

Cognitive approaches to Hungarian toponymy

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1. Introduction

According to the cognitive approach language is a product of the human mind, thus it can be investigated as a cognitive phenomenon. Holistic models consider it especially important that language is an integral part of the cognitive system, which is why we have to take into consideration this bi-directional connection during the examination of language. It is also important that this approach doesn't separate the language and its use from the person who's speaking. The cognitive view describes language through cognitive processes such as categorization, prototype theory or conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy. Toponyms, as elements of language, are also the products of the human mind, produced by people living in communities. The cognitive aspect practically replaces the toponyms in the medium in which they function, and makes possible complex research into the use of toponyms. Therefore it seems that the cognitive approach can be used effectively in several areas of toponymy, and it can offer a solution to some questions of onomastics, that can't be answered satisfactorily by traditional means (e.g. the problem of the status of the names which are formed from geographical common nouns). Applying the cognitive view, however, such aspects concerning the usage of toponyms can be foregrounded which previously could not be raised in toponymic research (e.g. the relationship between cognitive maps and toponyms). The cognitive view is not, however, unprecedented in Hungarian toponymic studies. Nevertheless the current cognitive trends only appeared in the 2000s in Hungarian onomastic studies. In my paper I review how the cognitive approach is used in Hungarian onomastic research and consider the results of applying the cognitive view.

2. Background

Hungarian onomastic research (especially historical onomastics) has always been open to other areas of linguistics, as well as to ways of thinking and results of related study fields. Thus the examination of linguistic signs has long involved the observation of phenomena outside of the linguistic system: besides social factors, the special features of human thinking have also been taken into consideration.

The psychological viewpoint already appeared in studies carried out by Lajos Lőrincze. He attempted to reconstruct differences between psychological situations leading to the emergence and transformations of names (1947). However, psychological notions had been applied in the explanation of particular phenomena even before that. An example of this is Manó Kertész' theory on the evolu-

tion of the type of toponyms emerging from proper names without a formant (1939).

Nowadays in Hungary the systematic categorisation of toponyms is usually performed on the basis of István Hoffmann's typology of toponyms developed in 1993. This categorisation is basically a structuralist approach, yet several of its elements perfectly coincide with cognitive theory. When revealing the motives behind name-giving, for example, in István Hoffmann's view we need to bear in mind that name-giving is a cognitive act (1993: 44).

3. The Cognitive approach

3. However, as a general theoretical framework, the cognitive approach appeared in Hungarian onomastics only as late as the early 21st century. Nevertheless, over this short period of time it has been applied successfully in numerous fields of onomastic research in connection with grammatical categorisation of Word-classes and meaning, the typology of toponyms, the categorisation of place names, the metonymical name giving, the mental map. Unfortunately I do not have enough time to talk about every result, so let us take some examples.

3.1. The problem of grammatical categorisation of word-classes and meaning has for a long time constituted a much disputed question related to proper names both in the Hungarian and the international literature. Faced with the unsustainability of the traditional grammatical categorisation of names, András Barabás, György Kálmán C. and Ádám Nádasdy jointly published a study which—applying the pattern of thought of formal logic—eventually came to question whether proper names belong to the linguistic system at all (1977).

However, Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy approaches the question from the aspect of cognitive semantics and provides a description for names on the basis of which several further onomastic phenomena can be explained effectively. Tolcsvai's basic assumption—after Langacker (1991, 2008)—is that human cognition categorises a group of phenomena in the realm of things and entities. Words used for the linguistic expression of things are mostly nouns, that is to say, the prototypical namings of things are nouns. Also proper names frequently appear in a name-giving role. Based on their semantic features and function, therefore, according to cognitive semantics—similarly to the traditional onomastic categorisation—proper names can also be considered elements of the category of nouns that nevertheless represent a special group within the category. They can be interpreted as linguistic units, which means that their processing as proper names does not require breaking them down into linguistic elements that make up the name (Tolcsvai Nagy 2008: 31).

At the same time, between common words and proper names there exists a significant difference in meaning. Common words represent a type or one of its manifestations, and the concretisation of the thing denoted by the common word

takes always place in the text through linguistic means. As opposed to this, the type and its realisation manifest simultaneously in the semantic structure of the proper name. In this way, the entity denoted by the proper name can basically be identified as unique for participants of the communicational situation, thus its identification does not necessitate comparison.

Therefore in this approach, proper names are linguistic units playing the role of nouns, i.e. similarly to nouns, they bear an encyclopaedic, notion-like meaning which for the respective speakers may either be totally schematic, or completely elaborate, with countless possible variations between the two poles (Tolcsvai Nagy 2008, Langacker 1991: 59).

3.2. In Hungarian onomastics several researchers have attempted to create a **typology of toponyms**. The categories of these typologies do not necessarily coincide, neither can they handle well the fact that notions of particular objects may differ from region to region, just like the question of which objects are denoted by proper names. In addition, it has been articulated as a further problem that different types of names are not categorised on the basis of linguistic criteria, but by the types of objects.

However, according to the holistic cognitive approach, the latter concern can be eliminated, since in the mental system there exists no sharp distinction between notions and the linguistic system. Categorisation based on the principle of prototypes also seems to resolve further difficulties related to the typologisation of toponyms. According to the theory of prototypes, as a result of cognitive processes, human beings create categories that are represented by the most typical objects or their features. Studies in cognitive linguistics suggest that no sharp distinctions exist between such categories as the borders between them are often blurred. Whether an object belongs to a particular category or notion, in turn, is often determined by the resemblance of its features to the prototype of the category. Furthermore, the categories display differences at the level of communities or even individuals, reflecting cultural, social and environmental experiences (cf. Rosch 1978).

In Hungarian onomastics the applicability of prototype-theory was confirmed through the categorisation of mountain names (cf. Reszegi 2008).

3.3. The theory of prototypes can be extended also to the description of **linguistic categories and word classes** (cf. Ladányi 1998: 410). According to this, linguistic categories also have typical and peripheral elements, depending on whether they bear the morphologic, syntactic and semantic, etc. features characterising the prototype of the particular category.

Based on these notions, I have attempted to shed new light on the question of toponyms that have identical forms with geographic common words (Reszegi 2009a). In the language use of any community a common word denoting a whole class of things may evolve in a new direction, obtaining the meaning of a

proper name, undergoing a transformation to denote a single entity belonging to the type. Nevertheless, we are often faced with the difficulty of the decision whether such linguistic elements indeed bear the value of proper names. In connection with the evolution of the word's meaning as a proper name, notably, not only the competence of the descriptive linguist, but also that of the general language user is uncertain (Hoffmann 1993: 94).

The question is interlinked with two opposing concepts on the emergence of names. Earlier it was a widely held opinion that common words gradually become proper names. Recently, however, researchers have emphasised the role of conscious name-giving. According to this view, speakers of a language create place names after already existing models in their toponymic system. The uncertainty surrounding the determination of the value as proper name or common word (of purely geographical common word names) nevertheless indicates that in the case of some names we should take into consideration the possibility of the gradual toponymisation of common words. This concept is underpinned in the study carried out by Andrea Heinrich examining the fieldnames of a settlement. In the consciousness of the population of the settlement geographic common names are not necessarily distinguished from the proper names that have evolved from them. Some places are always referred to using geographical common words, yet in the population's language usage some geographical common words serve both as common words and proper names. In addition, Heinrich also records the process of transforming common words into proper names (2000: 14–15).

The uncertainty of categorisation related to pure geographical common word toponyms is a necessary consequence of the gradual transformation into a name. According to a study which I carried out on a non-representative sample, nowadays for most users of the Hungarian language the category of toponyms, particularly microtoponyms is mostly represented by two-part place names, that is to say, most speakers consider the types of names like *Nyerges-hegy* (< *nyereg* + *-s* 'saddle-shaped' + *hegy* 'mountain'), *Zörgő-ér* ('rattling + rivulet'), *Egyházasvizsoly* ('settlement called Vizsoly that has a church' < *egyház* 'church' + *-s* topoformant + *Vizsoly* settlement name) typical toponyms (Reszegi 2009b). Furthermore, the names created with topoformants are also typical toponyms. Toponyms which are formally identical with geographical common words are obviously peripheral elements to the category of toponyms, representing a transition between toponyms and common words. Of course, the existence and extendedness of this transitory category may also display individual differences.

3.4. In the holistic-minded mental system, language and, within language, toponymic representations constituting part of the mental lexicon, are interrelated with spatial representations. Taking this idea as a starting point, in recent Hungarian onomastic research several studies have highlighted a thus far neglected question of onomastics, namely the **relation between the mental map and toponyms**.

The establishment and maintenance of the connection between the mental map and language is facilitated by the fact that in addition to physical perception, linguistic stimuli also play a role in the emergence of spatial representations: human beings grow up hearing speech about space (in some cases certain pieces of spatial information become available to us merely through linguistic mediation), and the notions processed in this way become incorporated into the individual's mental map. In this connection we should keep in mind that people become acquainted with and acquire their knowledge about the world in a community, whose behavioural patterns and communication deeply influence their emerging cognitive system. Therefore speech, on the one hand, mediates spatial notions, and on the other, through the articulation of spatial information, helps to make individual cognitive maps—which differ due to categorisation processes—similar to one other (Reszegi 2012).

The usage of toponyms may prove helpful in revealing the organisation of the cognitive map. Andrea Heinrich takes this as her starting point when, examining the toponyms of a particular settlement, she attempts to unveil the respective name users' cognitive maps (2000). She points out that the relations of the cognitive map ABOVE vs. BELOW and INSIDE vs. OUTSIDE are not organised according to real verticality; instead, their perception is guided by some hierarchical relation (centre and periphery).

The usage of names may reflect differences between the speakers' spatial concepts. In Hungarian no articles are used before names of settlements, but micro-toponyms are preceded by articles (though the reason for this fact has not been investigated yet either from traditional nor cognitive positions). Older speakers in the settlements studied by Andrea Heinrich use the names of the nearby locations *Karoly* and *Liget* with articles, similarly to the field names, since in their eyes the two places with their immigrant population “do not qualify as real, prototypical settlements”. However, the younger generations do not make the same distinction: similarly to the names of other neighbouring settlements, they use also these ones without articles (2000: 9).

The concept of the cognitive map can also be applied successfully in the historic research of toponyms. Erzsébet Gyórfy studied the features of the name usage of ancient Hungarian names of different river sections (2009) and, based on the model of the cognitive map, she concluded that the use of the names of particular river sections was typical within certain closed communities. Thus the names of the sections of the same stream or river do not have a synonymic relation to each other.

At the same time, based on the theory of spatial orientation, we may make some general onomastic-theoretical conclusions. Earlier it was one of the basic assumptions of Hungarian onomastics that toponyms are primarily used to facilitate human orientation in space. However, according to the cognitive approach,

spatial orientation does not so much depend on our knowledge of toponyms (that is, the linking of places with names), but it presupposes storing several other types of knowledge (such as points of orientation, directions, border-lines and distances), thus spatial orientation is largely guided by the structure of our cognitive/mental map (the cognitive representation of space) (cf. Heinrich 2000: 5, Reszegi 2012).

3.5. Taking into account the results of research carried out from a cognitive aspect, the need has recently arisen in Hungarian onomastic research for a **functionalist typology of toponyms** that takes into consideration both community name usage and mental processes. These are the grounds on which István Hoffmann has reshaped his fundamental principles on the typology of toponyms. One of his most crucial conclusions is the idea that in the course of the individual's acquisition of names also means semantic re-creation of the given name, and representation of the names may even change during their later usage. That is to say, the pieces of semantic content expressed in names do not directly represent the world, but our notions of the world. Should we, in turn, look upon toponyms as part of the mental system, the historic justification for semantic motivation loses its relevance (2012).

4. Conclusions

As the above outline shows, the cognitive approach has been applied rather successfully in Hungarian onomastic research. At the same time, the results go beyond the scope of Hungarian onomastic research and, I believe, some aspects of onomastic theory and methodology can be used even at an international level in onomastic research.

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