
Original Article

Selecting the right brand name: An examination of tacit and explicit linguistic knowledge in name translations

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ABSTRACT We examine decision makers' use of tacit linguistic intuitions and explicit linguistic knowledge for brand name translations from English to Chinese. We present a market study, which reveals that managers intuitively use linguistic sound and meaning characteristics, that is, which sounds and meanings best fit for the Chinese translation of the English names. A subsequent experiment shows that generalized types of existing name approaches (that is, whether the names are translated based on sound or based on meaning) are employed as explicit benchmark standards for new names. The results of the two studies suggest that brand naming is a process that involves accessing deeply engrained linguistic structures, as well as explicit linguistic knowledge and rules. We suggest directions for future research on name translation and discuss practical applications of our findings.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations invest substantial resources and use numerous advisors – marketing consultants, lawyers and linguists – when creating brand names. Naming decisions

are particularly important in international marketing where names must be adapted across markets. As *Business Week* reported, when Microsoft launched its new search engine, Bing, 'it took six months and

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dozens of experts to settle on the name. Brand naming is serious business in an age when goods must have global appeal' (Helm, 2009).

Broadly speaking, the vast literature on brand naming, focused on one language or comparing languages, has addressed two issues. One issue concerns how name characteristics affect consumer memory (for example, brand recall and recognition); the other issue is how they affect name evaluations (Pan and Schmitt, 1994; Schmitt and Pan, 1994; Schmitt *et al.*, 1994; Keller *et al.*, 1998; Klink, 2000, 2003; Lerman and Garbarino, 2002). In comparing languages, the major research focus has been on brand name translations, in particular on the complex issue of translating a name from a letters-and-phonemes-based phonographic language (for example, English) to a visual-character-based logographic language (for example, Chinese). In general, such translations can be analyzed along two linguistic dimensions: relatedness in sound (that is, phonemes) and relatedness in meaning (that is, semantics) (Zhang and Schmitt, 2001, 2004; Francis *et al.*, 2002; Li and Murray, 2002). These two dimensions yield four possible types of name translations from English to Chinese: a translation into Chinese that resembles the original English name in both sound and meaning; a translation that sounds similar to the original name, but has a different meaning; a translation that has similar meaning, but sounds different; and an entirely new name that does not resemble the original name in either sound or meaning. Although the first type of translation seems most desirable (for example, Coca-Cola uses a Chinese name, *ke kou ke le*, which sounds like the original name and expresses the core meaning of the brand – 'tastes good' and 'makes you happy'), it is hard to do, and thus most translations localize by using either sound or meaning similarity (Francis *et al.*, 2002; Li and Murray, 2002). The last option, a

new name, is rarely being used because companies strive for some consistency across markets.

Prior research has shown that consumer evaluations of name translations depend not only on linguistic factors, but also on how consumers process phonographic and logographic languages. Specifically, because of the nature of the writing systems, phonographic languages like English, which uses strings of easily pronounceable but meaningless letters, seem to be characterized by a higher degree of phonological processing and a lower degree of semantic processing than logographic languages like Chinese, which uses meaningful characters that may have different pronunciations (Schmitt *et al.*, 1994; Tavassoli, 1999; Francis *et al.*, 2002). As a result, when bilingual consumers encounter dual brand names consisting of an English and Chinese name, a quite common phenomenon in China, and provide name evaluations, they place more weight on sound than meaning when English is emphasized (for example, the English name is presented in a larger typeface), but more weight on meaning than sound when Chinese is emphasized (for example, in a larger typeface) (Zhang and Schmitt, 2001).

The present research employs the same brand name translation methods from phonographic to logographic languages that prior international research has used. However, unlike prior research, the present study focuses on so-called 'revealed preferences' in the marketplace and on decision makers rather than on consumers. In Study 1, we use market data to show that the revealed preferences in the marketplace reflect decision makers' linguistic intuitions about naming brands (that is, which sounds and which meanings fit best). In Study 2, we show that decision makers do not only use their intuitive information and thus endogenous linguistic characteristics of names *per se*, but also consider exogenous

linguistic information on existing competitors' names.

MANAGERS' TACIT AND EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE

According to organizational knowledge theory (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Grant, 1996), two types of knowledge are used in organizational decision making: tacit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Baumard and Wauchope, 1999). Tacit knowledge is intuitive and has two dimensions (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka *et al*, 2001) – a skill dimension ('know how') and a cognitive dimension consisting of mental schemata (Kakabadse *et al*, 2001). Explicit knowledge is rule based and codified within a firm; it thus can be clearly articulated and communicated. In the context of the name translations that we study here, tacit knowledge includes linguistic intuitions and schemata about the sound and meaning dimensions of brand names. For example, upon seeing a translated brand name, native speakers can generalize whether the name is sound based or meaning based relative to the original English name, and what sound and which meaning appear more appropriate. Explicit knowledge includes rules on using the linguistic information from existing competitor's names and prior naming approaches – for example, rules regarding whether to follow the same naming approach or to differentiate with a different approach.

Tacit linguistic intuitions

Since Chomsky's (1957, 1965) seminal work, linguistic researchers have shown that native speakers of a language have extensive linguistic intuitions about the syntax, phonology and semantics of a language (Akmajian *et al*, 1992, Fromkin and Rodman, 1993). Any native speaker, regardless of intelligence or education level, intuitively notices when a sentence is ungrammatical (for example, when the

word order in a simple sentence is wrong or awkward), although he or she may not be able to explicitly know and analytically explain the syntactic rules of word order in a given language. Any native speaker can intuitively detect a foreign sound in their native language without being able to articulate the characteristics and the complex rules of phonology. Finally, any native speaker intuitively grasps when a word's semantic meaning is applied in an unusual way without being able to provide the precise meaning and lexical rules of a word. Native speakers *just know* or *feel* what is intuitively right or wrong about a language.

Because the sound and meaning dimensions of name translations concern the phonological and semantic aspects of language, we expect individuals who make brand name and name translation decisions to be tacitly equipped with linguistic intuitions about the appropriateness of sound and meaning dimensions in their language, because they are native speakers of that language. Specifically, when Chinese decision makers name brands for the Chinese market, they should place more weight on the sound dimension of the name when a brand is launched with an English name emphasis, and, conversely, more weight on the meaning dimension when the brand emphasizes the Chinese part of the name. We investigate this hypothesis using actual market data in Study 1.

Explicit knowledge about existing names

In addition to tacit name-related linguistic intuitions, we expect that decision makers also use explicit linguistic knowledge and rules as part of the naming process. For example, people have learned certain linguistic knowledge and rules about prefixes or suffixes and what they mean, and they can generalize these rules to other words. Similarly, decision makers may apply rules

when naming brands. For example, they may use the linguistic structure of prior successful names as benchmarks or reference points. Prior successful names may thus set the standard and followers may copy the essential structural features, as ‘Power-ade’ did following the established market leader ‘Gator-ade’, ‘Babies “R” Us’ did following ‘Toys “R” Us’ and ‘Mac-ster’ did with ‘Nap-ster’ in the US market during the early dot.com years.

In the context of name translations, there have also been examples of benchmarking the standard approach. Pepsi used Coca Cola’s Chinese successful name translation *ke kou ke le* as a reference point by adopting the sound-and-meaning translation method of Coca Cola. The Chinese Pepsi name kept the ‘cola’ part (*ke le* meaning ‘makes you happy’) and used a sound-and-meaning translation for Pepsi itself (*bai shi*, sounding like Pepsi and meaning ‘experiencing hundred tastes’). We focus on this type of name-standard setting, in part, in study 1, and then in a more detail in study 2.

STUDY 1: REVEALING INTUITIVE LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

Although intuitive linguistic knowledge may guide the decisions of a firm, it will obviously not be easy for managers to articulate such tacit knowledge. Therefore, in the empirical study that we report next, rather than surveying managers, we investigated how decisions and preferences about name translations are revealed in the actual brand names in the marketplace that managers had chosen. Toward this end, we analyzed name translations in the Chinese marketplace for dual brand names. We assessed which language was emphasized (for example, by asking linguistic experts to code the font sizes of the English and Chinese names in the dual name) and whether the name translation seemed to be appropriate and well done on both sound and meaning dimensions (by asking experts

to assess the ‘appropriateness’ of the Chinese name). To test our hypotheses in a straightforward way, we performed regression analyses. We expected that, if managers used tacit linguistic knowledge, the regression coefficient for desirability of meaning (but not for desirability of sound) should be significantly positive for names emphasizing Chinese. Conversely, for names emphasizing English, we expected the regression coefficient for desirability of sound (but not for desirability of meaning) to be significantly positive. In addition, for names emphasizing both Chinese and English equally, we expected the coefficients for desirability of sound and meaning to be both significantly positive.

Method

A total of 155 brands that carried dual brand names (an English and Chinese name) were collected in Shanghai. Using dual names, rather than a Chinese name only, is the common approach for foreign brands. The brands, falling into 25 major product categories, had been randomly selected by a group of research assistants, who were blind to our hypotheses. The selected brands covered mostly consumer businesses (for example, beer, bottled water, candy, cosmetics, detergents, ice cream and soft drinks), but also included names from highly visible industrial and services businesses (for example, an airplane manufacturer, accounting firms and banks). The product categories and examples of brands are listed in Table 1.

A team of four linguistic experts, who were blind to our hypotheses, coded the data and provided evaluations. Specifically, based on the size and position of the names and logos, they categorized the dual names into three language emphasis conditions (English emphasis, Chinese emphasis or equal emphasis). They also provided overall evaluations of each Chinese name translation on three 5-point scales (bad–good,

Table 1: Product categories and examples of brands used in study 1

<i>Product categories</i>	<i>Examples of brand names</i>
Accounting firms	Price Waterhouse, KPMG
Airplanes	Boeing, MD
Automobiles	Ford, Chrysler
Banks	Citibank, J.P. Morgan
Biscuits and crackers	Oreo, Keebler
Beer	Budweiser, Becker
Bottled water	Evian, Drins
Candy	Hershey's, Cadbury
Cellular phones	Motorola, Nokia
Coffee, computers	Dell, HP
Contact lenses	Bosch & Lamb, Johnson & Johnson
Cosmetics	Lancome, Revlon
Detergent	Tide, Dosa
Fashion clothes	Channel, YSL
Gasoline	Exxon, Mobil
Home appliances	Siemens, Philips
Hotels	Hyatt, Ritz-Carleton
Ice-cream	Haagen-Dazs, Buds
Medicines	Johnson & Johnson, Bayer
Shampoo	Pantene, Head & Shoulder
Sportswear	Nike, Reebok
Soft drink	Gatorade, Coco-Cola
Tea	Lipton, Tetley
Toothpaste	Colgate, Crest
Watches	Rolex, Swatch

unsatisfactory–satisfactory, dislike–like); the three scales were summed up and divided by three (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.92$). Most importantly, they provided evaluations of the sound and meaning components of the translation on 5-point desirability scales (ranging from 1 = not at all desirable to 5 = very desirable). Linguistic experts were given both the English and the Chinese names, as well as information regarding the product category, and were asked to provide ratings on the above scales based on the fit between the overall name (in terms of sound and meaning) and the product. The rationale for this procedure was, if managers used tacit linguistic intuitions in name translations, then the intuitions should be revealed in the actual names and be captured by the linguistic experts' evaluations.

Furthermore, information on the order of brand entry into the market within each product category was collected on an ordinal scale. The linguistic experts categorized the Chinese name translations into sound-based (the sound is similar to the original name) or meaning-based (the meaning is related to the product category) translation methods.

Overall, inter-rater agreement was high ($r > 0.95$). Disagreements were resolved through discussions. Raters' consensus ratings served as proxies of market performance data in the absence of empirical data on revenues or profits. Specifically, in the data analysis, we used the consensus ratings of the raters after discussion for the overall name evaluations, as well as sound and meaning componential evaluations, types of emphasis and types of translation methods, and the consensus ratings of the raters in consultation with store managers for the order of brand entry. In other words, the final units of observation were brand names and index ratings of the name as a whole, and its sound and meaning components, rather than individual participants (for similar approach, see Holbrook and Lehmann, 1980; Holbrook and Batra, 1987).

Results

We performed regression analyses to test the hypothesis that the brand name evaluations can be a function of the characteristics of individual components (that is, characters that make up the names). Separate models were run for names emphasizing Chinese, for names emphasizing English and for names that had an equal emphasis for Chinese and English. Brand name evaluations were used as the criterion variable; desirability ratings of sound and desirability of meaning were predictor variables.

If managers based their name decisions on linguistic intuitions, then for names emphasizing Chinese we expected the

coefficient of desirability of meaning, but not of desirability of sound, to be significantly positive. The regression model was significant, $F(2,24) = 23.63$, $P < 0.0001$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.64$. As predicted, the coefficient for desirability of meaning was significantly positive, $b = 0.64$, $t(1,24) = 4.41$, $P < 0.001$. In contrast, the coefficient for desirability of sound was not significant, $b = 0.17$, $t < 1.2$, $P > 0.25$.

For names that emphasized the English language, we expected the coefficient of desirability of sound, but not of desirability of meaning, to be significantly positive. The regression model was significant, indicated by $F(2,78) = 114.69$, $P < 0.0001$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.74$. The hypothesis was partially supported: the coefficient for desirability of sound was significantly positive, $b = 0.60$, $t(1,78) = 9.08$, $P < 0.0001$. However, the coefficient for desirability of meaning was also significantly positive, $b = 0.22$, $t(1,78) = 3.55$, $P < 0.01$.

For names that had equal emphasis of Chinese and English, we expected both coefficients to be significantly positive. The regression model was significant, indicated by $F(2,74) = 267.82$, $P < 0.0001$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.76$. As predicted, both the coefficient for desirability of sound, $b = 0.26$, $t(1,74) = 4.63$, $P < 0.001$, and the coefficient for desirability of meaning, $b = 0.52$, $t(1,74) = 10.36$, $P < 0.0001$, were significant.

We also obtained evidence in the market data for explicit linguistic knowledge based on name standard setting. While the number of brands that were sound based or meaning based was equal (49.3 per cent versus 50.97 per cent out of 155), there was a strong relationship between the method of the first entry brand and the method of the later entry brands. The observed frequencies of followers using the same method as the first entry brands were significantly higher than the observed frequencies for not using the same naming

method (63 for sound–sound and 49 for meaning–meaning versus 13 for sound–meaning and 30 for meaning–sound), $\chi^2(1,155) = 32.57$, $P < 0.0001$, and two-sided Fisher's exact test, $P < 0.0001$, suggesting a strong dependency relationship between the names of the followers and the first entry brand.

Discussion

The brand name data analysis provided strong support for our hypothesis that tacit linguistic knowledge was used as a critical input in naming decisions. Of the six expected signs of the coefficients relating the componential name characteristics to the overall name evaluations, five were fully supported. There was only one unexpected finding: when the English language was emphasized, the sound component was weighted significantly (as expected), but the meaning component was also found to be significant. This unexpected finding may suggest that for Chinese managers as native speakers of Chinese, the meaning component may be permanently salient in their minds because logographic scripts contain inherently meaningful characters. They also consider, though, the sound component of English, their second and nonnative language, as an additional factor when relevant.

In addition, Study 1 also provided some evidence for the use of explicit linguistic knowledge. Follower brands tended to use the same translation method as the first entry brand. Given that, we found this tendency in the actual market data, the question arises whether this name standard 'me too' approach is a general phenomenon or whether managers apply a more specific rule – namely, they may view the prior name only as positive and as a relevant benchmark when the prior naming approach was successful. In the market data of study 1, success of the prior naming approach did not vary much; all existing brands on the market had been relatively successful. In

study 2, we conducted an experiment that allowed us to manipulate systematically the degree of success of the prior naming method.

STUDY 2: EXAMINING EXPLICIT LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

Study 2 addresses decision makers' use of explicit linguistic knowledge – specifically focusing on how they may use an existing brand name as a standard for creating a new name. To test this impact of the prior naming method on the perception of the new brand names, we provided participants with information regarding the successful and less successful market position of the first entrant in the category relative to competitors. For experimental control purposes, the information given to decision makers was fictitious (that is, we told one experimental group that the brand was successful and another that it was not). People often use similar information, such as brand popularity, as a proxy for brand performance success.

We predicted a three-way interaction of prior brand's naming method, current brand's naming method and market success. When the first entry brand used a meaning-based method, respondents in our study should evaluate meaning-based translations more positively than sound-based translations when the first entry brand was described as successful. However, respondents should evaluate sound-based translations more positively than meaning-based translations when the first entry brand was described as less successful. In contrast, when the first entry brand used sound-based method, respondents should evaluate sound-based translations more positively than meaning-based translations when the first entry brand was described as successful. However, respondents should evaluate meaning-based translations more positively than sound-based translations when the first entry brand was described as less successful.

Method

Pretests

Several pretests were conducted to select the stimuli for Study 2. First, four English native speakers generated fictitious English brand names for a variety of consumer products. Next, 20 native English speakers participated in the pretest by providing responses to the names. Participants were asked to rate on 7-point scales how familiar each name was to them (1 = not at all familiar, 7 = very familiar) and to what degree they thought each name was likely to be a brand name for the product (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely). A subset of the names with similar ratings was selected for Chinese translations.

Next, based on the selected English names, Chinese sound-based and meaning-based translated names were created by a group of four bilingual speakers in the field of language translation, and differences were resolved through discussions (pair wise inter-rater agreement > 0.92). Chinese names that were sound based sounded similar in Chinese to the English names, syllable by syllable. Those that were meaning based had Chinese characters whose meanings closely related to the core attributes of the product category.

Finally, the two types of names were tested with 40 Chinese native speakers in Shanghai on familiarity (7-point scale, 1 for not at all familiar, 7 for very familiar), brand name likelihood (7-point scale, 1 for not at all likely, 7 for very likely) and evaluations (on three 7-point scales, bad/good, not at all satisfactory/very satisfactory, and dislike/like; Cronbach α = 0.90). Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions (that is, sound based or meaning based). Translated names that had similar ratings were then selected and used for the main study, as shown in Table 2. The final stimuli had similar ratings in terms of perceived familiarity, brand name likelihood

and evaluations. Most importantly, there were no significant differences between the two different Chinese translation conditions on any of the names (all $P_s > 0.30$).

Participants

We recruited 120 Chinese business students in Shanghai to serve as decision experts in this study. They were asked to assume the role of managers performing naming evaluations and received a questionnaire booklet in Chinese to provide their responses.

Design

The study took the form of a 2 (first entrant’s naming method: meaning based versus sound based) × 2 (first entrant’s performance: successful or less successful) × 2 (naming method for the current product: meaning based versus sound based) mixed experimental design. The first two variables were between-subjects factors and the third variable was a within-subjects factor.

Procedure

Participants were given both the English name and the Chinese name of the supposedly first product that entered the Chinese market in a particular product category. The Chinese and English dual names were of equal size. In half of the cases, Chinese names were on top of English names; in the other half, the order was reversed. No significant differences were observed on this factor. Half of the participants received a version in which the first entry product’s name used a meaning-based method; the other half received a version in which the first entry’s product name used a sound-based naming method. To manipulate the market performance of the first entry brand, half of the participants were told that the first entry product was successful; the other half were told that it was less successful. After these manipulations, participants were shown a number of brand names and were asked to provide their expert evaluations of the names, using three 7-point scales: (a) bad/good, (b) not at all satisfactory/very satisfactory and (c) dislike/like.

Table 2: Stimulus brand names in study 2

Products	English names	Sound-based names ^a		Meaning-based names ^b	
1. Soft drink	Harprin	Ha(1)pu(3)lin(2)	哈 普 林	Jue(2)chun(2)	绝 纯
2. Lotion	Withrup	Wei(3)ruo(4)pu(3)	韦 若 普	Run(4)shu(1)	润 舒
3. Shampoo	Sakin	Sha(1)jin(1)	莎 金	Jing(4)xue(4)	净 屑
4. Mobile phone	Ranot	Ru(2)na(4)te(4)	如 纳 特	Yao(2)zh1(4)	遥 至
5. Crackers	Kerlay	Ke(1)li(4)	克 立	Xiang(1)su(1)	香 酥

Note:

^aChinese stimulus names are presented as characters in the experiments. They are represented in the table by the roman transliteration known as the Pinyin system, in which numbers in parentheses indicate the four tones of Mandarin Chinese.

^bThe meanings of the Chinese meaning-based names are based on the prototypical characteristics of the product categories and are as follows: jue(2)chun(2) meaning ‘totally pure’, run(4)shu(1) meaning ‘moist and comfort’, jing(4)xue(4) meaning ‘make the scalp and hair clean’, yao(2)zhi(4) meaning ‘reachable from far away’, xiang(1)su(1) meaning ‘smells good and tastes flaky’.

Results and discussion

An index of brand name evaluation was formed by averaging the evaluation items (Cronbach $\alpha=0.95$). A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of first entry brand's performance, $F(1,116)=8.91$, $P<0.01$. Evaluations of brand names were more favorable when participants were told that the first entry brand into the product category was successful than when they were told that it was less successful ($M=4.19$ versus $M=3.84$) – an effect that may be interpreted as a manipulation check on market performance. More importantly, the analysis revealed the predicted significant three-way interaction, $F(1,116)=52.67$, $P<0.0001$. No other effects were statistically significant.

As shown in Figure 1a, when the first entry product used meaning-based

translation method, participants provided higher evaluations of the new meaning-based names when the first entrant was described as successful than when the first entrant was described as less successful ($M_s=4.65$ versus 3.44), $t(58)=6.63$, $P<0.0001$. However, participants provided similar evaluations of the new phonetic names when the first entrant was less successful relative to when the first entrant was successful ($M_s=4.21$ versus 3.96), $t(58)=1$, $P>0.30$. The exact mirror image of the above results emerged when the first entry product was described as using sound-based translation method (see Figure 1b). Participants provided higher evaluations of the new sound-based names when the first entrant was successful than when the first entrant was less successful ($M_s=4.44$ versus 3.32), $t(58)=4.45$, $P<0.001$. However,

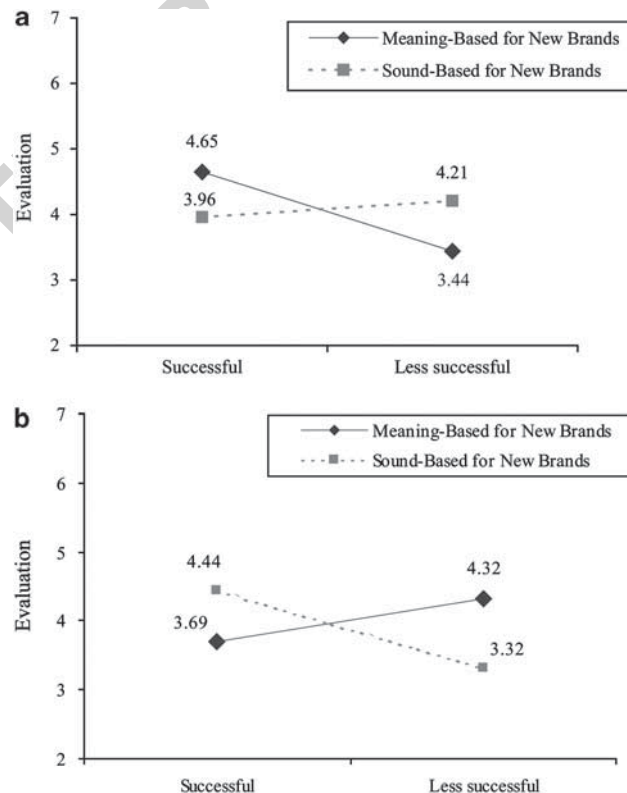


Figure 1: Brand name evaluations in study 2. (a) First entry brand using meaning-based method. (b) First entry brand using sound-based method.

higher evaluations of the new meaning-based naming were provided when the first entrant was less successful than when the first entrant was successful ($M_s = 4.32$ versus 3.69), $t(58) = 2.17$, $P < 0.05$.

Furthermore, in column wise comparisons, when the first entrant used a meaning-based naming method, the meaning-based naming received higher evaluations than the sound-based naming when the first entrant was described as successful ($M_s = 4.65$ versus 3.96), $t(29) = 3.24$, $P < 0.01$. However, the sound-based naming received higher evaluations than the meaning-based naming when the first entrant was less successful ($M_s = 4.21$ versus 3.44), $t(29) = 4.33$, $P < 0.001$. In contrast, when the first entrant used sound-based naming method, the sound-based naming received higher evaluations than the meaning-based naming when the first entrant was successful ($M_s = 4.44$ versus 3.69), $t(29) = 2.96$, $P < 0.01$. However, the meaning-based naming received higher evaluations than the sound-based naming when the first entrant was less successful ($M_s = 4.32$ versus 3.32), $t(29) = 4.94$, $P < 0.0001$.

In sum, the study indicates that participants used their explicit linguistic knowledge of the sound and meaning dimensions of the first entry to evaluate a new name. Successful or less successful market position of the first entry product, in the absence of other information, seems to become associated with the naming methods, and thus define opportunities and constraints for the name of the new brand.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research shows that when firms and their decision makers select name translations, they rely on tacit linguistic intuitions, as well as explicit and established linguistic standards. Specifically, decision makers rely intuitively on sound and meaning dimensions of a language and they use their explicit linguistic knowledge by

taking into consideration competitive naming approaches.

The present research has several limitations. First, the two studies examined name translations structurally in terms of sound- and meaning-based translations, but they did not examine the valence of the sounds and meanings (that is, whether the sounds and specific meanings of the names were attractive, appropriate or innovative). We suggest that future research examine the sound and meaning dimensions in terms of valence, investigating tacit knowledge of 'good' or 'bad' sound imagery and in terms of 'good' or 'bad' word connotations and associations. Second, while the present studies showed that both tacit and explicit linguistic knowledge matter in name translations, the research did not compare the two aspects of linguistic knowledge in terms of their relative importance. This should be done in future research. For example, subsequent entrants may intentionally deviate from the established standard by relying on their linguistic intuitions; that is, they may create, for example, a positively valenced translation regarding both sound and meaning when the standard may be a pure sound-based or meaning-based approach. Finally, the finding that both tacit and explicit linguistic knowledge are important should be conceptually replicated in other linguistic contexts by identifying the structural knowledge and rules that decision makers use in these contexts.

The present research has practical implications for brand naming and brand translations that may enrich existing managerial frameworks for international managers (Francis *et al.*, 2002). At a general level, our research suggests that name translations should be done locally, that is, global managers should trust their local staff and local agencies because, as native speakers of a language they can use their tacit and intuitive linguistic knowledge to design appropriate names. In addition, as the

responses of the local Chinese business students in our study indicated, when a company intends to minimize its risk in the Chinese market, it may pursue a 'me too' linguistic strategy when deciding on a local name.

Naming is one of the most important aspects of branding and essential for brand success. However, little research has examined brand naming and translation issues from a structural linguistic perspective. We have shown that as for other aspects of language (Chomsky, 1965), people bring to bear tacit, engrained linguistic knowledge and explicit rules to judge the appropriateness of brand names and translations. Individuals thus consider not only stand-alone factors related to the brand name as such (Keller *et al.*, 1998; Klink, 2000, 2003), but 'deeper' linguistic factors relating to the structure of a language and its use in a societal context.

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