

## Italian Brand Names through their Associations: Current Trends

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### Abstract

Italian brand names for cosmetics and cleaning agents (class 3 of the Nice Classification), pharmaceutical products (class 5), food and drink (classes 29 - 33) published on the site of the Ufficio Italiano di Brevetti e Marchi in 2004 and 2008 are the topic of our analysis with respect to associations from the domains “Power and Might”, “Tradition”, and “Security”. The results are compared on the one hand with a parallel study on German brand names (cf. the paper by Elke Ronneberger-Sibold and Sabine Wahl in this volume), and on the other hand with previous investigations on Italian and German brand names registered throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the latter studies certain shifts in the distribution of the associations became visible, for instance the stress on local production (*Madeinmarche*, 2008, Class 29), or *Il buon vitello della terra trentina* (‘The good beef from the Trentino land’, 2008, Class 29), or on national true production (*Very Italian Food*, Class 29, 2008), and finally on the old Italian and Latin tradition (*Crema cavascura Antiche Terme Romane* ‘Cream of the dark clay from the Old Roman Thermae’) despite the pressure of the globalizing market. From this point of view it is remarkable that other associations like SENSORY PERCEPTIONS are growing or are combined with the connotations of TRADITION and RELIABILITY which are typical for the Italian market. Our aim is to show which shifts are short-lived or of long duration, indicating far-reaching changes in the way of life and behavior of customers.

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### 1. Introduction: An overview on the current project

We are going to present some statements from a joint project study together with Elke Ronneberger-Sibold and Sabine Wahl about brand names with the title “Strategie linguistiche e semiotiche degli spots pubblicitari: analisi contrastiva tra Italia e Germania - due culture a confronto” and sponsored by the Ateneo Italo-Tedesco and the DAAD in 2009 and 2010. In particular we want to offer a comparison of Italian and German brand names registered in 2004 and 2008, with parallel corpora of historical Italian and German brand names from the very beginning of brand name registration, focusing on the connotations we already studied also for earlier periods, i.e. on the domains TRADITION and RELIABILITY.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1. Objectives

In our last reports we noted that the third chosen and earlier analyzed domain POWER and MIGHT is very poorly represented in both corpora, and instead we found other emerging association domains – see especially in the paper on German brand names by Elke Ronneberger-Sibold and Sabine Wahl in this volume.

In the last analyzed corpus from the years 2004 and 2008, certain shifts in the distribution of the associations became visible, for instance the stress on local production, as these Italian examples show: *Burro Friulano* (butter from Friuli), *Casa Calabria*, *Casa Sicilia* (Calabria House, Sicilia House), (*Madeinmarche*, 2008, Class 29); or *Il buon vitello della terra trentina* (‘The good beef from the Trentino land’, 2008, Class 29), or on national true production (*Very Italian Food*, Class 29, 2008), and finally on the old Italian and Latin tradition (*Crema cavascura Antiche Terme Romane* ‘Cream of the dark clay from the Old Roman Thermae’). My findings will refer to the changes in the relative importance of certain connotations related to basic social values in Italian brand names in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>1</sup> For the Italian brand names see Cotticelli-Kurras (2008, Vol. II: 695-709); Cotticelli-Kurras (2011) and Cotticelli-Kurras (2012a), (2012b) and (2012c); for the German material see Ronneberger-Sibold (2007, vol. 3, 324-37) and (2008); Ronneberger-Sibold (2012) and Ronneberger-Sibold/Wahl (2012).

### 1.2. *The joint project*

The methodology employed in our project is represented by a qualitative semantic analysis of brand names with respect to connotations and a quantitative analysis of the frequencies of these connotations in order to show whether such shifts are short-lived or of long duration, indicating far-reaching changes in the way of life and behavior of customers. The goal of this contrastive and semiotic analysis is to describe the resulting cultural and linguistic differences that can be noted between Italian and the German marketing strategies under the pressure of a globalized world. The theoretical framework contains linguistic, semiotic, cultural and marketing oriented aspects.

### 1.3. *The corpus*

The number of the collected items is c. 1000 names for each language; in the Italian corpus we have 600 brand names for 2004 and 400 for 2008.

We focused on the product names from those classes which have a high impact in every day situations, such as food and drinks, pharmaceutical, cosmetics and cleaning products.<sup>2</sup>

Documentation: The Italian corpus is gathered by a choice from the entries in the online register from Ufficio Italiano di Brevetti e Marchi (UIBM) <http://www.uibm.gov.it/dati> which is the official, now online, service run by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (now the Ministry of Economic Development) since 1980. From 1980 onwards it contains all the information about all registered brand names.

### 1.4. *The database*

The data were collected in a specially designed database in Microsoft Access that provides the previous collections thanks to a sophisticated structure and contains the relevant information about the brand names such as:

- location, date, product category, company, agency, etc.
- list of the underlying connotations (see below § 2.2.)
- the languages used in the brand names
- morphological structures of the names
- phonetic properties

We have a German and an Italian database, which differ slightly from each other, but allow a direct comparison of many categories. In the figure below you can see an example of data collection from the Italian material:

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<sup>2</sup> Their official Nice classification is the following:

Class 3: Detergents, cosmetics, hygiene products

Class 5: Pharmaceutical and veterinary products

Class 29: Foods such as meat, fish, poultry, game, eggs, oils and fats, jams, pickled fruit and vegetables

Class 30: Coffee, cocoa, sugar, rice, bread, canned

Class 31: Fruit and vegetables, cereals

Class 32: Beverages such as beer, mineral water, juices, lemonade

Class 33: Alcoholic beverages such as wine and spirits

Fig. 1: Example of our data base.

## 2. The semantic background

To produce a successful name, you need to identify the audience (target) that you want to reach with your advertising message and define its characteristics, namely to recognize what the cultural traits are that characterize it: It goes without saying that the components of traditional rather than progress or trust may also depend on the type of product, but you need to know what the areas are on which to rely.

From these assumptions you need to explain how a word designates a certain reality and this reality relates with the thought, knowledge, or the associations of the human mind, which are subject to and depend on the culture of the individual, or a social group, national group, and so on.

Precisely this kind of knowledge, or culture, is what you should take into account primarily in the name of a product, in compliance with the marketing strategies you want to pursue.

It is common knowledge that some associations are linked to the perception of the consumer, while others are linked to the intentions of the maker. The great skill is to match the two perspectives: The client or the manufacturer wants to reach through a well-defined message an ideal consumer with equally well-defined characteristics. As we noted earlier, we tried to combine one or more of the associations listed above to the various names of the tested products.

### 2.1. Maslow's pyramid

It should be added that the table of the connotations that I am going to describe in a moment is the result of an elaboration of our research group, even if it has a basis in the “pyramid of basic needs” by Maslow, since it also comes from psychology studies. It appears below the list represented in the pyramid of human needs by Maslow (1954) read from the top down:

- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.
- 2) Safety/security: out of danger
- 3) Belongingness and love: affiliate with others, be accepted
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition
- 5) Self-actualization: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts

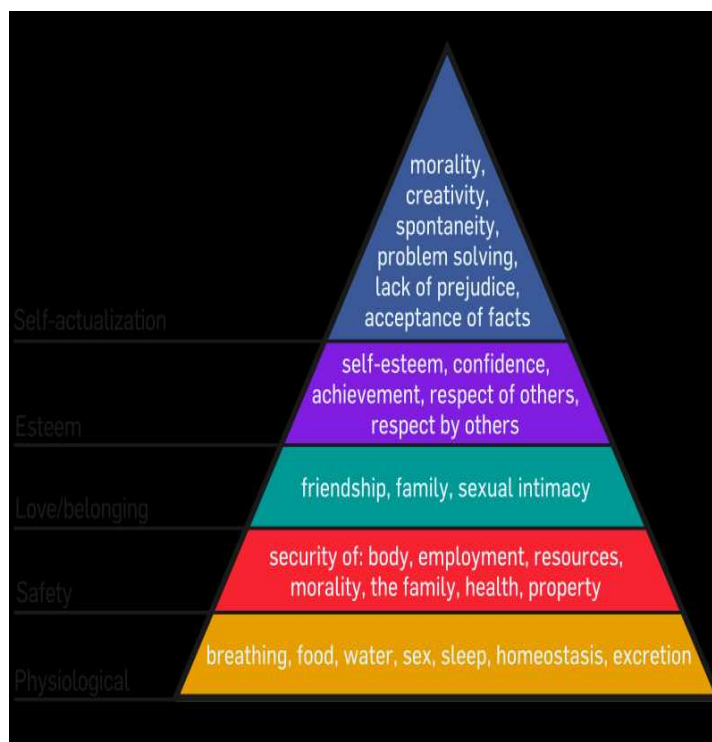


Fig. 2: Maslow’s pyramid.

**2.2. The list of the chosen connotations**

In the following table every “association” or detail listed in the column on the right is reduced to a “higher-level concept”, a connotation domain which from this point of view often refers to the semantic denoted and is listed in the left column.

Table of connotation domains and related associations	
Connotation domains	Associations and Details
Power	nobility, military, control, speed, shine of power
Independence	freedom, independence, individuality, spontaneity
Curiosity	the world, exotic, international, progress, magic
Physical perceptions	cosmos, physical dimensions, sensory perceptions (light, hard, dark, taste, etc.)
Order and wealth	wealth, wellness, nature, bio, purity, fresh
Saving	modesty, accuracy
Tradition, religion, honor	antiquity, religion, esotericism, history, good times, crafts, art, home
Progress	progress, comfort, convenience, nature, ecologic, beauty (not sensual)

Social contact	fun, games, summer, sun, holiday, humor, parties, communication
High quality	scientific, high quality, technical universality
Status	luxury, wealth, enjoyment, beauty, modernity, technology, industry, hi-tech
Aggressiveness	aggression, fight
Romanticism and sensuality	arts, beauty, sexuality, sensuality
Physical activity	sports, fitness, strength, youth, movement, mobility
Tranquility	sensitivity, harmony, family, childhood, reliability, comfort

Fig. 3: List of connotation domains and their associations.

### 3. Current connotations

#### 3.1. The distribution of connotations within the Italian corpus

In order to show the new connotations we have to make a comparison with the names of the earlier Italian corpus.<sup>3</sup>

##### 3.1.1. THE MAIN CONNOTATION IN THE BRAND NAMES FROM 1970-1980

The following diagrams show how the main connotations are distributed in the first major corpus I will analyze. We can see here that the three chosen connotation domains TRADITION, POWER and SECURITY in the previous analysis represent 60% of all the connotations. The rest makes up 40%.

#### Percent of the connotations 1970-1980

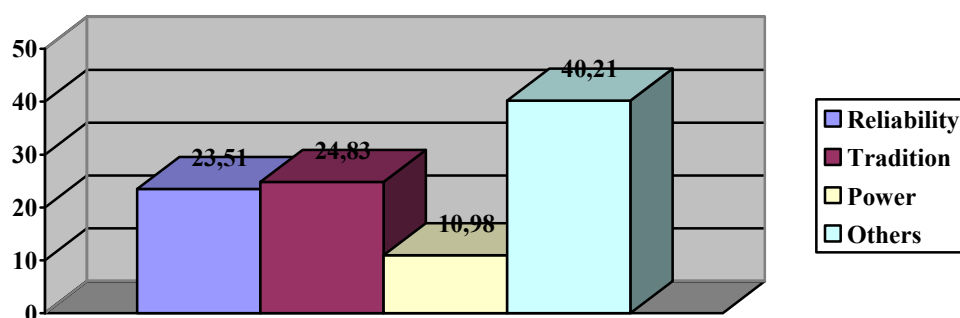


Fig. 4: Connotations in Italian brand names from 1970-1980.

I will now compare this statistical value with the distribution of the connotation in the new collected material. First there is an overview on the distribution of the same connotations through the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the last studied years in order to show that the value of the other connotations is increasing.

<sup>3</sup> For the connotations in Italian brand names see Cotticelli-Kurras (2008: 695-709); but especially Cotticelli-Kurras (2011: 95-113) and Cotticelli-Kurras (2012b). For the German material see Ronneberger-Sibold (2007, vol. 3, 324-337) and Ronneberger-Sibold (2008).

### 3.1.2. A COMPARISON BETWEEN OLDER AND NEWER CONNOTATION: CURRENT TRENDS

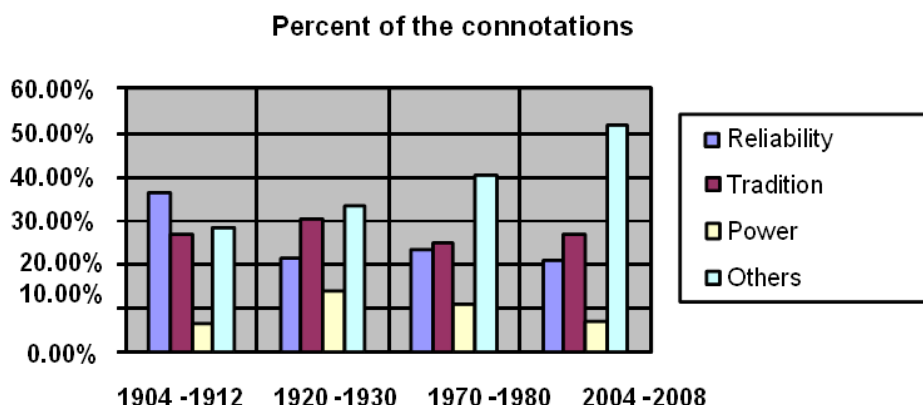


Fig. 5: Overview of the most common connotations in Italian brand names in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this diagram I gathered the three main connotations through the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in comparison with the generic “others”: It is interesting to see that the column of the “other connotations” is higher in the last examined years. So we tried to analyze what the other major connotations are. This was the main aim of the joint “Programma Vigoni” project. About the selected associations domains and their near description see also Ronneberger-Sibold/Wahl in this volume, especially § 3.

### 3.2. New findings

A statistical analysis let us find the following growing connotation domains among the Italian corpus, near the typical domains TRADITION, RELIABILITY and POWER:

Connotation domain	Details	associations	Linguistic features
PHYSICAL PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD, EXPERIENCE	perceptions, taste, colors, dimension	feelings, positive atmosphere	color adjectives, taste adjectives, etc.
CURIOSITY	exotic, wide world, progress, international	internationality, modern world, mobility	foreign languages, hybrid names
SOCIAL STATUS	rich, enjoyment, hi-tech, modern, technical	luxury, richness, beauty, technology, power	word formation with <i>super-</i> , <i>hyper-</i> , <i>gold-</i> , <i>royal</i>
SOCIAL CONTACT	fun, summer, hotness, sun	holiday, happiness, play	pseudo-compounds with <i>-party</i>
TRANQUILITY	sensibility, harmony, children	childhood, wellness, family	rituals, wellness places
TRADITION	honor, religion, (National) history, antiquities, art	security, reliability	geographical names of Italian regions, proper names, nature

Fig. 6: Selected domains of connotations often recurring in the corpus.

#### 3.2.1. SOME EXAMPLES FOR THE SELECTED DOMAINS

Referring to the domains presented in figure 6, a survey of the Italian material for the years 2004 and 2008 is given below:

A) Only PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE: taste, seeing, colors, feelings, dimension; gold is also color, not only quality or a status symbol. As we can see in figure 6, the domain of physical experiences is characterized by names and adjectives which underline the perceived world

and also a positive atmosphere. Most the cases are represented through perceptions of taste, such as:

- Fredde Bontà* ('Cold goodness', 2004, Class 29)
  - Bondolce desserts* ('Good sweet desserts', 2008, Class 30)
  - Olivottime novelle* ('Best new olives', 2004, Class 29)
  - La buona campagna* ('The good country', 2004, Class 29)
  - Pai Qualità oro* ('Pai, golden quality', 2008, Class 3)
  - I sapori dell'orto* ('The flavors of the vegetable garden', 2004, Class 29)
  - Caber + sapore – sale* ('Caber more taste, less salt', 2008, Class 30)
- Only in a few cases do we also find perceptions like coolness or fresh, such as in:
- Baby fresh* (2004, Class 3)

#### B) SOCIAL CONTACT, FUN

Most of the names refer to situations of leisure, a break, a pleasant lunch in company, such as the following:

- Passa da qui* ('Come over here!', 2008, Class 29),
- Be snack* (2008, Class 29),
- Giochimpara* ('Learn by playing', 2004, Class 3),
- Bam Bam Ristosauero*<sup>4</sup> (2008, Class 29),
- Circus* (2008, Class 29),
- Fettallegre* ('Cheerful slices', 2004, Class 29)
- Risoparty* ('Rice-party', 2004, Class 29)

#### C) WELLNESS, TRANQUILITY

The domain TRANQUILITY is often associated with childhood, family, harmony, or with places and situations of wellness, as in:

- KinderCare* (2008, Class 3)
- Johnson's baby: i riti dell'Amore* ('The rituals of love', 2008, Class 3)
- Il tempio del benessere* ('The temple of wellness', 2004, Class 3)
- Wellness Cucina* ('Wellness cuisine', 2008, Class 29)

#### D) SOCIAL STATUS

Social status may be associated with a special social status, but also with power. Power represents a status symbol in the following brand names:

- Bombardino* ('Little bomb', 2004, Class 3), the fast-acting hot and alcoholic beverage is like a very explosive drink
- Thermojetics* (Crème, Tea, 2004, Class 3, 30), means a very fast cream like a jet through its high temperature
- Jet-x* (cleaner, 2008, Class 3), also a very fast cleaner
- Galaxy* (pharmaceutical product, 2008, Class 5), is a promise for galactic effects
- Capitan Findus* (Fish, 2008, Class 29, 30), is marking quality by tradition, status through lexical choice (captain).

Social status is explicitly mentioned in the following examples:

- Lo re* ('The king', *lo* is a local/old variant for the current standard article 'il', 2004, Class 5)
- Delizie Reali* ('Royal delicacies', 2004, Class 29)
- Frutta Elite* ('First quality fruits', 2008, Class 29)

<sup>4</sup> *Ristosauero* is a cross formation between *ristorante* ('restaurant') and *dinosauro*, a pun meaning 'restaurant for a dinosaur'.

#### E) TRADITION, HONOR, RELIGION

Here one can find different nuances: In the case of Italy, tradition means the classic tradition of Antiquity, but tradition can be also found in the past, in the history of one's own family as well as of the homeland.

Local tradition: *Casa Sicilia*, *Casa Calabria* ('Sicilia/Calabria House', Mushrooms, 2004, Class 30), *Casa Sardegna* ('Sardinia House', Wine, 2004, Class 32, 33).

'Tradition' is combined with 'Taste' and the connection is stressed by adjectives that underline at the same time Italian products and tradition: *Dolcitalia*<sup>5</sup> ('Sweets from Italy', 2004, Class 30); *Sapori e tradizioni italiane* ('Italian flavors and traditions', canned, pickled vegetables, 2004, Class 29); *Mellinoteca nazionale* ('National honey museum', 2008, Class 30).

Past, family past, national history and tradition are important conceptual components and point to the genuine Italian tradition, as in: *Antico Mulino* ('Old Mill', pasta, 2008, Class 29), *Il caffè della nonna* ('Grandmother's coffee', 2004, Class 30,) or *La vendemmia di nonno Luigi* ('The harvest of grandfather Louis', Grapes, 2008, Class 29).

#### 4. Conclusions

Summing up it can be said that current trends in Italian brands refer mainly to the senses of sight and taste and to the associations involved. A comparison between the German and the Italian corpus is given in Ronneberger-Sibold/Wahl, in this volume, § 5. We were able to find out the different language strategies and class of words employed in order to underline the connotations and their implicit associations as far as the domains PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE and CURIOSITY, new to the current Italian language of advertisements, are concerned.

Regarding the class of words employed, we highlight the use of adjectives that emphasize colors, tastes and senses. The most frequent are the color adjectives, "blue, green, gold (en), (*blu, verde, oro*)", followed by the ones that describe taste, like "sweet, good, best, delicious (*dolce, buono, ottimo, delizioso*)", and finally the ones that reproduce the senses, for instance "fresh, wonderful (*fresco, mirabili*)".

The recurring names connected with the associations of senses are nouns such as *Delizie* (Delicacies), *Bontà* (Goodness), *Sole* (Sun).

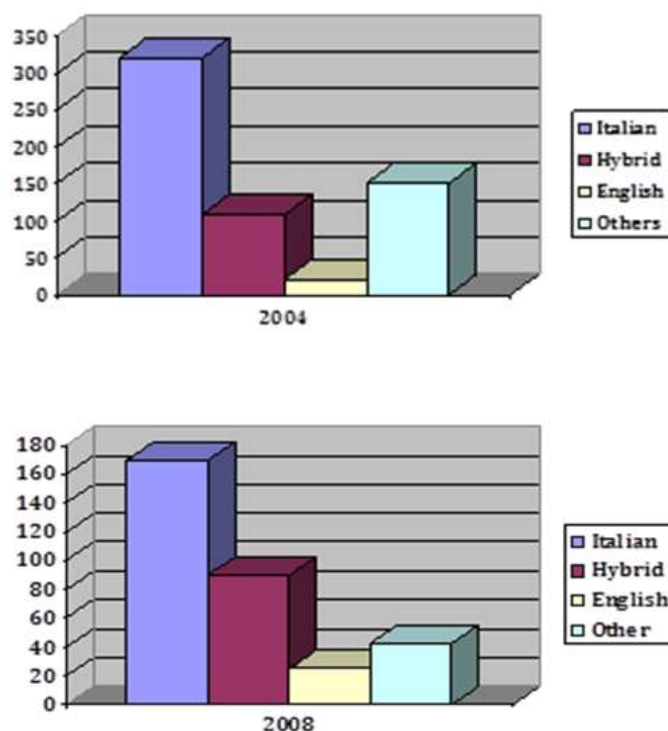
Also some verbal forms make reference to senses. The use of the imperative form, even if not often employed, does not codify a proper command, but it has rather a hortatory value: *Assapora* ('Taste!', 2004, Class 30), *Be snack* (2008, Class 29), *Passa da qui* ('Come over here!', 2008, Class 29), *Giochimpara* ('Learn by playing', 2004, Class 3).

Finally, personal pronouns or possessive adjectives (my, your, her/his = *mio, tuo, suo, sua*) are not often used but highlight personal involvement in order to indicate a direct experience: *Per te baby* ('For you, baby', 2004, Class 5); *Harpic il tuo bagno parla di te* ('Your bath is talking about you' 2004, Class 5); *Cialdi, il tuo espresso dove vuoi* ('your coffee wherever you want', 2008, Class 30).

The CURIOSITY connotation domain is well represented by associations with exotic, wide world, progress, internationality, modern world, mobility, but especially by words in foreign languages and hybrid names. The employed languages in the brand names of our corpus are in fact, in addition to Italian, foreign languages (English) and hybrid forms which testify to the second new connotation domain of CURIOSITY, as the following diagrams show:

<sup>5</sup> *Dolcitalia* is a cross formation between *Dolci* (Sweets) and *Italia*, from an unverbated phrase 'Dolci di Italia'.





**Figs. 7 and 8:** The most employed languages in the corpus from 2004 and 2008.

Though under the new domains of connotations we noted that especially the gustatory senses and optical perception (colors) play a major role, it can be said that the gustatory sense also highlights TRADITION as a constant value in Italian brand names.

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