

Section 10 Toponymic research and documentation

Chapter 27 Some aspects of cartographic and linguistic toponymic sources

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27.1 Introduction

Why would someone want to consult such sources? In order to find the official spelling of the name of a topographic object (its standardised form), its meaning, its derived versions (names of its inhabitants, adverbs derived from it. Or they might want to know how a toponym behaves in a text – is it declined according to its case (such as a locative); are there different forms for: to Wien, from Wien or at Wien (or suffixes and prefixes might be added); is it singular, dualis (Bahrain = the 2 seas) or plural, its gender can be relevant ('Wien and her churches'?). Then the definite or indefinite versions of the name might be relevant, and where to find which ones should be entered on the map

The range of sophisticated toponymic sources, be it print publications or online material, is very wide. Basically, they can be divided into two groups: The first group is composed of publications – for the main part gazetteers – that are the result of cartographic documentation or aim at the documentation of toponyms for reasons of standardization. Often these two aims (cartographic representation and standardization) are interlinked, because in many (but by far not all) countries the state authorities in charge of cartography are also responsible for the standardization of geographical names. The second group of sources comprises publications or

online material that was elaborated mainly out of an academic, mostly linguistic, interest in place names and focuses on toponymy as a sub discipline of linguistics. These two groups of publications basically focus on different aspects of place names though they sometimes overlap.

Apart from such sophisticated toponymic sources a lot of other linguistic publications may also contain information that can be useful when dealing with toponyms. Dictionaries for example may contain toponyms as well. With regard to several aspects of geographical names they may even be the first source of information. Even grammars may be of relevance for the study of place names, because toponyms may follow specific rules when it comes to the grammatical system of a language. Apart from aspects of spelling and grammar, also the phonetic side of names (i.e. their pronunciation) and the respective sources of reference have to be taken into account. Finally, a lot of toponymic information has been or is still being collected in connection with field research for different purposes by representatives of different disciplines. This material, which is often not published, may also be useful for anybody interested in place names.

27.2 Toponymic publications for cartographic documentation or standardization purposes

Many state bodies that deal with the standardization of geographical names have published gazetteers of standardized place names. Within the frame of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), a Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers was established which “addresses various issues of toponymic data processing, including the creation, maintenance and outputs of toponymic

data files (including gazetteer production) and aspects of toponymic data exchange formats and standards.”¹ Gazetteers or databases of this kind primarily focus on the correct spelling of names and their categorization and localization, although also other aspects may be taken into consideration (correct standard pronunciation, administrative affiliation etc.). These publications are therefore useful for finding the official spelling of the name of a topographic object, or – in other words – its standardised form. An example for a print publication of this kind is the “Gazetteer of Austria”, published by Joseph Breu in 1975. Its entries contain the following information: Standard German pronunciation according to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), description of the feature (topographic category, description of the location in words, administrative affiliation, geographical coordinates, indication of the respective sheet number of the official map) and – if necessary – grammatical information.²

Nowadays it is mainly online databases that have replaced printed gazetteers. As an example the New Zealand Gazetteer provided by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) can be mentioned (see chapter 13); it contains “all official names for features within the New Zealand Geographic Board’s coverage” and “other types of unofficial names, such as recorded and collected names”.³ There along with each place name the following information is provided: status of the respective name (official or non-official) plus reference information, administrative affiliation, feature type plus description of position and exact coordinates. The respective name is also shown on a map.

As I have already mentioned in many countries state cartographic services are also responsible for the standardization of geographical names. In these cases, their cartographic products may contain standardized

place names and therefore assume the character of a gazetteer. In Austria, for example, there are no standardized special gazetteers for names of rivers, brooks, mountains etc., of which the above-mentioned gazetteer by Breyer contains only the major features. The products of the Federal Mapping Agency (BEV) can be regarded though as de facto standardized names. As there are also no place name gazetteers published any more in this country, the maps of the BEV (available online and searchable⁴) therefore assume the role of a work of reference when it comes to standardized place names.

27.3 Toponymic publications for academic (linguistic) purposes

Place names have attracted the attention of linguists since the very beginning of modern philology as a discipline. Their predominantly historical-etymological interest in toponyms has different reasons: Place names conserve elements of the lexicon that are not used any more in the modern varieties of languages. Furthermore, in many areas of the world place names are the last relics of languages that were once spoken in the respective regions, but which – for whatever reason – have died out. The way these names have been taken over and integrated into the linguistic system in turn may reveal interesting details about the history of the language that prevails today. These are just a few reasons why onomastics have developed into a branch of its own within philology. There are also other disciplines though that are interested in the results of place name research. The etymology of a name may tell interesting stories about the history of a place and its environment, that's why toponomastics are also relevant for historians and archaeologists, for example. And finally names whose etymology refers to environmental incidents like floods or avalanches or to soil conditions

can be used as indicators for potential risks, especially in an era of rapid climate change.

As the historical-etymological dimension is a central – but not by far the only – element of onomastic research, the collection of the earliest traceable written records of a place name is of crucial importance for the documentation and interpretation of place names. Why? Simply because names may be subject to substantial changes in both pronunciation and spelling over the centuries. In many cases in the German-speaking area, for example, the initial “meaning” of a place name got lost, either through language change or innovative processes within the German language. In the course of time people tried to re-motivate the name and thus modified it. The village name *Fraunhofen* in Upper Austria for example is today associated by most speakers of German with the nouns *Frauen* ‘women’ and *Hof* ‘farm’. The oldest record of this name dating from the year 1342 (*Vronhof*) though shows, that it is actually not a ‘women’s farm’, but a ‘feudal manor’, for the first element of this composed name reflects Middle High German *vrôn* ‘command’.⁵ Depending from where we are in the world, these records may date back several hundreds or even thousands of years – or only a few decades. Even in areas where we have place names already mentioned in mediaeval documents, the density of historical records may vary from one category of place names to another. In Central Europe for example names of towns or villages or major rivers tend to appear earlier in written documents than field names or names of mountains or brooks, for example. The above-mentioned relevance of historical records is also mirrored in the structure of scholarly toponomastic reference books, of which they are often an essential component. Furthermore, such publications often contain the current phonetical realization of the names, which may substantially differ from the standard

phonetical form due to the presence of dialect variations. The historical-etymological dimension of place names may also be of relevance for standardization purposes, e.g. if it is used as an argument for (or against) the change of the official form of a place name.

The classical format of academic literature on place names that covers larger areas is the place name dictionary. It is often structured according to alphabetical order, but also other order criteria (e.g. geographical position or administrative affiliation) may be followed. Nowadays several publications of this type are also available online, either simply as pdf-files (sometimes searchable) or as more sophisticated online publications, based on databases. As examples for place name dictionaries available as (searchable) pdf files the 1st edition of P. E. Raper’s “Dictionary of South African Place Names” can be mentioned⁶, or – as an older example – the “Place Names Dictionary of Halland”, a Swedish province.⁷ As a good example for a (printed) multivolume place name dictionary transferred into a database format and now also available online (including mapping of the names) is the “Place name dictionary of Liechtenstein” (“Liechtensteiner Namenbuch”)⁸. It covers more or less the complete toponomastic landscape of this country.

Apart from place name dictionaries we find a broad variety of toponymic publications that deal with all possible aspects of place names. Due to the nature of the subject, these publications often also contain maps. Some scientific publications even focus on the mapping (and thus visualization) of their toponymic content. An example for such a publication could be the “Typological atlas of Old Sorbian place names” (“Atlas altsorbischer Ortsnamentypen”)⁹, analyzing a certain area in East Germany and a smaller adjacent Region in Poland.

To get an overview of publications on toponomastics, bibliographies are a useful tool. The International Council of Onomastic Studies (ICOS) has been drawing up an onomastic bibliography for many decades (1950–1996), published in its periodical “Onoma”. In recent years a database version of this bibliography has been created.¹⁰ Publications on onomastics may also be included in bibliographies of other disciplines. We find for example a section “Onomastik/Onomastique” within the “Romanische Bibliographie Online Datenbank 1965–2013”, an online bibliography of Romance Studies published by the German publishing house De Gruyter (which is not free of charge, though). This section is again subdivided in different subsections, for example in “Toponomastik/Toponomastique”.¹¹

27.4 Other linguistic publications relevant for the study of place names

Apart from place name dictionaries or other literature that focuses on toponymy, there are other linguistic works that may provide useful information with regards to toponymy. Classical language dictionaries for example, be it standard language dictionaries or dictionaries for non-standard varieties (dialects, sociolects, etc.) very often contain toponyms as well. The respective approaches vary from publication to publication, in any event it can be useful to consult the foreword or other outline texts where criteria for the inclusion of toponyms may be described (or not). There are several aspects of geographical names for which dictionaries may even be the first source of information. One example is the adjectival forms of toponyms or the names of residents or natives of a particular place (demonyms). There are languages in which these derivations follow more or less strict rules, e.g. German:

Wien (i.e. Vienna) – *Wiener* (adjective) – *Wiener*, *Wienerin* (demonym, masculine and female form). In many languages though these forms are not predictable because of competing derivation models, e.g. in Italian: *Milano* (i.e. Milan) – *milanese* (adjective) – *milanese* (demonym, masculine and female form), but *Napoli* (Naples) – *napoletano* (adjective) – *napoletano* (demonym, masculine and female form). As place name gazetteers, sometimes do not show this kind of information, it can be very useful to consult a dictionary, in the case of demonyms of Italian towns for example Lo Zingarelli in its 2010 edition. There we not only find *milanese* and *napoletano* as lemmas but also the sections “Inhabitants of Italy” (i.e. demonyms of Italian towns and regions) and “Inhabitants of the world” as an appendix at the end of the volume.¹²

As place names may assume special roles in the system of a language and “behave” different from appellatives, they are very often also taken into account by grammars. If we take a popular grammar of Standard German, for example,¹³ and look up “geographical names” (in German “geographische Namen”) in the index, we see that they are considered under the following sections of the grammar: semantic description of nouns, declination of names, pluralia tantum (cf. geographical names used only in the plural form, e.g. *Alpen*, *Kurilen*, *Niederlande* in German or *Alps*, *Kuril Islands*, *Netherlands* in English) and singularia tantum (a category to which practically all geographical names used in the singular form belong, e.g. *China* in German or English), use of the definitive article and the zero article (cf. the German name for Turkey, which must be used with the definitive article only [*die Türkei*], whereas other geographical names are used without any article [e.g. *China*], the latter phenomenon being called “zero article” in grammars of the German language), particularities in connection with the use of articles.

An important aspect of the linguistic nature of toponyms, apart from spelling and grammar, is their pronunciation, their phonetic form. In some languages, the spelling of place names may be of a very conservative nature and follow earlier orthographic principles. The correct pronunciation may therefore not be predictable. This is for example the case with the German town of *Duisburg*, where the digraph <ui> is pronounced as [y:], which is against the orthoepic principles (i.e. rules of pronunciation) of (today’s) Standard German. Place name gazetteers may contain this kind of information, but also dictionaries¹⁴ (often only of major or commonly known objects though). For many languages, special pronunciation dictionaries (print editions with phonetic transcription or online versions with integrated audio files) exist, which may also contain toponyms. Last but not least the “Placenames Database of Ireland” can be mentioned as an excellent example for the successful inclusion of an existing specific toponymic database containing pronunciation audio files in a wider online geographical names database, linked to online maps, scans of unpublished toponymic material, a “Glossary of words commonly found in Irish place names”, biographical resources (“Irish-Language Biographies”) etc.

27.5 Unpublished material relevant for the study of place names

Apart from publications or online sources also unpublished material can be very useful for the study of toponymic issues. In connection with linguistic field research (for example in connection with a dictionary project) more or less as a huge amount of toponymic data may be collected. If we take a closer look at some questionnaires for such dictionary projects we may find questions which directly aim at collecting toponyms. Number C5 of the questionnaire of the “Dictionary of

American regional English” for example reads as follows: “What are the names of some of the lakes and ponds around here?”¹⁵

Also ethnological research projects may implicitly help to document toponyms. The material of the “German Ethnological Atlas” (“Atlas der deutschen Volkskunde”) for example contains also a lot of information sent back by the thousands of persons who filled out the respective questionnaires in the 1930s. A few questions even directly address toponyms, for example question 167b, where informants are asked if a specific road or

27.6 Endnotes

¹ See

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/wg2.html>, accessed 5 December 2015.

² See Breu, Josef: Geographisches Namenbuch Österreichs, bearbeitet nach den Empfehlungen der Vereinten Nationen. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975 (= Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Kartographie, Forschungen zur theoretischen Kartographie 3).

³ See <http://www.linz.govt.nz/regulatory/place-names/find-place-name/new-zealand-gazetteer-place-names>, accessed 5 December 2015.

⁴ See www.austrianmap.at, accessed 5 December 2015.

⁵ All this is illustrated in the respective article of the “Dictionary of Upper Austrian Place Names”: Wiesinger, Peter (ed.), Ortsnamenbuch des Landes Oberösterreich, vol. 3, 1994, p. 64f.

⁶ See

<https://archive.org/details/DictionaryOfSouthernAfricanPlaceNames>, accessed 5 December 2015. It should be mentioned though that in the meantime newer editions of this work have been published, cf. Raper, P. E.: New

path is used by the funeral procession on its way to the cemetery and what the name of this road or path is.¹⁶

Even if these toponyms are often not in the focus of the projects by which they were collected, it would be a great benefit also for onomastics to have the respective unpublished and often not analysed material at least digitized and available online. This is for example already the case with the “German Language Atlas” (“Deutscher Sprachatlas”), a huge long-term project started in the 19th century and aiming at mapping dialect phenomena of German. In a certain phase of the collection process

dictionary of South African place names. Johannesburg: Ball, 2004.

⁷ Ortsnamen i Hallands län. 3 vols. Uppsala: Lundequist, 1948.

⁸ Stricker, Hans et. al: Liechtensteiner Namenbuch 1: Ortsnamen. 6 vols. Vaduz: Historischer Verein für das Fürstentum Liechtenstein, 1999; for the online version cf.

<http://historischerverein.li/taetigkeiten/projekte/abgeschlossene-projekte/liechtensteiner-namenbuch>, accessed 5 December 2015.

⁹ Eichler, Ernst (ed.): Atlas altsorbischer Ortsnamentypen. Studien zu toponymischen Arealen des altsorbischen Gebietes im westslawischen Sprachraum. 5 vols. Leipzig: Verlag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000-2004.

¹⁰ Cf. International Bibliography of Onomastic Sciences, <http://www.icosbibliography.net/cob/>, accessed 5 December 2015.

¹¹ See

<http://www.degruyter.com/databasecontent?dbid=rom&dbsource=%2Fdb%2Ffrom>, accessed 5 December 2015.

(1880s until 1930s) informants were also asked to write down the name of their village in the local dialect form. Due to this initiative, there are thousands of questionnaires available from Southern Germany, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Austria, Southern Tyrol and other regions containing this kind of information. Since a few years the scans of the respective questionnaires are now online and accessible via a catalogue.¹⁷

¹² Lo Zingarelli 2010. Vocabolario della lingua italiana. 2010 reprint of the 12th ed. Bologna: Zanichelli, 2009, cf. pp. 1388, 1455, 2634ff.

¹³ Gerhard Helbig / Joachim Buscha: Deutsche Grammatik. Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht. 10th ed. Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1987, cf. p. 723.

¹⁴ Cf. the entry *Duisburg* in the online version of the most popular dictionary of the German language, the “Duden”, which also contains an audio file with the Standard German pronunciation of this place name: <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Duisburg>, accessed 5 December 2015.

¹⁵ Cf.

<http://www.daredictionary.com/page/questionnaire/#Topography>, accessed 5 December 2015.

¹⁶ M. Zender (ed.): Atlas der deutschen Volkskunde. Neue Folge. Vol. 1. Marburg an der Lahn, 1958-1979, p. 28.

¹⁷ See

<http://regionalsprache.de/Wenkerbogen/Katalog.aspx>, accessed 5 December 2015.