

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation Thesis

**HISTORICAL LINGUISTIC STUDIES
IN THE DOMAIN OF
GEOGRAPHICAL COMMON NAMES**

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1. Delimitation of the subject, objectives of the dissertation

The study of geographical common names is of great importance for Hungarian historical linguistics, since the elements of this word group appear in very early written records already and are to be found in a great number. These words occur both in proper names and as individual common nouns in the early documentary sources. This is so, because, similarly to the present practice, the speech community of the time used geographical common names not only for the formation of place names, but also for the naming of certain natural features of land and places in the natural environment. Although geographical common names have a significant role from a historical linguistic point of view, a systematic survey of them has not been given up to the present. This paper attempts to fill this gap, certain viewpoints stressed, by focussing on the historical aspects of geographical common names.

The analytic way of processing of the Hungarian geographical common names would be an equally useful aid, as it could direct the attention to the individual words. The suitable format for this would be a historical-etymological dictionary of geographical common names that also considers the regional characteristics of the present-day Hungarian language. Such an analytic piece of work could be the basis for a further, synthetic and comprehensive processing of the material. By the theoretical findings of this paper, I aim to contribute to the designing principles of this dictionary as well.

Although this dissertation discusses the system and tendencies of change of geographical common names in the Early Old Hungarian Era, information and methodological experience from the study of the present-day relations of common names designating places are also applied at several points of this investigation. Accordingly, the sources consulted are also of two kinds: for some of the research points data from the Early Old Hungarian Era is used, while other parts of the inquiry are based on the present-day set of geographical common names.

2. Methods applied and research questions

The theoretical framework of this paper — especially in the clarification of the relationship between geographical common names and place names — essentially approaches the issues connected to geographical common names from the viewpoint of functional place name

descriptions. However, some details of the discussion significantly involve the cognitive approach as well. The functional approach applied in studies of place names may be usefully exploited in an investigation discussing geographical common names, because within the chronological boundaries of the study (i.e. in the Early Old Hungarian Era), geographical common names are always to be found as forming a part of place names. Therefore, research in this domain is connected to the possible directions and methodology of investigation in the historical linguistic study of place names.

The cognitive approach, on the other hand, is applicable in the processing of geographical common names, because, in my opinion, this theory is not foreign to the functional view on the description of names in general, and it is even closer to the framework for place name description designed by ISTVÁN HOFFMAN, which is applied in this study as well. There have already been a few papers discussing the usefulness of the cognitive approach in place name research, and it would be especially profitable to use this theory in connection with geographical place names, because it could help solve debated issues that have not been satisfactorily addressed by the functional approach. Such an issue is the description of the notion of the geographical common name. The investigation of the language use of the Early Old Hungarian Era with the means of cognitive linguistics is, as a matter of course, highly problematic in connection with several issues, because getting a better knowledge about cognitive processes in the Early Old Hungarian Era is a task close to impossible. Still, as language change is frequently triggered by a change in the speakers' attitude to a given thing, taking such a view on the present-day state of affairs as a starting point, the same approach may be applied to the Early Old Hungarian data as well.

The dimensional theory of language also serves as an organising principle in this dissertation, which means that the spatial, temporal and human aspects of the use of geographical common names are studied with special attention. For, looking into spatiality is inevitable in the case of a study on words designating places, and temporality is made especially important by the fact that the subject of the present study is a group of words that is exceptionally well documented. Finally, the investigation of human aspects often comes into prominence in relation to geographical

common names, because these are natural elements in language, which are used by a language community to refer to objects in the natural environment (both as common nouns and as being parts of place names).

3. Findings of the study

Theoretical issues connected to geographical common names

The introductory, theoretical chapter first and foremost focuses on the clarification of the notion of the geographical common name. The prototype theory of cognitive semantics is applied as a new approach to the issue, since it provides an opportunity for the dynamic handling of category boundaries. This is an important aspect when trying to give a suitable definition for the geographical common name, because geographical common names and other elements of the vocabulary are in such a close relationship that overlaps are not infrequent between the category of common names and other categories.

Accordingly, a prototypical member of the category of geographical common names is a word that expresses a concept of space and refers to a referent identifiable with a place name. On the other hand, peripheral members of the same category are words with meanings that are not of geographical nature, but which came to be used as place names after joining with an anterior constituent. Geographical common names used for the formation of building names belong to the latter group of words.

The proper delimitation of the category of the geographical common name requires us to pay attention to other semantic categories as well. For example, the distinction between syntagms referring to space and complex geographical common names is a problematic issue. Because of our incomplete knowledge about the language use of the time, words suffixed with *-s* also cause difficulties through the course of their classification into the category of the geographical common name. The prototypical nature of certain geographical common names comes from their frequent occurrence in place names, and from the everyday use of those names. This high frequency of use in place names also causes other geographical common nouns with an identical or similar role to become less used. This fact may imply that some of these words are dropped from everyday use and become extinct. Therefore, it is important to emphasize when giving a definition of the geographical common name that lexemes only appearing in place

names and not as individual common nouns are not to be considered as members of the synchronic set of geographical common names.

Closely related to the above outlined issue, the relationship of the notions of the geographical common name and the lexical place name formant (i.e. that of the lexical items for naming the type of the place) is discussed in detail. The clarification of the nature of the relationship between the geographical common name and the lexical place name formant is a significant theoretical issue, because almost all of the earlier attempts for providing a definition of the geographical common name took the meaning of the term as a starting point, and the function of the members of this category has been less studied. In my opinion, this is a decisive aspect in the defining of the concept of the geographical common name, and the intricate connections between the geographical common name and place name formants must be considered. It is also important to emphasise that the consideration of temporality and regional variability (being closely related to the place denoting function of these words) is essential, and not only in relation to individual words, but also with respect to the whole category. For, I classify only those words into the category of geographical common names from the set of lexemes expressing a concept of space that have a place type denoting function both in place names and as common nouns, however, this results in a group of words very diverse temporally and spatially.

Frequency relations of geographical common names in place names of the Early Old Hungarian Era

The investigation of frequency relations in Early Old Hungarian data shows that there are observable differences between the semantic load born by the individual semantic fields in the context of frequency of microtoponyms and settlement names developed from geographical common names. Furthermore, not only the semantic fields differ in this respect, but the geographical common names within them are also unequally represented.

The study of frequency relations in the semantic fields belonging to the domain of geographical common names adds one important piece of information to the earlier findings: within the group of building names, bare geographical common names represent a considerable proportion (compared to the ratio of building names at least). This observation has

significance, because it has been stated earlier in the literature that the category of civilized names (including building names among others) contains fewer of such words than the category of natural names (like names of mountains or bodies of water).

The frequency study of the individual geographical common names has enabled us to consider which of these words occur alone, too, as place names within a certain semantic field, and which of them do not appear without a formant or a complementary part in the Early Old Hungarian Era – despite the fact that they are very frequent in place names. The differences observable from this respect are surely in connection with the meaning content of the individual geographical common names. For example, the geographical common name *víz* (*water*) is highly frequent and general-meaning in water names, but does not occur as a bare geographical common name. Also, the geographical common names *hegy* (*hill, mountain*), *erdő* (*forest*) and *kerek* (*round*) do not participate in name formation through a semantic split. Therefore, the special semantic content of the common noun seems to be a necessary precondition of its use as a bare geographical common name.

The result of the frequency study of geographical common names forming settlement names conforms to the earlier findings: the lexeme *falu* ~ *falva* (*village*) became frequent after 1350, while the lexeme *telek* (*plot*) came to be less used (compared to its earlier frequency). At the same time, according to my observation, it is not only the factor of temporality that should be attended to while studying the productivity changes of the individual geographical common names, but also their spatial relations and the circumstances that can influence these relations.

Regional incidence of geographical common names

Here, the regional incidence of geographical common names is described through the factors affecting it. The historical factors, semantic field connections, cognitive and semantic issues concerning this domain are all interrelated and are often difficult to separate from each other. Nevertheless, I attempted to elaborate these factors one by one during the analysis of the spatial relations of geographical common names, but paying attention and referring to the connections between them all along.

The study has shown that the reasons for the differences between geographical common names in their incidence are partly historical: more

widespread names are early elements of Hungarian vocabulary. This observation, however, is further modulated by the occurrence of certain words of ancient origin (that are standard, i.e. that are in general use) in only relatively late texts.

The incidence of geographical common names is also significantly influenced by the rank that these elements have in the conceptual hierarchy within the given semantic field. For, referents that are physically closer to people often show low spatial distribution, as opposed to less important, rare concepts that are connected with a more contingent usage. The illustration of the present-day data on a map shows us that the basic concept of forest is most often expressed by the lexeme *erdő* in the present-day set of vocabulary. This factor must be taken into consideration in connection with the incidence of geographical common names in the Early Old Hungarian Era as well: the issues emerging in relation to the spread of the *falu*, *domb*, *erdő* and *kerek* geographical common names can be solved in a satisfactory way with the collective analysis of the members of the semantic field.

Further important factors to be considered in association with the incidence of geographical common names are the influencing cognitive factors, since the state and fate of microsystems is defined not only by their inner relations, but also by language-external factors. For example, the dialectal subsystem is influenced by the community's worldview and by the changes of that. On the other hand, linguistic categorisation is the classification of the objects in the environment from a linguistic point of view, that is, a kind of implicit theory about our environment. Therefore, it is not logical to attempt to describe the language without the consideration of the environment it is used in. In the case of geographical common names, the geographical environment is especially significant. It is the community's attitude to physical reality that is traceable through the investigation of the influence of the geographical environment on the incidence of geographical common names. This is well represented by the differences between the categorisation of the various dialects in the present-day set of geographical common names, that is, the phenomenon that people speaking different dialects use somewhat different linguistic representations for the same concept.

Finally, the investigation of the semantic relationships between

geographical common names also raises some problematic issues that fundamentally influence the spatiality of geographical common names and the possibility of the analysis of this spatiality at the same time. During the study of polysemous and synonymous meaning relations within a given semantic field, the question arises, whether it is meaningful to talk about proper polysemy and synonymy, or it is just the spatial differentiation of meaning that is observable in the present-day and the Early Old Hungarian set of names.

A special domain of the use of geographical common names: mediaeval charter writing practice

Charter writing was a special context for the use of geographical common names in the Early Old Hungarian Era. This is so, because these lexemes often appear in the Latin text of the charters as common nouns indicating place names in Hungarian. As the Latin common nouns are more typical in this role, it is justifiable to search for a motivation for the occurrence of these Hungarian geographical common names in the charters.

The use of these words as common nouns is probably not associable with the law-securing function of charters; it is rather attributable to the partly inconsistent practice of charter writers, and it reflects the language psychological situation that manifested itself in the continuous mediation between the two languages. Thus, in a certain sense, the presence of Hungarian common nouns in the Latin text can be considered as incidental, merely showing the linguistic confusion of the charter writers. Consequently, the investigation concerning the status of Hungarian geographical common names in Latin texts is not only complicated by the temporal and spatial versatility of charter writing, but also by the heterogeneous practice of the charter writers themselves. Despite a certain degree of contingency, some tendencies are still observable in this material. During the study, I typified the occurrences of geographical common names as common words, and I distinguished between the various functions they were put to. According to this, the Hungarian geographical common names used as common words can refer back to given place names in the text, they can accompany place names as explanatory elements, and common words referring to place type can appear quite apart from any place names. Along the lines of these groups, the factors that

define whether the Latin or the Hungarian form of the given geographical common name stands in the text are finely outlined.

An etymological study of the geographical common names in a semantic field

The last chapter of the dissertation is a case study demonstrating the theoretical and methodological observations on a concrete group of words. This study, again, describes the processes of change in the category of geographical common names by surveying the etymological past of a word group — that of fishing equipments and fishing places named after them — that originally was not used for place designating functions. Phenomena motivating this semantic transformation are handled with special attention here. Through the course of the study, geographical common names meaning ‘fishing place’ were analysed in charters from the Arpadian Era, and motivating factors for the semantic change have been identified. Geographical common names with the ‘fishing place’ meaning often occur as common words in the Early Old Hungarian charters. These occurrences can be distinguished from the instances of use as proper names (sometimes with complete certainty, sometimes uncertainly) with the help of the Latin context. The frequent appearance of the words *vejsze* (*fish garth*) and *szégye* (*fish weir*) as common words is probably attributable to the fact that these were often donated by the royal court, just as the fishing equipment called *varsa* (*fish-basket*). The geographical common name *tanya* (*farmstead*) also makes it clear (given that it was never given as royal donation) that the frequency of use of the above mentioned expressions was also influenced by the fact that these words for fishing equipment took up the ‘fishing place’ meaning very early.

The study of the Early Old Hungarian geographical common names meaning ‘fishing place’ also allows us to come to etymological, phonological, orthographical and unique word geographic conclusions. In this case study, several of the problematic issues manifest themselves that were discussed earlier, in the theoretical chapters of the dissertation. We can see here, for example, how the occurrences of bare geographical common names used as common words and as proper names are differentiated based on concrete data from charters. Also, the development of name formants as the result of historical changes can be witnessed. Furthermore, the chapter is a good demonstration of how the collective

analysis of a given semantic field can yield really satisfying results (for example from the word geographic respect).

4. Publications in the topic of the dissertation

Edited essays:

1. Néhány lehetőség és módszer a földrajzi köznevek jelentésföldrajzi vizsgálatában. *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 4 (2009), 73–83.
2. Földrajzi köznévi fogalmak megnevezési rendszerének tagoltsága a romániai magyar nyelvjárásokban. *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 5 (2010), 235–44.
3. Pusztai földrajzi köznevek helynévalkotó szerepe az ómagyar korban — A jelentéshasadás. *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 6 (2011), 121–31.
4. Fanevek helynévformáns szerepe a korai ómagyar korban. *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 7 (2012), 69–75.
5. A földrajzi köznévi fogalma. *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 8 (2012), 121–31.
6. A magyar tulajdonnevek viselkedése nyelvi interdiszciplínák tükrében. *Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány* XII/1–2. (2012), 7–15.
7. A földrajzi köznevek etimológiai és kronológiai rétegződése. *A nyelvtörténeti kutatások újabb eredményei* VII. Accepted for publication.
8. Vejsz(e). *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 9. Accepted for publication.

Essays in foreign languages:

1. *A study of two-part toponyms from a cognitive aspect.* In: *Names in Daily Life. Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences.* Accepted for publication.
2. *Etymological and chronological stratification of geographical common words* (2013). In: *Sprachentwicklungen und kulturelle Differenzierungen.* St. Ingbert. Accepted for publication.

5. Further publications

Edited essays

1. A fanevet tartalmazó helynevek morfológiai szempontú vizsgálata. In: *Név és valóság. A VI. Magyar Névtudományi Konferencia előadásai.* Szerk. BÖLCSKEI ANDREA–N. CSÁSZI ILDIKÓ. Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem BTK Magyar Nyelvtudományi Tanszéke, 2008,

53–9.

Reviews:

1. A családnév-változtatások történetei időben, térben, társadalomban. Szerk. FARKAS TAMÁS–KOZMA ISTVÁN. Budapest, 2009. *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 48 (2010), 263–6.

Manuscripts:

1. *Szláv eredetű faneveinkről*. Diákköri dolgozat. Debrecen, 2007. Manuscript.
2. *Szláv eredetű faneveinkről*. Szakdolgozat. Debrecen, 2007. Manuscript.

Essays:

1. A fanevet tartalmazó helynevek morfológiai szempontú vizsgálata. In: *Juvenilia II. Debreceni bölcsész diákkörösök antológiája*. Szerk. PETE LÁSZLÓ. Debrecen: DEENK Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadója, 2008, 16–22.
2. A szláv eredetű fanevek nyelvtörténeti jelentősége és vizsgálati lehetőségei. *Szkhonion. A DE-BTK HÖK művészeti és szakfolyóirata*. 2006/2, 47–56.