

Concluding words
Doreen Gerritzen
June 2009

The study of names – onomastics – has traditionally focused primarily on personal names and places names, often from the perspective of historical linguistics. Although this type of onomastic research is still prominent, a number of new developments are taking place. These developments involve both the categories of names and the approach. Research is increasingly focusing on what are known as ‘other names’: names that do not refer to either people or places. Commercial names are obviously the best example. A parallel trend involves the consideration of names from a more sociolinguistic perspective.

One crucial aspect of this type of research involves how we consider the meaning of names. Although the most common understanding of ‘meaning’ involves etymology, increasing numbers of onomastic studies are focusing on other elements of the meaning of names. While names are part of the history of a language, they also function in present language. Moreover, many new names continue to be created. Examples include street names, first names and, obviously, brand names. These functional and creative aspects have inspired both linguists and scholars from other disciplines to conduct innovative research on names.

One example of this kind of research could be the study of the complex interaction between globalisation and its potential threat to national or regional identities. Because many brand names are intended for use in multiple languages and cultures, companies invest considerable resources into choosing names that are appropriate in many countries. Nonetheless, names that refer to local, regional or national characteristics can also be regarded as strong brand names.

More generally, commercial names provide a good reflection of social changes, as we have seen in the past few days. This insight is possible because many new names are being created and existing names are being changed. The people that choose these new names must be aware of trends in society. In this respect, they can be compared to parents who wish to give fashionable names to their newborn children.

Commercial names are similar to first names in a number of respects, largely because both image and sound are crucial factors in their selection. Image is obviously a complex aspect of names, as reflected in the methodology of name-perception studies.

With regard to the phonological features of names, there are similarities between names that are chosen for commercial and for aesthetic reasons. The study of commercial names and the study of first names therefore stand to benefit from each other. This obviously applies to the study of the images associated with names as well. The use of brand names as first names provides a good example of the close association between the two types of names. In the Netherlands, there are girls with such names as Cacharel, Chanel, and Dior.

Commercial names involve several different name categories, including company names, brand names and product names. These name categories are interesting from a name-theoretical perspective, as they are not prototypical. Product names are particularly disputable, as they also function as proper nouns in everyday speech. Studying the ways in which they are used can provide insight into grey area between proper nouns and common nouns.

One typical characteristic of proper nouns is that they are not translated. There are obviously exceptions, as with names in children's literature (the Harry Potter books provide a good example) and names that are semantically transparent. For example, many languages have their own variant of the name 'United Nations' (or more accurately, they do not use the English variant). Product names show this kind of flexibility as well, as do some company names or semantically transparent parts of company names.

Names in the economy offer a wide variety of research possibilities, as we have witnessed during the past few days. The study of modern names is an important enrichment of onomastics, as it suggests new perspectives and new approaches. As you know, 'Commercial Names' was chosen as a preferred theme for one of the coming issues of *Onoma*, the journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences. As the editor-in-chief of this journal, I am very much looking forward to learning more about this subject. And of course this conference has been an excellent introduction already.

So I would like to express my appreciation to you all for your contribution to this conference. You have made clear that the study of names in the economy is a fruitful way of looking at names. I would also like to thank the members of the international scientific committee: Frans Hinskens, Ludger Kremer, Julia Kuhn and Paula Sjöblom. The Meertens Instituut should be mentioned here as well, for its generous financial support. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues Harm Nijboer and Reina Boerrigter, who organised this conference with so much enthusiasm. I think they deserve a round of applause.