

Summary of the PhD Dissertation

A Corpus Study of Geographical Appellatives

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The Topic and Objectives of the Dissertation

In Hungarian linguistic studies research into well defined areas of the vocabulary has rich traditions. Since a semantically homogeneous group of words is particularly suitable for linguistic investigation, such research can yield several various results. In my dissertation I set the aim to investigate geographical appellatives in Hungarian. As this layer of the language has hardly been systematically studied, the importance of such work cannot be overemphasized. The scarcity of this kind of research is all the more surprising because geographical appellatives are amply represented in the earliest written records of our language (*utu* 'road', *kutu* 'well', *azo* 'dry', etc.).

At the initial stage of onomastic studies research was almost exclusively focused on proper names with place names (toponyms) having been paid primary attention, which was mainly due to a general historical approach. This situation changed after place names began to be collected on a regular basis, which also brought about the accumulation of data taken from live language use. Any survey of international research into geographical appellatives will reveal that large databases represent the main type of source. A huge amount of data have been analysed by American, Belgian and Finnish researchers.

It can be observed that the methods of research have been refined upon by the growing attention to linguistic factors influencing the choice of a geographical appellative as well as by a consistent consideration of geographical differences. The thorough study of the names occurring in an area has proved to be remarkably instrumental to the presentation of certain general results. Thus, the analysis of the geographical appellatives of Rhode Island contributed to the formulation of their universal markers (MILLWARD 1972a). It can also be inferred that the trend of research into geographical appellatives is gradually turning from a general interpretation of phenomena to describing particular details. This, however, does not mean that attempts to give an overall view the system of geographical appellatives have been abandoned.

In Hungarian onomastics, the collection of geographical names started in the 1960s gave an impetus to the study of geographical appellatives, which resulted in their being attributed a growing significance. Attempts at their classification have always been

in the focus of interest. Another important field of research is their semantics and dialectal provenance.

Although the differences between place names (toponyms) and geographical appellatives have been thoroughly studied both in Hungarian and international specialist literature, the term 'geographical appellative' has not yet been unequivocally defined in onomastics. It is relatively easy to make a distinction between the two categories in an intuitive way, but it is much more difficult to formulate the features they differ in at the level of theory. No wonder that the theoretical aspects of the question have recently been examined by linguists as well as onomasticians.

The investigation of units of language indicating geographical objects has been paid extensive attention to not only in the history of Hungarian linguistics but also in international onomastics. Since the 1950's, several studies have been published on the geographical appellatives of individual languages, especially from a hitorico-etymological point of view. Their survey is made somewhat difficult by different terms (*generic element*, *generic term*, *appellative*) being used even in one and the same work. In English-language specialist literature the discussion of geographical appellatives is relatively frequent and is characterised by a variety of approaches.

Although geography is also interested in the study of geographical appellatives, their functioning can by no means be the concern of that branch of science alone, because the choice of the appellative given to a particular flow of water (*patak* approx. 'stream', *ér* approx. 'brooklet', *folyó* 'river') is as much dependent on the geographical environment as on the semantic structure of the language. It is assumed that geographical appellatives, like other word classes, make up a system that can be analysed, which brings us closer to a general knowledge of place names as well.

In what follows, by the term 'geographical appellative' I will mean nouns naming either natural or artificial objects of the earth surface and referring to geographical notions that are capable of being expressed by toponyms as well. It covers names of surface forms, waters and water bank spots, configurations of relief, regions, and fields belonging to a settlement. I will not include, however, names of institutions and buildings, which, although undoubtedly mean 'places' and are important points of orientation, fall closer to words of a different type by their linguistic function. From a

descriptive point of view only those appellatives can be considered to be also geographical which, when used as common words, denote types of places that can be referred to by a proper name as well.

Geographical appellatives are an organic part of the common vocabulary. They are generally used in everyday communication. The words *hill*, *lake*, *river* can occur in talking about the sights one has visited, *streets*, *squares* are also frequently mentioned as places of one's daily affairs. If a speaker presumes that the place in question is unknown to the partner, the addition of a geographical name can help get the message across: *the river* Amstel, *lake* Pääijänne. Travel descriptions and guides often resort to this method. Language use would be difficult without geographical appellatives or toponyms, for that matter. These words play an important role in the vocabulary of not only Hungarian but of any other language, especially in their toponymic systems.

Geographical appellatives have always played an important part in the general name-giving process as well. A geographical appellative is a component of a place name referring to the type of the location in question, which can be a *hill* as well as a *valley* or *forest*. Names that originally did not have such appellatives for various reasons can acquire them later via structural change (HOFFMANN 1993a: 34). Originally one-component place names of the *Rakaca*, *Ida* type can take on a secondary geographical appellative meaning the type of place: *Rakaca pataka* 'brook', *Ida vize* 'water'. Apart from this, any place name can form an occasional qualitative (in some cases formally possessive) structures with appellatives referring to the class of objects of the denotatum: *Szamos folyó* 'the river Szamos', *Debrecen városa* 'the town of Debrecen'. Such occasional formations are accounted for by their being attached to a logical class on the basis of their reference to a piece of reality: it is common knowledge that the *Szamos* is a river and this can be expressed by adding an appellative. Pluralised geographical appellatives can occur as basic forms: (*kertek* 'gardens' *táblák* 'plots [of land]' → *Pipó-kertek*, *Tibori-táblák*). In such names, the forms *kertek*, *táblák* denote areas divided into smaller parts.

The study of geographical appellatives is traditionally characterised by their being approached as a category as opposed to proper names, representing an initial state of the latter. My dissertation is designed to set up a theoretical framework that breaks away

from this traditional contrast and in which geographical appellatives are regarded as central elements of language use. They are treated as linguistic signs used in everyday communication and not just as parts of toponyms.

The methods applied

For any linguistic study, onomastics included, it is necessary to find sources related to a specific period of time and an area. Only those elements of language can be used as direct sources of research which do contain the linguistic products to be examined, such as present-day place names or forms of our ancient places names as preserved in the written records. These direct sources, however, cannot form the basis of my special approach, so I have made use of indirect ones that contain high concentrations of geographical appellatives.

In 1997, the Department of Hungarian Linguistics launched a project of building up a computarized database of place names. One of the functions of the Hungarian Onomastic Archive, an electronic collection, is the processing of the geographical appellatives still in use in the 20th century in the Hungarian-speaking linguistic territory. At the initial stage of research the geographical appellatives to be found in the *Új magyar tájszótár* (Hungarian Regional Dictionary, vols. i-iv) were collected and arranged into a database.

It was realised at a rather early stage of research that geographical appellatives should be paid special attention to in the process of collecting place names, so a questionnaire was designed to group them into separate classes. To ensure the reliability of the data, the questionnaires were distributed in 5-10 settlements representative of the dialects and ethnic groups of the area. The appellatives were given folk interpretations instead of literary ones. This was the data collection method used for making the book *Somogy megye földrajzi nevei* (The Geographical Names of Somogy County), the first work to contain the full set of geographical appellatives of an area. My sources have been enlarged with local place name collections which also include geographical appellatives typical of an area and which have come out since the 1970s.

The essential material of regional dictionaries that came out from the 1960s is another addition to my sources. All this has been done with a view on making a dictionary of geographical appellatives, which would serve as a basis for my PhD dissertation. At its present state, the dictionary features the meanings of 2600 geographical appellatives in their regional varieties. The results of this preliminary work are summed up in *Mutatvány földrajzi közneveink szótárából* (Samples from the dictionary of Hungarian geographical appellatives, HOFFMANN–NEMES 2000a). Both the database and the dictionary are being made on the computer, so the material of the latest collections can be and should be added to them without difficulty.

The dictionary that forms the basic part of my dissertation presents the occurrences of geographical appellatives as common words in the everyday language. It is being made as a (regional) dictionary giving a thematic list of entries in common use. It comprises the (regionally occurring) words that are used by speakers of present-day Hungarian to refer to different place types. In this phase of the processing work it is only the occurrences in (non-proper) place names that are taken into account. This restriction is necessary despite the fact that words denoting different place types, i.e. geographical appellatives, have always played a very important part in the name-giving process.

As shown by its title, my dictionary is one of geographical appellatives. Frequently used “geographical adjectives” (*alsó* ‘lower’, *közép* ‘middle’, *öreg* ‘old’, etc.) and phrases uncommon as dictionary entries (*nagy állás* ‘big meadow’, *nagy árok* ‘big ditch’) have been omitted, so have words that may be rather frequent and do occur in the sources studied but do not mean places as common words. Obsolete words and words with only a secondary place-naming function (*kereszt* ‘cross’, *szobor* ‘statue’) have also been left out. As all the entries are nouns, the part of speech is not defined.

After the dictionary has been accomplished, my aim is to carry out a linguistic analysis of this layer of the lexicon. The interest in this lexical layer is not particularly great in Hungarian specialist literature, which may be due to its heterogeneity discouraging from taking a unified view geographical appellatives. At first sight, their investigation may not appear to be so promising as the analysis of proper names (settlement names, names of regions, etc.). It should be added, however, that there are

several useful studies available of various subtypes of the category also discussed by researchers of other branches of science (ethnography, history).

The question of meaning in general and of lexical meaning in particular is one of the most complex and the least settled problems of linguistics. The word as a sign is the connection between three constituents whose mutual relationship can give definitions of meaning. The three constituents are the signifier (sound envelope or a set of graphemes), the signified (the sign object or denotatum) and the speaker (listener). The starting point of semantic investigation is the linguistic sign itself which is related to a denotatum. A concept (“the mental content inferred by the mind from the essential markers of objects and phenomena” [ÉrtSz.]) appears as topical and determined by grammatical and lexical factors. One of the aspects of the sound envelope – meaning relationship is the attribution of more than one meanings to a single sound envelop. It is in this respect that I describe cases of homonymy and polysemy in the chapter on the semantic investigation of geographical appellatives. Another important aspect of the relationship between sound envelope and meaning is the attribution of several sound envelopes to a single meaning, which involves cases of synonymy and variant forms. Examples of meanings shifting into the opposite domain also occur, which is a case discussed as one of antonymy. Finally, I touch upon appellatives showing subordinate or superordinate relationships.

Semantic word formation is one the commonest ways of enlarging the stock of appellatives (KÁROLY 1970a: 218). The centre of semantic change is the change of lexical units. Geographical appellatives offer the opportunity to disclose the semantic features influencing the most typically used metaphoric forms. Apart from the semantic description of geographical appellatives the research is extended to areal aspects as well.

The morphological description is based on *Új magyar nyelvtan* (New Hungarian Grammar) and *Magyar Grammatika* (Grammar of Hungarian). This chapter, however, is not aimed at a general description of Hungarian appellatives but is rather an examination of the characteristic features observable in the given corpus from various points of view and in their internal interrelations. Dialectal aspects are also taken into account in order to explore differences between the sets of geographical appellatives in various areas.

My investigation is extended to the whole Hungarian-speaking area irrespective of political boundaries, as my objective is to disclose regularities on the basis of reliable facts.

Summary of results

The subset of the vocabulary chosen for study is an organic part of the common vocabulary, which means that the usual concepts of semantic categories applied to appellatives in general are applicable to the description of its semantic interrelations (see KÁROLY 1970a, SZENDE 1996a for details). This can be carried out even if the different meanings of geographical appellatives occur in different areas.

The incessant change of meaning of linguistic elements is an important tool of vocabulary enrichment, although it remains practically unnoticed by non-linguists (see KÁROLY 1970: 218 for more details). The change in meaning can have several causes. Language-external causes can usually be traced back to changes in culture, society or technology, whereas internal ones should be sought in the changes of thinking or in the language system itself, one of which can be the mutual influence of meanings on each other. External (technological, social) factors do not seem to have caused any semantic change in geographical appellatives, but metaphor and metonymy, i.e. changes brought about language-internally, are quite frequent.

One of the most important cases of semantic change in this category can be observed in terms referring to parts of either the human body (*homlok* ‘forehead’, *láb* ‘foot’, *könyök* ‘elbow’, *derék* ‘waist’, *fenék* ‘bottom’, *hát* ‘back’, *orr* ‘nose’, *throat* ‘torok’) or to those of the body of animals (*fark* ‘tail’, *tarék* ‘crest’, *hegy taréja* ‘ridge of a mountain’). Besides them, parts of plants can also become geographical appellatives through metaphorisation: *ág* ‘branch’ → (*folyó*) *ága* ‘branch of a river’. Then I go on to present metaphoric semantic changes observable in oronyms, i.e. names denoting types of rising ground.

Metonymy, i.e. the transfer of meaning by contact, also plays a central role in the semantic development of geographical appellatives. The study of the relationship between the old and the new meaning can yield useful results in geographical appellatives, too, and can be instrumental to setting up new groups. Although

geographical appellatives could emerge by metonymy, their number and significance cannot be compared to those arising through metaphorisation.

In the corpus of the more than 2,000 geographical appellatives studied, the predominance of change of the type *plant name* → *place where it grows/can be found* is marked (*akác* ‘acacia’, *bükk* ‘beech’, *dió* ‘nut’, *cser* ‘Austrian oak’, *fűz* ‘willow’, *nád* ‘reed’). The types *animal* → *place where it lives* (*béka* ‘frog’, *ökör* ‘ox’, *csorda* ‘herd’, etc.) and *matter* → *place where it can be found* (*homok* ‘sand’, *kő* ‘stone’) occur less frequently.

The morphological examination of geographical appellatives reveals the affixes and techniques of compounding prevalent in their formation as well as dialectal differences in the application of these word formation tools. As the Hungarian system of affixes is very rich, it offers practically unlimited possibilities of vocabulary enrichment. A single word can serve as a base for numerous affixed derivations, geographical appellatives included, with various meanings: *csorog* ‘trickle, rill, dribble (as of liquids), verb,’ → *csorgás* ‘ibid., noun’, *csorgó* ‘ibid. present participle’ *csorgócska* ‘diminutive’, *csorgókút* ‘present participle + well’, *csorgóskút* ‘ibid.’. In geographical appellatives, not more than two affixes are attached to the same base (*fakad* ‘spring, verb’ + *ék* deverbil suffix ‘spring [of water] + *os* ‘place where a spring wells forth’).

The words derived can be classified in several ways. In traditional grammar, categorisation is made according to the part of speech the base and the derived word belong to: in this light, geographical appellatives can arise by both deverbil and denominal affixation. Consider the following types:

N → N *hidacska*, ‘small bridge’, *akácos* ‘clump of acacias’, *hegység* ‘mountain chain’;

V → N *áradmány* ‘flooded area’, *delelő* ‘place of midday rest’ *kaszálat* ‘hayfield’;

ADJ → N pl. *tisztás* ‘clearing’, *gyéres* ‘place with scattered vegetation’ *sűrűség* ‘thicket’.

Derived geographical appellatives can often take additional affixes. Their order is governed by the rule of productive affixes being preceded by others (ÚMNY. [New Hungarian Grammar] 259). The majority of derived geographical appellatives are

complemented with diminutive affixes, thus the meaning of words arising in this way can be predicted: ‘small area or object characterised by the presence of the thing named by the base: *köveske* ‘small plot of land with stony soil’ (from *kő* ‘stone’), *kökényeske* ‘small plot of land overgrown with blackthorn’ (from *kökény* ‘blackthorn’). In geographical appellatives referring to places on riversides and banks, *-sÁg* and *-Vs* can also occur as second affixes: *laposság* ‘plain ground’, *limbusosság* ‘swampy, moorish ground’, *fakadékos* ‘boggy ground’.

Geographical appellatives make up endocentric compounds, called subordinate in traditional terminology. It follows from our definition that each of them are nominal compounds with their second constituent being inflected only (*akácerdőt* ‘acacia forest, Acc.’, *faluréten* ‘**on** the village green’). The second constituent (or head) determines the *genus proximum*, i.e. the superordinate category the word belongs to: *akácerdő* comes under forests, whereas *falurét* comes under greens.

Even if compounds made up of more than two members, such as *borjúdelelőpart* ‘midday resting place for calves’, *bükkfacsaplesz* ‘beech undergrowth’, *mészköbánya* ‘limestone quarry’, which are defined as multiple compounds in *Magyar grammatika* (Grammar of Hungarian), they are in fact compounded from two words: *borjú* ‘calf’ + *delelőpart* ‘midday resting place’, *bükkfa* ‘beech’ + *cseplesz* ‘undergrowth’, *mészkö* ‘limestone’ + *bánya* ‘quarry, pit’.

In geographical appellatives, the following productive syntactic structures can be observed:

N + N	ADJ + N	ADV + N
<i>malompatak</i> ‘mill stream’	<i>körkanális</i> ‘round canal’	<i>gyalogösvény</i> ‘footpath’
<i>lenföld</i> ‘flax land’	<i>meddőföld</i> ‘infertile land’	<i>fennsík</i> ‘plateau’
<i>kútér</i> ‘well brook’	<i>ág</i> ‘branch’	<i>általút</i> ‘road across’
<i>káposztaföld</i> ‘cabbage land’	<i>hidegvölgy</i> ‘cold valley’	

During their migrations lasting for centuries, the Hungarians contacted Iranian, Turkic and, in the period preceding the conquest, Slavic peoples, taking over many new objects and concepts, and also their names, from them. For about four centuries, the longest and most intensive contact was maintained with ethnic groups speaking Turkic languages.

A group of words can be subjected to etymological study, i.e. the source languages and the workings of how this layer of the vocabulary was enlarged can be examined. I present a detailed historical analysis of geographical appellatives denoting *völgy* 'valley'. By *völgy* I mean a low area of land between two mountains or hills. All words belonging to this semantic field are included, even if they convey some special feature of meaning as compared to the basic one (e.g. *horvás* 'small valley'). Names given to different stretches of a valley, like *fej* 'lit. head, entrance to a valley', *fenék* 'lit. bottom, back part of a valley'.

The collection and systematisation of geographical appellatives may prove useful for cartography as well as translation science. In this respect special significance should be attributed to words naming objects situated in a multiethnic area or have come to the focus of attention for economic or political reasons. The names should be indicated in world atlases and maps unequivocally, which, however, requires both special language skills and professional competence.

Studies in the topic of the dissertation hitherto published:

Vízrajzi köznevek állományi vizsgálata [Corpus Study of Hydronyms]: *Tanulmányok Ujváry Zoltán 65. születésnapjára*. Varia Ethnographica et Folkloristica. szerk.: Szabó László és Keményfi Róbert, Debrecen 1997. 416–445.

A földrajzi köznevekről [On Geographical Appellatives]: *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 37 (1999): 331–41.

Mutatvány földrajzi közneveink szótárából [Samples from the Dictionary of Hungarian Geographical Appellatives]: *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 38 (2000): 179–187.

A földrajzi nevekről [On Geographical Appellatives]: *Jászkunság* 47 (2001): 57–73.

Összetétellel alakult földrajzi köznevek [Compounded Geographical Appellatives]: *Hungarian Studies and Dimensional Linguistics*, edited by István Hoffmann, Dezső Juhász and János Péntek. Debrecen–Jyväskylä, 2002. 91–99.

Képzéssel alakult földrajzi köznevek [Derived Geographical Appellatives]: *Studies to Honour Piroska B. Gergely*. Publications of the Hungarian Linguistics Department of Miskolc University, edited by Enikő Zsoldos-Gréczi and Mária Kovács. Miskolc, 2002. 139–143.

Generic elements in the Hungarian language. Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Onomastic Sciences. Uppsala, 2002. Forthcoming.

Néhány 'völgy' jelentésű földrajzi köznév a magyarban [Some Geographical Appellatives Meaning 'Valley' in Hungarian]: *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 41 (2003): 459–465.

Book reviews

Presentations at conferences

Földrajzi köznevek a magyarban [Geographical Appellatives in Hungarian]. 5th International Congress of Hungarian Studies, Jyväskylä, 2001.

Vízrajzi köznevek szóföldrajzi vizsgálata [Areal Study of Hydronyms]. 5th International Congress of Hungarian Studies, Jyväskylä, 2001.

Generic elements in the Hungarian language. 21st International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, Uppsala, 2002.