

Naming an Organisation: A (Socio)linguistic Study

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Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore. (Ecclesiastes ch. 44, v. 9)

The (re)naming practices of organisations have been well researched from a variety of perspectives, but mainly as an element of corporate branding. What seems to be missing is a (socio)linguistic perspective. Assuming that corporate (re)naming is, among other things, a sociolinguistic process, the absence of linguistic theories seems rather surprising. What is more, this issue is part of a wider problem, organisational scholars' overconfidence, which has led to the treatment of linguistics as a non-accredited theory and produced the mistaken view that organisational studies is able to do without linguistics. Using a number of examples taken from current organisational research, this paper shows that there have been attempts to introduce into the research on corporate (re)naming ideas and theories that already have been explained by linguistics. I will further describe a number of advantages that result from the application of linguistics in organisational studies. I also explain reasons for organisational scholars' fear of linguistics. In the case of corporate renaming, I will show practical uses of linguistic theories. In the conclusion, possible contributions by various linguistic subdisciplines are outlined.

Passion for a name is one of the strongest of all human passions. That which has a name has been considered lasting, memorable and of great worth (Moscovici (2000:243). Therefore, "to bestow a name on something or someone, has a very special, almost solemn significance. In naming something, we extricate it from a disturbing anonymity, to endow it with a genealogy and to include it in a complex of specific words, to locate it, in fact, in the identity matrix of our culture" (p. 45).

Society has always been well aware of the importance of a name; throughout history individuals, groups and organisations have permeated societies not only through their actions, but also through their names. Like flags, uniforms and coats of arms, names are unmistakable signs of affiliation and identity.

Like people, companies have names and, like personal names, company names stand for image, identity, reputation, culture and promise. The usefulness of having a good name is enormous: it can be applied to all products and can be combined with a variety of brand names which enables sub-branding. As a driver of the brand, the name can create equity, which can be measured and managed. The growing importance of corporate names is perhaps best reflected in an exploding number of agencies offering solutions to strategic corporate name generating. Small wonder that the naming rights business is positively booming: existing corporate names of good reputation can be simply given/taken in exchange for compensation (Burton 2008; cf. also Leeds, Leeds and Pistolet 2007).

Companies not only select their names with utmost care, they also continually refer to their names in their public discourse. In a computational analysis of a text corpus of five CPD default genres, company names were on the top of content word frequency lists (Fox and Fox 2004:97-124). Of course, companies know that the very presence of their names in the public space identifies them as lasting, memorable and of great worth; briefly, it assigns them desired public identities.

Organisation naming practices have been researched extensively, both prescriptively and descriptively, from a variety of perspectives, but mainly within the disciplinary frame of organisational studies and with a strong focus on corporate branding. Considering the fact

that a name is a linguistic entity, and corporate (re)naming a linguistic process, a lack of linguistic perspective in the research on organisations' (re)naming practices seems surprising. The aim of this paper is to contribute towards a (socio)linguistic understanding of organisation names as a comparatively new category of personal names which derives its symbolic importance from the social relationship between an organisation and society. The paper continues with a discussion of previous research. Section three describes naming as a social process, then there follows a discussion of corporate naming practices. The next section comments on company naming tendencies towards originality and conventionality. An insight into linguistic aspects of corporate (re)naming is offered in section six. Section seven demonstrates the necessity for applying linguistic theories to company naming research. In section eight, some explanations are provided for the absence of linguistic theories within organisational studies. How a linguistic perspective can lucidify and improve an understanding of the functions, merits and shortcomings of a company's name is shown in an example of corporate renaming. The discussion presents and systemises arguments for the use of linguistics in the research on company (re)naming.

Within the wide field of organisational studies, company names have been studied from a variety of aspects: (re)naming processes in organisations (Kohli and LaBahn 1995; Kollmann and Suckow 2007), names as cornerstones of corporate identity and company's reputation (Henderson and Cote 1998; Schechter 1993 Dowling 2000; Balmer and Greyser 2003; Fombrun and Van Riel 2003; Treadwell 2003) names as fundamentals of product identity and, by extension, consumer identity (Mills, Boylstein and Lorean 2001; Bouchikhi and Kimberly 2007). Special attention has been paid to the influence of the name upon a company's performance (Morris and Reyes 1992; Alashban, Hayes, Zinkham and Balasz 2002; Leeds, Leeds and Pistolet 2007) as well as changes in consumers' perceptions of both a company and its products caused by the new name (Muzellec and Lambkin 2007).

Most researchers into organisations' (re)naming position their interest within the frame of corporate branding: organisations' (re)naming policies as a key element of branding and brand management (Muzellec 2006; Kotler and Pfoertsch 2006), the importance of consistency between brand name and brand mark (Klink 2003), consumers' evaluation and perception of brand names (Lerman and Garbarino 2002), branding strategies for new products (Kohli, Harich and Leuthesser 2005), processes and problems in corporate rebranding (Gotsi and Andriopoulos 2007; Merrilees and Miller 2008), brand names as centres of relating and retrieving brand-related information (Baker 2003, Sen 1999).

While much of this research is prescriptive, focused on "as should", many researchers feel that outlining, advising and suggesting is not enough, and try to offer an insight into real situations, for example, creation of new brand names (e.g. Kohli and LaBahn 1995), consumers' perception and evaluation of new brand names (Kohli, Harich and Leuthesser 2005), the effects of replacing one brand name with another (Muzellec and Lambkin 2007), and, finally, names as exclusionary and inclusionary devices, or more precisely, names aimed at a monopoly within a specific field or industry, and names aimed at challenging existing names (Parker 2005).

Naming is a social process. A name is an expression of the name giver's experience of reality and, as such, is never neutral. The perception and interpretation of the name by others is inevitably done through the filter of a value system that is indicative of certain social and cultural preferences (Halliday 1978:203) which will both affect the choice of the name and be affected by the choice of a name. Those who have a name can assume social roles in various relationships of similarity, contrast, overlapping and inclusion within meaning systems: networks of relationships between a word and all other words used within a particular social context. A name, in sum, is a social representation. While, admittedly

arbitrary, if the name invites a consensus, “its connection with a thing (an organisation, for example), it becomes customary and necessary” (Moscovici 2000:46).

That which has no name, on the other hand, is relegated to the world of “confusion, uncertainty and inarticulateness” (p. 46). This is probably why our worst fears are, as is seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, in fact, nameless. In olden days, a common punishment for a crime against the community was expulsion from society, often combined with denaming. Thus a transgressor was not only forbidden to ever return to her/his community, but her/his name was never to be spoken again. Sméagol, in Tolkien’s novel, following the murder of his best friend Déagol, was turned out of the family hole. In Middle Earth this was practically equal to a death sentence; the outcast could hardly survive alone. In addition to being expelled, Sméagol was also denamed; his name was taken from him and replaced by the derogatory nickname Gollum (intended to ridicule him for the repulsive gurgling noise he made in his throat).

Aware of the social significance of naming, an organisation will tend to choose a name to project a desired public identity which, in turn, will enable that organisation to assume desired positions in the social space. Let us, for example, take *Hospira*, *Umbro* and *Volvo*, the names of well-known companies successfully engaged in healthcare, football-related apparel, footwear and equipment, and the automotive industry respectively. The name *Hospira* (incidentally, selected by company’s employees) which is derived from the words *hospital*, *spirit*, *inspire* and *spero*, is intended to embody optimism, trust and positive expectations crucial to the healthcare industry. The name *Umbro*, which was derived from the name of the company’s founders, the Humphrey Brothers, is meant to relate the company to the values of entrepreneurial spirit and individualism, and the name *Volvo* (Lat. I roll), symbolises the functionality of the product. It is through a particular name that each of these organisations has become a part of the global business nomenclature and thus a designated social location.

Today, organisations’ awareness of both the social importance and social potential of their names is ubiquitous. Organisations know about the legitimising power of the name and its ability to add value to their products and services. Accordingly, organisations treat a name as a prism through which stakeholders perceive them. For suppliers the name holds business prospects, for employees the name is an embodiment of corporate culture and corporate ideology, for consumers the name symbolises a positive experience, for the financial community it stands for a return on investment, and for an organisation’s wider social community the name signifies accountability.

It is through a name that organisations are labelled, described (via socially desirable characteristics such as hope, independence, serviceability) and interpreted. An appropriate interpretation of characteristics (*Hospira*, *Umbro*, *Volvo*, for example, will be seen as positive, important and reliable) will lead to a classification which will subject organisations to the process of social typing, categorisation of organisation-related knowledge along various dimensions of classification which acts as “a collection point for observable/unobservable information’ about organisations” (Hudson 1998:237-240). Observable information will be related to an organisation’s products/services, as well as its public actions, such as corporate public discourse. Unobservable information will have to do with stakeholders’ emotions and impressions towards an organisation; why, for example, do stakeholders prefer a product of company A to a similar product of company B although they know that as far as quality is concerned there is hardly any difference? At any rate, the process of social typing will facilitate stakeholders’ understanding of an organisation and thus enable the representation invoked by the name to be anchored in the mind of stakeholders and society as a whole. Once the name is acknowledged, and its chief representative function thus ensured, the name expresses both the image and a concept as

reality. Thus, (re)naming an organisation is never just a process of labelling aimed at clarity and/or logical coherence. As a rule, (re)naming an organisation is a consequence of a social attitude and an invitation to a social attitude.

The need for a corporate identity, an important part of which is embodied in a company's name, began to develop with industrialisation. A good example of 19th century organisations which worked intensively on their identities are British railway companies. Their aim was twofold: to express their competitiveness and to develop a strong esprit de corps which, apparently, was to serve as encouragement to the acceptance of "draconian employment terms" (Schmidt 1995).

The prominence of company names, however, starts only with the beginning of the 20th century. Previously, companies operated mostly in local markets and sold nameless goods to retailers who further sold these goods either nameless or under the store name (Schutte 1969). For most of the 20th century, the function of company names was seen as ideational; names were intended to convey content which was usually related to the organisation's products/services, the industry, the organisation's founders or its owners. Inevitably, company names were treated as simply trade names.

An oversupply of commodities on the global market in the early 1980s triggered two parallel and interdependent processes, one related to organisations, the other to consumers. Organisations started to increasingly focus on identity programs. Viewing identity, and a name as a key part of that identity, as decisive factors of their image, organisations in their (re)naming processes began putting emphasis on social values, for example, life, mission, and vision, rather than on the products and services. The change of attitude of organisations and the transfer of their focus from name as content (the ideational function of the name) to name as a social entity (the interpersonal function of the name) meant, sociolinguistically speaking, a change in the social positioning of the name-giver – corporate management. The content-focused name giver clearly identifies herself/himself as an observer, one who uses language (and a corporate name) as an opportunity to simply encode her/his experience of the external world and of her/his own internal world (consciousness). The value-focused name giver, on the other hand, identifies herself/himself as an intruder who uses language (and a corporate name) to participate, or to do something (cf. Halliday 1978:112). In the intruder's role the name giver intrudes herself/himself into the situational context (company) not just to express company-related attitudes and judgments, but also to affect company-related attitudes, judgments and behaviours in others. This value-related use of corporate names has definitely associated corporate names with companies' socialities and so enabled the intruders to define and formulate those socialities.

At the same time, consumers became more confident and more individualistic than ever before. As a result, they turned towards those products and services which, it seemed to them, offered quality based on what they felt were real values. In other words, consumers' decision to buy products and services started to be increasingly based on their perception of (King 2003: 261) these products'/services' contribution to their own value systems. One could say that postmodern consumers do not buy goods at all. What they do buy, as Campbell (1995:90) explains, is a "self-illuminated quality of experience" which they "had a hand in constructing" and which is tailored to suit their fantasies. To bridge the gap between the consumer's dream and reality, each of these experiences must have a name and it is precisely that name that a consumer desires.

The only way for companies to remain competitive in such a business environment is to develop, market and sell brands, "unique entities" embodying a combination of physical, functional and psychological values (King 2003:263). Brands facilitate identification of products, services and businesses, and present an "effective and compelling means to communicate the benefits and value a product or service can provide" (Morrison 2001:1).

One of the drivers of the brand (a key component of the processes of brand-building, brand architecture, brand equity and brand management), according to Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006:68), is a company's name, a "shorthand for everything that is being offered".

Embodying an "associated image" (Kotler and Pfoertsch 2006:95), which might be cultural, linguistic or personal, a company's name constitutes not only an asset, but also a key part of both the verbal and visual identity of a company. To successfully perform as a brand-building element, a name has to be available and usable across all markets, meaningful (capture the essence of the brand), memorable (distinctive and easy to remember) and protectable (can be legally protected in all countries in which the brand will be marketed). To perform as a brand-defending element, a name has to be future-oriented, positive and transferable (applicable to new products in the same or different market) (Kotler and Pfoertsch 2006:92-93). Bearing all this in mind, some organisations will opt for the name of the founder (e.g., Ford), some of the place where the company was first set up (e.g., Evian), some a name suggestive of the product/service (e.g., Victoria's Secret), and some will go for the unusual (e.g., Yahoo). Common to all these names is that they are intended to attract attention, to activate a high level of recall/recognition, and to invite positive associations. More recent cases of corporate (re)naming suggest that companies' names are getting shorter, that product and geographic associations tend to be dropped, and that many coined words are created, such as Alcoa, Kleenex, and Verizon.

Given all of these circumstances, it is not surprising that company names have become objects of consumers' veneration, even love, the intensity of which is best seen in the value of brands. The leaders for 2007 (and 2006) are Coca Cola, Microsoft and IBM, estimated to about 65, 59 and 57 billion dollars respectively. It seems that the mere mention of these names gives consumers the taste of, as Bernstein (2003:159) put it, their favourite brands' "past performance" as well as a "guarantee of their future satisfaction". Evidently, an organisation's name is not only an integral part of the product, a name *is* a product, and as such it has to be actively managed. This, of course, makes (re)naming practices of an organisation a strategic top management assignment rather than just one of the many marketing management functions (Balmer 2001). In this sense, it is definitely not an exaggeration to state that the name is the most valuable asset of an organisation (Stuart, Sarow and Stuart 2007:184).

In organisations' (re)naming practices two opposite tendencies are noticeable, originality and conventionality (Fox 2008b; also Fox and Fox 2004:83-84). On the one hand, each organisation strives to create/adopt a special name which will project the organisation and its products/services as distinct from all other organisations within the same industry, and therefore unique and indispensable. Because of the increasing similarity among organisations, which is clearly a consequence of companies' tendencies to adopt the same list of values (the number of corporate values being, after all, finite), and which inevitably results in companies' "all sounding the same" (Bernstein 2003:158), the possibility of telling organisations apart gains utmost importance. While, undeniably, the main discriminator between all these companies, as Bernstein reminds us, will be the way those similar philosophies are carried out, companies will still use names (and other elements of corporate public discourse), to create their own original personality, a sum of unique characteristics distinguishing that particular company.

On the other hand, organisations occasionally adopt a name which clearly shares certain characteristics of other names in the same category. There are probably thousands of companies all over the planet whose names include "net", "sys", "tech", "tel", "pharm", not to mention "soft" (cf. Kotler and Pfoertsch 2006). The issue of organisations' tendencies towards conventionality was addressed a quarter of a century ago by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who ascribed similarities among organisations to a powerful social mechanism known

as institutional isomorphism, “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions”. Institutional isomorphism which results from three types of social pressure, legitimacy, uncertainty, and professionalisation, seems to account for much of the life of organisation as well as the relationship between the organisation and society.

The issues of legitimacy will prompt coercive isomorphism which will be manifested in an organisation’s endeavour to adopt such a name as to satisfy social expectations of its habitus, for example, the society’s need for the organisation’s public communication (part of which is the organisation’s name) to be truthful, informative and motivating.

The uncertainty of the social environment (due to fierce market competition, for example) will apparently encourage mimetic isomorphism. Copying from others and adopting a similar name or a similar type of name (as in case of net, sys, tech, tel, pharm and soft) can help an organisation generate useful recognition at little expense. Supplying hard evidence for mimetic isomorphism, that is, proving that the name of organisation A is an emulation of the name of organisation B is not simple. In comparison to coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism is known to be more subtle and perhaps easier to detect but almost impossible to prove. Also, neither the lender nor the borrower of the name may be fully aware of the goings on. While a lending organisation does not exactly desire to be copied, it is definitely aware of its naming practices being treated as exemplary and, inevitably, emulated by others. Borrowers, on the other hand, may start with an intention to emulate a name of another (perhaps more competitive) organisation. Their awareness, however, of the role of originality in projecting an organisation as unique, will inevitably, lead them towards names that, at least partly, will be characteristically theirs (cf. Fox 2008b).

The final push towards conventionality in organisations’ (re)naming practices is delivered by the normative isomorphism which is a product of professionalisation. Rooted (1) in the similarity of increasingly global educational institutions/processes, and (2) in social and professional networks that link organisations and help dissemination of ideas, professionalisation is manifested in a constant increase of the number of “almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organisations” and “possess similarity of orientation and disposition that might override variations in tradition” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:152).

A perspective that is hardly ever taken in the current research on organisations’ (re)naming processes is the linguistic one. Indeed, contributions to research into companies’ (re)naming practices come almost exclusively from authors/publications in organisational studies and those fields of study (sociology, sociopsychology, theory of communication, and behavioural studies). which within organisational studies are perceived as accredited (Fox 2007a, 2007b, 2008a in press). What is more, those OD writings which claim to draw on the linguistic tradition, linguistic theories and methodologies are hardly ever referred to, a linguistic perspective is rarely offered, and the treatment of linguistic-based theoretical concepts, for example “language”, “discourse”, “text” and “genre”, which could be employed to provide an insight into processes and practices in organisations, continues to be rather implicit (Fox and Fox 2004:21). On the other hand, there have been attempts to introduce (socio)linguistics into research on company names and naming practices. Lieberman, for example, almost a quarter of a century ago, expressed his surprise at sociolinguistics not paying sufficient attention to names, especially considering “the nearly endless ramifications” of the linkage between the linguistic and societal in the naming process (1984:78). More recently, there have been sociolinguistic studies into brand naming (Friedrich 2002; Li and Shooshtari 2003). Also, a number of organisational scholars have shown an awareness of the importance of linguistics for research into an organisation’s

(re)naming practices (Kohli and LeBahn 1995; Yorkston and Menon 2004; Muzallec 2006; Lowrey and Shrum 2005, 2007).

Organisational scholars' reluctance to apply linguistic theories into organisational (re)naming research is, as I have already stated, rather surprising for a number of reasons. The process of corporate (re)naming, an essential part of organising a company's physical/social environment which uses language to create new meanings, is by definition a linguistic process. Name, as a linguistic entity, is an elementary part of an organisation's language as both a system and an institution. A part of language as a system, names enter all of the three functional components of an organisation's language: ideational (an organisation's language as a reflection/description of the organisation), interpersonal (an organisation's language as action) and textual (an organisation's language as texture, that which relates language to society/situation and facilitates an organisation's participation in social networks) (on functional relationship between language and social structure, Halliday 1978:183-192).

Functioning as an element of language as an institution, a name not only helps realise an organisation; it also, as Halliday (1978:186) argued, "actively symbolises it in a process of mutual creativity". Furthermore, as a part of language as institution, a name participates in social hierarchies and, inevitably, in the processes of creating power through language (Fox and Fox 2004). At any rate, in both capacities, as a part of language as a system and language as an institution, names of organisations are an indication of companies organising their social environment in a systematic way through the use of language. If a suitable word is not ready, an organisation will invent a name, that is, create a required portion of language¹. In adopting/creating a certain name, an organisation assigns itself selected ideational components within a meaning system, and so positions itself both ideationally and socially. In both capacities, as part of language as a system and language as an institution, an organisation's name also serves as a repository for knowledge underlying an organisation, or in de Beaugrande's terms (1997), as a "text-world model" of an organisation. As such, a name is simply a metaphor for a company, both creating the socialities of the organisation, and maintaining and transmitting those socialities.

That the need for a linguistic perspective among organisational scholar researching organisations' (re)naming practices is felt acutely is best seen in the attempt of some authors to introduce ideas and create theories which have already been explained by linguistics. The idea so tackled is "sound symbolism", which among scholars in organisational studies (Yorkston and Menon 2004; also Kohli and LaBahn 1995; Lowrey and Shrum 2005, 2007) is defined as "the linguistic process in which the sound of a word provides cues about the word's meaning". Words mentioned as examples of sound symbolism are Brobdingnagians and Lilliputians from Swift's *Gulliver Travels* and Snitch and Quidditch from Rowling's Harry Potter series. The idea of sound symbolism is legitimised as significant to the research into corporate (re)naming through reference to Plato, as well as a number of organisational scholars (Klink 2000, 2001, for example, is mentioned as particularly important).

Now, what the above authors refer to as sound symbolism is, as a matter of fact, a phenomenon in linguistics known as a naturalist view of the meaning in language. The two views of meaning in language, naturalist (a belief in the existence of an intrinsic connection between sound and sense) versus conventionalist (seeing a connection between sound and

¹ To explain the function of names in a systematic organisation of social environment, Halliday (1978: 201) describes a boy age two to four who played with wooden figures, a set of grooved pieces that could be fitted together, and demanded their names. Since his parents could not help him (the names, if they had existed, were not known to them), the boy invented names for the pieces of wood and so, in effect, created the portion of language that he considered necessary.

sense as arbitrary), were first debated by Greek philosophers. The naturalist view was endorsed by Plato, the conventionalist view was largely Aristotelian. The fact is that only onomatopoeic words offer a (partially) non-arbitrary connection between word form and word meaning, but even onomatopoeias change from language to language which itself is a proof of their arbitrariness (Lyons 1995). Since de Saussure (1916), mainstream linguistics has embraced the idea of the arbitrariness of linguistic sign (*l'arbitraire du signe*), meaning that it is impossible to predict word meaning from word form and, vice versa, word form from word meaning. While consumers may indeed prefer the ice cream name “Frosh” over “Frish”, as suggested by Yorkston and Menon (2004), there is no intrinsic connection between the forms of either of these two words with the meaning they stand for (ice cream). So, even if a consumer may for some reason prefer the sound “o” to the sound “i” (as expected by researchers), this preference, essentially, is a result of a consumer’s previous linguistic experience which originates in her/his accumulated knowledge of linguistic signs which, as we know, are arbitrary.

Lacking familiarity with linguistics, a number of authors in organisational studies (Collins 1977; Kohli and LaBahn 1995; Muzellec 2006) went a step further and created new names for the conventionalist/naturalist view of meaning in language. The conventionalist view has been named the “Juliet principle” (a reference to Shakespeare's line “that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet”). The naturalist view has been named the “Joyce principle” (a reference to James Joyce’s creation of hundreds of the words that “sound to the reader somewhat like what he meant them to denote” /cf. Collins 1977/). The brand name which, for example, Kohli and LeBahn (1995) suggest as an illustration of the “desired phonetic symbolism” and thus of the intrinsic connection between word sound and word sense is “whumies” which, as the authors argue, is because of its sound seen as an ideal brand name “for breakfast cereals but not for detergents”. While, of course, most of us would probably associate “whumies” to food rather than hygiene, the assumption that word “whumies” is intrinsically relatable to food is simply naïve. Yes, the word “whumies” does phonetically resemble “Yummies”, and yes, the word “Yummies” is perfectly arbitrary.

The absence of linguistic theories in research focused on organisations’ (re)naming practices constitutes a part of a wider issue, underrepresentation of linguistics in the field of study organisational discourse (OD) of which (re)naming practices are a part. Although OD has been referred to as a plurivocal project (Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam 2004:2), and in spite of the growing awareness of the importance of linguistic theories for the research into organisational discourse (Westwood and Linstead 2001; Dhir and Savage 2002; Tietze et al. 2003; Fox and Fox 2004; Dhir 2005), the majority of contributions to OD come from the authors whose disciplinary background is in organisational studies and fields generally perceived as related to it, for example, sociology, sociopsychology, the theory of communication, and behavioural studies. In other words, organisational scholars tend to perceive linguistic theories as (possibly) resistive to organisational studies and linguistics as a non-accredited field of study which is discouraging for both organisational scholars who may want to take a trip into linguistics, and linguists who feel that the legitimacy of their contribution may be challenged. Indeed, in many of those previously mentioned OD writings which claim to draw on the linguistic tradition, linguistic insights into a particular language and discourse issue is rarely offered, and the treatment of linguistic-based theoretical concepts, as previously stated, remains implicit.

Explanations for this situation are many. Coulmas (1997:3), for example, refers to a number of culprits, Chomsky’s generative paradigm for one, under whose influence the mainstream linguistics of the 1960s turned its back on society and sociology. The social sciences, at the same time, Coulmas further argues, went the “system-theoretic” way and were slow in building up an interest in language as a constructor of society.

Fairclough, on the other hand, is inclined to attribute the blame entirely to linguistics, which, as a discipline, is dominated by a “formalism” that “has little time for integrating linguistic analysis into interdisciplinary frameworks” (1999a:210). This asocial behaviour of linguistics, Fairclough suggests, encouraged social scientists’ view of text analysis as a process which, because it disregards social and cultural aspects of discourse, and often fails to link text to its social context (211). Similarly, Coupland (2001:8) points towards an absence of active interdisciplinarity which might have been expected from the contacts between sociolinguistics and social sciences, assigning the responsibility to sociolinguistic and its lack of interest in “shared research agenda”.

Finally, de Beaugrande (1997:28-29) warns of the danger of the classical view of language as a phenomenon which is quite distinct from other domains of human knowledge and activity, as a uniform, stable and abstract system in a single stage of its evolution, and as an entity that should be described at a high degree of generality apart from the conditions of its use. While at one point these views had strategic importance because they contributed to establishing linguistics as a scientific discipline by delimiting it from neighbouring fields (literature, folklore, and philosophy), today, within a post-classical perspective on language as a social practice which is integrated with knowledge of world and society, they are outdated and detrimental.

I will demonstrate the value of linguistics for research into organisations’ (re)naming practices in the case of United Aircraft (later renamed United Technologies) which within the conceptual frame of organisational studies has been treated as a textbook example of mistaken identity (Margulies 2003:72).

United Aircraft has been engaged in designing/building aircraft products but also in electric power generation and transmission, laser technology and electronics. In fact, United Aircraft was one of the most successful companies in the USA. Because of its name, however, it was identified principally with aircraft manufacture and often confused with United Air Lines. What all of United Aircraft’s activities had in common was high technology. So, the new name, United Technologies, created immediate benefits, including greater interest by consumers and wider coverage by Wall Street analysts.

Briefly, the name *United Aircraft* produced wrong (undesired) associations which “severely limited the company’s growth potential and its proper recognition” (Margulies 2003:72). The new name *United Technologies*, with a precise focus on the fortes of the company, helped clarify and strengthen the company’s sense of its own future. With a new identity, the company could apply its technology capabilities to a wider market segment which led to its impressive growth.

The case clearly underscores the importance of name as an element of a brand. It also confirms the importance of respecting name choice criteria which enable brand creation and brand sustenance. Finally the case shows how the second name, a more appropriate one, immediately rendered benefits and started to contribute to brand equity.

What remains to be told is the linguistic side of the story. In linguistic terms, the case of *United Aircraft* (later *United Technologies*) shows how a company’s name can affect and structure human cognition and perform human activities. It shows how a new name can lead to rethinking of the organisation (the previously narrow view of the company as an aircraft manufacturer gave place to the considerably wider view of the company as an expert in high technology).

A linguistic perspective on the case also confirms the importance of both the social role(s) of language in organisations and a development of a theory of an organisation’s language as a form of social practice. It further shows that (re)naming is a great deal more than just an element of branding process. By positioning an organisation in the social space (both names appealed to a number of stakeholder groups), (re)naming acts as a unity of

linguistic, cognitive and social actions/constraints regulating an organisation. So, from a linguistic perspective, the name *United Technologies* (like *United Aircraft*) became a part of a meaning systems of organisation, which is, inevitably, arbitrary and sustained by the power of those (corporate management) who created the system. In this sense, we can say that *United Technologies*, as indeed any other corporate name, is too a result of a process of “naturalisation” (Fairclough 1999b), a corporate management’s endeavour to win an acceptance for that name as a “non-ideological ‘common sense’”.

As far as the conventionality of the name *United Technologies* (like *United Aircraft*) is concerned, this issue, as mentioned before, has been tackled within the frame of organisational theory; a conventional name satisfies stakeholders’ social expectations, it fits painlessly into an uncertain business environment, and evidently corresponds with the increasingly uniform world views shared by corporate managers. From a linguistic perspective, however, the conventionality of the name *United Technologies* (like *United Aircraft*) is primarily a result of the organisation’s need for stakeholders to accept a name in a desired way. A conventional name is easy to understand and interpret and warrants an easy acceptance of the name which, in turn, enables the name to enter the process of social typing. Through social typing, the name *United Technologies* will enable the stakeholder to categorise her/his organisation-related knowledge, which will in give the stakeholder a (more or less) reliable idea about a set of characteristics of that particular organisation. Thus, from the perspective of linguistics, or rather sociolinguistics, the reasons for the conventionality of an organisation’s name arises primarily from the organisation’s need to control the way its discourse (which includes the organisation’s name) relates to society, particularly the stakeholders.

Finally, from a linguistic perspective, the new name *United Technologies*, which created “greater interest by consumers and wider coverage by Wall Street analysts”, in fact, became a capital: not just economic (which is understandable in the view of organisational scholars), but also social, symbolic, and cultural (Fox and Fox 2004). The foci on the other three forms of capital generated by a new corporate name reveal the merits of a corporate name that so far have not been systematically researched. Through the power of social capital contained in the name *United Technologies*, the corporation positioned itself anew in the global social network. As a symbolic capital, the name *United Technologies* defined and legitimised certain values and ideas, such as the trust in high technology. As a cultural capital, the name *United Technologies* has become a part of the organisation’s knowledge production and knowledge management: a process which not only reallocates existing resources, but also seeks to discover new configurations of knowledge which, as Gibbons and associates (2005:68) put it, “convey a commercial advantage, and on a recurrent basis”.

Research into organisational (re)naming practices has taken place predominantly within the frame of organisational studies. While there is an increasing awareness among organisational scholars that linguistic knowledge may be helpful in analysing and understanding the processes of corporate (re)naming, there has been little application of linguistics in corporate (re)naming research.

There is a range of subdisciplines within linguistics which can significantly contribute to the research into organisation names and naming practices. The widest theoretical structure for studying language in society, sociolinguistics, with its many facets as a part of linguistic theory, as a set of mini-theories, and as a social theory (Coupland 1998) provides an ideal theoretical frame for understanding both social meanings created through a corporate name and the complex relationship between those meanings, the (re)naming practices of an organisation, the organisation itself, and society. In fact, considering the multitude of social roles of (re)naming, it would probably be most exact to refer to it as a sociolinguistic process. Like any other act of communication, (re)naming is socially relevant in the sense that it is

both socially situated and socially situating. Researching organisations' (re)naming practices refers to both the systematic study of names as components of meanings in the language system (the potential) and studying social meanings of each of organisation's names (the actual) (Halliday 1978:72). Cultural linguistics can offer an insight into the cultural dimensions of an organisation's name and cultural values underlying the name and world views expressed in the name. Critical discourse analysis, a field of study that provides an insight into the dialectical relationships between an organisation's discourse (and naming practices as an integral part of that discourse) and social conditions, such as the distribution of social power, that generated that discourse. From the perspective of corpus linguistics, a name will be treated as one of many lexical items on which organisational discourse founds an organisation's identity. Finally, corporate (re)naming in the broadest sense is a product of corporate knowledge which invites research within the frame of cognitive linguistics, not to mention the potential contribution of semantics, textlinguistics, and psycholinguistics.

As my interpretation of case of *United Technologies* has shown, openness of research into organisations' (re)naming practices towards linguistics can provide a considerably clearer view of an organisation's discourse and (re)naming practices as part of that discourse. It is with the help of linguistic theories that organisational scholars can fully understand various facets of corporate names, including name as a part of a unity of linguistic, cognitive and social actions/constraints regulating an organisation, name as a part of an organisation's meaning system, and, finally, name as an expression of individual and group power creating and maintaining an organisation's meaning system.

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