

Iconicity in Brand Names*

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1. Introduction

Why are brand names a promising area for research into iconicity? What is meaning in consumer products, and their designations? In the following, I will address these questions, arguing that it is connotational meaning that is much more important for effective 'branding' than denotational meaning. I will then distinguish three types of iconicity in brand names, and discuss them in some detail in the following sections: foreign-sounding names, names evoking a particular register of English, and the syntax of brand names.

The terms *brand name*, *business name*, *certification name*, *collective name*, *corporate name*, *house name*, *product name*, *proprietary name*, *registered name*, *service name* and *trade name* are widely used as synonyms, and the second element *name* may also be substituted by *mark*. The two most frequently used terms *brand name/mark* and *trade name/mark* are used somewhat generically to "refer to any name created for the specific purpose of furthering trade" (Praninskas 1968: 12). Section 45 of the U.S. Federal Trademark Statute defines *trademark* as,

a word, name, symbol or device or any combination thereof which is used to identify and distinguish the goods of one person from goods manufactured or sold by others and to indicate the source of the services, even if the source is unknown (quoted from <http://www.tmpatentlaw.com/tmlaw.htm>).

Brand name/mark is often said to be a colloquial term for *trade name/mark* (cf. e.g. Crowley 1979: vii), and these terms will be used interchangeably here. The words and symbols which are specifically created and used to further trade are

often registered with the Patent and Trademark Office and then enjoy particular legal protection against similar marks that might be used fraudulently. Currently, well over one million trade marks are registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office and their number is rising by about 30.000 a year (cf. Bryson 1994: 288). In Germany more than 400.000 were registered in 1992 (cf. Horrmann 1992: 3), and their number has also been rising constantly. One can conclude from these figures that it is becoming increasingly difficult to register new names. It has become a familiar complaint among creators of trade names that new names that have not already been registered in an identical or similar form are difficult to come up with. However, a commercial name used to designate and promote a product is still considered a trade name even if it is not registered. Indeed, the vast majority of trade names are not legally registered. According to the U.S. Federal Trademark Statute, simple use of a commercial name establishes a common-law claim to the name:

No registration of any form is required for ownership of a trademark under the common law. A business may claim common law ownership as soon as the mark is used in commerce (quoted from <http://www.tmpatentlaw.com/tmlaw.htm>).

This means that unregistered trade names are also protected under the law. Of the so-called *trademark symbols*, *TM* (for 'trade mark'), *SM* (for 'service mark') and ® (for 'registered trademark') only the latter, least frequently used, shows that a brand name has been registered. The fact that not all trade names are registered is important because it means that the legal restrictions to registration only apply to a rather limited number of names. The U.S. Federal Trademark Statute lists the following legal restrictions to registration: descriptive and deceptively misdescriptive, generic, geographically descriptive and deceptively misdescriptive, scandalous and immoral, deceptive names, and surnames cannot be registered (cf. <http://www.tmpatentlaw.com/tmlaw.htm>)

Part of the above-quoted definition of brand names (from Praninskas 1968: 12) is that they are "*created* for the specific purpose of furthering trade" (my emphasis). If indeed iconicity is prevalent in circumstances in which language is created, as the introduction argues (cf. Fischer and Nänny, this volume), brand names will be a most promising area of research. Brand names, which are in large part a phenomenon of the twentieth century, are continuously being created to name new products, or to distinguish them from similar ones. The creative and financial efforts spent on a new brand name are considerable as the brand name

is of prime importance in the marketing of a product and because the above-mentioned legal restrictions apply. Generally, it can be said that brand names are only rarely arbitrary linguistic signs. In a corpus of more than 2000 automobile names I analysed, only a minority of them were symbols in Peirce's sense, i.e. signs in which the link between signifier and signified is purely conventional. The vast majority are iconic, or indexical in some way: 36% of the names were based upon a metonymic relationship (e.g. *Aspen*, *Bel Air*, *Biarritz*), i.e. they are indexical signs, in which the signifier is closely associated with the signified. The remainder are icons, for which there is a similarity between the signifier and the signified (cf. Saeed 1997: 5, on Peirce's classification of signs; and Piller 1996a: 173f, on the analysis of a corpus of automobile names). According to Bencze (1991: 157), secondary motivation that is iconic can be an image (i.e. there is a topological similarity between the sign and the denotatum), a diagram (i.e. the relations of the sign are similar to the relations of the denotatum), or a metaphor (i.e. there is a similarity between the signified and the denotatum). In my corpus of automobile names, 28% of the names are metaphorically iconic in this sense (e.g. *Eagle*, *Falcon*, *Hawk*), and 24% are diagrams (e.g. *MT*, *S10*, *SX/4*). There are no images.

Thus, the word *Eagle* used for a brand of car is motivated by its primary meaning. While in metaphorically iconic brand names like *Eagle* the secondary motivation derives from a similarity in meaning, we look for a similarity between form and meaning in strictly iconic ones. Strictly iconic signs are either images or diagrams. Although they are somewhat rarer than metaphorically iconic brand names, advertising experts have always been aware of the persuasive force of phonetic symbolism or the 'physiomy of language' (cf. e.g. Klickow 1963 and 1964). Truly iconic brand names, 'images', are onomatopoeic names like *CatChow* for a cat food, which to my mind imitates the sound a satisfied cat might make,¹ or those names coined on a recurrent pattern of sound symbolism (cf. Fónagy; A. Fischer, Meier; all in this volume). The close front vowel, for instance, is often associated with smallness and endearment, and occurs in *Huggies*, a brand of baby wipes, or *Crunchie*, a brand of breakfast cereal. Initial *cr-* is associated with 'crispiness', the sensation of eating firm and fresh food, and occurs in the names of various food products, e.g. *Crunchie*, *Crispie*, or *Crisco*. After this brief glance at brand names that are images, I shall concentrate on diagrammatic iconicity in the following, i.e. on brand names that are characterised by a similarity between the relation of signs and the relation of denotata. I am going to discuss three different types of diagrammatic iconicity in brand names:

1. The brand name is part of another language, or seems to be part of another language, and therefore the name suggests that the product so named is also part of another culture and has the qualities stereotypically associated with speakers of that language. These brand names are diagrammatically iconic because the product is related to another culture just as the name is related to another code.
2. The brand name is not linked to another language but to a particular register of English, and thus connotes for instance the exactness, and the technological and scientific marvels usually associated with the language of technology. Again, these brand names are diagrammatically iconic because the product is related to a certain field of action just as the name is related to the code of that field of action.
3. The syntax of brand names is modelled as an iconic structure. While in general English the determinant usually precedes the determinatum, word order in brand names is usually the other way round. In *Ford Escort*, for instance, the more general designation precedes the more specific one and thus the structure of the name mirrors the relative importance of the two (or more) denotata.

2. Meaning in brand names

Before discussing these three types of brand names in further detail let me address a theoretical issue that makes the study of iconicity in brand names particularly tricky: in modern consumer society various products from one product group differ little in their functionality. Any old car is a means of transport but only some are “Built to set you free” (Chrysler advertising slogan), are “Driven by passion” (Fiat slogan), are “Engineered to be enjoyed” (Peugeot slogan), or are “The American Legend” (Jeep slogan). The same goes for banks. All of them can do money transactions but what consumers can reasonably expect these days is “More than just a bank” (NatWest slogan), “Not just banking. Citibanking” (Citibank slogan), “The new global perspective” (State Bank of India slogan), or “Global strength. Local presence” (Hong Kong Bank of Australia slogan). It is usually not a product’s utilitarian character that is being advertised but products are invested with additional emotional values such as freedom, comfort, prestige, modernity, power etc. A study of branded products

bluntly heads one of its chapters *Zur Irrelevanz des Grundnutzens in der aktuellen Konsumkultur* ('on the irrelevance of a product's main use in contemporary consumer culture'; Fritz 1994: 167). According to two psychologists, a car in modern Western consumer society is no longer a means of transport but

an expression of Eros in the broadest sense, a need to demonstrate that one is alive, that one matters, that one makes a difference in the world (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 27).

Really 'good' brand names, i.e. those with a powerful sales appeal, connote these secondary product properties and not the functional ones. Thus, when we look for similarity between form and meaning in brand names, we are looking for something quite intangible. Let me exemplify this by comparing two standard examples of iconicity from non-commercial language with iconic brand names: the title page of Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* is printed in the shape of a bomb (cf. Figure 1) — the typographic form of the title page mirrors the shape of the denotatum of the word *bomb* 'a hollow metal container filled with explosive, or with other chemicals of a stated type or effect' (*LDEL*C), and both, the title page, and the concept of *bomb* may additionally be invested with connotational meanings such as 'destructive', 'causes suffering', 'WW II' etc. Comparing this with *CatChow*, the name of a brand of cat food, we see, or rather can hear, that *chow* does neither imitate any sound that might pertain to the food nor the sound a cat might make while eating: there is no similarity between this form and the denotatum of the words 'food' or 'eating' but rather with a connotational meaning of them, 'satisfaction'. This similarity is 'suggested' to the consumer because we all know that food does not necessarily produce satisfaction. Thus, in the first example there is an iconic relationship between the form of the title page and the denotational meaning of *bomb*, while in the second example the form of the brand names does not mime, or pretend to mime, denotational, but connotational meaning.

An example of diagrammatic iconicity should further clarify my point: in the (regular) English plural forms a 'more' in form is related to a 'more' in content. So, just as we get a longer form in *cars* than in *car* we get a similar quantitative relationship between the denotata of these two items. Illustration 2 details these relationships: the relationship between the signifier *car* and its signified, and the signifier *cars* and its signified is established by convention. The symbolic nature of these relationships is marked by dotted lines. The continuous lines, however, indicate a direct relationship. The signifier *car* is directly

Slaughterhouse-Five

OR

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

A DUTY-DANCE WITH DEATH

BY

Kurt Vonnegut

A FOURTH-GENERATION GERMAN-AMERICAN
NOW LIVING IN EASY CIRCUMSTANCES
ON CAPE COD
[AND SMOKING TOO MUCH],
WHO, AS AN AMERICAN INFANTRY SCOUT
HORS DE COMBAT,
AS A PRISONER OF WAR,
WITNESSED THE FIRE-BOMBING
OF DRESDEN, GERMANY,
"THE FLORENCE OF THE ELBE,"
A LONG TIME AGO,
AND SURVIVED TO TELL THE TALE.
THIS IS A NOVEL
SOMEWHAT IN THE TELEGRAPHIC SCHIZOPHRENIC
MANNER OF TALES
OF THE PLANET TRALFAMADORE,
WHERE THE FLYING SAUCERS
COME FROM
PEACE.



Figure 1. *The title of Slaughterhouse-Five; source: Vonnegut 1966*

related to its plural form, and one car is directly related to a larger quantity of cars. The relation between the two signifiers, *car* and *cars*, directly reflects the relation between their two signifieds ('diagrammatic iconicity').

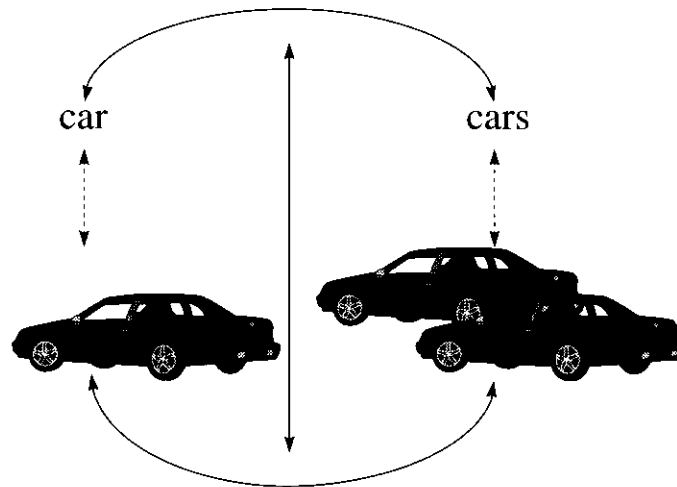


Figure 2. *Example of diagrammatic iconicity*

Compare this to *LaFemme*, the name of a 1955 trim option on the Dodge Custom Royal. The model is noteworthy for being the automobile industry's first appeal to women with a special pink and white colour combination on the car and matching cape, boots, umbrella, shoulder bag and floral upholstery fabrics (cf. Gunnell 1992: 278). Although there is no objective relationship whatsoever between this car and France, although none of its parts was manufactured in France, and although no French couturier was involved in the design, the name implies that just as *LaFemme* is a French phrase, so the automobile is part of French fashion.² Illustration 3 details this relationship: the signifier *LaFemme* is conventionally related to its denotation, a particular type of American car. It is also directly related to the sign system in which it usually works: it *is* a French sign in an English context. As a French sign in a French context, *LaFemme* is conventionally related to its denotation, 'the woman'. As a French sign in an English context, however, it is conventionally related to connotational meanings such as 'fashion', 'elegance', or 'femininity'. So, through the relation between

the sign *LaFemme* and the sign system 'the French language' that exists in English (represented through a continuous line in Illustration 3), a relation is *suggested* diagrammatically. This relationship between the two signifieds, that makes the car attractive for female customers, is represented through the bottom dotted line. The difference between the two examples is clear: in the first case, an objectively existing relationship is mirrored iconically; in the second case, it is *created* iconically.

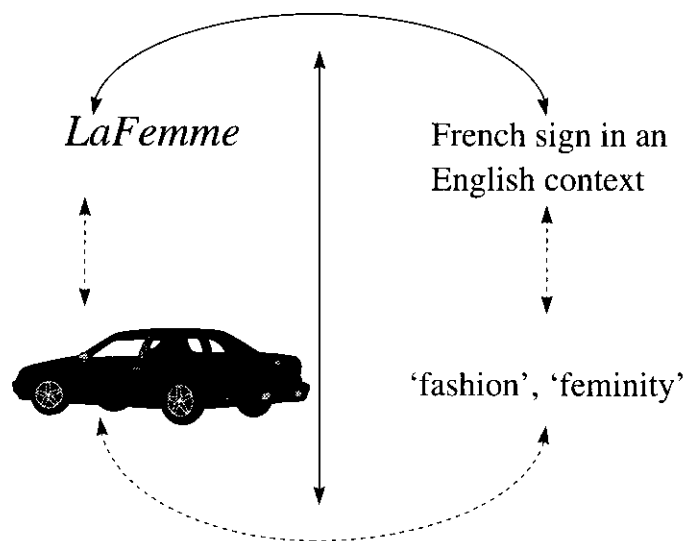


Figure 3. *Example of diagrammatic iconicity in brand names*

This creation and suggestion of similarities does not only apply to strictly iconic and diagrammatically iconic names but also goes for metaphorically iconic (Peirce's sense) names: to be admitted for registration, metaphors cannot focus on essential features as that would make them descriptive (cf. Ephratt 1996) but they may nevertheless be iconic. To take the well-known brand name for a computer company and their products, *Apple*: to compare a computer to a typewriter, or a counting machine would be ridiculous because the grounds of comparison 'can type', 'can do calculations' are too basic, and a must on whatever type of computer. But if you compare it to an apple, you are doing something really creative: you compare it to the archetypal fruit of northern

climes — so the metaphorically evoked message is ‘this PC is an archetype’; you compare it to the fruit of temptation in the Bible: ‘You won’t be able to resist this computer’; an apple is a basic shape/fruit: ‘this computer serves your basic needs, and you won’t be confused by technical gibberish’, etc. This is the ‘information’ the name *Apple* metaphorically creates and sells — although it may not necessarily be an actual property of the product. This creation of similarities on the level of connotational rather than denotational meaning is typical of commercial language and should be borne in mind during the following discussion of the three types of diagrammatic iconicity in brand names I outlined above.

3. Foreign brand names

Brand names that are taken from another language than English, or are invented but comply with certain expectations people hold about the sounds of words of another language suggest the ‘foreignness’ of a product: “Sometimes it pays *not* to translate” (Crystal 1987: 348; emphasis in the original). Consumers are invited to assume that the stereotype/s they hold about the language in question, the area where it is spoken and its speakers will also apply to the product. Thus, brand names based on a foreign language will typically be taken from prestige languages, from languages that are, and whose speakers are, positively stereotyped. This iconic use of words from another language as a prestige marker in commercial language has been described most thoroughly for Japan, and its use of Latin inscriptions (cf. e.g. Haarmann 1984, 1986; Wienold 1995). These inscriptions are typically English or English-sounding words.

In British and American culture, a commonly held stereotype about France, for instance, is the attractiveness of French fashion and cuisine. And, sure enough, there are cosmetic products called *clinique* or *Voile Parfumé*, hosiery called *L’Eggs*, food products called *LaYogurt* or *Courvoisier*, or cars called *d’Elegance*, *La Comtesse*, or *Parisienne*. French is also spoken in Switzerland and here the stereotype differs: watchmakers and jewellers want to connote precision and reliability together with elegance and high value. In order not to confuse the consumer they usually print *Suisse* and/or *Genève* (not ‘Switzerland’ or ‘Geneva’!) a couple of times prominently somewhere in the ad. Examples are *Corum, Maîtres Artisans d’Horlogerie, Suisse; Chopard Genève*, or *Piaget, Maître Joaillier à Genève*. It is also interesting to note that in the last example none of

the diacritics that we would expect in *maître*, à, and *Genève* is printed — it is not linguistic precision that counts but linguistic impression. Spanish, on the other hand, is the language of the American Southwest, and all the stereotypes about freedom, adventure, masculinity etc. are suggested to hold true for the product, too: in car names like *Bravada*, *Caballero*, *El Camino*, or *La Espada*. Obviously brand namers are very confident that consumers will pick the ‘correct’, i.e. the positive stereotype because, besides the positive stereotype, there is also a negative stereotype about Spanish as it is at the same time the language of a poor, discriminated minority. Italian is often used to connote luxury and elegance as in the perfume name *Dolce Vita Duo Prestige*, or in *Pronto*, the name of a calling card. For fans of automobile racing Italian is also the language of men like Ettore Bugatti, Tazio Nuvolari, or Alberto Ascari, and it comes as no surprise that we get car names like *Avanti*, *Corsa*, *Gran Turismo*, or *La Tosca*. Most of the American brand names of this type are taken from Romance languages (cf. Piller 1996b: 183, on the figures for American automobile names), but the meditative mantra of Hinduism *Om* can also be found on cosmetic products: it seems to promise a superior sense of perception as the slogan “the sixth scent” indicates.

As soon as a language has prestige status, the ‘borrowings’ from that language often turn out to be no ‘real’ borrowings at all. From a native speaker’s point-of-view they are mistakes or oddities (cf. also Wienold 1995: 28). Thus, brand names sometimes are not really words of one or the other language. It is a common strategy to ‘turn English words into Romance ones’ by prefixing them with a *le* or *la* or *el* etc. Thus, *L’Eggs* (the hosiery comes in egg-shaped packages and obviously plays on *legs*), *LaYogurt*, or *El Morrocco* (a car) turn perfectly English words into foreign ones. In some instances, this play with foreign languages gets really confusing as in *Mikasa*, the name of a furniture retailer, which I would identify as a spelling variant of Spanish *mi casa* ‘my house’ but which a number of Americans I asked thought of as a Japanese name. Illustrations 4 and 5 demonstrate the point I am trying to make nicely: any utterance with a certain sound structure qualifies as Spanish if you’ve just almost choked yourself to death with hot enchilada sauce. (cf. Illustration 4), and certain products — like night clubs in Illustration 5 — are so strongly connected to the use of foreign-sounding names that the name of a night club is all the cartoon character can think of upon hearing the foreign-sounding phrase.

It is important to note that even the easy-to-register invented names may take on these connotations, and may thus become diagrammatically iconic.



Figure 4. A 'Blondie' cartoon (© King Features Syndicate Inc. 1996)

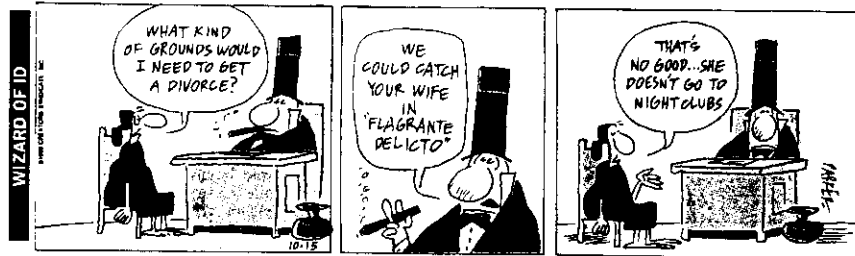


Figure 5. A 'Wizard of ID' cartoon (© Creators Syndicate Inc. 1996)

KODAK, for instance, was created by George Eastman with the help of a stack of children's letter cards shifted around until he came up with the name (cf. Nolan 1961). He liked the name because of its 'perfect shape' — symmetry — and because of its full vowels that are so attractive to speakers of languages with a Germanic stress-pattern, and the accompanying reduction of unstressed vowels to the schwa. Languages with full vowels are spoken in more pleasant climes — with brighter colours.³ XEDOS, a car produced by Mazda, is an artificial computer coinage that sounds very Greek because of the initial 'X' and the ending '-os' — and, sure enough, in ads the car is placed in front of Doric columns and other classical sites, and its 'classical features' are stressed.

It should also be noted that stereotypes are not identical throughout the English-speaking world but may differ from one culture to another. Thus, Audi makes use of a stereotype about Germany and technological reliability with its German-speaking slogan *Vorsprung durch Technik* ('ahead because of technology') in Britain but not in the US, where the slogan 'driving at its most advanced' is used.

4. Brand names taken from a particular register

A similar strategy of diagrammatic iconicity is employed in brand names that are part of a particular register of English. Just as acronyms are typical of the language for the specific purpose of technology, so the products they denote are suggested to be technologically and scientifically reliable and advanced. Most speakers of English have no clue what *DECpc Lpv 433dx* or *17GLsi* on computers, *JVC Compact VHS GR-AX210U* on a camcorder, *JVC Personal XL-P42* on a CD-player, or *LN7*, *RT/10*, *SL 2* or *XR-7* on cars stand for but they assume that these names stand for something, and probably something sophisticated. Names of this type suggest to the non-specialist that the product so named (usually a machine about which the consumer has little or no expert knowledge) is distinguished from others by its technological sophistication like the sign used as a name differs from other words by its specific character.

Table 1. *Brand names that are number-letter-combinations together with a price list (source: the on-line catalogue at <http://www.pcplnt.com/advance/>)*

<i>JVC Compact VHS Camcorder</i>	GR-AX210U	\$549.50
	GR-AX410U	\$609.50
	GR-AX510U	\$669.50
	GR-AX710U	\$689.50
	GR-AX810U	\$719.50
	GR-AX910U	\$769.50
	GR-DV1U	\$2449.50
<i>JVC Stereo Cassette Deck</i>	TDR272BK	\$144.50
	TDR462BK	\$208.50
	TDV662BK	\$291.50
<i>JVC Slimline Tuner/Cassette/CD</i>	RC-QS10	\$144.50
	RC-QW20	\$161.50
	RC-QW35	\$168.50
	RC-NX1	\$216.50
<i>JVC Detachable Tuner/Cassette/CD</i>	PC-X55	\$144.50
	PCX-X75	\$178.50
	PC-X103	\$178.50
	PC-X106	\$194.50
	PC-XC7	\$194.50
	PC-XC70	\$276.50

If these names are taken in groups, at least the numerals make some sense in relation to each other (cf. Table 1). Table 1 shows the designations for various products manufactured by JVC in relation to their prices. 'The higher the number the higher the price' is a clearly noticeable pattern for all products but it is the only one. The numbers themselves do not form regular patterns: the names of the camcorders (210–410–510–710–810–910), for instance, sometimes differ by one hundred from the next advanced product, sometimes by two hundred. The same goes for all the other products: for the names of the stereo cassette decks it is 272 that falls out of the pattern, for the names of Slimline Tuner/Cassette/CDs it is 35, and the names of Detachable Tuner/Cassette/CDs only form pairs but no overall pattern. The use of the letters seems to be even less motivated. To the average consumer they look like acronyms of which they do not know the base. In fact, most of these brand names do not have a base, i.e. they do not stand for anything. Only the assumption that they stand for something motivates them and makes them iconic. Enders (1974) calls these acronym-like brand names 'magic signs' that tell the lay consumer that the product they refer to are more sophisticated than they can ever hope to understand.

Certain product groups, particularly in the electronics sector, about which consumers have little or no expert knowledge but which they expect to be technologically sophisticated, bear virtually no trade names but number-letter-combinations. Out of 126 loudspeakers by 71 producers reviewed on the website <http://www.best.com/~mtbr/audio/reviews/speakers.shtml>, only 17 (=13.5%) (*Aerius*, *Alpha Speakers*, *Centaur Minor*, *Cornwall*, *Ensemble*, *Focus*, *Heritage*, *Infinity Beta Speakers*, *Isis*, *Nucleus Reference*, *One*, *Quintet*, *Sapphire Speakers*, *Stratus Silver*, *Subwoofer*, *True Subwoofer*, *Zeta*) are word names while all the others are number-letter-combinations (e.g. *1B*, *300ti*, *800 ASW*, *C10*, *CDM-1*, *DM 601*, *ES22*, *KG 3.5*, *KX-212*, *S-35*, *SC-IV*, *VS-100*), numbers-only names (e.g. *5.0*, *302*, *407*, *602*, *731*, *733*, *1000*, *12600*), or combinations of words, numbers and/or letters (e.g. *Energy C-8*, *Impact 20*, *Kappa 6.1*, *Lynnfield 500L*, *Matrix 804*, *Mirage 3si*, *PowerField 12*).

Some of the above word names like *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Kappa* and *Zeta* combine the iconic representation of a high standard of technology that a letter suggests with being Greek, the language of learning par excellence. Many of the other names of loudspeakers rely on the prestige of Latin (e.g. *Aerius*, *Focus*, *Matrix*, *Nucleus*, *Stratus*) or antiquity in general (*Centaur Minor*, *Heritage*, *Isis*). As Latinate words are much more frequent in most registers of English for Specific Purposes than in everyday vocabulary, this is a further indicator that brand

namers try to suggest these particular registers of English to the consumers of technically advanced products like loudspeakers. As 'classical' words they are particularly appealing to consumers with 'classical' tastes, in music or elsewhere.

5. The syntax of brand names

A further interesting aspect of iconicity in brand names is their syntax: the typical combination of 'name of producer' followed by 'name of series, type, model etc.' as in *Ford Escort*, *Saab Aero*, *Mercury Sable* (cars), *DECpc Lpv 433dx*, *Samsung SyncMaster 17GLsi* (computers), *Trump TAJ Mahal* (gambling place in Atlantic City owned by Donald J. Trump), or *Christian Dior Dolce Vita Duo Prestige* (perfume) is extremely uncommon in the system of general English word order: combinations such as *attorney general*, *president elect*, or *notary public* are exceptions from the usual pattern, in which the more general item follows the more specific one. The *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al. 1985: 1296) says about this pattern:

Though virtually confined to cuisine (rather than mere cooking), it is moderately productive within these limits, perhaps especially in Am[erican] E[nglish]. In Br[itish] E[nglish] one finds *veal paprika* and many others, but there is some resistance to this type of postposition with other than French lexical items, as in *pâté maison*, *sole bonne femme*.

If we take brand names into account, this minor type is no longer restricted to 'cuisine words' but it turns out to be the major pattern in the formation of phrasal brand names (for figures on the frequency of this pattern in American automobile names, cf. Piller 1995).

How can we explain this surprising frequency of an uncommon syntactic pattern? I suggest that this uncommon structure in brand names mirrors the fact that the name of the producer is supposed to stay around for far longer than the name of a certain line or make, and that it therefore has to take precedence over the latter in the mind of the consumer. If it comes to buying the product the first thing is that you enter the Saab instead of the Mercury dealership, or choose the DEC over the Samsung display area — choosing a particular Mercury or Samsung or whatever is secondary. The structure of the names mirrors these action sequences, and is thus diagrammatically iconic.

6. Conclusion

It has been shown that brand names are artificially coined language items with the express purpose of furthering trade. The brand name is of vital importance in the marketing of a product as the words of two brand namers from the early 60s, which are still valid even today, show:

Change the advertising, change the distribution, change the promotion, change even the product itself, and you may have lost nothing but instead gained in sales appeal. But change the product name, and you are starting all over again (Lippincott and Margulies 1961: 47).

Therefore a great deal of creativity and money is invested in the creation of brand names, which makes them a suitable field for investigation into iconicity. At the same time it is a very difficult field as the properties of the products that are mirrored iconically are rarely of the tangible sort. The product characteristics advertised in modern consumer society are no longer the central uses a product can be put to but rather secondary values they are invested with. So it is often quite difficult, if not impossible, to state what it is exactly that a certain name mirrors.

Notes

- * I am very much indebted to Olga Fischer and Max Nänny for extensive comments on a previous draft of this paper.
- 1. There is (or was: *CIDE*: 'dated') a US slang noun *chow* for 'food', which might derive from Chinese Pidgin English *chowchow* (cf. Romaine 1994: 166); the zero-derived verb *chow* (according to *LDEL*C also American English slang) means 'to eat as though one is very hungry, and showing pleasure'.
- 2. Generally, the implication could be 'part of French culture' but fashion is the stereotypical aspect of French culture that is most frequently invoked in brand names.
- 3. Eastman went to the trouble of documenting that *KODAK* sounded good even to speakers of African languages as a picture in the George Eastman House, a museum devoted to him and his enterprise, in Rochester, New York, shows.

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