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ABSTRACT. This article presents how the English language was shaped by a combination of various influences. The various influences can be tracked by analyzing the different place names that can be found on the British Isles. Even though today's place names might appear completely different or in many cases even illogical, in the past they were used to express natural features, habitation forms, followers of a god or a particular family, etc. Place names change as does the language itself, because it is a living entity that evolves and takes on different shapes and forms.

Key words: Toponymic units, English language, history of toponymy, etymology, place names, semantic and structural aspects.

According to a well-known philosopher, Popper, there are three kinds of worlds: the physical world, the mental world and the world of contents of thought, which includes products of the human mind, of which language is one. To name objects is therefore part of the genetic make-up of man. What is amazing though is that most people are able to use language correctly, name places, people and objects, even though they do not have a set of syntactic or semantic rules on hand. The way in which man names rivers, mountains, valleys, towns and other environmental entities reflects how he thinks and lives and what his psychological disposition and subconscious mind produces in his daily contact with universal semantic domains like entities, events, abstract concepts and the relations between these domains. These four domains proposed by Eugene Nida, tend to correspond, albeit not in all languages, to grammatical classes, although all four domains can be presented, for instance, by nouns only. An event which is often represented by a verb, could also be represented by a noun, e.g., the word battle. Grammatical meaning is, however, additive and does not change the category of the root. How can we use semantic domains to classify geographical names? Let us take a look at some features relevant for our purpose: Entities are animate or inanimate.¹

Inanimate entities are either natural or manufactured, e.g. natural geographical features like hill, sea, lake, farm, sun, etc.; natural substances like iron, rock, mud, fire, etc. and plant related products like forest, bush, thorn, blossom, etc.

Manufactured entities can be artifacts like carriage, crown, statue, paper, instrument, etc.; processed substances like bread, wine, honey, perfume, poison, etc. and constructions like gate, fence, camp, ship, etc. Each entity can in turn be categorized into smaller categories, e.g., geographical entities can have three subcategories with items of a celestial-atmospheric nature (sun, sky, etc.), supernatural nature (paradise, hell, etc.) or relating to the planet earth with items which are generic (region, country), features of land (mountain, desert), features of the sea (lake, island, bay), cultivated areas (farm, field) and politically defined areas (domain, province, empire).

In the same way events can have twelve categories referring to events which are:

1. Physical (rain, overflow, burn)
2. Physiological (eat, reproduce, sleep, drown)
3. Sensory (hear, feel, touch, see, smell) 4. emotive (desire, hate, fear)
5. Intellectual (reason, remember, decide, learn)
6. Communicative (signal, speak, write, pray)
7. Social (meet, marry, honor) 8. controlling (conquer, rule, resist)
9. Movement (move, enter, run)

¹ Nida E. Grammatical meaning of toponyms. Oxford University Press, 1975, P. 174

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10. Impact (break, cut, destroy) 11. transfer (distribute, receive, exchange)

12. complex actions or processes involving more than a singular event (sow, shear, cook, weave, sacrifice).

In this way meanings are not treated as lexical units but are classified according to themes. Geographical names are structured in various transformations by using combinations of any of the items describing any category of any domain. A name like Happy Valley is a compound expressing the relation between an abstract state and a geographical feature of land, denoting a place. Similarly, Somerset West is a compound expressing the relation between the name of a human being imposed on a place and a spatial relation. In this way geographical names with specific components referring to certain domains can be listed for purposes of research, e.g., names referring to sun as in Sunnyside, Sun City, Sunland; names with a spatial reference of east/west, upper/lower, middle, center, etc. as in Somerset West, East London, Northcliff, Southbroom, Midlands, Middledrift, Waterval-Bo, Upper Tongaat, Lower Houghton, Onderstepoort, etc. The higher the frequency of certain domains, the clearer the inferential possibilities concerning a country or community's cultural, historical or environmental picture, keeping in mind that with names inference eventually becomes reference.

As it is mentioned earlier, **habitation names** contain elements like “farm”, “homestead”, and “enclosure”. As settlements grew larger those elements also included “village” or “town”. Rye (web: www.englishplacenames.co.uk) mentions some of the common suffixes in habitation names, such as *-ham*, *-tun*, *-by*, *-thorp*.

The suffix **-ham** means “homestead”.

The suffix **-tun** means “enclosure” or even “fence”, later it extended its meaning to “an enclosure round a homestead”, a “farm” and then “village”.

The suffix **-by** means “homestead” or “farmstead”.

The suffix **-thorp** usually has the meaning of “a secondary or outlying farm attached to some other settlement”. Usually, names that contain such suffixes have the meaning “some form of habitation”.

Unlike habitation names which indicate that the place is a form of settlement, **feature names** provide information about the natural features. The reference in feature names extends from a wide variety of flora (alder trees, ash trees, oak trees, beans, corn field, rye, willows etc.) and fauna (horses, wild cats, swans, stags, owls, cuckoos etc.). Included in the nature features are also a wide selection of references to streams, fords, mounds, hills, valleys, ridges, meadows, woods, clearings, marshes, and islands. Nowadays the original fauna has vanished, the traditional farming system has changed, woods have been cleared, marshes drained, in summary, the natural world has undergone a series of changes. What may have been completely logical and self-evident for the original settlers may come across as confusing nowadays.²

The prefix **tre-** has the meaning “farm, village”, it is derived from the Welsh tref, tre which is related to the Cornish trev. Some affixes are regionally bound, which is not the case with the prefix **tre-**. Treales in Lancashire and Treflys in Gwynedd mean “homestead of the court”. Tremaine in Cornwall, Tremain in Dyfed and Triermain in Cumbria have the meaning “farm of the stone”. Other examples are Trematon (has the Old English suffix **-tūn**), Tregony, Tregavethan, Trehawke, Trehunsey, Trekinnard, Treneglos “village with the church”, Tranent “village of the streams”, Trenowth “new farm”. Although **tre-** has mostly the meaning “farm, village”, it can be misleading, e.g., Truro its first element is not **tre-** but the Cornish tri ‘three’, another example is Trelleck “three stones”.³

² Rye, web: www.englishplacenames.co.uk

³ Field. Grammatical analyzes of toponyms. Cambridge University Press, 1994, P. 13

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The suffix *-ingas* has the meaning “followers of”. The toponyms *Yalding* – “followers of *Ealda*”, *Hastings* – “followers of *Hæsta*”, *Reading* – “followers of *Rēada*” and *Poynings* – “followers of *Pūna*” have the meaning “followers of a pagan god”, whereas the toponyms *Worthing* – “followers of *Worth*”, *Lancing* – “followers of *Wlanc*”, *Angmering* – “followers of *Angenmæ̅r*” and *Goring* – “followers of *Gāra*” have the meaning “family members or followers of a certain family”. Related to the meaning of followership words *hearg* and *wēoh* or *wīg*, although they are not ending in the *-ingas* suffix, can be included here because they have the meaning “pagan shrine, temple” and they can be found in different toponyms throughout England. The word *hearg* is imbedded in the place names *Harrow*, *Peper Harrow* and *Arrowfield* and the word *wēoh* or *wīg* can be found in place names like *Weedon*, *Winwood* and *Wye*.

The suffixes *-ham* and *-hamm* “Even if you know that ham is probably derived from the Old English word meaning “homestead”, you wouldn’t necessarily be able to say for certain that *Langham*, for example, meant ‘something plus homestead’. This is because the Old English *-hamm* (water meadow or enclosure) also comes out as “*ham*” in modern place names. Only by looking at early forms can you distinguish between the two, and even then, it is not always possible. In this particular case, *Langham* could mean either “long river meadow/enclosure” or “long homestead”. Until the early spelling of the name is known (and by ‘early’ I mean at least the twelfth century or before), it is not possible to see which Celtic, Latin, Old English, Old Norse, or even Old French elements might form the name. Place name scholars have to hunt through a variety of historical documents in order to record early spellings.”⁴ As it is already mentioned, the place name element *-ham* (“village”) originates in Old English, so does *-hamm* (“land in a river band, water meadow”). So, without proper information we cannot deduce meanings of certain toponyms. The main problem lies in the modern spelling, the double m in *-hamm* has been dropped and is now spelled as *-ham* in toponyms and therefore the safest way to finding out a meaning of a place name is to search for the earliest written form. *Evesham* and *Chippenham* are place names that have the ending *-ham*, but they both lie in river bends, hence *-hamm* is the proper ending considering the meaning. The other parts in these place names are personal names *Eof* and *Cippa*. Further examples of the spelling *-ham* but actually having the meaning *-hamm* are: *Farnham* (‘fern-covered water-meadow’), *Topsham* (‘*Toppa*’s watermeadow’), *Burnham* (‘water-meadow by the stream’).

The suffixes *-ingham*, with *-hām-stede*, *-hām*, *-tūn*, *-tūn*, *-ingham* from that period is the combination of *-ingas* and *-ham/ -hamm*. The difference between *-ham* and *-hamm* in this combination is also important. For example, *We have Nottingham* “village of *Snot*’s people”, (the ‘s’ has been lost due to Norman influence) which has the suffix *-ham* and on the other *Buckingham* and *Birlingham* have the suffix *-hamm* “land in a river bend occupied by *Bucca*’s people” and “water-meadow belonging to *Byrta*’s people”. The early spelling of *Buckingham* is *Buccinghamme* and of *Birlingham* is *Byrlinghamme* which is also verification of its meaning. Two groups of toponyms with the suffix *-ingham* may be distinguished. There is no apparent difference between them in modern spelling, however the difference may be seen when the original spelling is taken into consideration. The first group consists of place names like *Birmingham* – “village of the people of *Beorma*”, *Billingham* – “village of the people of *Bill*”, *Atcham* (*Attingham*) – “village of the people of *Eata*”, *Ovingham* – “village of the people of *Ofa*”, *Altrincham* – “village of the people of *Aldhere*”. The second group consists of place names such as *Everingham* – “village of the followers of *Eofor*”, *Gillingham* – “village of the followers of *Gylla*”, *Empingham* – “village of the followers of *Empa*”, *Framlingham* – “village of the followers of *Framela*”, *Walsingham* – “village of the followers of *Wals*” and *Cottingham* – “village of the followers of *Cott*”. The suffix *hām – stede* occurs in many names, as *Hampstead*, *Hamstead* and *Hempstead*. Usually compounds like those mentioned are

⁴ Rye, web: www.englishplacenames.co.uk

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prefixed with a name of a tree or a plant, for example, *Ashampstead*, *Nettlestead*, *Nuthampstead*, and *Wheathampstead*. Not only trees and plants can be found in these compounds, the place name Berkhamstead has the meaning “homestead on a hill” and Easthampstead (early form Yethamstede 1176) means “homestead by a gate”, namely the gate to Windsor Forest. The suffix *-tūn* can stand alone, but it is not uncommon to find it as a derivative of the *-ham/- hamm* suffixes, e.g. Littlehampton (“small home farm”) or Northampton (“north home farm”). Hampton, Hampton Bishop, Hampton Wafer and Hampton Lucy come from the *-hamm-tun* combination and all of them have the meaning “village in or by riverside meadow-land”.

The suffix *-tun* is the most common of all Old English suffixes; it is never used alone and is mainly used as a second element. A possibility where it occurs as a first element might be in the place name Tonbridge, although it may be possible that the first element is a personal name, Tunna. The suffix *-tun* comes in various combinations, in combination with geographical directions, in combination with climatic seasons, or churches, mills (in these place names confusion may arise because of the same element which has another meaning ‘in the middle’), products, personal names, natural features, animals and plants.

The suffix *-ford* Place names ending in *-ford* are usually of historical importance. Stamford “stone or stony ford”, Stamford Bridge (originally was Sandford), Stratford “ford crossed by a Roman road”, Wallingford “people of Wealh”, Stafford “ford by a landing place”, Oxford “ford for oxen”, Bedford “Bēda’s ford”, Hertford “stag ford”, Hereford “army ford”, Guildford “ford by a landing place”.

The suffix *-wīc* has the meaning ‘dwelling, farm, dairy-farm, industrial building’, other forms of this suffix are *-wīch* or *-wīck*. Warwick means “dwellings near a weir”, Ipswich “Gip’s port”, Norwich ‘northern port’. The suffix *-wīc* also appears in one of Southampton’s early name forms Homwic. In Greenwich and Sandwich, the first part alludes to natural attributes “green” and “sandy”. In Woolwich the first part carries the information of the cargo ‘wool’ that was carried across it. Directions and location can be also included in place names, e.g., Northwich, Southwick, Westwick, Middlewich and Netherwich. As already mentioned, “industrial building or dairy farm” are also meanings of *-wīc*, e.g., that of cheesemaking is imbedded in Cheswick, Chiswick and Keswick. Colwich and Colwick were places where charcoal was produced. Some places got their names according to different occupations such as priest or smith (Prestwich/Prestwick, Smetwich). Other names were given by describing a place using trees or plants, e.g., Ashwick, Hazelwick, Appletreewick, Redwick (“reed”), Benwick (“beans”) and Slaughterwicks (skah-treow, “*sloe-tree*”).

The original meaning of the suffix *-by* was “farmstead” and, as was the case with the AngloSaxon suffix *-ham*, many of these places grew into villages and towns. As a part of their settlement, the Vikings renamed a lot of places. To the suffix *-by* often an Old English word was added, e.g., Utterby has the first part utterrai which means “outer, more remote”. Further examples of *-by* ending place names include: Selby “village with willows”, Linby “village with lime trees”, Thrimby “thorn-bush village”. Some common names in the Danelaw are Kirkby or Kirby ‘village with a church’ and Crosby “village with cross”. Coningsby was owned by a king and Whenby was owned by women. The ending *-by* is often added to personal names, e.g., Scandinavian names: Brumby, Ormsby, Barkby, Stainsby, Bleasby, Humby (also found in Scotland), Corby, Oadby; Irish names: Duggleby and Lackenby; English names: Ellerby and Gutterby.

Another common Scandinavian suffix in The Danelaw is *-thorpe*. It appears in various forms such as *-thorp*, *-throp* or *-trop*. It has the meaning “secondary settlement” and usually follows the 33 names of the parent village, e.g., Barby Thorpe, Tattershall Thorpe, Scotton Thorpe. In names that use geographical directions, the direction usually indicates the position of the daughter village, e.g., Easthorpe and Westhorpe are east and west from Southwell. Names with Old English first elements are also not uncommon, e.g., Newthorpe, Woodthorpe, Milnthorpe, Kingthorpe and Bishopthorpe.

This suffix is also usually used with Old Norse personal names, e.g., Alethorpe, Caythorpe, Grimethorpe, Kettlethorpe and Sibthorpe. The Vikings often gave names based on personal names wherever they settled.

Place names are also indicators of how certain tribes have migrated. By looking at Celtic place names it is apparent that they fled westwards to escape the new conquerors, and by looking at Scandinavian place names it becomes clear where their conquest had come to an end and where they had settled. The unique place names given by the Normans are evidence not only of their influence on the language but also of their personality as a folk. The Celtic tribes had different names for the same places, which tells us they were tribes with similarities as well as differences. The networks of roads and positions of Roman towns indicate their organization capabilities. The place names of the Anglo-Saxon also give away that they were not unified but they all formed their own kingdoms. Much information is imbedded in place names. By thoroughly analyzing them different pieces of the puzzle that is the English language come together.

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