

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 What are Names and Toponyms?

Names, or more specifically proper nouns, are linguistic signs made up of single or multiple words that can denote a range of entities: from a person to groups of persons, to plants, animals, and other living beings, to landmarks such as rivers, buildings, settlements, and so on. George Redmonds' definition captures this function of names aptly; he describes names as 'special words that we use to identify a person, an animal, a place or a thing, and they all have a meaning. In many cases that meaning will lie concealed in the name's history, but in others it will still be transparent' (Redmonds, 2007, p. ix). The scientific study of all kinds of names is called onomastics and derives from the Ancient Greek word *ónoma* (*ὄνομα*) 'name'. Since onomastics is deeply connected with numerous other fields, including linguistics, history, geography, anthropology, and sociology, the study of place names is, naturally, very interdisciplinary. Onomastics is commonly known to have two principal branches:

- (1) anthroponymy (or anthroponomastics): the study of personal names
- (2) toponymy (or toponomastics): the study of place names, or toponyms

Other names investigated in different but related subfields are ethnonyms (the names of nationalities or ethnic groups) (Koopman, 2016) and glottonyms (the names of languages) (Bright, 2003).

A toponym (from Ancient Greek *τόπος* (*tópos*) 'place', and *ὄνομα* (*ónoma*) 'name') is a name given to a particular place, and toponymy and toponomastics refer to the discipline that studies place names. It is worth noting that although toponymy can be considered a synonym of toponomastics, the word 'toponymy' in itself can also be used to indicate and identify the set of place names belonging to a specific area. For example, Singapore toponomastics is the study of Singapore place names, while Singapore toponymy could be understood as a synonym of Singapore toponomastics, but can also be used to refer to the whole set of place names associated with Singapore. Thus, the term 'Singapore toponymy' can be used in the sentence: 'Singapore's toponymy reflects its sociopolitical history and make-up.' In this example, we cannot utilise the term 'toponomastics' in such a way.

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Toponyms are linguistic signs denoting a space and place and are tied to the way humans conceptualise and organise spaces. Being geographical in nature, places and their toponyms are undeniably connected with the fields of geography, topography, cartography, geology, and landscape archaeology. Place names, furthermore, are part of the lexicon of human speech and follow the rules of a given language, reflecting the sounds, morphology, structure, and meanings of the language itself, its origins, and the changes that the language underwent in its development (see Chapter 2). All these make toponyms invaluable to linguists and philologists. Any sense of place is, thus, richly integrated with the interplay and connection of different contexts and disciplines, creating a multilayered entity ready to be uncovered and unpacked. The process of naming a place indicates that the place is important with regards to human activity and human society (Algeo and Algeo, 2000), and this importance will be explained in detail in this book.

Toponymy and toponomastics, as general terms, refer to the study of place names and their features, including, but not limited to, their origins, etymology, development and change over time, use, cultural and sociological characteristics, and their value in society. In the context of linguistics, they are usually considered to be part of the ‘linguistic items’ studied in etymology and sociolinguistics. Linguists usually seek to discover the etymology and meaning of a particular toponym (Coates, 2013), or they focus on how names are used.

In the sections that follow, we will first provide the definitions, with related discussions, of some of the subfields associated with toponymy and toponomastics, as well as of the technical approaches applied to the study of toponymy. We will then go into the ways in which scholars have previously classified toponyms, before looking at the structure of place names and at how groups of toponyms (known as toponymic systems) share the same roots and naming processes. We will then conclude this chapter with an explanation of how toponyms can be seen as linguistic fossils.

### 1.2 What are the Sub-Disciplines Connected with Toponymy?

Toponyms, at their core, are labels for places, whether they indicate natural features (e.g., mountains, rivers, forests) or man-made features (e.g., buildings, streets, cities). As humans, when we name or label something, it means that we have deemed it important and seek to make it noticeable in our conceptual schema by attaching a name to it. If a place is not named, it is not a place, but ‘merely the distance between places, a place holder’ (Algeo and Algeo, 2000, p. 272). With the constant expansion of human settlements and activities, geographical places that remain unnamed have become fewer and fewer, as more and more places accrue importance in the human schema. At the same

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time, as we continue to expand human occupation, there will virtually be no place left unnamed.

Toponymy and toponomastics categorise different types of place names and this has generated a number of different technical terms. These terms identify, classify, and differentiate the many different types of existing place names. Readers are directed to the website of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (<https://icosweb.net/>) for a more exhaustive list.

- Toponyms: place names in general. From Ancient Greek *tópos* (τόπος) ‘place’, and *ónoma* (ὄνομα) ‘name’.
- Hydronyms: the names of all kinds of water bodies, including rivers, streams, brooks, lakes, and seas. From Ancient Greek *hýdōr* (ὕδωρ) ‘water’, and *ónoma* (ὄνομα) ‘name’. The discipline studying hydronyms is called hydronymy. Hydronymy can also indicate the set of specific hydronyms belonging to a specific area. A less used but more detailed categorisation of bodies of water includes the following.
  - Oceanonyms: the names of oceans. From Ancient Greek *Ōkeanós* (Ὠκεανός) *Oceanus* (a water deity) ‘ocean’.
  - Pelagonyms: the names of seas. From Ancient Greek *pélagos* (πέλαγος) ‘sea’.
  - Potamonyms: the names of rivers. From Ancient Greek *potamós* (ποταμός) ‘river’.
  - Limnonyms: the names of lakes. From Ancient Greek *límḗ* (λίμνη) ‘lake’.
  - Micro-hydronyms: the names of smaller and more localised bodies of water, for example, brooks, springs, and wells.
- Oronyms: the names of mountains, hills, and hillocks. From Ancient Greek *óros* (ὄρος) ‘mountain’, and *ónoma* (ὄνομα) ‘name’. The discipline studying oronyms is called oronymy. Oronymy can also mean the set of specific oronyms of a specific area.
- Speleonyms: the names of caves, chasms, grottoes, mines, and entire underground systems. From Ancient Greek *spélaion* (σπήλαιον) ‘cave’ and *ónoma* (ὄνομα) ‘name’.
- Odonyms: the names of streets, avenues, boulevards, drives, lanes, and other denominations relating to inhabited areas. From Ancient Greek *hodós* (ὁδός) ‘a way, path, track, road’, and *ónoma* (ὄνομα) ‘name’. The discipline studying odonyms is called odonymy. Odonymy can also mean the set of specific odonyms of a specific area.
- Urbanonyms: the names of urban elements, such as, streets, blocks, parks, avenues, drives, churches, buildings, and so on. These are all part of an urbanonymic system, also considered micro-toponyms, as they are usually only known by the local people living in the area (Urazmetova and Shamsutdinova, 2017). From Latin *urbs* ‘city’, and Ancient Greek *ónoma*

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(*ὄνομα*) ‘name’. With the rapid expansion of human settlements, more man-made places have been classified recently (Podolskaya, 1988, p. 14).

Finally, other less commonly used denominations of toponyms include the names of forests (dryonyms, from Ancient Greek *dry's* (*δρῦς*) ‘tree’, and *ónoma* (*ὄνομα*) ‘name’), the names of islands (insulonyms, from Latin *insula* ‘island’ and *ónoma* (*ὄνομα*) ‘name’, or nesonyms, from Ancient Greek *vḗσος*, ‘island’, and *ónoma* (*ὄνομα*) ‘name’), and the names of groups of people (inhabitants, natives, residents) connected with a particular polity (demonyms, from Ancient Greek *dēmos* (*δῆμος*) ‘people’, and *ónoma* (*ὄνομα*) ‘name’).

Place names can be studied according to different research approaches. In the next sections, we will present the most commonly used classification systems.

### 1.3 Strategies and Categories in Toponymic Research

A commonly used strategy in toponymic research is to classify toponyms into the broad categories of macro-toponyms and micro-toponyms. Macro-toponyms are names of larger or major geographical sites, such as countries, capitals, regions, and even major streets. Micro-toponyms are smaller places known to a smaller set of people (usually locals), for example, wells, gates, local streets, and brooks. Blair (2015, p. 2) lists three types of micro-toponyms; they are either names for small features, the placenames of a local area, or ‘unofficial placenames that hardly anybody knows of’. Meanwhile, Tent (2015, p. 8) defines micro-toponyms as ‘names of small geographic features – either natural or constructed – that are not officially recognised or gazetted, and do not generally appear on any published maps. They usually name a feature that is itself part of a larger named feature.’ Scholars like Clark (2009, p. 208) also mention that micro-toponymy studies minor geographic features. Clark notes that studying micro-toponymy involves analysing ‘the name for the bank on a lake, or for a feature on such a bank, or a waterhole in a river, or the name of a feature on the side of a mountain’. Miccoli (2019, p. 86) connects the ‘macro-/micro-’ difference to the level of knowledge regarding the places and the sources where these names can be found; macro-toponyms are usually well known and can be found in large-scale maps, guides, and atlases. Micro-toponyms, on the other hand, have limited spread of knowledge, are known only to specific people within a region, and, if official, are attested mostly in city plans. However, the boundary between these two categories can be blurred, depending on the perspective of the user(s) defining these places. For example, Singapore is a macro-toponym, for both locals and non-locals alike, but Orchard Road, being a tourist attraction in Singapore, can be a macro-toponym to those that know it and a micro-toponym to those that do not. Similarly, Jurong, a suburb in Singapore, can be a macro-toponym to local

Singaporeans, for it is a large and important region in the nation, but a micro-toponym to non-locals. Although there is no hard boundary between the two categories, another way to look at them is to think that macro-toponyms tend to be standardised and are unlikely to change, while micro-toponyms are relatively less stable and are subject to change (Urazmetova and Shamsutdinova, 2017).

Being ‘micro’ in its features does not make a micro-toponym ‘micro’ in its significance. Micro-toponyms deserve to be recorded and studied as well as place names of larger features. Often, micro-toponyms are coined by local speakers, and they not only serve as navigational markers, but also as markers of their identity. Many micro-toponyms are significant in oral traditions, appearing in foundation myths and legends.

Tent (2015) points out how The Australian National Placenames Survey (ANPS) adopted the terms ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive toponymy’ for toponymic study. Tent explains that intensive toponymic research involves ‘writing a placename’s “biography”’. This is done by answering the *wh-* questions: ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘when’ the place was named, ‘what’ is the meaning of the name, and ‘where’ the name comes from (Tent, 2015, pp. 67–8). He goes on to say that extensive toponymy ‘is more straightforward to conduct than intensive toponymy’. This approach looks for patterns in a collection of place names, unearthing observations such as naming practices and distribution of geographical features and so on that may not be obvious if we only focus on discrete place names. Thus, at the heart of the extensive approach would be the search for toponymic patterns among toponymic datasets. While some forms of classification are useful, Tent cautions against an intensive/extensive dichotomy, arguing that the intensive approach often forms the basis of and precedes the extensive model (Tent, 2015, p. 70). Thus, knowledge of individual place names facilitates the identification of patterns and processes among numerous toponyms.

One other broad classification involves the semasiological/onomasiological distinction. The semasiological approach deals with what names or their elements mean or meant, while the onomasiological approach deals with how particular concepts are encoded linguistically. Coates (2013) states that the semasiological approach can be understood in the linguistic and historical senses, as in the question ‘why and how did X come to be called X?’, and the onomasiological approach looks to answer the question ‘how do we, or should we, express terminologically the elements in system Y (and the relations among them)?’ (Coates, 2013, p. 4316).

One final noteworthy classification is represented by the two categories of endonyms and exonyms (Kadmon, 2007). An endonym is the ‘name of a geographical feature in one of the languages occurring in that area where the feature is situated’, while an exonym is the ‘name used in a specific

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language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated' (Kadmon, 2007, p. 10). *The Glossary of Toponymic Terms* by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names lists the pinyin (Hanyu Pinyin, or pinyin in short, is the Romanisation system for transliterating Mandarin Chinese) form Beijing as an endonym and Peking as an exonym. Another example is the exonym Moscow, while Москва and the Romanised Moskva are both endonyms.

#### 1.4 Different Approaches to Toponymy

The study of toponyms is carried through either of two approaches. One approach looks at places and place names over a long period of time (historical toponomastics and diachronic toponymy; see below and Chapters 3 and 5), while the other is concerned with the study of place names within a specific moment in time (synchronic toponymy; see below and Chapter 8).

The historical, diachronic, and etymological study of place names is mainly conducted according to two approaches which are commonly used, but which do not have universal accepted appellations and definitions. Aiming at a terminological systematisation and at a conceptual standardisation, we call them, in this book, diachronic toponymy and historical toponomastics.

As a general definition, we call diachronic toponymy the discipline which studies toponymy inherently in undocumented and endangered languages and language families (Perono Cacciafoco et al., 2015), that is, within linguistic contexts in the absence of written documents and records. The approach is conducted by applying to the study of generally aboriginal and/or Indigenous place names a traditional comparative methodology aimed at the reconstruction of consistent or regular sound changes affecting the language, enabling us to recover proto-forms and roots for the analysed place names (see Chapter 4). In some cases, by studying the 'story' or history of a place name or related place names, we are also able to reconstruct historical events that happened to minority and Indigenous groups, often foreshadowed by their local oral-traditional myths. In this context, the term 'diachronic' is interpreted literally as 'throughout time' (from Ancient Greek *diá* (*διὰ*) 'through', and *chrónos* (*χρόνος*) 'time'), because, in diachronic toponymy, due to the absence of historical documents and records, the linguist can try to reconstruct a place name only between two ideal points in time, from the currently attested toponym to the reconstructed proto-form recovered through the application of the comparative method to the target language, and possibly related languages. While the reconstruction of a proto-form and root is possible, in this context, it is very difficult to hypothesise an absolute

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chronology for those proto-forms and roots and, therefore, the ideal representation of this process is that of two points in time, generating a straight line from the currently attested form to the reconstructed proto-form, without the option of an accurate chronological documentation of the sequence of sound changes for the place name.

We call the other etymological approach to the study of toponymy historical toponomastics, namely the historical-linguistic practice of reconstructing the history (and prehistory) of place names by relying on available written (or otherwise documented) historical records and sources. This is more generally done in the context of well-studied and documented languages and language families (e.g., the Indo-European languages). Historical toponomastics is closely related to etymology (the study of the origins of words and their original meanings), and aims at reconstructing, through the application of the comparative method, the historical phonetics of place names (the diachronic development of sounds in a language and the relation of one sound to another in the same language, whose study allows us to reconstruct proto-forms and roots in an original proto-language from which the analysed language and its relatives in the same language family derive), their proto-forms and roots, and the sound laws generating them. The historical toponomastics approach allows the linguist to reconstruct a sort of ‘chronological stratigraphy’ of the place names, because the existence of historical documents and records enables scholars not only to etymologically recover proto-forms and roots for the toponyms they study, but also to collect, list, and analyse the diachronic variants of a place name and, therefore, to chronologically ‘portray’ its morphological development over time. In this process, there will be always a moment in which historical records are no longer available, because the linguistic investigation goes back to times predating the invention of writing. From that point in time, the comparative method, together with the recovery and application of sound laws intrinsic to the naming process, and the historical-phonetic reconstruction of forms and proto-forms mitigate the absence of historical records and allow for the completion of the etymological reconstruction of the examined place names.

As we have just illustrated, the diachronic and historical study of place names involves other disciplines and sub-disciplines of historical linguistics, such as etymology, historical phonetics, and historical semantics, all of which contribute to the correct interpretation of the origins of toponyms. Place names not only record elements of the civilisations of those who lived before us, but also depict the past landscape and the changes caused by human activity. Therefore, an effective chronological reconstruction needs to tap into historical geography, historical cartography, historical topography, landscape archaeology (David and Thomas, 2008; Cambi, 2011), geo-archaeology (Cremaschi, 2008), palaeo-anthropology (Facchini et al.,

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1993), genetics (Beretta, 2003; Perono Cacciafoco, 2014). Data and approaches from these (sub-)disciplines can be useful to cross-check results from a linguistic analysis. This can be done, for example, by evaluating the changes in the hydro-geo-morphology of relevant territories and areas occupied by human settlements. Researchers can then investigate possible links between the toponyms and the actual landscape, thereby confirming or disproving etymological hypotheses (Gelling and Cole, 2000). The links and intersection of these fields with toponymy will be taken up throughout this book.

A non-etymological approach to the study of toponymy looks at place names in the context of a specific frame of time, that is, synchronically, even if in the study of languages almost nothing is properly ‘synchronic’, because language and its elements continuously change and develop over time and all the linguistic aspects are products of diachronic processes. Therefore, ‘synchronic’ indicates, in this context, a toponymic study concerned with place names as they exist at one specific point in time and within a limited time frame. We call this approach synchronic toponymy, which deals with the function of names in society and with the perception of names by members of society (Karpenko, 1964, cited in Belen’kaya, 1975, p. 315). Belen’kaya (1975, p. 320) notes the following: ‘Synchronic analysis not only points up the relationship between place names in the over-all system of toponymics, but suggests the linkage between place names and objective reality, i.e., the way in which the population perceives the name and understands its content, regardless of whether this understanding corresponds to the original meaning of the word.’

This is a sociolinguistic discipline that accounts for societal factors in establishing, changing, conceiving, or understanding place names. These factors include changes in language planning and language policies, political or economic factors, and the sociopolitical influences that force people to shift away from the languages that they normally speak. This approach thus complements a diachronic/historical study of toponymy. The discussion on synchronic toponymy will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 8.

### 1.5 How do we Classify Toponyms? A Brief Outline of Toponymic Classification Systems

Place names can be classified into different systems. What follows is a discussion of the most commonly used classification systems. We will provide a brief overview of the types of toponymic classification systems that scholars have developed over the course of the last fifty to sixty years. These typologies span through different time periods and contexts and across different countries.



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For years, scholars have sought to develop adequate typologies to classify place names. While we do not aim to list and analyse them all in this volume, we have included a few notable ones here. For a more comprehensive and exhaustive review of such toponymic classification systems, indispensable readings are Tent and Blair (2009; 2011).

As early as 1945, in his celebrated *Names on the Land* (Stewart, 1945), George R. Stewart began to categorise places in the USA in terms of their naming strategies. Stewart later developed a toponymic typology first published in 1954 (Stewart, 1954) and then refined in his book *Names on the Globe* (Stewart, 1975). He proposed ten categories of place names as summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 *Stewart's toponymic typology*

Category	Sub-categories
<u><i>Descriptive names</i></u> <i>Names that describe and characterise the qualities of a place</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sensory descriptives</li> <li>2. Relative descriptives</li> <li>3. Intellectual descriptives</li> <li>4. Metaphorical descriptives</li> <li>5. Subjective descriptives</li> <li>6. Negative and ironic descriptives</li> <li>7. Hortatory descriptives</li> <li>8. Repetitive descriptives</li> </ol>
<u><i>Associative names</i></u> <i>Names that evoke associations with different objects</i>	
<u><i>Incident names</i></u> <i>Names that associate a place with an incident at a particular time</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acts of God</li> <li>2. Calendar names</li> <li>3. Animal names</li> <li>4. Names of human actions</li> <li>5. Names from an event associated with a person</li> <li>6. Names from feelings</li> <li>7. Names from sayings</li> </ol>
<u><i>Possessive names</i></u> <i>Names that denote some idea of ownership or that a place is associated with something or someone</i>	
<u><i>Commemorative names</i></u> <i>Names that commemorate a person, place, or event</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Persons</li> <li>2. Other places</li> <li>3. Abstractions</li> <li>4. Miscellaneous</li> </ol>
<u><i>Commendatory names</i></u> <i>Names given by some attractive peculiarities of a geographical object</i>	

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Table 1.1 (*cont.*)

Category	Sub-categories
<u>Folk etymologies</u>	
<i>Names with false etymologies</i>	
<u>Manufactured names</u>	
<i>Names which are manufactured or coined from sounds, letters, or fragments of other words</i>	
<u>Mistake names</u>	
<i>Names which appeared from a mistake made in the transmission from one language to another, either from inaccurate hearing of what was said, or because of faulty rendering of the sounds in writing</i>	
<u>Shift names</u>	
<i>Names which have been moved from one location to another</i>	

Stewart's development of this typology is based 'upon the proposition that all place-names arise from a single motivation, that is, the desire to distinguish and to separate a particular place from places in general' (Stewart, 1975, p. 86). Although there are many purposes in coming up with such systems to categorise place names, according to Stewart's system, the focus is not to reconstruct the origins or etymology of toponyms. Rather, Stewart hopes to explain the naming processes and differentiate one place name from another. Indeed, the system devised by Stewart allows a preliminary categorisation of place names, which can lead to observations of patterns on the settlement dynamics, history, landscape, and so on.

While this classification system (like more or less all classification systems) is a good attempt at classifying place names, it is far from perfect. Some of Stewart's categories have many sub-categories, making them relatively cumbersome for users. For example, there are eight sub-categories under 'descriptive' names, such as sensory descriptives, relative descriptives, intellectual descriptives, and metaphorical descriptives, among others, which make it confusing to classify place names and to discriminate one sub-category from another. Moreover, the boundaries between each category do not seem to be clear-cut, and a place name can be in two or more categories. Stewart (1954, p. 11) calls them 'border-line instances'. Some overlapping types include: descriptive-incident, where 'an incident, if recurring, may become characteristic and, therefore, descriptive'; and incident-possessive, 'since possessive names are so closely connected with associate-descriptive, they also are naturally connected with incident names' (Stewart, 1954, p. 11). However, as Tent and Blair note:

Stewart's resultant typology has several areas of overlap (e.g., 'commendatory names' and 'names from feelings'), and has classes that are too narrow (e.g., 'repetitive