

[next>](#)

S02 The naming process

[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1.We give names](#)[2.What do we name?](#)[3.What do we name for?](#)[4.Nature of names](#)[5.What is expressed?](#)[6.Name types](#)[7.Place names research](#)[8.Sea name categories](#)[9.Sea naming period](#)[next>](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<previous - next>

The content of this module is based on teaching materials by Meiring. These teaching materials are made available in the "[documents](#)" section.

The module contains the following chapters:

[Introduction](#)[Chapter 1:](#) We give names[Chapter 2:](#) **What** do we name?[Chapter 3:](#) **What** do we name **for**?[Chapter 4:](#) **Nature** of the names[Chapter 5:](#) What is **expressed** in a geographical name?[Chapter 6:](#) Name **types**[Chapter 7:](#) Place names **research**[Chapter 8:](#) **Sea name categories**[Chapter 9:](#) **Sea naming period**

When reading through the following pages, you will come across some uncommon terms. These terms are hyperlinked to the UNGEGN [Glossary of Terminology](#) (pdf). Behind each term a number (#) is given that corresponds to the numbering applied in this glossary, e.g. [toponymy](#) (#344).

For exercises and documents (and literature) on this topic see respectively the "[Exercises](#)" and/or the "[Documents](#)" section of this module.

The complete module can be downloaded [here](#).

[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)

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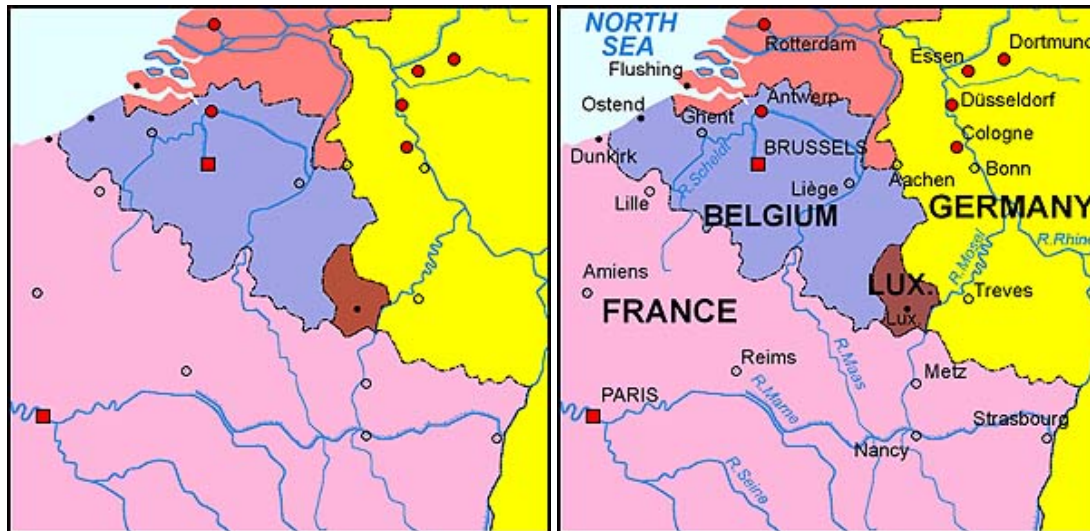
[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1.We give names](#)[2.What do we name?](#)[3.What do we name for?](#)[4.Nature of names](#)[5.What is expressed?](#)[6.Name types](#)[7.Place names research](#)[8.Sea name categories](#)[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

INTRODUCTION

[<previous](#) - [next>](#)

Why do we name?

[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1.We give names](#)[2.What do we name?](#)[3.What do we name for?](#)[4.Nature of names](#)[5.What is expressed?](#)[6.Name types](#)[7.Place names research](#)[8.Sea name categories](#)[9.Sea naming period](#)[<previous](#) - [next>](#)

1. WE GIVE NAMES

<previous - next>



- 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

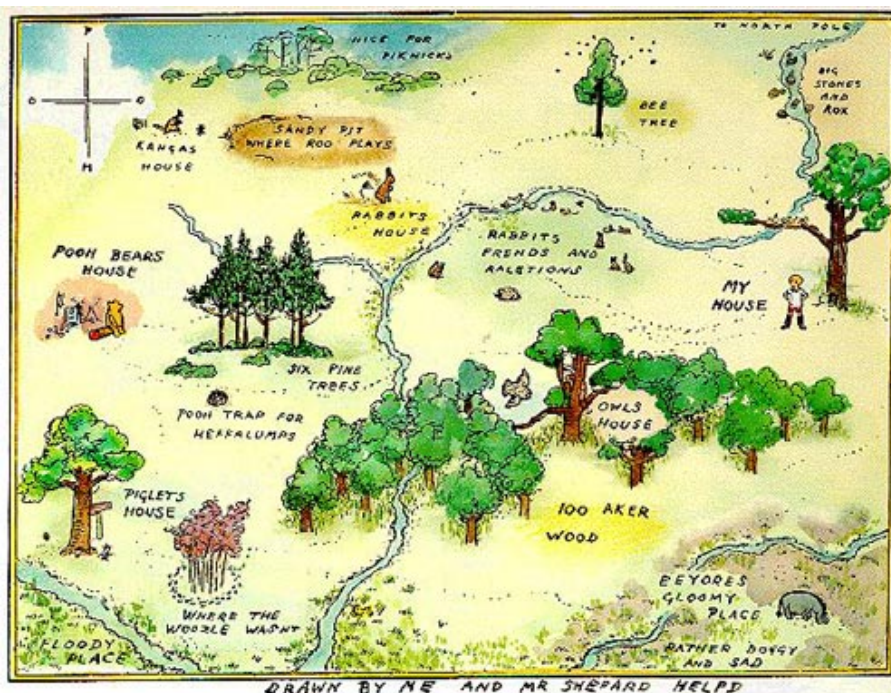


Home
|
Selfstudy
:
[The naming process](#)
|
[Contents](#)
|
[Intro](#)
|
[1.We give names](#)
|
[2.What do we name?](#)
|
[3.What do we name for?](#)
|
[4.Nature of names](#)
|
[5.What is expressed?](#)
|
[6.Name types](#)
|
[7.Place names research](#)
|
[8.Sea name categories](#)
|
[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

2. WHAT DO WE NAME?

<previous - next>

Source: <http://www.oh-no.com/wood.html>

Rivers and lakes
 Mountains
 Settlements
 Roads, bridges, etc
 Bays, gulfs, capes
 Polders
 Estates
 Administrative areas
 Regions
 Islands
 Fields
 Houses, farms
 ...

[Home](#)
 |
[Selfstudy](#)
 :
[The naming process](#)
 |
[Contents](#)
 |
[Intro](#)
 |
[1.We give names](#)
 |
[2.What do we name?](#)
 |
[3.What do we name for?](#)
 |
[4.Nature of names](#)
 |
[5.What is expressed?](#)
 |
[6.Name types](#)
 |
[7.Place names research](#)
 |
[8.Sea name categories](#)
 |
[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

3. WHAT DO WE NAME FOR?

<previous - next>



What do we name them for?



Source: © www.terkepbank.hu

- 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

[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1.We give names](#)[2.What do we name?](#)[3.What do we name for?](#)[4.Nature of names](#)[5.What is expressed?](#)[6.Name types](#)[7.Place names research](#)[8.Sea name categories](#)[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

4. NATURE OF THE NAMES

<previous - next>



- Specifics
- Generics
- Possible transfer to other objects (false generics)

Generics indicate the nature of the named object: in Mount Everest, mount is the generic part, and Everest is the specific part. When the generic part of the original name no longer matches the named object, we refer to false generics: Bloemfontein in Afrikaans refers to a fountain with flowers (bloemen), but it now is the capital of the Free State province in South Africa. Rio de Janeiro refers to the river (rio) discovered in January. Instead of a river it now refers to the largest city in Brazil. Tel Aviv refers to the Hill of Spring, instead of the largest city of Israel, etc.

False generics

City names with modified meaning

- Bloemfontein
- Rio de Janeiro
- Blackpool
- Montevideo
- Tel Aviv

Relationship between specific and generic may denote

- Nature
- Property
- Purpose
- Events

- "Vaal River" refers to a river with a greyish tint (vaal in Afrikaans)
- "Stellenbosch" refers to a forest (bosch) that was the property of governor Van der Stel
- "Bloedrivier" refers to a river where a bloody (bloed) battle was waged
- "Natal" refers to a region that was discovered at Christmas (Natal in Portuguese) 1498

Home
|
Selfstudy
:
The naming
process
|
Contents
|
Intro
|
1. We give
names
|
2. What do
we name?
|
3. What do
we name for?
|
4. Nature of
names
|
5. What is
expressed?
|
6. Name
types
|
7. Place names
research
|
8. Sea name
categories
|
9. Sea naming
period

<previous - next>

5. WHAT IS EXPRESSED IN A GEOGRAPHICAL NAME?

<previous - next>

**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, click [here](#) to download article)

Geographical names expressing specific events

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| • Physical | • Social |
| • Physiological | • Controlling |
| • Sensory | • Movement |
| • Emotive | • Impact |
| • Intellectual | • Transfer |
| • Communicative | • Complex |

Home
|
Selfstudy
:
[The naming process](#)
|
[Contents](#)
|
[Intro](#)
|
[1.We give names](#)
|
[2.What do we name?](#)
|
[3.What do we name for?](#)
|
[4.Nature of names](#)
|
[5.What is expressed?](#)
|
[6.Name types](#)
|
[7.Place names research](#)
|
[8.Sea name categories](#)
|
[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

6. NAME TYPES

<previous - next>

Names might be

- *Simplex*: Hawaii, Oslo, Pretoria, Enschede
- *Complex*: Port Elizabeth, al-Qahira, New York, Frankfurt am Main



Source: © www.wirednewyork.com

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



Home
|
Selfstudy
:
[The naming process](#)
|
[Contents](#)
|
[Intro](#)
|
[1.We give names](#)
|
[2.What do we name?](#)
|
[3.What do we name for?](#)
|
[4.Nature of names](#)
|
[5.What is expressed?](#)
|
[6.Name types](#)
|
[7.Place names research](#)
|
[8.Sea name categories](#)
|
[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

7. PLACE NAMES RESEARCH

<previous - next>

**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: attitude vs nature

The way in which man names geographical objects (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 relationships between these domains (Meiring 1993, click [here](#) to download article).

Different research approach

- Synchronous
- Diachronous

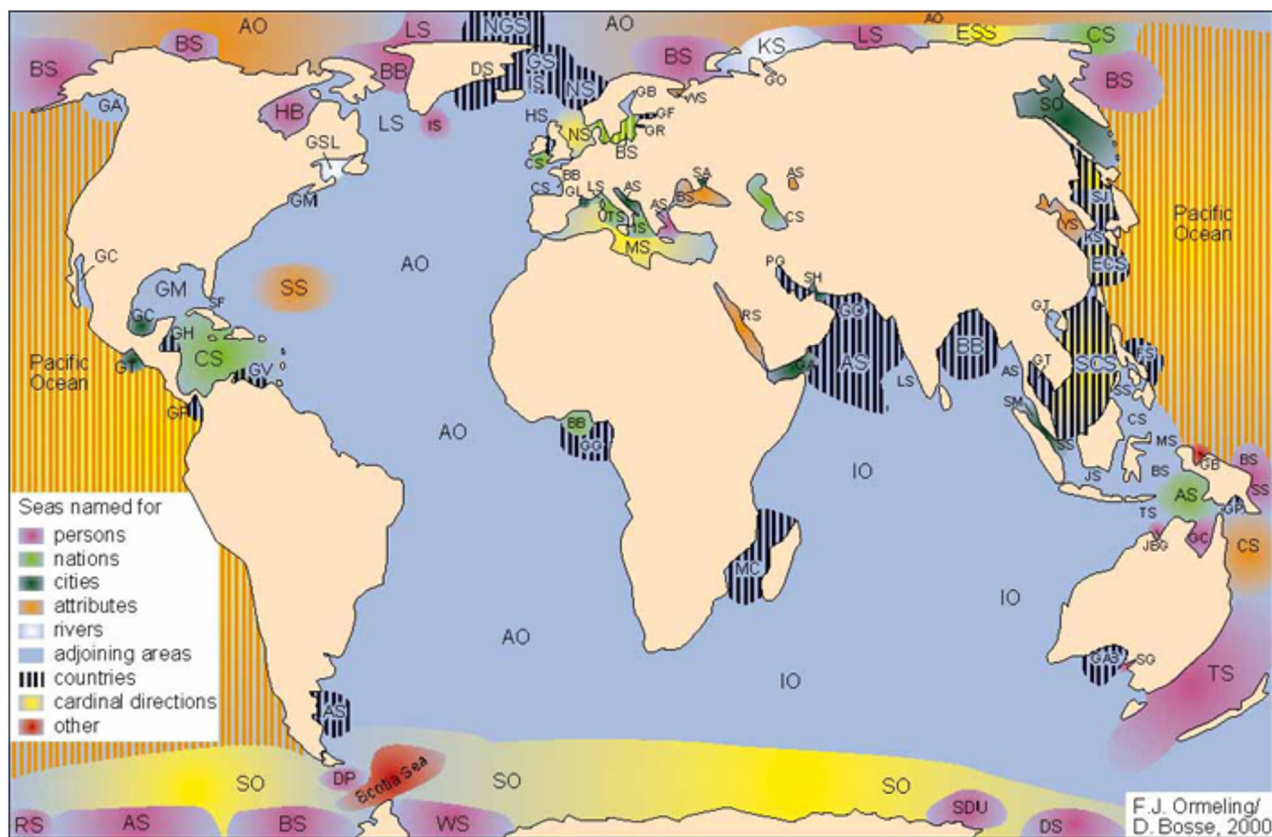
A synchronous research approach studies all names that were in use in a society at a specific time) see [next](#) page (#8), see name categories. A diachronous approach looks at the development-changes in the use of names over time (see [page 9](#), see naming periods).

Home
|
Selfstudy
:
[The naming process](#)
|
[Contents](#)
|
[Intro](#)
|
[1.We give names](#)
|
[2.What do we name?](#)
|
[3.What do we name for?](#)
|
[4.Nature of names](#)
|
[5.What is expressed?](#)
|
[6.Name types](#)
|
[7.Place names research](#)
|
[8.Sea name categories](#)
|
[9.Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

8. SEA NAME CATEGORIES

<previous - next>

[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1. We give names](#)[2. What do we name?](#)[3. What do we name for?](#)[4. Nature of names](#)[5. What is expressed?](#)[6. Name types](#)[7. Place names research](#)[8. Sea name categories](#)[9. Sea naming period](#)

<previous - next>

9. SEA NAMING PERIOD

[<previous](#)[Home](#)[Selfstudy](#)[The naming process](#)[Contents](#)[Intro](#)[1.We give names](#)[2.What do we name?](#)[3.What do we name for?](#)[4.Nature of names](#)[5.What is expressed?](#)[6.Name types](#)[7.Place names research](#)[8.Sea name categories](#)[9.Sea naming period](#)[<previous](#)