

# Word-order in American car names

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Commonly only terms like *Oldsmobile 98*<sup>1</sup>, *Star Chief* or *Chevy* are used as automobile names but in order to fully identify an American automobile larger syntagmas like *1951 Oldsmobile 98 Holiday two-door hardtop coupe V-8*, *1958 Pontiac Star Chief Catalina four-door hardtop*, or *1982 Chevrolet Cavalier Cadet sedan* are used. These syntagmas specify one or more of the categories of “model year” (1951; 1958; 1982), “manufacturer” (*Oldsmobile; Pontiac; Chevrolet*), “series” (98; *Star Chief; Cavalier*), “model” (*Holiday; Catalina; Cadet*) and “body type” (*two-door hardtop coupe; four-door hardtop; sedan*), and sometimes the engine type is indicated, too (*V-8*). Before addressing the question how these constituents are ordered within the polynominal string their functions will now be examined in some more detail.

The first constituent is the model year designation which is usually nothing more than a numeral: *1990, 1991, 1992* etc. Only a few manufacturers use other designations as Packard, for instance, who spoke of *series* instead: cars built in 1946-47 were referred to as *21st Series*, in 1948-49 as *22nd Series* and so on. To achieve greater regularity the *26th Series* of 1953 was followed by the *54th Series* in 1954. Occasionally, the model year designation may occupy a position other than the initial one within the syntagma such as in *Cord L29* where the series designation is derived from the year of introduction of this model: 1929. From 1930 till 1932, when production of this line finished, the normal order is restored, however: *1930 Cord L29, 1931 Cord L29, 1932 Cord L29*.

The second position in the syntagma is usually occupied by the designation of the manufacturer. Thus, all the automobiles offered by one manufacturer or division have this designation element in common. In marketing theory this branding strategy is called family or blanket branding (cf. Hisrich/Peters, 1978: 235f). It has the advantage that it facilitates the acceptance of a new product as consumers will generalise that the level of quality of a new product is the same one as of already existing ones. It also reduces the cost of branding as brand name research and extensive advertising will be

superfluous and it helps to make profits at an earlier stage as consumers will respond to the new product faster when they recognise it as part of an already existing range. The disadvantage of this strategy is obvious, too: should a manufacturer or a division fail to maintain a consistent level of quality all products of the range might be affected. If one automobile of a certain division acquires a reputation for poor quality this reputation might spread to the whole make. Marketing theory recognises three general branding strategies: family branding, individual branding and a "no name" strategy. Family or blanket branding is the only one of these that is used by the major automobile manufacturers. The strategy of individual branding, in which no manufacturer designation is given, is only very occasionally used by the major American manufacturers. An example would be the *Valiant*, which was turned out by Chrysler Corporation and marketed without manufacturer designation in 1960 but later on became *Plymouth Valiant*, or the *Merkur XR4Ti*, a car imported by the Lincoln-Mercury-Division from Ford's German subsidiary. In this case a certain connection is maintained by the fact that *Merkur* and *Mercury* can almost be regarded as spelling variants, however. Individual branding is also used by minor manufacturers who may not even offer a range of products and no automobile manufacturer uses a "no name" strategy, which simply uses the generic term such as "car" and nothing else. It is most common with low cost items such as food stuff. An example that gets quite close to this strategy in cars is Renault's *Le Car*, which features the words *Le Car* in large letters on both front doors but additionally carries the Renault badge on its front and back (cf. Finch, 1992: 322).

It is important to note that today all the 15 domestic American brands (Geo, Chevrolet, Saturn, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Buick and Cadillac by General Motors, Ford, Mercury and Lincoln by the Ford Motor Company and Plymouth, Dodge, Jeep-Eagle and Chrysler by the Chrysler Corporation) are put out by only three corporations: General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler Corporation. These "Big Three" have within each concern successfully created a semblance of competition. How successful this creation of a pseudo-competition has been can be shown syntactically (the examples are taken from Aronoff, 1981: 332): One can say

	GM	
{	Ford	} is putting out a new model.
	Chrysler	

but likewise substitute make for manufacturer:

Pontiac  
 { Dodge } is putting out a new model.  
 Lincoln

One cannot use the name of a series or model in this function as agent, however. These can only be used for cars while the name of the make is polysemous: it denotes the manufacturer as well as the car.

Chevelle  
 \*{ LeMans } is putting out a new model.  
 Horizon

While the polysemy of the names of makes that used to be independent manufacturers and were taken over such as Cadillac, Oldsmobile or Dodge can be explained historically, it must be regarded as a real marketing success in names of makes that were created for the purpose of filling a marketing gap within a corporation such as Pontiac, Plymouth or Mercury.

The third and fourth position in the syntagma of an American automobile designation is occupied by the series and model designation. What I call "series" might also be called "line" or "model" in automobile literature and for "model" one can also find "line" and rarely "series". The category "series" refers to the size of the automobile. The size of a car is determined by its comparative weight and the wheel base and it is most commonly classified as "full-size", "intermediate size", "compact" and "sub-compact"<sup>2</sup>. But this is only a very rough classification as on the one hand size differences were not very pronounced until the late 50s and early 60s and on the other hand differences in size and range have proliferated to an enormous variety since then. So, in 1950 Oldsmobile, for example, came in three different series: 76, 88 and 98. There were "two different engines, a six for the 76 and a V8 for the others, but they looked almost alike, and differences in size were very small, an extra 2.5 inches on the wheel base and 2 inches on the front tread between the bottom and top of the range." (Georgano, 1992: 176). Since the 1960s a number of new size types have emerged, the "muscle car" type for example "resulted from installing the most powerful V8 from the full size range in an intermediate body shell" (Georgano, 1992: 209). It has to be noted that the information given by series as regards the size of a certain vehicle is always a relative one which only provides information about the

comparative size of a certain car at a certain point in time. The standard size of a so-called full-size car, for instance, had been growing until around 1970, so that Ford's full-size series, the Fairlane, was 198 inches in overall size in 1954 but 214 inches in 1960 (cf. Georgano, 1992:203). With a growing consciousness of fuel economy and environmental issues car makers started to downsize their products from the late 1960s onwards. Thus, an intermediate sized car of the 60s may well be larger than a full-size car of the 80s.

Again, this position might not be filled at all. Especially pre-World War II cars and the automobiles turned out by minor manufacturers were sometimes not even differentiated in series. But even when more than one series are offered one might be singled out by not getting a series designation, the full-size Chevrolets of the early 70s, for example, had no series designation but only manufacturer and model designations such as *Chevrolet Biscayne*, *Chevrolet Bel Air*, *Chevrolet Impala* and *Chevrolet Caprice* while the mid-sized Chevelle showed all three designations: *Chevrolet Chevelle* (base trim), *Chevrolet Chevelle Malibu*, *Chevrolet Chevelle Concours* and *Chevrolet Chevelle Greenbrier*.

The fourth position of the syntagma is occupied by the model designation. A car of a given series is offered in various models differentiated according to standard and available trim, accessories and equipment. Thus, the 1955 *Studebaker Champion* series came in three models: *Custom*, *Deluxe* and *Regal*. *Custom*, *Deluxe* and *Regal* variations on the mid-sized *Commander* were the same as on the low-priced *Champion*, but in the top line *President* series there were only two model variations: *Deluxe* and *State*. The terms used as model designations are not necessarily descriptive, in most cases it is not even obvious that they relate to trim levels, the Kaisers of 1949, for instance, were offered as *Kaiser Traveler* (standard equipment) and as *Kaiser Vagabond* (deluxe equipment). There are on average three models of a given series: economy, standard and deluxe (cf. Aronoff, 1981:334). Apart from this systematic variations there are often all kinds of special models or special editions<sup>3</sup> offered. Again, the differences between a special edition and the standard version of a given automobile tend to be of a rather superficial kind and are supposed to aid the marketing of the car by individualising it and giving it a semblance of customising. In 1955, for instance, there was a *LaFemme* option on *Dodge Custom Royals*, it was differentiated from the standard version by "special Heather Rose and Sapphire White color combinations and matching cape, boots, umbrella, shoulder bag and floral upholstery fabrics." (Gunnell, 1992: 278). This special edition was one of the first efforts of

automobile marketing to target women. Another example would be the “designer editions” of the *Lincoln Mark IV* from 1976 onwards, the only difference with the standard version being two plates with the name of a couturier such as *Bill Blass*, *Givenchy*, *Pucci* or *Cartier* on it.

It is quite confusing that one and the same name is often used as a series designation at one point in time and as model designation at another. Thus, in 1957 a *Pontiac Bonneville* was a limited-edition convertible on the *StarChief* series, but in 1958 the name was reassigned to a separate line so that in 1958 *Pontiac Bonneville* designated a series rather than a model or Ford’s *LTD* designation was first used as a model name denoting a luxury interior trim on the *Galaxie* in 1965 and then changed into a series designation in 1967. Most of the names in my corpus of 12241 American car names successively occupied both slots in the syntagma, series designation as well as model designation. Additionally, this fourth position might also be regarded as a ragbag for all kinds of information. Often, it contains an engine designation, *Six*, *V-8*, etc. or a designation which refers to a certain body type. The designations *Chevrolet Nomad station wagon* or *Plymouth Suburban station wagon* must be regarded as a tautology as *Nomad* and *Suburban* denote the station wagons of these manufacturers.

The last position in the syntagma of American automobile designations is usually occupied by the body type designation. This designation is in contrast to the designations of manufacturer, series and model a common noun rather than a trade name. That it is intended and understood as such can easily be seen from the fact that it is usually spelt in small letters while the other designations are marked off by the use of capitals. The use of a common noun in connection with a brand name is common practise not only in the automobile industry, in Steenbergen’s (1965: 329) corpus of Dutch brand names for various products 35,29% of them were used in connection with a descriptive common noun. The reason for this practise is basically a legal one: in order to prevent trade names from degenerating into generic terms advertising experts advise manufacturers to “support” trade names by a common noun that enters into a determinant-determinatum relationship with the trade name.

The most conspicuous feature in the syntagma of American automobile designations is the unusual item order. “[...], a *syntagma* is a combination of full linguistic signs, which are in a determinant/determinatum relationship to each other. [...] In a word-formation syntagma, in English and other Germanic languages, the determinant [...] normally precedes the determinatum [...]” (Lipka, 1990: 79). For Marchand and

those scholars that follow him the determinatum is, from a semantic point of view, "the element whose range of applicability is limited by the determinant" (Marchand, 1969: 11), and from a syntactic point of view, it is "that element of the syntagma which is dominant in that it can stand for the whole syntagma in all positions." (Marchand, 1969: 12). Determinatum and determinant are roughly equivalent with the terms "head" and "modifier" as used by the London School of Grammar, for instance in the *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et. al., 1985). The normal item order "determinatum following determinant" is only partly found in automobile designations, however. The determinant (dt)/determinatum (dm) relationship in a noun phrase<sup>4</sup> like *1958 Pontiac Star Chief Catalina four-door hardtop* can be analysed as follows:

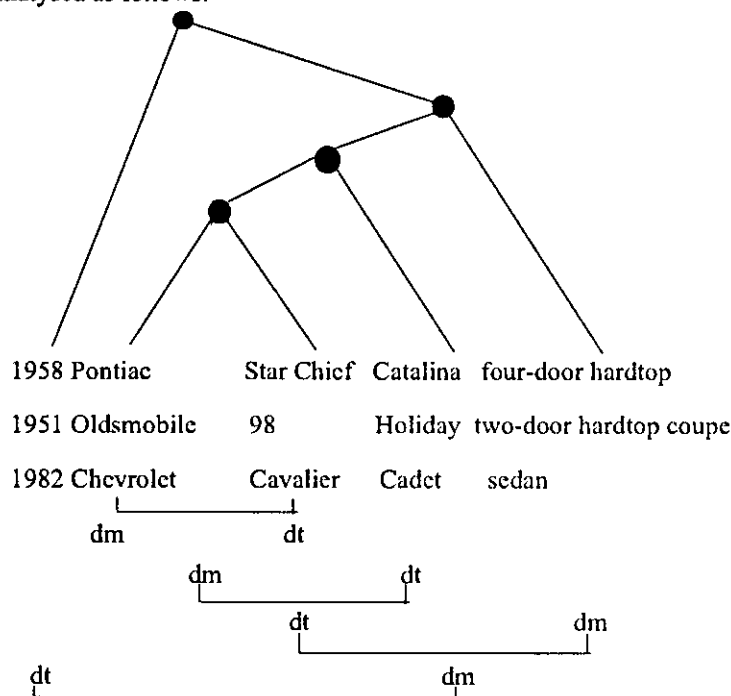


Figure 1: The normal hierarchical structure of automobile designations

There is nothing exceptional in the way a numeral (*1958*; *1951*; *1982*) premodifies a noun phrase (*Pontiac Star Chief Catalina four-door hardtop*; *Oldsmobile 98 Holiday*

*two-door hardtop coupe*; *Chevrolet Cavalier Cadet sedan*) and a noun phrase (*Pontiac Star Chief Catalina*; *Oldsmobile 98 Holiday*; *Chevrolet Cavalier Cadet*) premodifies another noun phrase (*four-door hardtop*<sup>5</sup>; *two-door hardtop coupe*; *sedan*) as we would expect the determinatum to follow the determinant in these cases. With *four-door hardtop* (*two-door hardtop coupe*; *sedan*) as the head of the whole noun phrase its word order complies with the general grammatical rules of complex nominals. Within these noun phrases there are two other premodifying noun phrases, however, *Pontiac Star Chief Catalina* (*Oldsmobile 98 Holiday*; *Chevrolet Cavalier Cadet*) and *Pontiac Star Chief* (*Oldsmobile 98*; *Chevrolet Cavalier*) the word order of which is decidedly odd as in these cases the determinant follows the determinatum.

*The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et.al., 1985:1238ff) only knows of postmodification by finite clause, by non-finite clause and by prepositional phrases with a minor pattern in which a noun can postmodify another noun. The formation type given that comes closest to the car name syntagma is called "postposed 'mode' qualifier" of the type *Lobster Newburg* under the heading "minor types of postmodification" (Quirk et.al., 1985: 1296):

Though virtually confined to cuisine (rather than mere cooking), it is moderately productive within these limits, perhaps especially in Am[erican]E[n]glish. In Br[itish] E[n]glish one finds *veal paprika* and many others, but there is some resistance to this type of postposition with other than French lexical items, as in *pâté maison*, *sole bonne femme*.

This minor type is thus not restricted to "cuisine words" but is the major pattern in the formation of automobile designations!

One might argue that *Pontiac Star Chief* (*Oldsmobile 98*; *Chevrolet Cavalier*) should be analysed along quite different lines, namely, as a compound of the type *bloodstain* (cf. Quirk et.al., 1985: 1574) consisting of noun<sub>1</sub> and noun<sub>2</sub> and having the meaning "noun<sub>1</sub> [produces/yields] noun<sub>2</sub>". Thus, *Pontiac Star Chief* (*Oldsmobile 98*; *Chevrolet Cavalier*) could be paraphrased as "Pontiac produces Star Chiefs" ("Oldsmobile produces 98s", "Chevrolet produces Cavaliers") and would show the normal determinant-determinatum order. The problem with this analysis is that *Pontiac* is like all manufacturer designations a polysemous noun denoting a certain "automobile maker" but also a "car made by that automobile maker" and that in the case of *Pontiac Star Chief*, *Pontiac* is used in the later meaning as can easily be shown by the fact that we can refer to a given Pontiac Star Chief also as *that Pontiac*. And, of course, there is no way to explain *Star Chief Catalina* (*98 Holiday*; *Cavalier Cadet*)

as *"Star Chief produces Catalinas"* (*"98 produces Holidays"*; *"Cavalier produces Cadets"*). The second problem with this analysis would be that the term *Star Chief* is owned - or exclusively used - by Pontiac so that there is no *\*Ford Star Chief*, *\*Plymouth Star Chief* or *\*Hudson Star Chief* as there are *chocolate stains*, *wine stains* or *mud stains*. Instead, *Star Chief* modifies the meaning of *Pontiac* in opposition to *Pontiac Bonneville*, *Pontiac Chieftain*, *Pontiac Firebird* etc. and *Catalina* determines *Star Chief* in opposition to the *Star Chief Custom*, *Star Chief Safari*, *Star Chief Transcontinental* etc.

A further possibility to explain the unusual item order in automobile designations as not that unusual would be to interpret the syntagma as an appositive one because in apposition the defined element frequently precedes the defining one (cf. Quirk et. al., 1985: 1304). Quirk et.al. (1985:1301) give the following definition: "For linguistic units to be APPOSITIVES, i.e. in apposition, they must normally be identical in reference." The problem with apposition is that scholars are not unanimous about the question which linguistic units should be regarded as appositive syntagmas. Quirk et. al. (1985: 1302) give three conditions that have to be met by linguistic units to be regarded as being in full apposition:

- (i) Each of the appositives can be separately omitted without affecting the acceptability of the sentence.
- (ii) Each fulfils the same syntactic function in the resultant sentences.
- (iii) It can be assumed that there is no difference between the original sentence and either of the resultant sentences in extralinguistic reference.

In a sentence like

*She sold her Pontiac Star Chief.*

all these conditions are met. Both sentences

*She sold her Pontiac.*

and

*She sold her Star Chief.*

are acceptable. In both sentences *Pontiac* and *Star Chief* have the same syntactic function, they are the head of the noun phrase that functions as direct object, and it can be assumed that the extralinguistic reference of all three sentences is the same. As either element of the appositive construction is omissible, as both belong to the same syntactic class and as both belong to the same information unit<sup>6</sup> we could regard the



syntactic relationship between manufacturer and series designation and series and model designation as “full, strict and restrictive apposition” exemplified by Quirk et al. (1985: 1305) with the sentence

*My friend Anna was here last night.*

Meyer (1992: 50) uses slightly different criteria to distinguish between apposition and postmodification:

- 1 The first unit of the apposition can be deleted.
- 2 The second unit of the apposition can be deleted.
- 3 The two units can be interchanged.

The more of these criteria are met the closer a given syntagma is to the apposition end of the gradient of apposition to postmodification. In the case of *Pontiac Star Chief* (*Oldsmobile 98*, *Chevrolet Cavalier*) and *Star Chief Catalina* (*98 Holiday*, *Cavalier Cadet* etc.) either unit can be deleted but interchange is, if not impossible, very uncommon:

? *a Star Chief Pontiac* (*98 Oldsmobile*, *Cavalier Chevrolet*)

? *a Catalina Star Chief* (*Holiday 98*, *Cadet Cavalier*)

This means to say that the syntagma of “manufacturer designation + series designation + model designation” is closer to the apposition end of the gradient than to the postmodification end.

It is quite satisfactory to interpret the uncommon word order in automobile designations as due to apposition as long as we are only looking at nouns that are used as such names but in a number of cases adjectives are used as series or model designations, too. In names like *Chrysler Imperial*, *Pontiac Deluxe* or *Plymouth Valiant* the second element is according to the OED only institutionalised as adjective. If it is to be interpreted as part of an appositive construction it first has to be converted from adjective to noun. Actually, only regarding them as nouns derived by zero-morpheme allows for sentences like

*She sold her Valiant.*

*The postwar Imperial began as an extra fancy Chrysler.* (Gunnell, 1992: 236)

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that all the examples given (others are *Packard Corporate*, *Dodge Intrepid*, *Buick Regal* or *Plymouth Reliant*) are adjectives

of French origin and that there is a minor word order pattern in English, also borrowed from French, in which an attributively used adjective follows the head of the noun phrase in which it functions as (post)modifier. This is especially true of a number of institutionalised expressions such as *president elect*, *heir apparent*, *attorney general*, *court martial* etc. (cf. Quirk et.al., 1985: 418). It is especially interesting to note that the word order in products of one and the same company may vary with etymology as in *Zimmer Classic* vs. *Golden Zimmer*.

Thus, all our attempts to explain the determinatum-determinant order in automobile designations along the lines of the normal grammar of the noun phrase in general language - be it as noun postmodifying another noun (type: *lobster Newburg*), as verbless compound (type: *bloodstain*), as appositional construction (type: *my friend Anna*) or as adjective postmodifying a noun (type: *president elect*) - remain unsatisfactory to a certain extent. Only if we look at other brand names do we find that there is a fair number of them showing this word order pattern that deviates from the word order in other noun phrases in general English. There are tires called *Goodyear Eagle GS-C*, *Goodyear Aquatred* and *Goodyear Wrangler GS-A* (*automobile* 1 (1994), 33), radar detectors called *BEL 625 Super Wideband Ka* (*car and driver* 6 (1993), 97), in which *BEL* stands for the manufacturing company *BEL-TRONICS*, *625* for the model and *Super Wideband Ka* is supposed to be a kind of descriptive term, or *Escort Passport 1000 Laser* and *Escort Passport 3200 WideBand* (*car and driver* 6 (1993), 112), motor oils called *Valvoline High Performance Synthetic* and *Valvoline All-Climate* (*car and driver* 6 (1993), 117) or cigarettes called *Camel*, *Camel Light* and *Camel Special Lights* (*car and driver* 6 (1993), 137). These examples, which have been collected at random, indicate that many other brand names show the same item order in which the designation for the manufacturer, division or distributor is followed by a special model designation which might be further determined by another designation. Of course, only products that are marketed within a "family branding strategy" will exhibit this kind of pattern. Unfortunately, for purposes of comparison, no study of the word order in brand names other than automobile names has come to my attention. All the major ones (e.g. Praninskas, 1968) arbitrarily exclude manufacturer designations so that the problem of word order of course does not even pose itself. In her study of German brand names Römer (1976:62) interprets brand names that have more than one constituent as nominal appositions ("nominale Beifügung"), her examples are car names and brand names of drinks such as *Ford Consul*, *Opel Kadett*, *Opel Rekord*, *Opel Kapitän*, *Opel Admiral*, *Opel Diplomat* and *Asbach Uralt*.

(cognac), *Asbach Soda* (with soda), *Nestle Extra* (dairy products) and *Racke rauchzart* (whisky).

One would like to know why trade names exhibit such strange patterns. I would like to suggest three possible reasons for this phenomenon. There might be a psychological reason. Lysinski (1918) found in a quite early experiment on the memorability of trade names that it was a lot easier for subjects<sup>7</sup> to remember a new trade name when it followed a more general term than was the case with the opposite word order. Unfortunately Lysinski does not talk about more general brand names such as manufacturers designation being followed by a more specific one such as a series or model designation but about the requirement that the generic term should be followed by the brand name. As we have seen exactly this is not the case within the syntagma of automobile designations.

Another possible explanation is that trade name creators might want to confer additional prestige on their product by making them as similar to titles as possible. That the choice of trade names is often motivated by considerations of prestige has again and again been noted (cf. e.g. Praninskas, 1968: 81), titles often carry prestige and thus, one might reason that a word order modelled on the exceptional one of titles (*Lord Nelson*, *Father Brown*, *Mrs Johnson*, *Queen Elizabeth* etc.) might also enhance the status of a given brand.

Again, I think that however ingenious such an idea might be it cannot account for the fact that a majority of trade names with more than one constituent follow this pattern. Rather, I would like to suggest an intralinguistic cause as the most plausible one. Initially, trade names were premodified by the name of the manufacturer, which was naturally used in the genitive, in the course of time the genitive marker was lost or voluntarily left out, and once the pattern had been established new coinages followed it, too. A case in point is the name change of *Borden's*, a large, diversified international corporation with American roots, into *Borden*, the various stages of which are described by Parcels (1981: 206ff). An example of a car that carries the genitive marker on its nameplate is the *Basson's Star*. The genitive phrase can occasionally still be found in literature e.g. *Ford's Model T* (Duke, 1978: 28), and it is frequent in early advertisements: The first used-car advertisement (*Motocycle* June 1896, quoted from Anderson, 1950: 278), for instance, reads "For sale. One of Hildebrand & Wolfmuller's Motocycles."

Everything that has been said so far about the word order in automobile designations has to be qualified in two respects. First, it has not always been that fixed as it might appear from the outline given above. Especially early automobiles for which only manufacturer and model designation were used might exhibit determinant-determinatum order such as *Model T Ford*, *Model O Hudson*, *Model K Cadillac* or *Aero Willys* but even in early names this order is less common than the other way round. Stylistic variation also accounts for changes in word order. Yates (1974), for instance, refers to one and the same car as *Oldsmobile Rocket 88*, *Oldsmobile Rocket*, *Oldsmobile 88*, *Olds, 88*, but also as *Rocket Olds*. Occasionally manufacturers introduce deviating word order, too, such as *Cadillac Renaissance Coupe de Ville* and *Cadillac Seville Caballero*<sup>8</sup>: here, *Coupe de Ville* and *Seville* denote the series, while *Renaissance* and *Caballero* refer to a special edition of either series. Thus, in the first case the more specific element precedes the more general one while it follows it in the second case.

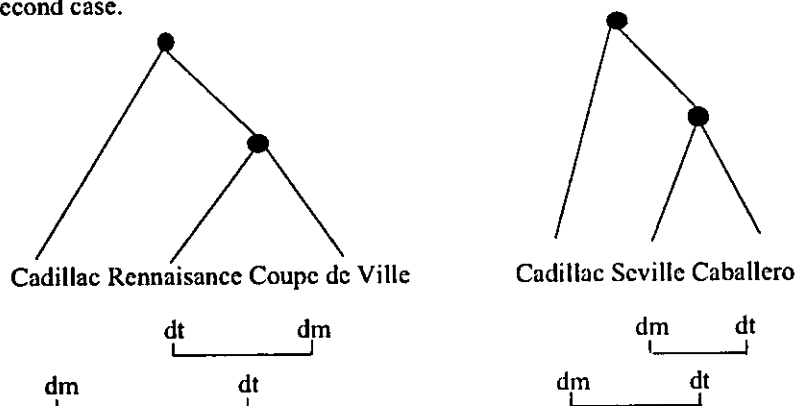


Figure 2: Deviating and normal hierarchical structure of automobile designations

Another example is *Cimarron* by *Cadillac*, where a common pattern of the English noun phrase is observed: a noun phrase functioning as head is postmodified by a prepositional phrase.

This usage has been attributed to the fact that the division felt a little bit uncomfortable with the first compact car it set out to manufacture in 1982 (cf. Flammang, 1989: 83) - it soon changed the name into *Cadillac Cimarron*, however. On the other hand, it should be noted that not every instance that looks like variation actually is variation: *Chrysler Crown Imperial* and *Chrysler Imperial Crown* refer to two different vehicles,

the first is a model of the *Crown* series, the later a model of the *Imperial* series. The same kind of confusion arises between *Buick Regal Somerset* and *Buick Somerset Regal*.

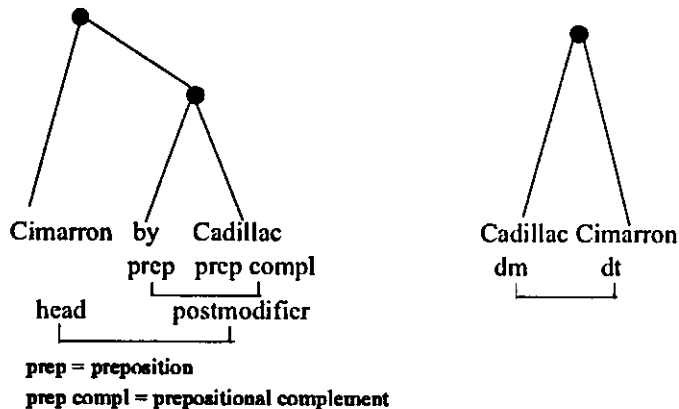


Figure 3: Deviating and normal hierarchical structure of automobile designations

The second qualification of the word order pattern set out above is that the various constituents do only seldom appear as a string - even if more than one constituent is actually present - in one of the major settings where automobile names are used: on the cars themselves. On the vehicles themselves the various constituents of the name are usually placed at some distance from each other so that it is not necessarily possible to make out which element modifies which one. The *1957 Pontiac Star Chief Custom Bonneville two-door convertible*, for instance, displayed the word *Bonneville* twice, on either rear fender, the words *fuel injection*, also twice, on either front fender, and the word *Pontiac* once on the back and once on the front of the car as part of the Pontiac emblem. The most established pattern is to display series and/or model designation on the front or rear fenders (usually on both), on the pillar between rear and side window (usually on both) or on the trunk lid, while the manufacturer designation is most commonly placed on the hood and/or the trunk lid.

In most contexts where automobile designations are used the problem of word order does not pose itself to that extent as it has been described above for the example *1957 Pontiac Star Chief Catalina four-door hardtop* (*1951 Oldsmobile 98 Holiday two-door hardtop coupe*; *1982 Chevrolet Cavalier Cadet sedan*) because the use of the

various constituents is largely optional. Thus, all the following variations would be acceptable:

*She sold her four-door hardtop.*

*She sold her Catalina.*

*She sold her Star Chief.*

*She sold her Pontiac.*

*\*She sold her 1957.*

All the constituents can be used on their own except the model year designation. "This restriction is pragmatic; it can be traced to the fact that simply giving the model year of the car is not informative enough." (Aronoff, 1981: 332). Additionally, only two, three or four elements instead of all five may be used in any conceivable combination. Aronoff (1981: 332) gives the following phrase structure rule for American car names:

car name → (year) (make) (line) (model) (body type)

Apart from automobile catalogues and information brochures it is quite rare to find all the five possible elements present in a single phrase. An analysis of the constituents used in the automobile names in twenty different printed automobile advertisements of single or double page length picked at random yielded the results shown in table

As can be seen no single instance of the use of all five constituents in one phrase could be recorded, and the majority (66,67%) of the designations used are made up of no more than one element. The polynominal strings, which have been said to be one of the major characteristics of modern trade names (e.g. Schippan, 1989: 51), and the constituent order of which was discussed above, are only of very restricted occurrence and they get reduced in many contexts. They are a problem of English for specific purposes as used in automobile catalogs, manuals and brochures rather than for general English as used in advertisements, fan-literature, the numerous car magazines or even more so in speech.

number of constituents	types	tokens	total	%
5	year+manufacturer + series + model + body type		0	0
4	year + manufacturer + series + model	<i>1993 Ford Escort GT(2x)</i> <i>1993FordRangerSplash</i> <i>1994 GMC Sonoma Highrider</i>	4	2,26
3	year + manufacturer + series (1x) year + series + model (2x) year + series + body type (1x) manufacturer + series + model (12x)	<i>1993 Saturn SLI</i> - <i>1993 Taurus SHO (2x)</i> <i>1993 Regal Sedan</i> - <i>Chevy Camaro Z28</i> <i>Dodge Shadow ES</i> <i>Eagle Vision TSi</i> <i>Ford Escort GT</i> <i>Ford Ranger Splash (3x)</i> <i>Ford Taurus SHO</i> <i>GMC Yukon 4x4</i> with deviant word-order <i>90th Anniversary Buick LeSabre (2x)</i> <i>Shadow ES - The New Dodge</i>	16	9,04

2	year + series (1x) manufacturer + series (16x)	1994 Corvette Buick Park Avenue Chevrolet Corvette Chevy Camarro (2x) Eagle Vision Ford Mustang Ford Ranger Lincoln Mark VIII (3x) Oldsmobile Achieva Saturn SLI (3x) with deviating word order: Intrepid - The New Dodge Achieva by Oldsmobile	39	22,03
	manufacturer + body type (1x) series + model (13x)	Saturn car - Camaro Z28 (3x) Escort GT Grand Am 9t Intrepid ES Mustang 9T (2x) Seville STS (2x) Taurus SHO with deviating word order: 90th Anniversary LeSabre ES Shadow		
	series + body type (6x)	Mustang Convertible Mustang Coupe Regal Sedan (4x)		
	model + model (2x)	Splash 4x2 Splash 4x4		
1	year (0x) manufacturer (65x) series (36x) - model (8x) body type (9x)	e.g. Buick, Eagle, Ford e.g. Achieva, Corvette, LeSabre e.g. Highrider, SHO, Z28 e.g. car, compact pickup, Sports Sedan	118	66,67
		total	177	100

Table 1: Constituent usage in advertisements

## Notes

1 If not indicated otherwise all the car names and the information about a certain automobile are taken from the three volumes of the Standard Catalog of American Cars (Flammang, 1989; Gunnell, 1992; Kimes/Clark, 1989).



2 These size classifications do not compare with European sizes: there are virtually no European cars that would classify as "full size" for Americans, even a Rolls-Royce is at best "intermediate size" (cf. Sobel, 1984:23). The smallest category, sub-compacts, would include a car like the VW Golf (*VW Rabbit* in the US). While in Europe car size is categorised according to cubic capacity (below 1000 cc: small car; 1000-2000 cc: mid size; more than 2000 cc: full size), the criteria in the USA are comparative (rather than absolute) weight and wheelbase. The descriptive term *compact* itself exemplifies this difference in the perception of car size: "[...] it was he [= George Mason, Nash-Kelvinator manager who introduced the Rambler] who decided not to call it [=Rambler] a small car, perhaps because he knew American buyers frowned on the word in most things, and cars, in particular. Rather, the Rambler would be advertised as a 'compact'." (Sobel, 1984: 55).

3 Special editions are common with all kinds of products but they are especially well-known with automobiles as is shown by the following subtitle of an article on computers: "Sondermodelle gibt es nicht nur bei Autos: Auch PC-Hersteller bauen Spezialserien." (Kleinwort, 1993: 128).

4 Following Levi (1978: 39ff) and Leisi (1985: 116ff) I do not attempt to differentiate between nominal compounds and free syntactic phrases in automobile designations. The terms *noun phrase* and *complex nominal* will be used.

5 Here I am only concerned with the relationship of the various constituents with each other, not with the fact that these constituents themselves may be complex nominals (*four-door hardtop*, *Star Chief*).

6 *Pontiac Star Chief* as opposed to any other Pontiac we know of. Apposition can - like relative clauses, which it strongly resembles, - occur as restrictive and non-restrictive modification (cf. Quirk. et. al., 1985:1303f).

7 The experiment was conducted with native speakers of German but as German and English noun phrases exhibit basically the same word order, it might be possible to transfer his results to English trade names as well.

8 Neither vehicle is a regular Cadillac, both are conversions that came from Wisco Corporation in 1981.

9 *automobile* 6(1993): advertisements for Oldsmobile Achieva (pp.16f), Buick Park Avenue (34), Eagle Vision (61), Ford Taurus (88f), Dodge Shadow (140)

*automobile* 1(1994): advertisements for GMC Sonoma (14), Chevrolet Corvette (30f), Buick Regal (42), Lincoln Mark VIII (136f), Dodge Intrepid (138).

*car and driver* 6(1993): advertisements for Chevy Camaro (2f), GMC Yukon (78f), Pontiac Grand Am (80), Ford Ranger (86), Ford Escort (106f), Cadillac Seville (110f), Saturn SL1 (148f), Buick LeSabre (154f).

*car and driver* 9(1993): advertisement for Buick Regal (160).

*Mustang & Fords* 5(1994): advertisement for Ford Mustang (2f).

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