

## Book Reviews

**Insular Toponymies: Place-naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island.** By JOSHUA NASH. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2013. Pp. xiv + 302. \$149.00. ISBN 978-9027202925.

With his book *Insular Toponymies: Place-naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island*, Joshua Nash opens up a new area for placename studies, pointing to “the need to develop the scope of Australian and international toponymy beyond mere place name listings and to expand related folk etymologies” (3). Although there have been no follow-up studies to Nash’s research, he has stirred the interest created by Charles Nordhoff and James Hall in their *Bounty* trilogy, the account of the actual mutiny in 1789 and its aftermath. As an echo of the dramatic ways in which the lives of the *Bounty* crew changed, Nash explores the changes that took place in language as the descendants of Alex Smith and Ned Young, mutineers who survived the bloodletting, moved from Pitcairn Island to Norfolk Island. A revision of his doctoral thesis at the University of Adelaide (2001), the book consists of 123 pages plus a remarkable section of 162 pages containing lists of placenames from the two Australian island environments that provided the setting for his research. The choice of Norfolk Island in the southwestern Pacific—an archipelago consisting of three islands, Norfolk, Nepean, and Philip—and Dudley Peninsula at the eastern end of Kangaroo Island, off the coast of mainland South Australia, meets the author’s goal to map the toponymic features of insular environments. This is an ambitious task to accomplish in places where the boundary between insider and outsider may not be easy to cross, and in fact, in Nash’s own words, “[a]s a rank outsider it took time to gain trust and establish friendship with knowledgeable people” (38).

Not surprisingly, then, from the very beginning, throughout the eight chapters into which the book is divided, Nash points to the relevance of his fully immersive or “ethnographic” experience on Norfolk Island. Being able to establish connections with the islanders and to share with them both the personal and the work-related spheres of their everyday lives played a crucial role in his research. It is thanks to the long stretches of time spent on the islands (especially in Norfolk) and to the ties established that, as it may be expected when fieldwork is at stake, he was able to observe interactions between participants, interview people, and gain access to very useful primary and secondary sources. From this standpoint, the story and the implications of his meeting with the 84-year-old Norfolk Islander Bev McCoy are emblematic:

I had thought that the information and knowledge Bev had imparted to me was all I would ever get, but a small legend had been created by my meetings with Bev McCoy. Speaking with him was a token that I was serious about what I was doing. It helped me garner greater respect within the community. “If Bev thought you were ok, you’re ok with us,” said some of my new mates. (3)

As Nash points out, the story of Bev McCoy is enlightening in that not only did the Islander crucially contribute to his very knowledge of the Norfolk language but he was also inspiring in terms of the methodological and theoretical approach adopted. A further outcome worth noting is the new self-awareness that the author’s toponymic project

aroused in the people with whom he established ties: “[d]espite the value placed on retaining this cultural knowledge by Norfolk Islanders, they do not consider the knowledge they possess to be amazingly interesting cultural knowledge” (120).

What further impresses the reader is that Nash’s eyes are open to what he sees in front of him, and he sees linguistic phenomena meticulously. An example is provided by the fourth chapter, “Linguistic aspects of Norfolk Island toponymy,” by far the most extensive of the book, in which he provides copious lists of placenames. By analyzing and comparing the grammatical patterns and rules that can be identified in the names listed, Nash offers intriguing insights into some features of the Norfolk language, one of these being the lexicalized prepositions in Norfolk toponyms. Also intriguing are the two small sections in this chapter that make reference to approaches different from those taken in the book as a whole. One tackles road names from the point of view of critical toponymy research; the other is an interlude on roof names that foregrounds linguistic landscape studies. What provokes further thoughts is that, in his investigation, Nash actually raises a number of theoretical issues that he sees as relevant to broaden the scope of placename studies, since “[t]here is a distinct gap in linguistics of a method and theory in toponymy” (4).

What most engages Nash’s interest in this study are the “ecolinguistic method” that he adopts and the concept of “pristine” toponym. According to Alan S. C. Ross, a toponym is pristine “if, and only if, we are cognizant of the actual act of its creation,” but Nash sets out his own theoretical position by arguing that the knowledge of all placenames history is not a necessary condition for claiming pristine status. What he suggests is that names whose histories cannot be recalled are to be considered pristine because they are embedded (unofficially or locally) as opposed to unembedded (officially or brought in from outside). Yet even though the term “pristine” is used throughout the book, as the author himself acknowledges, his main interest lies in the “contrasts—official versus unofficial, embedded versus unembedded and to a lesser extent pristine versus non-pristine” (7). Also, one wonders how his development of the concept of “pristine” is framed within a study that mostly relies on toponyms whose histories are known: “[t]he study of Norfolk Island and Dudley Peninsula toponymy contributes to pristine placename because people remember a large amount of placename history” (7). The contribution to toponymic studies would probably have been more remarkable if contrasted with cases of non-pristine toponymy, whether insular or not.

More demanding for the reader is the emphasis laid on what is dubbed an “ecolinguistic approach” or “ecolinguistic method.” After explaining in a footnote that the words “ecology” and “ecological” are used to “refer specifically to the relationship between linguistic and natural environments” (4), what Nash then foregrounds is the strict bond that this approach allows him to establish between “language documentation and fieldwork” (37). Especially notable is the fact that an “ecolinguistic perspective poses language as an embedded cultural and ecological artifact related intricately to the place where the language is spoken” (37) or one of the further claims advanced in the closing chapter according to which an “ecolinguistic approach to toponymy considers both linguistic structure and cultural content” (117). Ultimately, be it ecolinguistic or not, the approach seems to a large extent to revolve around the author’s immersive and fruitful experience mentioned above:

[M]y ecolinguistic fieldwork methodology (detailed in the following pages) holds that sustained contact, conducting research affably, good interpersonal dealings, the establishment of friendships, and even the exchanging of gifts are what constitute a good fieldwork process. [...] Moreover, it claims that both fieldwork and fieldworker are interacting with and within the community and are not separated from the linguistic ecology. (38-39)

The impression one gets is that the meanings associated with “ecolinguistic” point to issues that range from fieldwork techniques to linguistic representations of the environment, grammatical structures and cultural features at large. In other words, this adjective draws a combination of trajectories that eventually seem to conflate into the view of language as a social phenomenon laid down by Firth (1957) and later developed by Hallyday and Sinclair.

Equally notable from a methodological standpoint is the novelty of Nash’s contribution to the field of toponymy since a “comparative study of the toponymy of two island locations has never been carried out in Australia or elsewhere in the world” (5). It is however worth adding that, in this respect, the research would probably have benefited from a more detailed account of the toponymy of Dudley Peninsula, which is instead mainly relegated to two quite slim chapters.

The South Pacific has long been a vast and inviting area for those interested in the dynamics of how language behaves with population shifts from island to island, and it is clear that Nash is fascinated by the toponymic and linguistic heritage that he has been able to recover and record. No doubt, Nash’s detailed excursion into the placenames of these two Australian insular environments is of great relevance for linguists interested in endangered languages. However, its major and enduring value is perhaps to be found in the meticulous fieldwork that has made this unique achievement possible, namely the record of hundreds of toponyms (1045 on Norfolk Island and 232 on Dudley Peninsula) that enshrine linguistic and cultural jewels for present and future generations of scholars interested in these fields of research. In addition, the very personal style, the human experiences reported, and the many beautiful photos taken by the author zoom into the people and the landscapes of these two insular settings and make this book enjoyable for a broader, non-scholarly audience as well.

## Bibliography

Firth, John R. 1957. *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*. London: Oxford University Press.

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**Mapping Shakespeare’s World.** By PETER WHITFIELD. Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford Press. 2015. Pp. 204. \$45.00. ISBN 978-1-85124-257-2.

A slenderly written, lavishly illustrated volume, *Mapping Shakespeare’s World* states its goals directly: “This book sets out to survey the settings of the Shakespeare plays, to ask how familiar they were, or what they might have meant to Shakespeare himself and his contemporaries. It also maps Shakespeare’s visual world in a more general sense, looking at historical events, historical figures and cultural stereotypes associated with those places” (4). Evidently a project commissioned by the Bodleian Library, it is a showcase for more than 102 images—maps, engravings, and paintings, handsomely reproduced in full color. These works are credited mainly to the Bodleian, the British Museum, or the British Library Board. Some are familiar, such as the 1590 *Degli Habiti Antichi e Moderni* by Cesare Vecellio, whose portrait of a Moor often is reproduced in discussions of *Othello*. Others were new to me, such as a seventeenth-century drawing of Angers, employed by author Peter Whitfield in conjunction with his remarks on the setting of Shakespeare’s *The Life and Death of King John*.

That I am unable to report anything more about the latter drawing—not the name of its creator nor its place in French art nor its provenance nor the accuracy of its depiction