

Linguistically Mixed Names

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Abstract

The article explores how linguistically mixed names are formed. The idea of hybrid formation is dismissed. Many linguistically mixed names include borrowed place names or loanwords, and these are regular formations. Other names have become linguistically mixed after they have been borrowed. As a part of the adaptation process, non-native elements may be translated or reinterpreted.

Studies from various contact linguistic areas suggest that generics are more frequently translated than specifics. This indicates that generics and specifics play different roles in names. The specific individuates and is most important for identification. The role of the generic is to give a rough classification of the locality, which means that the generic needs to be intelligible, i.e. in the living language. This also means that the generic is the best indication of formation language when linguistically mixed names are analysed.

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Linguistically Mixed Names

Contact names reveal some interesting aspects of place names that may be less obvious in monolingual areas. For this reason, contact onomastics is important also for what it can tell us about names in general. My specific area of study has been place names of Norse origin in Orkney.¹ In Scotland's Northern Isles, the Norse language survived into the 18th century, though it was gradually superseded by Scots English from the 14th century onwards. There are very good surveys of place names and dialect words from Orkney and Shetland, but being early works, these are not at all concerned with the contact aspect. To Jakobsen, who studied Shetland names around 1900, any name with one Norse element is a Norse name. Hugh Marwick, who published Orkney Farm-names in 1952, does not really question this view. In a modern approach, linguistically mixed names should be analysed as products of the bilingual or multi-lingual societies in which they were formed. Here the main emphasis will be on the formation of linguistically mixed place names, with examples from different contact areas.

Formations Including Existing Names of a Different Origin

The fact that place names are easily borrowed in contact situations and often survive language shifts can be observed in contact areas across the world. One obvious reason is that place names are so closely linked to the locations they refer to. Names are efficient signposts to places, and it makes sense for different linguistic groups to identify places by the same names. The large number of surviving names of Norse origin in the Northern Isles proves that the incoming Scots took over the Norse name instead of coining their own. Such loan names

¹ I use Norse as a common term for the original Old Norse language brought to the isles by Viking Age settlers and the local dialect that developed from Old Norse, usually called Norn.

become part of the recipient group's onomasticon. This means that they may be adapted to suit the recipient language, and that they may enter in new name formations just like other names: *Scapa* > *Scapa Bay*. Formations including such loan names are probably the most common form of linguistically mixed names.

The fact that Scots is the only living language in Orkney and has been so for centuries, means that there are no Old Norse (ON) names as such, but a large number of loan names of ON origin that have become a part of the local Scots onomasticon. *Swanbister Bay*, *Bay of Houseby* and *Loch of Loomachun* are typical examples. The two former are Scots English formations including farm names of ON origin. Farm names in *-bister* < *bólstaðr* 'settlement' are frequent in Norse Scotland. *Houseby* reflects *húsabýr* (literally 'house farm'), a widespread name much discussed in Scandinavia, as they often refer to administrative centres. Whereas *Swanbister Bay* and *Bay of Houseby* are names of bays next to the farms, the generic 'lake' in *Loch of Loomachun* refers to the same locality as the Norse name *lómtjörn* 'red throated diver lake'.

Similar examples can be found in other contact areas. Cox (1989: 3) gives the example *Loch Lacsabhat*, in which the specific is an ON name *Laxavatn* 'Salmon lake'. Here too the Gaelic generic that is added means the same as the generic of the ON name. A parallel example from the Finnish-Swedish contact area is *Markjärvsjö* (Huldén 1962). *Järv* is a Swedish adaptation of Finnish *järvi* 'lake', whereas *sjö* is the Swedish synonym. When onomasts comment that the name *Ardtornish Point* contains the word for headland in three languages (Nicolaisen 2001: 72), it shows our focus on etymology. For the persons who coined the names, it was probably a matter of increasing the descriptive value of the names. These names should be classified as new formations in the new language. The ON name that started out as **Tor(f)nes* later entered as the specific in a Gaelic formation *Àird Tòranais*, with the Gaelic word for headland as its generic. The Gaelic name in its turn enters into a Scots English formation in the name *Ardtornish Point*.

As we see, more than two languages may be involved. Another multilingual example is the short-lived New Sweden colony in America (1638-1655), where the Swedes met Native Americans as well as Dutch immigrants. They adopted quite a lot of Indian names, sometimes adding Swedish generics: *Mechansio Berg*, *Penichpaska kil*. *Berg* is the Swedish word for 'hill', whereas *kil* in the sense 'stream' is actually a local loan from Dutch. This leads us over to another common kind of linguistically mixed names.

Formations with Loan Words

The New Sweden examples illustrate how easily words are borrowed in contact situations. From an etymological point of view, *Penichpaska kil* is Indian and Dutch. The formation is Swedish, though, including a loan name and a loan word. We saw above that the colony lasted for less than twenty years, which means that the words and names were exchanged within a very short period. The colony was later conquered by the Dutch and the names disappeared.

In Orkney, the transmission period was much longer. The bilingual period lasted for more than three centuries, and a large number of Norse words were borrowed, of which some still survive. A number of the loan words are very productive in place name formation, such

as *geo* < ON *gjá* ‘narrow inlet’ and *quoy* < ON *kví* ‘enclosure’. From an etymological point of view, names such as *Clay Geo*, *Heatherquoy* are of mixed origin. From a formation point of view, they are regular Scots formations including loan words.

The genesis of a name is when it is formed. The speakers coining names can use the total lexicon and onomasticon available to them at that point. This means that none of the examples so far, i.e. names including loan words or loan names, are irregular from a formation point of view. They are formed of the current word stock and name stock.

Part Translations and Reinterpretations

A loan name has to fit into the phonological and morphological system of the recipient language. Phonological adjustment seems to be compulsory where the phonological systems do not match, and morphemes of the recipient language can be added. In some cases, adaptation goes further and elements are translated or replaced by words that make sense in the recipient language. I have very little evidence for translation in the Orkney material, but German and Finnish contact onomasts agree that translation of the generic is more common, whereas phonological adaptation is the rule for the specific. For instance, most languages have name for the *Atlantic Ocean* < Greek *Atlantis thalassa* ‘Sea of Atlas’, in which the Greek origin of the specific is preserved and the generic is translated into the local language.

In some cases, the new elements are reinterpretations rather than translations, i.e. opaque elements are replaced by words from the living lexicon. Examples include *Kirkwall* ‘church wall’ < ON *kirkjuvág* ‘church bay’, and Norwegian *luft* ‘air’ as an adaptation for Sámi dialect *loufta* ‘fjord’ in names such as *Hjemmeluft* and *Tappeluft*. Part translations and lexical adaptations may result in linguistically mixed names. We should note that phonological adaptations occur regularly, whereas translations and reinterpretations are sporadic, depending on individual initiative.

Hybrid Formations?

We have seen that adaptation processes may result in linguistically mixed names, but can we envisage names being coined with elements from two different languages from the beginning? The idea of such hybrid formations is dismissed by most contact onomasts. It is not totally rejected in British tradition, however. As late as 1991, Sandred (1991: 120) suggests a mixed origin for the name *Conesford* in Norwich. He suggests that the name could be compounded of Scandinavian *konungs* ‘king’s’ + English *ford*.

The Finnish onomast Huldén (1962: 129) expresses the generally held view, when stating that mixed formations are not coined under normal circumstances. As an example of non-normal formation, he mentions *Morokulien*, created by Swedish and Norwegian broadcasting companies for a place on the border where entertainment programmes were co-produced in the early days of television. The name contains the Norwegian and Swedish word for ‘fun’, and is now on official maps. It is not normally stated why hybrid formation should be dismissed, but fundamentally, it rests on the insight that bilingual speakers normally use a certain language in a certain context. Code-shift is unlikely within a linguistic

unit such as a name, if one does not want to make a special statement, such as the joint Norwegian–Swedish project at *Morokulien*.

Identifying the Formation Language of Linguistically Mixed Names

Since onomastics is the study names rather than words, our primary concern should be with the origin of the name, the formation. So how do we identify the linguistic origin of contact names that contain elements from different languages? This was one of the focal questions of my Orkney studies (Sandnes 2010: 265). The indicators found here are likely to be relevant in other contact areas as well.

Generics Should Have Priority

Three names *Boat Meadow*, *Boats Hellia* and *Boat Geo* may serve as examples. Their common specific is either Scots ‘boat’ or ON *bátr*. If we look at the specifics first, we realise that a competence of Scots is required to name a meadow ‘meadow’. The ON word is *eng*. This means that *Boat Meadow* has to be a Scots formation. The generic of *Boats Hellia* is an ON word *hella*, denoting flat rock near the sea. This word is unknown in Scots, and we can safely conclude that the name is an Old Norse formation. *Boat Geo* is more problematic. *Gjá* ‘ravine’ is originally an ON word, but it was borrowed into the dialect in the form *geo*, which is still the standard word for a narrow inlet of the sea. In many of the ambiguous cases, the specifics may help us determine the origin, for instance the clearly Scots specific of *Clay Geo*. In *Boat Geo*, however, both elements are ambiguous, and we have to leave the formation open.

In Normandy, the Scandinavian colonisation never replaced the native language, but it resulted in a large number of mixed names. One large group is names combining a Scandinavian personal name and the French generic *ville* ‘farm; village’, e.g. *Osmonville* (Osmondi villam 1137). These are often labelled Scandinavian names, but are they really? Considering the generic, they are more likely to be French formations. This raises another classical question in onomastics: Who coins the names – the owners themselves or their neighbours? From a formation point of view, the mixed *ville*-names are unproblematic if coined by the neighbours, possibly administrators who needed names for tax roll and other records.

Morphology

Morphology of a dead language is a definitive proof of a name’s origin. If a name in Orkney or Normandy contains reflexes of Norse morphology, it must have been formed when Norse was still a living language with its morphology intact. There is an interesting difference between Normandy and Orkney in this respect. In Norman names, there are no certain instances of ON morphology. We only see Latin case marking from the written language, cf. *Osmundi villam* above.

Many Orkney names, on the other hand, contain reflexes of ON morphology. For instance, *Queena*, *Leean* and *Quear* contain the remains of the post-positioned definite and

plural articles. (ON *kvína* ‘the enclosure’, *hlíðin* ‘the slope’ *kvíar* ‘the enclosures’). *Lamaquoy* (‘lambs’ enclosure’) has genitive plural marking of the specific. Reflexes of definite articles are the most common morphological indication of Old Norse formation in Orkney. In other contact areas, there will be other grammatical differences, e.g. different word order in Celtic – English language contact areas.

Morphology of the living language can be added to any name. In the rather unusual form *The Leeans*, *Leean* is a Norse definite form, to which Scots definite and plural marking has subsequently been added. In Orkney, *of*-periphrasis is a very common way of forming secondary names: *Bay of Houseby*, *Hills of Heddle*, *Bu of Rendall* (‘manor of Rendall’). The present forms are all Scots formations; there is no similar formation pattern in Scandinavian languages.

Generic and Specific

As stated in the introduction, contact names are interesting for what they tell us about place name formation in general. The number of borrowed names underline that the deictic function of place names is most important; they point out locations whether we understand them or not. There is a significant difference between generics and specifics in this respect, however. It is more important to understand the generic. If we start with formation, names are always formed with understandable generics, i.e. in the living language. This is not a requirement for the specific in secondary names: It may well be an opaque name, like Indian *Penichpaska* in the Swedish formation *Penichpaska kil*. Also, research in different contact areas show that generics are more often translated in borrowed names than specifics, i.e. a stronger tendency to make generics intelligible in the new language. Finally, explicit generics are often added if the user does not perceive one. We have seen examples such as *Ardtornish Point*, but similar epexegetis also takes place in monolingual areas. This is well attested in Scandinavia, where Proto-Norse names were often coined by derivation, with a suffix that carries no separate meaning. At a later stage, an explicit generic is often added, so that they become regular compounded names: *Sams* > *Samsø* (Danish *ø* ‘island’).

Translations and additions of elements cannot be explained by the language system as such. Rather, they reflect the fact that names are coined and used by people who do not merely see them as labels, and who try to make sense of the names. Users may interpret names different from the etymological meaning and change the names accordingly. The fact that generics and specifics are treated differently probably reflects that the elements play different roles in names.

The role of the specific is individuation, i.e. the same as the name as a whole. For identification purposes, it makes sense to preserve an established name and reuse it, even if we do not grasp a meaning in it. Lakoff says that we perceive meaning, and this is true for our conception of names. We not only know, we experience and feel that places bear specific names. This is demonstrated when name changes are suggested, it tends to stir up feelings.

The role of the generic is to classify. The cognitive sciences tell us that categorising is fundamental for our understanding the world. Categorisation can only take place if we understand the elements, however. There is another factor involved as well: Many of the

generics are easily observed – a lake, a farm or a road. In these cases, the connection between the generic and the lexicon is more likely to be maintained. The categorising role of the generics can also be observed in other ways. Staffan Nyström has compared the words that can denote slopes and depressions in the landscape with the elements used to denote these features in place names. The interesting result is that only part of the possible lexical items are actually used in names (Nyström 1988: 171). This indicates some kind of implicit categorisation in place name generics. Categorisation means simplification, so unlimited variation is not desirable.

In the eastern parts of Trøndelag, some of the names in the mountains are South Sámi. Adapted forms of these names are also used by Norwegian speakers, e.g. lake names *Gereke* < Sámi *Gierkiejaevrie*, *Bilnen* < Sámi *Bielnienjaevrie* and *Garkstjerv* < Sámi *Gaarkestjaerhvienjaevrie*. We notice that the specifics are phonetically adapted, for instance all the falling diphthongs are replaced. More notably, the generics are systematically omitted. This is not because local Norwegian speakers do not know that *jaevrie* means lake, but perhaps because it does not convey a spontaneously felt meaning. The examples indicate that a generic that does not fulfil its classifying function is of no use, and can be omitted. The specific is sufficient to point out the name

To sum up: names are formed from the total word and name stock available to the speaker. Although the function of names is to point out localities, this does not prevent the users of names from a) making the connection between the name and the place, b) trying to identify parts of names, and c) trying to clarify names not immediately understandable. The genesis of a name is when it was formed, but its present form may be the result of regular language change as well as adaptation processes by speakers trying to analyse the names. Onomastics should analyse all these processes.

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