

Place Name Patterns

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PROFESSOR T. M. PEARCE in his "Spanish Place Name Patterns in the Southwest" (*Names*, December, 1955) has done me the compliment of using as his basis of reference my article "A Classification of Place Names" (*Names*, March, 1954). As he puts it, "this classification, with one modification and one addition, has served well for my investigation."

Now, I do not think that my classification is to be considered perfect, for I know that the matter is one of considerable difficulty and delicacy. I am therefore happy to have it subjected to criticism. In this particular case, however, Professor Pearce's modification and addition do not seem to be necessary or helpful.

With respect to the modification he states, "I have modified the second category, identifying the place with the name of a person or group possessing it, to include identifying a place also with the names of animals or other wild life possessing it." He illustrates his position at another point in the article.

I readily grant that the distinction between descriptive and possessive names is a fine one. I believe, however, that it represents something in actual practise, and is worth preserving. Professor Pearce would include most animal names under the category possessive, believing that animals may be said to possess the place. This seems to me to be stretching the meaning of the word too far and also to be starting in a direction of no return. If animals can be considered as possessing a place, why not plants? Or some particular kind of earth or rock? Or an atmospheric condition? Thus we are likely to end up with "possessive" including everything that in my original description I put under "associative description."

In this case we might as well get rid of the whole conception of possessive names. In fact, I made that suggestion in my article; "These names resemble associative-descriptive names so closely that they could well be classified with them on purely theoretical

grounds. For practical purposes, however, they seem to be better distinguished." This is just a position that I still wish to maintain. To start moving the animal names from associative-descriptive to possessive seems to me to be going too far.

In connection with animal names I would also differ from Professor Pearce at another point. He states, "Professor Stewart writes that most animal names . . . fall into the Category of Incident Names. He may be right, but documentation is usually lacking. . . . Rather, it may be generally assumed that the animals are abundant in such localities." In this connection I would argue, first of all, that if documentation is lacking, we have no scholarly right to put any particular name into the one category rather than into the other. At best, we can only approach the problem of an undocumented name on a basis of probability. Here my experience with animal names seems to differ from that of Professor Pearce. I have very frequently found the statement of the type; "We named this place Buck Creek because we killed a buck there." I have much less commonly found the statement, of the type, "We named this place Deer Creek, because there were a great many deer in this vicinity." I therefore believe that the probability of a place being named for an animal because of an incident is at least high enough to make it unsafe to assume that, lacking documentation, the place is named for a certain animal because of its abundance there.

Professor Pearce also states: "The category I have added is (10) names which transfer terms of folk imagination, affection, and humor to localities and landmarks." Now, as I stated in my article, my classification is "with respect to the means or mechanisms by which places are named." I added that these means or mechanisms had a relationship to the motives of the original namers, but that I was not attempting to enter in to this deeper problem of psychology. I think, however, that by adding his new category, Professor Pearce is bringing in what may be called primarily a question of motive. By admitting humorous names he would make it necessary also to add such classifications as patriotic, religious, etc.

I must admit that, partly because of the limitations of the English language, some of my categories may be said to include both mechanism and motive. Thus a place may be named by means of a descriptive adjective and at the same time with the purpose of describing the place. The same may be said of commemorative and euphemistic names.

To return, however, to Professor Pearce's new category, he seems to go over completely to motive, neglecting mechanism. For instance, he gives as examples: "*Chico*, 'little', *Antonchico*, 'little Tony,' *Chaperito*, 'little hat,' *Tienditas*, 'little stores'." Granting that these may be humorous in motive, all of them apparently make use of one or other of the mechanism which I have already listed. Thus *Chico* would seem to be an ordinary descriptive adjective used for humorous ends.

Antonchico might be possessive, or might record an incident. On the evidence provided by this paragraph I therefore see no basis for establishing a tenth category. It would be ungracious of me, however, to conclude without thanks to Professor Pearce for this interesting collection and interpretation of southwestern names.

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Bucksaw is a name translated from the German, *Bocksäge*. This word in turn is derived from *Sägebock*, the four-legged frame, in America generally known as sawhorse.