

THE SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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1.INTRODUCTION

In the field of Toponymy the syntactic and semantic aspects of geographical names are usually implicated, directly or indirectly, according to the context in which the names are used or analyzed. Although theoretical semantics deals inter alia with the relation between logic and language and truth-conditional theories, this will not be discussed as semantic concepts, but will be assumed as being the theoretical framework behind the question: what do geographical names mean? It is important to ask the right questions in order to get the relevant answers. The necessity to know what names mean or what the syntactic patterns are becomes clear when we keep in mind what experts in authoritative bodies regarding geographical names ask themselves when they draw up guidelines. Experts are interested in what feature is actually being named and how it is described, which in semantic terms is the relation between logic and language; whether it is a dialectal name with either a literal or figurative meaning; how the name relates to the socio-economic, cultural or physical characteristics of the environment, etc. Semantics is where geography, linguistics and mapmaking meets, which leads to the question of finding the right linguistic form for the specific entity. When dealing with syntax and meaning and their interrelatedness, however, it is not so much a question of right or wrong, but rather: what makes sense and is it relevant? In this regard the syntax and semantics of geographical names will be discussed integratively.

2.SEMANTIC DOMAINS

According to a well-known philosopher, Popper, there are three kinds of worlds: the

physical world, the mental world and the world of contents of thought, which includes products of the human mind, of which language is one. To name objects is therefore part of the genetic make-up of man. What is amazing though is that most people are able to use language correctly, name places, people and objects, even though they do not have a set of syntactic or semantic rules on hand. The way in which man names rivers, mountains, valleys, towns and other environmental entities reflects how he thinks and lives and what his psychological disposition and subconscious mind produces in his daily contact with universal semantic domains like entities, events, abstract concepts and the relations between these domains. These four domains proposed by Eugene Nida (1975:174), tend to correspond, albeit not in all languages, to grammatical classes, although all four domains can be presented, for instance, by nouns only. An event which is often represented by a verb, could also be represented by a noun, eg. the word battle. Grammatical meaning is, however, additive and does not change the category of the root.

How can we use semantic domains to classify geographical names? Let us take a look at some features relevant for our purpose:

Entities are animate or inanimate. Inanimate entities are either natural or manufactured, eg. natural geographical features like hill, sea, lake, farm, sun, etc.; natural substances like iron, rock, mud, fire, etc. and plant-related products like forest, bush, thorn, blossom, etc. Manufactured entities can be artifacts like carriage, crown, statue, paper, instrument, etc.; processed substances like bread, wine, honey, perfume, poison, etc. and constructions like gate, fence, camp, ship, etc. Each entity can in turn be categorised into smaller categories, eg. geographical entities can have three subcategories with items of a celestial-atmospheric nature (sun, sky, etc.), supernatural nature (paradise, hell, etc.) or relating to the planet earth with items which are generic (region, country), features of land (mountain, desert), features of the sea (lake, island, bay), cultivated areas (farm, field) and politically defined areas (domain, province, empire).

In the same way **events** can have twelve categories referring to events which are 1. physical (rain, overflow, burn) 2. physiological (eat, reproduce, sleep, drown) 3. sensory (hear, feel, touch, see, smell) 4. emotive (desire, hate, fear) 5. intellectual (reason, remember, decide, learn) 6. communicative (signal, speak, write, pray) 7. social (meet, marry, honor) 8. controlling (conquer, rule, resist) 9. movement

(move, enter, run) 10. impact (break, cut, destroy) 11. transfer (distribute, receive, exchange) 12. complex actions or processes involving more than a singular event (sow, shear, cook, weave, sacrifice). In this way meanings are not treated as lexical units but are classified according to themes. Geographical names are structured in various transformations by using combinations of any of the items describing any category of any domain.

A name like **Happy Valley** is a compound expressing the relation between an abstract state and a geographical feature of land, denoting a place. Similarly **Somerset West** is a compound expressing the relation between the name of a human being imposed on a place and a spatial relation. In this way geographical names with specific components referring to certain domains can be listed for purposes of research, eg. names referring to sun as in **Sunnyside, Sun City, Sunland**; names with a spatial reference of east/west, upper/lower, middle, center, etc. as in **Somerset West, East London, Northcliff, Southbroom, Midlands, Middledrift, Waterval-Bo, Upper Tongaat, Lower Houghton, Onderstepoort**, etc. The higher the frequency of certain domains, the clearer the inferential possibilities concerning a country or community's cultural, historical or environmental picture, keeping in mind that with names inference eventually becomes reference.

3. SYNTACTICAL PATTERNS AND SEMANTIC UNITS

Many names are formed with inflections or stems or roots, eg. the genitive form **Simon's Town** or the adjectival component **Sunny-** in **Sunnyside**. The syntactical patterns of geographical names have many variations. Most geographical names | are compounds with a stem and generic component functioning as a semantic unit whether written as one or two words, which are language specific writing patterns. In Afrikaans we have **Kaapstad** which is **Cape Town** in English, **Oranjerivier** which is **Orange River**, etc. The generic component could also precede the naming component as in **Lake St. Lucia** and **Mount Everest**. Names formed from African languages often represent full statements like "this matter is settled" (**Pelindaba**) and "it is better here than in the south" (**Phalaborwa**).

Geographical names, being examples of compounding, which is also an economy device, have the same basic semantic patterns than other noun-noun compounds in language, eg. relations expressed with paraphrases like:

x with/of y **Thabazimbi** (mountain with/of iron)

x resembles y **Vaal River** (river like the colour grey)

x belongs to y **Simon's Town** (town of Simon)

x at y **Barkley East** (Barkley in the east)

x for y **Signal Hill** (hill for signalling)

x where y happened **Rustenburg** (town where they rested)

These prepositional phrases express concepts of constitution as in **Thabazimbi**, resemblance as in **Vaal River**, belonging as in **Simon's Town**, location as in **Barkley East**, purpose as in **Signal Hill** and action as in **Rustenburg**. These concepts correlate with the semantic domains mentioned above. Many compounds could fall under more than one category, but that is not the point. What is important is to know that each geographical name has at least one, be it explicit or not, semantic pattern as its internal structure. Exactly what prepositional paraphrase is at the base of each name could prove to be an interesting piece of research exposing perhaps etymological facts about the name.

The semantic domains being but one aspect of the meaning of names, do not explain why a statement like

"and this is happy peaceful South Africa" or

"Congratulations! You have just won a whole week at Naboomspruit!" is to some people a contradiction in terms because in the first case the name **South Africa** evokes other feelings than peace in some people and **Naboomspruit** is not everyone's idea of the ideal holiday resort, especially if one prefers a place like Durban.

4. LEXICAL MEANING AND GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

What, if any, are the conventional expectations people have when they see or here the name of a place, river, mountain, etc.? Everyone has a frame of reference which gives meaning to certain words in the language, but what more do we have to know about a geographical name than its purpose of locating a referent? Does the name Thabazimbi mean anything to someone who does not know that it is

situated at the foot of a mountain being mined for iron ore, and for someone who does not know it is derived from an African description meaning 'mountain of iron'? Geographical or other environmental factors supply us with information as to the motivational force behind the choice of a name, but do they define the concept? Contrary to what Pulgram says "...they deepen our knowledge of the named object, but they are incapable of redefining it once it has been named" (Pulgram, 1959:70), one could state that there are four ways to define a place, i.e. a quantitative definition according to latitude and longitude; an ordinal definition according to a named/numbered grid on a map; a description by means of the name of the place and fourthly by reference to its infinite corpus of possible connotations which ever is relevant to its identification, eg. "the place where the 1992 Olympics were held" (Barcelona). Features or attributes unique to a place is ultimately transposed on the name, be it environmental or more subtle like an experience someone had at the place.

Names indicating botanical, zoological, archaeological, geographical, geological, historical and cultural features indeed tell us more about man and his environment, but most of all we begin to move into the behavioural sciences as we find out how man sees the world and reacts to it. However, when the coreferential lexical meaning of the name fails to explain its etymology, it can always be interpreted by the principle of relevance.

Toponyms with obvious etymological transparency are for instance **Sandflats**, **Lakeside**, **Adam's Mission**, **Crocodile River**, **Platkop**, **Bushveld**, etc. Culture specific names and syntactical features, for instance the lack of compounds in African languages, can be seen in names like **Monate**, which looks like a simplex but is indeed a description meaning 'it is nice'. (Cf. **Pelindaba** and **Phalaborwa** above). The indigenous name for **Blouberg**, a mountain without vegetation on its summit is called **Monna a se na morini** meaning 'man without beard'. The motivational transparency of structures like **Kenton on Sea**, **Trent on Main**, **Vina del Mar**, etc. is clear. One should, however allow for humour and irony in names, when the motivational factors are ascribed to hopes, feelings or expectations rather than environmental qualities. When a town in the middle of nowhere is called **Washington**, or a name like **Palm Springs** appears on a map indicating that it is in the middle of a desert or droughtstricken area, it comes close to literary style.

Nevertheless, to be able to use a geographical name or understand statements in which it is used in other contexts than referring to a place, river or mountain, knowledge of conventional and associative meanings connected with the place is valuable. Affective connotations may differ according to experience and acquired prejudices about places - connotations which form part of the descriptive backing of a name.

5. THE DESCRIPTIVE BACKING IN NAMES

The backing of descriptions which names have is a concept introduced by Strawson in his theory of reference. It was Donnellan who said that a name is worthless without a backing of descriptions which can be produced on demand to explain the application (Donnellan, 1960:335). This descriptive backing amounts to the collective content of all conventional beliefs and connotations attached to a name. It stands to reason that this descriptive backing also has a subjective content as it is based on individual experience and knowledge about a place, person or object bearing this name. The set of assumptions about a place corresponds to what Wilson describes as the "encyclopaedic entry for the concept" (Sperber & Wilson, 1986:87). These assumptions are open-ended with new information being added by various entries from various sources. According to Sperber & Wilson information relating to a specific "conceptual address" are to be distinguished as either logical or encyclopaedic or lexical. A name like **Barcelona** would have no logical entry but its continual accumulation of encyclopaedic matter qualifies it for a concept appropriate to be used in natural language other than referring to a place. On this level geographical names, like other names are as much a part of the lexicon as other words. Several linguists and philosophers have argued against the idea that names are unique. Kripke and Putnam actually stated that "proper names are far from being unique. Their reference is fixed by an initial act of 'baptism' and maintained by a causal chain which relates each of their particular uses to this initial act." (In Sperber and Wilson 1986:91.) This is what is called the causal theory of reference which allows for appropriate encyclopaedic entries to form the meaning of a concept. The entries/connotations/ additional information are inferential but become descriptive backing on which referential meaning is based when using the name.

In the prototype theory logical properties do not determine the meaning of a word either, but a mental model of the thing the word refers to is used to refer to things where the prototype is applicable. Let us compare the name of a colour, for instance blue, with a geographical name like **Barcelona**. Like colour names a proper name cannot be defined in terms of logical properties but by means of descriptions:

- blue is the name of a colour which can be seen as the colour of the sky, a flower, water, something between indigo and green, etc.
- **Barcelona** is the name of a city, with a population of x, followed by descriptions indicating its exact geographical position or salient properties like being a city known for its picturesque architectural attractions, the place where the 1992 Olympics is/was held, etc. Each advertisement or song referring to **Barcelona** then adds to its associative meaning.

What is really the issue here is that any existential or associative information can be used to make the use of names meaningful in natural language. The descriptive backing of geographical names in particular forms the basis of deductive inferences giving meaning to expressions in which it is present. This descriptive backing and its conventional use is clear in statements like:

- **Wall Street** is upsetting the apple cart again
or
- They are waiting for **Pretoria's** answer.

Because names are believed not to have lexical meaning, there has to be some semantic content to enable us to use names in this way. Many metaphors have geographical names on which the meaning is based, eg.

- Today you are going to meet your **Waterloo**
- We should cross the **Rubicon** and get on with the process.

Successful communication depends on shared knowledge assumed by both speaker and hearer. These assumptions rest on the encyclopaedic entries, the relevant entries of the concept. Names like **Waterloo** and **Rubicon** have historical backing which has become conventional meanings. Although both names invariably have other more exclusive connotations, it is the conventional meaning which is assumed to be relevant in idiomatic and metaphorical expressions with names.

6. IDENTIFICATION BY DESCRIPTIVE BACKING

Using a name always presupposes a referent with a certain descriptive backing acting as a means of identification, for instance, when a name is used in an existential proposition, it refers to something which has some conceptual content. Searle, (1969:135) says that "an existential statement does not refer to an object and state that it exists, rather it expresses a concept and states that that concept is instantiated". This brings him to the conclusion that proper names must have some conceptual or descriptive content when they are used in existential statements. Searle's famous words that names function not as descriptions but as pegs on which to hang descriptions boils down to the same thing that Strawson referred to as the descriptive backing of names.

When a name is used as identification of the referent, for instance, when someone inquires about a certain town or city - where it is located, what makes it special, why is it worth visiting, what distinguishes it from any other place, what happened that makes it important - all the information considered to be relevant for the identification of this place could be regarded as descriptive backing not only for referential purposes but as a means of identifying. This is where identifying descriptions and proper names makes it semantically possible to say things like

- **Salisbury** is **Harare** but **Harare** is'nt **Salisbury** any more
- You're looking for **Hong Kong**? Go to **Cape Town**.

When we use the descriptive backing of names as the semantic content of the name we are dealing with the theoretical issue of presupposition.

7. PRESUPPOSITION

In onomastical context presupposition functions on two levels:

The first level is the mere application of a name in the relation x presupposes y where x is the name and y is a proposition, conventional fact or predicate, as in x = the name Paradise, and y = the conventional belief that Paradise is a place with everything one could wish for. A statement like:

This place is Paradise

is then selfexplanatory. Theoretically the presupposition cannot be neutralised even when negated in a statement like:

This place isn't Paradise at all because it is not the relation between x and y which is being negated but the relation between "This place" and that which Paradise stands for. When that which a name stands for, its associative meaning, is unacceptable to a community it is often replaced by a new name.

Presupposition also plays a role in the speech act situation being the information that the speaker assumes he is sharing with the hearer. When the relation x presupposes y has the same meaning for both speaker and hearer, the name can be used successfully in conversations. The expression "**Durban** is home to me" has several possible implications as to why someone would want to associate home with **Durban**. It is more than a statement of locality of residence because it could involve personal feelings and values which has to be shared by the hearer to attain its perlocutionary effect. At the core of reference and predication lies the principle of unique differentiation and predication working in harmony with the principle of relevance. Geographic names are linguistic signs representing abstract mental structures. Their use in natural language not only enriches the vocabulary but stimulates conversation due to the inferential nature of propositions they represent.

How do we identify the propositions intended in the choice or use of a geographic name? Obviously by first of all looking at the lexical meaning the name might have, keeping in mind that names are often given in an arbitrary way. Inferential possibilities, however, are always bound to the principle of relevance - and what is relevant is the form of the word, the specific language or culture it represents and its referential use in communication situations. Where names which are culture specific, for instance traditional Muslim names, Afrikaans names or African names, are concentrated in a certain area it either suggests that the past or present inhabitants were/are members of a certain cultural group or that the body responsible for naming the place, its streets or suburbs had strong bonds or sentiments regarding that culture, eg. the Scandinavian names in Valhalla, a suburb to the south of Pretoria. (Liebenberg in NOMINA AFRICANA, 1988:109).

8. THE SEMANTIC VAGUENESS OF GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

According to Kempson (1977:124) there are basically four types of vagueness in language and these types show a certain interrelatedness. When applied to names we find that all four are applicable, making names the best examples to illustrate vagueness as a semantic concept.

The first type, namely referential vagueness applies when the meaning of the lexical item is quite clear but its applicability is uncertain, as in topographic terms referring to specific environmental features of size, population, height, etc. which are uncertain, eg. **town/city, mountain /hill**. The second type of vagueness, namely indeterminacy of the meaning of an item applies in instances where the motivational factors are uncertain, eg. what the relation is between the proper name and the generic item in for instance **Graham's Town** or **Orange River**; what the motivational factors are for naming a place **Hopetown** or **Johannesburg**. The third type of vagueness occurs when an item has multiple meaning and there is a lack of specification. When someone says "I want to go to a place called Hillcrest" the name does not guarantee identification because it has more than one referent. There are seven entries for **Hillcrest** in the South African Post Office code book. The utterance could either mean that the speaker wants to go to any place as long as it is called Hillcrest, or that he wants to go to the town in Natal/ the suburb in Wellington or Kimberley or Pinetown or Pretoria, etc. The first possibility is what Kempson refers to as multiple meaning due to the disjunction of different possibilities - which is also the fourth type of vagueness. When an interpretation allows for multiple implications which can be applied simultaneously the term is vague. If we keep in mind that semantic information increases in relation to the elimination of uncertainty, it is obvious why names are regarded as vague with propositions of which the meaning is inherently uncertain.

Studying the semantic content of names can open up many motivational factors which could clear up uncertainties in the referential possibility of a name. The opentexturedness of a name allows for infinite possibilities of associative meanings which makes the definition in terms of a complete set of criteria for one referent virtually impossible. What lies behind the high frequency of well known names like **Hillcrest, Hillside, Morningside, Fairview, Newtown, Panorama, Protea Park, Mountain View**, (which all have six or more entries in the official Post Office code book) in no way changes the unique reference each name has in a specific context. Communication will only break down when the wrong

assumptions lead to the wrong interpretation in the use of these names, which is why there is a different post office code for each Hillcrest entry, etc. The fact that names are countable reflects its usefulness in syntax. Being part of language man uses it to express certain concepts. Like he nominalises verbs or verbalises adjectives he also takes proper nouns and uses them as common nouns. Any noun with the feature 'semantically singular' can function as countable nouns, eg. Two coffees, please or There are seven **Hillcrests** in the book = Two cups of coffee, please/ There are seven entries of **Hillcrest** in the book.

In precision semantics Pinkal (1983:47) assumes that knowing the meaning of an expression is knowing the ways the expression can be made more precise. This means that multiplicity of meaning does not have to lead to vagueness, because when the principle of relevance is applied the relevant propositions are taken into account. Names corresponding to common nouns are used for descriptive purposes, but the seven places called **Hillcrest** have different features, making each entity unique. Waismann 's words on common nouns describe this as words having systematic ambiguity while at the same time there is a sort of family likeness between all the uses, and it is that which makes us denote them by one word (Waismann, 1963:135). What is important in the semantic approach to names is that when names are used a cognitive process of categoration takes place in the minds of the speaker and hearer, based on association rather than denotation. As in any situation where language is used successful! reference relies on the fact that the conditions, presuppositions, values and descriptive backing only applies to one referent. Shared knowledge about a place naturally makes the use of the name easier, as it satisfies what Lyons calls the psychological salience of the subject.

"What is known is of course, almost by definition, more salient than what is unknown, and, other things being equal, the more recently that something has been mentioned and put into the universe of discourse, or the more familiar something is to the participants in a conversation, the greater will be its psychological salience" (Lyons, 1977:510). This also applies to a specific name used to refer to a place already known officially or unofficially under a different name.

Saliency could also make the use of different names with a salient relation quite

meaningful, for instance, a name like **Sodom** triggers **Gomorra**. In the world of sailing **Cape** to **Rio** forms a pair and on a different note **Nagasaki** and **Hiroshima** share associative meaning. When used individually one name acts as a mediating response for the other name.

Can we call the descriptive backing of the two names and their interrelatedness part of their meaning? The fact that they can be replaced by synonymical descriptions, albeit with less effect, makes the names meaningful.

Stereotypical meanings of geographical names like **South Africa - land of sunshine** are what Eikmeyer & Rieser call "reconstructions of hypotheses speakers have concerning the properties of an object" (1983:149). In the same way two names are associated on the grounds of a stereotypical event.

9. REFERENTIAL TRANSPARENCY

The vagueness of topographical terms regarding geographical, geological or other physical features, complicate the inferential process as to number of inhabitants, size, etc. We also have false generics, eg. when **Bloemfontein** and **Hammanskraal** do not refer to a fountain or kraal but to residential areas. This illustrates how arbitrary lexical meaning in names is, although it indicates a possible motivational factor in the etymology of the name. Topographic terms are also language specific and reflect contact with other languages in a particular country. In South Africa terms like **-veld, -koppie, -kloof, -krans, -poort, -vlei, -kraal, -spruit**, etc. are typical Afrikaans generic components. In American names we find indigenous terms like **-ranch, -pup, -prairie, -canyon**, etc. In most English speaking communities terms like **-brook, -creek, -pond, -marsh, -lake, -river, -mount**, etc. are found. Toponyms with exclusive meanings like those given by mountaineers, hikers and campers eventually lose their exclusivity when they enter the place name vocabulary the same way new common nouns become part of a language. The names of tracks, trails and routes become generalised through frequent usage as a means to refer.

Meaningful nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, numerals from the different languages in a country are part of structures like **Upper Delta, Nooitgedacht, Kwambonambi, East London, Derdepoort, uMpumalanga**, etc. The indicators

like **upper, nooit, kwa, east**, etc. are only vague with reference to the location of the referent. If you do not know where the **Delta** is the transparent common noun upper would not be of any use to indicate where the place is.

The referential vagueness as to population or size, infrastructure or other physical attributes of **Cape Town** in comparison to **Greytown, Washington** and **Wellington** in the Cape Province, **Johannesburg** and **Ventersburg, Edinburgh** (Scotland) and **Edinburg** (Orange Free State), leaves us with the only relevant conclusion, i.e. that the lexical meaning is arbitrary and is a mere indicator of the prepositional content which could be verified.

The fact that the suburb Northcliff happens to be a large cliff facing north in no way explains that it is a suburb of Johannesburg that can be reached by following a certain route. To merely look for a cliff facing north could end you up in Roodepoort. The one thing that makes a name unlike other lexical items is the fact that any place can be called Northcliff if the name has a special meaning for someone. Of course there are certain guidelines to be followed, but this does not stop someone from naming his beach cottage Northcliff. This accounts for the various referents a name can have. Alan Gardiner used this varying degree of descriptive backing that names have to classify names as pure names and less-pure names.

" The purist of proper names are those of which the sound strike us as wholly arbitrary, yet perfectly distinctive, and about which we should feel, if ignorant of their bearers, no trace of meaning or significance." (In Combrink, 1964:254).

This implies that the higher the motivational transparency of a name, the "less-pure" it is. To grade names according to levels of purity, however, is to contradict the very nature of names. Although it is only natural to look for meaningful explanations of the relation between name and object one cannot ignore the arbitrary base on which people, places and other objects are given a name. In the naming process a certain sense of permanency is assumed, regardless of whether the named object undergoes changes or not, or whether other referents are known by the same name.

Homonymical names, surnames, etc. are classified by Gardiner as less-pure. These names are regarded as classnames by Pulgram on the grounds of the amount of extra-linguistic factors identifying the name. To him a true proper name is

"a complete description of a specimen, of an individual, regardless of the number of the characteristics and peculiarities that either the speaker or writer, or hearer or listener, provides or is able to supply. Whatever particulars are necessary or wanted can be added from the storehouse of accumulated knowledge concerning the subject."
(Pulgram, 1959:170).

This of course contradicts the statement that names which are arbitrarily given are meaningless. Any name that can be defined in terms of extra-linguistic characteristics have meaning. Knowledge of the nature of names described in terms of transparency, be it motivational, lexical or propositional transparency, brings a deeper understanding of the social impact a geographic name could have. This knowledge is valuable in designing universal or official policies on names.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AS SEMANTIC UNITS

Semantic units include all linguistics features of names, eg. phonological, graphical, morphological and syntactical features.

The employment of the definite article, be it capitalised or not, in geographical names, eg. **the Cape**, **the Namib** or **The West Indies**, **The Ivory Coast**, etc. as against the zero article in for instance **Natal**, **South Africa**, **Switzerland**, etc. reflect how language in general is used. Names function not only as descriptions in making unique reference, but are elliptical constructions for a phrase. Syntactically all names with zero article can be used in structures where an article precedes the name and is followed by a common noun or clause, eg. **the Natal region** or **the Switzerland we know**. Most geographical names with a definite article seem to presuppose a descriptive phrase which was shortened or economised - a natural tendency in language use, eg. **the Seychelle (islands)**, **the Namib (desert)**, **the Cape (peninsula/province)**. Names like **The Ivory Coast** and **The Grand Canyon** resemble structures like **the Natal region** where **Natal** has an adjectival function. Collectives like **The Seychelles**, **the Congo Caves**, **The Valley of a Thousand Hills**, etc. are all semantically singular like all other names taking the definite article and function as a unit.

When names that usually take the definite article are used without the article as in **West Indies** has the best team or **Grand Canyon** here I come, it displays a

common phenomenon in language variation and style to express well acquaintedness or affection. The vocative use as in the last example compares with the use of son or child in the same way.

Names with prefixes or suffixes are pronounced as one word and often written as such, eg. **Ladysmith** (but **Lady Grey**), **King William's Town** (but **Queenstown**) etc. where the meaning of lady or king is not relevant. Similarly the names of animals and plants, eg. bushbuck, yellowwood, hartbees, etc. are although resembling a compound, semantic units referring to a species. As part of a name, as in **Bushbuckridge**, it could not be separated should a disjunctive spelling be preferred. The only linguistic viable possibility is **Bushbuck Ridge**. Whether written as one word or two, the name is a semantic unit.

A zero generic term is customary in English with names like **Rio Grande**, **Sierra Nevada**, **El Dorado**, etc. where the generic river, mountain, etc. is presupposed. Names like **El Dorado**, **La Rochelle**, **Las Palmas** are seen as semantic units, very often written as one word in some South African names, eg. **Eldoraigne**, **Eldorado Park**. Guidelines on the alphabetization of different names are ultimately based on what is essentially regarded as the name and what is part of the structure. Advisory bodies have to decide on whether to enter names like **Mount Everest**, **Lake St. Lucia** or **Cape Agulhas** under **Mount**, **Lake** or **Cape** or under the proper name **Everest**, **St. Lucia** and **Agulhas**. Decisions have to be made on the semantic status of the articles in **El Dorado**, **La Rochelle** and **Las Vegas** as against the article in **Den Haag**, **The Heads** and **Die Koppe**.

Semantically and syntactically articles and any preceding generic terms are, regardless of the specific language, to be considered part of the name, in which case generic terms cannot be used in the following way:

Lakes St.Lucia and Michigan

Mounts Everest and Kilimanjaro

Being a debatable issue the semantic unity of a name and its parts is often a matter of frequency of use and saliency. **Lake St.Lucia** as a unit is more conventional than for instance **St.Lucia Lake**, although **St.Lucia** (without **lake**) is most common. Convention is an important factor to be taken into account when decisions have to be made on names and changing names. Changing geographic names implies changing concepts based on conventional use, and this includes the spelling and pronunciation of the name and the vast amount of descriptive backing the name has in its present form. Before changing a name it

should be kept in mind that linguistic norms should be adapted from the right/wrong issue to the issue of what makes sense and what is relevant. Morpho-syntactic engineering should be kept to a minimum when names are salient items of reference, and not even the possibility of semantic overloading should cause a name like **Drakensberg Mountains** to be changed to an unfamiliar **Drakens Mountains**. Like St. Lucia the use of the Drakensberg as a unit is common as a means to refer.

On the other hand, if there are names in everyday use which have a higher frequency of use than an existing name, it should be recorded for consideration towards possible adjustment.

Names representing a phrase or description should comply with general language rules of the particular language. This is why names like **Thabazimbi** and **Pelindaba** are written as one word. In the same way **Queenstown** and **Dewetsdorp** are semantic units representing a genitive relation, i.e. "the dorp of De Wet(English)/ De Wet se dorp"(Afrikaans). According to the compound rule in Afrikaans a word with a genitive s cannot be written disjunctively as it does not have an independent status as a word. Sometimes this s is obsolete in which case it should be dropped if policy requires a disjunctive spelling in Afrikaans. In English an apostrophe **s** poses no problem as in **Graham's Town**. If the **s** indicates a plural form the word can stand on its own with the **s** still intact.

11. CONCLUSION

All names have meaning - artificially coined names, mountain names, river names, names imposed on places, names of historical, cultural or popular figures, events being named, etc. all contribute to make the world a colourful and interesting place to live in. Geographical names offer various research possibilities in the field of genetic semantics. It includes etymological studies, the study of of intralingual cognates, interlingual cognates, morphological variants and multiple meaning in items. In etymological studies the present meaning of an item is traced to the origin of the word which might expose certain shifts or changes of meaning corresponding to social changes. Intralingual cognates refer to items within one language which are genetically related but differ in form, eg. **-ton/-town** in

Germiston and **Queenstown**; **-burg/-bury** in **Edinburg** and **Malmesbury**.

Interlingual cognates are comparisons of related forms across different languages, eg. English **-dale**/Afrikaans **-dal**, as in **Riversdale/Riversdal**;

Uniondale/Groblersdal. Morphological variants can be found in one language in the inflection and compounding of a specific item as **sun** in **Sunnyside, Sun City** and **Sunland**; or **rus** in **Volksrust, Rustenburg** and **Odendaalsrus**. Various applications of one name to different places with varying degrees of similarity could prove to be an interesting field of study as is the whole field of genetic semantics which could explain the relation between genetic identity and structural identity in geographical names.

Variation is an inherent quality of language and a reflection of how it is made -important enough to qualify as a specialist field of study in Sociolinguistics. The heterogeneous nature of language communities guarantees variation in language use, ultimately surfacing as syntactical variation in geographical names. Names displaying dialectal features reflect the dynamic principle of language change which can also be accounted for sociolinguistically in all developing languages. Each community, whether socially or geographically determined, has the potential to name or rename an entity. Some names are spontaneous utterances while others are formed after long and serious consideration.

For examples of language and culture specific spellings of South African place-names various articles have appeared in issues of *NOMINA AFRICANA* and valuable information can be found in Raper's *DICTIONARY OF SOUTH AFRICAN PLACE NAMES*.

Considering variation in the syntax and motivational transparency of geographical names, the responsibility to continually redefine requirements for well formed but original names ultimately falls on the shoulders of advisory bodies. Like the ideal standard language, official place names should reflect the cultural diversity of its users as well as their history and the environmental features of the country.

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