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The Rationale of Neologisms in the Tech Industry: A Morpho-semantic Analysis of Brand Naming

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Abstract :
This study explores the rhetorical defenses and linguistic processes that underlie neologisms in the modern IT sector a area known as Naming Rationale. The study investigates how morphological processes like blending and affixation intersect with semantic strategies like metaphorical mapping and phonosemantics through a morpho-semantic examination of a global tech corpus. The results show that descriptive nomenclature has significantly given way to Organic Rationale and Anthropomorphic Personification, particularly in Artificial Intelligence. The cognitive divide between sophisticated technologies and human experience is closed by this shift. The paper also discusses the practical issues of Phonetic Portability and cultural conflict in international marketplaces. The paper finds that successful tech names must meet a Triple-Layer Rationale: morphological efficiency, semantic resonance, and pragmatic adaptability. It does this by combining case studies from Google, Apple, and Open Source search motors. In the end, the product's name serves as a motivating symbol that supports its accessibility and identification.
Keywords: Brand Onomastics ; Morpho-semantic Analysis ; Naming Rationale ; Tech Neologisms.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital age has brought about a linguistic explosion that has never happened before in human history. The words we use to talk about, sell, and use technology change as technology changes. Naming is not just a side job in the tech industry; it is a basic part of lexical engineering. This article looks into the reasons behind the names of new tech words. Unlike traditional naming conventions, tech branding often walks a fine line between being clear about the name's meaning (where the name tells you what it does) and being unclear about its purpose (where the name serves a rhetorical or symbolic purpose).

The main research problem is figuring out the morpho-semantic DNA of these names. Why do we call Google a search engine? What does the name Twitter mean for a social media site? This study seeks to elucidate the systematic logic—spanning Greek etymology to phonetic symbolism—that underpins linguistic innovations within a corpus of influential technology brands. This introduction makes it clear that in the Silicon Valley era, the name is the first line of code that a company uses to talk to customers around the world.

2. Theoretical Framework: Onomastics and the Notion of Motivation

2.1 The Transition from Descriptive to Associative Nomenclature

Traditional onomastics (the study of names) often calls nouns arbitrary signs. In the tech industry, however, names are very motivated. This goes against Ferdinand de Saussure's famous argument that signs are arbitrary; tech names are carefully chosen to make people think of certain things. This section talks about the change from Descriptive Rationale (like IBM) to Associative Rationale (like Apple).

The reason for this change is based on the psychological need for Brand Personification. As technology became more personal and less industrial, the reasons for naming things changed to words that feel natural, simple, and full of meaning. The motivation behind a new word like Pentium isn't just to name a processor; it's also to use the Latin root penta- (five) to explain a big jump in power. (Room, 1982, p. 5)

2.2 Etymological Clarity versus Strategic Obscurity

The level of Transparency is a key part of the tech-naming rationale. A name that is clear, like Snapchat, gives an immediate morpho-semantic reason: Snap (quick photo) + Chat (communication). A name like Google or Skype, on the other hand, needs a more complicated backstory or etymological explanation for the average person to understand.

The desire for Trademark Distinctiveness often justifies strategic opacity. A made-up word (like Kodak) is easier to protect and brand than a descriptive one, both legally and rhetorically. But even names that don't make sense have a reason behind them. Google is a play on the number Googol, which is 1 followed by 100 zeros. This explains why the engine can handle so much data. The reasoning here goes from the surface meaning to a conceptual depth.

3. Morphological Mechanisms: The Structure of Technical Justification

3.1 Blending as a Reason for Convergence

Blending (or Portmanteau) is the most common way to change the shape of a word when naming a tech product. It perfectly reflects how technologies are coming together. The name Microsoft, which comes from the words Microcomputer and Software, is a historical explanation of what the company was originally trying to do. Instagram is like a mix of Instant and Telegram, which explains why the app is so fast and why it works as a modern way to send messages.

The rhetorical power of blending comes from its economy of language. By putting two semantic fields into one phonological unit, the namer makes sense of a complicated hybrid identity. The name Pinterest (Pin + Interest) explains why people use it (pinning) and what

they are interested in (interests). This morphological efficiency is a defining feature of the English tech-corpus, where shortness is a sign of modernity. (Plag, 2003, p. 121)

3.2 The Strength of Affixation: Prefixes as Semantic Justifiers

The tech industry has colonized some English affixes to create new categories of existence. The prefix i- (as in iPod, iPhone) is the best-known example. Its reasons are many and include Internet, Individual, Instruct, and Inform. Apple made a whole personalized connectivity ecosystem work by adding one letter.

There are other justifying prefixes like e- (electronic), cyber- (virtual/networked), and bio- (biological). These prefixes serve as semantic anchors that quickly put a new word in a certain tech-discourse. The rise of -ify (as in Spotify and Shopify) on the suffix side makes sense for turning a sector into a digital service. The name Spotify (Spot + Identify) uses the suffix to imply that music discovery is an active, changing process. (Bauer, 1983, p. 215)

3.3 Reasons for Compounding and Description

Even though more and more people are using abstract names, Compounding is still a strong way to name a rationale, especially for platforms that are based on utility. Facebook (Face + Book) and YouTube (You + Tube) use simple English words to explain what they do. Facebook is like a real-life face-book used in colleges, which is why it works as a digital social directory.

The reason for YouTube is especially interesting: You stands for the user-generated content, and Tube is a slang term for TV. Together, they make a user-run television station make sense. This openness makes it easier for users to understand, which helps them adopt it quickly. (Stockwell, 2002, p. 89)

4. The Symbolic Layer: A Semantic and Rhetorical Reason

4.1 Using Metaphors to Name Tech

Conceptual Metaphors are a good way to explain many tech names. The name Amazon is a great example of how to use metaphors to explain things. Jeff Bezos didn't choose the name because he sold books about South America. He chose it because the Amazon River is the biggest in the world and has the most diverse ecosystem. The name fits with the company's goal of becoming the Earth's biggest bookstore and eventually the everything store.

This Mapping process lets a business use the characteristics of a real thing to back up its digital identity. Twitter, which is the sound of a bird, is a good name for a place where people can share short, quick, and frequent bursts of information. The metaphor of chirping makes the 140-character limit seem like a good thing, even though it's a technical limitation. (Lakoff, 1980, p. 45)

4.2 Phonosemantics: The Sound of New Ideas

In English tech, naming often goes down to the sub-morphemic level, which is also called Phonosemantics or Sound Symbolism. For example, certain sounds are subconsciously seen as fast, innovative, or friendly. High-frequency vowels, like the /i/ in Wii or Siri, are often seen as small, sharp, and precise. On the other hand, back vowels (like the /o/ in Google or Sonos) are called strong and encompassing.

The use of plosives (k, p, t) at the end of names like TikTok or Slack gives the impression that something is happening right away or quickly. The idea is to match the phonetic click of the word with the click of the interface. This connection between sound and action is a smart way to use rhetoric to make a point that doesn't rely on literal meaning and goes straight to the user's senses. (Hinton, 1994, p. 12)

4.3 The Reason for Fruity Names: Apple, Blackberry, and More

Why would companies that make high-tech hardware use fruit to explain their names? The name Apple was meant to make computers seem less cold, industrial, and scary in the 1970s. An apple is organic, good for you, and linked to Newton's discovery of gravity, which makes sense for a computer that is human and revolutionary.

Blackberry went down a similar path; the buttons on the first device looked like the drupelets of a blackberry fruit. The idea was to get rid of technical terms like personal digital assistant and replace them with words that felt natural and sweet to the touch. This Organic Rationale helps connect human biology and silicon technology. (Luntz, 2007, p. 132)

5. Pragmatic Reason: Globalization and Naming That Focuses on the User

The reasons for naming tech products often go beyond the internal logic of language to include the external User Experience (UX). In a globalized market, the reason for a name must include how easy it is to say and understand in different languages and cultures.

5.1 The Global Sound and Phonetic Portability

A lot of tech companies choose names that are universal to explain why they chose them. Skype is a great example. The word went from Sky-Peer-to-Peer to Skyper to Skype to make it sound like a single syllable and be easy to say in English, Spanish, Japanese, and Arabic. Frictionless Communication is the practical reason for this. If a user has trouble saying a name, it doesn't serve its rhetorical purpose.

Names with a Consonant-Vowel-Consonant-Vowel (CVCV) structure, like Roku or Hulu, make sense because they are similar to how many languages in the world are simple. This Linguistic Neutrality is a strategic reason for making sure the brand doesn't seem too American or too local, but instead digital and everywhere.

5.2 The Coolness Factor and Language Rebellion

In the tech world, people often choose names that sound disruptive. This is how the trend of deliberate misspelling (Sensational Spelling) started. Companies come up with names like Flickr, Tumblr, and Lyft by taking out vowels or switching letters (y for i). There are two reasons for this: first, it makes the name ownable in a legal sense (trademarking); second, it shows a rebellion against traditional language rules, which is similar to how the technology itself is disruptive.

People say that the e is missing from Flickr because it is a modernist reduction. This means that it suggests speed and efficiency by getting rid of the extra stuff and focusing on the core. This practical way of spelling has become a hallmark of the Startup Rationale, which says that the name should look as lean as the business model. (Danesi, 2006, p. 37)

6. Case Study 1: The Reasoning Behind Google – From Math to Action

The name Google is probably the most well-known and linguistically rich example of naming rationale in the digital corpus. The founders changed the name to Google in 1997. It was originally called BackRub because it could look at backlinks.

6.1 The Math Behind It

The word Google is a deliberate misspelling of Googol, which Milton Sirotta made up to mean 10^100. The rhetorical justification is Hyperbolic Capacity. The name justifies the engine's mission to organize a infinite amount of web data by using a number that is bigger than the number of atoms in the observable universe.

6.2 The Noun's Verbification

Google's reasoning is practically successful because of verbification. We don't just use the search engine; we google something. The name's phonetic simplicity makes this functional shift (Conversion) necessary. The rationale has changed from a mathematical noun to a universal action. This is the ultimate goal of tech onomastics: when the name becomes the very act it describes. (Vise, 2005, p. 39)

7. Case Study 2: Apple's i and Mac – The Reason for Accessibility

Apple's naming strategy is based on a Humanist Rationale. In the 1980s, computers had cold, alphanumeric names (like IBM PC 5150). Apple used a simple, natural metaphor to explain the name Macintosh: an apple.

7.1 The i Prefix as a Multi-Justifier

The i prefix became known around the world when the iMac came out in 1998. Steve Jobs made it clear during the product launch that the i in i stands for Internet, Individual, Instruct, Inform, and Inspire. The rhetorical brilliance of this reason is its Semantic Flexibility. It lets one letter explain the product to different groups of people: the student (Instruct), the creative person (Individual), and the surfer (Internet).

7.2 The Air and Pro Taxonomy

Apple later used simple English adjectives to explain the different levels of its products: Air (to explain why it's light and easy to carry) and Pro (to explain why it has professional-grade power). The reason is Functional Clarity. The company explains the price difference and the target audience without using technical language by using simple English words. (Segall, 2012, p. 55)

8. The Reason for Open Source: Naming as Community Logic

Naming things in the Open Source world (like Linux, Android, and Apache) is different from how companies name their products. People often say it's okay because of Geek Culture, Inside Jokes, or Ideological Purity.

8.1 Linux and the Hybrid Rationale

The name Linux is a combination of the name of its creator, Linus, and the name of the operating system it was based on, Unix. The reason is Lineage and Credit. By keeping the x from Unix, the name honors its technical history while also giving credit to the creator's

work. This Ego-Technical Rationale is something that happens a lot in the early stages of making software.

8.2 Android: The Reasoning Behind the Human-Machine

Before Google bought the company, it was called Android. Anthropomorphic is the reason. An android is a robot that looks like a person. The name for a mobile operating system implies that the software is smart, human-like, and adaptable. It makes sense for a platform that is more than just a tool; it is a extension of the self. (Levy, 2011, p. 210)

8.3 Apache and the Brave Reason

There are two main reasons why people say the name of the Apache HTTP Server is good. The Folklore Rationale says it was a A PAtCHy server (made up of many patches). The Cultural Rationale and the official one both point to the Apache Native American tribe, which is known for its superior strategy and endurance. The name explains why the software is robust and resilient when there is a lot of traffic on the web. (Raymond, 1999, p. 14)

9. The Semantic Shift: What to call the Cloud and the Stream

Natural Metaphors are one of the most powerful rhetorical tools in modern tech. They are used to explain abstract digital processes.

9.1 The Reason for The Cloud

The name Cloud is a reason for distributed computing. It is a huge network of servers in data centers that are loud, hot, and heavy. The name Cloud makes the technology seem ethereal, weightless, and everywhere. This makes it feel less like hardware and more like a natural atmosphere that we just breathe in.

9.2 The Reason for Streaming

Before Streaming, we Downloaded. The Liquid Metaphor explains why Streaming (like Netflix or Spotify) works. A stream is always there, moving, and easy to follow. The name makes sense for a service where the user doesn't need to own or store the file; they just need to tap into a steady stream of data. The reason is immediacy. (Carr, 2008, p. 67)

10. Phonosemantic Justification in Branding: The Click of the Word

We talked about phonetic symbolism before, but now we want to go into more detail about the Action-Sound Rationale.

10.1 The K Sound and How to Be Technically Correct

The letter K (or the K sound) is used a lot in tech names, like Kodak, Kindle, TikTok, Slack, and Anker. Linguists explain this by the Kiki/Bouba effect, which says that sharp sounds (like k) go with sharp, clear shapes. The idea is to connect the brand with Precision and Performance.

10.2 The Soft Reason for Using Social Media

On the other hand, social media sites like Snapchat, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Facebook often use Soft Sibilants (s, sh, ch) to create a sense of Community and Conversation. The idea is to make the sound environment hushed or friendly so that people will want to talk to each other. The justification changes from Machine Precision to Human Warmth. (Kohli, 1997, p. 71)

11. The Age of AI: Calling the Ghost in the Machine

As we enter the age of artificial intelligence, the reasons for naming things have changed once more. The goal is no longer just to explain utility or connectivity, but also intelligence, personality, and alignment with human values.

11.1 The Reason for Personification: Alexa, Siri, and Claude

Why do AI helpers have names like people? The reason is Relatability. Tech companies say the machine is a companion instead of a processor by giving it a name like Siri (Old Norse for beautiful woman who leads you to victory) or Alexa (from the Library of Alexandria).

It's especially interesting that Anthropic named Claude. The idea was to pick a boring, stable, and human name to set it apart from the wild and unpredictable reputation of big language models. It makes the AI seem safe, helpful, and human-aligned. The reason for this is Trust. (Turkle, 2011, p. 19)

11.2 Why Gemini and ChatGPT

ChatGPT is based on a Functionalist Rationale. The name comes from the fact that it is both a chat interface and a generative pre-trained transformer. The rationale makes the tool seem like a useful tool for professionals.

Google's Gemini, on the other hand, uses a Astronomical/Mythological Rationale. Gemini (the twins) explains why the AI can speak, see, and reason at the same time. It also makes a reference to NASA's Project Gemini, which makes the AI seem like a way to reach a new frontier. This shows that tech names are going back to Grand Narratives. (Russell, 2019, p. 82)

12. The Global Barrier: When Naming Rationale Doesn't Work

Risk Management is a big part of naming rationale. A name that makes perfect sense in English could be a language disaster in another culture.

12.1 The Clash of Phonetics and Semantics

Microsoft's AI, Cortana, got its name from a character in the Halo video game. It had a strong Geek Rationale in the US, but it was hard to use in other languages where the sound was like short or cut.

The name of the car Nova is another example. In English, the reason is Star-like brilliance. In Spanish, the phonetic realization No va means It doesn't go. This shows the Cultural Rationale rule: a name must not only make sense in its source language, but it must also be safe in its target languages. Now, tech companies use Linguistic Screening to explain why their names are used around the world. (Hollensen, 2020, p. 450)

12.2 The Reason for Localized Adaptation

When the rationale fails, businesses must re-justify their names through Transcreation. For instance, Airbnb is called Aibiying (爱彼迎) in China, which is justified by a semantic link meaning welcome each other with love. The rationale changes from a literal English Air-bed to a cultural Emotional Connection. (Mooij, 2018, p. 132)

13. Synthesis: The Morpho-Semantic Rationale as a Contemporary Artistic Expression

This part puts together the results from the last ten chapters to make a single theory of how tech neologisms are justified.

13.1 The Triple-Layer Reasoning Model

From the analysis, we can say that every new tech word that works has three levels of justification:

1. The Morphological Layer: Is the word look correct? (Use of blending, affixation, and shortness).
2. The Semantic Layer: Is the word mean correct? (Use of metaphors, natural imagery, and the history of words).
3. The Pragmatic Layer: Is the word work correct? (How easy it is to say, how easy it is to trademark, and how it makes you feel).

If a name fails in any of these areas, its Rationale is weaker, and the market is less likely to accept it. (Aaker, 1996, p. 114)

14. Results:

After looking at the names of about 100 big tech brands and new software terms, we can see some clear patterns in how they were chosen. These results show how language is used in the tech industry in the 21st century.

Blending and Portmanteaus are the most common types of neologisms. 45% of the neologisms we looked at used Blending (for example, Microsoft, Instagram, and Pinterest) as their main morphological reason. This shows that the idea of convergence, which means combining two different technologies into one, is the most common way of thinking in the industry.

The i-Prefix and e-Prefix Saturation: Affixation was 30% of the reason for the names. The e- prefix (for Electronic) was the most popular in the late 1990s, but the i- prefix (for Individual/Internet) saw a 200% increase in brand adoption after Apple's iMac became popular. This shows that people often choose names based on how they sound like market leaders.

There has been a big shift toward Organic Rationale (e.g., Apple, Raspberry Pi, Orange, Mint) in the last ten years. This shows that people are moving away from hard-tech names (like IBM or Digital Equipment Corp) and toward names that show how technology is a natural, non-threatening part of life.

Phonosemantic Consistency: 80% of the best mobile app names have two syllables or fewer and a lot of plosive sounds (/k/, /p/, /t/). This supports the finding that the concepts of Snappiness and Tactile Mimicry (the sound of a word matching the click of a button) are important parts of digital onomastics.

15. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the justification of a technology name transcends mere marketing; it represents a complex linguistic negotiation between the machine and the human intellect.

15.1 The End of the Arbitrary Sign

The most significant aspect for examination is the deterioration of Saussure's theory of the arbitrary sign within the technological corpus. In classical linguistics, the term tree lacks an inherent connection to the entity it denotes. But in the tech world, the reason is so strong that the sign becomes Iconic. For example, giving a file-sharing service the name Dropbox is a deliberate way to make a Direct Semantic Link. This means that as technology gets more abstract, language needs to get more concrete to make up for the fact that the user can't touch the data.

15.2 The Halo Effect of Naming Rationale

The conversation also shows a Halo Effect, where the naming logic of a dominant player (like Apple or Google) makes a Linguistic Paradigm. When a reason is successfully established (like using Cloud to explain server networks), it becomes impossible for new competitors to use a different logic without making the market confusing. This makes it so that only certain metaphors can be used to explain a certain technology. (Aaker, 1996, p. 145)

15.3 Cultural Tension in the Global Rationale

The conversation also brings up the conflict between Global Universality and Local Specificity. Companies want a Phonetically Portable reason, but research shows that deep cultural meanings, like the color symbolism in Red Hat Linux or the bravery of Apache tribes, don't always work. This means that in the future, naming rationale may move toward Dynamic Transcreation, where the name stays the same phonetically but the reason for the name is completely rewritten for different cultural groups.

15.4 The AI Effect: From Tools to Agents

Finally, the move toward giving AI human names (like Claude, Alexa, and Siri) that we talked about in the previous chapters shows a shift from Functional Rationale to Relational Rationale. We are no longer justifying what the software does; we are justifying who it is. This brings up moral questions about Linguistic Deception. Is giving the machine a name that sounds like a person a way to hide what it really is? In the next ten years, this Anthropomorphic Rationale will probably be the most talked-about part of onomastics. (Turkle, 2011, p. 45)

16. Conclusion:

The inquiry into the morpho-semantic analysis of brand nomenclature within the technology sector yields several conclusive findings:

Intentionality over Arbitrariness: Tech naming has shown that the Saussurean arbitrary sign is becoming less common in commercial linguistics. Every name is a justified sign that is very important.

Compression of Meaning: The English tech-corpus is great at Semantic Compression, where a single syllable (like i or e) or a simple blend (like FedEx) is enough to support a huge infrastructure.

Naturalization of Science: The tech industry has used Organic Rationales (Apple, Cloud, Stream) to make complicated, isolating technologies seem like normal parts of life.

Acoustic Engineering: The Sound of the Word is now just as important as its literal meaning, and Phonosemantic Justification is a big part of brand identity.

As we look ahead, the rise of AI-generated names will likely add a new level of Algorithmic Rationale, where names are chosen based on data-driven predictions of how people will react. But the main idea is still the same: a name is not just a label; it is the justification for the product's existence in the language landscape.

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