

PLACES, NAMES and PLACE NAMES

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It seems to be a common belief that every place has its name. The reality looks a little different, though. It often happens that a modern collector of toponyms, while walking on a terrain, finds places, or at least natural objects that the informant cannot provide a name for. We can say that the existence of a name depends on extralinguistic factors, even though a name is a linguistic item, being a part of a language rather than of a place. Depending on the predominant way of living in different periods of history, man has chosen to live in places with different natural conditions (Indreko 1934: 113–122; Pall 1977: 7). According to everyday needs, men gave names to places of some importance to him, thus differentiating them from other, unimportant places. As the way of living changed, new places moved into focus, while some of the old ones fell into oblivion, as did their names, thus breaking a tradition.

Although several definitions have been offered for the term "place name," every language user knows quite well, what a place name is. He has learned that certain linguistic signs identify a place, differentiating it from all other, either similar or different places. Consequently, words and phrases employed as place names have but one object of reference, one single meaning. We can say that the only way a place name, as a proper name in general, differs from an appellative (common noun) is its function. A name serves to identify and individualize, whereas an appellative is used to classify. This distinction was not recognized easily. It was preceded by a long search for morphological and extralinguistic signals that turn a word or a word combination into a proper name.

In place names there is the problem of the boundary between common and proper nouns. Most of the borderline cases can be described as place descriptions referring to their relative locations: *Alempool heinamaa* 'the lower meadow,' *Pealminerava* 'the higher reef,' *Ülevaltpõld* 'the higher field,' *Külaalune põld* 'the field near the village,' literally 'the field under the village' etc. This type of names can

be found in other Finnic languages as well (Nissilä 1944: 399–405). Traditionally they have been listed among proper names, although according to some scholars toponyms should qualify for proper names only if their appellative nature has ceased to be transparent (Penttilä 1943: 37). Some scholars still believe that a place name can be considered a proper name only if the reality has changed to differ from what the name refers to, e.g. *Veskimägi* (*veski* 'mill' + *mägi* 'hill') cannot be called a proper name so far the hill still really carries a mill.

Although linguistically opaque (personal and place) names have been intriguing people from times immemorial, onomastics is a relatively new discipline. Attention has been paid to the problems of naming already since the 17th century, but the early beliefs and results were quite arbitrary. At the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, the German philosopher, linguist and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm **Leibnitz** wrote in his book *Brevis designatio meditationum de originibus gentium* that all proper names originate in common names. This idea serves as the basic principle for modern onomastics: *nomen est omen*. According to this idea a name is originally not just an arbitrary group of speech sounds, but one having a meaning, i.e. some mental contents which may or may not have gradually lost its transparency up to becoming totally opaque. Not a single name has emerged accidentally, there must have been a human association between the place and the name, something to be found out by etymological research. In a wider perspective the above approach to proper names could be called an evolutionist one.

According to the evolutionist point of view it is natural to assume that the inhabitants (hunters, fishermen, tillers etc.) of a certain area would use certain words or word combinations to point out certain spots, natural objects, settlements and artefacts to distinguish them from the landscape. As the word is used in that particular connection over and over again, and as it becomes familiar among a growing number of people, the appellative gradually develops into a proper name. The evolutionist approach to denomination focuses on two factors, notably, the place and its first name-giver, studying the influence of the place on the name-giver and his/her verbal reaction to this influence. Obviously there is a difference between the name systems of a fisherman and a tiller, even in case they live in one and the same village. Such occupation-derived differences in Finnish place names have been discussed by R. L. Pitkänen (1998).

As for modern names, however, most researchers believe that many a name has been specially made up. Human ability to create linguistic signs functioning efficiently in verbal communication leads us to assume that the built-in grammar enabling verbal expression of our ideas must include – beside all else – the rules of name synthesis, i.e. the syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical traits typical of place names (Kiviniemi 1978: 77).

Attempts have been made to classify place names by size, colour, form, ownership etc., proceeding from the so-called name-giving principles, which the Czech scholar R. Šrámek has summarized in the following four question words: *what?*, *where?*, *whose?*, and *what kind of?* (Šrámek 1973). That quadrupartite classification has been called an extralinguistic model (Pall 1997: 20). Also, the Swedish onomatologist I. Modér and the Finnish onomatologist V. Nissilä have attempted to analyse the extralinguistic background of names, with respect to our closest surroundings.

Their evolutionist approach, proceeds from the origin of the name. Some newer methods of semantic and syntactic analysis have inspired K. Zilliacus and E. Kiviniemi, whose classifications are based on 1. the relation of a place with another place, 2. the character of the place, 3. the relation of the place with its spatial and temporal environment.

So we have accepted the thesis that every proper name has its origin in a common noun. The Finnic place names, including Estonian ones, have – at least originally – been compound words. It seems rather likely, though, that most of those compound words have never been compound appellatives. The initial part of the town name *Kuressaare linn* probably originates in the name of the island (*saar* 'island'), but **Kuressaar* or **Kuresaar* was originally not an appellative compound, even though at first sight the *kure*-component seems familiar enough (*kure* as Gen. of *kurg* 'crane').

Leaving aside philosophical details, we can say that a language does, indeed, include a pattern for name formation, i.e. certain rules according to which names are made up of lexical units. Although in principle any word seems to be fit for becoming a name component, reality does not prove it. Evidently, word selection for names is governed by an extra-linguistic system. Estonian specialists in toponomastics have so far not paid much attention to the relations either between the name and its object of reference, or between the name and the society. A few relevant observations are based on the Finnish material, though,

according to which the name-giver is, for example, expected to take into consideration other names occurring in the vicinity. Kiviniemi has pointed out that the number of places of the same kind may have a considerable influence on the semantic character of the names in the area. Such places that are rare near the home of the community need not be given any extraordinary or rare name as quite ordinary name-giving systems will do (1978: 80). The smallest Finnish and Estonian name systems belong to farms. Estonian farms being small, the words *Mägi* 'hill' and *Jõgi* 'river' could well function as proper names within the confines of a farm (term names will be discussed below). So, on a farm appellative words and phrases could develop into proper names as their object of reference was locally unique.

The basic formula of Estonian place names is C1Nom/Gen + C2Nom: e.g. *Mustjõgi*, *Kasemägi*, *Pikkjärvi*, *Suursoo* (Pall 1997: 26). The first component is an attributive and the other component is a generic word, i.e. a determinative. As a rule, the attributive has an identifying and individualizing function, whereas the determinative has the classifying function. As the determinative is the place word in place names, the study of those determinatives enables the curious to find out what kind of places have been found worth giving a name to. Some statistics are yet available, too. A non-specialist might perhaps assume that the largest number of bog and meadow names can be found in places especially rich in bogs and meadows. The reality is more complicated. The most frequent object of reference in the place names of western Estonia with its boggy plains is 'hill,' i.e. this is where the yield of compound place names with the *mägi*-component is the largest (Kallasmaa 1981: 114), whereas *soo* 'mire' comes only seventh in the line. Actually, *mägi* 'hill' is the most popular object of reference in place names all over Estonia, including the really hilly area in the south-east. But the south-eastern upland also hides a lot of small mires, supporting the fact that the area is richer in place-names with the determinative *soo* 'mire' than the large mires of western and central Estonia. According to Valdek Pall (1997: 64) the top of the frequency list of place name final components is common for most part of the Estonian territory, despite the considerable differences in the local usage and landscape (the material analysed came from 20 parishes). The spread of this or that name element may be affected by various circumstances, both linguistic and extralinguistic. According to Pall (1997: 58) the primary importance belongs to the character of the landscape, i.e. the presence or absence of

certain objects of reference: e.g. such determinatives as *laid*, *kari*, *rahu* denoting small islets in the sea, can never be met inland. The linguistic peculiarities of the local usage come only second. Still another important factor is the suitability of the location (landscape object) for human life and economic activities.

It should also be pointed out that the above-mentioned formula appears in different variants. First, almost all names of Estonian settlements, as well as of some bigger natural objects, have dropped the original determinative, leaving us with *Tartu*, *Pärnu*, *Narva*, *Peipsi* instead of *Tartu/Pärnu/Narva linn* 'the town of Tartu/Pärnu/Narva' or *Peipsi järv* 'Lake Peipsi.' Neither do most of the village or farm names take the determinatives *küla* or *talu*, respectively, any more. Second, even a two-component place name may become the attributive part of another place name, in which case we speak of a place name with a compound attributive. In this perspective, the story of the name *Pikaoidu oja* 'P. brook' (<*pikk* 'long'+*oit* 'puddle') was, most likely, as follows (Pall 1977: 45): **Pikkoit* → **Pikaoidu heinamaa* (→ *Pikaoidu talu*) → *Pikaoidu oja*. This sequence demonstrates how during a certain period a name has evolved to refer to different objects. Notably, the original determinative has become the second element of the attributive, while its place is taken by another determinative referring to a new object. So, as time goes by, even name types may change, let alone individual names, while place names are particularly sensitive to changes in land exploitation and in the development of the village community.

According to Gea Troska the Estonian village was established in the feudal age. Yet in Saaremaa big villages are believed to have existed as early as in the prehistoric times (Jaanits *et al.* 1982: 337), emerging around the 1st–4th centuries (Lõugas 1985:56), cf. also Lang 1996: 503 suggesting that the first village-like structures were probably formed yet in the Roman Iron Age). In any case the establishment was completed by the 11th century. A village consisted of a set of households, or farms having a common territory. The village fields and meadows had been divided among the farms, each having several scattered patches of land situated among those of other owners, whereas the pastures were in communal exploitation. The system (also called strip-farming) persisted right into the middle of the 19th century. The village land formed a whole, plus some separate grasslands or wooded areas (Troska 1987: 13). In the earlier centuries the patches of land were reraffled between households every year, but later (by the 13th century – Ligi 1961: 247) fields had passed into the demesne of

individual households. Meadows, however, seem to have been raffled even later, which has left its traces in some place names. In Saaremaa, for example, we find *Arbaia talu* (farm), *Arbakurisu* (Karst hole, cleft), *Arbademägi* (hill), *Arbadepealne* (meadow), *Arva talu* (farm), *Arvaalune* (meadow), *Arva heinamaa* (meadow), *Arva jõgi* (river), *Arvakoppel* (paddock), *Arvamets* (wood), *Arvanurk* (paddock), *Arvasoo* (swamp), *Arvandi põld* (field) and in Hiiumaa there is a meadow called *Suurearva heinamaa*. All of these contain the element *arb:arva* 'a narrow strip of a meadow or field' (Kallasmaa 1996) which appellative is, in its turn, associated with the word *arp:arbu* (*arp:arbi*; *varp*, *arb*) 'lot,' Ger. 'Loos, Zaubermittel' (Wiedemann 1893).

The so-called strip-farming that has long been considered the most ancient system of land-use on the Estonian territory is certainly a reason behind the great number of names of natural objects on this territory, as the patches of land belonging to a household were scattered across the village territory. (The actual history was rather more complex – the Baltic fields and the Celtic fields, block-shaped fields and strip fields, sometimes used simultaneously, cf. Lang 1996: 482–490). Around the mid-19th century the consolidation of lands began, which the process lingered in some places until 1940. As late as in the early 19th century scattered fields are reported to have been in use in all regions of Estonia (Troska 1987: 33). The consolidation of farmlands brought about major changes in the purpose of most of the plots, while many place names disappeared from use and a single, previously rare pattern of name formation prevailed.

The above change can be better analysed by means of the concept of a place name association, which in my interpretation is the set of place names used by the inhabitants of a certain territory (to refer to the objects situated within that territory). In Estonia the biggest such territory usually belongs to a village, which means that the names in use on the village territory should, in the ideal case, be familiar to all native residents of the village (some differences could be explained by occupational differences like the above-mentioned case of fishermen versus land cultivators). In the case of denser settlement a place name association may also embrace two or three neighbouring or interlaced villages.

Having discussed place name associations at a greater length elsewhere (Kallasmaa 1992) I would like to point out here that Estonian place name associations seem to fall into two (village-based) categories:

1) a settlement (village, farm) name in the centre of a great number of names of natural objects not, however, derived from the central name, either linguistically or onomastically. Usually the farm names are in a considerable minority compared to the names of natural objects.

2) associations containing mainly settlement names. A list of village-associated place names contains mainly the name of the village itself and farm names, and very few names of natural objects. No names have been recorded for fields, pastures, meadows, etc. Possibly these were called after the farm: so the property of *Jaani talu* (farm) included *Jaani heinamaa* (meadow), *Jaani karjamaa* (pasture), *Jaani mägi* (hill) etc. Smaller natural objects could also be called after the neighbouring farm. It often happened that neither the informant nor the name collector regarded such farm-derived names as proper names and left them out of record.

The name associations of the first category were older, village-centered and reflective of strip-farming, whereas the second kind is farm-centered. After the scattered landholdings had been consolidated, the farms became separate entities and their mutual connections loosened. As an Estonian farm was relatively small, its lands could easily be described like ordinary objects of landscape: river, hill, field, pasture, swamp, bog etc., which, within the confines of a particular farm, developed into term names such as *Jõgi* 'River,' *Mägi* 'Hill,' *Põld* 'Field,' *Karjamaa* 'Pasture,' *Soo* 'Swamp,' *Raba* 'Bog' etc., as the classifying function coincided with the identifying one. Talking about the neighbours, the term was supplemented by the name of the farm and thus it became a determinative. The pattern *farm/village name + name of natural object* flourished.

Even today the files of the Institute of the Estonian Language contain a limited number of term names, but there is no reference either to how widely they were known or to whether the background system was farm-based or village-based. The following example of the structural variety of term names comes from western Estonia:

(1) a geographical term functioning as a name on a limited area, while the meaning of the original appellative roughly corresponds to the object referred to by the name: *Rand* (meadow 'Shore'), *Silmad* (bodies of water), *Lepik* (meadow, 'Alder grove'), *Nina* (Cape), *Tire* 'Brook,' *Sõerd* (meadow), *Lubt* (meadow, 'Floodplain meadow'), *Aas* (meadow), *Rank* (Hill), *Kuusik* (wood, 'Spruce grove') etc.;

(2) a name based on a geographical term the meaning of which does not correspond to the object of reference: *Meri* (meadow, 'Sea'), *Tammik* (field, 'Oak grove'), *Lõpp* (pool, *lõpp:lõpe* dial. 'Bay'), *Kanarbik* (field, 'Heather'). Those names indicate the former character of the place;

(3) a name based on an appellative that neither is used in the dialect any more nor refers to the present character of the object of reference: *Laks* (meadow, cf. *laks* 'puddle'), *Oit* (meadow, cf. *oit* 'puddle'), *Ahl* (pasture, cf. *ahl* 'puddle') etc. There are even names without an appellative found in the modern usage: *Võhastik*.

The above three groups of term names illustrate the development of an appellative into a proper name.

Most of the names of natural objects are compound names consisting of an attributive and a determinative: *Läänemeri* 'Western + sea,' *Võrtsjärv* '?' + lake,' *Emajõgi* 'Mother + river,' *Väike väin* 'Small strait.' Sometimes the attributive is a compound, sometimes the determinative may be missing altogether. In the latter case the name originates, as a rule, in a settlement name.

The names with a compound attributive component fall into two groups:

(1) the compound attributive can occur as a place name: *Langemetsa mägi* ('Hill of a Felled Grove'), *Jooksoja põld* ('Field of a Running Brook'), *Allikniidijõgi* ('Springmeadow's River'), *Tõrvaaru mets* ('Tar Grassland Grove ?').

(2) the attributive compound originates outside the domain of proper names: *Vanakuradikivi* 'Old Nick's Stone,' *Köstriemandakivi* 'Parish clerk wife's stone,' *Vanamoorigäär* 'Old woman's bend' (bog), *Utetalloja* 'Lamb's Brook' etc.

As we could see, two-part names of natural objects are in the nominative case. Settlement names, however, are genitive-based, as settlement names are, as a rule, used without the determinative: the village names *Abaja*, *Ariste*, *Kuralase*, *Lellapere*, or the town names *Jõgeva*, *Paide*, *Mustvee*. The name of our capital *Tallinn*, having retained the determinative (*linn* 'town') is an exception among other settlement names. Its formal structure rather resembles that of a name of a natural object.

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