

# ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF SEVERAL SPECIAL PROPER NOUNS

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## ***Abstract***

*Our ability to function in today's social and economic world is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge. A spoken language is dynamic, its vocabulary being enriched by new words all the time. A special category of lexical creations are the eponyms and the antonomasias, linking various fields: literature, history, mythology, economics, marketing, law etc. A brief analysis of some of these proper names, now common nouns, shows us that poor interdisciplinary knowledge makes the understanding of a text almost impossible. Eponyms and antonomasia are met in everyday language. Their study yields a fascinating insight into the rich heritage of the languages and their development. From a legal and an economic point of view, these phenomena have affected the right of a trademark since becoming legal. It is true that finding a name for a new product is a risky approach, particularly from the financial point of view. The paper provides examples and discusses the most important aspects implied by these linguistic issues.*

**Keywords:** economic phenomenon, brand risk, linguistic phenomenon, lexical creations.

**JEL Classification:** A<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>3</sub>, Z<sub>1</sub>.

## **1. Introduction**

Words are interesting, powerful and vital to a successful life; they have changed and will continue to change the course of world history, being, at the same time, a reminder of the ancestors' culture. One has to recognize that our ability to function in today's complex social and economic world is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge.

The vocabulary of a language is formed by all the words which exist in that particular language. All the words known and used by a certain person, or the set of words that one can use to create sentences form an individual's vocabulary. As the famous Romanian linguist Th. Hristea (1984, p. 7) said, "The richness of a language is, first of all, given by the richness and variety of its vocabulary". And the richness of an individual's vocabulary is said to reflect that person's education and intelligence. The richer the vocabulary, the more easily one can communicate and the better one will understand those around him/her.

Any living language is believed to be dynamic; it is getting richer in words because it is open to "invasions", borrowings from other languages, and because it has many ways of multiplying its own words, for example derivation. Moreover, there are people, whose minds are constantly at work thinking up witty new words, abbreviating older words or using acronyms. All the modifications that appear within the lexicon of a language keep up with the development and globalization of science, technique and economy, with the modification of humans' mentality and concept of life in order to meet the increasing needs of the process of communication. On the other hand, it is also true that the grammatical structure of a language evolves much slower than its lexicon, giving the language stability.

Many of the new words, no matter how they were born, will name objects, phenomena, processes, institutions which have never existed before or one has never known about before. The new lexical creations can appear due to two main processes: an external one, consisting of borrowings from different languages, and an internal process, consisting of derivation, which generally refers to the process of affixation (holding the major responsibility for the lexical growth), compounding, involving the juxtaposition of two or more lexical units that already exist within a certain language, conversion, involving the transfer of items from other lexical classes to a certain different class, contraction, with its two minor processes: clipping and abbreviation.

A language usually borrows from that foreign language spoken by that society which produces innovations in a specific domain and/or the society that has a major influence on the economic life of the entire global population. The lexical borrowing is "either a product of bilingualism itself, or simply the consequence of knowing a language, which the speaker influenced by it does not use it normally" (Hristea, Th., 1984, p. 40).

A very special category of lexical creations are the eponym and the antonomasia, linking various fields: literature, history, mythology, economics, marketing, law and informatics. A brief analysis of some of these proper names, which became common nouns, shows us that poor interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary knowledge makes the understanding of a not very complex text almost impossible.

Without claiming a comprehensive approach, we try to emphasize the fact that the vocabulary of a language is the human civilization's ongoing memory.

## 2. Some special proper nouns

According to dictionaries, the word *eponym* – a word that came into Romanian via French – comes from the Greek word: *epōnymos* from *ep(i)-* + *-onyma*, meaning “name”, being a noun: eponym 1. a person, real or imaginary, from whom something, as a tribe, nation, or place, takes or is said to take its name; 2. a word based on or derived from a person's name; 3. any ancient official whose name was used to designate his year of office; and an adjective: eponymous: giving one's name to a tribe, place, etc. (*Dictionary.com Unabridged*)

From the linguistic point of view, the *eponym* has three main meanings: firstly, the meaning from the dictionaries; secondly, the term is used to designate the proper names which became common names; and last, but not least, those common nouns coming from proper names.

Pierre Germa (1993, p. 5) stated in his *Du nom propre au nom commun, dictionnaire des éponymes*: “Voilà qui est clair: dans le sens le plus large du terme, peut être éponyme tout patronyme (*Braille, Raglan, Pullman*), tout prénom (...) ou surnom ou pseudonyme même. Mais peuvent également être éponymes les dieux, demi-dieux et héros de quelque mythologie que ce soit...”.

As one can notice, some scientists use the term with only one meaning, some combine two meanings, others use the term understanding all the meanings.

Proper names are particularly common in terminology: it is especially about those of some scientific personalities - scientists, researchers, inventors – and about the name of some theories, inventions, brands, agencies, organizations and so forth. They are found in the terminology of different subjects not only just like that, but also as a source of common names, adjectives and verbs derived or included in syntagmatic terms. Most eponyms originate from a person's surname: boycott, for instance, comes from the Irish landlord Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott. We can further divide eponyms into:

Patronyms (definition: a name derived from a father or an ancestor), for example, are common nouns which come from a proper noun, i.e. the inventor's name. Here are some of them:

AL-KHOWARIZMI, Mohamed Ibn Mussa al-Khowarismi (Algorismi) (750-850), an Islamic mathematician who wrote on Hindu-Arabic numerals and was among the first to use zero as a place holder in positional base notation; the word *algorithm* derives from his name.

AMPERE, André-Marie, (1775-1836), French mathematician and physicist, considered the father of electrodynamics; the ampere, one of the seven base units of electric current is named after him;

APGAR, Virginia (1909 – 1974), an American physician: the Apgar score, used to determine the general health of neonates;

AUGUSTUS, Gaius Julius Caesar (63 BC –14 AD), the first ruler of the Roman Empire: the month of August;

BAEKELAND, Léo Hendrick (1863-1944), a Belgian chemist who invented Bakelite, an inexpensive, non-flammable, versatile, and popular plastic;

BEGON, Michel de, intendant of Santo Domingo, as well as a passionate plant collector: begonia is named after him;

BRAILLE, Louis (1809-1852), was the inventor of Braille, a worldwide system used by blind and visually impaired people for reading and writing;

CARDANO, Géralamo (1501-1576), Italian physician who invented the Cardan shaft with universal joints, which allows the transmission of rotary motion at various angles;

CHAUVIN, Nicolas, is a legendary, possibly unhistorical French soldier and patriot who is supposed to have served in the First Army of the French Republic and subsequently in *La Grande Armée* of Napoleon. His name is the eponym of *chauvinism*, a term for excessive nationalistic fervour;

CLEMENT, Abate, obtained this hybrid, tangerine-like, in Algeria, at the beginning of the XXth century;

COLT, Samuel (1814-1862), an American engineer who invented and popularized the Colt revolver at the beginning of the XIXth;

DAHL, Andreas, a Swedish botanist who acclimatized a plant originating in Mexico: the dahlia flower is named after him;

DIESEL, Rudolf (1858-1913), German engineer who invented the diesel engine;

DOBER, dog breeder who obtained a new breed of dog (the *Doberman pinscher*);

GARDEN, Alexander, (1730–1791) Scottish naturalist and physician who acclimatized the exotic bush we name gardenia nowadays;

HOOVER, William Henry, (1849–1932), American industrialist who developed the vacuum cleaner; so, to hoover is to vacuum with one;

KALASNIKOV, Mikail, the Soviet who invented this gun for siege in 1947;

LA VALLIERE, one of Ludovic XIV's favourite who wore that type of tie as an honour for being received at Versailles;

Mac ADAM, John London (1756-1836), Scottish engineer who discovered this procedure used for roads;

MANSART, (1646-1708), a French architect who used the mansard roof (*mansarde*), named for his great-uncle François Mansart, at the château of Dampiere-en-Yvelines;

MAUSOLE, (377-353 î. H), his tombs, impressive in size, were regarded as equally impressive as the seven wonders of the ancient world;

MECENAS, a Roman statesman, patron of arts, who tried to convince the art lovers to make donations;

MORSE, Samuel (1791-1872), the inventor of a character code represented by dots and dashes (or short and long pulses) originally used to send messages by telegraph;

NEWTON, Isaac (1642-1727), English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, alchemist, and natural philosopher who patented the Newton – unit of force;

NICOT, Jean (1530-1600), French ambassador to Portugal, who sent tobacco seeds back to France in 156; nicotine was Nicot's grass.

OHM, Georg (1789-1854), German physicist who discovered the law, named after him, which states that the current flow through a conductor is directly proportional to the potential difference (voltage) and inversely proportional to the resistance;

PASCAL, Blaise (1623-1662), French mathematician, physicist and religious philosopher who laid the foundation for the modern theory of probabilities and formulated what came to be known as Pascal's law of pressure;

POUBELLE, Eugène René (1831-1907), As a prefet of the Seine region of France he introduced hygiene measures in Paris in 1884, introducing the trash can; the French dustbin (*la poubelle*) is named after him;

RAGLAN, Fitzroy James - lord (1788-1855), British general; the raglan, an overcoat in which the sleeves go directly to the neck without shoulder seams, was named after him;

SANDWICH, John Montagu, an 18th-century English aristocrat, who ordered his valet to bring him meat tucked between two pieces of bread, and because Montagu also happened to be the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, others began to order "the same as Sandwich!";

STRAS, Georges-Frédéric, French jeweller, XVIIIth century, inventor of the stone which imitates the diamante;

VOLTA, Alessandro (1745-1827), Italian physicist who made discoveries in electrostatics, meteorology and pneumatics; his most famous invention, however, is the first battery;

WATT, James (1736 -1819), a Scottish inventor and mechanical engineer whose improvements to the steam engine were fundamental to the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution;

Toponyms (definition: a name derived from the name of a place) also generated eponyms; thus, the name of a town or region led to the designation of a specific product name,

whether we are aware of this or not. We will give some examples, if not the most important, certainly the most picturesque.

*Angora*: since the XVIIIth century a breed of cat has been known as just Angora, called after the historic name of Ankara, Turkey;

*Bordo*: a deep purplish red colour whose name comes from the colour of the red Bordeaux wine (called claret in the UK);

*Champagne*: a sparkling wine whose name comes from Champagne, a well-known wine region in France;

*Mocha*: a type of coffee from Mocha, a Red Sea port and source of mocha coffee;

*Tulle*: a type of lightweight, very fine netting; early tulle netting probably originated in Tulle, a French city;

*Bungalow*: is a type of single-story house that originated in India; the word derives from the Hindi word, meaning Bengali and used elliptically for a “house in the Bengal style”;

*Cashmere*: Cashmere wool, usually simply known as cashmere, is a fiber obtained from the Cashmere goat, from Cashmere;

*Cravat*: The necktie traces back to the time of Thirty Years’ War when Croatian mercenaries from the Military Frontier in French service, wearing their traditional small, knotted neckerchiefs, aroused the interest of the Parisians. Due to the slight difference between the Croatian word for Croats, *Hrvati*, and the French word, *Croates*, the garment gained the name “Cravat”;

*Denim*: the name of the fabric shows its provenience: from Nîmes, a town in France;

*Jean*: the name of the fabric comes from the Italian town Genova (Gênes in French);

*Hamburger*: the name comes from Hamburg, a German town;

*Havana*: type of tobacco specific to Havana/Cuba;

*Landau*: a type of prams produced in Landau, a German town;

*Spa*: the name of a thermal resort from Belgium;

*Tequila*: Tequila is a town from Mexico where that alcoholic drink is produced;

*Cologne*: perfume originating from Köln, a German town (Cologne in French);

*Cognac*: the name of this alcoholic drink comes from Cognac, a French town;

*Bayonet*: type of gun produced at the beginning in Bayonne;

*Damask*: the name of this fabric comes from Damask, the capital of Syria;

Of course, there are more examples, probing the flexibility of the languages, the interaction with an infinite number of social and economic fields.

The mythological, biblical or literary characters/sources had a similar treatment; we will mention just some of the well-known examples. It is obvious that a more ample research paper will notice more implications, some of which being, perhaps, more interesting.

*Academy*: the name traces back to Plato's school of philosophy which was held in Akademos' garden;

*Aphrodisiac*: from the Greek goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite.

*Amphitryon*: from Molière's line "*Le véritable Amphitryon est l'Amphitryon où l'on dine*", the name Amphitryon has come to be used in the sense of a generous entertainer, a good host; the French word for "host" is in fact "amphitryon"; its Spanish cognate is "anfitrión".

*Don Juan*: a rogue and a libertine who takes great pleasure in seducing women; Molière's play *Don Juan ou le Festin de pierre* (1665) is among the best known works about this character;

*Goliath*, a Philistine giant in the Bible, slain by David; it names a person or a thing of colossal size or power;

*Quixotic*, adjective coming from *Don Quixote (Don Quichotte)*, is behaviour that is noble in an absurd way, or the desire to perform acts of chivalry in a radically impractical manner.

*Vandal*: a "vandal" is someone who engages in senseless destruction; this usage is a result of the Vandals' sack of Rome under King Genseric in 455. During the Enlightenment, Rome was idealized, while the Goths and Vandals were blamed for its destruction;

And the list could go on, but, as already stated, we noted just some of the most well-known eponyms, many of them being met in economic or social situations.

### **3. Between marketing and intellectual propriety: antonomasia**

In the marketing field one can notice a well-spread linguistic phenomenon: the brands of different products used as common names. The phenomenon is not recent, but it has reached a certain level of strangeness recently. Thus Romanian people and maybe other peoples, too, want to buy a pair of Puma adidas, a Revlon rimel or a Toshiba xerox.

The economic boom after the WWII brought into the consumers' attention several brands which, due to their unprecedented spread and the lack of competitors, got rapidly known, becoming common names, common nouns. We will give several examples, some of them wearing the perfume of the epoch.

The name of the ordinary refrigerator comes from a brand registered in the United States of America in September 1918, in Detroit, by a company belonging to the General Motors Group, presently Electrolux. In 1965, the "refrigerator" *Frigidaire* with number 50 million was produced on the occasion of 50 years of activity of the producing company. The refrigerator was the most used household in the USA, with a covering rate of almost 100%!

The inventor of the fridge, the refrigerator, to be hypercorrect! – is a European, Carl von Linde (1876). It is interesting to know that the Linde AG, founded by Linde in 1879, is the oldest German technical company still functioning.

The linguistic phenomenon of transforming a brand into a common noun has known a special evolution since the apparition of the competition and the legislation for registered brands. The Adidas trainers, for example, are a brand of the Adidas Group AG, but in today's Romanian dictionaries one can find the entry of adidas explaining that it refers to sport shoes, trainers, classifying it as a common noun; and this is the way the public also perceives it. The case of the soluble coffee produced by Nestlé is similar. The name “claxon”, Klaxon, more exactly, written with capital letters at the beginning, in 1911, was invented by KM Europ, the German producer of warning horns for vehicles, founded in 1908. The ordinary aspirin is a brand of the Bayer group for the acetylsalicylic acid. Cellophane, that thin, quite stiff, transparent material used for covering goods, especially flowers and food, is the brand of a Sweets company, from the beginning of the XXth century. Pampers, a type of diapers, is a brand of the Procter & Gamble group, but the Romanians call pampers all the disposable diapers or nappies (so, they buy Huggies pampers or Libero pampers). Other types of antonomasia are: lego, linoleum, lycra, neoprene, nylon, scotch, teflon, tergal, thermos, ping – pong, botox, rimel, tampax, superglue, vaseline, nutela, viagra, zip, jeep, etc.

Since the moment they came into our language, the eponyms and the antonomasias have undergone phonetic transformations and/or nominal flexions specific to the common nouns: adidași (adidases), pempărși (pampers), nessuri (nesses), etc. We are sure that the adjectives and verbs made from those nouns are interesting and deserve to be study.

#### **4. Brand risk or economic failure**

Any producer analyzes the market before giving a name to their new model or brand. This analysis is complex and takes time. If the product is destined to be traded on the external market, there should be a correlation between its name and the language spoken in that country, possibly its dialects. A survey containing information about other similar products and their names should be filled in; a possible association made unconsciously by the consumers could irremediable damage the image of the new product. This thing is very-well known by the automobile producers.

The process of naming a vehicle is excruciating, but crucial to success. The chosen name should evoke an image designed to stimulate sales; it should not be too sophisticated, while not offensive in any language, if possible. A new name positions the product on the market even before being released and an “uninspired” name closes any chances of success.



General Motors is said to have learnt this lesson in the 1980s. Chances are you have heard about how Chevrolet had problems marketing the Chevy Nova automobile in Latin America because *no va* means “it doesn’t go” in Spanish. In addition to the intention of transmitting an image or an attitude, a new name also transmits a subtle message to the consumers, a signal that suits their political or social criteria. “Hunter” would suit people who like hunting, but would not be recommended to those who advocate the protection of animals. Honda’s Civic model was successful in almost all countries, but the same cannot be said about Volkswagen Jetta (Jetta, pronounced Ietta, means bad luck in Italian). The most numerous, or spicy, failures at this chapter, have been the names which had sexual connotations in other languages. It happened to Ford Caliente and Ford Pinto in Brazil, to General Motors with Opel Ascona in Galicia (northwest region of Spain), to Mazda company with the Laputta model in those countries where people speak languages of Latin origin, to Honda company with the Fitta model in the Nordic countries in 2001, and so on. Even if the food or textile producers are in danger of losing market share due to the names of their products, the automotive industry has experienced the most uncomfortable experiences so far.

The political and military fields, especially the names given to some military operations, are studied thoroughly, thought alternatively and in comparison, in order not to bring religious prejudice, not to be interpreted, speculated or used as means of propaganda. The first step in planning the name of an operation is following an administrative logic. The so called centres of planning and management of military operations work beside the allied countries’ staffs. They usually choose names for the operations. The latest example is the name given to the recent offensive against the Taliban in Afghanistan. As the international force involves 2,500 Afghan soldiers among those 12,500 troops from NATO, the military operation was symbolically named “Operation Mushtarak”. The word comes from Dari (Afghan Persian) and means “together”. There were, of course, unfortunate experiences in the past. During the Second World War the bombing of Hamburg by the Allies in 1943, aimed to destroy the city, was named “Operation Gomorrah” (the name of the settlement destroyed by a rain of fire according to the Bible). Also, “Strengthened Lead”, the Israeli offensive in Gaza in 2009, has religious connotations, referring to a traditional poem of the Festival of Lights (Hanukka). Religious references are frequently found in military operations in the Middle East. The Iranian missile manoeuvres take place under the name of the “Great Prophet”. Only Israel has used names that seem to emerge from a weather report: “Summer Rain”, “Autumn Clouds” (the Gaza Strip, 2006) or “Hot Winter” in February 2008. For practical reasons, all EU operations begin with EUFOR followed by the geographical region where they occur (EUFOR Congo, EUFOR Chad and so on). The American invasion in Afghanistan is a classic example for how important choosing the name of a campaign or operation is. Just two weeks

after the attacks on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, Washington was forced to change the original name of the operation. Thus “Infinite Justice” (“Justice without limit”) became “Enduring Freedom”, because the first name sounded clearly as revenge to the Muslims. Moreover, an Iranian newspaper called the operation “Imperialism without limits”, speculated on the true purpose of the war. Sometimes, the names of the American operations had ideological connotations (“The Just Cause” for the invasion of Panama) and sometimes they have relied on animal symbols (“Dragon of Fire”, “Bear’s jaw” or “Beaver’s Cage” held during the Vietnam War). The message of these names should be clear, unambiguous, clearly communicating that this is a military operation, not an ideological attack.

## 5. Conclusion

The most part of the brands which became generic terms or common nouns are found in Romanian, French and other languages, being an important international resource of terminology. From the linguistic point of view, within the global context and having the help of these common elements, the international economy aims more to a certain Anglo-American monolingualism than to a real plurilingualism. The respect of what should mean linguistic diversity is seen only when we analyze the evolution of these terms within a certain language, respectively when we find out how they adopted to the phonetic and grammatical norms of that language, be it graphically, derivationally or plural forming, etc.

As we have already shown, the vocabulary of a language is not static; moreover, it does not belong to a certain science only – for example, linguistics – but also to several fields, meeting some of the most pragmatic fields of our economic and social life.

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