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Is toponymy necessary?*

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Like other areas of linguistic study, toponymy as a domain of analysis does not present itself as being overly reflective of its own assumptions. I ask whether a sub-category or sub-analysis dedicated to toponymy is required at all if we analyse toponyms, landscape terms, and geographical names within the scope of general linguistic analysis (lexical semantics, morphosyntax, and phonology). Or put succinctly: Is toponymy necessary? Data from a longitudinal study of Norfolk Island and Kangaroo Island toponymy indicate there are no marked aberrancies in either sets of data which cannot be accounted for by either more general Norf'k (the Norfolk Island language) or English rules. I conclude by suggesting future studies in landscape terminology should be more mindful of the requirements of the linguistic study of toponymy, especially within lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonological concerns, rather than just within the semantic domain.

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Language and place

In a 2008 lecture in an advanced course in grammar, my former PhD supervisor summarised his opinion of morphophonology and morphophonemics: 'they are a crock'. He opined that if one did one's morphology and phonology adequately, creating another sphere of analysis was unnecessary. In a similar manner, I offer a critical theoretical appraisal of toponymy. I consider whether the grammatical aspects of toponymy, *not* the historical, cultural, cartographic, and geographical implications, should already be incorporated within other linguistic analyses.

As a subset of proper names and a possible consideration within the repertoire of linguistic analysis (Coates 2006, 2011), toponymy is not overly reflective about its own presuppositions. There is a dearth in the toponymy literature of work

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dedicated to unravelling the intricacies of the epistemology of this interdisciplinary area of study, the assumptions upon which the field rests, and the metaphors toponymists live by. In this discussion piece I concern myself with the question: If we conduct adequate formal linguistic analyses (lexical semantics, morphosyntax, and phonology) on toponyms, toponymies, landscape terms, and geographical names *within* and under the rubric of other more general linguistic analysis, is a sub-category or sub-analysis dedicated to toponymy required at all? Expressly: *Is toponymy necessary?* As a toponymist asking this question, I may appear to be pulling the carpet out from underneath my very own feet, and simultaneously jeopardising my own bread and butter. On the contrary, I am actually applying myself to what I believe has been a neglected concern within linguistics, onomastics, landscape studies, the ethnography of place-naming, and even lexicography: a detailed questioning of the philosophical basis for the placement and application of toponymy within linguistics. While this question may be relevant to other fields, my presentation is wholly linguistic.

Beginning work in toponymy some years ago, I have sought through the linguistics, geography, onomastics, and anthropology literature searching for appropriate toponym typologies, data division techniques, and methodology and theory on how to conduct a toponymic analysis within linguistics. I have witnessed changing trends move from the historically and salvage-focused work on indigenous (Australian) placenames, published most recently in Clark et al. (2014), to the more cognitively directed ethnophysiography of Turk & Stea (2014) and Mark et al.'s (2011) study of *Landscape in Language*. Juliette Huber's paper in *Language Sciences* (2013, 41) continues this empiricisation of landscape terminology through the lens of both taxonomic categorisation and grammatical analysis. I contend I have garnered some applicable and relevant methodological and theoretical work and have used these to the best of my ability in my own toponymic analyses. My assertion as to the ontological and philosophical necessity and possibility of there even needing to exist a domain within linguistic analysis labelled toponymy is because, I believe, and have experienced through empirical research, that creating a category of toponyms within a language's or languages' toponymy assumes, and is only necessary, when appropriate pre-theoretical taxonomies and theoretically driven analyses have not done the required work. That is, after years of working in toponymy, I do not conceive of placenames, toponyms, and landscape terms as offering anything necessarily lexically and grammatically unique not covered in any other competent linguistic analysis.

Does toponymy actually exist?

I recently came across a quote by Le Page (1998: 48):

> I have come to realize more and more the extent to which academics, as they become authorities on subjects, are at the same time creating the universe which they study, the subject matter of their discourse. They evolve their own perceptual framework and then fill it with their percepts.

Although linguists and toponymists, myself included, assert that toponymy comprises a distinct conceptual and semantic domain *separate* from other lexical and grammatical domains of language, I query how distinct this domain actually is. Do we or have we separated (or neglected) placenames, place-namings (toponymies), and landscape terms and their many categories, e.g. 'mountain', 'hill', 'river', and 'lake', from what we consider to be bona fide language (e.g. vocabulary, morphosyntax, phonology)? Applying Le Page's claim to toponymy, is separating toponyms a neat conceptual means to create 'the universe' of toponymy and then fill it with our own ideological percepts? Are toponyms as distinct from other domains and levels of language as toponymists would have us believe? Do placenames even belong in the realm of linguistic analysis at all? Since toponyms seem to be able to be exposed to formal morphological, syntactic, and phonological analysis, why is there any need to separate landscape features in formal linguistic analysis? I query the claim that the 'place semantics' attested and applied to placenames leads to the insistence that such names are different from more formal aspects of linguistic analysis (see papers in Mark et al. 2011).

The mere existence of a domain of linguistic analysis termed toponymy implies quintessence and distinction. Moreover, the driving force of categorisation and the ability to produce acceptable and reliable tools for delineating and locating placenames within a language's lexicon questions the validity of separating or including placenames in different and separate linguistic analyses to other lexical domains such as animal, biotic, and personal names, or the semantic analysis of common nouns.

If toponyms are linguistically unique, and specifically semantically unique, how should landscape terms be assigned a separate category within linguistic analysis — and if so, under which and whose criteria? I present a summary of all the toponymic patterns based in data I have collected in two island environments in Australia — more than 1000 placenames on Norfolk Island (South Pacific) and more than 200 on Kangaroo Island (South Australia). These data hold for placenames, fishing ground names, house names, and road names, and are derived from Nash 2013 (49–50ff).

Rules for English language toponyms on Norfolk Island and Kangaroo Island are:

1. A single English (proper) noun is productive, e.g. Cascade, Codrington, Arcadia, Possum.
2. (Proper) noun + (generic) noun (+ noun) is productive, e.g. Headstone (monolexemes), Pole Point, Charlotte Field, Ball Bay, Hurlstone Park (bilexemes), Selwyn Pine Reserve (trilexemes).
3. Numeral (+ noun) (+ noun) is productive (e.g. Nine Acre Piece, One Hundred Acre, 77, Four Square.
4. Adjective + noun is productive (e.g. Middlegate (monolexemes), Big House, Rocky Point, New Ground, Bloody Bridge (bilexemes)).
5. Adjective + noun + noun is productive, e.g. New Farm West.
6. Definite article + adjective (+ generic noun) is productive, e.g. The Big Flat.
7. Adjective + (generic) noun is productive, e.g. Little Cascade, Fat Gulley.
8. (Proper) noun + possessive + noun is productive, e.g. Sheres Gulley, Clitchers Corner, Burns Farm, Collins Head, Steels Point.
9. Generic noun + proper noun is productive, e.g. Mount Pitt, Lake Ayliffe.
10. Proper noun (+ proper noun) + possessive is productive, e.g. Barney Duffys, Ragseys.
11. There are fishing grounds that have arisen through humour, e.g. Oodles (where you catch oodles of fish), No Trouble Reef, No Reason, and Horse and Cart.

Rules for Norf'k, the Norfolk Island language, and some idiosyncratic English language toponyms on Norfolk Island are:

1. Houses can be named using a single Norf'k lexeme, e.g. Hettae.
2. House names can consist of Norf'k words, e.g. Auwas Hoem, or a combination of English and Norf'k words, e.g. Auwas Paradise Roof, Truly Auwas, Dar Shed, Kettle se Boil.
3. Norf'k house names can be exclamations, e.g. Hassette!!
4. Norf'k fishing ground names and house names can use the common Norf'k double possessive form, e.g. Dar Side fer Honeys. Other syntactic variants occur in connection to the obligatory semantic component, e.g. Powders can occur as Dar Side fer Powders or Dar fer Powders.
5. ((English/Norf'k) definite article) + noun (+ noun) is productive, e.g. The Crack, The Gardens, The Thumb, Ar Saddle, Dar Milky Tree, Dar Fig Valley, Dar Boomerang, Convict Store, Offie Bank (offie is the Norf'k name for trevally fish).
6. Norf'k fishing grounds can take spatial prepositions, e.g. Up the Norwest, Out orn ar Milky Tree, Down to the East, Down ar Graveyard.

It appears from these rules, especially the first set of rules which are English language toponyms, that there is nothing lexically or grammatically aberrant about Norfolk Island and Kangaroo Island (English) toponyms. These rules are common to any other rules of English grammar, although names like No Reason, 77, and Horse & Cart are not typical of English placenames. While many Norf'k toponyms do not resemble English names, the Norf'k toponymic patterns are not aberrant in any way from other Norf'k forms. Even the Norf'k names Side ar Whale Es (place where the whale is) and Johnny Nigger Bun Et (Johnny the Negro Burnt It), which are not accounted for in the above rules, are perfectly grammatical in Norf'k. The grammatical rules of the Norf'k and English toponyms of Norfolk Island and the English toponyms of Kangaroo Island need not be treated separately from other lexical and grammatical domains; their forms can be accounted for under more formal rules of Norf'k and English grammar.

Is toponymy possible? Future possibilities

I do not doubt toponymy has a place within historical linguistics and any other area of language and landscape studies, nor do I believe toponymy has no efficacy within linguistic studies of landscape terminology. It would be advantageous to establish to what extent toponyms are a subset of proper names and whether this is the case only by the nature of the referent (e.g. Felecan 2013). Whether all noun phrases can be toponyms and whether all toponyms can be noun phrases should be of future interest to linguists and toponymists.

I have published on the placement and efficacy of toponymic analysis in order to understand the lexical, grammatical, and historical emplacement of language within the specific social and ecological domains where languages are or were spoken. This is where I am convinced toponymy *is* possible, effective, and beneficial, and that there is the potential for exhaustive studies of all aspects of place-naming. This is because, like other domains not normally of primary concern for linguists such as the analysis of personal names and spatial language, toponymy offers insight into how languages actually work. I posit looking at one single element such as toponymy — and indeed any element generally considered peripheral to linguistic analysis — may give a hint as to how the whole system appears. This approach is typical of a parameter rich, conclusion poor approach to linguistics.

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