The *How* of Toponymy: A Comment on Tent's "Approaches to Research in Toponymy"

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This comment considers several ways the *how* of toponymy is an addendum to Tent's (2015) *where, who, when, what,* and *why* of toponymic research. Summarizing Tent's claims leads to identifying less–mainstream yet theoretically pertinent research concerns central to the *how* of toponymics.

How

In a recent paper in *Names*, Jan Tent concludes by encouraging 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" (Tent, 2015: 72–73). This comment offers a response to this invitation by reflecting on and hopefully adding to Tent's work.

Tent does an excellent job in revealing and recognizing a bilateral approach to the toponymic research advanced by the Australian National Placenames Survey (ANPS) and the large-scale documentation and theoretical work the Survey has conducted for more than a decade. Avoiding terms like *quantitative* and *qualitative*, which Tent believes are "too general and vague," and *microtoponymy* and *macrotoponymy*, which because "both have already been conscripted by the discipline of toponymy with their own specific senses […] would introduce unnecessary confusion" (66), the following is arrived at: "Abiding by ANPS practice, the terms *intensive* and *extensive* shall be used hereafter when discussing approaches to toponymic research."

"Approaches to Research in Toponymy" sets about delineating the intensive model — "answering questions on the etymology and meaning of particular toponyms" (66) and research at the micro level, which examines *discrete* cases or toponyms — from the extensive model, listing seven areas of toponymic research, which might be

exposed to extensive analyses. Tent's paper proposes "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" (67).

Tent tells us "conducting intensive toponymy is the process of writing a place-name's "biography"; the five *wh*-questions — *where*, *who*, *when*, *what*, *why* — dominate intensive toponymy. It is here the main inquiry lies, which is taken up later: is the *how* of toponyms and toponymies covered by this *wh*-questioning? If not, *how* are toponyms initiated and operationalized in the world?

Intensive toponymy consists of three domains or fields: a toponym's identification (technical linguistic and classificatory explanations); a toponym's documentation (source material about a toponym's history); a toponym's interpretation (the active interpretation of the "biography" of a toponym based in its most reliable 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. (70)

Extensive toponymy is succinctly defined:

> 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. (70–71)

This leads Tent to the ANPS toponym taxonomy which has been presented in numerous publications, several which are listed, including one published in *Names* (Tent and Blair, 2011). Because extensive toponymy is mainly concerned with describing toponyms — "because it is interested in revealing placenaming practices and patterns" (72) — like intensive toponymy, it does not necessarily consider the ways and means the science of toponymy is able to deal with the assessing the operation of toponyms and understanding their active and actual use. Adding to the *wh*-questions, the task remaining is to query the ability of research which is not necessarily explicitly labelled *toponymic* but which offers much to reflections on the nature of toponymies. These lead such demonstrations into the *how*-realm of toponymy.

The *how*

By considering the relationship between universal and culturally specific phenomena in toponymy, an application of the *how* of toponymy as a method is able to integrate and consider not only phenomena between, within, and across toponymic contexts, but also consider what these contexts actually mean. There is a corpus of oft-quoted research which examines how toponyms function and behave and some of the actions they perform. Basso's (1988; 1996) work with the Western Apache, Carter's (1987) creative interpretation of spatial history and placenaming, Kari's (2011) study of Ahtna Athabascan geographic knowledge, and Myers's (1986: 57) "life-world of constituted

meanings" of the Pintupi people in Aboriginal Australia all allude to the *how* of toponyms and toponymy and ways in which these invoked *hows* of toponymy can be collected and analyzed: as cultural deictics, as toponymic knowledge connected to land and mores, and as mappable linguistic history.

Research more esoterically connected to toponymy, less explicitly toponymic, and less directed by the *wh*-questions Tent identifies strives, among other things, to unravel how placenames (as language) and world relations operate. Phenomenological and more philosophical takes on toponymy (e.g. Casey, 1996; Dominy, 2001; Gray, 1999; Malpas, 1999; 2007) inculcate an assessment of attributes of landscape vis-à-vis toponymy and how landscape setting and being-in-the-world shape ways in which individuals develop an attachment to place through placenaming processes and toponymy. Using Faeroe Island placenaming and personal inscription of names-as-cultural-landscapes, Gaffin (1996) encourages incorporating more detailed deliberation on the aesthetic and ecological relevance and connectedness of toponyms to place and their importance as markers of insider distinctiveness and cultural belonging. Like Dominy, Gaffin asserts the cruciality of the role toponyms play as spatial descriptors and the importance of considering spatial orientation of names *In Place*, the title of Gaffin's (1996) book, in an ethnographically prompted toponymic analysis.

Although many of these accounts are conceivably attributable to the *how* of toponymy, and while their role in toponymic research may appear peripheral to the brief of Tent, the ANPS, and possibly toponymics in general, there is a possible reconciliation: incorporating the *wh*-questioning with the *how* of toponymy. The coupling of the historically and structurally driven *where*, *when*, *who*, *what*, *why* with the *how* analysis of the nuts and bolts of the workings of these *wh*-toponymies highlights the tension between submitting toponyms as arbitrary signifiers as opposed to their constitution and operation in the world as non-arbitrary elements of a lexicon used by people to describe a landscape.

Whether or not the identified research here falls under Tent's categories *intensive* or *extensive* does not seem as critical as assessing the extent such posings and presentations convey toward characterizing the *how* of toponymy. That many of these more obscure slants, and the names given to such fields of inquiry — ethnophysiography, landscape ontology, phenomenology of place — do not fall nicely into quantitative or qualitative toponymy or even mainstream toponymic research at all does not in any way diminish their importance to the field of toponomastics. In conclusion, Tent offers an invitation:

> 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. (72–73)

It is possibly in a state where toponymists learn consciously to distinguish between the different approaches to their discipline while making suppositions about the ways in which intensive–extensive, micro–macro, and label–free outlooks could be attained that the possibility of harmonizing the *wh*-questioning and the *how* of toponymic workings may be achieved.

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