

GLOBALIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

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Edited by
Francis Egbokhare
Clement Kolawole

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Ibadan Cultural Studies Group
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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COPYING THE MASTER: Linguistic Strategies in Imitation Brand Naming.

Olayinka Egbokhare

Introduction

In recent times, the need to gain a considerable share of the market has continued to motivate products manufacturers and end users to engage in aggressive and strategic marketing drives. When a brand succeeds, it is expected that there will be an upsurge of brands whose names are very similar to that of the successful brand. In the view of Emmanuel Ekunno as expressed in *Brand Faces*,¹ cloning is the dress word used for illegal copying of other people's intellectual properties. This is not strange considering the fact that brands have become the most important asset of most organizations today. With cloning, people deliberately create a look-alike of a product in order to confuse the buyer at the point of purchase. Counterfeiting is, especially, common in developing countries. Many reasons have been suggested for the ease with which these 'copycats' lure unsuspecting consumers into buying imitation brands. They include the following:

- i) The people already have the forms of the words in their consciousness so fakers only try as much as possible to avoid visual and auditory clues that may give them away.
- ii) The English orthography is inconsistent unlike the local writing system. With English, a change in letters may not suggest a change in sound. Whereas in the local

¹ Issues number 21

- writing system, a difference in letters means a difference in sound.
- iii) The average consumer is not sensitive to little variations because these are sounds of English. In fact, changes in the place of articulation or the manner of articulation may go unnoticed.
 - iv) Labels, packaging, graphics, colour logo, etc., are the same for many of the imitation products, even the changes in name are slight. To make things easier for the 'copycats,' consumers buy by design. They may not pay a close attention to details so long as it looks like the graphics of the brand they are familiar with.
 - v) One last factor that engenders and encourages this deception is the problem of general illiteracy and, or ill literacy. Many people cannot read so they depend on the seller who would conveniently pass off SMT as SMC. Yet many of the literate consumers are lazy readers who may not read beyond the first two or so letters SM... and as such, fall victim.

So what is branding?

Branding is the use of a name, term, symbol or design or a combination of these to identify a product. Brands provide customers with a guarantee of value and quality, making the customer's choice easier. In a competitive market place, there is confusion and a lot of message fatigue. When products are branded, consumers are given a shortcut to consumption. They are empowered to make safe choices, knowing that they hope to derive satisfaction and value from the brand they have purchased. (Terpstra and Sarathy, 2000: 267, Perreault, Jr. and McCarthy 2002: 264).

A good brand name, for example, is characterized by the following qualities. It is;

- i. short and simple
- ii. easy to spell and read
- iii. easy to recognize and remember
- iv. easy to pronounce
- v. pronounceable in only one way.
- vi. pronounceable in all languages

- vii. suggestive of product benefit
- viii. adaptable to packaging/labeling needs
- ix. void of undesirable imagery
- x. always timely/does not go out of date)
- xi. adaptable to any advertising medium
- xii. legally available for use, not in use by any other firm.

Having established what a brand is, let us now ask some basic questions.

1. What kind of alterations are available to 'copycats'?
2. What linguistic strategies are employed to make this possible?
3. What position in the word is favoured?

In answer to the first question, there are two major kinds of alterations, namely visual and auditory. The major elements of a brand include the logo, trade names, trademarks, trade colours, product design and packaging. When the change is auditory, a sound or more is altered, making the imitation sound like the original; Chelson: Chealsea, Samsong: Samsung. For instance x may be spelt y as these examples indicate.

A visual change involves a change of symbols, colour, package or graphics. Yet, the imitation shares a very strong resemblance with the original such that the change may be imperceptible. The linguistic strategies employed to make the imitation possible occur along two major dimensions: morphological and phonological.

Morphological level

- A. At the morphological level, the forms of the words are altered either at the initial, medial or final positions. Thus, we may have an inclusion of suffix or prefix. In the use of extensions, a meaningful grammatical unit is added to the root or stem of a trademark, for instance, Eva: Evalin. A major part of the original brand name is retained, plus an addition at the end. An initial extension is not favoured. Also, the typeface or case of the trademark may be manipulated to deceive. For instance, the imitation may retain the font and graphic of the original brand. The imitation may be varied to obscure and confuse. What we have classified as morphological is perhaps better described as graphical manipulation. It includes also coalescing the letters of a brand at some point.

B. Phonological Level

Alterations at the phonological level show changes in the sound systems. In essence, the nature of the changes is traceable to the phoneme or the minimal unit in the sound system. The changes may be of five types:

1. Addition
2. Deletion
3. Replacement
4. Rearrangement or reshuffling
5. Graphical

The deception is carried out without much ado because the name employs;

1. Similarities in the place of articulation. Some examples are
 - a. National : Nasional (t ʃ)
 - b. Phillips : Phillibs (p b)
2. Similarities in the manner of articulation
SMC: SMT
[c] voiceless palatal plosive
[t] voiced alveolar plosive
3. Similar phonation
Tudor - Tunor (d-voiced alveolar -n-voiced alveolar nasal)
Vim -Vin (m-voiced bilabial nasal -n-voiced alveolar nasal)
4. Similar spelling

Nike	-	Nikke
Timberland	-	Timber land
Murphy Richards	-	Morphy Richard
Black Knight	-	Bright Night
1. Examples of brands where a sound or letter has been added

a. Nike	Nikke	
b. Nautica	Nautical	
c. Aiwa	Naiwa	
d. Panasonic	Panasoamic,	Panaasonic
e. Eva	Evar, Evalife,	Evalin
f. Sony	Song AC,	Sunny
g. Tommy Hilfiger	Tommy	Hilfinger

2. Examples of brands where a letter or sound has been deleted

- | | | | |
|----|--------------|---------|----------|
| a. | Panasonic | Pansony | Pansonic |
| b. | Calvin Klein | Calvin | Klin |
| c. | Samsung | Samsong | |

3. Examples of Replacement.

- | | | | |
|----|------------|------------|-----------|
| a. | Phillips | Phillibs, | Phillids. |
| b. | South Pole | North Pole | |
| c. | SMC | SMT | |
| d. | Tudor | Tunor | |
| e. | Nakai | Makai | |
| f. | National | Nasional | |
| g. | Sanyo | Sanwo | |

4. Examples of brands where a letter or sound has been rearranged.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Baycuten | Baytucen |
| Black Knight | Bright Night |

5. Other examples [Graphical]

Some other examples lack a definite pattern, for instance

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Gordon Dry Gin | Gideems Dry Gin |
| Chealsea London Dry Gin | Chelson London Dry Gin |
| Moulinex | Mannonlex |
| Timberland | Timber land |

The third research question deals with the common positions of change. The changes occur in three notable positions, initial, medial and final. In the sample employed for this study, most of the changes occurred in the final position, followed by the changes in the medial position. One possible explanation for the fewer occurrences of changes in the initial position may be because such changes are quite easy to detect. As already pointed out, most readers only concentrate on the initial syllable, the imitators may not want to reveal the deceptive naming too early.

a. Examples of changes in the final position.

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| Nautica - | Nautical |
| SONY - | Sonic |

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------------|
| Phillips | - | Phillids, Phillibs |
| Eva | - | Evar, Evans |
| Chealsea | - | Chelson |
| SMT | - | SMC |
- b. Examples of changes in the medial position.
- | | | |
|------------|---|----------------------|
| Tudor | - | Tunor |
| Panasonic | - | Panasoanic, Pansonic |
| Nike | - | Nikke |
| Timberland | - | Timber land |
- c. Examples of changes in the initial position
- | | | |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| Nakai | - | Makai |
| Aiwa | - | Naiwa |
| Black Knight | - | Bright Night |
| ST | - | CT |
| South Pole | - | North Pole |
- d. Examples of changes in two positions
- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| Media | - | Final |
| Moulinex | - | Mannonlex |
| Gordons | - | Gideems |
| Panasonic | - | Pansonic |

So far we have examined the concept of branding, the occurrences of imitations in brand naming as well as the linguistic variables that make this imitative brand names possible. The issue of imitation of brand names will be with us for a long time as a result of the alarming cost of building brand recognition. Another reason is the prevalent difference in cultural values. For instance, in South Korea, many people do not see counterfeiting as unethical. To make the matters worse, some consumers have no ill feelings about the imitation of brands. In fact, in some cases, some consumers claim the imitations work better than the original. To some other consumers, imitation brands are usually of inferior quality. The imitators merely try ride on the back of the successful brands. Moreover, they do not have to spend so much on the ground breaking efforts of product awareness since they would only, always imitate already established brand names.

A worse scenario is the possibility that the consumer will still prefer to buy the imitation brand simply because the price of the original is outside the consumer's budget. In essence, he may not be after full

satisfaction but an average satisfaction. Thus the attitude of consumers are, unusual though, favourably disposed them.

In non-literate societies, the concept of brand as intellectual property is farfetched. One major effect of imitation on consumers is that it creates confusion and in some cases, it heightens post purchase dissonance. With the awareness on consumerism and the growing quest to get value for money, the incidents of cloning may decrease. The more consumers know about their rights and the more observant they become about brand identities, the more difficult it will be to deceive them. Also, once a consumer has been deceived once by imitation brand naming, s/he becomes a more painstaking buyer who seeks detailed information before making a purchase.

Without doubt, illiteracy is one important reason for the success of brand imitation. The second factor is culture, especially for the consumer. However, for the imitators, it is simply a matter of making profit by reducing the cost of marketing. To avoid deception, the consumers should pay more attention to visual signs that cannot easily be imitated. In pharmaceutical products, brand imitation can have disastrous consequences. It is therefore important for a lot of attention to be paid to establishing legal frameworks that make imitation difficult. We suggest that two brands must not sound alike whether or not they are spelt differently. Thus, both spelling and pronunciation should be registered and the owners of such brands must communicate these to consumers.

The cultural challenges can only be surmounted by education. In societies where people do not pay attention to signals and logos or brand marks, cloning will be made easy. Marketers have to do a lot to educate consumers on unique brand features so as to safeguard their intellectual properties. Cheaper alternatives or low budget options can also be made available to cater for the low-income cadre of the consumers. Competing brands should be closely monitored so that any attempt at cloning will be quickly pointed out to unsuspecting consumers who may be deceived by similarities in spelling, packaging, logo, graphics or colour. There is a very thin divide between brand imitation and product faking; in many cases, both go hand in hand. In brand imitation, the manufacturer tries to borrow from the shine of a successful product by appropriating most of the features. On the other hand, product faking is a deliberate attempt to subvert the success of the original product by passing off a substandard

product as original product. Below is a list of some common brands and their imitation counterparts:

1.	Nike	Nikke
2.	Vim	Vin
3.	Calvin Klein	Calvin Klin
4.	Nautica	Nautical
5.	SONY	Sunny, SQNY, Sony AC
6.	Samsung	Samsong
7.	Aiwa	Naiwa
8.	Nakai	Makai
9.	Panasonic	Pansonic
10.	Tudor	Tunor
11.	Moulinex	Mammonlex
12.	Phillips	Phillids, Phillibs
13.	Morphy Richard	Murphy Richard
14.	SMC	SMT
15.	Timberland	Timber land
16.	Hugo Boss	Hogo Boss
17.	Tommy Hilfinger	Tommy Hilfinge
18.	South pole	North Pole
19.	ST	CT
20.	Eva	Var, Evalife
21.	Black Knight	bright Night
22.	Chealsea	Chelson
23.	Gordon Dry Fin	Gedeem Dry Gin
24.	Sanyo	Sanwo
25.	National	Nasional
26.	Baycuten	Baytucen
27.	Nixoderm	Exoderm
28.	Yamaha	Yahama
29.	Procold	Protocold
30.	Bentolin	Bintoline
31.	Seiko	Seciko
32.	Addidas	Abbibas
33.	Tenovate	Tempovate
34.	Expression	Esspression
35.	Ahuja	Ahuya
36.	Sharp	Shrap
37.	Deitz	Deits
38.	Boss	Boos
39.	Gucci	Cucci
40.	Felvin	Felgin

41.	Maloxine	Malozine
42.	DKNY	DKNWhy?
43.	Binatone	Benatone
44.	Chap	Chap 2
45.	Sean John	Seani Johni
46.	PUMA	PUNMA
47.	FUBU	FABU
48.	Reebok	Redbock
49.	Ralph Lauren	Ralph Loven
50.	Duracell	Dulacell
51.	NATIONAL	interNATIONAL
52.	KDK	KDR

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