A study of two-part toponyms from a cognitive aspect[1]

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Abstract

Geographical appellatives constitute one of the fundamental sets of the Hungarian vocabulary and name system, since no other elements are suitable for referring to types of geographical objects and places. In the present-day Hungarian place name system the most common way of place name formation is the compounding of a geographical appellative as a type marker with an element bearing some individualizing feature. What I am mostly interested in is the semantic categories of the components prefixed to geographical appellatives, since these categories have been amply discussed by traditional Hungarian place name research from various points of view, which is an important starting point for the cognitive study of place names.

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1. Geographic common names as expressions designating a place constitute a significant part of the vocabulary of any language, thus they represent a central element also in the Hungarian language, since it is exclusively these elements that are appropriate for the denotation of different types of places and objects. Geographic common names may form a toponym even on themselves. However, in the Hungarian toponymic system of our time it is a much more typical mode of the creation of toponyms when an element specifying the individual character of a place is attached to the geographic common name (i.e. the lexeme denoting the type of place). Although both types of names have been studied by Hungarian onomastic research even up to date, in my opinion it can be fruitful to approach this category of toponyms also from another aspect, namely from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics. My presentation focuses primarily on two-part toponyms, and specifically on the semantic category of anterior components adjoining geographic common names. These semantic features have been examined in depth and clarified by Hungarian toponymic research, which may provide a sound starting point also for the cognitive examination of place names. For this purpose I selected a series of examples from the toponymic stock of the modern Hungarian language.

In my view through the cognitive study of the lexemes serving as anterior components of two-part toponyms we can gain some insight into the function of toponyms. In this respect earlier toponymic research suggested that place names play a role primarily in spatial orientation (cf. Lőrincze 1947/1967: 3, Kálmán 1973: 5). Nevertheless, this idea was refuted by onomastic research already a long time ago. Also examinations from a cognitive approach have underpinned that spatial orientation does not necessarily require the existence of toponyms, as place names facilitate getting around in a certain space exclusively if the individual has a non-lingual knowledge of the particular area already (cf. Reszegi 2012).

The examination of the semantic functions of anterior components does not only prove the role fulfilled by place names in spatial orientation. If spatial orientation constituted the primary function of toponyms, these would carry information exclusively on visual factors

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(such as form, colour, nearby vegetation and forms of relief), and naturally, languages do abound in these types of names (e.g. in the Hungarian *Zöld-domb* 'green hill', *Nagy-hegy* 'big mountain', etc.). On the other hand, it would seem logical that the prototypical features should be the characteristics that can be perceived through the senses, since the use of linguistic symbols represents the cognitive information processing between man and his environment. We can rightly assume that in the course of the formation of a toponym the result of the simplest selection is the use of those features which are the most characteristic of the given place as external marks. However, as soon as these names lose their distinguishing, specific character, other features and toponymic factors are realised as typical characteristics. Thus the relation of the place to any external entity, circumstance or another place acquires a significant role in the formation of two-part toponyms of the corpus (e.g. the place name *Husztóti-völgy*—that is 'the valley in the settlement of Husztót'—expresses the relation of the particular place to another place) (Polgári 2007: 19).

At the same time, the driving force of name giving may be absolutely subjective, which is difficult to be clearly identified. What is more, it can happen that the function manifesting in the name has no relation to the denoted entity. For instance in the case of street names the commemorative function is rather frequent: there are hardly any settlements in Hungary without a *Kossuth Lajos Street* (named after Lajos Kossuth, one of the most prominent Hungarian politicians of the 19th century, who played a major role in the Hungarian War for Independence).

In my study I analyse the name corpus of a smaller area (the one-time district of a county), taking its roughly 6600 micro-toponyms under the magnifying glass. (The resource of the toponyms is BMFN.). At the same time I am convinced that an examination carried out on a contemporary name corpus of this type may lead to conclusions that are valid even for historic toponyms. In my study of the anterior components of Hungarian two-part place names of the given territory I rely on István Hoffmann's functional-semantic categories, where the particular categories refer to the functions of the name-parts of the toponyms (1993: 45–6). The functions of the individual name-parts are the following:

1. denotation of the type of place, Nagy/*dűlő* 'big borderland',
2. naming of the place, e.g. *Luka/*hegy 'mountain called Luka',
3. denotation of a special feature
   3.1.1. a characteristic feature of the place, e.g. *Kis*/híd 'small bridge'
   3.1.2. relation of the place to some external entity or circumstance, e.g. *Körtefa*/dűlő 'borderland surrounded by pear trees'
   3.1.3. relation of the place to another place, e.g. *Mágocsi*/földek 'pieces of land in the vicinity of the settlement of Mágocs'.

The procedure is not new, since the analytical framework elaborated by István Hoffmann has been applied in several earlier works for the study of the name corpus of smaller areas or periods. The novelty of the present research consists on the one hand in the large number of data, and on the other, in the target of the research itself, i.e. my attempt to explore the function of toponyms by using the semantic content manifesting in the names. István Hoffman's typological system does not entail an approach of cognitive linguistics, yet it does contain an idea that can be very well reconciled with the fundamental principles of cognitive linguistics according to which the models serving as a basis for the name giving are not linguistic classes, but ontological categories of human thinking (Hoffmann 1993: 44). In his view by revealing the linguistic rules and inherent thought patterns embodied in toponyms we can also discover the driving forces of their emergence.

2. From a functional-semantic aspect the adjunctive parts adjoining geographic common names as basic parts can be of a denotative or specifying function.

When becoming part of a new name, toponyms in a denoting function refer to the same denoted entity as they did in their original toponymic meaning (Hoffmann 1993: 47, Tóth 2001: 134). From the point of view of their emergence, these toponyms are formed through the attachment of a secondary geographic common name to the already existing place name (to the toponym *Luka*): that is how for instance the toponym *Luka-hegy* 'mountain called Luka' was formed. Most of the names that can be listed here contain an anterior component of foreign origin, like for instance the Serbo-Croatian component *Luka* from the lexeme *luka* meaning 'woods'. Two factors may have motivated the emergence of this name type: on the one hand, users of the name may not have perceived the adopted name informative enough, as it does not refer to the type of the denoted entity, because to the majority of the name users' community the structure of these names is not sufficiently transparent (Póczos 2010: 65). On the other hand, the attachment of a geographic common name must have been influenced by the toponymic system (as a framework of reference). Namely, the basic model with a geographic common name as posterior component is the most widespread naming pattern of the modern Hungarian name stock. Therefore we can talk about adaptation to the norms of the toponymic system of the receiving language also in this case (Hoffmann 1993: 26, Tóth 1999: 435, Póczos 2010: 65). The number of anterior components with a denotative function is rather low in the examined corpus, since—even together with the names whose listing to this category is somewhat questionable—their proportion remains below 4%. The source of uncertainty can be traced back to the fact that among the analysed names several pairs occur in which either member of the pair is a one-part, whereas the other is a two-part name. In the lack of historic data, in the case of such pairs the direction of the change is fairly difficult to determine. Nonetheless, names containing an anterior component of foreign origins can be clearly placed into the category of names formed with complementation, as the transfer must have occurred prior to the attachment to the geographic common name (Póczos 2010: 139). With respect to other names, however, we often lack any kind of hint regarding which member of the name pair emerged in a secondary process (for instance *Meggyes* '(area) covered with sour cherry trees'~ *Meggyes-dűlő* 'borderland covered with sour cherry trees'.

The role of name parts with a denotative function is reference to the denoted entity. Therefore, in their case we can talk about the role of aiding orientation in space only in the sense that through their use communication about the given area becomes simpler and clearer (which is true for all toponyms). Nevertheless, attachment of a geographic common name facilitates categorisation, which can play a major role in orientation.
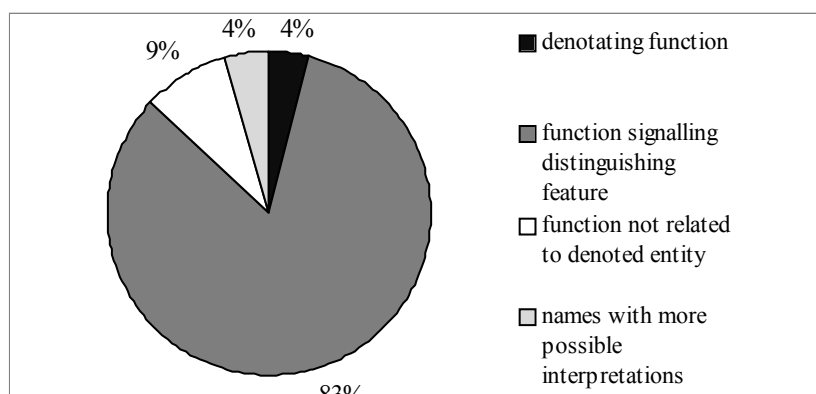

Table 1. Functional-semantic distribution of the anterior component of two-part toponyms containing a geographic common name as posterior component

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3. Another similarly universal yet much more typical motivation for name giving is the marking of a distinguishing feature in place names: this mode of name giving is characteristic of 83% of the adjunctive part of two-part names. The reason for this lies in the function of the adjunctive part itself, whose most important role is distinction, the most obvious method for this being the expression of some specific feature of the place. The typological system I apply breaks down the class of name-parts denoting distinguishing features into further subcategories: the name-part may designate a feature of the denoted entity itself (size, shape, material, etc.), the relation of a denoted and an external entity (e.g. flora, fauna, owner, building standing on the place, etc.) or any feature of the denoted entity related to its location. The productivity of the particular subcategories shows great variation. The largest group (42%) of the examined two-part names contains names that relate the denoted entity to another place. Another highly frequent phenomenon (with a proportion of 26%) is constituted by names expressing the relationship of the denoted entity to some external things. As opposed to this, reference to different features is expressed by as little as 15% of the names.
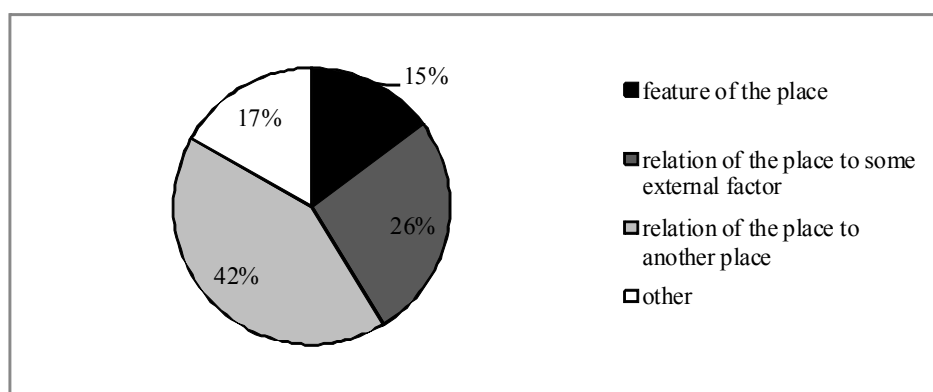
Table 2. Distribution of the distinguishing function in two-part names

3.1. From the features of the denoted entity the most frequent motivation for name giving is the size of the place: e.g. *Kis/völgy* 'small valley', *Nagy/tó* 'large lake' (as it is shown in table 3.). Anterior components referring to the shape of the place—such as *Hosszú/föld* 'long land', *Görbe/oldal* 'curved side'—are also widespread. Therefore we can conclude that from the features of the denoted entity characteristics perceivable by the senses are the most typical motivation for name giving. This is both understandable and justified, since the use of linguistic symbols represents cognitive information processing between man and his environment. However, the presence of names referring to the material or colour of the place—e.g. *Homokos/domb* 'sandy hill', *Fehér/part* 'white beach'— is minimal, even though also these are directly perceivable features of the given place. Although neither the age nor the function of the place is necessarily perceivable visually, yet within the group these still belong to the more frequent elements. The function of the place is expressed for instance in the anterior component of the toponyms *Piac/tér* 'square where a market functions' and *Mise/út* 'road leading to mass', while toponyms like *Új/iskola* 'new school' or *Öreg/hegy* 'old mountain' refer to the age of places. We can see that factors reflecting features perceivable through the senses—and as such being the most obvious potential driving forces of name giving—are actually not very characteristic, what is more, we can observe remarkable variations even among the particular sub-types.
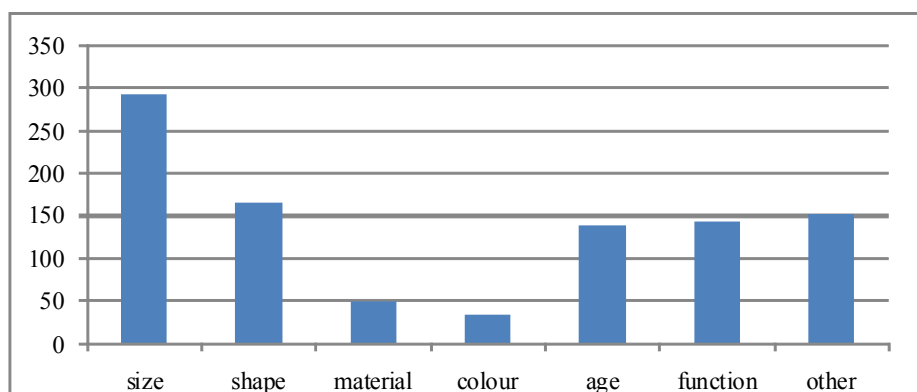
Table 3. Distribution of anterior components expressing features of the place

3.2. Among adjunctive parts referring to the denoted entity and an external factor, the proportion of names referring to an owner or user is the highest. The frequency of these names stands out even compared to all the other sub-types, as their 15% occurrence represents the second most frequent name type. Naturally, the dominant presence of names containing these types of anterior components is enhanced also by the fact that all anterior components constituted by a person's proper name (*Schober/malom* 'mill of a person called Schober'), the name of an ethnic group (*Horvát/hegy* 'Croatian mountain'), the name of a profession (*Tanító/föld* 'land owned by the teacher') or the name of a community (*Evangélikus/templom* 'Evangelical church') is listed in this category, unless users of the name are aware of a different motivation for the name giving (cf. Póczos 2010: 71, 74).

Personal names appear fairly frequently also among anterior components denoting the origins or emergence of a place, because besides possession, the use of personal names can often be traced back to the founder of the given object, especially in the case of crosses and wells (e.g. *Brunner/kereszt* 'cross erected by a person called Brunner', *József/kút* 'well bored by the order of a person called József'). It is difficult to distinguish between anterior components referring to dwellers and owners of a particular place, only the type of the place or possibly information from the users of the given name can give us hints (e.g. *Német/utca* 'German Street': "It was inhabited almost exclusively by Germans").

Pieces of information gained from the users of a particular name can often reveal naming motivations that differ from our conclusions, which may call our attention to the arbitrary nature of our categorisation, since we usually tend to draw conclusions merely about the most probable possibilities (cf. Póczos 2010: 80). However, information acquired from the users of the name often falls into the category of folk etymology. E.g. the toponym *Sárkány/gödör* 'dragon pit' is interpreted by the locals as follows: "…Earlier this used to be the dwelling place of a dragon. When it flew away, a big storm gathered and water flooded the land". The example highlights well the fact that the information contained in a name is often interpreted by users merely on the basis of feelings and intuitions evoked by the name, and in fact the users do not (and cannot) know anything about the actual naming motivation.

The number of other adjunctive parts expressing the relation between the place and any external entity is significantly lower. Anterior components referring to the vegetation represent 3% (e.g. *Diós/völgy* 'valley with walnut trees'), while components denoting buildings in the area make up 2% (e.g. *Templom/utca* 'street where a church stands'); parts referring to the fauna (e.g. *Bika/rét* 'bull meadow'), the origins of the place (e.g. *Irtás/kert* 'garden made through clearing') or the dwellers of the area (e.g. *Magyar/utca* 'street inhabited by Hungarians') make up 1-1.5% each. Anterior components referring to the vegetation are usually related either to the plants grown in the given area (e.g. *Szőlő/hegy*

'mountain where vineyards are cultivated') or the natural vegetation of the place (e.g. *Bükk/zug* 'corner with beeches'). Similarly, components containing names of animals can refer to animals bred in the area (e.g. *Bika/föld* 'bull land') or the natural fauna of the territory (e.g. *Róka/kút* 'fox well').

We can see an interesting example of an anterior component with reference to a distinguishing feature in the toponym *Badacsony-tető*, which was named so that its owner planted vines there from the famous Hungarian wine region of Badacsony. In the formation of the new name an already existing place name acquired new toponymic meaning by being transferred to a new, distant area. These types of names belong to the category of name transfer (cf. Tóth 1999: 437). This name type proves that toponymic use is not restricted exclusively to local contact.

As we could see, anterior components expressing the relation of the place to some external entity or circumstance are present in greater proportion than components reflecting particular features of the place. Among these we can find names which express special features perceivable through visual stimulus, such as some nearby vegetation or the vicinity of a building, etc. Nevertheless, the names that make up the largest number within this category are not these ones, but the anterior components referring to owners or users of the place. These names can only be really informative to persons with true local knowledge, while their role played in orientation is even less significant than of those anterior components which signal the relation of the place to another place.
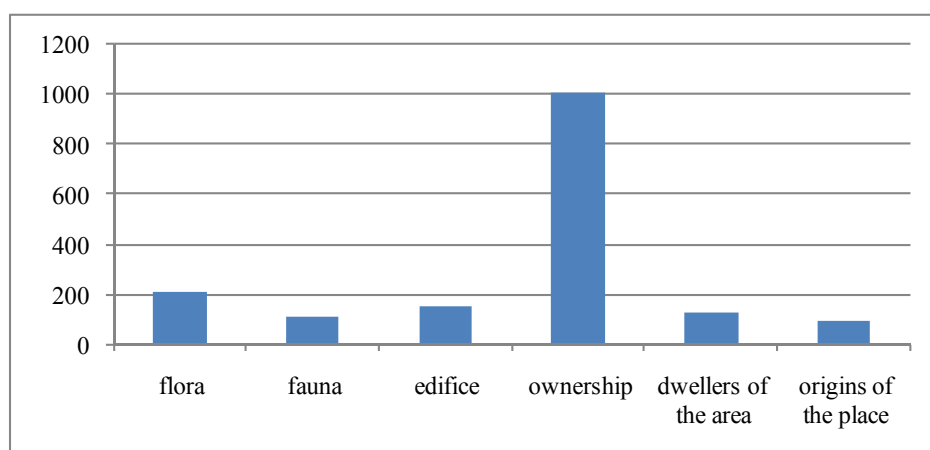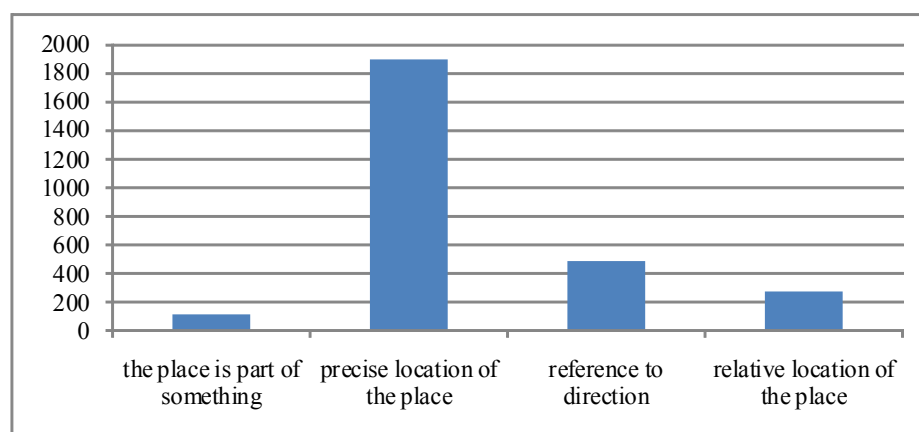

Table 4. Distribution of anterior components expressing the relation of the place to some external factor

3.3. A rather high proportion, namely 42% of anterior components connected to geographic common names expresses the relation of the place to another place. Also within this group, the most frequent name-forming method (28% of all two-part toponyms with a geographic common name as posterior component) is reference to the precise location of the place. The following micro-toponyms for example contain names of nearby settlements: *Husztóti/völgy* 'valley in the settlement of Husztót', *Szakáli/szőlő* 'vineyard in the vicinity of the settlement of Mecsekszakál'. Information gained from the name users may help in the assessment of the semantic structure of certain toponyms: e.g. the brook called *Kakukk/árok* 'cuckoo ditch' springs in the area called *Kakukk-völgy* 'cuckoo valley'. The denotation of direction, although much less frequent than the former type (merely 7%), is quite common in the anterior components of the examined names. Names belonging to this group are mostly street names, e.g. *Gerényesi/út* 'road leading to the settlement of Gerényes', or the names of water streams, e.g. *Sásdi/árok* 'water flowing towards the settlement of Sásd'. Among toponyms referring to the relative location of the denoted entity typical are the place names

with the anterior components *alsó, felső, közép* (e.g. *Alsó/falu* 'lower part of the village', *Felső/hegy* 'upper mountain', *Közép/mező* 'middle field'). A small portion (2%) of the names reflects the fact that the denoted entity is part of another place: for instance *Hársma/tető* 'top of the hill called Hársma', *Somlyó/oldal* 'side of the mountain called Somlyó'.

In toponyms the expression of the relation of a given place to another place does in some sense play a role in spatial orientation. These types of names certainly are useful in orientation for those with some local knowledge. Their function, however, cannot be restricted to this single aspect, since facilitating communication related to the given place is obviously also a crucial motivating factor in the formation of these names. On the other hand, to people who are not familiar with the place these types of toponyms are not informative enough—in fact, their orientation can be facilitated much better through the use of geographic common names.

Table 5. Distribution of anterior components expressing the relation of the place to another place

4. In the case of certain types of names it can occur, what is more, it is rather typical that the name-part has no semantic connection whatsoever with the denoted entity. This category can be divided into two groups, namely into names either with commemorative or conventional function (cf. Hoffmann 1993: 46). Names with a commemorative function preserve the name of a well-known personality, event or place, whereas the ones with a conventional function are linked to the regular semantic field of the naming practice. This name type constitutes roughly 9% of all two-part names and is characteristic primarily in the naming of public places (streets, squares), e.g. *Petőfi/utca* 'street named after Sándor Petőfi, 19th century Hungarian poet', *Nefelejcs/utca* 'forget-me-not street', as well as of fountains, wells and springs, e.g. *Sárkány/kút* 'dragon fountain', *Szent/kút* 'holy well'. We can list into this category also the toponyms with an anterior component made up of a personal name, where however the motivation of the naming is not the owner himself/herself, but a family member (usually child or grandchild) of his/her, e.g. *Etelka/forrás* 'spring named after a person called Etelka', *Róbert/kút* 'well named after a person called Róbert'.

5. On the basis of the study of the anterior component of two-part toponyms, with respect to our central topic we can draw the following conclusions. I am confident that my analysis shows clearly that the most dominant motivation in the naming process is the relation of a place to another. Within this, it is the precise location of the place that provides the major naming motivation: that is, reference to a nearby water, form of elevation or region. The presence of features directly perceivable through the senses lags far behind the previous type, and is surpassed even by the reference to the owner, as a naming motivation. This means that basically toponyms foster orientation when the person looking for directions is already

somewhat familiar with the given area (beyond purely linguistic experiences). Nevertheless, in the course of spatial orientation awareness of the toponyms (i.e. memorisation of the toponyms linked to different features of the area) is not necessarily needed. When giving directions to a foreigner, namely, oral instructions can be sufficient only if common names are used that help linguistic categorisation, and thus knowledge of the language is sufficient for their comprehension (cf. Reszegi 2012, Heinrich 2000: 5, Hochbauer 2010: 108). Therefore we can conclude that the basic function of toponyms lies mostly in their role to foster simple, unambiguous denotation of a particular place for a given speech community. Toponyms namely immediately denote certain fix points in the landscape and its mental representation, i.e. in the representational scheme known as the mental map. In this way, toponyms enable mental recalling of particular places, that is to say, through them communication relating to a given area becomes smoother. Spatial orientation, however, presupposes the storing of several other types of information, such as roads, borders, sectors, junctions, landmarks, as well as their relation. Thus spatial orientation is guided by the setup of the cognitive map (i.e. the cognitive representation of space).

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