Approaches to Research in Toponymy

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There are two basic ways to conduct toponymic research — one concentrating on the etymology, meaning, and origin of toponyms, and one focusing on the toponyms of a region and examining patterns of these names. Usually, this distinction is not explicitly recognized. This paper considers the differences between the two approaches and proposes guidelines for their use.

KEYWORDS toponymic research, toponymy, extensive, intensive, quantitative, qualitative

Research paradigms

It is common for a discipline to contrast the *micro* and the *macro* levels of its research domains; between the examination of a *case* and the *pattern-analysis of cases*. The difference is akin to talking about the *weather* and the *climate*. In the former, the meteorological characteristics of a given place and time are described and analyzed, whereas in the latter, the characteristic or prevalent weather patterns throughout the year of a region are described and analyzed. In medicine, for instance, the study of a case and the pattern-analysis of cases are known as *diagnostics* and *epidemiology* respectively. In the research paradigm, the contrast is most commonly expressed in the generic terms *qualitative* and *quantitative* research.

Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon or case. This method investigates the *why*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* of a single case or small focused sample. The conclusions drawn from such a study cannot be generalized, and only propositions (informed assertions or hypotheses) may be made. The results of qualitative research are often followed up by a quantitative study in order to find empirical support for hypotheses.

The quantitative method empirically investigates data in a numerical form via statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques, and asks specific, narrow questions in an attempt to discover underlying meanings and patterns of relationships, including classifications of types of phenomena and entities.

ANPS paradigm

The Australian National Placenames Survey (ANPS), whose remit is to construct a national database of geographical names in Australia, recognises the bilateral

approach to research, but feels the terms *quantitative* and *qualitative* are too general and vague. The terms focus on the type of data gathered and analysed, not on the actual process and practice of the kind of research conducted. ANPS has, therefore, adopted the following terms to reflect and denote more precisely the two research approaches it takes: *intensive* and *extensive* toponymy (to echo the qualitative and quantitative paradigms respectively). *Intensive* is used in the sense of "relating, or pertaining to intensity, or degree of intrinsic strength, depth, or fullness, as distinguished from external spatial extent or amount." Whereas, *extensive* is used in the sense of "pertaining to extension; denoting a large number of objects. Opposed to *intensive*. That has the effect of extending or enlarging in scope," or of "extending over or occupying a large surface or space; having a wide extent, widely extended; [...] far-reaching, large in comprehension or scope; wide in application or operation; comprehensive; [...] denoting a large number of objects" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Perhaps the most obvious terms to employ would be *microtoponymy* and *macrotoponymy*, however, both have already been conscripted by the discipline of toponymy with their own specific senses, and to employ this pair would introduce unnecessary confusion. Coates (2013a) uses the terms *semasiological* and *onomasiological* to distinguish the two approaches, where the former seeks to answer the (semasiological) questions "Why is X called X?," "How did X come to be called X?" and "What does it mean for X to be called X?" The latter asks the (onomasiological) question: "How do we, or should we, express terminologically the elements in system Y (and the relations among them)?" Coates also suggests that the most important methodology is etymological, mainly because "all names were once meaningful (at their creation), [...] and that the original meaning can be recovered [...]." This is a rather fragile argument. Just because etymological onomastics has been the principal kind practiced in Britain, as Coates declares, we cannot conclude that it is therefore inherently more important than an onomasiological approach. It is an argument *ab absurdo*. Both approaches tell different stories for different purposes, and answer different questions. Claiming one approach is more important than another is akin to arguing phonology is more important than syntax.

Abiding by ANPS practice, the terms *intensive* and *extensive* shall be used hereafter when discussing approaches to toponymic research.

Toponymic research: a brief overview

As with other disciplines, toponymy also employs both these research models. However, unlike fields such as psychology, linguistics, education, and sociology, toponymy does not seem to have consciously or explicitly made a distinction between them. Naturally, some disciplines lend themselves more to quantitative investigations, psychology and sociology come to mind. For example, Hunter and Leahey (2008) conducted a comprehensive analysis of 1274 articles published in the two premier North American sociology journals between 1935 and 2005, and found that approximately two-thirds of the articles used quantitative methods for analysis.

At toponymic conferences, the majority of papers presented tend to fall within the intensive model; answering questions on the etymology and meaning of particular toponyms, and so on. In other words, the research has been at the micro level, the

examination of *discrete* cases or toponyms. Few papers concentrate on pattern-analysis of groups of toponyms. This is somewhat surprising, because toponomy lends itself very readily and logically to extensive analyses. For instance, such analyses can reveal much about:

- placenaming practices and patterns (both temporally and spatially) (see Kelly, 1999)
- regional distributions of certain types of toponym, or geographic feature (see Sims-Williams, 2006).
- settlement patterns (both temporally and spatially) (see Campbell, 1991; Sims-Williams, 2006)
- the geomorphology of a region (by concentrating on feature types) (see Watkins, 2011)[1]
- grammar/syntax of toponyms (see McMillan, 1949; Long, 1969; Zinkin, 1969; Little, 1978)
- linguistic geography (i.e., regional distribution of name types) (see McDavid, 1958; Cheshire, 2011; Watkins, 2011)
- the influence of names on property values (see Norris, 1999).

In addition, extensive toponymic studies are often easier to conduct than intensive ones. The use of modern resources such as online gazetteers, databases, and computer programs, such as Excel or SPSS, make it relatively easy to conduct extensive research. Intensive research usually relies on documentary evidence, evidence that is not always available or extant.

As evidence in support of the contention that most toponymic studies are intensive in nature, a numerical survey of all articles on toponymy that appeared in *Names* from volume 1 (1952) to 62 (2014) reveals the following (Table 1).

This paper proposes that toponymists, and the discipline of onomastics in general, make a conscious distinction between intensive and extensive research and that each should have its own label, comparable to *diagnostics* and *epidemiology*.

Approaches to the study of toponymy

Intensive toponymy

Every placename has a story behind it — the name was bestowed by someone, at a particular time and for a particular reason, and sometimes the name is changed for various reasons. Conducting intensive toponymy is the process of writing a

TABLE 1

TOPONYMY PUBLICATIONS IN NAMES 1952–2014

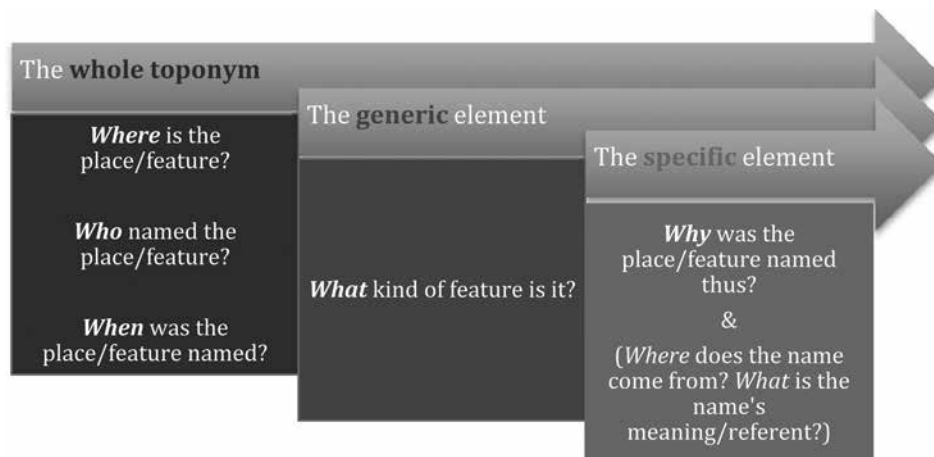| Articles in *Names*	Number of publications
Qualitative approach	223 (54.4%)
Quantitative approach	64 (15.6%)
Mixture of 1 and 2	29 (7.1%)
Other[2]	94 (22.9%)
Total	410

FIGURE 1   The *wh-* questions relating to a toponym's elements.

placename's "biography," which essentially involves answering the following *wh-* questions:

- *Who* named the place?
- *When* was the place named?
- *Why* was it given this particular name?
- *What* does the name mean? *What* kind of feature is it?
- *Where* does the name come from? (referring to either the language or region of origin); *Where* is the place located?

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of how these *wh-* questions relate to the different elements of a toponym.

The naming of *Montville* in Queensland, Australia, provides a fitting example of intensive toponymic research and the answering of the five *wh-* questions (see Tent, 2012). Hannah Smith (née Freeman, b. May 1816, Birtsmorton Worcestershire, England; d. April 17 1901, Montville, Queensland), moved from England to the USA with her family of sixteen children. They settled in the town of *Montville* Connecticut. However, in 1879 Hannah and some of her sons moved to Queensland, Australia, where they settled at Redland Bay. They moved again in 1893 to the Blackall Ranges where Hannah's sons Henry and Fred bought a selection of land. The local township was called *Razorback*, after the steep ridge on which it stands. In the same year, Henry applied to establish a "Receiving Office" (i.e., a Post Office) there. In 1897, he applied to the Under Secretary of the Queensland Post and Telegraph Department to have the name *Razorback* changed to *Vermont*. This was rejected, but apparently, at the request of his mother, he reapplied, this time requesting the name be changed to *Montville*, after their hometown in Connecticut. This request was officially accepted on November 27 1897 (see Figure 2).

- *Who* named the place? <u>Henry Smith</u>
- *When* was the place named? <u>November 27 1897</u>
- *Why* was it given this particular name? <u>To commemorate the hometown of Hannah Smith's family</u>

FIGURE 2   Official documentation on the naming of *Montville*.

- *What* does the name mean? <u>From the French *mont* = "mountain," *ville* = "town"</u>
- *Where* does the name come from? <u>Transferred from Connecticut, USA.</u>

In many cases, answers to some or all of the *wh-* questions may not be found because too long a time has passed since the naming, and/or the necessary documentation (if it ever existed) has disappeared.

Other questions ANPS researchers ask include:

- Did the place or feature have previous names?
  - if so, what are these?
  - for each or these names, the five *wh-* questions are posed
  - and why any previous names were replaced
- To which category of toponym does the name belong? (see Tent and Blair, 2011).

ANPS also identifies three basic fields or domains of intensive toponymy:

1. A toponym's **identification**
2. A toponym's **documentation**
3. A toponym's **interpretation**

Each of these fields has a number of parameters:

1. A toponym's **identification** (five parameters):
   a. its orthographic form(s) (including previous names)
   b. its linguistic substance (morphology, syntax, semantics, etymology)
   c. the feature type of its generic element
   d. the taxon, class, or category of its specific element (based on its semantic components)
   e. its location (latitude + longitude)
   [For parameters a, b, and c, a sound linguistic knowledge is required][3]

2. A toponym's **documentation** (three parameters)
   a. collected primarily from written sources
   b. found preferably in primary sources
   c. referenced in standard bibliographic terms

3. A toponym's **interpretation** (two parameters)
   a. its "biography"
   b. based on the most reliable of its documentation.

Intensive toponymy is grassroots research, is often the basis of extensive toponymy, and often precedes extensive toponymy, although the latter can of course be conducted without having done the former. Examples of intensive toponymic studies in *Names* include: Bigon (2011), Coates (2013b), Clark (2014), and the series of articles on the origin of the name *Missouri*, Lance (1999) and McCafferty (2003; 2012).

Extensive toponymy

Extensive toponymy embraces broader, more wide-ranging research than intensive toponymy, and is based on datasets or corpora of toponyms, gazetteers, maps,

atlases, and so on. In many respects extensive toponymy is more straightforward to conduct than intensive toponymy. In extensive toponymy, placenames function as independent variables which can be tested against dependent variables such as region, toponym type, or feature type. An example of this can be seen in Tent and Slatyer (2009) who investigated the different placenaming practices of the Dutch, English, and French on the Australian coastline before European settlement of the continent in 1788. The Dutch, English, and French toponyms are the independent variables, whilst the seven toponym types are the dependent variables. The analysis used the toponym taxonymy developed by Tent and Blair (2009; 2011). The toponym types include:

- **Descriptive** (indicating an inherent characteristic of the feature), e.g., *Wide Bay*, *Sugarloaf Mountain*, *Three Mile Creek*
- **Associative** (indicating something which is always or often associated with the feature or its physical context), e.g., *Shark Bay*, *Fishermans Bend*, *Telegraph Point*
- **Occurrent** (recording an event, incident, occasion, date, or action associated with the feature), e.g., *Thirsty Sound*, *Pentecost Island*, *Seventeen Seventy*
- **Evaluative** (reflecting the emotional reaction of the namer, or a strong connotation associated with the feature), e.g., *Hope Islands*, *Mount Disappointment*, *Beauty Point*
- **Shift** (use of a toponym, in whole or part, from another location or feature), e.g., *Newcastle*, *Waitara*, *Heidelberg*
- **Indigenous** (importing an indigenous toponym or word into the Introduced system), e.g., *Uluru*, *Wooloomooloo*, *Wangaratta*
- **Eponymous** (commemorating or honouring a person or other named entity by using a proper name as a toponym), e.g., *Adelaide*, *Tryall Rocks*, *Maria Island*.

The cross tabulations of the independent and dependent variables reveal the varying placenaming practices of these three nations (Table 2).

More extensive mining of the data reveals further telling facts that could not have been unearthed without a quantitative analysis. The most interesting particulars relate to descriptive and eponymous toponyms bestowed. The Dutch had only

TABLE 2

PLACENAMING PRACTICES OF EUROPEAN POWERS IN AUSTRALIA 1606–1803

Toponym type	Percent of toponyms		
	Dutch	English	French
Descriptive	14.4%	20.2%	9.3%
Associative	12.2%	14.9%	6.3%
Occurrent	3.6%	11.3%	1.9%
Evaluative	5.0%	3.6%	1.3%
Shift	4.3%	6.0%	0.6%
Australian Indigenous	0.7%	0.4%	0
Eponymous	59.7%	43.5%	80.6%

conferred 153 toponyms during their 150-year contact with the continent. During this period, they had charted some 55 percent of the mainland's coastline (from the tip of Cape York to the Nuyts Archipelago, off the coast South Australia, including the south and east coasts of Tasmania). Their motives in charting these waters were navigational (naming features that had some significance for navigation or respite) or commercial (finding new markets), unlike the British and the French who in later years had territorial designs. The toponyms appearing on the Dutch charts reflect their commercial motives as they are mostly descriptive and eponymous (after officials of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (*VOC*) "Dutch East India Company") in nature.

As Table 2 shows, eponymous placenames far outnumber any other type. Whilst the Dutch tended to name places after *VOC* officials, the British favored the nobility and political figures, because, after all, many of these were benefactors. The French appeared to be somewhat more enlightened and named places after scientists, literary figures, philosophers, as well as military and naval figures.

Examples of extensive research articles in *Names* include: Campbell (1991), McArthur (1996), Algeo (1999), Norris (1999), and Kelly (1999; 2000). An example of mixed research is Clark (1978), and examples of other forms include: McArthur (1995; 2000), Rennick (2005), and Tent and Blair (2011).

Concluding remarks

Both the intensive and extensive paradigms contribute to each other in addition to the discipline of toponymy as a whole.

The type of toponymy practiced in the Old World (which for the purposes of this discussion includes Europe, the Middle East, China, Japan, South and Southeast Asia) has tended to be different from that practiced in the New World (here, the Americas, the former European colonies of Africa, as well as Australia, and New Zealand). Old World toponymy inclines to concentrate more on intensive research with the emphasis being on the etymology and meaning of toponyms (Coates, 2013a). However, most of the *wh-* questions of intensive toponymy cannot be answered because most toponyms are so ancient that information on their origins no longer exists. In the New World, on the other hand, more *wh-* questions can be answered because many of original documents and records relating to the naming of places are still extant in the form of charts, explorers' and settlers' diaries, surveyor's records, as well as other government records (see Figure 2).

Extensive toponymy generally does not require such records because it is interested in revealing placenaming practices and patterns; distributions of certain types of toponym, or geographic feature; settlement patterns, and so on. As I have said elsewhere (Tent and Slatyer, 2009: 5), placenames are:

> reminders of who we are, and whence we came, and are a rich source of information about a region's history. [They] also form an integral part of a nation's cultural and linguistic heritage, [...] [and] in many regions, they reveal the chronology of exploration and settlement.

With this in mind, I encourage toponymists to consciously distinguish between the different approaches to toponymy (no matter what labels they may go by), and to

engage in more extensive toponymic research. There are many rich and informative stories to be told using this approach.

Notes

[1] Of course, an intensive enquiry into the origin and meaning of a toponym can also reveal information on the geomorphology of a geographic feature or its surrounding region, *Iron Knob* (in South Australia) and *Cornelian Bay* (a suburb of Hobart, Tasmania) being examples. Although Watkins' map illustrates the distribution of the various generic names of streams as used across the USA, the map can also be used to establish where the watercourses are in the country. It can be inferred that areas with few or no watercourse names are arid areas.

[2] Refers to theoretical papers on toponymy.

[3] The following case will illustrate this point. The toponym *Ko Rimaroa* was conveyed to Captain James Cook and Joseph Banks by the Māori inhabitants of Doubtless Bay (north-east coast of the North Island, New Zealand) and Queen Charlotte Sound (northern end of the South Island, New Zealand) in December–January 1769–1770 when Cook enquired, via their Tahitian interpreter Tupa'ia, about Māori knowledge of the existence of the Great Southland. Tupa'ia interpreted the name as *'O Rimaroa*, following the phonology of his own language, Tahitian.

Cook and Banks in turn interpreted Tupa'ia's pronunciation as *Olhemaroa*, and transcribed it thus. Non-Polynesians find it difficult to distinguish between Polynesian /l/ and /r/ sounds and thus tend to confuse them. Moreover, a Polynesian language will either have /l/ sounds or /r/ sounds, never both; the two occurring in one word is thus impossible. The confusion was magnified when John Hawkesworth edited and published Cook's journal in which he transcribed the name as *Ulimaroa*. Up until Tent and Geraghty (2012) unraveled these linguistic and orthographic misinterpretations, the etymology of *Ulimaroa* was unknown. The name had featured as a late eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century appellation for the continent of Australia (see Djurberg, 1801; 1818), the name of an early twentieth-century Australian steamship, and is the name of a Melbourne mansion, and a location west of Brisbane. Several attempts had been made to discover its etymology, but all were unsuccessful because none of the authors had the necessary linguistic knowledge. See Tent and Geraghty (2012) for a full exposition of this name.

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