

Notes

Language Contact as Reflected in Toponyms in South-West Africa/Namibia

It would seem that multilingualism manifests itself in several ways. In the first place the individual may display knowledge of two or more languages and the influence these have upon each other. Then, too, the interaction of different languages in society may be reflected in various ways.

For the onomastician the latter is more relevant, specifically the effect of language contact as reflected in proper names. Since this is an extremely wide field, the present discussion is limited to toponyms in South-West Africa/Namibia.

In 1972 the Onomastic Research Centre of the Human Sciences Research Council undertook a research project into Khoekhoen or Hottentot placenames. In addition to data from archival and published sources, information was gathered by means of questionnaires and field-work. With a view to further onomastic analysis, the etymology was sought of the lexical items of which the toponyms are composed.

South-West Africa/Namibia is, or has been, inhabited by Khoekhoen, Herero, Damaras, Ovambos, Germans, Afrikaners, English, and other peoples. This fact, and the concomitant effects of physical and language contact between these groups on the toponyms, were taken into consideration. When the questionnaires were compiled for distribution to owners and inhabitants of farms with Khoekhoen names, researchers attempted to ascertain the degree of influence exercised by language contact. In the ensuing field-work, attention was again given to this matter. In both structured and unstructured interviews the questions posed were designed to identify entities the names of which reflect language contact.

To the findings of this project were added the results of the research on German placenames undertaken by my colleague, Mrs. L.A. Moller. Her questionnaires, as well as her field-word interviews, made provision for determining the influence of language contact on toponyms of German origin.

Khoekhoen placenames are among the oldest in South-West Africa/Namibia. Most of the Khoekhoen languages have become inactive,

Nama being the only surviving one. It is characterized by 'clicks,' or suction consonants which are semantically determinative. In standardized usage today four occur, namely the dental click, the palatal, the lateral, and the cerebral. One of the most conspicuous manifestations of language contact on Khoekhoen (in this case Nama) toponyms is the disappearance of the suction consonants.

One method employed to determine the lexical meaning of the Khoekhoen placenames was to study toponymic clusters. When names from different languages occur for the same or proximate geographical features, it is often found that the more recently bestowed name is a translation of the older one. The studies of the Onomastic Research Centre corroborated this finding.

Thus *Aigams* has the newer name for *Warmbad*, and is known in English as *Warmbaths*. *Amros* 'Green Hill' is known by its German translation of *Gruneberg*. *Dâ* is the Nama word for 'burn.' It occurs in *Daunas*, which is known by its Afrikaans equivalent *Brandberg* 'burn(t) mountain.' *Spitskop* means 'pointed hill'; this name is a translation of *Gouib*.

In some instances toponyms have been translated from Nama into an European language and further adapted or translated. Thus *Bobbejaankrans*, literally 'baboon cliff,' is known in German as *Pavianskranz*. *Breckhorn* is an adaptation of *Breekhoring* 'break horn,' which is translated from *Daminab*. *Vertwall* is an adaptation of the Afrikaans word *verdwaal* '(to be) lost'; the name translates the Nama *Guhawus*. The converse situation, namely that words or names from Afrikaans or English are adapted into Nama, does not occur very often. Personal names *Frans* and *Jacobus* are incorporated in the Nama toponyms *Frانياus* 'Frans's fountain' and *Jacobubhab* 'Jacobus's ravine'; the final *-b* of *Jacobus-* is a gender marker indicating masculine singular. The Nama name for *Walvis Bay* is *Bais*. It is an adaptation of the Afrikaans word *baai* 'bay,' plus the gender marker *-s* of the feminine singular.

A number of Herero toponyms have been translated into German. *Okamaruru* means 'salty water'; the German name for the place is *Salzbrunnen*. *Okaue mukaendu* is the Herero name for *Frauenstein*. Its literal meaning is 'memorial rock of the women.' *Otuwapa* means 'white stone'; the German name *Weissenfels* translates it directly.

Although no quantitative analysis has as yet been made of the various aspects reflecting language contact, it seems as though phonological adaptations occur most frequently. When, for example, Nama names are used in Afrikaans, English, or German contexts, they are pronounced

according to the phonological rules of the language in question. Similarly, Afrikaans names may be pronounced as though they were English or German, and so forth.

This phonological adaptation is carried over into the written form of toponyms. When Nama placenames were written by German missionaries and others, the styling was germanized. Thus *ai* was written *ei*; e.g. *Geiaub* 'large fountain,' now *Grootfontein*; *Eibees* 'fire (hot) spring,' now *Warmbaths*, et cetera. In modern Nama orthography these digraphs are written *ae* or *ai*, as the case may be. New names submitted for official approval are adapted according to the modern orthography.

Orthographical adaptation of toponyms from Dutch and Afrikaans into German may be discerned in forms such as *Dreihuk*, Afrikaans *driehoek* 'triangle'; *Dunkerhuk*, Afrikaans *donkerhoek* 'dark corner'; *Kraikluft*, Afrikaans *kraaikloof* 'crow ravine'; *Krumneck*, Afrikaans *Kromnek* 'crooked neck/col'; *Windhuk* for *Windhoek* and so forth.

Hybrid toponyms, of which one element is in one language and the other in another, also give evidence of language contact. It would seem as though the specific term is generally retained in the original language, while the generic, often descriptive of the feature to which the name refers, is from the adoptive language. Nama and Afrikaans elements thus occur in *Amspoort* (*ams* 'mouth'; *poort* is an opening in a mountain); *Garubberg* 'leopard mountain'; *Giribesvlakte* 'jackal flats'; *Onanisrivier* 'narrow ridge river,' and the like.

Nama and English hybrids include *Anawood* (*ana* is the tree *Acacia albida*); *Brinas Mountain* 'goat mountain'; *Dabby Bushes* ('*tamarix usneiodes*'); and so forth.

Examples of toponyms of which the specific term is Nama and the generic German are *Arutal* ('*Albizzia anthelminthica*'), *Khuosgebirge* (the meaning of which is not known), *Numaisspitze* 'wild fig-tree,' and *Uniabfluss* 'palm river.'

Names also occur which reveal contact between Nama, German and Afrikaans, e.g. *Gaputzpan*. Contact between Afrikaans and German is revealed in such toponyms as *Hartebeestmund*, *Kwaaikluft* and *Streitfontein*, while hybrid names reflecting contact between German and Herero include *Gross Omaruru*, *Klein-Okombahe-Nord* (and *Sud*), and *Omahoro Gross*.

When a subsequent language impinges on a relatively unknown previous one, tautological forms may result, particularly in instances where a generic term is added to an existing toponym. Thus in *Hamabrivier*, *Nossob*

River, and *Uniabfluss* the generic term is repeated, *ab* and *ob* meaning 'river.' Successive language groups which come into contact with a geographical entity may each give it a name. In this way a place may, simultaneously or consecutively, bear names in different languages. *Windhoek* and its Nama name *Aigams* has been mentioned, as has *Aigams* for *Warmbad* and *Warmbaths*, and *Bais* for *Walvisbaai*, *Walvis Bay* in English. Keetmanshoop's name is *Nugoaes* 'black mud,' a name it also bore in the Afrikaans translation of *Swartmodder*. *Anis* means 'place of smoke,' actually steam, referring to hot springs there. Officially the place has the Biblical name *Rehoboth*. Luderitzbucht seems to have three Nama names, namely *Chanugaub*, *Naminus*, and *Nuidoms*. *Okahandja* is an Herero name; the Nama name is *Geikheis* 'large sandy place.' Another place with an Herero and a Nama name is *Otjimbingwe* 'place of the leopard' or *Atsab* 'try to drink.' Similarly, *Omaruru* 'place of bitter milk' is *Uitigams*, after a type of bush. *Grootfontein* is an Afrikaans name meaning 'large fountain.' Its Herero name is *Otjivande tjongue* 'leopard flats,' while it is known in Nama as *Geiaub* 'large fountain,' from which the Afrikaans name was translated.

Folk or popular etymology is another manifestation of language contact, where an existing name, meaningless to subsequent encounterers, is adapted to give it meaning. Thus *Auob* 'bitter river' popularly became *Ouhoop* 'old heap'; *Koerikuis* 'white quartz' became *Koringhuis* 'wheat store/granary'; *Nudaob* 'distant road' was transformed into *Good Hope* and subsequently 'translated' into Afrikaans as *Goeiehoop*.

I trust that these remarks will give some idea of the complexity of the language situation in South-West Africa/Namibia and the manner in which toponyms reflect contact between these languages.

P.E. Raper

Onomastic Research Centre, Pretoria

References

- Moller, L.A. *German placenames in South-West Africa*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal (in preparation).
- Nienaber, G.S. *Hottentots*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1963.

Notes

Nienaber, G.S. & P.E. Raper. *Toponymica Hottentotica*, 3 vols. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1977 and 1980.

Raper, P.E. "Solving the problem of the meaning of Khoekhoen place names by studying toponymic clusters." *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*. Cracow: Jagiellonian University Press. 291-97.

Raper, P.E. "Treatment of placenames in a multilingual society." *Onomastica Canadiana* 63 (June 1983): 27-33.

Contributors

JAMES KARI, Alaska Native Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99701
THOMAS E. MURRAY, English, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210-1370
W.F.H. NICOLAISEN, English, State University of New York, Binghamton, NY 13901
HERBERT PENZL, German, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720
P.E. RAPER, Onomastic Research Centre, HSRC, Pretoria, RSA.
ROBERT M. RENNICK, 312 Riverside Dr., Prestonsburg, KY 41653
ZHU BIN and CELIA MILLWARD, English, Boston University, Boston, MA 02215