

Norf'k placenames and creole toponymy

Joshua Nash

University of Adelaide

1. Introduction

In this short note I consider the role toponyms in the creole or language contact environment can play in helping creolists understand the nature of lexical change and social and ecological adaptation in small (island) contact languages. The toponyms I discuss are from the language of Norfolk Island (South Pacific), officially written 'Norf'k' since 2004 after the establishment of the Norfolk Island Language (Norf'k) Act 2004 (Administration of Norfolk Island 2004). This is an endangered contact language (Garrett 2006, UNESCO 2007) I have worked on during several fieldwork stints over several years. I analyze the acceptability of variant placename forms given by native speakers of a select corpus of Norf'k toponyms, toponyms which are grammatically quite distinct from English toponyms.

Norf'k toponyms serve differing social and orientation functions to English toponyms and knowledge of these toponyms is a strong marker of insider identity and linguistic delineation within the Norf'k speaking community. Socially, knowing Norf'k toponyms is a power and status marker within Norfolk's insular society. Regarding orientation, Norf'k toponyms are essential orientation tools for talking about place and spatial relationships on Norfolk.

Norf'k stems from the language which emerged on Pitcairn Island from 1790 in a small community comprised of Tahitian and English speakers. All the Pitcairn Islanders were moved to Norfolk Island in 1856. This marks the beginning of Norf'k as a form of the language of Pitcairn which has undergone changes due to its transplantation to a new environment.

Like any toponyms, Norf'k toponyms are an important element of the language's referential and denotational lexicon; they demonstrate how names linked to places, people, and events represent a lexical and grammatical history of relationships between people, language, and place within the specific natural, social, and linguistic tapestry of Norfolk Island.

In order to assess the grammatical acceptability of various Norf'k forms, I interviewed 10 informants on Norfolk Island during fieldwork in 2009. Informants

were asked to rank their preferences for well-known Norf’k toponyms like *Ar Side fer Honeys* (‘Honey’s Place’) and *Dar House fer Ma Nobbys* (‘Ma Nobby’s House’). There were six possible constructions for each toponym. The results of this analysis are presented in the tagmemic analysis.

2. Analysis

Many Norf’k toponyms are distinct from English toponyms on Norfolk Island in form and meaning. Some bear little resemblance to English toponyms (Table 1):

Table 1. A select corpus of Norf’k placenames (author’s fieldnotes, 2012)

Name	Notes
<i>Ama’ula Lane</i>	<i>Ama’ula Lane</i> is one of only a few road names using Norf’k words (<i>ama’ula</i> < Tahitian ‘clumsy, careless, slovenly’). The official nature of this road name illustrates an acceptance within the community of the Norfolk Islanders’ Tahitian heritage which began in the 1960s. Norf’k road name generics can take nouns, verbs, and adjectives.
<i>Dar Coop</i> (The [Chicken] Coop)	A rock fishing area at <i>Steels Point</i> on the extreme northeast of Norfolk named as such because the area is shaped like a chicken coop. The form DET + (GENERIC) NOUN is productive, e.g. <i>Dar Cabbage</i> , <i>Dar Mustard</i> (both coastal locations), <i>Dar Porpay Side</i> (literally ‘The Cherry Guava Place’).
<i>Dar House fer Ma Nobbys</i> (Ma Nobby’s House)	A fishing ground to the northwest of Norfolk out past the <i>Captain Cook Monument</i> . It was named such because local Norfolk Islander Ma Nobby’s house is used in lining up the marks. It is approximately three miles offshore and it was named by some of the old fishermen in the early 1900s. This name adheres to the common Norf’k toponym form (see tagmemic analysis).
<i>Out ar Mission</i> (Out at the Melanesian Mission)	This placename and general area close to the western coast of Norfolk refers to the buildings and surrounding area where the Anglican Melanesian Mission once stood and where St. Barnabas Chapel and Bishops Court still remain. The Mission was stationed on Norfolk Island from 1867 to 1920. The pool near Anson Bay Road is known locally as <i>Mission Pool</i> and as <i>The Kerapai</i> in Mota, the lingua franca used by the Melanesian Mission. Other forms such as <i>Out ar Station</i> (Out at the Cable Station) and <i>Out ar Target</i> (Out at the Shooting Range) have also been documented.

Table 1. (continued)

Name	Notes
<i>Fata Fata</i>	<i>Fatafata</i> is a common name for islets formed in the middle of streams and creeks and comes from the Tahitian meaning 'to flatten out'. There is a large <i>fatafata</i> on the top of a valley near in the <i>Shortridge</i> area. This <i>fatafata</i> became known by the proper name <i>Fata Fata</i> . It is one of only a few placenames containing only Norf'k words. The only other example of a reduplicated Tahitian form functioning as a Norf'k toponym is the diving site name <i>Tai-Tai</i> (< Tahitian <i>taitai</i> adjective 'salty, brackish, bitter, flat, tasteless').
<i>Johnny Nigger Bun Et</i> (Johnny Nigger Burnt It)	This is an area on the cliff face in the northern part of Norfolk towards <i>Red Stone</i> . It was named after one of the several African-American whalers who came to Norfolk.. There used to be a lot of grass and bracken fern in this area. Johnny was looking for pigs, possibly in a group, and they burnt the bracken to aid their hunt. This form is uncommon although it appears to be productive. Other Norf'k toponyms with predicates are <i>Side Eddy Find ar Anchor</i> and <i>Side ar Whale Es</i> (see entry below).
<i>Parloo Park</i>	<i>Parloo</i> (<Tahitian 'to masturbate') is an example of a Tahitian word in Norf'k used to describe taboo things, concepts, and actions. <i>Parloo Park</i> is located in the extreme southwest of Norfolk in the <i>Old Hundred Acres Reserve</i> . The name is known to very few people and mainly to the older generation. It is the place young boys and girls used to get up to a bit of mischief, particularly on their first date. The form (Tahitian/Norf'k) SPECIFIC + GENERIC is productive in at least two more cases — <i>Gudda Bridge</i> (<i>gudda</i> < Tahitian 'to fuck'), <i>Horsepiss Bend</i> (<i>horsepiss</i> < Norf'k 'name of a weed so named because the flowers smell of horse urine when squashed').
<i>Side ar Whale Es</i> (literally, 'place the whale is')	A land feature known to few people which when looked at from a distance resembles a whale. This is not a common form, although similar names such as <i>Side Monty Drown</i> ('The Place Where Monty Drowned') and <i>Side Eddy Find Ar Anchor</i> ('The Place Eddy Found an Anchor') have been documented.

In order to consider what analyzing Norf'k placenames may offer creolistics in terms of the extent to which their forms are related to the social ecology of Norfolk Island, e.g. who knows and uses Norf'k toponyms and what function they serve, I analyze what I term the 'common Norf'k toponym form'. Because of the slot-like nature of this form of which there are many variants, a tagmemic analysis is appropriate. I use tagmemics and a description of slots to indicate whether tagmemes are obligatory or optional. In order to test the acceptability of variations in this form, i.e. *Dar ... fer ...-s*, Norf'k speakers were questioned about the acceptability

of the six forms. I use the topographical name *Dar Pine fer Robinsons* (Robinson's Pine) because it conforms to the form and is a well-known toponym.

There are at most five tagmemes in this form. However, the patterns can be applied to any other Norf'k toponym, comprising the form *Dar...fer...-s*. Of the six forms presented below, only the first three were acceptable by my informants, for all toponyms adhering to the common Norf'k toponym form:

- (1) *Dar Pine fer Robinsons*
- (2) *Ar Pine fer Robinsons*
- (3) *Pine fer Robinsons*
- (4) **Robinsons Pine*
- (5) **Ar/Dar Pine fer Robinson*
- (6) **Robinson Pine*

Dar Pine fer Robinsons differs significantly from the suggestion of the English 'Robinson's Pine', which has only been observed in one secondary map source (Buffett n.d.). Although an equivalent English translation of the Norf'k name rather than the literal 'The Pine of Robinsons', it was not considered an acceptable Norf'k form because it did not conform to the common form. What is more interesting linguistically and ethnographically is that this particular pine growing on the northeast coast of Norfolk would have been known mainly to onshore and offshore fishermen, the majority of whom are Norf'k speakers. This is because *Dar Pine fer Robinsons* and the associated offshore fishing ground name *Pine fer Robinsons* was used primarily for the purposes of fishing and navigation. This name has been used entirely by Norf'k speakers, so using the English 'Robinson's Pine' would not only seem to appear as not conforming to the system, but comprises a variant of the name which would not be considered Norf'k.

The use of *ar* or *dar* has no structural, functional, or semantic significance apart from possible pragmatic marking of specificity by the use of *dar*, e.g. 'which pine? *Dar Pine fer Robinsons*'. The form of (3) indicates that *ar* and *dar* are optional. 'Robinsons Pine' is considered English by Norf'k speakers and (4) and (5) are not considered possible Norf'k names. The nucleus of the common Norf'k toponym form consists of five tagmemes with a specific function for each:

Formula:	Article + Generic Noun + Preposition + Proper Noun + Possessive				
TAGMEME	1	2	3	4	5
	(a) <i>Dar</i>	(b) <i>Ar</i>	<i>Pine</i>	<i>fer</i>	<i>Robinson -s</i>
	The	Pine	of	Robinson	POSS

1. (a) *Dar* (b) *Ar*: Form is optional. There are two phonological variants but the forms in free variation are subject to the pragmatic constraint marking specificity. Inclusion is optional except when the conditions in (2) occur.
2. *Pine*: Inclusion is optional based on a key cultural understanding that the place being referred to is known. If excluded, tagmeme 1a is obligatory.
3. *Fer*: It is obligatory in all cases except when only tagmeme four and five are present. Realization does not change form.
4. *Robinson*: Inclusion is obligatory. This tagmeme is always a male or female proper noun, the combination of a name status term like *Ma* or *Pa* and a proper noun or nickname.
5. *-s*: Inclusion is obligatory. Realization does not change form.

Possible syntactic variations are:

(7) *Dar Pine fer Robinsons*

(8) *Ar Pine fer Robinsons*

(9) *- Pine fer Robinsons*

(10) *Dar - fer Robinsons*

(11) *- - - Robinsons*

Forms which are not possible are:

(12) **Ar - fer Robinsons*

(13) **Dar Pine fer Robinson*

(14) **Dar - fer Robinson*

(15) **Ar - fer Robinson*

The tagmemic analysis accounts for all toponyms adhering to the common Norf'k toponym form. This system can be applied to generics such as 'side' (place), e.g. *Dar Side fer Honeys*, house, e.g. *Dar House fer Ma Nobbys*, and pool, e.g. *Dar Pool fer Helens*. The analysis shows that tagmemes 1a and 1b, 2, and 3 comprise the core syntactic element of this toponym form. The combination of tagmeme 4 and 5 constitutes the semantic or cultural element of these toponyms. When the generic element represented by the tagmemes 1a or 1b, 2, and 3 or 1a and 3 are present, the core semantic element appears sequentially second. This has implications for understanding the relationship between Norf'k syntax, semantics, and social dynamics on Norfolk Island, i.e. what is semantically central does not necessarily appear sequentially first.

Patterns from the tagmemic analysis pose the semantic element (tagmeme 4 and 5 combined) as central to the social and historical meaning of a toponym. Names such as (*Dar Side fer*) *Martys*, (*Dar fer*) *Johnnies*, and (*Dar Pool fer*) *Helens* emphasize the personal (semantic) element of toponyms, and the part they play in understanding toponym location, spatial description, and history within the social ecology of Norfolk. The analysis reveals that a core syntactic element is related to a core semantic element. It illustrates the difference between the interrelatedness of obligatory and culturally central aspects and optional aspects that are culturally peripheral.

3. Toponyms in creolistics

In addition to Berleant-Schiller's (1991) suggestion of creole toponymy, I have only come across one other mention of pidgin and/or creole toponymy, namely Bright (2004), who documents some derived pidgin forms in Amerindian-based pidgin languages in the Pacific Northwest. In Berleant-Schiller's (1991:92) geography focused paper, she puts forward how documenting (creole) toponyms through fieldwork 'shows the importance of human informants and observations in the field for gathering toponymic information' and seriously questions the reliability of the axiom that toponyms gathered from maps and other secondary sources are evidence of past landscapes and land use practices. Furthermore, what appears nearly as a serendipitous seminal work for importance and implications of creole toponymy, Berleant-Schiller (1991:92) 'tests some accepted principles of naming against field observations and proposes the significance of creole language and diglossia in the place names of creole speech communities.' In order to express the methodological mandate I put forward in this paper, I quote at length from Berleant-Schiller (1991:92–93):

Long-term field research in toponymy is by nature slow, but it is far from unrewarding. It allows the researcher not only to gather primary data, in this case place names, but to observe the culture in which they are embedded and their relationship to changes in land use and landscape. The researcher can experience the place and its people, incorporate local language and speech into the study, and elicit the contributions of native speakers. Far from being misinformed, local residents are the only sources of local speech, oral tradition, and place names that are not on maps or that differ from those maps. They are also the only providers of information that leads to an understanding of indigenous systems of knowledge and ways of ordering and classifying the world.

While Berleant-Schiller does open up the question of creole toponymy as a unique and worthy subject of investigation, she does not address in any sufficient depth

or detail the relationship between toponymy, lexicon, grammar, culture, and landscape and how toponymy in a contact language situation may affect discussions of language types. The toponyms presented in Table 1 build on Berleant-Schiller's questioning regarding the effectiveness of toponymy in understanding the social and ecological embeddedness and connectedness of toponyms in Norf'k. Furthermore, the presented Norf'k data suggests that Norf'k toponyms and their distinctiveness from English forms and semantics could play an important role in further lexical and grammatical analyses of the language.

The data collection method advocated in this paper and in a more detailed longitudinal study of Norfolk Island toponymy (Nash 2011) is similar to Berleant-Schiller's proposition: dealing intimately with speakers of the contact language in question and probing them regarding the role insider, lesser known, and esoteric toponyms play in understanding the social and ecological functions of Norf'k. In a small language contact situation, toponyms and processes of place-naming serve an orientation purpose, as a memory of past events and people, as a protest against official toponyms, an entertainment, fun and pastime based function, or to reflect changes in individual and societal affluence, e.g. increase in tourism, housing developments.

4. Conclusion

I have put forward the concept of creole toponymy, and analyzed an illustrative corpus of Norf'k toponyms in order to speculate about what role contact language toponyms may be able to offer this discussion. Although I only analyzed one common Norf'k placename form in detail, Norf'k toponyms are a key part of the process of language documentation on Norfolk Island and in Norf'k. Norf'k toponyms are an integral element of the wider Norf'k lexicon; Norf'k toponyms contribute, at least in part, to a description of the social memory of a language, which has had to adapt to a specific ecology and create ecological links to place through language after the Pitcairners were moved to Norfolk in 1856.

This paper has also suggested that the toponymic data obtained in the ecology where the contact language is spoken should then be analysed considering system-external relationships, i.e. the relation between system-internal sense and form relationships and system-external relationships to, for example, the natural environment, and the role toponyms and toponymic knowledge may play in creating and maintaining social and linguistic boundaries. These speculative approaches should offer food for thought for linguists engaged in toponymic fieldwork, the analysis of the social and ecological situatedness of creoles, and the role of toponyms in this analysis.

Received: 4/19/2012

Revised: 8/1/2012

Accepted: 8/20/12

References

- Administration of Norfolk Island. 2004. *Norfolk Island Language (Norf'k) Act 2004*. Norfolk Island: Administration of Norfolk Island.
- Berleant-Schiller, Riva. 1991. Hidden places and creole forms: Naming the Barbudan landscape. *The Professional Geographer* 43(1). 92–101. DOI: 10.1111/j.0033-0124.1991.00092.x
- Bright, William. 2004. *Native American placenames of the United States*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Buffett, Moresby. n.d. *Norfolk Island* (map). In possession of the Buffett family, Norfolk Island.
- Garrett, Paul B. 2006. Contact languages as 'endangered' languages: What is there to lose? *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 21(1). 175–190. DOI: 10.1075/jpcl.21.1.05gar
- Nash, Joshua. 2011. *Insular toponymies: Pristine place-naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, South Australia*. PhD thesis, University of Adelaide.
- UNESCO. 2007. Degree of Endangerment of the Norf'k Language (Norfolk Island, South Pacific).

Author's address

Dr Joshua Nash
212b Strickland Avenue
South Hobart TAS 7004
Australia

joshua.nash@adelaide.edu.au