

Names | A Journal of Onomastics



The Green Corpus: A Study of Vegan and Vegetarian Product Names

Isabel Espinosa-Zaragoza
University of Alicante, SPAIN

ans-names.pitt.edu

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Vol. 74 No. 3, Summer 2026

DOI 10.5195/names.2026.2826



Articles in this journal are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.org/).

Abstract

Vegan and vegetarian brands exhibit ingenuity through word formation processes to signal vegetal origin. This paper analyzes a manually compiled corpus of 563 product names from 55 brands to identify the orthographic, morphological, and semantic devices used to navigate regulatory pressures while achieving market distinctiveness. By examining these linguistic mechanisms, the study explores how naming strategies communicate that products are meatless alternatives while preserving consumer appeal. The findings reveal five primary conceptual strategies, indicating a varying degree of similarity to animal-based counterparts: (1) approximate identity, achieved through vowel-based orthographic alteration and unorthodox spellings (e.g., *cheeze*); (2) negation and absence, utilizing compounding and negative suffixation (e.g., *no-pork*, *fishless*); (3) conceptual hybridization, effected via linguistic blending (e.g., *soyrizo*); (4) positive valence, employing positively connotated words (e.g., *ultimate*); and (5) equivalence, established through constructions denoting sameness (e.g., *just like*). Ultimately, these devices not only serve as innovative mechanisms to communicate the product's plant-based nature but also help bypass legal nomenclature restrictions while contributing to the introduction of novelty, creativity, and "spiciness" to Modern English.

Keywords: ergonyms, brand name, lexical innovation, food labeling, vegetarianism, veganism, applied linguistics, advertising

1. Introduction

Veganism, defined by Righetti and Bertuzzi (2024, 3) as "a lifestyle and dietary choice that involves abstaining from animal products for food and other human purposes", has become increasingly popular over the last decade (2010–2020), driven by ethical, environmental, and health-related motivations, among others (Righetti & Bertuzzi 2024, 8; Sexton et al. 2022; Gheihman 2021; Supacane 2020; Domke 2018). In parallel, vegetarianism, which typically involves the exclusion of meat, fish, and seafood, and sometimes other animal-derived products such as dairy and eggs, is similarly widespread while being less restrictive (Dagnelie & Mariotti 2017). As a result, the rise of plant-based and alternative food products has been accompanied by a surge in creative branding practices, particularly in the naming of products.

These names do more than simply label products, as they function as strategic tools designed to shape consumer perception, convey values, and differentiate products within an increasingly competitive market. Understanding how these names are constructed can offer insight into the marketing intentions behind them and the linguistic mechanisms brands use to appeal to target audiences. This study, to the best of the author's knowledge, is the first to systematically analyze the naming architecture of vegan and vegetarian products, and explores the underlying strategies embedded in naming practices by addressing three questions:

RQ1: To what extent are certain naming strategies prevalent within individual vegan and vegetarian brands?

RQ2: Which linguistic phenomena or devices are most frequently employed in the creation of vegan and vegetarian product names?

RQ3: What underlying intentions or marketing strategies are reflected in the naming choices of these brands?

By analyzing these questions, the study aims to reveal broader patterns in the intersection of language, branding, and consumer persuasion. This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews literature on product naming and legal constraints; Section 3 outlines the study's methodology; and Section 4 presents the analysis of the results. Finally, Section 5 offers the conclusions and future directions, followed by the References.

2. Naming in Advertising: Qualities and Characteristics

Although ownership markings trace back to 2,000 BC, the formal practice of brand-naming as a commercial strategy originated in the 19th century (LCCA 2015; Danesi 2011). In contemporary markets, the nomenclature of product lines, that is, the systematic naming of all products within a specific category, can be regarded as being as important as the primary brand name. Establishing a cohesive brand architecture

through these naming systems ensures that product identities remain recognizable and unified, thereby maintaining essential brand equity (Aaker 2014, 1996).

Product naming is pivotal to the customer buying cycle, influencing awareness and (re)purchase decisions (Profitwell 2019). It is also a key element in shaping the brand's identity ideals, which include (1) coherence, (2) meaning, (3) durability, (4) vision, (5) differentiation, (6) value, (7) authenticity, (8) commitment, and (9) flexibility (Wheeler 2009, 31). Similarly, all the language consumers encounter while exploring and using products is considered a brand's "verbal identity". This verbal identity encompasses basic elements whose objective is to make a brand's language distinctive, such as the (1) brand name; (2) naming system for products, sub-brands, and groups; (3) strapline; (4) tone of voice principles; and (5) use of stories (Allen & Simmons 2003, 115).

Effective brand naming requires a synergy of linguistic and strategic qualities: originality, memorability, distinctiveness, suggestiveness, and the ability to convey positive meaning (Ituero & Ituero 2018; Beltrán 2011; Wheeler 2009). In addition, names should be concise, phonetically accessible, and free of negative cross-market connotations (Keller 2013) while remaining visually adaptable and legally protectable to support long-term brand extensions and trademarking.

Strategic naming is often achieved through the exploitation of linguistic devices designed to capture attention and enhance a product's selling power (Keller 2013; Özbal 2012; Vasiloaia 2009). These include: (1) negation; (2) punctuation, notably exclamation marks; (3) wordplay, such as puns and double meanings; (4) colloquialisms; and (5) phonological features like rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and assonance. Furthermore, orthographic transgressions or unorthodox spellings (Gómez Duran 2018; Jacobson 1966), that is, intentional misspellings utilizing low-frequency letters, such as *z*, *k*, or *y*, are utilized to surprise the reader through striking visual and phonetic effects, thus enhancing a product's attention value, readability, and overall appeal. Other unpredictable formations (Bauer 1983) such as linguistic blends, acronyms, and initialisms are frequently paired with visual elements to improve brand distinctiveness. Finally, positively connoted language is used to further contribute to the persuasive impact. Leech (1966) and Caples (1994) both emphasize that the exploitation of positive adjectives is a prevalent and effective means of enhancing selling power.

Overall, the use of linguistic strategies in product naming, such as blending, affixation, and wordplay, serves to enhance onomastic distinctiveness through lexical variety and originality. This thus highlights the importance of analyzing such practices within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and applied linguistics to understand their impact on brand identity, consumer perception, and the evolution of professional discourse in the food industry.

2.1 The Legal Landscape of Plant-Based Product Labeling

Although vegan and vegetarian products lack specific global legislation, they are governed by general frameworks, such as the Food Information Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 and the US FDA Standards of Identity, which are designed to prevent consumer confusion regarding ingredient composition and quality (Alpers et al. 2025; Rørdam 2013). Consequently, certain names are legally reserved for animal-derived products (e.g., *beef*, *meat*, *chicken*, *milk*, *cheese*, etc.). According to Food Compliance International (2023), while species-specific terms such as *pig* or *chicken* are strictly protected and devoted to animal products, *steak*, *sausage*, and *burger* remain permissible as they refer to shape, composition, and culinary application.

Global debate persists regarding the naming of meat substitutes. In the US, Mississippi's 2019 ban on "meaty" terms was successfully challenged on First Amendment grounds, allowing qualifiers like *plant-based* alongside traditional descriptors (Cusack 2021). However, as of 2026, the landscape has shifted toward stricter prohibitions in several states targeting the labeling of meat cultivated from animal stem cells, also known as *in vitro* meat (Klein 2026). Conversely, while the EU has traditionally permitted descriptors like *burger* (Bánáti 2020), a recent November 2025 proposal sought to restrict terms such as *steak* and *sausage* to animal products. The dairy sector is even more restrictive: designations such as *milk*, *cream*, *butter*, *cheese*, and *yoghurt* are strictly reserved for animal products (Bánáti 2020). As Leialohilani and De Boer (2020) argue, while EU safety standards provide a stable foundation for innovation, the sector is undermined by a rigid onomastic focus on *milk* and inconsistent legal interpretations across different food categories. Ultimately, this constantly updated and highly volatile regulatory pressure creates an atmosphere of global regulatory flux. This thus compels brands to adopt the creative linguistic strategies and orthographic workarounds analyzed in this study to ensure long-term marketability, particularly as established food nomenclature becomes more strictly regulated to maintain category distinctions.

The matter of whether or not consumers are confused by the naming of vegan and vegetarian products has been researched in recent years, yielding divergent results. While Ketelings et al. (2025) suggest that relying solely on meat-like terminology can lead to confusion, other studies indicate that these labels are not inherently misleading. For instance, Gleckel (2020) found that consumers are no more likely to mistake

plant-based products for animal-derived ones regardless of whether terms such as *beef* or *milk* are used. Additionally, omitting these descriptors may actually increase confusion regarding a product's intended taste and culinary application without affecting consumers' understanding of the products' nutritional attributes (Gleckel 2020). Furthermore, avoiding meat-related labels can diminish the sensory appeal of plant-based dishes, potentially undermining global efforts to reduce meat consumption (Marshall et al. 2022). Collectively, these findings imply that restrictive legislation may hinder, rather than facilitate, the consumer's ability to make well-founded dietary purchase decisions. As a consequence, such regulatory constraints directly impact how marketers name these products. This study aims to shed light on the onomastic techniques and word-formation processes currently utilized to navigate these legal boundaries, and cleverly brand vegan and vegetarian products.

2.2 Naming in Food Products

Previous research on food nomenclature has primarily examined consumer perception among specific demographics (i.e., children, teenagers, or dieters) (Truman & Elliott 2019; Keller et al. 2012; Irmak et al. 2011) across diverse categories, including halal food (Isnaniah et al. 2024), snack items (Verrill et al. 2020), and in vitro meat (Bryant & Barnett 2019). Notwithstanding, the emphasis has typically been on perception and willingness to try the products, rather than on the linguistic construction of names. While Haryati (2014) analyzed word-formation in Indonesian food naming by identifying blends, compounds, and wishy-washy names—more formally known as ablaut-motivated compounds (Bauer 1983)—most studies prioritize descriptive naming trends over creative morphological processes (Faure 2024; Zhao 2021). By quantifying specific word-formation strategies in the vegan and vegetarian sector, this study addresses this literature gap, shifting the focus from consumer's perception, acceptance, and trial to the intentional advertising language used in product nomenclature.

3. Methodology

The corpus comprises 563 names selected from a total of 1,715 vegan and vegetarian products across 55 brands, compiled from webpages between August 2024 and August 2025 (see table 1). The manual compilation method was chosen due to the complexity of adapting Natural Language Processing-based web crawlers to differently structured webpages, particularly since many brands offered only a small number of products. In addition, table 2 presents a comprehensive breakdown of the brands and the prevalence of creative naming within their catalogs.

Table 1: Corpus Description

Name	The Green Corpus of Vegan and Vegetarian Product Names
Brands	55
Products	1,715
Selected Products	563
Compilation Date	August 2024 to August 2025
Sources	Vegan and Vegetarian Webpages
Medium	Written
Availability	Accessible for Research Purposes under Demand

Table 2: Prevalence of Creative Naming Across Brands in the Corpus

Brand	Creative (n)	% Creative	Not Creative (n)	% Not Creative
88 Acres	7	18.42	31	81.58
Abbot's	5	83.33	4	66.67
Alpha Foods	24	80.00	6	20.00
Amy's	6	4.17	138	95.83
Asanté Foods	4	30.77	9	69.23
Back to Nature	3	7.50	37	92.50
Beastie Plants	5	71.43	2	28.57
Beyond Meat	11	100.00	0	0.00
Birds Eye	9	69.23	4	30.77
Candy People	3	100.00	0	0.00
Daiya Foods	30	100.00	0	0.00
Desi Treat	2	10.53	17	89.47
Dopsu	11	100.00	0	0.00
Dr. Praeger's	20	57.14	15	42.86
Earth Grown	4	100.00	0	0.00
Edward & Sons®	4	4.17	92	95.83
Elmhurst	2	4.55	42	95.45
Every Body Eat	1	7.69	12	92.31
Follow Your Heart	12	70.59	5	29.41
Franklin Farms	5	11.11	40	88.89
Frieda's	3	18.75	13	81.25
Gardein	53	88.33	7	11.67
Garden Gourmet	8	29.63	19	70.37
Green Course	1	14.29	6	85.71
Jada	2	20.00	8	80.00
Kelly's	3	25.00	9	75.00
Linda McCartney	1	6.67	14	93.33
Loma Linda	14	37.84	23	62.16
Meat The Mushroom	1	100.00	0	0.00
MorningStar Farms	25	48.08	27	51.92
Nature's Fynd	4	57.14	3	42.86
Naturli'	11	15.49	60	84.51
No Whey! Foods	40	29.85	94	70.15
OMV!	24	55.81	19	44.19
PAOW!	6	21.43	22	78.57
Plamil Foods	11	22.92	37	77.08
Plant Menu	32	74.42	11	25.58
Primal Kitchen	4	6.90	54	93.10
Primal Spirit Foods	1	12.50	7	87.50
Quorn	16	16.33	82	83.67
Redefine Meat	22	100.00	0	0.00
Rhythm 108	4	10.53	34	89.47
Sweet Earth	8	50.00	8	50.00
The Plant Based Seafood Co.	4	100.00	0	0.00
Tofurky	7	21.21	26	78.79
Toffuti	11	50.00	11	50.00
Trupo Treats	3	18.75	13	81.25
Unconventional	2	50.00	2	50.00
Unfished	16	84.21	3	15.79
Upton's Naturals	6	28.57	15	71.43
Vegan Junkstar	1	20.00	4	80.00
Vegan Zeastar	17	100.00	0	0.00
Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli	17	24.29	53	75.71
Violife	16	66.67	8	33.33
Wendy's Vegan Kitchen	1	10.00	9	90.00
Total	563	32.83	1155	67.35

Both vegan and vegetarian products were included as they often share commercial spaces and utilize similar linguistic strategies to establish market distinctiveness. The primary criterion for inclusion in the corpus was the use of creative naming strategies; consequently, brands lacking evidence of linguistic innovation were omitted. This filter specifically excluded: (1) purely descriptive items, such as *NY Cheesecake*, on the grounds that they lack distinctive onomastic features; (2) brands where creativity is restricted to the corporate identity (e.g., *MALK*), while individual products utilize standard terminology (e.g., *Almond Milk*); and (3) labels that merely indicate dietary classifications, such as *vegan*, *vegetarian*, or *plant-based*. This ensures the analytical focus remains strictly on product-level nomenclature. In cases of device co-occurrence or amalgamation, where a product name employed multiple linguistic strategies, the product name was systematically assigned to every corresponding category in the taxonomy. As a result, the final corpus comprises brands that either consistently or intermittently employ creative naming.

The corpus represents a geographically diverse set of brands, primarily based in the United States (31, 56%); spanning 13 different states with a nearly 40% concentration in California), with representation from 13 other countries, including the UK (6, 11%) and the Netherlands (3, 5%). The brands' founding dates span over 115 years (1905–2023). While the mean founding year is 1999, the median of 2011 highlights a significant concentration of brands established within the last two decades. This indicates that the linguistic phenomena observed are not limited to a single era of brand naming, but rather primarily reflect recent trends in brand naming.

4. Analysis of Results

Out of the 1,715 products compiled from 55 brands, 563 (32.83%) showcase creative naming strategies. Nevertheless, the total count of linguistic devices identified amounts to 618 due to device amalgamation. Consequently, for the purpose of the frequency analysis, the device count serves as the primary unit of analysis. This approach ensures that each constituent linguistic feature is represented in the data, even when appearing in combination with others. These linguistic devices are often shared across brands, indicating a broader trend within the vegan and vegetarian sector rather than brand-specific innovation (with some exceptions). Regarding the first research question on the prevalence of creative naming strategies across brands, the degree of creativity varies: table 2 shows that 9 brands (16.36%) apply creative naming across their entire product range, while 31 brands (56.36%) use such strategies in less than half of their products. Overall, 43.64% of the brands demonstrate creative naming in at least half of their products. Thus, while all 55 brands include some level of creativity, fewer than half employ it consistently across their full product line.

All linguistic devices and word-formation processes identified in the corpus were categorized based on the semantic associations and meaning they intend to convey to the general public, particularly regarding their degree of resemblance (or lack thereof) to meat-based counterparts. These categories include: (1) negation, highlighting the absence of animal-based ingredients; (2) conceptual hybridization, via linguistic blending by merging two words to maximize meaning efficiently while creating innovative names; (3) approximate identity, using devices like unorthodox spellings to suggest strong resemblance to meat while acknowledging differences; (4) equivalence, implying complete similarity between meat and its plant-based alternative; and (5) positive valence, incorporating positively connoted modifiers (i.e., adjectives, adverbs) to enhance appeal by suggesting superiority over animal-derived products.

Table 3 presents the quantitative distribution of the linguistic devices across the five conceptual categories established above. The most frequent type of creative naming emphasizes high similarity to meat products, with 250 names that account for 40.45% of the sample. It is closely followed by negation strategies (203, 32.85%). Hybridization and positive valence occur with similar frequency (12.94% and 11.17%, respectively), while equivalence appears only rarely (16, 2.59%), since its use is limited to one brand (i.e., Violife).

Table 3: Frequency and Distribution of Semantic Categories

Conceptual Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Approximate Identity	250	40.45
Negation and Absence	203	32.85
Conceptual Hybridization	80	12.94
Positive Valence	69	11.17
Equivalence	16	2.59
Total	618	100

Regarding Research Question 2, brands most often choose either approximate identity (40.45%) or negation (32.85%), together accounting for 73.30% of all creative names. These linguistic strategies are further detailed in the following sections, ordered by their prevalence in the sample to illustrate the primary creative mechanisms driving plant-based nomenclature.

4.1 Approximate Identity: Tweaking the Familiar

The most prominent category in the corpus is approximate identity, which signals similarity between meat substitutes and animal products. This is primarily achieved through: (1) vowel-based orthographic alteration (155, 62.00%) and (2) unorthodox consonant spelling (61, 24.40%). Other markers include (3) the modifier *redefine* (22, 8.80%); (4) quotation marks (8, 3.20%); (5) *mock* (3, 1.20%); and (6) *-ish* suffixation (1, 0.40%).

Vowel-based orthographic alteration is the most prominent strategy in this category, encompassing both vowel deletion and substitution. Deletion systematically replaces vowels with symbols—such as apostrophes or underscores—to signal the absence of animal ingredients across nearly the entire vowel set, including *a* (e.g., *chedd'r*, *saus'ge*), *e* (e.g., *chick'n*, *be'f*), *i* (e.g., *fsh*, *m_lk*), and *o* (e.g., *p'rk*). Substitution utilizes visually similar symbols or orthographic vowel equivalents (e.g., *M!lk*, *MYLK*). Consistently employed by brands like Plamil Foods and Trupo Treats, these alterations provide a clear visual cue that the product is a plant-based alternative.

Unorthodox consonant spelling further enhances memorability by utilizing low-frequency letters (Gómez Duran 2018). Key strategies include: substitution, where *z* replaces *s* (e.g., *cheeze*, *zalmon*, *shrimpz*, *VeggiGuez*) or *k* replaces *c* (e.g., *Spooky Kookies*) or both occur simultaneously (e.g., *KALAMARIZ*); and digraph modification, such as altering *ck* in *chicken* (e.g., *chiqin*, *chik'n*). Additionally, *z* in *cheeze* carries into derived forms like *cheezy* and *cheezecake*, establishing a recognisable visual pattern. Furthermore, the analysis reveals consonant gemination (e.g., *codd*) and final deletion (e.g., *chedda*, *chick*). Brands often layer these techniques to establish recognizable visual patterns across product lines, as seen in *White Chedda Cheezy Crisps* (Back to Nature) or *Cheddar Cheez* (Primal Kitchen). Together, these unorthodox spelling practices, including deletion, substitution, and gemination, serve to mark the product as a distinctive plant-based alternative while maintaining recognizability and enhancing market appeal.

Less frequently, brands signal approximation through lexical modifiers and orthographic markers. One brand consistently prefixes products with the word *redefine* to suggest a reinvented, non-animal identity. Similarity is further signaled via use of quotation marks (e.g., *"steak" pieces*, *ground "beef"*) to distance the product from the animal original. The modifier *mock* is employed to denote intentional imitation by mimicking the appearance, flavor and texture of meat (e.g., *mock duck*, *mock meat*). Finally, the suffix *-ish* (e.g., *kebab'ish*) provides a deliberately vague reference to the original target.

The high prevalence of this category, which highlights the approximate nature of these products, likely stems from its high morphological productivity and ease of application: minor orthographic shifts allow brands to maintain a clear link to animal-based “originals” with minimal effort, applied either consistently or inconsistently. These linguistic devices present in the naming not only contribute to a trendy, modern and also daring brand image but also effectively bridge the gap between consumer familiarity and dietary innovation by signaling that a product is an intentional counterpart.

This orthographic strategy follows a historical precedent in the food industry, where phonetic alterations signal a departure from traditional product formats. For instance, the mid-20th century release of *Cheezy Whiz* presumably utilized a modified spelling to reflect a change in texture and application (i.e., a spreadable sauce instead of a block of cheese) while still evoking the flavor profile of the original. This established an orthographic tradition of “flavor-signaling”—also seen in *chik'n* for poultry-flavored snacks—that predates the current plant-based market. Modern vegan brands likely leverage this existing consumer familiarity with creative spelling to denote “reimagined” versions of animal-based products without relying on unfamiliar nomenclature.

4.2 Negation or Absence: Naming via Exclusion

Negation is the second most prominent device in the corpus, signaling the absence of animal-derived ingredients through three primary mechanisms: negative composition with *no* (102, 50.25%), suffixation with *-less* (64, 31.53%), and composition with *free* (37, 18.23%). Negative composition is achieved via hyphenation or free compounding (i.e., no solid compounds were found) (see table 4). This strategy is particularly prevalent in brands like Dopsu and Vegan Zeastar, which utilize *no* to negate specific animal categories across their entire product lines.

Table 4: Negative Compounding Denoting Product Absence

Negative Composition	Product Name	Brand
No-Lamb	<i>No-Lamb Pieces</i>	Dopsu
No Chicken	<i>No Chicken Noodle Soup</i>	Amy's
No-Beef	<i>Fajita No-Beef Pieces 200g</i>	Dopsu
No Pork	<i>OMV! Deliciously Vegan 2 No Pork Sausage Rolls</i>	OMV!
No Duck	<i>Plant Menu No Duck Spring Rolls 180g/10 Pack</i>	Plant Menu
No Bacon	<i>Carlos Tomato Stuffed Crust Smoky No Bacon & Mushroom Pizza</i>	Plant Menu
No Meatballs	<i>OMV! Deliciously Vegan 12 No Meatballs</i>	OMV!
No Whey	<i>No Whey Candy Bar</i>	No Whey! Foods
No Crab	<i>King No Crab</i>	Vegan Zeastar
No Tuna	<i>Plant-Based Sushi Roll – Spicy No Tuna</i>	Vegan Zeastar
No Salmon	<i>Plant-Based Sushi Roll – No Salmon Asparagus, No Salmon Sashimi</i>	Vegan Zeastar
No Eggs	<i>OMV! Deliciously Vegan 16 Savoury Mini No Eggs</i>	OMV!
No Ham	<i>No Ham Slices 100g</i>	Plant Menu

Negation is also transmitted by means of negative derivation, by attaching the negative suffixation *-less* in animal products (see table 5). While these usually follow standard English rules (i.e., fully attached and therefore yielding a solid word), occasional hyphenation (e.g., *steak-less*) may be utilized to attract attention and emphasize the negation.

Table 5: Examples of Negative Affixation Signaling Absence

Negative Suffixation	Product Name	Brand
Meatless	<i>Zesty Italian Meatless Meatballs</i>	Earth Grown
Steak-less	<i>Steakless Ranchero Burrito</i>	Alpha Foods
Chickenless	<i>Chickenless Patties, Chickenless Tenders</i>	Earth Grown
Porkless	<i>Porkless Mix</i>	Jada
Beefless	<i>Beefless Seitan</i>	Franklin Farms
Cheese-less	<i>Cheese-Less™</i>	Every Body Eat
Duckless	<i>OMV! Deliciously Vegan Hoisin Duckless Wrap</i>	OMV!
Fishless	<i>Quorn Vegan Fishless Fingers</i>	Quorn
Milkless	<i>Cherries in Milkless Dark Chocolate</i>	No Whey Foods

Regarding the third and last negation mechanism, composition with *free*, hyphenated, and non-hyphenated instances were found (e.g., *chick free*, *chicken free*, *dairy free*, *ham free*, *meat-free*). In sum, these mechanisms leverage high morphological productivity and consumer familiarity with “free-from” labeling to indicate absence.

4.3 Conceptual Hybridization through Linguistic Blending

Contrary to the previous cases, linguistic blends, also regarded as unpredictable formations (Bauer 1983), are more complex to create and, therefore, less productive. Different types of blends were identified in the corpus: mainly total blends and partial blends.

Total blends are characterized by a “telescoping” of two words, where the onset of the first word is merged with the coda of the second. For instance, *Vuna* as in *vegan* plus *tuna*. In these blends, one constituent typically denotes plant-based origin. This plant-based identity is often established through varying degrees of morphological clipping of the word “vegan”, where the source word is reduced to elements such as *v-* or *vega-* before fusion (see table 6). Furthermore, some cases rely on minimal phonetic substitution to evoke the target meat product while signaling its vegan status. One example is *Voie Gras* (e.g., *v(egan)* + *(f)oise gras*), where the initial voiced labiodental fricative /v/ replaces the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/ to maintain the auditory profile of the luxurious original while subverting its animal-based identity.

Table 6: Examples of Total Blends from the Green Corpus

Product Name	Source Words	Brand
Vuna	<i>v</i> (egan) + (t) <i>una</i>	Garden Gourmet
Voie Gras	<i>v</i> (egan) + (f) <i>oie gras</i>	Garden Gourmet
Vegalami	<i>vega</i> (n) + (sa) <i>lami</i>	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
Vegarizo	<i>vega</i> (n)+(cho) <i>rizo</i>	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
Vegaola	<i>vega</i> (n)+(gran) <i>ola</i>	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
Burgan	<i>burg</i> (er)+(veg) <i>an</i>	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
Vegenaise	<i>vege</i> (table)+(mayon) <i>naise</i>	Follow Your Heart

Note: Elisions are indicated with brackets; splinters are indicated with italics.

Partial blends are words made of a complete word concatenated with a splinter—a non-morphemic word fragment (Bauer 1983)—from another word, as in *Soyrizo*, where *-rizo* acts as the splinter from *chorizo* (see table 7). Additionally, the corpus includes instances where a productive splinter, such as *veggi-* (derived via the clipping of vegetable), is followed by a complete word, as seen in *VeggiWiener*, *VeggiTasty*, and *VeggiBarbacue*. Similarly, partial blends also include a source word being a plant-based ingredient such as *soy*, *seed*, or *veggie* to indicate it is not animal based. Other noteworthy cases, such as *PlanTuna*, showcase the haplographic overlap of the letter *t*, while *Shroomacon* is a blend created from the splinters of *mushroom* and *bacon*, respectively (e.g., (mu)*shroom* + (b)*acon*).

Table 7: Examples of Partial Blends from the Green Corpus

Product Name	Source Words	Brand
Soyrizo	soy + (cho) <i>rizo</i>	Frieda's
Veggieetizers	veggie+(app) <i>etizers</i>	MorningStar Farms
Seed'nola	seed+(gra) <i>nola</i>	88 Acres
OatNog	Oat+(egg) <i>nog</i>	Elmhurst
VeggiWiener	<i>veggi</i> (e)+wiener	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
VeggiTasty	<i>veggi</i> (e)+tasty	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
VeggiBarbacue	<i>veggi</i> (e)+barbacue	Veggie Deli/Vegan Deli
Vegemince	<i>vege</i> (table)+mince	Linda McCartney

Note: Elisions are indicated with brackets; splinters are indicated with italics.

The lower prevalence of blending in the corpus may be attributed to the fact that blends are cognitively more demanding than transparent compounds. Unlike simple concatenations, blends require the consumer to engage in an inferential process to “decipher” the disguised source words, just like with puns (Yus 2003). While this cognitive effort can lead to a pleasurable sense of discovery and commercial attractiveness (Lefilliâtre 2019), the complexity of creating such names makes them more cumbersome to apply consistently across an entire product range than compounding or derivation, to mention a few. Consequently, this naming strategy tends to appear sporadically rather than as a brand-wide naming convention within the plant-based market.

4.4 Positive Valence: Beyond the Similarity Continuum

In this category, the focus is not on signaling the degree of (dis)similarity to the animal-based product, but rather on mitigating negative perceptions regarding the taste or nutritional value of vegan and vegetarian alternatives by positioning them as potentially superior to the originals. To achieve this, marketers frequently employ positively connoted adjectives that enhance the appeal of the product. This strategy may have gained prominence following the success of one of the first widely recognized plant-based burgers, the *Beyond Burger*, whose name suggests superiority.

Positively connoted adjectives such as *perfect*, *sensational*, and *supreme* are commonly used to elevate perceived quality. Quantitatively, the adjective *ultimate* is the most prevalent in the corpus (25, 36.23%), a result driven by its systematic application across the extensive product range of a single brand (Gardein). This highlights that while *beyond* and *better than* (both 11, 15.94%) also follow a master brand strategy, their high frequency is not due to widespread adoption across the sector, but is a reflection of individual market productivity. As noted by Espinosa-Zaragoza (2022), this creates a cohesive parallel syntactic structure, or syntactic nomenclature (Martín 2009). In marketing literature, this is recognized as a master brand strategy

(Aaker 2014), where the equity of the parent brand is leveraged across a variety of products for instant recognition. This approach is also seen in Redefine Meat, where the repetition of *redefine* (Section 4.1) serves a similar master brand function. Ultimately, the frequency of these descriptors within specific product lines indicates that positive valence is often a brand-specific systematic positioning rather than a scattered linguistic choice, cohesively signaling that these alternatives are potentially superior to their animal-based counterparts.

4.5 Equivalence: Achieving Category Parity

Some vegan and vegetarian products in the Green Corpus emphasize complete equality or parity with animal-based products, particularly in terms of flavor and texture. This strategy is evident in a product line by the brand Violife, which revolves around the construction *just like* in its naming (e.g., *Just Like Cheese Mozzarella Shreds*, *Just Like Cream Cheese Block*). In these cases, the brand forgoes more linguistically economical or playful strategies, such as unorthodox spellings like *cheeze*, in favor of explicitly reinforcing equivalence between the plant-based product and its traditional animal-derived counterpart by means of the construction *just like*. Unlike terms such as *mock*, which belong to Section 4.1 (Approximate Identity) and inherently signal a hierarchy between a “real” original and a “substitute” meatless copy, the construction *just like* functions as a marker of equivalence. It suggests that the plant-based product has reached a level of development where the distinction in flavor and texture has been neutralized. This category is the least represented in the corpus (16, 2.59%), with Violife being the only brand to consistently employ this approach (although not in the entirety of their product selection), suggesting that brands rely more frequently on indicating (dis)similarity rather than claiming total equivalence.

4.6 Multi-Device Naming Strategies

To maximize consumer impact, 55 products (8.90%) of the creative subset in the Green Corpus utilize multiple linguistic devices simultaneously. This linguistic device amalgamation allows brands to manage complex multiassociations. For instance, Asanté Foods combines negative suffixation and quotation marks (i.e., *grilled “steak-less” strips*) to indicate ingredient absence while establishing an approximate identity. Similarly, NATURLI’ employs blending and positive valence in *Bolog’nice*, where the single apostrophe signals the fusion of *bolognaise* with *nice*. Consequently, such combinations result in a higher frequency of total linguistic features (i.e., 618) than total products analyzed (i.e., 563), illustrating the high semiotic and creative density utilized in the plant-based sector naming.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions

This study examined the word-formation processes and linguistic devices utilized in the creative naming of vegan and vegetarian products. The *Green Corpus of Vegan and Vegetarian Product Names* is available in the university repository for research purposes upon request (<https://hdl.handle.net/10045/168585>).

The findings derived from the analysis offer a comprehensive answer to the study’s core research questions. First, the analysis revealed that 563 (32.83%) of the product names in the sample exhibit creative linguistic strategies, though only a small portion of brands apply these strategies consistently across their entire product range (9 out of 55; 16.36%). A larger subset, however, integrates creative naming in at least half of their products (15, 27.27%), while the majority of brands (31, 56.36%) use these strategies sparingly, indicating a pervasive but uneven trend within the sector. Secondly, regarding the specific linguistic mechanisms involved, vowel-based orthographic alteration emerged as the most prevalent device, potentially due to the ease in eliding and substituting vowels, followed closely by compound negation. These strategies are often used to signal the plant-based nature of the products while maintaining recognizability and appeal. These linguistic resources are commonly shared across brands, reflecting a trend within the vegan and vegetarian sector as a whole rather than being unique to any one brand. Lastly, the underlying marketing strategies reflected in these choices reveal a tendency to convey varying degrees of similarity to their meat-based counterparts, ranging from overt negation to near-identical references. Notably, approximate identity and negation account for over 73% of all creative names, suggesting that marketers strategically balance familiarity with differentiation to guide consumer perception.

The analysis of these creative naming strategies offers significant value by bridging the gap between theoretical linguistics and the applied requirements of the marketing industry. Within the framework of

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), these phenomena are viewed not as isolated linguistic curiosities but as evidence of a specialized professional discourse that adapts to shifting market demands. Consequently, this study illustrates the instrumental use of language in a real-world commercial context. For practitioners in international marketing, understanding these linguistic mechanics is essential for critically evaluating the communicative intent behind neologisms and for developing a sophisticated awareness of the contemporary branding trends that define the global plant-based sector.

To address current limitations, future research will focus on expanding the corpus to incorporate new product releases, ensuring a continuously updated corpus for the longitudinal analysis of the evolution of plant-based nomenclature. While the current study prioritized manual curation, the potential implementation of automated corpus-gathering methods remains a viable avenue for a future significant expansion. Such growth would support cross-linguistic comparison and the monitoring of legislative developments, both of which are essential to understanding how evolving regulations and market pressures continue to shape the linguistic landscape of the plant-based sector.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the use of publicly available product names from brand websites for the purposes of linguistic analysis and academic and research purposes. All product names were used under fair use provisions for academic criticism and review. Their inclusion does not imply any endorsement or affiliation, and all trademarks remain the property of their respective owners. Also, a special thank you to the anonymous reviewers and the Editor-in-Chief for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions that assisted in shaping the last version of this work.

AI Disclosure Statement

Gemini 1.5 Flash (Google AI) was used (February 14, 2016) strictly for post-editing assistance. More specifically, the tool was utilised: (1) to conduct a comprehensive check for typographical errors across the manuscript; (2) to selectively suggest improvements of clarity and conciseness on individual paragraphs to meet character limits; and (3) to revise the format of the references section according to journal guidelines. No original text, data analysis, or literature synthetization was generated by the AI-TT. The author iteratively reviewed, verified, and rewrote the suggestions and therefore maintained full creative control and sole responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of the final manuscript.

References

- Aaker, David A. 1996. *Building Strong Brands*. New York: Free Press.
- Aaker, David A. 2014. *Aaker on Branding: 20 Principles That Drive Success*. Berkeley: Morgan James Publishing.
- Allen, Tony, and John Simmons. 2003. "Visual and Verbal Identity". *Brands and Branding*, 113–26. London: Profile Books.
- Alpers, Christiane, Hanns-Thilo von Spankeren, Mareike Hunfeld, and Greta Bockholdt. 2025, January 9. "Naming and Labelling of Vegan and Vegetarian Products – It's What It Says on the Tin". *Hogan Lovells*. Accessed August 11, 2025. <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/naming-and-labelling-of-vegan-and-vegetarian-products-its-what-it-says-on-the-tin>
- Bánáti, Diána. 2020. "Veggie Burgers, Vegan Meats?: The Ruling of the European Parliament Paved the Way for Meat Substitutes with Meat Denominations". *Élelmiszervizsgálati Közlemények* 66, no. 4: 3,166–3,174.
- Bauer, Laurie. 1983. *English Word-Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beltrán, Fernando. 2011. *El nombre de las cosas: Cuando el nombre marca la diferencia*. [The Name of Things : When the Name Makes the Difference]. Madrid: Conecta.
- Bryant, Christopher. J., and Julie C. Barnett. 2019. "What's in a Name? Consumer Perceptions of in Vitro Meat under Different Names". *Appetite* 137: 104–113.
- Caples, John. 1994. *Tested Advertising Methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cusack, Wayne. 2021. "Trouble with Names: Commercial Speech and a New Approach to Food Product Label Regulation". *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy Sidebar* 17: 119–164.
- Dagnellie, Pieter C., and François Mariotti. 2017. "Vegetarian Diets: Definitions and Pitfalls in Interpreting

- Literature on Health Effects of Vegetarianism". *Vegetarian and Plant-Based Diets in Health and Disease Prevention*, 3–10. Cambridge: Academic Press.
- Danesi, Marcel. 2011. "What's in a Brand Name? A Note on the Onomastics of Brand Naming". *Names* 59, no.3: 175–185.
- Domke, Felix. 2018. "Vegetarian and Vegan Products - Labelling and Definitions". *European Food and Feed Law Review* 13, no. 2: 102–107.
- Espinosa-Zaragoza, Isabel. 2022. *A Study of Colour Names in the Cosmetic Industry*. PhD dissertation, University of Alicante.
- European Union. 2011. "Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council". *Official Journal of the European Union* L 304/18, 22 November 2011: 18–63. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/1169/oj>
- Faure, Pascaline. 2024. "From Veronal to Quviviq: A Lexicological Analysis of Trade Names for Prescription Sleeping Pills from 1903 to 2022". *Names* 72, no. 4: 37–48.
- Food Compliance International. 2023. "Challenges in Naming Plant-Based Alternatives". Accessed April 22, 2025. <https://foodcomplianceinternational.com/industry-insight/scholarly-articles/3256-challenges-in-naming-plant-based-alternatives>
- Gheihman, Nina. 2021. "Veganism as a Lifestyle Movement". *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 5: 1–14.
- Gleckel, Jareb A. 2020. "Are Consumers Really Confused by Plant-Based Food Labels? An Empirical Study". *Journal of Animal and Environmental Law* 12:1–18.
- Gómez Duran, Gemma. 2018. "La Manipulación de la Orto-grafía del Español como Recurso para Naming" [The Manipulation of Spanish Orthography as a Resource for Naming]. *Kepes* 15, no. 17: 183–203.
- Haryati, Citra. 2014. "A Study of Word Formation Process of Food and Beverage Product Names in Indonesia". *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies* 2, no. 2: 1–6.
- Irmak, Caglar, Beth Vallen, and Stefanie Rosen Robinson. 2011. "The Impact of Product Name on Dieters' and Nondieters' Food Evaluations and Consumption". *Journal of Consumer Research* 38, no. 2: 390–405.
- Isnaniah, Siti, Tiya Agustina, Muhammad Arief Rochman, and Hari Kusmanto. 2024. "The Naming of Halal Food and Beverages: A Multimodal Semiology Study". *Studies in English Language and Education* 11, no. 1: 454–473.
- Ituero, S., and R. Ituero. 2018. *Estrategias de naming: Dándole un nombre a tu marca* (MOOC) [Naming Strategies: Giving a Name to Your Brand]. Crehana. <https://www.crehana.com/cursos-online-branding/estrategias-de-naming-dandole-un-nombre-a-tu-marca-1>.
- Jacobson, S. 1966. *Unorthodox Spelling in American Trademarks*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Keller, Kathleen L. et al.. 2012. "The Impact of Food Branding on Children's Eating Behavior and Obesity". *Physiology & Behavior* 106, no. 3: 379–386.
- Keller, Kevin Lane. 2013. *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Ketelings, Lindsay et al.. 2025. "What's in a Name? Examining the Confusion of Meat-like Terminology on Meat-Imitating Plant-Based Products". *Appetite* 209:107965.
- Klein, Tom. 2026, February 10. "Will States Take Lab-Grown Meat off the Table?" *National Conference of State Legislatures*. <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/will-states-take-lab-grown-meat-off-the-table>
- LCCA (London College of Contemporary Arts). 2015, December 17. "A History of Branding". *Education* (blog). <https://www.lcca.ac.uk/blog/education/history-of-branding/>.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1966. *English in Advertising. A Linguistic Study of Advertising in England*. London: Longman.
- Lefilliâtre, Boris. 2019. "The Cognitive Motivation and Purposes of Playful Blending in English". *CORELA - COgnition, REprésentation, LAngage* 17, no. 2 : 1–28.
- Leialohilani, Annisa, and Alie de Boer. 2020. "EU Food Legislation Impacts Innovation in the Area of Plant-Based Dairy Alternatives". *Trends in Food Science & Technology* 104:262–267.
- Marshall, Danae, Faiza Bano, and Kasia Banas. 2022. "A Meaty Issue: The Effect of Meat-Related Label Terminology on the Willingness to Eat Vegetarian Foods". *Food Quality and Preference* 96:104,413.
- Martín, E. 2009. *Nominología: Cómo crear y proteger marcas poderosas a través del naming*. [Nominology: How to Create and Protect Powerful Brands Through Naming]. Madrid: Fundación Confemetal.
- Özbal, Gözde., S Carlo Strapparava, and Marco Guerini. 2012. "Brand Pitt: A Corpus to Explore the Art of Naming". *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC'12)*, 1822–1828. Paris: European Language Resources Association (ELRA).
- Profitwell. 2019. "Optimizing Your Buying Cycle Stages and Converting Users". *Profitwell*. <https://www.profitwell.com/recur/all/buying-cycle-stages>

- Righetti, Nicola, and Niccolò Bertuzzi. 2024. "Rethinking Veganism in the Digital Age: Innovating Methodology and Typology to Explore a Decade of Facebook Discourses". *Sociological Research Online* 30 no. 1: 96–115.
- Rørdam, Mette Ohm. 2013. *EU Law on Food Naming: The Prohibition against Misleading Names in an Internal Market Context*. PhD dissertation, Copenhagen Business School.
- Sexton, Alexandra E., Tara Garnett, and Jamie Lorimer. 2022. "Vegan Food Geographies and the Rise of Big Veganism". *Progress in Human Geography* 46, no. 2: 605–628.
- Sucapane, Daniella. 2020. *Plant-Based or Meat Alternative? How the Naming and Packaging of Plant-Based Meat Alternatives Influence Consumers' Product Perceptions*. PhD dissertation, Concordia University.
- Truman, Emily, and Charlene Elliott. 2019. "Identifying Food Marketing to Teenagers: A Scoping Review". *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 16:67.
- US Food and Drug Administration. 2026. "Food Labeling". Title 21 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Pt. 101. Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-101>.
- US Food and Drug Administration. 2026. "Food Labeling". 21 CFR § 101. Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR). Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-101>.
- Vasiloaia, Mihaela. 2009. "Linguistic Features of the Language of Advertising". *Economy Transdisciplinarity Cognition* 1:294–298.
- Verrill, Linda, Iryna A. Iles, and Xiaoli Nan. 2020. "Soda or VitaSoda: How Product Name Influences Perceptions of Snack Food Healthfulness and the Moderating Role of Nutrition Facts Labels". *Health Communication* 35, no. 8: 966–973.
- Wheeler, Alina. 2009. *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team*. 3rd ed. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yus, Francisco. 2003. "Humor and the Search for Relevance". *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, no.9: 1295–1331.
- Zhao, Dan. 2021. "Snack Names in China: Patterns, Types, and Preferences". *Names* 69 no. 4: 13–20.

Notes on the Contributor

Isabel Espinosa-Zaragoza is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Philology at the University of Alicante, where she obtained her PhD (graduating *summa cum laude* and receiving the Extraordinary Doctorate Award). She previously earned a Master's Degree in English and Spanish for Specific Purposes (Extraordinary Award), a Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching, and a degree in English Philology (Extraordinary Award). Her research interests lie at the intersection of lexicology, word-formation, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), alongside computational linguistics, Natural Language Processing (NLP), and automatic text simplification.

Correspondence to: Isabel Espinosa-Zaragoza, Department of English Philology, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras I, Universidad de Alicante, Ctra. San Vicente del Raspeig s/n, 03690, San Vicente del Raspeig, Alicante. Email: isabel.espinosa@ua.es