The Resource of a Communicative and Functional Paradigm in Studying Place names
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Abstract

The communicative and functional study of place names is based on the principles of the theory of speech activity.

Object-perceptional cognition allows defining the nature of objects first and only then turning to isolated individual features. Giving a linguistic sign to an object is mediated by the idea of it. This idea is primarily the idea of an object, not the idea of its characteristic features.

Schemes of actions with the names of objects acquired by man in the course of cognitive activities rest upon the results of object-perceptional cognition. It implies a transfer from the least detailed to the most detailed idea of an object and a consequent formation of categorical structures typical for place names in a dialogue.

The analysis of units (Vygotsky) is used to determine the functional properties and interconnection of names within the system. It allows us to save all the basic properties inherent in a holistic place name (not just its components) and uncover relationships that characterize human activity.

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According to M. Makarov, in the history of linguistics of the last three centuries "at least three paradigms – historical (genetic, evolutionary), systemic and structural (inventory, taxonomic), and communicative and functional – were among the leaders" (Makarov, 2003, 11). The first two points in place name research have been thoroughly analyzed by evolutionists, who offer a number of versions of the origin of names, and structuralists, who give a series of descriptions of various systems of names in a given terrain. Meanwhile, the resource of a communicative and functional paradigm in the sphere of place naming has not yet been adequately evaluated.

This situation probably came about due to the fact that proper names are words or short combinations of words that occupy the position of a substantive in the text. They are traditionally defined as names that carry nominative function, meaning they have no access to the syntactic, discursive, and activity-related characteristics. Moreover, the attempt of M. Dokulil to consider derivation from the standpoint of functional linguistics, including the theme-and-rheme division of linguistic units, has remained largely ignored, and not used in practice.

Nowadays the substantial (comparative) and relational (structural) conceptions of language are more and more pressed by the informational conception. There are at least two sides of information. Any data is first obtained and accumulated by a person and then passed on to other people. Therefore, two conceptions of a cognizing subject can be created – the conception of an observer and the conception of an agent. We suggest the principal role be given to the latter. Accumulated information includes both special features of an object understood individually and data shared by all community members who use a name. At the same time communication is always a dialogue, where all participants search for and finally find a common decision. The famous semiotician, Y. Lotman, emphasized that "consciousness is impossible without communication... Language is preceded by dialogue and is generated by it" (Lotman, 1992, 19). Man begins as an observer, but continues as a communicator. The need to disclose information to others causes him to begin the process of categorization – logical processing of the results of cognitive activity – and translate them into a communicative activity.

The approach to studying place names presented here is based on the principles of the theory of speech activity, elaborated by Soviet and Russian psychologists and psycholinguists. Proper names of small-sized geographic objects of Belarus, Slovakia, England, and the USA are used to illustrate this idea.

The concept of *activity* is broader than *communication*, but it is applicable to all kinds of man's activities. According to E. Tarasov, "the theory of speech activity describes nonverbal context in a way as close as possible to the human way of comprehending reality by means of placing speech in the structure of nonverbal activity" (Tarasov, 1987, 98).

Let us consider some notions of the theory of speech activity. A. Leontiev marks out within a single human activity "first of all separate **activities** by the criterion of different motives encouraging certain kinds of activity. Then **actions** are distinguished, i.e. processes subject to conscious goals. Finally, **operations** are singled out that directly depend on the conditions for achieving a particular goal" (Leontiev, 1974, 17).

A fixed way of doing the action (*operation*) presents a non-psychological part. Here is an analogy with the car driver given by A. Leontiev: "gear shift [operation] in normal cases does not exist for the driver's consciousness. He does something else: gets away, takes the hill, drives by rolling, stops at a specified location, etc." (Leontiev, 1975, 108). The thesis that "in most cases the question what language elements the operation consists of is secondary" is reasonable from the standpoint of psycholinguistics (Tarasov, 1987, 128).

Similarly we can define a non-psychological **operation** of binding the basis of a place name and its formant in the process of naming as a way of performing an action. The **action** itself is regarded as being aimed at implementing a common goal – distinguishing one object from another. Finally, the motive of the name giver's **activity** is the desire to find his bearings on the ground. It is a less conscious but more global part of man's life activity.

The principles of communicative and functional study of place names are covered below in opposition to the structural study of place names, and are based on the principles of the theory of speech activity presented by G. Asmolov (Asmolov, 1983, 119-128).

Objective character vs. stimulus character (Principle 1)

According to A. Leontiev, the most important criterion for distinguishing separate activities is their subjects which are their motives (Leontiev, 1974, 102). The subject of activity is not a thing as a natural object, but as an object in the structure of human activity. In place naming it means that the object is considered by its individualizing activity, in providing a certain single object with a feature that separates it from others.

In traditional word formation the analysis of a place name starts from searching for motivation, its distinguishing feature. As a result, the basis of a place name and its formant are identified. If we analyze a place name in this way, we will move from the feature of one object to the feature of another object notwithstanding the fact that the latter object is of completely different nature and origin. For example, names of swamps are motivated by the proper names of rivers, though the natural object "swamp" differs significantly from the natural object "river": Amer. *Alder Brook > Alder Brook Swamp, Bell Creek > Bell Creek Swamp*, Blr. *Aresa > Areskae Balota, Dzitva > Dzitvianskae Balota*.

When dealing directly with place naming it is worth noting that for all the diversity of the landscape, every single object of one kind (e.g., swamp) will not differ in the main from other objects of the same kind. Therefore a sign that forms the basis of a place name will be chosen at random (as a reaction to the stimulus) from the widest possible range of potential features of the object: Eng. *cherry > Cherry Brook*, Amer. *tamarack > Tamarack Swamp*, Svk. *kameň* 'stone' *> Kamenský potok*, Blr. *biaroza* 'birch' *> Biarozavae Balota*. It distinguishes this object from other objects nearby, and therefore is local rather than universal.

Perceptual cognizing of the object at first causes a person to determine its nature and only then resort to individual characteristics, especially because "designation of an object by means of a verbal sign is mediated by the notion of it" (Ufimtseva, Aznaurova, Kubriakova, Teliya, 1977, 31). This notion is, above all, the notion of an object but not of its distinguishing feature. Besides, most formants of place names are of substantive nature, or at least imply a substantive element, since the feature cannot exist without its bearer. Therefore, the substantive part of a place name is the first to be analyzed.

Differentiators in the names of geographic features are used alongside classifiers, i.e. geographic terms and suffixes (abridged geographical terms). These classifiers point to which type of objects (river, lake, marsh, pond, etc.), or at least which categories (substantive, adjective, etc.) names belong to: Eng. *Gedney **Marsh**, **River** Torridge*; Amer. *Cowles **Bog**, Potter **Marsh***; Svk. *Radnovský **potok**, Strieborný **potok**, Trsten**ík**, Lazár**ka***; Blr. *Hluchi **Moch**, Vasileŭskaja **Amšara**; Čarniš**nia**, Miadzvied**nik***.

Despite the increasingly important role of a differentiating component, the main syntactic role is played by substantives in multicomponent place names not subjected to compression: Blr. *Bielaje Vozera* 'white lake'. In the example of two similar sentences, the first is less certain in respect of the place of action, while the second has the maximum of its specification (in Blr. *Пайшлі на возера /* Pajšli na vozera '*Let's go to the lake'* and *Пайшлі на возера Белае /* Pajšli na Bielaje Vozera '*Let's go to Lake Bielaje'*). One may notice that the differentiator appears later in the structure of utterances. Initially it is not a nuclear element. Only the necessity for detail makes the name giver push the individual feature (more appropriate functionally) to the fore. However, even when it is functionally more important, a differentiator is usually not used without a classifier. Consequently, a full-scale investigation requires not only a differentiator and a classifier to be treated individually, but also the relations settled between them: "Only a union of root and auxiliary morphemes can be a name, a nominative and a communicative unit" (Nikitevich, 1985, 31).

Activity vs. reactivity (Principle 2)

This principle implies the activity of the subject and demonstrates the creative nature of human behavior as well as the selectivity and focus of cognitive activity due to values, goals, previous experience, etc. This conditionality will be discussed below within principles 6 and 7. Here we emphasize only the role of obtained experience for the future activity. There is an explanation in physiology: I. Sechenov showed the dependence of reflexes not only on the irritant, but also on the total of previous influence (Sechenov, 1958, 304).

Non-adaptability vs. adaptability (Principle 3)

The principle implying that man creates conditions of his existence is expressed in the formula "internal works through external and change itself by this" (Asmolov, 1983, 123). The searching activity of man leads to finding a definite scheme of naming objects of a certain kind, which is then carried down to other objects (see principle 4). In place names of a certain terrain distinctive ways and means of place naming are typical for all kinds of objects.

Indirect associations vs. direct associations (Principle 4)

According to this principle, the activity of the subject is mediated by its relation to the object, resulting in them finding a framework for action. Piaget emphasized that "the main connection underlying all knowledge is not a mere 'association' between the objects (since it denies the activity of the subject), but 'assimilation' of objects in accordance with certain schemes that are inherent in the subject" (Piaget, 1983, 91). This idea is closely related to the principles of activity and non-adaptability of human activities.

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Interiorization of exteriorization vs. socialization (Principle 5)

The schemes of action with objects obtained in the course of human cognitive activity are based on the results of sensory perception of the subject. In addition it includes a transition from less to more, and more detailed representation of the object in place naming as well as consistent formation of the necessary categorical structures in the dialogue: "in order to transmit any experience or the content of consciousness to another person, there is no other way but to assign it to a certain class, to a certain group of phenomena, but it ... necessarily requires generalization" (Vygotsky, 1956, 50-51).

Categorized data about cognized objects are kept in the mind of man, but at the same time, if necessary, are subjected to re-categorization. Schemes of actions with objects obtained at the previous stage remain with man at the new stage of understanding the subject of naming. Any of the derived schemes of actions may be activated in the course of activity: "for man's consciousness, the contribution made by his activity remains open, and hence it follows that the mind may seem the basis of this activity" (Tarasov, 1987, 115).

Analysis by units vs. analysis by elements (Principle 6)

Delimitation of the two types of analysis was carried out by L. Vygotsky. From his point of view, due to the use of analysis by elements "we obtain products which are alien in relation to the analyzed whole, elements that do not contain the properties inherent in the whole as such, and have a number of new properties which the whole could never find" (Vygotsky, 1982, 13-14). At the same time, the method of analysis aimed at dismembering a complex whole into units promotes not only the preservation of the basic properties inherent in the whole, but also discloses the relations that characterize the activity (Leontiev, 1974, 17).

To find these items in place naming activities we start with place names which contain in their structure (1) a stem equal to a word, and (2) a zero formant, but which despite the simplicity of their structure can play the role of proper names. Normally, it would distinguish onymized geographical appellatives – river, lake, marsh, and other words denoting the geographical object in common vocabulary: Eng. *the Run, the Swale, the Peak*; Amer. *the Cove, the Desert*; Svk. *Potok* 'river', *Hať* 'causeway', *Močar*; Blr. *Vozera, Hory, Balota*, etc. The conclusions concerning the primacy of object perception among humans and the secondary character of its qualities and relations made by psychologists and cognitive researchers confirm the logic of our reasoning.

Further dynamics of human thought in naming individual objects are based on finding individualizing features in the object and representing them in place names: Eng. *English Channel, Sarclet Head, Bardon Hill*; Amer. *Big Swamp, McCaslin Marsh, Bear Rock Swamp*; Svk. *Červený potok, Čierna skala, Kováčov potok*; Blr. *Kryval', Zahraddzie, Hančarova*. Steps in naming sites are becoming more complex, but the unit of activity which was found at the previous stage (represented by a geographical appellative) remains in the mind and in the new name. It means that the properties inherent in the integral perception of objects and its translation into words are preserved at each stage.

The third stage gives an additional distinctive feature to those objects that have already obtained a differentiator: Eng. *Linga Island > East Linga Island*; Amer. *Cedar Swamp > Acushnet Cedar Swamp, Bolton Cedar Swamp, Pocasset Cedar Swamp*; Svk. *Jánošov potok > Jánošov dlhý potok*; Blr. *Moch Vasileŭščyna > Moch Dal'n'aja Vasileŭščyna, Moch Bližniaja Vasileŭščyna > Moch Dal'n'aja Vasileŭščyna 2*.

Each of the three main stages represents a stop in the activities. Finding the units of activity helps to maintain both intellectual achievement and the communicative mechanism. The mechanism is not accidental because it is perfected in practice and is perceived as

necessary (cf. understanding of a place name as a combination of a basis and a formant). The differentiators vary which provides the system with a variety of names.

When creating a place name a small amount of information about the named object is placed inside the sign itself, but it is enough for communication. Vygotsky emphasizes that "meaning is not the sum of all the psychological operations that stand behind words. Meaning is something much more specific; it is the internal structure of a sign operation. This is something that lies between a thought and a word" (Vygotsky, 1956, 52).

Studying separate elements of a place name means that the feature found in a certain name cannot be presented in another name, because they are not integrated by the unified motive of activity. In addition, all the names are described as belonging to one class. No matter that the names of water bodies are studied or names of populated places, the elements used in them will be presented as part of the system without regard to their extralinguistic nature.

The dependence of mental reflection on the place of a reflected object in the structure of man's activity (Principle 7)

Human actions have double determination: an object's properties and the objectives of a kind of activity. Consequently, we can assume that a different significance of geographical objects for people should be reflected somehow in their names. By taking into consideration the common foundation for contemplating the process of naming (singleness of an object in the scheme of human activities without regard to random individual characteristics of it) in all subsystems of place names in all regions considered, the researcher gets the opportunity to carry out typological analysis of the place of objects of a certain kind in comparison with other objects of the same kind in the activities of different nations. Individual features go to the background while the interdependence of perception and representation of individual objects on the one hand, and linguistic structures on the other, is coming to the forefront.

An interesting and important part of the study of names from the standpoint of the theory of speech activity is the correlation of actions with medium objectives and their place in the hierarchy of goals. According to E. Tarasov, "connections between representations of objects are defined by their *contrast* when one of them supersedes the other; they show *similarity* when they merge into one representation; and finally, *complication* when they are combined but kept separate" (Tarasov, 1987, 25).

All of these connections are clearly visible when analyzing place names. Here the activity starts with similarities: the object under naming is compared with the models of geographical names already kept in mind. As a result a place name for a geographic entity is formed by directly transferring geographical appellatives into the group of place names without any additional means of naming (e.g. the words denoting swamps could be the following: Amer. *the Swamp, the Bog*, Eng. *the Moss*; Svk. *Močiar*; Blr. *Moch, Balota*). One more opportunity to notice similarity is presented in the case when the finished name of one subsystem of place names, in which it was once created, transfers to another subsystem in the same way. Meanwhile, the classifier of this name is no longer correlated with the surrounding world and as a consequence the combination of words is idiomatized (swamp names like Amer. *Burgaw Savannah, Blue Desert*; Blr. *Dziehceŭ Luh, Novy Most*.)

However, individual objects are numerous, and identical names have to be somehow differentiated. The scheme comes to the forefront of the naming process which presupposes the existence not only of classifiers in names but also their attributes, i.e. individual features. The natural way of this scheme is reflected in analyzing systems of place names in different nations. No wonder that names made up of the two components represent the overwhelming majority. The ideas about objects turn out to be connected at this stage through their contrast to other objects characterized differently or not characterized at all.

It happens that two or more objects, previously perceived as one, are sometimes in need of new distinctive features. In this case, an old differentiating element is complemented by a new one. The first feature which is common to two or more objects does not differentiate them. It shows the above described similarity by bringing together the same ideas about different objects. The identifying role is played by a new feature which appears so that names do not merge. Here is a complication.

Humans name objects differently. The general scheme of place naming is due to the common motive of identifying the object in the space of individual geographical names. However, various quantitative and qualitative parameters of structural and semantic features of each subsystem need interpreting.

It is no mere chance that the motivator is much more frequently expressed by the name of another object in place names denoting small-scale objects. In other words, it is motivated by the relative feature. Meanwhile, the names of large-scale objects are almost devoid of such a property, being most frequently motivated by the properties and qualities of an object under naming. A small-scale object is not able to orient man in space as well as a large-scale object because the former is not as noticeable as the latter. Therefore, to better perform the orientation function such a name has to stick to one of the more significant benchmarks.

Rivers belong to such important benchmarks among water bodies. They are conspicuous in the landscape, more stable in their location in space and can be considered as reliable reference points. Since ancient times, they have been regarded as "vital arteries". Therefore, proper names of rivers are the most stable and the least etymologically transparent. In fact, the most ancient and life-supporting units of common vocabulary are non-motivated.

The use of borrowed and semantically non-transparent names in the names of rivers (especially the largest ones: Rus. *Volga, Don*; Blr. *Dnieper, Nieman*, Eng. *the Thames, the Severn*; Amer. *Mississippi, Missouri*) is due to the mechanism of "psychological retardation". Changing the names of the most important realities could prevent a man from finding his simplest orientation in space.

With this in mind, it is necessary to separate names subject to etymological analysis for identifying the motivation from semantically transparent names and statistically assess their role in each of the subsystems of place names. Statistics on representing types of connections between representations (similarity – contrast – complication) in addition to studying the degree of etymological transparency of various subsystems of place names will determine the place of each kind of geographical object in human life according to linguistic data, and build a continuum of the object's significance to humans.

It is no mere chance that not only single-component and non-transparent names but also suffixal formations are most common in the names of rivers and lakes, too. The functionally significant component of a place name (the stem of it) is preserved, while the less significant formant contracts into a suffix (but it does not disappear completely – this is also important) in order to save on language means. The reason for this is the stability of large and ancient objects. This can be proved by the fact that names of small-scale objects much more often than the names of large-scale objects preserve the semantics of place name elements and by the absence of contracting the geographical appellative into a geographical suffix.

That is why one should use names of small-scale objects to create a functional theory of place names. They are less prone to the loss of the inner form than the names of large-scale objects.

Lack of functional significance of the classifier also results in contracting a combination of elements (stem and formant) into a complex place name. It happens, though, only in the cases when the classifying element ceases to relate to the object under naming: names of swamps Amer. *Bearwallow, Punkhole, Middlemoor*, Blr. *Čarnaliesak, Kozibor*. In all

mentioned examples the elements merge if the classifier does not have the meaning of "swamp".

Assigning names to a class is most clearly reflected in analytic languages where the derivational chain is easily restored without any historical research: Amer. *Silver Spring Brook Marshes* < *Silver Spring Brook* < *Silver Spring* < *silver*. Such examples help to determine the extent of the remoteness of the subsystem in question from the center of the whole system of names, as well as to identify figures and background in place names.

So, human creative nature, selectivity, and purposefulness of cognitive activity are noted in place naming that are due to goals, past experience, and attitude toward an object. These characteristics are reflected both in the semantics and in the structure of names that are different in scope and significance for humans.

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