

On the Study of Names

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In 1988, I retired from 30 years of teaching linguistics at UCLA, with a research specialty in the languages of Native North America and Mesoamerica. Since then, I've increasingly returned to an earlier interest in place name etymology, dating from my graduate student days at Berkeley. In 1993, I published a volume called *Colorado Place Names*; there I attempted, in particular, to do justice to names of Spanish and American Indian origin. In 1998, I published a revision of E. G. Gudde's *California Place Names*. Now, in 2001, I'm completing a comprehensive etymological dictionary of U.S. placenames derived from Native American languages; it is to be published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

It has been pointed out that scholars in Great Britain and Europe have generally regarded name studies as a branch of linguistics, focusing particularly on etymology. By contrast, American onomatists (to use George R. Stewart's term) have given greater emphasis to "the motivation of the namer"—to "the human activity of naming." Since my own training and experience have been in linguistics, I find it essential to recognize that names are part of language, and that they deserve study by the most sophisticated methods that the linguist can bring to bear. However, I recognize that multiple approaches, e.g., those of history, geography, literature, folklore, and anthropology, as well as linguistics, are essential. This being the case, I am saddened to observe that a relatively small proportion of professional linguists show an interest in onomastics, and that a relatively small proportion of onomastic scholars have specialized training in linguistics. But things are improving; linguists have recently held important positions in the American Name Society, and ANS now has an annual joint session with the Linguistic Society of America. My hope for the future of ANS, and for its journal *Names*, is that it will be characterized by increasing crossover with linguistics and other disciplines.