Names | A Journal of Onomastics

2023 Award for Best Article in NAMES: A Journal of Onomastics

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At the end of each year, the Editorial Board of *NAMES* systematically reviews all of the articles that were published in the journal to select its winners for the Best Article of the Year Award. As per *NAMES* tradition, all of the articles that appeared in each volume are carefully and independently assessed using the following set of criteria: (1) scientific innovation; (2) academic writing style; (3) research methodology; and (4) overall potential to make a significant and lasting contribution to the field of onomastics research. As the members of the Board noted, given the quality and diversity of this year's publications, it was extremely difficult to make a final decision. Nevertheless, when all of the votes were tallied, three clear winners emerged.

Coming in third place was "A Case Study of De-Russification of Ukrainian Hodonyms: Rigged Trial or Justice Restored?" which was co-authored by Oleksiy Gnatiuk and Anatoliy Melnychuk of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in Ukraine (volume 71, no. 4: 40–55). This article was a part of the *NAMES* Special Issue on Ukrainian Names and Naming (volume 71). Among the many accolades it received,

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this unique piece of scholarship was praised for presenting "a thorough, well-conducted analysis of a timely and highly interesting topic: 'toponymic cleansing' in Ukraine after the Russian military invasion". Another Board member echoed this sentiment who also commended the researchers for conducting "a deeply thought-provoking piece of contemporary research" which deserves special recognition for being carried out under the most extraordinary of circumstances. This is an accolade which can be extended to the other contributors to the Special Issue. Individually and collectively, their continuing research vividly and courageously documents not only the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing Ukraine, but also the courage and perseverance of its people.

The article which came in second place is entitled "Using the ANPS Typology to Unearth the Relationship Between Japanese Sign Language (JSL) Endonymic Toponym Distribution and Regional Identity". This outstanding piece of research was authored by Dr. Johnny George, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Economics at Meiji University, in Tokyo, Japan (volume 71, no. 3: 1–19). This article was roundly praised as being an exceptionally innovative piece of onomastic research which promises to make a lasting and significant scientific contribution to the study of names in sign language.[1] However, as one Board member explained, it was not the subject matter alone which made this a stand-out piece of research.

It is highly original in investigating and identifying multiple onomastic layers in the comparison between toponyms in Japanese and their analogs in JSL, thus in the cross-referencing between sources of toponyms (locational, eponymous, etc.) and their expression in the two languages. In addition to the clear, direct style of composition and organization, the use of charts and visuals engages the reader and helps advance the argument. Because of its combination of languages and areas of study, as well as the way it addresses regional and national adaptations, it has the potential to advance the field of onomastics on several fronts.

The above assessment not only provides an excellent summary of the many reasons why this publication was selected. It also makes a very important general point about the Board selection process. In the end, winners of Best Article of the Year award are found to excel in **all** of the above-mentioned criteria. Without doubt, this year's first place winner surpassed that exceedingly high academic threshold.

The 2023 winner of the *NAMES* Best Article of the Year award goes to Dr. Russel Fielding, of the HTC Honours College and Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina, USA. The title of his prize-winning paper is "'A Change of Name During Sickness': Surveying the Widespread Practice of Renaming in Response to Physical Illness" (volume 71, no. 2: 11–28). As one Board member wrote: "This is an excellent and innovative article on a topic which has not been systematically studied before. The analysis is thorough and precise, and text is very pleasant to read. The article opens new perspectives on the power of names". Some of the other words of praise this contribution received are presented below:

This article is exceptional as it concerns a worldwide survey on the original onomastic topic of renaming after illness in as many as 694 cultures. This in itself is a remarkable achievement, but in addition the research is also presented in an easy accessible, well organized style of writing. Even though the study has limitations in that English search terms were used, it may well stimulate others to extend this type of research, which in my view is one of the main properties of a *NAMES* best paper winner.

This is a very wide-ranging scoping study examining global sources dating from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries, which reveal a widespread set of beliefs around renaming the sick, particularly children, as an aid to healthy recovery. It identifies a commonality of practice across continents that has not been hitherto established, while opening the door to further anthropological and onomastic investigation of social customs that point towards names holding special psychological significance. It therefore makes an important and exciting contribution to socio-onomastics, facilitating comparative study of other forms of name changing that accompany changes in personal (self-)perception.

A looking into 'the anthropology of illness' through onomastic investigation, this article is also a call to action, as it lays out future research needs. The research is informative about a practice that seems to be common across the planet and for more than two centuries, and yet is remarkable enough to be noticed and recorded by early anthropological studies. There are many reasons for renaming; to save a person from a physical illness is one that has onomastic and anthropological importance.

A geographer by profession, Dr. Fielding's research exemplifies the power of onomastic data to provide important new insights into a wide variety of academic disciplines.

This strong interdisciplinary focus is a feature shared by all of this year's winners. This commonality is not without historical importance. As Professor Thomas Murray wrote in the essay "Onomastics and the Academy: Past, Present, and Future" on the golden anniversary of *NAMES*:

> Ours is a complex discipline reaching far beyond the study of place names and personal names to provide insights into such diverse facets of the human condition as language, folklore, history, sociology, psychology, and literature. [...] we should more often seize the interdisciplinary nature of onomastics and turn it to our advantage by demonstrating how critical the study of names is [...] "
> (2001: 218–219).

Now, over 20 volumes later, it is gratifying to see that *NAMES* is continuing to heed Murray's sage advice and is providing a powerful platform for exceptional onomastic investigations which promise to make significant contributions to an ever-increasing variety of academic fields by top researchers from around the world. True to the American Name Society's commitment to encourage the global appreciation of names and naming, this year's selection of winners comes from several different nations, histories, cultures, and languages; and powerfully reflects the wonderful diversity of the world's onomastic community.

In closing, on behalf of the Editorial Board of *NAMES* as well as its international list of readers, the authors of this year's winning papers are heartily congratulated for their outstanding scholarship. In addition, a very special thanks is given to the members of the *NAMES* Editorial Board for their continuing professional and personal dedication.

Notes

[1] George's article follows in the footsteps of another exceptional piece of scholarship exploring onomastics and sign language. In 2018, a contribution by a team of researchers from Gallaudet University published a seminal study on names in American Sign Language (Petitta, et al.). This work also won Best Article of the Year.

References

Murray, Thomas. 2001. "Onomastics and the Academy: Past, Present, and Future*". NAMES* 49, no. 4: 215–221.

Petitta, Giulia et al. 2018. "'My Name in A-on-the cheek': Managing Names and Name Signs in American Sign Language-English Team Interpretation*". NAMES* 66, no. 4: 205–218.