



2024 Award for Best Article in *NAMES*: A Journal of Onomastics

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At the start of each calendar year, the members of the *NAMES* Editorial Board review the articles that appeared in the previous volume to determine the winners of the Best Article of the Year. After careful reading of each article, the publications are judged across the following three criteria: (1) creativity and originality; (2) potential scholarly contribution to onomastics; and (3) writing style and organization. Per secret ballot, the reviewers independently select the three publications which they have assigned the highest ratings for each of these criteria. The ballots are collected and tallied by the *NAMES* Editor-in-Chief. In years past, the outcome of the election has been so close that it was necessary to have several rounds of voting to finally determine the top three papers. This year, however, the tallies yielded three clear winners. Although the onomastic subject area for each of the top papers was radically different, all three had one common feature which segregated them from the rest of the year's submissions. Each demonstrated a remarkably innovative methodological approach which the Board members determined had the potential of making a significant and lasting contribution to future onomastic research.

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Moving in reverse order, third place in the competition was the article entitled “Gender and the Urban Linguistic Landscape: Polish Street Naming Practices” (volume 72, no. 2: 1-19). This fascinating examination of honyms was co-authored by two members of the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies at Poland’s famed University of Warsaw: Assistant Professor Krzysztof Górny and Senior Assistant Ada Górna. Using a series of descriptive statistics, their investigation reveals glaring and widespread gender inequities in the distribution of eponymous street names throughout Poland’s three largest cities: Warsaw, Kraków, and Łódź. Their methodological research elegantly combines geography, onomastics, statistics, and gender studies to provide concrete empirical evidence of a clear preference for commemorating the accomplishments of men. In doing so, the study offers an innovative interdisciplinary investigatory approach which can be easily applied by other onomasticians to test for the presence of underlying prejudices in the public naming practices used in other cultural, linguistic, and temporal contexts—thereby enriching our collective understanding of the ways in which power imbalances are reflected in and reified by naming policies and planning. As one of the Board Members explained:

This is an analytically sound article in the interests of social justice and a revisionist historical understanding—given the public discourse over this naming problem in Poland, it’s research that may make a difference, or may participate in making a difference, and may set a standard for such research and onomastic problem-solving in other places where names discriminate, and history is distorted, as a result.

Thus, this study provides valuable insights for not only scientists but also social activists who can use the information provided to help persuade prospective policy-makers and decision-makers to address long-standing and pervasive societal inequities.

The paper that was awarded second place also distinguished itself with a novel approach to research but in a completely different branch—namely, literary onomastics. The title of this winning submission was “A Corpus Linguistic Approach for Onomastics in Drama: Proper Names and Naming in Edward Childs Carpenter’s *The Cinderella Man*” (volume 72, no. 3: 14–27). Written by Maya Sfeir, a lecturer in the Department of English at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, this paper demonstrates how, for example, the statistical analyses of frequencies, collocations, keywords, and concordances can be used to gain an accurate picture of onomastic phenomena occurring in literary, and identify potentially important pattern variations which may have otherwise been overlooked. As one Editorial Board Member explained:

Part of what makes this submission so outstanding is that the quantitative approach allows for a transparent and reliable analysis of Carpenter’s work, without all of the subjectivity that can undermine purely qualitative approaches. The application of corpus linguistic techniques made it easier to appreciate the onomastic patterns of the drama.

What’s more, the statistical analyses provide a solid foundation upon which subsequent intra and inter-author comparisons with other works of literature.

Interestingly, the article which was selected for first place combined all of the outstanding features of the other two winners (i.e., innovative interdisciplinary mixed method approach to investigative onomastic landscape punctuated with highly informative visualizations of patterns). However, in this case, the landscape is not physical space but a virtual/intellectual one; and visualizations are not of one work written by a single author but of 28, 357 references that appeared in nearly 800 scientific journals over the past five decades. The title of this investigation is “Unveiling the Landscape of Onomastics from 1972 to 2022: A Bibliometric Analysis” and was co-authored by three colleagues: Siyue Li of Zhejiang University, Chunyu Kit of City University of Hong Kong, and Le Cheng of Guanghua Law School of Zhejiang University in China (volume 72, no. 3: 40–64). With an impressive array of dynamically colored diagrams, this mammoth undertaking provides readers with a condensed “panoramic view of contribution networks and the evolutionary trajectory” of international onomastic research. The resulting overview was eye-opening as it was impressive to the Editorial Board. Below are just a few of the laudations this work received.

In terms of creativity and originality, the author takes what might have been simply a chronological or numerical summary and turns it into a multi-layered analysis with a rich variety of graphs and charts that visualize the topical history of onomastic scholarship. With the half-century of material compiled, worldwide in scope, the results offer great potential to the continued study of onomastics against this historical backdrop. Additionally, the work is eminently well organized, presented, and articulately presented.

For me this was the standout article of the year because of its contribution to the historiography and evolution of Onomastics as a discipline. As the article points out, not enough has yet been done to provide a narrative of the history of name studies, and it makes an important intervention by reviewing publications over the past 50 years from a number of perspectives. Understanding our own discipline and its phases of theoretical development and subject focus helps us to better articulate its impact and value, as a community, and it was particularly interesting to be reminded how rich and diverse the field is [. . .]

I am a big fan of rendering data as readable as possible. This article is a master class in the visualization of data. [. . .] This research supplies the overview that can set many future projects along more deliberate, informed paths.

The Winners of the Awards have been notified and each will be sent a congratulatory plaque in commemoration of their scientific achievement. In addition, the authors will be invited to give a presentation on their research during a special session of the annual conference of the American Name Society. Congratulations goes out to all of the winners. And, as always, a very heartfelt thank you goes to each and every member of the *NAMES* team. From reviewing submissions, copyediting, typesetting, issue collation, and publication release, the success of *NAMES* is directly due to the uncommon dedication of the *NAMES* team members, who each volunteer their time and expertise, without any financial remuneration. It is that extraordinary generosity that explains why *NAMES* has not only been able to survive but thrive, for over seventy years of continuous, uninterrupted publication. Here is to yet another successful year of publication. May next year's deliberations for Best Article of the Year be even more challenging than ever before!