

ENGLISH GEOGRAPHICAL TOPONYMS AND REASONS OF THEIR DERIVATION

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Abstract

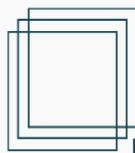
Historical and cultural geographers have a long research tradition of studying place names, or toponyms (topos: place, onomia: name). However, this topic is by no means the exclusive domain of geographers. Place names research has attracted the interest of archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, folklorists, cartographers, linguists, sociologists, planners, poets, and members of the general public with knowledge of the subject. Place names are fascinating because they offer vital clues and insights into the history of the landscape, the patterns and origins of settlement, the physical geography of locations, the physical geographies of subsequent occupancies, nationalistic sentiments, political and ethnic shifts, human activity, and the processes of cultural diffusion.

Introduction

Place names, including those for towns, cities, physical features, streets, regions, marine areas, islands, reefs, etc., are essentially the result of three separate or connected factors: (1) a landscape must have certain natural, spiritual, or cultural features (such as a mountain, waterfall, sacred grove, dam, or road); (2) these features must be acknowledged and given a name by a cultural group or society; and (3) the act of naming is a prerequisite for the creation of a place, turning a space into a place, and fostering a sense of place. Therefore, place making is the result of numerous human variables that go beyond place naming, such as historical, cultural, religious, economic, symbolic, and political considerations.

Analysis and Results

Place names and toponyms are of interest to geographers because they shed light on the origins and processes of places (in prehistory, history, and time-space geographies), identify spatial locations (places, mental maps, and cartography), and operationalize meanings in relation to human-nature relationships and space (relative, relational, social, conceptual, or lived space; cultural landscapes). Toponyms are the humanization of space and surroundings where meaning is given, identity is located, symbolism is explained, territories are designated, and functional geographies are established, regardless of whether one is thinking about space in the terms of David Harvey or Henri Lefebvre. Cultural addresses are only attached by human cultures to a landscape that has ceremonial value and vernacular labeling;

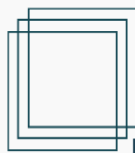


Place names are products of the past and contemporary languages, therefore their researches encompass word meaning, onomastic (name-related) inquiries, and etymological-linguistic exercises. Older place names become increasingly difficult to track down in terms of their origins since they reflect the diversity of dialects and languages spoken in the past. With at least 500 different languages or dialects spoken in "old Australia," compiling the complete list of Aboriginal place names in Australia was no simple feat. On the other hand, Margaret Gelling points out that place names in England reflect a variety of languages and dialects, including pre-Celtic, Pictish, Greek, Roman, Celtic, Latin, Germanic, Welsh, Old English, Norman French, Cornish, Gaelic, and Gallo-Brittonic. This makes tracing place names in English extremely challenging. She acknowledges that historical terms have had a variety of meanings and advises non-philologists to avoid drawing quick conclusions about groups of words that appear similar but may actually represent quite diverse things. The onomastic interpretation of place names is still an active area of study in cultural geography, despite the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic theory having received little attention in the past.

The utility of place names is therefore restricted to the eras in which they were produced, as noted by geographers who expressly point out that place names convey evidence of environmental settlement and social conditions at the time the name was coined. Two processes yield place names: first, some names "evolved" from the "folk mind" through "unpersonalized linguistic development," and then, over time, they crystallized. Other names were "bestowed," meaning that someone purposefully announced a place name that was recorded and kept. Place names, whether acquired or developed, represent significant indicators, signals, and symbols of changing cultural landscapes that may have numerous or distinct meanings for different populations across time. They also give the impression that culture and society have continued from the past to the present. For many locals, place names still evoke mental maps of meaning that combine symbolic representations, historical legacies, and codified information.

Languages have the power to maintain place names to some extent. For instance, American names that are English, Portuguese, French, Spanish, and Indian have all been preserved thanks to folk etymology, which is highlighted by the process of assimilation and phonetic transfer. Numerous Spanish names, such as San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Sierra Nevada, Colorado River, and El Cerrito, are readily phonetically transferred into English and are still used as place names in the United States today. Thai historian Dhida Saraya contends that the "Dvaravati" cultural tradition served as the cornerstone for Thai society and culture. The significance of Dvaravati in river and sea trade in mainland Southeast Asia is emphasized by its Sanskrit name, which translates to "being a gateway to the port." The early urban formations emerged as "muang," or cities or towns, under its cultural impact. In ancient Siam, the term "muang" was used to describe groups that occasionally gathered in specific historical regions.

Place names often alter in history. The Japanese Islands were referred to in East Asia as "Wako" in Chinese. Mark Hudson associated this term with pirate islands (Wa or



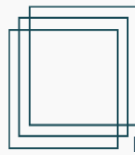
pirates), whereas Howard French read it negatively as "bent," "tortuous," or "throw away." In the Tang era, Yamato Japan asked the Chinese to rename Wa as Nihon or Nippon, which means "origin of the sun." The Chinese emperor turned down the proposal of the Vietnamese monarch Gia-long to rename his kingdom Nam Viet, which translates to "Southern Viet/Yue." The examples of Japan and Vietnam show the geopolitical influence of the Chinese emperor in granting names to adjacent nations.

Conversely, one could try to determine the spatial variety and density of place names. An encyclopedia of natural, cultural, historical, and mystical knowledge can be found in place names. The density of place names can be explained by several variables. These include the terrain and the physical surroundings. A more varied topography would encourage the creation of more place names than would flat areas devoid of notable physical markers. Because of the abundance of habitation names, population density and population density are roughly proportionate. The length of human settlement in an area (new names added to or replacing old names) and the cultural makeup of the population are other factors that influence the density of place names. In contrast to Europeans, who filled their densely populated landscapes with a density of place names in Europe, Stewart contends that Americans, with their relatively unpopulated landscapes, perceived things in a "larger way" and, as a result, names covered enormous sections of the terrain (representing miles of an area).

A few town names in the US and Canada have traditionally used the phrase "nigger," which is a pejorative term for persons of color. Many of these place names were changed over the 20th century due to the word's racist overtones. One instance is the Texas competition known as Dead Nigger Draw, which was renamed to Dead Negro Draw in 1963 to honor the Buffalo Soldier tragedy of 1877 then to Buffalo Soldier Draw in 2020. Named for a brief freedmen's community from the 1870s, Niggertown Marsh and Niggertown Knoll in Highlands County, Florida, were taken off public maps in response to a complaint in 1992. In 2015, Quebec, a province in Canada, voted to rename eleven locations that used the word "nigger" or its French equivalent, nègre.

Conclusion

Names originated from uncommon sources, pronounced or spelled unconventionally, and with unusual spellings are sometimes seen as peculiar, especially by those who are not from the culture that gave rise to them. During the 1860s, for publicity purposes, the Welsh village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll changed its name to the longer Llanfairpwllgwyngyll-gogerychwyndrobwlllllantysilio-siliogogogoch pool (pwll) of the white hazels (gwyn gyll) near (go ger) the fierce whirlpool (y chwyrn drobwll) [and] the church of [St.] Tysilio (Llantysilio) of the red cave. It's the longest place name in the UK, with 58 letters. Usually abbreviated, for example on road maps, to just the last six syllables from its "long form"—Lake Chaubunagungamaug, or even more simply, "Webster Lake"—this freshwater body in Webster, Massachusetts, has historically (since at least 1921) been



known by the seemingly Native American 45-letter/fourteen-syllable name Lake Chaggoggagoggmanch-auggagoggchaubunagungamaugg.

Taumatawhakatangihanga-koauauotamateaturipuka-kapikimaungahoronukupokai-whenuakitanatahu is the name of a hill in New Zealand that has the longest single-word place name in the entire world.

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