

TECHNOLOGY BRANDS INSPIRED BY NATURE

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Abstract: English for Specific Purposes covers topics ranking from engineering to legal or business English; therefore it focuses more on language in context than on teaching language structures. Discourse in science and technology areas develops specialist type of knowledge according to the needs and practices of the respective communities which require particular forms of professional communication. This paper focuses on the problem of naming and classifying technology words, tech company brands and electronic devices, making a correlation with the natural environment, including vocabulary specific to biology, geography or history in a technical context etc. The research is based on a teaching activity performed by university students in Computing and Applied Electronics during an ESP evaluation task and it highlights issues about naming in the scientific discourse.

Keywords: English for Science and Technology, brand names, IT product names, nature.

Introduction

This paper examines names of popular technology related brands and IT product names selectively. It defines what a brand name is; it identifies and describes different technology, mostly computing brand names and information technology product terms with reference to nature. It also provides a brief history of their naming where available and discusses the linguistic features associated with them in a contrastive English/Romanian analysis.

Brand naming and brand identity

Brand names such as *Apple*®, *Blackberry*® and *Orange*® are as recognizable as the names of celebrities. These brand names are pivotal to creating an identity for the products and, thus, a “meaning code” for them. The brand name allows consumers to identify specific products and distinguish them from others. It has become so vital to the marketing world that it is now fiercely protected by law. Anyone who uses a trademark or brand name acquires the legal right to prevent others from using a similar one. The development of commerce goes hand in hand with that of the marketing and advertising strategies and techniques. As a consequence of this process, trade names have become increasingly diverse (Felecan, O. 2008: 579). Therefore, the importance given

to private property, market competition and distinctiveness has increased accordingly (Schack 2008: 61).

Why does naming a computer, a car or a mobile phone create such a powerful impact on us? The issue of naming deserves more attention. The identity of a brand is strongly connected to its name. Names being powerful, choosing to use or to alter them is an act of power. Basically, the answer lies in the ability of names to attribute a life-giving force to things. It is well known that the Romans thought names were prophetic; imprinting this belief in the expression *nomen est omen* which means *a name is an omen*.

The target audience for IT devices are supposed to be young adults and/or those engaged in computing and not only. Therefore, the physical appearance and the naming of these devices and programs are intended to appeal to this particular group in terms of design and images. The modality in which the general public uses a brand is linked to the associative meanings triggered by the name in use, which customers should identify whenever they hear, see and speak the name (Bugheșiu 2013: 80).

Names such as *Apple*®, *Blackberry*®, *Nokia*®, *Orange*®, *Samsung*®, *Windows*® etc. have become cultural symbols recognized by virtually anyone living in a modern consumerist society. According to Klein (2000: 16), brand name constitutes “the very fabric of their companies”. Many of the names contain evocative words; these verbal allusions are intended to evoke images of liveliness and vigour to suggest that the purchase and the use of a particular product will invigorate the user the way that nature protects and influences human beings. Sjöblom (2008) underlines the “multimodal potential” of company names, explaining that

multimodality in communication means that the interpretations are provided not only by linguistic elements (writing and speaking) but also by other semiotic modes, e.g. image, sound and movement, which all are linked together in a socio-cultural context (Sjöblom 2008: 351).

Considering Danesi’s definition, a brand name is a “product name that is designed to convey a specific image with which consumers can identify or relate to”. He explains the notion of “brand image”, which empowers “a product with an identity or distinct ‘personality’ by giving it an appealing name, designing a distinct logo for it, devising appropriate pricing for a specific market segment, associating it with a certain lifestyle through advertising and so on” (Danesi 2009: 47). This “image” constitutes the connotative meaning of a brand name or its “connotative index” (Danesi 2007: 37). According to the author, “it comes as little surprise to find that the term brand is no longer used today just to refer to a specific product line, but also to the company that manufactures it and to the social image that the company wishes to impart of itself and of its products” (2007: 14). A product is something made in factories while a brand is a logical construct, a name evoking an unconscious system of thought. But the “logical reasoning” used is hardly deductive; it is, rather, based on a poetic sense of the meaning

nuances built into words. The whole brand-naming process is essentially a “poetic” or “rhetorical act” as pointed out by the author (Danesi 2009: 182).

Furthermore, Keller (1993) defines brand elements as those trademarkable devices that help to identify and differentiate the brand. Researchers have investigated the value of a brand that stems from consumers’ brand knowledge. The researcher conceptualizes brand knowledge as a combination of brand awareness, or “likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease to which it does so” and brand image as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (Keller 1993: 3), it is shaped by the associations formed by consumers.

Thus, in their efforts to develop an effective name, marketers inevitably weigh the use of a meaningful brand name versus a non-meaningful brand name. A meaningful name is one that conveys relevant information about the product or an important product attribute, or establishes a connection between the product and the product category (Keller et al. 1998). Considering their idea one key element in selecting a brand name is the extent to which it conveys persuasive information. Persuasive meaning involves the extent to which a brand name suggests the qualities of the product. In most cases, the judgment that a name is good has little to do with its referential qualities, but rather its ability to be appealing.

Marketing practice and theoretical and empirical research have suggested that meaningful brand names are easier to remember and recall than non-meaningful brand names and, furthermore, meaningful brand names are generally preferred over non-meaningful brand names (Klink 2001; Kohli and Suri 2000). For example, does it suggest something about a product ingredient or the type of person who might use the brand? The choice of a good name depends on the priority given to the brand naming purposes. If recognition, recall and positive affect are the most important early in the product’s life, a meaningful name is likely to be favoured. If flexibility and adaptability are given higher priority, then a non-meaningful name is attractive. Klink (2001) embedded semantic meaning into brand names and found that consumers preferred products with meaningful brand names to products carrying less meaningful brand names. For instance, *Blackberry* is said to be a good name because it is “appealing to a broad range of customers” and has a “quick personality” (Frankel 2004: 75).

A suggestive brand name is defined as a brand name that conveys relevant attribute or benefit information in a particular product context (Keller et al. 1998). It also has well-defined associations or meanings that are seen as relevant in a product setting. Suggestive names are those that connect the consumer by allusion to certain lifestyles or psychological domains of meaning. Danesi also explains that “even in relaying seemingly straightforward information, descriptor brand names nevertheless evoke codes of meaning. They identify the product not as a simple product, but as something that belongs somewhere, is created by someone, or can do various things. And often the name is linked subconsciously to specific areas of lifestyle” (Danesi 2009: 5).

The iconic name is a subtype of the suggestive name category because it contains brand names that possess some property of iconicity. An icon in semiotic theory is a

sign that is made to resemble its referent in some way. The *Apple* Computer logo is an example of a visual icon, because it portrays its referent (an apple) visually. Alliterative names such as *Twitter* are vocal icons simulating the sounds that birds are perceived to make. Letter names and logos constitute a relatively large onomastic category. The name is written in a distinctive style (font, colour etc.), which also constitutes its logo. The combination of the linguistic and the visual element is highly effective, since it taps into two forms of memory, the verbal and the visual.

Another study (Kohli and Suri 2000) shows that meaningful names rate higher on overall liking than non meaningful names and, at the same time, they are easier for consumers to recall. The authors investigated differences in overall liking and recall of brand names across categories following the Patent and Trademark Office classification: *descriptive*, describing the product (*Laser Jet* for a laser printer), provide end-users with the benefit of knowing something about what kinds of goods or services that the company provides; *suggestive*, evoking the product's benefits, such as *Diehard* batteries; *arbitrary*, a common English word that has no apparent relation to the product category – *Apple* computer company; *coined* brand names, a fictional word, inherently unrelated to any product or product category. An analysis of their results indicated that these categories could be collapsed into two categories: *meaningful*, descriptive and suggestive names and *non-meaningful*, arbitrary and coined because there were essentially no differences in consumer responses to descriptive versus suggestive names and arbitrary versus coined names. In many cases, product names were developed and used as both a product and a corporation name. Therefore, for the present paper, I have adopted the meaningful/non-meaningful designation.

Naming in technology

In the following section of the article I will illustrate how names of tech brands and names of regular IT products are often used in combination with other words to suggest certain effects, e.g., colour, space, exotic origins and other linguistic means. The descriptor name is a word or phrase that describes the product in some way, such as what the product allows users to accomplish with it. Names such as *Argonaut* or *Oracle* are examples of words that are used metaphorically by corporations. *Argonaut Information Systems* was used metaphorically to convey the notion that the accounts payable software would perform heroically for end-users. The use of *Oracle Database Company* was intended to convey the idea that the company's databases would provide information upon request. The practice of using real words in a suggestive manner became more common between the 1970s and 1990s; therefore, it has become very common during the Internet boom of the 1990s. The use of real words in an arbitrary way was done with “the intention of communicating a set of associations that reflected the essence of these nascent brands” – they “provide a mental image that shapes our understanding and have the potential to re-describe reality by revealing new connections and hinting at hidden meanings” (Ind 2013: 201–202).

For instance, *Apple Inc.*, an American multinational corporation that designs,

develops and sells consumer electronics, computer software and personal computers, was founded in 1977, establishing powerful relationships with a core group of customers. It is associated with the familiar fruit that is represented on the logo of the company. According to Steve Jobs, Apple was named so because his family background was in the neighbourhood of an apple orchard, and he was on a fruitarian diet. He thought the name was “fun, spirited and not intimidating”. For example, *Acorn Computing*, a British computer company was based in Cambridge, England, in 1978. The company produced a number of computers which were especially popular in the UK, including the Acorn Electron and the Acorn Archimedes. Acorn’s BBC Micro computer dominated the UK educational computer market during the 1980s. Apricot Computers was one of the pioneers of the PC era. Originally known as *Applied Computer Technologies* (ACT) in 1985, however, the firm officially changed its name to *Apricot* and went on to flesh out an entire range of PC-compatible computers in UK. Another example is *Blackberry*, a wireless handheld device, developed by Research in Motion, which provides email, phone, text messaging, web browsing, an organizer, as well as instant messaging and corporate data access. The first BlackBerry device, the 850, was introduced in 1999 as a two-way pager in Munich, Germany. The name *BlackBerry* was coined by the marketing company Lexicon Branding. The name was chosen due to the resemblance of the keyboard’s buttons to that of the drupelets that compose the blackberry fruit etc. Cranberry’s Smart Client is an IT device designed in 2007 by combining the highly managed environment of a thin IT product with the performance of a full PC. Orange is former France Télécom S.A., a French multinational telecommunications corporation; it has been the company’s main brand for mobile, landline and internet services since 2006. The company was rebranded as *Orange* in July 2013. Raspberry Pi is a low cost, credit-card sized computer that plugs into a computer monitor or TV and uses a standard keyboard and mouse. The name is a kind of homage to other fruit-themed technologies like *Apricot* and *Tangerine*; while the *Pi* is short for the programming language *Python*, *Tangerine Computer Systems* refers to a British microcomputer company. Samsung is a South Korean multinational electronics company. According to Samsung’s founder, the meaning of the Korean word *Samsung* is ‘three stars’. Skype is a free voice-over-IP service and instant messaging client, currently developed by the Microsoft Skype Division. The name comes from *sky* and *peer*. Windows is the operating system from Microsoft that runs on most PCs.

Suggestive technology brand names:

- *Facebook*, a social networking website; a combination of two concrete nouns, the name suggests a universal, self-inclusive book created by people all around the world;
- *Foundry*, a data networking hardware corporation; the name connotes a foundational element;
- *Lumia*, Windows phone models by Nokia; the name is reminiscent of the Latin word *lumen* ‘light’ and it is probably associated the same way all over the Western world,

regardless of language. In fact people, who know its Finnish background, recognize the Finnish word meaning 'snow' in the name (Sjöblom 2013: 7);

- *Oracle*, database applications corporation; the name suggests some sort of wisdom used in order to satisfy customers' needs;

- *Solaris*, a Unix-based operating system, developed by Sun Microsystems;

- *Trojan horse*, malicious software disguised as a useful program. The term comes from the Greek story of the Trojan War, in which the Greeks give a giant wooden horse to their foes, the Trojans, as a peace offering. But after the Trojans drag the horse inside their city walls, Greek soldiers sneak out of the horse's belly and open the city gates, allowing their compatriots to capture Troy;

- *Veritas*, a company in the business of providing data protection and storage server computer networking hardware, the name comes from the actual Latin word meaning 'truth'.

I have also included below some examples of toponymic descriptor technology brands identifying the geographical location from where the technology brand originates or where a technology company is situated:

- *Adobe*, a software company, which got its name from the Adobe Creek that ran outside its original offices in Mountain View, California;

- *Amazon. com, Inc.*, an American international electronic commerce company. The founder searched for something "exotic and different" and chose Amazon, pulling references between the Amazon river and what he envisions his company to be;

- *Apache*, the most popular Web server software. The first version of Apache was released in 1995 by the Apache Group. According to the Apache Software Foundation the name was chosen from respect for the Native American Indian tribe of Apache, well known for their superior skills in warfare strategy and their inexhaustible endurance;

- *Cisco* is a truncation of San Francisco, the city that is near the company's headquarters in Silicon Valley;

- *Java*, an object-oriented programming language from Sun Microsystems for building internet applications; named after an island of Indonesia, Java ME – the Java Platform Micro Editor used to create applications that run on mobile phones etc;

- *Nokia*, a telecommunications company; it is a Finnish name based on a toponym: the first factory Nokia that manufactured wood pulp in the 1860s was situated on the banks of the Nokia river; the form of the name does not connect it to Finland, on the contrary there are people who think that is Japanese (Sjöblom 2013:6);

- *Silicon Valley*, a region in the Southern part of San Francisco, which is considered home to many of the world's largest high-tech corporations, now generally used as a metonym for the American high-technology business sector. The word *valley* refers to the Santa Clara Valley in the region, while the word *silicon* originally referred to the large number of silicon chip manufacturers;

- *Strawberry Global Technologies*, a private UK firm providing businesses with

server, storage and virtualisation services. The company name was picked from its initial place of origin of Strawberry Hill in Twickenham, Middlesex;

– *Yosemite* interface, the name of Apple's eleventh version of OS X, released in 2014, named after the famous valley in Yosemite National Park in the western Sierra Nevada Mountains of Northern California.

Some names are suggestive of the qualities of Nature, which is an appropriate onomastic fit since they refer to cleanliness, brightness, clearness or other sensory aspects. Suggestive names are effective semiotically, because they link products to human life schemes and cultural symbolism. Automobiles named after animals (*Beetle*®, *Cobra*®, *Colt*®, *Cougar*®, *Jaguar*®, *Mustang*®, *Viper*®) are part of a long-standing perception of the automobile as a replacement of animals as transporters of people. This is why we still refer to the energy associated with motor vehicle engines in terms of "horse power". Cars named after animals imply that animalistic qualities are entailed by driving the automobiles: e.g., a *Jaguar*® brings to mind a large and powerful creature, a *Cougar*® a fast and exotic animal.

Brand-naming is a rhetorical strategy and thus many of the suggestive names above, for instance, are saliently metaphorical. Symbolic names refer to the use of letters, numbers, acronyms, reflecting an "Internet-savvy code": *Toyota XR Matrix*® (car), *iPod*® (digital device), *Xbox*® (video game), *PS3-4-5-6*® (video game), *XM4Home*® (radio system), *Minds@Work*® (digital equipment). Considering the letter X, in the field of electronic products the following names can be found: *X-cam*®, *Xybernaut*®, *NeXT*®, *XM Satellite Radio*®, *Xbox*®, *Xobile*®, *Xincom*®. Another example is the use of lower-case "i", a practice introduced into brand naming by the Apple Computer Company. Today it is used to name a vast array of products: *iCaps*® (eye care products), *iCom*® (computer software), *iMac*® (computer), *iMark*® (eye shadow), *iPod*® (digital device), *iZod*® (shoes), and so on. The lower case "i" suggests "imagination", "Internet", "ingenuity," and "intelligence" etc. Using certain morphemes (such as suffixes) might convey scientific soundness. Various brand names are created in similar ways, connecting them to a generic scientific lexicon: *Panasonic*® (televisions and stereos), *Technics*® (stereo system) etc.

In addition, from a grammatical perspective, brand names belong to the category of proper names, having a special status, that of not marking concordance in gender or number (cf. Martin 2013: 303). On the other hand, product names belong to the category of ergonymic names, which are names for objects created by people; they are regarded as broader terms for commercial names (cf. Heegen 2013: 320–321). In brand name creation there is little concern for the orthographic, stylistic and other rules of the language. All brand names as they are registered are given a common class noun phrase which is the actual name for the product as recognised by the law. English words have been used in technology for certain creative-linguistic purposes, they are used in the case of a lexical gap, when not finding a suitable equivalent for a word or expression in the host language, or when the equivalent in the host language is considered taboo. They are also popular with computing because they are shorter than

the native language equivalents and because they attract the attention of the consumer (Bhatia 1993). Their symbolic value (Kelly-Holmes 2000) is revealed by the fact that consumers do not have to understand the foreign language that is used, as long as they recognize the connotations of the term with which it is associated.



Figure 1. Some examples of famous tech logos

A glossary of technology products, devices or features named in correlation with nature

In the computer world there are many technical words, referring to tech products – specifications, mechanisms and devices which are named after varied aspects related to the natural environment. Apart from the examples of technology brand names which have been included and discussed previously in this paper, I have also identified a list of information technology terms associated with technology products, using the Glossary of *Infotech, English for Computer Users*, by E. S. Ramacha, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Reference to human body:

- *backbone* – high-speed lines or connections that form the major access pathways within the Internet; Ro. *baza*;
- *barebones PC* – a computer that has minimal components: a case, motherboard, CPU, hard drive, RAM, and power supply;
- *Bluetooth* – a wireless technology that allows handhelds, mobile phones and other peripheral devices to communicate over short distances. It was named after Harald I Bluetooth, the 10th-century Danish king who unified Denmark and Norway;
- *freehand* (adjective *free* + common noun *hand*) – a Macromedia program for creating vector graphics, Ro. *fără folosirea mâinilor*;
- *handheld game* (noun *hand* + past participle of the verb *hold*) – a game played on portable gaming devices, Ro. *joc portabil*;
- *heartbleed bug* – a security hole in OpenSSL that was discovered by Codenomicon, a Finnish security firm. OpenSSL is the encryption technology used to create secure website connections over HTTPS;
- *laptop* – a small type of portable computer; Ro. *laptop*;
- *palmtop* – a hand-held personal computer; Ro. *palmtop*.

Natural environment (reference to plants, animals, insects etc.):

- *bug* – an error in a computer program. The term was first used by Grace Hopper,

American mathematician and admiral in the U.S. Navy who was a pioneer in developing computer technology. After a moth infiltrated the circuits of her computer, she coined the term *bug* to refer to unexplained computer failures. Ro. *eroare*;

– *to debug* – to correct program errors;

– *CamelCase* (also “dromedary case”) – a naming convention most often used in programming languages and website names in which the first letter of each word in a compound word is capitalised;

– *cell* – a specific location within a spreadsheet and is defined by the intersection of a row and column, Ro. *celula*;

– *cloud* – an early network diagram, it is associated with the entire Internet. It may also be used to describe specific online services, which are collectively labelled “cloud computing”; Ro. *cloud*;

– *leaf* – a file within a directory on the hard drive; Ro. *fișă*;

– *log file* – (*log*, Ro. *jurnal* + *file*) a file that contains a list of events; it is often generated during software installations and is created by Web servers; *log in*, *log out*;

– *FoxPro* – a text-based procedurally oriented programming language, Ro. *program FoxPro*;

– *Leopard software* – is another name for Mac OS X 10.5, which was released on October 26, 2007. It followed Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger and preceded the release of Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard;

– *Lion software* – is Mac OS X 10.7, the eighth version of Apple’s desktop operating system;

– *mouse* – a small input device used to specify the position of the cursor or to make choices from menus; a *mouse pad* is a surface designed for tracking the motion of a computer mouse. During the 18th century people began to use the word *mouse* in various technical senses when referring to items that somehow resembled a mouse. The nautical mouse was a pear-shaped knob on the outside of a knot. The plumber’s mouse was a small weight with a cord attached. The computer mouse grew out of this tradition and dates from around the mid-1960s; Ro. *mouse*;

– *Python* – a high-level programming language designed to be easy to read and simple to implement;

– *root* – the top-level directory of a file system. The word is derived from a tree root, since it represents the starting point of a hierarchical tree structure. The folders within the tree represent the branches, while the actual files are considered the leaves;

– *Ruby* – an object-oriented programming language. It was created by Yukihiro Matsumoto and is named after the birthstone of one his colleagues, in the physical world it refers to a red gemstone;

– *shell* – a software program that interprets commands from the user so that the operating system can understand them and perform the appropriate functions, in the physical world it refers to a small protective covering for certain animals, such as clams, crabs;

– *skin* – refers to the appearance of a program’s interface. By changing the skin of

a program, one can make the interface look completely different, but usually still have all the same functions;

- *spider* – a computer-robot program that collects information from sites by using keywords or through web indexes;

- *Tiger* – the code name for Mac OS X 10.4, released April 29, 2005. Tiger follows a list of other felines in the Mac OS X line up, including *Panther* (10.3), *Jaguar* (10.2), *Puma* (10.1), and *Cheetah* (10.0). Apple originally used the cat names as internal names for the operating system development, but actually started to market the names with the release of *Jaguar*;

- *tweet* – an online posting created by a Twitter user; Twitter is an online service that allows you to share updates with other users; in the physical world it refers to the sound a bird makes;

- *virus* – a piece of software which attaches itself to a file and infects a program and other software;

- *worm* – a self-copying program that spreads through email attachment; it replicates itself and sends a copy to everyone in contact with it;

- *Web* – a network of documents that works in a hypertext environment, also known as WWW the World Wide Web; other combination of words: *webcam*, *webcast*, *web designer*, *web editor*, *web index*, *webmaster*, *web page*, *web portal*, *web TV*, *website* etc.

Fire/Flash family of compound nouns:

- *Firebird* – an open source relational database management system that runs on Linux, Windows, and a variety of Unix;

- *Firefox* – a web browser, part of the open-source Mozilla project;

- *Firewall* – a software and/or hardware device that allows limited access to an internal network from the Net;

- *flame* – an angry or insulting comment on a discussion group;

- *Flash* – the Adobe Flash Player/Professional multimedia authorising program, used to create animations and advertisements;

- *flash card reader* – a device which reads and writes a flash memory card;

- *flash drive* – a USB storage device;

- *flash memory* – a type of non-volatile memory that can be erased and reprogrammed.

Conclusion

Naming a product, technology or company makes it possible to refer to it as if it had a distinctive character or quality. Names in computing provide significant examples of the various factors that go into the production of a brand name, a product aimed at a specific target group and the deliberate use of language designed to appeal to it. Well chosen brand names stick to our mind, in the same way that the meanings of ordinary words do. As a result, they become a significant area of our semantic and pragmatic knowledge.

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