon, Inprise, PageMill, iOwn.com, Vento, Geneer, Quadra and so on; 90% of Master-McNeil's clients are from Silicon Valley, where it created i.a. Athlon and Duron for Advanced Micro Devices.

6. Linguistic analysis of hi-tech brand names in Silicon Valley: semantic appositeness and multilingual communication

This section contains a brief description of hi-tech brand naming in Silicon Valley. Below we will demonstrate how the semantic appositeness and multilingual communicative capability ensure effective communication and contribute to the success of global brands in this area. Our corpus of study are the hi-tech brand names created by professional naming firms in that area.

6.1. Semantic appositeness

Semantics has been the key concern in the selection or creation of brand names. The meaning of a brand name is an important, even vital tool in communicating information about brand, product, and service to the target audience and potential buyers. Whether it be proper names or place names (Ajax, Shangri-La), dictionary terms (Cheer, Pampers), or coined words (Acer, Electrolux), they all seek for positive or favorable inherent semantic meanings which marketers believe are able to invoke or to suggest consumers' associations with product attributes. For example, brand names based on proper names such as Nike and Ariel can give people favorable cultural associations inherent in the names, resulting in favorable associations with the products they signify. Dictionary words like Pampers or Tulip, by their semantic meanings, can inspire positive feelings in the consumers' mind and imply product benefits, while coined brand names such as Panasonic and Sunkist derive their meanings from combination of morphemes which are suggestive or descriptive of products.

Today, most brands depend on their linguistic meanings to communicate something about a product. This is helpful in promoting the brand because the target audience can derive knowledge about the product directly from the names themselves. Completely meaningless brand names are difficult to promote and hence not beneficial to communication. Meanings must be relevant to products; otherwise, they will communicate different or irrelevant

information to the customers. Various versions of criteria for an ideal brand name all state that brand names should preferably suggest product information either directly or indirectly. Examples include Vitasoy, Kleenex, Walkman, Kool-Aid, NesCafe, Maidenform, Mobil, Tropicana, etc., which directly provide the meanings apposite to products.

The same is the case in Silicon Valley. Meaningfulness of brand names is the prevailing consideration in brand naming here, whether the meaning is implied, suggestive or directly descriptive. Our corpus of hi-tech brand names created by naming firms for Silicon Valley enterprises clearly shows that the overwhelming majority of these names are semantically meaningful, and that such meanings are relevant to the products. With regard to actual brand naming practices in Silicon Valley, we found that most hi-tech brand names created by naming firms are coined from morphemes or word parts; moreover, such morphemes and word parts can imply, suggest or describe product benefits or attributes. The coining process follows the same rules as does regular word formation: shortening (Performa, Renova, Intuit), compounding (PageMaker, ImageWriter), blending (DigiPlex, DigiScan, Fruitopia, Prinergy), affixation (Athlon, Duron, Infinium), and alteration (Compaq, FotoSets).

These neologisms are meaningful, possessing both the distinctiveness required for legal protection and the suggestiveness required for brand promotion. Examples are numerous, such as Lucent, PowerBook, DeskJet, AirTouch, Agilent, Adaptec, etc. Two cases will be analyzed semantically in more detail. The first is that of Athlon, the name of high performance microprocessors. This name is associated with athletic competition, emphasizing that the new product is a champion among its peers; it also suggests endurance, power, and speed, highlighting the superior capabilities and performance of the processor family. The second case is that of Duron, a name associated with 'durable', highlighting the processor's combination of capability, durability, and value. These names are not totally arbitrary or fanciful, which would make it difficult to promote the product; neither are they totally descriptive, which would make it difficult to register the brand, and promote a generic use of the name (such as in the case of thermos or mimeograph);

rather, they are suggestive and associative, retaining some degree of legal distinctiveness.

6.2. Multilingual communication

Global brand names target the world marketplace, crossing local and national borders. Naming global brands is difficult and complex because it involves different lingual, cultural, legal, marketing, and social climates. From a sociolinguistic point of view, a brand name that conveys a favorable meaning in one language may connote a negative meaning in another language, or even be a taboo word. Lekus (1969) listed several thousands of brand names with potential taboo meanings, involving more than 40 languages. Aman (1982) further summarized four possible sources of taboo meanings on the basis of English brand names. David Crystal (1987:115) offered the following observations on the complexity and difficulty of developing international brand names:

International companies are finding it increasingly important to develop brand names that can be used in a wide range of countries. To have a product with a single, universally recognized name can lead to major savings in design, production, and promotion costs...but often companies are not so successful, ending up with a name that is unusable for legal or linguistic reasons. A word that is pronounceable in one language may be quite impossible to say in another; and there is always the danger of unfortunate connotations creeping in, because of the name overlapping with words of an irrelevant or taboo meaning.

In Silicon Valley, brand names are usually destined for global operation; hence multilingual usability of brand names becomes a very critical issue for hi-tech brand names. Judging from the practices of brand naming firms in this area, the linguistic aspects of multilingual usability of brand names are secured by an

indispensable process in brand naming: viz., linguistic analysis. When the candidate names have been generated, the next important step in the procedure is a linguistic analysis, so as to ensure the multilingual and multicultural applicability of the prospective names. As shown by the procedures used by the naming companies in the area, hi-tech brand names in Silicon Valley are created with special attention to their linguistic decomposition in many languages. The numerous candidate names that are created have to undergo linguistic analysis, including phonetic, morphological, and semantic screening, so as to delete unsatisfactory names and to assure that the final name can be easily pronounced and does not carry an undesirable meaning in other languages and cultures. It is important to make sure a name will work in as many languages and cultures as possible, because the language of hi-tech is spoken everywhere, hence one has to think globally in brand-naming high-tech products. In so doing, one can guarantee the names' global character: easy pronunciation, spelling, and freedom of negative or taboo meanings at least in the major commercial languages. Lexicon Branding, for example, once candidate brand names have been developed, will ask native linguists in the countries for which the product is targeted to analyze and test these names.

It should be noted that most of this linguistic analysis is conducted using specialized software; for example, Lexicon developed Sounder® and GlobalTalk® for phonetic and multilingual assessment of names, while Namebase's Global NameCheck™ system is an online name testing service. Existing or newly created names can be evaluated in 17 major languages for phonetic features, for meanings, and for possible connotations, including positive as well as negative associations in formal/conversational/slang usage, as well as for ease of pronunciation. Such multilinguistically analyzed and screened brand names can ensure their global usability while avoiding phonetic or phonological mistakes (like Hyundai) and semantic or cultural misconnotations (as in Fanny).

Of course, there are other linguistic characteristics of the hi-tech global brand names in Silicon Valley that ensure successful communication, but we find that semantic appositeness and multilingual communicative capability, as stated above, play a major role

in the linguistic contribution of brand names. As one can see clearly in the naming procedures used by naming firms in Silicon Valley, a final brand name is generated and screened through a very complicated process, each of whose stages is aimed at creating a final product which can meet all and every rigid linguistic and other requirements.

7. Hi-tech brand naming calls for linguistic scholarship

Brand names form a good corpus for interdisciplinary studies. Similar to proper names, brand names represent a new corpus for onomastic studies (Nuessel 1992). Brand naming is the social use of language in commercial communications and is becoming increasingly important in modern marketing. Although brand naming is a process involving different considerations, brand naming is linguistic in nature because it encompasses the choosing, selecting, or coining from existing words and word parts in accordance with linguistic rules and principles. In brand naming, both the internal structures of language (phonetics, phonology, phonotactics, morpho-logy, semantics) and external factors (sociolinguistics, psycho-linguistics) have to be taken into consideration. Brand naming is one form of human linguistic communication, a sharing of information about the company, its products and services with consumers, investors, and employees. According to Mey, 'pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society' (Mey 2001:6). From this definition, it is clear that brand naming also belongs to the subject matter of pragmatic studies. In the preface to his *Pragmatics: An Introduction*, Mey (2001) envisioned the field of pragmatics as progressing at the speed of lightning. New forms of language use can be identified and researched, establishing new topics in pragmatic studies; the language use of brand naming is just one of these, of potential linguistic value and practical significance to both scholars and entrepreneurs. Brand naming can be regarded as a special domain of language use, as part of a social language,

viz., the language of advertising, whose study can be included into sociolinguistics and intercultural communication.

A brand name is only a symbol for a product; it does not necessarily entail success. Yet, a linguistically sound and reliable name can contribute to an effective communication about the brand among consumers, and thus to final success of the brand and product. Though it is hard, indeed almost impossible to measure the extent to which a name contributes to the success of the brand, it is universally accepted that a good name can trigger consumers' favorable associations with the product it represents and communicate product information most effectively and appropriately to consumers.

Today, brand naming has partly become the task of professional naming consultants who have the necessary language knowledge and linguistic expertise to create new brand names that are linguistically sound and legally available, and can best communicate product attributes and benefits. In the mature market of the hi-tech world, it is getting more and more difficult to create the right names for products. The colossal growth of the computer industry, the Internet, and world competition are all making it difficult for companies to come up with fitting names for their products. It can be safely predicted that hi-tech companies will more and more resort to linguistic scholarship in brand naming. As Willard Doyle (quoted in Calvo 1994:B1) has expressed it:

The maturing of the high-tech industry is good news. We're involved in an area that is becoming very important in the computer field. There's a whole depth here nobody's tapped. In a decade or two, there will be very smart people specializing in refining our communications down to the semantic level.

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Notes

1. Different people have different criteria for an ideal brand name, but generally speaking, an ideal brand name is short, simple, and easy to spell and pronounce, preferably suggestive of the product, and free of negative connotation in other languages and cultures.
2. The linguistic analysis of Viagra was conducted by Jim Burger of Namebase (www.namebase.com/news1.html).
3. This article mainly studies brand names created from English or from roots of ancient languages such as Latin and Greek.
4. These, along with Pentium, were among the candidate names generated.
5. In 1999, under the direction of Dr. William Leben, professor of linguistics at Stanford University, Lexicon conducted a pilot study on sound symbolism and brand naming, which confirmed that certain consonants can better convey product attributes than others. Visit www.lexicon-branding.com/techniq/sound.htm.
6. Dr. William Leben gave a speech entitled The Naming Industry on January 8, 1999 at the 73rd Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (visit www.lsadc.org/web2/meetprogram.htm).
7. An internet search showed that in 2000, there were at least 37 naming companies in California, such as Addison Whitney, Catchword, Idiom, Lexicon, Master-McNeil, Metaphor, Namebase, NameLab, Nomenon, Phenomena, etc. They are located mostly in Palo Alto, San Jose, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, Sausalito, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

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