

## Gyórfy Erzsébet, Individual and collective knowledge of toponyms

1 In Hungarian onomastic literature some traces of socio-onomastic research can be spotted already from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on. The most thoroughly researched subfield of this field is the knowledge of toponyms, which appeared in research works related to the problem of the continuity, transformation and disappearance of toponyms. Most scholars though added their comments on the topic more or less incidentally, as ‘by-products’ to their toponym collections from current language usage. Besides statistical data emphasis was laid on the elucidation of factors influencing the knowledge of names. Synthesising the results of different studies we can conclude that based on observations the knowledge of names is basically influenced by the following factors. Putting the place itself in the centre, what carries importance is (1) the distance from the centre, (2) ownership relations, (3) the character of cultivation and utilisation, and finally (4) frequentation.

Furthermore, the knowledge of names may depend on the names user’s (1) occupation, (2) field of work, (3) age, (4) gender, (5) provenance (whether the person is one of the locals), and (6) personal inclination. In the study of the knowledge of toponyms the greatest advancement was achieved by József Zsolnai, since he placed this question into the very centre of his research interest. As part of his research efforts he interviewed 81 inhabitants (1.2%, total population 6,542) of the settlement called Ásotthalom. His study contains also a detailed description of the method he used. His questionnaire on the knowledge of toponyms distinguishes between three categories: (1) active toponymicon, i.e. the language user is aware of the name and can also localise it, (2) passive toponymicon, i.e. the language user cannot localise the place name, and (3) the language user is not aware/has not heard of the name. Furthermore, based on the order of frequency of the toponyms, he could establish the basic and peripheral elements of the entire toponymicon. In addition, he highlights the knowledge of names also categorised on the basis of the name users’ age and gender. A rather striking deficiency of his sampling is that it focused merely on persons belonging to the age groups between 10 to 15, 40 to 60 and 60 to 80 years, that is to say, it ignored completely the probably most substantial (most numerous and definitely most active) part of the population between 15 and 40 years. Through simultaneous study of the denotate, the name and the name user, he examines also what influences the knowledge of toponyms. Inquiry into the different types of objects shows that it is not so much the distance, but the character of the place that is decisive: the well-known names usually belong to schools, vineyards, factory farms. Furthermore, also the tone of the name may influence its popularity (e.g. *Kurva-domb* ‘Whores’ Hill’). It is noteworthy that the study dedicates attention also to the popularity of parallel names by contrasting the knowledge of old and new toponyms.

László Tóth applied Zsolnai’s method when examining the knowledge of names in the settlement of *Székely*, with the only remarkable difference that the 90 inhabitants he interviewed constitute 14.27% of the population, which should render a more realistic picture of the actual situation. From the criteria influencing the awareness of toponyms Tóth emphasises the necessity of usage. According to his studies at the end of the frequency list of toponyms we will find names where the naming motivation has ceased to exist, as well as newly emerged names. However, the two types point into opposite directions within the toponymicon: while the former ones are about to vanish, the latter ones are becoming more and more active. With respect to the relation between the peripheral and basic toponymicon he states that there is constant migration between the two sections: each name emerges as a peripheral element before becoming part of the basic toponymicon, and finally, after its awareness has faded, it shifts back to the section of peripheral names. It should be noted that according to Tóth those elements of the toponymicon are considered peripheral which are known to less than one third of the interviewees.

2 Henceforward studying the knowledge of toponyms, and in fact socio-onomastic studies disappeared from the scene of Hungarian onomastic research for almost two decades. However, at the same time, the question of spatial representation and the study of the relation between spatial cognition and the linguistic systems of expression related to space shifted to the foreground of cognitive sciences and by now have

become its most intensively studied subfield. The main reason for this is that cognitive scientists believe that spatial cognition may play a decisive role in the relation of language and thinking.

The cognitive map as a central notion of spatial cognition comes from cognitive psychology. The cognitive map refers to the mental representation of space, and differs from the mental map, which is the actual manifestation of the cognitive map (usually in the form of a drawing). While cognitive mapping is an implicit process, mental mapping is the explicit realisation of the same process. However, some authors (just like I myself in my presentation) do not distinguish between the two notions and use them as synonyms.

Kevin Lynch, American urban planner was the first to give a profound description of the elements of the mental map. In his view the individual's mental map consists of five different types of elements and their relationships: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. The general mental map of the external environment emerges from immediate perception and the memories of past experiences. The mental map is the result of an interactive bilateral process taking place between the environment and the observer. This implies that mental images vary from individual to individual, yet Lynch presumes also the existence of a collective image (or map) which is formed on the basis of consensus. The individuals can be considered to form groups that are homogeneous from the aspect of gender, age, occupation, temperament and confidentiality.

Nowadays researchers dedicate distinguished attention to the study of the neurological basis of spatial orientation as well as of the strategies of orientation and route planning. The goal of the latter research trend is to reveal mechanisms of path-finding and route-tracking in everyday situations related to orientation: linguistic coding as well as navigational and communicational strategies. So far studies have been mostly focused on inquiries into the role of common words, thus the role of toponyms in orientation has been somewhat neglected. Nevertheless, from a strategic aspect, in the course of navigation, place names may hold an important position, therefore together with Katalin Reszegi we would like to point out that toponyms should be taken into consideration in the study of spatial representation.

In summary, it can be stated that mental maps refer to representations of space which—according to the network-based connectionist approach—are also linked with different types of knowledge. Visual, auditive, tactile, etc. experiences are stored just like emotional elements or spatial language. Although toponyms are considered by many merely as peripheral elements of language, in my opinion they must not be excluded from the study of spatial language. Therefore in my presentation I will give an outline of the toponymic map of the population of the settlement of Tépe. As the names on the map can be interpreted as potential points of orientation.

**3.1** My onomastic research was carried out in Tépe in August 2013. Tépe is situated in Hajdú-Bihar county, next to Road 47 and the brook of Kék-Kálló, in the area called Sárret. The village neighbours the settlements of Derecske, Konyár, Gáborján, Szentpéterszeg and Berettyóújfalu. The urban area of Tépe covers 96 hectares, surrounded by 2,224 hectares of extra-urban area.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century agricultural activity was uninterrupted on the extra-urban areas. Also the inhabitants of the village owned some lands, which they cultivated themselves. Later on these pieces of privately owned land were nationalised. Since the fall of the communist regime the village has undergone substantial change. More than half of the extra-urban area (farmlands) has been concentrated in the hands of a single family (they either own or lease the pieces of farmland), who continue to cultivate the land, yet due to the modernisation of the equipment nowadays this sector needs less and less labour force. This also means that the active connection between the locals and the extra-urban area has been fading. Certainly, this has substantially affected also the features of the locals' mental map and the related knowledge of toponyms.

The settlement has 1,150 inhabitants, of whom 80 people (14.3%) were involved in my study. For the purposes of my research I established four categories based on age groups: 1) below 20 years, 2) 21 to 40 years, 3) 41 to 60 years, and 4) over 60 years. Furthermore, in the selection of the interviewees my intention

was to represent each and every decade as well as both genders proportionately. Table 1 shows the numerical distribution of my interviewees.

age	total	female		male	
under 20	20	0–10:	2	0–10:	1
		11–20:	9	11–20:	8
21–40	20	21–30:	6	21–30:	3
		31–40:	4	31–40:	7
41–60	20	41–50:	3	41–50:	4
		51–60:	9	51–60:	4
above 60	20	61–70:	4	61–70:	7
		71–80:	4	71–80:	5
	80		41		39

*Table 1*

**3.2** The study of the knowledge of names had been preceded by a traditional gathering of toponyms when I collected the toponymicon containing the names in current use. For this purpose I contacted members of the older generation who due to their earlier occupation (as field guards, agricultural workers, shepherds, etc.) were familiar with the lands. This phase of the collection was carried out by means of a survey. Mostly I let my interviewees freely wander across the imaginary landscape, prompting their recollections with questions related to the types of places only if they stumbled.

After this, knowledge of the collected material was tested with the help of questionnaires. The interviewees needed to answer with respect to individual names whether 1) they know the name and where the place is, 2) they know the name but cannot localise the place, or 3) they have not heard of the name at all. At the level of individual interviewees answers were mostly accepted based on trust, therefore I only rarely asked my interviewees to actually localise the place. (This was incidentally the case with children.) However, it should be noted that if we want to highlight the individuals' mental map, beyond the knowledge of names, we will be faced with the fact that some of these mental maps may contain 'incorrectly' localised places. Nevertheless, in the case of names that the interviewee could merely recognise, no control whatsoever could be applied.

**3.3** In the course of my research several different questions arose, both of theoretical and practical character, which are highly significant from a methodological point of view, therefore I would like to highlight them before presenting the results.

The first and most important question was what is actually studied when we research the knowledge of names of a settlement's inhabitants.

The question of the meaning of proper names basically divides researchers into two parties: According to one group, proper names carry no meaning, whereas the other group insists that proper names do have a meaning, although there is no consensus on what the meaning of the name actually is. Earlier studies on the knowledge of toponyms suggest that the authors consider place names linguistic elements with meaning, whose meaning is the denotate itself. This conclusion can be made based on the tendency that in earlier categorisations distinguished importance is assigned to the fact whether the interviewee can localise the place signified by the toponym.

This approach would be correct in the case of ideal toponym-users, however, we must admit that we all know several places without being aware of or being able to remember their names, and in turn, there are also place names we cannot localise exactly, or maybe not even roughly. Localisation constitutes a sensitive problem, anyway, since it is not clear how localisation could actually be defined. Does it mean that the person should be able to lead us to the place, or explain how to get there, or at least tell in broad lines where the place is located? Should we approach the question from the aspect of the cognitive map, the problem arises what this map is actually like: is it map-like, or image-like at all? For sure, it is obvious that some details of the map may be more chiselled than others, while other spots could be fuzzy or lack exact

localisation. Approaching the issue from a linguistic aspect, we can logically comprehend also the fact that some places cannot be named: either because we are not familiar with their names, or because they have not been named (yet) or because we can easily refer to them in some other way (e.g. with a structure containing common words). We may have the internal need to suppose one-to-one correspondence between pieces of topographic and linguistic (in our case toponymical) information, yet this does not necessarily reflect the real situation. Since in the course of my work I examined the knowledge of toponyms per se, I registered each and every case where the interviewees stated that the toponym sounded familiar to them, i.e. even if they had just heard the name before.

Another problematic issue could be the delineation of the researched area. I defined the urban and extra-urban areas of the settlement of Tépé as the territorial unit of my inquiry. Naturally, from the aspect of public administration this is a clearly defined area. Could this be relevant from the point of view of the map of familiar toponyms? My answer is both yes and no. The study of personal mental maps, namely, enables exactly the revelation of differences between individuals: in our case, for instance, if somebody associates a place and thus also the related toponym to Tépé or any of the surrounding settlements (Szentpéterszeg, Derecske or Konyár). However, in addition to individual variations, we need to take into account that in the course of the settlement's history also the boundaries of the village have changed. We can witness personal differences also in the case of these respective names: among the pieces of information linked to the place/toponym it will be registered that at a certain point in time it belonged to one settlement, and later to another. Should we attempt to define also the collective knowledge of toponyms, it is probably worth working with the boundaries emerging on the basis of the most numerous manifestations by interviewees.

The individual use of names faces researchers with the pressure of decision also from another point of view. It is not rare that families should apply their own names when speaking about particular places. For example, they may name a piece of land after the person they bought it from, among themselves referring to it like 'the land of Uncle Zoli' (*Zoli bácsi féle föld*). In my opinion, in this case we may question even the proper name status of the mentioned example, which sounds more like a casual coinage or a description. Nevertheless, in the course of the collection work I discovered also names that indeed have the form of proper names: e.g. *Tyúkmonyos domb* ('Chicken Egg Hill'), *Gatyaszár-lapos* ('Leg-of-Pants Flat'). Later on these names acquired special status because they were unknown to other communities of language users. However, we can exclude the existence of individual names neither theoretically, nor practically. Nevertheless, if we want to focus on the elements of the collective mental map, we need to rescind from the analysis of such individual names, similarly to neglecting the detailed analysis of individual variations when our goal is the study of the common lexicon.

4 Subsequently, I will present the results of my onomastic research—due to the tight schedule—focusing exclusively on the toponymicon of the age group of interviewees below 20 years.

As expected, the youngest generation is the least well-acquainted with the toponymicon, however, this age group displays also the greatest individual differences. In the age group below 20, there are merely three toponyms that each person knows or is aware of. These include two street names and the toponym *Halom-domb* ('Heap Hill'). The latter is well-known and easy to localise for everyone, because this is where children go sledging in wintertime. Further well-known toponyms are the names of streets, the name of the largest water of the settlement (the brook *Kálló*), the piece of land called *Békás* and a farmland called *Deák tanya*. Moderately well-known are the remaining street names and toponyms such as *Horgas*, *Kálló köz*, *Dögtemető*, *László-tanya*, *Kis-erdő*, *Makkos erdő*, *Mérges*, *Péterszegi út*. All the places are relatively close to the urban areas.

It is worth taking into account also individual differences (see Table 2). It is not surprising that children under 10 years have the least command of toponyms: most of the place names they are aware of are street names of the urban-area. It may be of interest, however, to see that the two girls' toponymicon is richer. Above the age of 10, the interviewees were familiar with a substantially larger number of toponyms, and they could be divided into two clearly distinguishable groups: People belonging to one of the sub-groups

knew relatively few toponyms, while members of the other sub-group were acquainted with at least 80 place names from my list. What could have caused this difference?

The system of spatial notions emerges from the spatial analysis of perceptual input, and the same applies also to the toponyms constituting part of this system. Therefore those who frequently visit with their parents or grandparents extra-urban areas or agricultural lands surrounding the village are more likely to acquire toponyms. Naturally, on their mental maps much more information will be linked also to particular places (or place names), e.g. the exact picture of the landscape, the quality of the land, certain events, emotions, etc. Nevertheless, knowledge of the space and of the toponyms will be shaped also by the pieces of information received from others during conversations. For instance a boy who was familiar with a large number of toponyms admitted spending lots of time with his grandfather who told him many stories about old times and his youth. The stories told by the grandfather contained numerous toponyms.

	knows	heard
7 year old male (W)	6	10
7 year old female (Z)	13	20
9 year old female (AC)	12	6
11 year old female (V)	80	9
11 year old female (AB)	20	18
11 year old male (AS)	88	28
12 year old male (Y)	31	21
13 year old female (U)	37	16
13 year old female (X)	54	27
13 year old female (AA)	53	20
14 year old male (BJ)	80	17
14 year old male (H)	140	5
15 year old male (M)	51	20
15 year old male (T)	84	57
15 year old female (BO)	36	6
15 year old female (BQ)	43	8
15 year old male (BR)	34	5
17 year old female (AW)	44	28
17 year old female (BP)	49	14
17 year old male (BS)	34	18

*Table 2*

5 Of course my work is far from complete. In the following phase of the research I will complete the analysis of the three remaining age groups. In the course of the field work I managed to contact also interviewees who represent three different generations of a single family. I identified two such groups, which may bear interesting results in a comparison. Eventually, I pose the question whether we can assume the existence of a certain collective mental map.