

Katalin E. Nagy

Studies on Toponymic Knowledge in Hajdú-Bihar County*

Besides the genesis of names, 21st century Hungarian onomastic research is focusing ever more on toponymic knowledge and name usage, thus, toponym-sociological terms appear as a subject of scientific research programs with increasing frequency (e.g. GYÖRFFY 2013, 2015, 2018, E. NAGY 2015, 2016). This essay is an effort to refine the concept of toponymic knowledge – through empirical research on the topic – thereby making a contribution to the series of these works mentioned here.

This study is comprised of two units. First, a discussion of the research method used. Second, an illustration of the relationship between the age of informants and toponymic knowledge through modern toponymic corpora. Also discussed are the opportunities researchers have when wishing to transfer the cognitive map existing in the minds of informants to some platform, so that they can explore the relationships within toponymic knowledge and spatial visualization.

I carried out the case studies in six settlements of Hajdú-Bihar county, all of which are amongst the relatively small members of the Hungarian system of settlements, with even the largest settlement examined having a mere 1800 residents. I mention details about the toponymic knowledge of only two village communities (Bodaszőlő and Pród) while making an effort to underline general conclusions.

1. Methodology

The study on toponymic knowledge has been carried out on smaller, geographically well delineated settlements; the informants involved in the research are members of the various village communities. The survey on toponymic knowledge was in each case preceded by collecting toponyms, in the course of which, the toponymic corpus of the settlement in question took shape. Whether or not the researcher collecting the corpus and the one carrying out the research on toponymic knowledge is the same person does indeed matter for the success of the research work. This is because in the course of collecting toponyms preceding the survey on toponymic knowledge, researchers can gain insight into the history and the onomastic corpus of the settlement, and even familiarize themselves with the village community to some extent. Prior

* The study was carried out as part of the project *International Scientific Cooperation for Exploring the Toponymic Systems in the Carpathian Basin* (ID: NRDI 128270, supported by National Research, Development and Innovation Fund, Hungary).



knowledge earned through the collection work enables researchers to understand the medium of language users within which they perform their research work in its variety, specific sociological and psychological dimensions (KISS 1995: 40).

I selected my informants so that every age group would be represented, from the youngest primary school children up to retired people. When selecting any informant – and, in particular, the youngest and the oldest ones – the existence of several abilities, which are also included as the criteria for collecting toponyms has to be considered. Amongst other requirements, it is essential that the informants possess the mental capacities required for the interviews, that is, they should be capable of understanding the situation and the intention of the researcher. I categorized the informants of each settlement into four generational groups: the first group is of those under the age of 20, the second is of those between the ages of 21 and 40, the third group is of those between the ages of 41 and 60, and finally, the fourth group is of those over 61.

Data collection had two phases. In the first phase, sociological data were recorded, and the coached conversations directly producing toponyms took place. Each interview began with a free conversation first on the names of the outer plots of land, and then on those of the inner regions. In an imaginary fashion, I navigated my informants to a specific point in the area, and then asked them to list the places near to it. Then, selecting their own street as the point of departure, I asked them to imagine themselves leaving from there and walking through the village while introducing it to me. I concluded the conversations by putting questions to the informants on their toponymic knowledge concerning places they had not mentioned.

Following the on-site work, I performed the research procedure in the course of which I compiled Excel-spreadsheets and personal digital name-maps. Transferring the cognitive maps existing in individual persons' minds to a given platform is primarily a geographical, psychological task, rather than an onomastic one. That being said, in the latest works on socio-onomastics there is still an effort made to contribute in some fashion to the issue of mental mapping. There are several ways of doing that.

Attempts to grasp the cognitive maps of informants can be made, on the one hand, by making, or having the informants themselves make drawings, that is, by either the informant or the researcher putting the names known to the former on paper. I personally do not consider this method to be practical, as maps prepared this way often lack details, not to mention that they are largely dependent on the orientation abilities of the informant or the researcher.

On the other hand, using the benefits of modern technology, it is possible to make attempts at representing toponymic knowledge on a digital platform. The reason why this latter solution is likely to be more successful is that space itself



is actually a given element, and, instead of a blank sheet, toponyms can be projected onto the actual world, or, to be more precise, photos of it. Therefore, I relied on the Google Earth program to represent the toponymic knowledge of the informants I involved in my research. One of the advantages of this method is that maps of individual informants can be conveniently compared, which allows for further analysis.

2. Results

The results for the two settlements includes a report on the toponymic knowledge of the four age groups. For each age group, I indicate the collated name competency average. I calculated the collated toponymic knowledge average by averaging the toponymic knowledge percent ratios of all the members of the age group in question. After that, I determined the number and the percentage ratio of the names known to every member of the group, and also of those names which are not known to any member of the group. I considered an informant to be familiar with a toponym where the informant had heard the name and could localize it as well, that is, if the name was an active element of the informant's toponymicon. The informants are not familiar with a name if they do not mention it of their own accord, and cannot localize it even after being asked about it by the collector. I also studied the ratios of outer- and inner-region names. Without aiming for an exhaustive list, I have also mentioned several factors of settlement history, farm husbandry, geography, socio-cultural and other non-linguistic aspects, which are highly likely to have an influence on toponymic knowledge.

2.1. Results of the survey carried out in Pród

The settlement with the smallest population, Pród, has 256 inhabitants. It is a village located in the Northern part of the county, and as a unit of public administration, it was merged into Hajdúböszörmény in 1978. It is a settlement that is both geographically and socially isolated. The geographical isolation is due to the fact that the village lies some 15 km-s Northwest to the city, on the Hajdúhát plains, while the social isolation is a consequence of the inhabitants being the descendants of the people who once established their homes on the outer plains. The toponymic corpus of the village consists of 317 pieces of onomastic data. I involved 24 of the residents of Pród in my socio-onomastic survey, thus, I interviewed 9% of the entire population. Distribution by gender is 9 females (38%) and 15 males (62%). The youngest informant was 11 years old, the eldest 87 years old.

The first age group can be considered to be familiar with 18% of the complete onomastic corpus on average. The proportion of names known to every



member of the group adds up to a mere 6% of the complete onomastic corpus. Even though the village only has a few streets, the members of the first group are not familiar with all of the inner-region names. One third of the names known to everyone are inner-region names (e.g. *Bagota utca* ‘Bagota street’). Typically, knowledge with respect to the inner-region names is supplemented by knowledge with respect to the names of those outer regions (67%) which are either located near the inner settlement (e.g. *Gátőrház* ‘Dike-reeve’s house’) or denote larger objects of any part of the outer region (e.g. *Keleti-főcsatorna* ‘Eastern main canal’). The ratio of names completely unknown to the age group was 56%. These denote both smaller and larger objects, and several examples can be mentioned for virtually any kind of toponyms: hydronyms (e.g. *Szőkeér* ‘Blond brook’), names of farmsteads (e.g. *Csíkos-tanya* ‘Csíkos farm’), names of dirt roads to borderlands (e.g., *Perzséte dűlő* ‘Perzséte lain’), names of taverns (e.g. *Dedő csárda* ‘Dedő tavern’), etc. are all included among them. These cover the outer regions in their entirety, and are exclusively outer-region names.

At 49%, the toponymic knowledge of the second age group is nearly three times higher than that of the first one. The ratio of names known to everyone is 24%, with 88% of the names in this category denoting outer-region, and 12% of them denoting inner-region names. The toponymic knowledge of the second age group does not cover every inner-region name either, even though the village, consisting of merely eight streets, is very small indeed. Within the complete toponymicon, the proportion of names completely unknown to the age group was 24%. These names denote outer-region objects, more than half of them are names of farmsteads. This result stems from the history of the settlement, i.e. the members of the second age group already grew up in the streets of the inner region, and as such, did not have an intensive relationship with the farmstead network of the outer regions.

The average toponymic knowledge of the third age group is 60%. 28% percent of the complete toponymicon is known to all of the informants, 13% of these names denote inner-region, and 87% of them outer-region objects. Most of the inner-region names are known to every member of the group, with the exception of the former official names of two streets, *Kossuth Lajos utca* ('Lajos Kossuth Street') and *Petőfi Sándor utca* ('Sándor Petőfi Street'). Names known to everyone are mostly associated with formerly inhabited places of the outer regions, i.e. the names of former farmstead-area schools (e.g. *Bársony-iskola* ‘Bársony School’), taverns (e.g. *Dedő csárda* ‘Dedő tavern’), and other outer-region buildings (e.g. *Tejház* ‘Milkhouse’) are all mementos of the bygone network of farmsteads. It is conspicuous that while the second age group is uniformly familiar with the names of the main borderlands only (e.g. *Bársony dűlő* ‘Bársony Lane’), the third age group, in contrast, knows the

names of 11 borderlands (*Miniszteri út* ‘Minister’s Road’). There is only 8% of the toponymicon not known to anyone of the informants belonging to this age group. Each of these names denotes an outer-region object, they are mostly the names of farmsteads (for example *Bodnár-tanya* ‘Bodnár Farm’), roads and dirt roads to borderlands (*Meditációs út* ‘Meditation Road’), as well as plots of land (e.g. *Gimnázium földje* ‘High School Estate’).

On average, 79% of the toponymicon is known to the fourth age group. The proportion of names known to everyone is 27%. 8% of these names denote inner-region objects, while 92% of them denote outer-region objects. Nearly half of the inner-region names are unknown to members of this age group. Similarly to what has been seen in surveys on modern toponymicon carried out in other settlements, the residents of Pród are also not familiar with the official names of all of the streets. One fourth of the outer-region names known to everyone are names of farmsteads. The number of farmsteads known by their names to the first age group is two, the same number is not even a dozen for the second age group, while the names of 20 farmsteads are uniformly known to the fourth age group. These names mostly denote the larger, more important farmsteads of the former farmstead centre. Just like the names not known to anyone within the first age group, and the names known to everyone in the third age group, from an onomastic aspect, these names cover virtually every kind of toponyms, and from a geographical aspect, virtually all of the outer plots of land. All of the names which are not known to anyone denote outer-region objects and add up to a mere 2%.

2.2. Results of the survey carried out in Bodaszőlő

Bodaszőlő is a village with a population of 1376, as a public administration unit (like Pród) it belongs to Hajdúböszörmény. It is located 16 km-s to the south of the city. The settlement is surrounded by a huge forest area. This circumstance is a fundamental determinant of the nature of the onomastic corpus, namely, a significant proportion of the names denoting outer-region objects have a geographical common word, related to forestry, as a second constituent. The toponymic corpus of the settlement consists of 127 data. In my survey, I involved 60 local residents, which is 4% of the entire population. The gender distribution is 38 females (66%), 20 males (34%).

Members of the first age group on average are familiar with 30% of the complete onomastic corpus, that is, with nearly every third toponym. The proportion of names known to every member of the group adds up to a mere 12% of the complete onomastic corpus (e.g. *Lorántffy*). All of the names known to every informant from the first age group are inner-region names. The number of names not known to anyone is high, nearly half of the toponymicon (46%) is



unknown to all of the members of the group. With the exception of two official inner-region street names (e.g. *Kun Béla utca* ‘Kun Béla Street’), all of these denote outer-region objects (e.g. *Lédig-erdő* ‘Lédig Forest’).

The average toponymic knowledge of the second age group corresponds to 41%. The proportion of names known to everyone is 19%, with only two outer-region names in this category (*Dombi-tanya* ‘Dombi Farm’ and *Zelemér*). 27% of the complete toponymicon is unknown to members of this age group. These names denote outer-region objects, most of them objects related to forestry (e.g. *Rókaporozó nyiladék* ‘Foxhole Road’).

Members of the third age group on average are familiar with 48% of the complete onomastic corpus, that is, with nearly second or third toponym. 17% of the complete toponymicon is known to every member of the group. Most of the names known to every informant from the third age group are inner-region names. The outer-region names which they are familiar with are mostly point-like locations nearest to the settlement (e.g. *Ruszki-laktanya* ‘Russian military base’). The onomastic corpus of Bodaszőlő has but a single toponym not known to any member of the age group, *Hegyes-kert* ‘Hilly Garden’.

On average, 66% of the toponymicon is known to the fourth age group. The number of names known to every informant adds up to a mere 18% of the toponymicon (e.g. *Józsai út* ‘Road to Józsa’), 60% of these names denote inner-region, while 40% of them outer-region objects. Within the fourth age group, the number of names everyone claimed to be unfamiliar with is also one, this particular name denotes an outer-region animal breeding facility.

2.3. Personal name-maps

According to the informants personal name-maps, it can be said that while the toponymic knowledge of the eldest informant from Pród (aged 87) covers nearly all of the borderlands, that of the youngest one (aged 11) consists of but a few dozen names (see Figure 1 and 2). Moving from the inner region to the outer regions, the geographical distribution of these grows sparser. The names best known to younger informants are those of places located near more important roads.



Figure 1: The toponymic knowledge of the youngest informant (Pród)



Figure 2: The toponymic knowledge of the eldest informant (Pród)

3. Conclusions

Both the name-maps and the summarizing charts clearly show the average toponymic knowledge to increase significantly from the lower age groups to higher ones at both settlements (see Figure 3).

	Names known to every member of the group (%)		Names unknown to every member of the group (%)	
	Pród	Bodaszőlő	Pród	Bodaszőlő
Age group 1	6	12	56	46
Age group 2	24	19	24	27
Age group 3	28	17	8	~1
Age group 4	27	18	2	~1

Figure 3: The toponymic knowledge of the different age groups

The results of my research support the hypothesis generally known in the literature, i.e. the toponymicon of a given settlement will be better known to its older, and less well known to its younger residents. This, however, does not necessarily imply that older informants will be the ones to know the most toponyms, as socio-cultural, social and other factors can have a significant effect on the toponymic knowledge of an individual resident. A 52 year-old informant from Bodaszőlő – who, unlike most people in his age group, is familiar with a significant proportion of the onomastic corpus, 84% – owes his exceptional toponymic knowledge to the fact that he became active in forestry when still a child; to put it more specifically, his family owned a *vákáncs* ‘newly planted forest’, and he often joined his parents in pruning the branches.

I also involved one non-locally born resident from each of the two village communities as an informant. One of the residents of Pród (male, aged 54) has been living in the village for a mere six years. The toponymic knowledge average within his age group is 60%, in contrast, he is familiar with only 24% of the toponymicon. His toponymic knowledge falls in line with the toponymic knowledge of those in the first age group the best: a 15 year-old male informant, for example, is familiar with 27%. The non-locally born informant from Bodaszőlő (aged 65), who has been living in the village for eleven years, is familiar with 31% of the toponymic corpus, just like two informants in their teens, who belong into the first age group. All of this leads to the presumption that an adult who has newly moved into a village has to go through cognitive processes – by which I primarily mean learning about toponyms of the mental lexicon and the spatial objects they denote – which are very similar to those experienced by a child who has lived there since birth.

I have presented the methods and the results of research work on toponymic knowledge carried out in two settlements, with the focus set on age, a sociological aspect. Further research results may be obtained by broadening the territorial boundaries, in other words, extending the scope of the surveys to the toponymic knowledge of the village communities living in the neighbouring settlements. This expansion, however, should be the topic for another time.

References

- GYÖRFFY, ERZSÉBET 2013. A helynév-szociológia kutatási területei, feladatai. [Research areas and tasks of socio-onomastics.] *Helynévtörténeti Tanulmányok* 9: 115–125.
- GYÖRFFY, ERZSÉBET 2015. A helynévisméretről. [On the knowledge of toponyms.] *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 53: 5–33.
- GYÖRFFY, ERZSÉBET 2018. *Helynév-szociológia*. [Socio-onomastics.] Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó.
- KISS, JENŐ 1995. *Társadalom és nyelvhasználat*. [Society and language use.] Budapest, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
- E. NAGY, KATALIN 2015. Helynév-szociológiai vizsgálatok két Hajdú-Bihar megyei településen. [Socio-onomatic studies in two settlements of Hajdú-Bihar County.] *Magyar Nyelvjárások* 53: 35–45.
- E. NAGY, KATALIN 2016. Pród helyneveinek névszociológiai vizsgálata. [A socio-onomastic study of toponyms in Pród.] *Régiókutatás Szemle* 1: 151–158.

Abstract

Toponymic knowledge as a scientific research field is an increasingly popular topic among Hungarian toponomastics. The toponymic knowledge of name-users is undoubtedly influenced by various sociological factors such as age, gender, ethnic origin, occupation, education, etc. The subject of this case study of the toponymic knowledge of inhabitants in different ages living in the same settlement focuses on whether the hypothesis “older people know more place names, while younger people know less” is still valid. The study used the onomastic corpus of two settlements, Pród and Bodaszőlő in Hajdú-Bihar county. The primary purpose of this research is to reveal the relationship between the age of informants and their knowledge of the toponymic corpus of their settlements. The informants’ toponymic knowledge is presented on maps where information from field work and interviews is transferred onto a digital map.

Keywords: socio-onomastics, place names, the knowledge of toponymy, age groups

