

A *BEEMER*, *QUEEN ELIZABETH*, AND *THE STEAMING ELEPHANT* — A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF VEHICLE NAMES IN ONOMASTICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The names of vehicles are all around us: a *Jumbo Jet* flies over us, we board *MSC Grandiosa* for a cruise around the Mediterranean, and we can see a *Trabi*, a *Beemer*, and a *Rangie* standing alongside one another at a classic car meet. Car owners may also give their car an individual name, like *Eleanor*.

The above-mentioned vehicle names are the names of different kinds of vehicles (car, aircraft, ship), but they also differ in another way from each other: *Jumbo Jet*, *Trabi*, *Beemer*, and *Rangie* are the names of a class of vehicles while *MSC Grandiosa* and *Eleanor* are the names of individual vehicles. Vehicle names thus denote either an individual vehicle or a class of vehicles.

Although vehicle names exist in large numbers and are well documented and easily accessible in some vehicle categories (e.g., for ship names see Lloyd's Register, n.d.), surprisingly little research has addressed this name category (Nübling et al., 2012). Moreover, they are not even mentioned — or at least in any detail — in some of the fundamental works of onomastics: although some names in the category have been analyzed in various papers, the literature lacks an extensive overview of these names. Vehicle names, therefore, are to be seen as an as yet under researched area in onomastics.

Vehicle names are recognized by most onomastic overviews and scholars — explicitly or implicitly — as a unique name category. The International Council of Onomastics Sciences (ICOS) mentions vehicle names in its terminological

list — to be more precise, ship names — but it does not categorize them explicitly under an existing onomastic term. From the ICOS categories, vehicle names best fit, however, into the category ergonyms. Ergonyms are defined as: “ergonym — name of a product or a brand; NOTE: The term chrematonym in some languages is used in this sense, but can also have a broader meaning (i.a. proper names of social events, institutions, organisations...)” (ICOS Terminology Group, n.d., p. 2). Names of vehicles are also seen as ergonyms (Ergonyme / Objektnamen) in the work by Nübling et al. (2012). This book shows that various names of vehicles, like automobile names, train names, ship names, and airplane names, fall into the category of vehicle names.

Koß (2002) does not mention vehicle names in his book, while Van Langendonck (2007, p. 220) puts vehicle names (together with the names of buildings) into the category “prototypical proper names”, without elaborating further on the category. In the edited volume of Hough (2016), several subcategories of vehicle names are discussed; the term vehicle name itself is, however, not mentioned as a category of names.

Both Šrámek (1996a) and Knappová (1996) see vehicle names as part of the higher category of chrematonyms.

Šrámek (1996a) puts train names clearly into the chrematonyms category, showing that some chrematonyms name single objects (like the IC train *Mozart*) while others name a group of objects (e.g., brand names like *Audi*). This is in accordance with above mentioned individual vehicle names and class vehicle names: as we have shown, a vehicle name can be a name of an individual vehicle (*The Rocket*), or it can be the name of a series of practically identical vehicles (*Volkswagen Golf IV*) cf. ‘Einzelobjekte’ and ‘Mengenobjekte’ (Šrámek 1996b, p. 381).

Knappová (1996, p. 1567) similarly sees vehicle names as chrematonyms; more precisely, as a subcategory of “proper names of results of social activity”. According to her, in chrematonyms, both linguistic (like genus etc.) and extra-linguistic (like inventor) pieces of information or characteristics of the named object (e.g., *Tesla Roadster*) are included (see in detail Knappová 1996).

Zelinsky (2002, p. 257) does not use the term chrematonyms: he puts vehicle names into the category “Artifacts” and provides a possible categorization of these names:

Vehicles

1. Ships and boats
2. Trains
 - a. Named railway cars
3. Aircraft
4. Space craft

5. Individual automotive vehicles
 - a. Automobiles; vanity plates
 - b. Buses
 - c. Trucks
 - d. Motorcycles

Kovács (2021) considers vehicle names as a category of ergonyms (object names) and creates a taxonomy of vehicle names similar to Zelinsky.

Vehicle names are thus part of the name category ‘names of artifacts’/‘ergonym’/‘chrematonym’, depending on the author and the terminology used in the given country. Although — as we will show — research on vehicle names is carried out, it is done mainly from one particular viewpoint or on one given vehicle name category; thus, these papers do not provide a broader, comparative overview of these names of this name category.

The present paper contributes to closing this research gap. We will argue that vehicle names can be created both officially and unofficially, and we will show why various different names can name the same vehicle.

In the first step of the review, an overview of the literature on vehicle names according to vehicle categories — like ship names — is given. In the second step, in the discussion, a categorization and a name-giving and using matrix for vehicle names are provided, based on previous findings.

2. METHODS

In the first part of the paper, an overview of the literature on vehicle names is provided: papers from the journals *Names* (after 1950) and *Onoma* (after 1995) are discussed, together with vehicle name-related contributions of leading English and German books on onomastics (Eichler et al., 1996; Koß, 2002; Nübling et al., 2012; Hough, 2016). Most examples of vehicle names are drawn from the cited papers.

Two limitations of the overview must be mentioned, however. First, the review focuses only on German and English literature and leaves out other languages from the overview. It must be noted, however, that books on the topic have been published in some Nordic countries — they are, however, only accessible in Nordic languages (e.g., Schybergson, 2012; Seppälä, 2013; Johannessen, 2015).

Second, the overview only analyzes the names of civilian vehicles: the names of military vehicles are excluded from the current paper. The distinction between these two large categories (civilian vs. military vehicles) is necessary because different naming conventions and traditions apply to civilian and military vehicles. Moreover, the naming conventions of the two categories differ partly because of the different types and purposes of vehicles existing in these two categories.

In the overview, vehicle names are described according to vehicle categories. This approach is chosen because 1) naming conventions differ in various vehicle categories, and 2) most academic papers describe the naming conventions of only one vehicle category. Organized in this way, it is easier to summarize papers describing naming in one vehicle category and to see parallels between the naming strategies of different vehicle categories.

3. RESULTS. VEHICLE NAMES BY VEHICLE CATEGORY: AN OVERVIEW

Vehicle names can be categorized according to the type of vehicle they are naming (cf. Zelinsky, 2002). In this part of the paper, the naming characteristics of different types of vehicles are reviewed.

3.1. Ship and Boat Names

Ships and boats are both watercraft: ships are larger, ocean-going vessels, while boats are smaller ‘pleasure craft’ (Jones, 2016; Ashley, 1996b). Ships are obliged by maritime authorities to be named — from a specific size on — and they have to bear an abbreviation denoting the characteristics of the vessel, for example, the type of engine (*MS = Motor Ship*) (Nübling et al., 2012). Some ship names are well-known to the larger public, like *Santa Maria*, *Mayflower*, or *Titanic*.

Ships have been named since antiquity: Greeks and Vikings already named their ships (Nübling et al., 2012): in the shipyard of Piraeus (4th century B. C.) ships were given religious names (Jones, 2016). According to a listing, English ships before the middle of the 14th century had religious motivations in their names in almost all cases (Jones, 2016). Later, ships were often christened with the names of famous persons (anthroponyms; e.g., *Queen Elizabeth*), toponyms (*Savannah*) or with names consisting of abstract words (*Independence*). Ship naming patterns largely depend on the name-giving tradition of a given era and/or on the naming conventions of a shipping line or a given country (Kuba, 1996). In Germany in the late 20th century, for example, ships used toponyms, anthroponyms, mythological names, or names of animals and plants in their names, but fantasy names were also common (Horn, 1987 cited by Nübling et al., 2012).

Ships are often not unique, however: they can be identical — or very similar — to each other. In these cases, ships belong to a ship class. A ship class is named in a standard case after the first ship of the class, and the following ships are named alongside a given pattern containing, for example, the same morphemes: *MSC Seaside* and *MSC Seaview* both are ships of the *Seaside* class (cf. Kuba, 1996; Jones, 2016).

It is important to note that shipping lines often follow a given pattern to name their ships regardless of ship class: for example, *Evergreen Marine* — known from the news when one of its ships, *Ever Given* blocked the Suez Canal in early 2021 —, gives its ships the name prefix *Ever* (cf. Nübling et al., 2012).

Smaller ships like boats or yachts also have names (Ashley, 1996b). The names of these ships are often extravagant, and humorous and rely on wordplays (e.g., *Sail LaVie*, *Capitalist Tool*, *Aquadisiac*; Ashley, 1996b).

Although ship names show a large variety, all the names have to be conformable to (international) law and, in most cases, have to be unique (Kuba, 1996). New ships can inherit the names of old ones, partly to ensure continuity but also for marketing reasons: a known and proven name has both financial and sentimental value (Kuba, 1996).

3.2. Automotive Vehicle Names — Cars, Trucks, and Busses

In the case of cars and other automotive vehicles, we must distinguish between

- 1) brand names given by the manufacturer to a series of — virtually identical — types of vehicles;
- 2) unofficial — common nicknames given by society;
- 3) individual — owner-given — (nick)names of vehicles.

We analyze the latter names in this subchapter in more detail; other naming contexts will be discussed in Chapter 4 of the paper.

Car nicknames have existed since the early days: in the United States, they were subject to analysis and the topic of several papers in the journals *American Speech* and *Western Folklore* in the 1930s (cf. Kus, 1979). In 1952, Minton categorized truck names in the US, pointing out that the names frequently referred to the driver, to children, or to females.

Since naming cars seemed to fade out by the late 1950s, Brunvand (1962) tried to preserve these naming conventions and collected names of cars in the US. He noted that in the 1950s, the names of cars were written — hand painted — on the car itself; in the 1960s, however, these written names started to disappear (cf. Ashley, 1996a). The names frequently appearing in Brunvand's data were feminine names, colors, animal names, song titles, references to television shows, movies and comic strips, names alluding to the given name, hobby or occupation of the owner, or names describing car features.

Naming cars is (and was) not only common in the United States: Bágyi (2010) collected car nicknames in Hungary in the early 20th century. After categorizing the names, she showed that names are motivated by 1) the brand of the car; 2) the characters on the registration plate; 3) the appearance of the car; 4) other characteristics of the car; 5) special occasions connected to the car; 6) love of vehicles.

Names of cars or other vehicles are, in some cultures, more important than in others: in some countries in South America and Africa, it is common to give individual names to land vehicles (cf. Ashley, 1996a; Nübling et al., 2012). As a result, corpora of truck names from Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, and Ecuador were collected and analyzed in the 1980s (Kus, 1994).

However, one South American country must be emphasized: Peru, where trucks traditionally have individual names written on them. These names were collected and analyzed extensively by James Kus (1979, 1994). Kus (1979) systematically collected truck names in Peru in 1977: he recorded the names and several observable characteristics — like the brand — of the truck itself. Comparing his data with previous research, Kus showed that over time, the numbers of some name types increased (e.g., religious names and men’s names like *Corazon de Jesús, San Pedro, Juan Carlos*), while others decreased (e.g., romantic names).

Kus (1994) continued his research and collected over 10,000 individual truck names in ten years. As a result of his data analysis, two naming dimensions emerged, divided into two subcategories each. One dimension is about the naming habits: it consists of the subcategories “traditional” (31%) and “contemporary” (14,7%) names. Traditional names consist of Native American names, religious names, names of male saints, and names of female saints and maxims, while contemporary ones are foreign names and company names. The other dimension of Kus describes the geographical characteristics of naming and he distinguishes between a “conservative” Peru (Andes and East of the Andes) and a “progressive” region (Lima, Libertad) (Kus, 1994, p. 241).

Due to the decade-long data collection period, Kus was able to show the changes in naming patterns: for example, names of male saints decreased, while company names and slogans as names increased. In addition, due to the longitudinal nature of the study, he was able to demonstrate that the truck names of a given truck may change over time, for example, caused by a change of ownership.

In a similar study, taxi names in South Africa were collected and categorized by Neethling (2005), who concluded that the names described the appearance of the car; described the owner; provided identification; conveyed positive values or showed a religious affiliation.

Please note that all these names are unofficial: they are given to the vehicle by their owner. Giving vehicles individual names has thus a cultural context: in some countries, it is common to accord an individual nickname to special kinds of vehicles.

3.3. Rail Transport Vehicle Names — Trains and Locomotives

The names of rail transport vehicles can be analyzed in at least two groups: on the one hand, there are the names of locomotives (e.g., *Rocket*); on the other, we may research the names of trains like *Orient Express* (Nübling et al., 2012).

Jones (2016) sees the background of naming locomotives as a continuation of the historical custom of naming horse-drawn (mail) coaches. The first locomotive names were created in the early 1800s in Britain and later in Germany, in both countries denoting various characteristics of locomotives like the novelty of the machines (*Experiment*), technology and mechanics (*Steaming Elephant*), strength (*Hercules*), speed (*Rocket*) or excellence (*Success*) (cf. Kuba, 1996; Weyers, 2008; Nübling et al., 2012; Coates, 2016). Most early locomotive names were metaphorical (Coates, 2016; Nübling et al., 2012).

Later naming practices for locomotives — at least in Great Britain — are described in detail by Coates (2016), showing that names could have a much broader source, like the names of racehorses (*Hyperion*). According to Nübling (et al., 2012) later German locomotive names are animal names (*Falke*) or names of geographical locations (*Elbe*, *Harz*) or famous people (*Schiller*). We must note, however, that most early locomotives were unique pieces: with technological advancement, mass production, and the large number of locomotives, however, individual names disappear, and alphanumerical codes are used instead to denote not a single locomotive but a class of identical or similar locomotives (Nübling et al., 2012).

The names of trains also underwent changes over time: for the first time, only the most prestigious trains had names (*Orient Express*) and these expressed exclusivity, speed, and comfort (Weyers, 2008; Nübling et al., 2012). The segment of these exclusive trains exists today, but train names are not exclusive to the luxury segment anymore: more and more trains bear names. These names are connected to the train's route, like cities or sights along the route (*Lüneburger Heide*, *Matterhorn*), although trains can have the names of famous people or planets (Nübling et al., 2012; in detail Weyers, 2008).

Nübling (et al., 2012) mention an interesting approach to train names from Austria from the early 2010s: train names were sponsored — a yearly amount was paid to name a train for a whole year. The sponsored names came from tourist locations or were the names of companies, universities, and organizations (*Erlebnisregion Tennengau*).

3.4. Aircraft Names

Since most aircraft are produced in large numbers, the names of aircraft types do not denote a single aircraft — apart from experimental airplanes —, but a series of nearly identical airplanes.

The names of aircraft exhibit considerable variety, depending on the manufacturing country, the manufacturer, or the aircraft size (cf. for an overview Kuba, 1996). Some names represent aircraft designers or design offices (*Boeing 737*), but designer names can also be abbreviated (*D = Douglas*). In addition, numbers can be added for different aircraft types produced by the same designer, e.g., *DC-3 = Douglas Commercial 3* (cf. Kuba, 1996). These official names of airplanes are

given by the manufacturer or the designer and may follow an existing pattern, cf. for the naming pattern of *Boeing* (Puzey, 2016).

It is possible, however, that an aircraft (better to say, a class of aircraft) can be known under many different names. For example, the famous *DC-3* is known — in the military — as *Dakota* (England), as *Skytrain* (the variant *C-47* in the US), as *Showa L2D* (licensed production in Japan), and even as *Lisunov Li-2* (licensed production in the former Soviet Union). These different names may exist because the same aircraft was licensed and produced in another country under a new name.

Small civilian airplanes also have names and these come from various semantic fields. Some patterns are, however, either recognizably connected to manufacturer naming traditions or across different manufacturers. e.g., the use of the morpheme *sky* in *Skylane*, *SkyCourier*, *SkyCoupe*, or mythological names (Kuba, 1996).

It is not only airplanes that may have names: a paper by Vinne (2007) describes the naming process of a *Goodyear* airship. Although the paper is focused on the naming process of the airship *Spirit of Innovation*, it also discusses historical names and the naming traditions of airships.

Airplanes may also have individual but official names. The German airline *Lufthansa* named her airplanes as early as in the 1920s, using bird names, animal names, and mythological names, e.g., *Nachtigall* (Nübling et al., 2012). Later, after World War II, individual *Lufthansa* airplanes were named after cities and destinations (*Berlin*). Likewise, in Austria and Switzerland, airplanes bear the individual names of sights, mountains, or cities like *Bern*, *Piz Buin* (Nübling et al., 2012).

3.5. Names of Spacecraft

An early contribution to spacecraft names was provided by Minton (1958), who described how the name of the first satellite — *Sputnik* — and its nickname-like derivatives (e.g., *Whatnik*, *Spacenic*, and for the failed American satellite launch attempts *Goofnik* or *Kaputnik*) resonated in Western newspapers.

In the early years of the space age, names connected to spacecraft were the topic of another study: Pearce (1962) describes various naming strategies in the early 1960s, analyzing the names of — both scientific and military — aerial objects such as rockets and spacecraft. Rockets had names in the setting of exploration (*Marco Polo*), animal names (*Kingfisher*), or humorous names (*Snooper*). Early satellite names bear a name connected to discovery (*Explorer*) or mythology (*Samos*), but there was no clear naming pattern discoverable. It must be noted that the use of these satellites was partly in a military context. Pearce emphasizes that at that time, “the Age of Greece has returned to rule the space” (Pearce, 1962, p. 9).

We must note, however, that the analysis of Pearce was written when space flights were first beginning — thus the described naming strategies are correct

for that time period. Using his categories today, however, would have its limitations, partly due to the technological advancement — and the new categories of spacecraft — of the last 60 years.

Naming traditions for spaceships can be extended to science fiction: fictional spaceships can also bear names like the *USS Enterprise* of *Star Trek* (for an overview, cf. Krueger, 1966).

3.6. Other Names Connected to Vehicles

Names for other kinds of vehicles, like motorcycles, bicycles, and scooters, exist (e.g., for motorcycles see Richard, 2023); however, there is no academic paper describing and analyzing these names which is known to the author.

Vehicle names can also be present on the registration plates of vehicles. Neethling (2007) analyzed the personalized registration plates in part of South Africa (Western Cape). Most plates refer to the owner's or their family's identity, describe the car's characteristics (e.g., color, brand), the business or lifestyle of the car owner, or are connected to religion.

4. DISCUSSION

As we have seen, some names discussed in the onomastic literature are the names of individual vehicles, while others denote a class of vehicles. Moreover, some names are official, and some are unofficial. To create order, we need to look more closely at some aspects of names: first, we must distinguish the class names of vehicles from those of individual vehicles. We also have to consider the use of vehicle names: Is it an official or unofficial name, and when it is unofficial, is it just used by some individuals or a larger group of people?

It is essential, therefore, to highlight the fact that vehicle names can be described from various viewpoints. These different viewpoints of name-giving and name-using are responsible for the fact that the same vehicle can bear several names. To give an example of this, an iconic French car was the *Citroën 2CV* (official brand name), but it also had nicknames, like *Tin Snail* in English-speaking countries or *Ente* ('duck') in German-speaking countries ("Citroën 2CV", 2023). An example of the car may be called by a family as *Family Duck*.

In the following sections, these different viewpoints of vehicle names are described to show how they are related to each other.

4.1. Official Names

Some of the names and examples mentioned earlier are official names. Official names are names used in an official context: these names are registered (may

even be legally protected), and they appear on an official document or in official communications (cf. Kovács, 2021).

4.1.1. Brand Names

Brand names, together with company names and product names, fall into the category of commercial names (Sjöblom, 2016). Commercial names are connected to advertising and play an important role in it: they aim at influencing consumer decisions (Sjöblom, 2016; cf. Sjöblom, 2021).

A brand name can be defined as “a widely known, financially valuable name which includes an image of the surplus value offered by the product” (Sjöblom, 2014, p. 94). Brand names can be regarded as the most valuable assets of companies (cf. Kohli et al., 2001). On the one hand, the goal of brand names is to differentiate a product from other, similar products of a product category (Kovács, 2019), on the other hand, brand names are created to promote and facilitate selling products (cf. Keller, 2013).

Brand names are created with various linguistic devices where the creation process is conscious: the process considers — in an ideal case — the meaning, pronunciation, positive and possible negative associations of the proposed name (cf. Praninskas, 1968; Rivkin & Sutherland, 2004; Ronneberger-Sibold, 2004; Kircher, 2019). Furthermore, by creating brand names, legal aspects also play an essential role (cf. Shuy, 2002; Teutsch, 2007).

It is necessary to separate vehicle names from brand names. Brand names are the official names of the vehicle and are created (and owned) by a company, usually by the manufacturer and/or the brand owner (Kovács, 2021). Brand names of vehicles are, for example, *Ford F150*, *Ford Bronco*, or *GMC Yukon*. In the case of car brand names, they consist of two parts: the company name followed by the model name, since *Ford* and *GMC* can be considered both: they are company names, but at the same time, they are also brand names (cf. Van Langendonck, 2007). (To avoid confusion, we will understand under car brand name any official part of or combination of these names.)

Under the umbrella of vehicle names, Kuba (1996) understands the brand and model (type) name of a given car, like *the Fiat Berlinetta*. On the other hand, Nübling (et al., 2012) see car brand names as brand names (Koß, 1996; Platen, 1997; Rivkin–Sutherland, 2004): they use the term, however, only for the official, and in most cases protected brand name of the car. Nübling (et al., 2012) use the term vehicle name for the individual names of cars or trucks. In the case of cars, we see that the terms brand names and vehicle names may overlap: *Citroën 2CV* is a vehicle name and a brand name simultaneously (cf. Nübling et al., 2012, also for the different uses of brand names Van Langendonck, 2007).

The brand names of vehicles have been subject to research: Piller (1999), for example, analyzed over 1000 car brand names in the US in a time period of 100 years (from the 1890s to the 1990s). She analyzed the names in a cognitive-semantic framework and highlighted that American automobile brand names are created by using “metonymy, metaphor, iconicity, and descriptive designation” (Piller, 1999, p. 89), showing that different naming strategies were applied in different time periods to create car brand names. In addition, she notes that the names may vary according to the register they are used in. She identifies the following different registers: “product information”, “maintenance information”, “background reports”, “advertisements” and “car brand names on the car”. According to the register in which the car name is being used, the constituents of the name may differ, for example, by adding the year of the production or the body type of the car to the brand name.

4.1.2. Vehicle Class Names vs. Individual Vehicle Names

It should be noted that the official names are class names in most cases; that is, they do not denote one given vehicle but a series of virtually identical vehicles (cf. Kovács, 2021). Brand names fall clearly into this category: they do not denote one example of a car but a large number of cars sharing the same characteristics; the *Ford F150* is not the name of an individual car.

In some cases, however, official names for individual vehicles exist, too. Individual official names for vehicles are common in some vehicle categories (ships, trains, spacecraft), but in others, like automobiles, uncommon. For example, the vehicle called *MS Splendida* denotes one individual example of a vehicle bearing an individual name. Ship names are also painted on the hull and are part of the ship’s official papers.

As mentioned above, ships may have class names. Ships of a ship class are practically identical vehicles. The name of the ship class is, in most cases, the name of the first ship in the given class; and each example of the ship class has her own individual name. For example, the *Freedom* class cruise ships of Royal Caribbean bear the names *Freedom of the Seas* (first ship of the class), *Liberty of the Seas*, and *Independence of the Seas*.

4.2. Unofficial Names

Vehicles may also be named, however, unofficially (cf. Kovács, 2021). In this case, the name is used only in unofficial contexts (the name is not part of the official documents of the vehicle). Unofficial names of vehicles can emerge in two ways.

One way is the emergence of a community nickname used by a wider public (by society). An example of these names are unofficial car (brand) nicknames. These names go back to the first mass-produced car, the *Ford Model T*, since the car was often called *Tin Lizzie*; but it was also known by many different, less appealing nicknames (Botkin, 1930). This name, however, was not the name of a unique exemplar of the car — it was the nickname of the *Ford Model T* itself. These names first emerged in a small group and then spread across larger groups to be used, for example, by fans, enthusiasts, or the wider public. Such names are *Tin Snail* for the *Citroën 2CV*, *Beemer* for the brand *BMW* or *Tin Lizzy* for the *Ford Model T*.

Individual unofficial names of unique vehicles may also exist: the possession and the frequent use of a vehicle can cause an emotional attachment to the vehicle and which is often represented in an individual name given by the owner/user of the vehicle. However, these names are not widely known: only the vehicle users (together with the close family) use the name for the given vehicle.

4.3. Vehicle Names: An Attempt at a Synthesis

Some vehicle names are official while others are unofficial, with some used by a whole society and others by just a small number of people. Some vehicle names are given for an individual vehicle while others denote a class of vehicles. In the following sections, we synthesize all of the above-mentioned viewpoints on vehicle names and naming, also highlighting potential directions for future research.

4.3.1. Definition

As we have seen, vehicle names are categorized by some authors as brand names (cf. Kuba, 1996). Therefore, to avoid confusion, as a first step, it would be necessary for onomastic theory to define the notion of vehicle name.

When the notion of vehicle name is defined broadly — for example, “any name a vehicle can possess in any context” — commercial names, especially brand names, and vehicle names necessary overlap. When we define vehicle names in a narrow context — for example, “the name of a unique vehicle” — brand names and vehicle names do not overlap; we may lose, however, names for a class of vehicles because they are not names of an individual vehicle (cf. Kuba, 1996; Nübling et al., 2012).

Similarly, if we decide to define vehicle names as official names, we have to bear in mind that some vehicle names — like the individual nicknames of cars — will not be considered vehicle names. When we try to define vehicle names as unofficial names, we could lose the context of commercial names and brand names and also perhaps whole vehicle categories — for example, ships — because not all ships necessarily have an unofficial name.

Considering all of the above-mentioned controversies and in order to remain in the tradition of previous onomastic work, the author would opt for a broader definition. A possible definition for vehicle names is thus the following: a vehicle name is a name used for a unique vehicle or a class of vehicles in an official or unofficial context.

By defining vehicle names as a broad class, there is necessarily an overlap to commercial names, especially brand names. The overlap is, however, inevitable: vehicle brand names are, on the one hand — in an economic/marketing context — brand names; on the other hand, they are official names of vehicles defined by the brand owner. In this regard, the viewpoint is different: the term brand name is used and considered in a marketing context; thus, it is a name used in economy.

4.3.2. A Taxonomy of Vehicle Names

The next question concerns which names can be considered vehicle names. Below, a taxonomy for vehicle names is provided, partly based on that of Zelinsky (2002) and the Hungarian taxonomy of Kovács (2021). It must be noted that the taxonomy may be extended further in every category by dividing, for example, ship types.

Names connected to private and public vehicles

1. Automotive vehicle names
 1. Automobile names — *Eleanor, Bully, Ford Escort*
 2. Bus names — for example, in Jamaica: *Lion*
 3. Truck names — *Volvo Actros*
 4. Motorcycle names — *Ducati Hypermotard*
 5. Other automotive vehicle names — *Bagger 288* (excavator)
2. Rail transport vehicle names
 1. Train names
 - 1.1. Engine names — *Rocket, Flying Scotsman*
 - 1.2. Train names — *Orient Express*
 2. Tram names — *Robin Hood*
 3. Other rail transport vehicle names — *Galloping Goose* (railcar)
3. Ship and boat names
 1. Ship names — *Cutty Sark, Titanic, The Mayflower*
 2. Boat names — *Unsinkable, Ship Happens*
 3. Submarine names — *Trieste, Deepsea Challenger*
 4. Other ship names — *R/P FLIP* (floating research platform)
4. Aircraft names
 1. Airplane names — *Jumbo Jet, Spirit of St. Louis*
 2. Helicopter names — *Ecureuil*

3. Airship names — *Zeppelin*
4. Other aerial transport vehicle names — *Terrafugia Transition* (flying car)
5. Spacecraft names
 1. Spaceship names — *Enterprise, Space X*
 2. Names of probes — *Pioneer, Voyager*
 3. Names of satellites — *Astra, Thor*
 4. Other spacecraft names — *Mir* (space station)
6. Other vehicle names — *Cannondale* (bicycle)
7. Other names connected to private and public transportation vehicles
 1. Radio call signs
 2. Names on plates

4.3.3. Official and Unofficial Name-giving

Vehicle names can be categorized and analyzed in connection to the process of name-giving: as we have seen, vehicles can be given names both officially and unofficially (cf. Kovács, 2021). Both naming processes are important: partly, the parallel existence of official and unofficial names explains why a vehicle can possess two different names at the same time. Both official and unofficial names can denote a class of vehicles and individual vehicles (Figure 1).

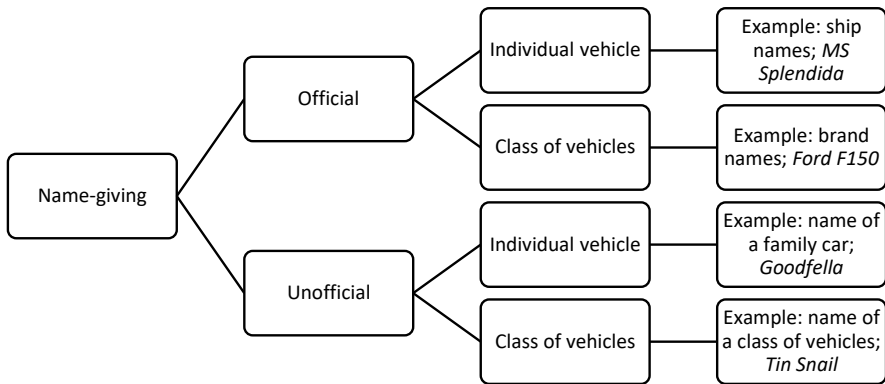


Figure 1. Name-giving process for vehicle names

Official names also imply that regulations for these names exist. Some regulations are legal (e.g., legal aspects of brand names), while others are written or unwritten rules and traditions in a company (e.g., car names are from a given semantic field, like *Volkswagen Bora, Scirocco, Passat*).

Official name-giving can account for different names for the same (class of) vehicles in another way: a vehicle with the same characteristics may have different official names in different countries, as we have seen in the case of *DC3*. Another example is the 1970s car *Fiat 124*, which was manufactured in Spain under the name *Seat 124*, as *Tofaş Murat 124* in Turkey, and in the former USSR as the *Zhiguli VAZ-2101*; which was again sold on Russian export markets — like in Hungary — under the name *Lada 1200*. Nevertheless, all of the mentioned vehicles are virtually identical: the different names are due to the different manufacturers.

An essential fact for vehicle names is — as also seen in the examples throughout the paper — that vehicle names are often existing proper names, which are used to name a vehicle. In these cases, vehicle names seem to inherit and/or bear some characteristics and/or be connected to the meaning of the proper names.

Based on some examples, we show in the following sections, how proper names are used to name vehicles. A brand name can bear the name of the founder (*Ford*, *Opel*) or the name of a famous person (*Tesla*; for a more detailed overview, see Kovács, 2019). An airplane name can be connected to the designer/founder/company name (*Boeing*, *Antonov*, *Airbus*). Ship names can bear the names of famous persons (*Queen Elizabeth*) or toponyms (*Badacsony*, *Tihany*). Ship names are often chosen to honor other ships (e.g., *Queen Elisabeth II*). Another example is the first nuclear-powered merchant ship *NS Savannah* (NS=Nuclear Ship), which received her name from the *SS Savannah* (SS=Steamship), the first steamship to cross the Atlantic; and again, *SS Savannah* received her name from the city of Savannah, a city located in Georgia, on the Atlantic coast of the US. In the case of individual car names, the names often are the names of family members, or — with bus names in South America — the names of saints. Trains names are often connected to the routes — sight, cities, geographical locations — they use: for example, InterCity trains in Hungary bear names like *Dráva*, *Mura* (river names) or *Arrabona*, *Savaria*, *Scarbantia* (Latin names of cities in western Hungary).

Vehicle names not connected to proper names are found in a more significant number in brand names denoting car types (e.g., *Silver Shadow*, *ID.5*) or in the names of ships and boats (*Allure of the Seas*, *MSC Sinfonia*).

4.3.4. Using a Name

The last important question is where the name of the vehicle is used (Figure 2). Vehicle names can be used in an official setting: these names appear in official documents, for example, in a Certification of Registry in the case of ships. The other possibility is that the name is used in unofficial settings: the name can be used by an individual or a smaller or larger group of individuals. For example, a family may use for a *BMW* the name *Speedy*. However, for a larger group of society, *BMW*-s are known by the nickname *Beemer*.

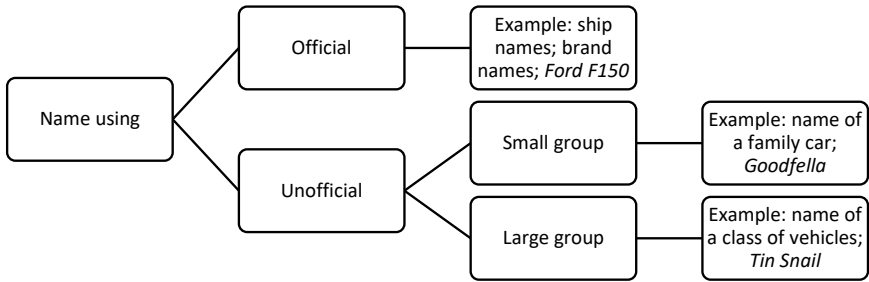


Figure 2. Using vehicle names

Again, these different name-using settings can be responsible for different names of the same vehicle because an unofficial name may be added to the official name. Table 1 summarizes the above-mentioned peculiarities of vehicle names and provides some examples of different names (cf. also Kovács, 2021).

Table 1. Examples of vehicle names

Name-giving	Name using	Examples	Example: Citroën 2CV	Example: M61 locomotives (Hungary)
Official names for a class of vehicles	Official use	<i>Ford Focus</i> ; <i>Shinkansen 100 series</i>	Citroën 2CV	<i>MÁV M61 series</i> (Official name in the Hungarian State Railways)
Official names for individual vehicles	Official use	<i>Oasis of the Seas</i> ; <i>Maersk Houston</i>	–	–
Unofficial names for a class of vehicles	Unofficial use by a group	<i>Range</i> (for Range Rover); <i>Bug</i> (for a Volkswagen Beetle)	–	<i>Nohab</i> (series nickname from the name of the producing company <i>Nydqvist och Holm AB</i>)
Unofficial names for individual vehicles	Unofficial use by a larger group	<i>Herbie</i> (for a Volkswagen Beetle); <i>Eleanor</i> (for a Ford Mustang)	Tin Snail	<i>Király</i> (Hungarian for ‘king’; for the vehicle M61 010)
	Unofficial use by an individual or a small group	<i>Rusty</i> (family name of a car), <i>Blacky</i> (family name of a car)	Family Duck	–

The above synthesis also provides opportunities for further research on vehicle names. In the following section, we list some suggestions for research on vehicle names: analyzing names in a given vehicle category (synchronic approach); showing changes of names in a period of time in a given vehicle category (diachronic approach); exploring similarities and differences between names in different vehicle categories; name-giving patterns for individual cars in various countries; brand name giving patterns of vehicles; semantic fields for brand names for certain types of vehicles; the connections between brand names and unofficial brand nicknames for car brands/models; the spreading of unofficial names in communities; naming strategies for new types of vehicles; the use of proper as vehicle names, etc.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper attempted to synthesize onomastic research on vehicle names, intending to make these names more accessible for future onomastic research.

In the first step, vehicle names were described according to various vehicle categories. It was shown that although the names of various vehicle categories — for example, the names of ships — have been analyzed and described during the last decades, it was also pointed out that onomastic research lacks a comprehensive overview of this name category and that some vehicle categories — like bicycles and motorcycles — seem entirely left out of onomastic research.

In the discussion part, the paper argued that vehicle names can be created officially and unofficially, and that the same vehicle can bear different names at the same time. As the paper has shown, official and unofficial names and name-using patterns — names used by smaller or larger groups — are responsible for the multiple names of the same vehicle.

In addition to providing an overview, we hope that the paper will serve to place the names of vehicles increasingly at the heart of onomastic endeavors.

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SUMMARY

Although names of vehicles surround us in our everyday life, vehicle names are seldom subject to research in onomastic literature: in most cases, the research only describes the naming patterns of one vehicle category. This paper aims to review the notion 'vehicle names' in light of the onomastic literature to provide a comprehensive overview of the name category. The paper takes the literature review as its research method: vehicle name-related research in English and German onomastic literature is synthesized to show in which onomastic research contexts vehicle names appear. Based on the results of previous onomastic research, the paper argues that the notion of vehicle names should be defined broadly. It also shows that vehicle names can be considered from different viewpoints: it is possible to distinguish official and unofficial name-giving, but the setting in which the vehicle name is used is also important. The final part of the paper shows how these viewpoints interact with one another: The paper also provides a taxonomy of vehicle names and indicates future research directions for vehicle names.