toponymy course
Naming Principles

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We give names in order to have labels for geographical objects.
Why do we name? In order to make sense of our environment
We give names

- In order to be able to have labels for geographical objects.
- That is much more important than the semantic meaning of the names.
- We give names to point, linear, area- and 3D-objects on the Earth’s surface.
What do we name:

- Rivers and lakes
- Mountains
- Settlements
- Roads, bridges, etc
- Bays, gulfs, capes
- Polders, huertas
- Estates
- Administrative areas
- Regions
- Islands
- Fields
- Houses, farms
- Slopes
What do we name them for?

- Attribute names
- Names of cardinal directions
- Names of soil or vegetation characteristics
- Names to commemorate events
- Names that commemorate other places
- Names to commemorate people
- Names with religious overtones
- Names to stake claims
Names mostly start as descriptive names

- So first names mostly are transparent.
- Later, because knowledge of the (initial) language disappears, they may become opaque.
Nature of the name:

- Specific part
- Generic part
- Possible transfer to other objects (false generics)

The relationship between specific and generic name parts may indicate:
- nature
- property
- purpose
- events
What is expressed in geographical name? Relationships between x and y

- X with/of Y: Thabazimbi (mountain with 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)

(after Meiring, 1993)
These relationships might be expressed in place names because specific events happened there:

- Physical
- Physiological
- Sensory
- Emotive
- Intellectual
- Communicative
- Social
- Controlling
- Movement
- Impact
- Transfer
Names might be

- Simplex: Hawaii, Oslo, Pretoria, Enschede
- Complex: Port Elizabeth, al-Qahira, New York, Frankfurt am Main
Apart from establishing relationships or memorizing events, names do more:

They have/provide connotations! (descriptive backing):

What do you think of when you hear the name Hawaii, New York, Gaza Strip Pernambuco?
Names do more (2)

Names provide boundaries: in an urban environment street names are grouped in themes, so that when a person hears a street name, she recognises the theme and will know where to go.
DISCIPLINE

historical geography

METHODS

reconstruction of former landscapes and of former relationships, movements

etymology (derivation, meaning)

CONTENTS

plantnames

-> odonymy

-> hydronymy

-> oronymy

-> choronymy

-> hagronymy

donomastics

standardization

anthroponymy

cartography
Historical aspect:

Names tell us something about:

- The nature of the entity named when the name was given
- The nature of the society that provided the name: its attitude towards nature
Names ending in –burg: 7th-9th century
Names ending in –donk: after 10th cent.
Names ending in –dam: after 13th cent.

Just as for Christian names, we also see trends in place names
Synchronous research: Sea name categories
Diachronous research: Sea naming period
Toponyms ending on –broek, -woud and –veen, behind the coastal dunes in the Netherlands, and their relation to the natura of the subsoil: eutropic peat ( ), eutropic/mesotrophic peat ( ), oligotrophic peat ( )
Role of names

ROLE OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

cartographic purposes

oral
  → pronunciation
  → orientation

non - oral
  → orientation
    → link
  → anchor
  geographical framework
  → sovereignty

non cartographic purposes

  → etymology
  → description
  → brand names
  → symbols
  → images
  → education
  → traffic