

The semiotics of unconventional automobile naming in Zimbabwe

Raphael Nhongo; Primrose Baba Tshotsho

Abstract

Although manufacturers are responsible for naming vehicles that they produce, the users, admirers and those with aversions to these automobiles have a tendency of giving secondary or additional names to the vehicles. In most cases, those secondary names become more acceptable and common identifiers than the original ones given by the manufacturers. This article explores these secondary names by establishing their origins, their etymology and their meanings. The secondary names being studied here were collected through interviews with mechanics at workshops and with motorists at fuel stations in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Purposeful sampling coupled with volunteer sampling were utilised to select members who were interviewed about secondary names of automobiles and their etymology and meanings. The results showed that the secondary naming of cars comes mainly as a result of shape, efficiency, speed, primary name, politics, social acceptability and the socio-economic factors associated with it. The article concludes that the secondary naming of automobiles is a way of showing appreciation, love or hate of the product, and such naming follows some systematic pattern. "Secondary name" as a term in onomastics has not been common but was used here because "nickname" and "pseudonym" were not suitable as descriptors of the concept being scrutinised.