

Toponymy of Climbing Space: Names Within the Polish Climbing Community

Mariusz Rutkowski

University of Warmia and Mazury

Social groups create social space from geographic space in ways which are useful to their members. The nature of the social space can be approached through the names which are used to define it. A study of the names in the "climbing space" created by Polish climbers shows that they are used in ways which are meaningful only within the context of climbing and they serve to express group values and to promote group solidarity.

The perception of mountains or more particularly the perception of the surrounding space, is conditioned by social as well as geographical factors; one important social factor is membership in a particular social group and engaging in the kinds of activities associated with it. Social groups have their own characteristic spatial activities, which determine the perception of space characteristic of them. This perception should be understood as a mental reflection of physical (objective) reality rather than as passive reception. The perception is a dynamic process in which a group delineates space, which results in the creation of a particular kind of social space (Lefebvre 1974). Creation of space is understood in its cultural and symbolic meaning, and not as creation of physical spatial forms (e.g., buildings), but as distinguishing from the surrounding reality such objects as may be attributed to a specific type of activity.¹ Therefore, social space can be defined as symbolic space, perceived and mentally processed by a particular group, and the creation of such an understood social space is a prerequisite for successfully realizing the activities which are important to that group.

Mountain climbing is highly specialized and it is quite different from other kinds of contact with mountains, such as skiing or hiking. As a result, mountain space is perceived by climbers in a unique way, one

not easily understood by people not involved in climbing, although it is completely logical from the point of view of the climbers themselves.²

In the process of creating “climbing space;” that is, the social space of the group of climbers, perception and identification of suitable physical objects is based on a single criterion—whether or not they can be used for climbing. When such objects are identified the climbing space is shaped on the basis of “space patterns,” such as rock formations (chimneys, cracks, roofs, overhangs, walls, shelves, edges, etc.) or climbing routes. The arrangement of such objects then creates the group space of the climbing community.

The climbing space created in this way is, in the process of further social domestication, additionally marked by using proper names to refer to the objects used to create it. Thus, those objects, due to their key role in creating “the climbers’ mountains,” become onymic objects (Šrámek 1982).

Here, I will consider the proper names of objects of climbing space used in the Polish climbing community. I will describe them from the point of view of their function as linguistic signs, taking into account their semantic content and links to appellative lexis, as well as other naming categories. Focusing the study in such a way will allow me to draw an informative socio-onomastic portrait of the climbers space and will illustrate the strong connections between the names and the social group using them.

The means by which the names were created are not addressed in this study although it appears that the kinds of naming occurring in other systems can be found here as well, including such processes as transfer of other names to toponyms, adoption of existing verbal schemata, collocations, and the like. Puns, plays on forms and meanings of words, and rhymes also play significant roles and suggest the great creativity of the climbing community. Interesting as such a study would be, the details would be difficult if not impossible to comprehend by readers with no knowledge of Polish. Thus, little space is given to this topic here.

Although “the main function of a toponym is to identify a place” (Ainiāla 1998, 47), proper names, as with all linguistic signs, have other, additional functions in communication. Many of the names concerned with elements of the external characteristics of objects can fulfill a descriptive function. Using characteristic features of the named

objects in the process of naming is the simplest way of linguistically differentiating one object from other, similar objects. In the naming of climbing space descriptive names are frequent and they can be classified according to the type of information included in the name. The most frequent descriptive motifs are the shapes of objects, their color, and their size.

Descriptive names³ include *Eska*, *Rysa Esowata*, *S-Rysa* (S-shaped routes), *Diagonalna Rysa* 'diagonal crack', *Zgięta Rysa* 'bent crack', and *Zygzak* 'zigzag'. Characteristic climbing routes or their sections running horizontally across a rock wall are frequently named *traverse*, e.g., *Słoneczny Trawers* 'sunny traverse', *Śmieszny Trawers* 'funny traverse', *Wielki Trawers* 'great traverse', and *Żółty Trawers* 'yellow traverse'. Climbing in a straight line, crossing the middle of a drop is the most desired kind of climbing and closest to the ideal. Such climbs are considered to be the most difficult and are given an international name *Direttissima*, an Italian word meaning 'the straightest', which occurs frequently in Polish climbing publications, along with such related forms as *Superdirettissima*, *Hyperdireta*, *Direta*, and *Diretka* (a Polish diminutive).

The color of an object is another differentiating feature, and three colors—white, black, and yellow—are most often selected by climbers. Such color names include *Biała Ściana* 'white wall', *Biały Filarek* 'white buttress', *Czarna Płyta* 'black plate', *Czarna Rysa* 'black crack', *Żółta Rysa* 'yellow crack', and *Żółta Ścianka* 'yellow wall'.

Another group of descriptive names is made up of items which characterize objects on the basis of their size, especially their length (*Długa Rysa* 'long crack', *Długi Komin* 'long chimney'); their depth (*Głęboka Rysa* 'deep crack', *Głęboki Komin* 'deep chimney'); their width (*Gruba Rysa* 'thick crack', *Szeroka Rysa* 'wide crack', *Szeroki Komin* 'wide chimney', *Wąska Rysa* 'narrow crack'); or their height (*Wysoki Komin* 'high chimney'). These are found along with more general names such as *Duża Kaskada* 'big cascade', *Duży Komin* 'big chimney', and *Wielki Okap* 'great overhang'.

Many names give information about the location of an entity within the structure of a rock wall, rather than giving its characteristic features. Such a location is usually given in relation to other objects, but often indirectly: *Droga pod Okapem* 'the route under the overhang', *Droga wśród Gałęzi* 'the route through the branches', *Filarek nad Grotką* 'the

buttress over the cave', *Ryska nad Dziurą* 'the crack over the hole', *Ryska nad Tablicą* 'the crack over the plate', *Ryska w Filarze* 'the crack in the buttress', and *Ścianka nad Grotą* 'the wall over the cave'. Names in which the generic *route* is absent but suggested are also possible: *Pod Wąsem* 'under the moustache', *Przy Kancie* 'near the edge', *Przy Kominku* 'near the chimney', *Przez Konia* 'through the horse', *Przez Kostkę* 'through the bone', *Przez Krzyż* 'through the cross', *Przez Kulę* 'through the globe' (*Moustache, horse, bone, cross, and globe* are pieces of rock walls, named for their shapes). Names which specify the location of an entity without the relational element include *Południowy Komin* 'south chimney', *Północna Ściana* 'north wall', *Północno-Zachodni Filarek* 'northwest buttress', *Wschodnia Rysa* 'east crack', and *Zachodnia Grań* 'west ridge'.

A new route is a significant event in the climbing community and it is often named to commemorate the person who established it, most often a noted climber. Such routes include *Droga Grońskiego* 'Groński's route', *Droga Stanisławskiego* 'Stanisławski's route', *Droga Motyki* 'Motyka's route', *Droga Kurtyki* 'Kurtyka's Route', *Droga Heinricha i Chrobaka* 'Heinrich and Chrobak's route'. Climbers' names are also found in the names of specific formations: *Komin Świerza* 'Świerz's chimney', *Rysa Kordysa* 'Kordys' crack', *Filar Korczaka* 'Korczak's pillar', *Okap Muskata* 'Muskat's Overhang'. Allusions to climbers are found here (*Kant Okularnika* 'Four Eyes' edge', *Komin Gwoździa* 'Nail's chimney', *Komin Kaskaderów* 'stunt men's chimney') along with forenames: *Filarek Halinki* 'Halinka's buttress', *Płyta Waldemara* 'Waldemar's plate'. The names commemorating specific climbers are the oldest names in climbing space, and they are mentioned in the first climbing guidebooks, which date from the beginning of the 20th century.

The commemorative function is not limited to items containing the names of climbers. It can also be found in names whose motivation is based upon the specific events or circumstances accompanying the establishment of a new route. Names recording the time of the first climb are relatively transparent: *Okap 22 Lipca* 'the overhang, 22 July', *Pierwszy Dzień Wiosny* 'first day of Spring', *Pierwszomajówka* '1 May party', *Sierpniowa Potyczka* 'August skirmish', *Powitanie Wiosny* 'welcome of Spring', *Niedziela Palmowa* 'Palm Sunday', *Długi Majowy Weekend* 'long May weekend', *Majowe Szaleństwo* 'May madness'. Names may also record elements of larger social and political life,

which indirectly provide information regarding the time of the establishment of a climbing route. The route which was established in July 1978 was named *Polak w Kosmosie* 'a Pole in space' in honor of the first Polish astronaut. The route called *Seoul 88* was established during the summer Olympic Games in Korea. Related to these are acts of naming which make political statements, such as *Solidarność* 'Solidarity', a name which was given in honor of the trade union which was illegal at the time the route was established in 1982, when Poland was under martial law.

Characteristics of the new routes themselves are often recorded in their names: *Doskonałe Powtórzenie* 'perfect repetition', *Kolanowe Nonszalancje* 'knee nonchalance' (ironic because climbers shouldn't use their knees when climbing), *Za Ósmym Razem* 'the eighth time' (the climber had failed to establish the route on 7 previous attempts), *Zużyta Lina* 'used rope', *Tańczący z Blokami* 'dancing with the blocks' (alluding to the English film title "Dances with Wolves" and at the same time to the loose rocks along the climbing route).

In a number of commemorative names, however, the identification of those commemorated is difficult to determine because they occur in the names only as implications and allusions. For instance, the name *MM* comes from the initials of the climber M. Malczak. Similarly, the name *Obywatel PP* 'citizen PP' honors the climber P. Pudzianowski and at the same time is a play on the name of the Polish singer Obywatel GC. Yet another name, *Markiz De Robot* 'Marquis de Robot' implies the name of the climber P. Drobot.

Names based formally or semantically on earlier names of the climbing space constitute another large group. They are created by referring to names already existing. Such names use a similar form (the word as found in the motivating name), or modify an existing name; examples are: *Black Diamond* < *White Diamond*, *Malinowa Depresja* 'raspberry depression' (< *Malinowy Filar* 'raspberry buttress'), *Poziomkowy Szlak* 'wild strawberry trail' < *Poziomkowa Rysa* 'wild strawberry crack'.

In addition to such structural relations as these, the toponymy of climbing space includes more sophisticated links between onymic items, realized on the semantic level. Such relations are based on associations making use of connotations existing in the motivating items (or more precisely, in parallel appellative structures). Often both names, the original and the relative, belong to a common semantic field, and thus names such as *Baader Meinhof* and *Czerwone Brygady* 'Red Brigade'

are, in their original meaning, names of European terrorist organizations. *Messerschmitt* and *Spitfire* are, in their primary meaning, the names of fighters of the German and British air forces, respectively, during the Second World War. Other examples of shared semantic elements are found in *Pytajnik* 'question mark' and *Wykrzyknik* 'exclamation mark', *Roszcza* 'castling' and *Warcaby* 'checkers', *Telewizor* 'television set' and *Magnetowid* 'video'.

The existence of a relationship between two names becomes a motivation for further development of semantic and associative motifs and often results in groups of semantically linked names. Such a complex series of names is usually the result of a gradual, systematic increase in the number of climbing routes. The basis of a series is the first relative name, more precisely a pair of names—the motivated name and the motivating name. The first relation emphasizes the common semantic element, which then becomes the motivation for further naming items. A naming series also appears when, as a result of an intense exploration of a specific wall, several climbing routes are established in a relatively short period of time. In such cases there is often a repeated copying of the same semantic motif to a number of onymic items. For instance, elaboration of the associations originally connected with the name *Rewolucja Francuska* 'French Revolution' triggered the occurrence of such subsequent names as *Francuskie Stosy* 'French stakes', *Hiszpańskie Czary* 'Spanish witchcraft', *Polska Inkwizycja* 'Polish Inquisition', *Gilotyna* 'guillotine', *Młot na Czarownice* 'hammer on witches'. In a similar fashion, the names *Truskawki* 'strawberries' and *Poziomki* 'wild strawberries' were completed by the name *Tutti Frutti*. The conceptual field connected with classical music provides a foundation of semantic associations among the names *Symfonia* 'symphony', *Traviata*, and *Kakofonia* 'cacophony'. Jazz music is, in turn, the organizing element of the series *Jazz*, *Improwizacje Jazzowe* 'jazz improvisations', *Okolice Jazzu* 'jazz area', along with the witty addition *Disco Polo*, representing a completely different kind of music. Another series is based on a common motif adapted from the Pink Panther films: *Powrót Różowej Pantery* 'Return of the Pink Panther', *Zemsta Różowej Pantery* 'Revenge of the Pink Panther', *Powolne Konanie Różowej Pantery* 'slow agony of the Pink Panther', and finally *Zgon Różowej Pantery* 'death of the Pink Panther'. (Only the first two of these are actual film titles; the other names were created by climbers and built upon the Pink Panther motif.)

In the naming of climbing space there is a large group of names transferred from popular culture, most often film titles (such as the Pink Panther, mentioned above), titles of books or musical compositions, and names of rock groups. These names indirectly characterize the climbing community, and offer insights into climbers' cultural orientation, since only favoured elements of culture are generally copied. Examples of film titles which provide the names of climbing routes include *Easy Rider*, *Fitzcarraldo*, *Łowca Jeleni* 'The Deerhunter', *Nocny Kowboj* 'Midnight Cowboy', *Orły Temidy* 'Temida's Eagles', *Osiem i Pół* '8 1/2', *Psychoza* 'Psycho', *Seksmisja* 'Sexmission', *Skrzypek na Dachy* 'Fiddler on the Roof', and *15.10 do Yumy* '3.10 to Yuma'. Transferred titles of books include *Gra w Klasy* 'Rayuela' by J. Cortazar, *I-Ching*, *Imię Róży* 'The Name of the Rose' by U. Eco, *Kocia Kołyska* 'Cat's Cradle' by K. Vonnegut, *Siekierzada* 'Axerezade' by E. Stachura, *Szatańskie Wersety* 'Satanic Verses' by S. Rushdie, *Śniadanie Mistrzów* 'Breakfast of Champions' by K. Vonnegut, *Władca Pierścieni* 'The Lord of the Rings' by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Życie Jest Gdzie Indziej* 'Life is Somewhere Else', by M. Kundera. Titles of musical compositions include *Fugazi* (Marillion), *Hey, Jude* (The Beatles), *Krakowski Spleen* 'Cracow Spleen' (Maanam), *Schody do Nieba* 'Stairway to Heaven' (Led Zeppelin), *This Is Not America* (David Bowie), and *Wish You Were Here* (Pink Floyd).

While most of the names of climbing space fit neatly into the categories presented above, there are some which do not display clear links to acts of nomination and neither do they seem to be motivated by the circumstances of a climb, or the features of an object or a climber. These names occur simply because they happen to suit the climbing community. Since the names tend to employ certain selected areas of meaning, they are not accidental. The emphasis on particular areas of meaning found in these names may provide a basis for making claims about a given naming community, especially claims concerning shared values, attitudes toward reality, cultural orientations, and the like. One would expect that the creators of names within a community would employ themes which are particularly close to them, while at the same time meeting general expectations and fitting an established system of values of a community.

The reason for the existence of a climbing community is, obviously, climbing itself and climbing holds the central position in the system of

values of the community. The thematic field and the names provide windows into the community and its values. Many of these will be found in the names relating to the act of climbing per se.

Climbing, understood as a physical activity, occurs in names containing a metaphorical description of a climb, for example *Kaczy Chód* 'duck's walk', *Krok Defiladowy* 'parade march', *Pajęcza Zwinność* 'spider dexterity', *Pajęcze Ruchy* 'spider movements', *Podrygi Kawalera* 'bachelor's leaps', and *Wężowe Ruchy* 'snake movements'. A frequent source of metaphors compares a climb to a dance: *Jacolowe Tańce* 'Jacol's dances', *Kazaczok* 'Cossack' (Russian national folk dance), *Lekcja Tańca* 'a lesson of dance', *Taniec Starca* 'old man's dance', *Taniec Śmierci* 'death's dance', *Taniec Wędkarza* 'angler's dance', *Tańcowała Małgorzatka* 'Maggie's dance', *Tańcz Głupia*, *Tańcz* 'dance you silly, dance', *Tańczący z Blokami* 'dancing with the blocks', *Taniec Lekkich Goryli* 'dance of lightweight gorillas', *Primaballerina*, *Zbójnicki Taniec* 'highlanders' dance'.

Noteably there are a number of names which refer to a monkey's climbing which may be included in this metaphorical group: *Małpia Rysa* 'monkey's crack', *Małpia Ścianka* 'monkey's wall', *Małpia Ścieżka* 'monkey's path', *Małpie Hormony* 'monkey's hormones', *Małpie Ryski* 'monkey's cracks', *Małpi Gaj* 'monkey's grove'. Such metaphorical comparisons are possible because dance is understood as a source of pleasure, an entertainment, and also a symbol of beauty, harmony of movement, and lightness. A monkey realizes the cliché of an agile, light animal, skillful at climbing. The naming process uses this connotation in a selective way, however, since the notion that a monkey is a stupid creature is ignored.

In some names one can see metaphorical descriptions of climbing where space is seen as primarily vertical and physical space is functionally subordinated to the act of climbing. The vertical orientation of space and the positive evaluation of this orientation can be seen in such names as *Brama do Niebios* 'gate to heaven', *Drabina Miłości* 'ladder of love', *Wzwyż Wstępowanie* 'ascension', which share the motif of rising, even soaring. The opposite situation, movement downward, specifically to fall, is synonymous with failure and this is reflected in the few names with this motif, such as *Młody Zgruszkował* 'a young one fell', *622 Upadki Bunga* '622 Bung's falls', and *Lot ku Ziemi* 'flight towards the earth'.

Other names focus on climbing as a physical experience, and these emphasize the pain, trauma, fatigue, and hardships associated with climbing, e.g., *Boski Ból* 'divine pain', *Dachowa Męka* 'roof torment', *Droga przez Mękę* 'a way through torment', *Krew i Honor* 'blood and honour', *Krwawa Rączka* 'bloody hand', *Krwawa Pięść* 'bloody fist', *Krwawy Palec* 'bloody finger', *Same Łzy* 'tears only'.

In the area of psychological experience, most striking is the treatment of climbing as abnormal behavior, even a mental disease, as seen in *Cyklofrenia* 'psychosis', *Cyrk Wariatów* 'madmen circus', *Ludzki Neuroleptyk* 'human neuroleptics', *Mamy Źle w Głowach* 'we are mad', *Obłąd* 'madness', *Odmienne Stany Świadomości* 'altered states of consciousness', *Senne Majaki* 'nightmares', and *Szalone Pomysły* 'crazy ideas'.

Social life constitutes another theme field, especially as it concerns sex and alcohol. Those areas are always in the scope of interest of young people so their presence in these names comes as no surprise. It is worth mentioning that naming in these semantic fields in particular is often accompanied by humor and linguistic creativity, as in *Mała Cipuchna* 'little fanny', *Między Pośladkami* 'between the buttocks', *Kamasutra*, *Odwieczna Magia Seksu* 'eternal magic of sex', *Pornografia* 'pornography', *Seksploracja* 'sexploration', *Słodka Magia Seksu* 'sweet magic of sex', *Speleologia Dekoltów* 'speleology of low-cut necks', *Sutki Prostyutki* 'prostitute's tits', *To Tylko Sex* 'it's only sex', *Drink Bar*, *Gin z Tonikiem* 'gin and tonic', *Izba Wytrzeźwień* 'sobering chamber', *Maraton Trzeźwości* 'marathon of sobriety', *Pić Trzeba* 'one must drink', *Pijane Trójkąty* 'drunk triangles', *Rum z Colą* 'rum and cola', and *Beer or not Beer*.

The system of naming climbing space presented here, the system which functions in a closed micro-community, strongly determined by the perception of the mountains and the structuring of space characteristic of this community and its creation of a specific social space, is of course only a small part of the many layers of names which characterize the larger society and it is in many ways independent of other areas of naming. This independence has allowed climbing toponymy to evolve relatively free from the norms and rules found in more public or official naming systems. As such it has absorbed aspects of colloquial language, unofficial language and slang. This microtoponymic climbing system belongs to a neo-folkloric culture in which a high (official) national

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culture and a low, plebeian (unofficial) culture are opposed. This neo-folkloric culture is characterized by spontaneous and unrestricted creations which function primarily in oral usage and within a specific group whose members have strong feelings of camaraderie and a sense of pride and partnership in the group. The key element in creating such names as those shown here is the existence of a relatively closed community which has developed its own practices and customs, including language, and a unique perception of the world in which it functions. In the case of the climbing community, the perception of space is of critical importance. Isolation and a sense of uniqueness are necessary for developing specific behaviors, including naming, and these generally are not known beyond the members of the group. Since their correct reception and understanding occurs only within the constructed world, linguistic norms created within a closed social group, as in this case a naming system limited to a single community, serve to create both a feeling of group identity and also to act as a sign of individuality.

Notes

1. There are of course many types and subtypes of social space and many different ways of creating different social spaces from the same physical space. Tourists, for instance, have a characteristic way of perceiving the mountains and they tend to focus on spectacular summits, trails, and hostels. The same space is perceived in a different way by painters, poets, and writers, who notice the beauty of the landscape, and differently yet by mountain rescue teams whose objective is fast and efficient action. Skiers also create their own, again different, mountain space (Millward and Millward 1984).

2. In Poland, alpine climbing is limited to one mountain range of alpine character, the Tatra Mountains. Areas of lower rock formations are also popular for rock climbing.

3. The names analyzed here were taken from Polish climbing guidebooks and climbing magazines.

4. A quick review of the names of climbing routes from other language areas suggests that climbing space is shaped in similar ways throughout the world. Similar names are given to similar structures, using similar linguistic resources and rendered in a similar style, such as American: *The Nose*, *Reticent Wall*, *The Shield*, *Stoner's Highway*, *East Buttress*, *Rise and Whine*, *American Sportsman*; Czech: *Vyvalene Ocy* 'bulging eyes', *Slza* 'a tear', *Gilotina* 'guillotine'; French: *Pedro Polar*, *Macumba Club*, *Oxygen*; Italian: *La Carota Pazza*, *Il Canto della Terra*, *Silvia Ti Amo!*, *Forza Remo*, *Trek Eritrek*, *Danze con la Panza*, *Striptease*; Spanish: *Soy un hombre nuevo*, *Directissime*; Australian: *Some Kind of Bliss*; German: *1001 Nacht*, *Maharadscha*.

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