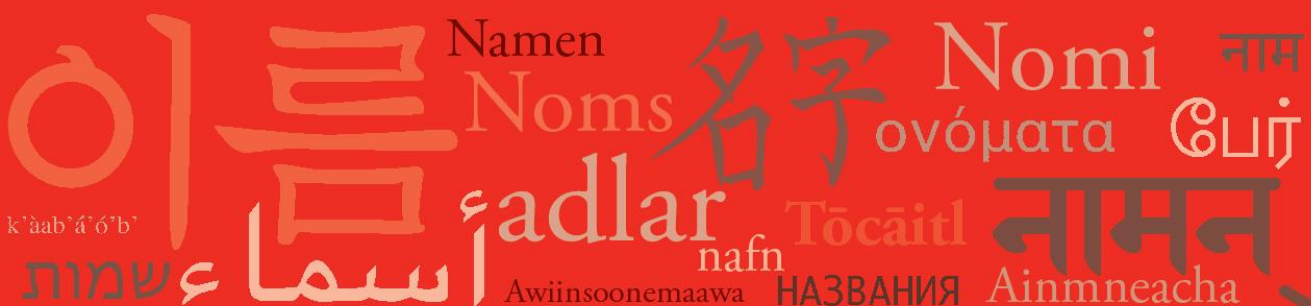


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More than a Meds Hub: Placemaking in the Names of Finnish Pharmacies

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Abstract

This study examines aspects of placemaking in the names of Finnish pharmacies through the frameworks of onomastics and cognitive linguistics. Pharmacies are places with multifaceted identities, roles and tasks within healthcare and medicines management, and pharmacy names are company names carrying meanings that can contribute to people's sense of place. The data set contains 639 pharmacy names. The analysis is based on the functional-semantic method of company names. In Finnish pharmacy names, the most common identifying name part is a place name, usually of a region smaller than a municipality, referring to the physical location of the pharmacy. More than 90% of the names contain at least one index of localness. Some pharmacy names contain lexical items that may evoke images of high-quality service, happiness or health, literally or through metaphors; but only a few names reflect human-centeredness or emotional closeness to people in an explicit manner. The business concept 'pharmacy' (*apteekki* in Finnish, *apotek(et)* in Swedish) appears in every name. However, in the identifying name part, references to medicines or healthcare are rare. Overall, the names of Finnish pharmacies convey the image of a physically accessible, nearby "neighborhood pharmacy".

Keywords: onomastics, brand names, commercial names, cognitive linguistics, Finland, placemaking

1. General Introduction

This study examines aspects of placemaking in the names of Finnish pharmacies. Pharmacy names are company names that identify and distinguish a business (Sjöblom 2016), as mandated by the Finnish *Trade Names Act (128/1979)*. Additionally, similarly to other commercial names, company names have persuasive functions aimed at influencing consumer behavior and increasing brand value (Gustafsson 2021; Keller & Swaminathan 2020; Sjöblom 2016; Ainiala et al. 2012). Drawing on cognitive linguistics (Evans 2019) and previous research on company names (Sjöblom 2016, 2006), this study is based on the premise that the semantic content of a pharmacy name is constructed through use and reflects the functions of the name within specific social contexts.

1.1. Pharmacy Names

Previous onomastic studies have described pharmacy or drugstore names in Indonesia (Ardhan 2023), Poland (Czapla & Kutyla 2012) and Ukraine (Babukh & Redkva 2020), as well as in Sweden and the United Kingdom (Donskova et al. 2023). These studies demonstrate that the naming patterns of pharmacies vary between countries and cultures. For example, pharmacy names in Sweden follow historical naming patterns (Ekström 1978) and often include names of animals (Donskova et al. 2023), while pharmacy names in the UK and Poland mainly reflect the pharmacy's (historical) location or ownership (Donskova et al. 2023; Czapla & Kutyla 2012). Many drugstore names in Surabaya (Indonesia) include good wishes or prayers (Ardhan 2023).

Historical catalogues of Finnish pharmacy names exist (e.g., Jalander & Skoglund 1938), but no onomastic studies have been conducted on the topic. In the 1700s, the themes in the names of Finnish pharmacies were varied and the names were often in Swedish, the administrative language of Finland at the time (e.g., *Kongliga vapnet* 'the royal coat of arms', *Apoteket Gripen* 'The Griffin' and *Apoteket Rosen* 'the rose') (Peldán 1967). However, in the 19th century, pharmacists began to name (new) pharmacies primarily after their location (Peldán 1967).

In Finland, operating a pharmacy that supplies medicines to private customers (i.e., a community pharmacy) (World Health Organization 2019) requires a personal license, and the ownership, number, and location of pharmacies are regulated by the government. The aim, according to the Finnish *Medicines Act (395/1987)*, is to ensure access to high-quality pharmacy services for the whole population based on the needs of a specific area. In addition to community pharmacies, medicines are supplied to (in)patients by hospital pharmacies and dispensaries as well as the Military Pharmacy.

The official name of a pharmacy comprises the municipality name in the genitive case, the pharmacy's ordinal number in that municipality (if applicable) and the word *apteekki* 'pharmacy' (e.g., *Loviisan 2. apteekki*). The official pharmacy name has primarily informative and practical functions (Sjöblom 2006), reflecting the fact that pharmacies are established in specific locations. However, pharmacies can operate

under an alternative, self-chosen company name that carries additional meanings and functions (Sjöblom 2006) and aligns with the pharmacy's brand management strategies (Gustafsson 2021; Keller & Swaminathan 2020). In bilingual regions, pharmacies often display their names in both Finnish and Swedish, the two official languages of Finland¹.

1.2. Placemaking and Sense of Place

The concept of placemaking involves actions that influence the characteristics of places with the aim of enhancing social interaction and feelings of belonging and well-being (Finlay & Rowles 2021; Project for Public Spaces 2016). In human geography and related fields, the concept of sense of place refers to cognitive and affective factors that contribute to personal place meanings and attachment to places (Sebastien 2020). Sense of place is constructed through subjective experiences of the place (Hay 1988), but also by other factors, including representations conveyed by language (Sandst 2024; Stokowski 2002). Giving names to places is an example of an act of placemaking in which naming can contribute to the sense of place through language (Ainiala & Olsson 2021; Ainiala 2020).

Since the 1990s, care as a spatio-temporal activity (i.e., involving space and time) has received increased attention in healthcare research, and geographical and sociological knowledge on the concepts of space and place has been applied to health and care (Gesler 1992; Finlay & Rowles 2021). According to Thompson and Bidwell (2015), quoting Crang (2005, "Multiple Spaces"), healthcare occurs in places, which are "created through actions". This implies that healthcare settings are not just physical spaces or static backgrounds for care (Roxberg et al. 2020); instead, they are dynamic places in which different types of (inter)actions occur and identities are negotiated (Roxberg et al. 2020; Thompson & Bidwell 2015; Gustafson 2001).

Thompson and Bidwell (2015) note that the identity of a pharmacy is not straightforward because pharmacy services include both commercial activities and healthcare. Although pharmacies are commercial companies, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2023) also considers them easily accessible local healthcare services. The services of a modern Finnish pharmacy include not only the supply of medicines, but also the provision of health advice and pharmaceutical care in collaboration with other healthcare professionals (Airaksinen et al. 2021).

Based on earlier research on names and placemaking (Ainiala & Olsson 2021; Ainiala 2020; Baker 2001), I assume that pharmacy names too can influence people's sense of place. They can, for example, contain references to familiar geographical locations and other indexes of localness (Ainiala 2020). Furthermore, since pharmacists are considered local healthcare providers, pharmacy names can contain linguistic expressions that convey concrete or abstract accessibility and closeness to customers and patients (Kuopila & Nieminen 2014; Zitting & Ilmarinen 2010).

1.3. Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine aspects of placemaking in the names of Finnish pharmacies. Studying pharmacy names can offer insights into how language is used to construct places within a service environment that operates at the intersection of healthcare and commercialism. By systematically analyzing pharmacy names, I intend to answer the following research questions:

- How are the geographical and physical locations of Finnish pharmacies reflected in their names?
- What other types of indexes of localness appear in pharmacy names?
- How do pharmacy names convey the pharmacy's accessibility and closeness?

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Source

I obtained information on pharmacy names from the Pharmacy Register of the Finnish Medicines Agency (Fimea). The register is openly available on the National Code Server (<https://koodistopalvelu.kanta.fi/codeserver/>) maintained by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The register includes the names and contact details (street address, postal district and home municipality) of all Finnish pharmacies (N=973 on September 3, 2023). I excluded the names of hospital pharmacies and dispensaries because they do not generally supply medicines to private customers, as well as the names of

subsidiary pharmacies operating under the license of a main pharmacy. Pharmacies without an active license were also excluded.

I validated the actuality of the remaining 639 names of (main community) pharmacies with the help of the pharmacies' own websites. This allowed me to assess which name each pharmacy uses in its daily operations. I based my assessment primarily on the Finnish-language version of the pharmacy name in the pharmacy logo. In the absence of a logo with a pharmacy name, I reviewed the text elsewhere on the website or on the pharmacy's Facebook page.

All pharmacies have a Finnish name, except for the three pharmacies in Åland (a unilingual Swedish-speaking region of Finland), which use Swedish names exclusively. These three Swedish names, as well as Finnish pharmacy names with foreign-language name elements (e.g., *Apteekki Primavera*), were included in the analysis. However, any parallel names in other languages were excluded, since they correspond to the Finnish name and are therefore deemed unlikely to yield additional insights to answer the research questions². The final data set contains the names (supplementary table 1) and addresses of the main pharmacies listed by Fimea on September 3, 2023, taking into account any (name) changes that occurred up to March 3, 2024.

2.2. Methods and Definitions

I used the principles and concepts of the functional-semantic analysis method for company names developed by Sjöblom (2006). The first step is to divide the names into syntactic name parts, each of which has been described as having its own meanings and functions. Finnish company names can consist of four parts: a corporate identifier, a part signifying the business concept, an identifying part, and a supplementary part (Sjöblom 2014, 2006). To facilitate a systematic exploration of meanings and functions, the name parts were further divided into three main categories: proper names, expressions carrying a lexical meaning, and quasi words (Sjöblom 2006). Quasi words (Sjöblom 2014) are "made-up words" (i.e., linguistic items that resemble real words but lack an established dictionary meaning).

I conducted a systematic web search for each name to collect further information on the location of the pharmacy, indexes of localness, and any other available information regarding the pharmacy's name. The settlement names appearing in pharmacy names were classified into names of municipalities or names of districts within municipalities based on the Finnish *Settlement Name Index* (2016). In Finland, a municipality is an autonomous local authority with taxing rights and elected governance (Sanastokeskus n.d.). Information on nearby landmarks was obtained from Google Maps (<https://www.google.com/maps>) and a list of shopping centers from the Council of Finnish Shopping Centers (2023).

This study is descriptive in nature and only descriptive statistics are reported. Inferential statistics were not applied because the analysis covers the full data set of names of main community pharmacies rather than a sample. The interpretation of the analysis draws upon my academic training in linguistics and native proficiency in the Finnish language and culture. When necessary, I used dictionaries published by the Institute for the Languages of Finland: the Dictionary of Finnish Dialects, the Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish, and the Etymological Dictionary of the Finnish Language, all available at <https://kotus.fi/sanakirjat>. Additional online sources to support the discussion in this paper are listed in supplementary table 2.

In the following sections, I first describe how the geographical and physical location of a pharmacy is reflected in its name. I then discuss aspects of localness in pharmacy names based on the classification proposed by Ainiala (2020): the name can contain (1) a local place or personal name, (2) local dialect or slang, or (3) other regional reference. Finally, I evaluate how the names of Finnish pharmacies convey accessibility and closeness (Kuopila & Nieminen 2014; Zitting & Ilmarinen 2010). Accessibility refers to how easy it is to reach and use the services. It includes physical or virtual proximity, but also any other aspect that may lower the concrete threshold to use the services. Closeness, on the other hand, implies a low metaphorical threshold, human-centeredness, and emotional closeness to people.

3. Results

All Finnish pharmacy names include a part signifying the business concept 'pharmacy': *apteekki* in Finnish, *apotek(et)* in Swedish. A corporate identifier, on the other hand, does not appear in any of the names. It is not needed because, in Finland, community pharmacies can only operate as a sole proprietorship, except for the two pharmacies owned by universities. In the following, I report the results of the other two parts, where variation occurs: the identifying name part and the supplementary name part. The types of identifying name parts (Sjöblom 2014) appearing in Finnish pharmacy names are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Types of Identifying Name Parts in Finnish Pharmacy Names by Frequency and Percentage

Type of identifying name part (N=639)	Frequency	% of all names
Proper noun	490	76.68
Toponym	481	75.27
Name of a municipality (autonomous local authority, e.g., city or town)	184	28.79
Name of a district or neighborhood within a municipality	217	33.96
Name of a shopping center or cultural/conference facility	47	7.36
Name of a street, square, or park	21	3.29
Hyronym	4	0.63
Other toponym	8	1.25
Anthroponym	3	0.47
Other name	6	0.94
Expression carrying a lexical meaning	145	22.69
Appellative	65	10.17
Adjective or adjectival modifier	76	11.89
Numeral	3	0.47
Interjection	1	0.16
Quasi word (“made-up word”)	4	0.63

The most common identifying name part is a proper noun, appearing in 490 pharmacy names (76.68%). The proper noun is most commonly a toponym (N=481, 75.27% of all names) in the genitive case (N=437, 90.85% of toponyms). The identifying name part of 145 names (22.69%) consists of an expression carrying a lexical meaning. Only three numerals and one interjection appear in pharmacy names. All appellatives in pharmacy names, organized by theme, are shown in supplementary table 3.

The most common adjectives or adjectival modifiers in pharmacy names are *vanha* ‘old’, *uusi* ‘new’, ordinal numbers (e.g., *ensimmäinen* ‘first’), and *ykkös-* ‘first, best’, which refer to the order of establishment of the pharmacy in its home municipality and together account for 10.95% (N=70) of identifying name parts. Only four so-called quasi words (Sjöblom 2014) appear in pharmacy names, although these are otherwise quite common in Finnish company names (Sjöblom 2006).

3.1. References to Location

In my data comprising Finnish pharmacy names in 2023, the most common identifying name part is a name of a district or neighborhood within a municipality (N=217, 33.96% of all names) (e.g., *Urpolan Apteekki* in Mikkeli). Municipality names appear as an identifying name part in 184 names (28.79%) (e.g., *Apteekki Sastamala, Mäntyharjun Apteekki*). Additionally, 115 pharmacy names (18.00%) contain at least one supplementary name part, which is also nearly always (N=110/120, 91.67%) a settlement name (e.g., *Järvenpään Sonaatti Apteekki*, where *Järvenpää* refers to a municipality).

In addition to names of municipalities and their districts, pharmacy names contain other toponyms, including street names (*Kontulankaaren apteekki*) as well as names of (historical) market squares (*Härkätorin Apteekki*), shopping centers (*Apteekki Karisma*), and other recognizable locations (*Steissin Apteekki*, where *Steissi* is a local informal name for the Helsinki Railway Station (Ainiala 2010)). A shopping center name is primarily a commercial name but also serves as a toponym signifying the location of the pharmacy. The name of a shopping center or cultural or congress facility appears in 47 pharmacy names (7.36%), while a street, square or park name is the identifying name part of 21 pharmacy names (3.29%).

Name parts signifying location are not necessarily proper nouns. Direct location-based meanings can also be found in pharmacy names that contain an appellative, such as *keskusta* ‘city center, downtown’, *tori* ‘market(place)’ or *asema* ‘station’. On the other hand, a toponym in a pharmacy name does not always refer to the pharmacy’s location. For example, the identifying name part of *Carelia-Apteekki* is Latin for Karelia, a region divided between Finland and Russia. However, the pharmacy is in Helsinki, where it was founded and named by a Karelian pharmacist in 1929.

Locally, a pharmacy name such as *Ykkösapteekki* could be sufficiently unique, although there are 18 *Ykkösapteekki*s in Finland. However, identifying and branding pharmacies nationwide is increasingly important as a growing share of commercial activity and communication shifts to digital environments (Airaksinen et al. 2021). Indeed, all but one of these 18 pharmacy names include a supplementary part specifying the location of the pharmacy.

Eight pharmacy names (1.25%) refer to geographical areas that do not appear in the Finnish *Settlement Name Index* (2016). For example, the identifying name part of **Keski-Kotkan** *apteekki* refers to ‘central Kotka’, an area in the city of Kotka, where the pharmacy is located. Similarly, *itä* ‘east’ in **Itä-Apteekki Pirkkala** refers to the eastern region of the municipality of Pirkkala, but not to a precisely defined area.

On the other hand, toponyms in two pharmacy names refer to an area larger than a municipality: **Savon Apteekki** is in the Province of Savo (in the city of Savonlinna) and **Vaara-Karjalan Apteekki** (Joensuu) in the scenic region of Vaara-Karjala, which is a so-called *maisemamaakunta* ‘landscape province’. Although these two names carry meanings related to the location of the pharmacy, they do not specify the exact location, even at the level of a municipality; rather, they index localness, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2. Indexes of Localness

According to Ainiala (2020), local toponyms are only one means of indexing localness: localness can also be indexed in company names by a local personal name (e.g., company owner’s name), local dialect or slang, or some other regional reference. The personal names that appear in Finnish pharmacy names are names of historical figures, not of business owners. I therefore discuss them in the category of other regional references.

In total, at least 609 pharmacy names (95.31%) contain at least one index of localness, either in the identifying name part or in the supplementary part. In the following subsections, I describe different aspects of localness (Ainiala 2020) to the extent that I have been able to deduce based on a systematic online search. The aim is to provide a descriptive yet comprehensive overview of the different types of indexes of localness (Eckert 2019) identified in the study, with illustrative examples for each (see supplementary table 2 for online references).

3.2.1. Local Place Name

In addition to toponyms referring to the location or service area of the pharmacy, discussed in section 3.1, pharmacy names include proper nouns that can give the name a local tone (Ainiala 2020; Sjöblom 2006), such as names of local landforms or bodies of water. Names carrying a local hydronym include *Apteekki Saimaa*, *Tammerkosken Apteekki*, *Lieksan Pielis apteekki*, and *Ounas apteekki*. Saimaa is the biggest lake in Finland, and Tammerkoski a channel of rapids in the city of Tampere. *Pielis* may refer to Pielisjoki (river) or Pielisjärvi (lake), and *Ounas* to Ounasjoki (river) or Ounasjärvi (lake). The name parts *Ounas* and *Pielis* could also stem from street names which reflect local natural landscapes, as the pharmacies’ respective street addresses are *Ounasvaarantie* and *Pielisentie*.

Other names that index localness by including a reference to local topography are *Apteekki Lohjanharju* (Lohja), *Lakeus Apteekki* (Lapua), and *Salpa apteekki* (Kouvola). *Lohjanharju* is a ridge near the city of Lohja. The appellative *lakeus* refers to the vast plains of Finnish Ostrobothnia where Lapua is located, and *Salpa* to Salpausselkä Ridge that runs through the city of Kouvola.

A name part may look like an appellative but express localness (and location) metonymically through a place name: the street address of *Kajaanin 2. Veturi apteekki* ‘locomotive’ is Veturitie Street, and *Tapuli Apteekki* ‘bell tower’ is in the district of Tapulikaupunki in Helsinki. *Tammedica Apteekki* contains a quasi word which shares its initial syllable *Tam-* with *Tampere*, the name of the city where the pharmacy is located.

3.2.2. Local Dialect or Slang

Use of local dialect or slang in pharmacy names is rare: it only appears in four names (0.63%). The only name containing a local slang word is **Steissin Apteekki**. The pharmacy is located at the main railway station in Helsinki, which is called *Steissi* in the local slang (Ainiala 2010). The name thus indexes localness not only through a local slang expression but also by containing an informal place name. The identifying name part of **Moroapteekki** *Tesoma, moro*, is a dialectal interjection used as a greeting in the Tampere region, and the owner of **Mäntsälän Kotoapteekki** has explained that the name is based on the local dialectal word *koto* 'home, abode'. The name **Nousten apteekki** (Nousiainen) includes the dialectal variant of the standard genitive of the place name (*Nousiaisten*).

In addition, the metaphorical or idiomatic use 'master in some field' of the identifying name part of **Haka Apteekki** is especially common in Western Finland, including the city of Tampere, where the pharmacy is located. Informal language also appears in pharmacy names that carry names of shopping centers. Examples are the names of two Helsinki pharmacies, **Hertsin apteekki** in Herttoniemi (*Hertsikka*) and **Lauttiksen Apteekki** in Lauttasaari (*Lauttis*). In such names, localness is reflected in the use of a local place name (city district and shopping center) and local informal language.

3.2.3. Other Regional Reference

In addition to place names and local dialectal or slang expressions, localness is conveyed in pharmacy names in various other ways. Geographical associations (Pike 2015) can be either easily identifiable or at least guessable to any language user familiar with the Finnish culture, or they can be implicit, going unnoticed without additional information or knowledge of the region.

Three of the names in my data contain the name of a locally significant historical person: **Pyhän Henrikin Apteekki** in Turku, **Lieksan Pietari-apteekki** in Lieksa, and **Seinäjoen Alvar apteekki** in Seinäjoki. According to legend, Pyhä Henrik (St. Henrik) was the first bishop of Finland, who lived in Turku in the 1100s. In 1653, Pietari Brahe (Per Brahe the Younger) founded the town of Brahea, which once stood on the site of the town of Lieksa. In Seinäjoki, there are several buildings designed by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto

(1898–1976), including the architectural whole named the *Aalto Centre*.

The name of **Seitsemän Veljeksen apteekki** carries the name of the landmark literary work *Seitsemän veljestä* 'The Seven Brothers' by the Finnish author Aleksis Kivi (1834–1872). The author was born and lived in Nurmijärvi, where the pharmacy is located. The main characters of the book also appear on the Nurmijärvi coat of arms. The home municipalities of **Linnanportin apteekki** 'castle gate' (Savonlinna) and **Linnan Apteekki** 'castle' (Turku) each have a medieval castle still standing. **KuninkaanApteekki** 'king' (Vaasa) and **Kruunu-Apteekki** 'crown' (Loviisa) are in cities with historical connections to the Swedish royal house: the city of Vaasa is named after the ruling dynasty of Vasa and Loviisa after the Swedish queen Lovisa Ulrika. **Oulun III Hansa Apteekki** is in the city of Oulu, which was an important port and trading area as far back as the 15th century.

Names carrying a reference to the heraldic animal of the region or county where the pharmacy is located include **Karhu Apteekki** 'bear' (Pori), **Laihia Orava apteekki** 'squirrel', and **Ibes-apteekki** 'lynx' (Lahti, Province of Häme). Names that reflect localness based on urban planning include **Atlas Apteekki** in Jätkäsaari (Helsinki), where street names include names of distant lands and sea gods, and **City apteekki** in the center of Lappeenranta, which is called *City*. Other names that are more implicitly local and reflect the history and branding of their home municipality are **Nuotti Apteekki** 'musical note' in the "music parish" of Kauhajoki, **Järvenpään Sonaatti Apteekki** 'sonata' in the hometown of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957), **Ankkuriapteekki** 'anchor' in the "city by the sea" of Kotka, and **Omena-Apteekki** *Lohja* 'apple' in Lohja, the venue of an annual apple carnival.

Localness is not always easily detectable without very specific information on the pharmacy's location. At first glance, **Priima apteekki** 'prime, top-notch' does not seem to contain any index of localness. However, if one knows that the pharmacy is located next to the hypermarket *Prisma* in Iisalmi, a word play based on the substitution of a single letter and the resulting two consecutive i's (as in Iisalmi) can be considered as a reference to localness. **Apteekki 360** is in a circle-shaped (360°) building in Helsinki, and **Satama apteekki** 'harbor' near the Kuopio harbor. **Kontioapteekki** is located on Karhulantie in the Karhula district—both *kontio* and *karhu* mean 'bear' in Finnish. The identifying name part in **Koivu Apteekki** 'birch' refers to the pharmacy's location in Koivistonkylä (*koivisto* 'birchwood').

Ruoholahden Ässäapteekki is located adjacent to the grocery store *S-market*. *Ässä* can refer to the letter S but also to an 'ace' in card games. Furthermore, it is a dialectal word that can be used to express that someone is good at something. The name of **Oiva apteekki** 'excellent, ideal' in Kotka may be perceived as local if, through the pun, it evokes the image of a classic glass eagle 'kotka' designed by Finnish designer Oiva Toikka. All of these names carry indexes of localness but also other meanings, which can be literal but also metaphorical, metonymic, or symbolic (Sjöblom 2006).

3.3. Conveying Accessibility and Closeness

In connection with the recent health and social services reform (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2025a), guaranteeing local services for the whole population of Finland has been a hot topic in the national media. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021) defines a local service as “a service provided in the daily living environment of clients or available as an easily accessible electronic service”. To be accessible, a service should be located close enough that the threshold for using it is low in terms of travel (Zitting & Ilmarinen 2010). This does not necessarily mean that the service is close to home; it can be in an otherwise convenient location, easily accessible during a commute for other business.

Accessibility is reflected in pharmacy names in the fact that most pharmacies are named after the location of the pharmacy, usually carrying the name of a place or region smaller than a municipality (see section 3.1.). These include streets, squares, parks, and shopping centers, as well as neighborhoods, villages, business parks, hamlets, and inhabited islands. The name of a pharmacy therefore reflects the fact that it is a nearby “neighborhood pharmacy”, geographically close and thus physically accessible to its customers and patients.

For example, none of the 16 pharmacies in the city of Espoo uses the toponym *Espoo* in its name, but those named according to their location contain either the name of a city district or the name of a shopping center. In bigger cities, districts may be large enough to accommodate several pharmacies. Thus, for example, *Töölön Apteekki* in the district of Töölö in Helsinki is registered in the pharmacy register as *Töölön Kampinkeskuksen apteekki*, where *Kampinkeskus* is the name of the adjacent commercial center. The need to further specify the location of the pharmacy reflects the importance of expressing the pharmacy’s physical proximity and accessibility.

As discussed in section 3.1, names may also contain appellatives that refer to an accessible location in the city center, near other shops or on the way (e.g., at the station). On the other hand, accessibility can be understood as proximity to the customer or patient in a more abstract sense, as in the names *Mäntsälän Kotoapteekki* ‘home, abode’, *Mankkaan OMA Apteekki* ‘Mankkaa’s own pharmacy’, and *Lähiapteekki Järvenpää* ‘nearby pharmacy’ in Järvenpää, where *lähi* could refer to proximity in both the geographical and emotional sense. However, such names are rare.

In the context of local healthcare services (Zitting & Ilmarinen 2010), closeness means that the metaphorical threshold for using the service is low: the services are human centered, and the customer is happy to use them. Closeness in this sense is explicit, although metaphorical or metonymical, in the names of pharmacies that suggest either high-quality service (*Hyvän Mielen Apteekki Ylöjärvi* ‘good mood, feel-good’, *Oiva apteekki* ‘excellent, ideal’, *Priima apteekki* ‘prime, top-notch’), or benefits of the service for the customer (*Hyvinvointi Apteekki* ‘well-being’, *Onni apteekki* ‘happiness, luck’, *Elinvoima Apteekki* ‘vitality’).

Such names, in my view, also refer to the customer base; yet another dimension of the local services concept (Zitting & Ilmarinen 2010). A pharmacy is for everyone, not just for individuals experiencing health issues. Even more implicitly, closeness is reflected in names that can evoke positive images of the pharmacy through metaphors, such as *Aurinko Apteekki Riihimäki* ‘the sun’, *Lempi apteekki* ‘love, favorite’, *Apteekkisydän* ‘heart, core’, and *Bonusapteekki*. In addition, names that contain local dialect, such as *Moroapteekki Tesoma*, *Mäntsälän Kotoapteekki*, and *Steissin Apteekki* (section 3.2.2.), can reflect closeness by evoking feelings of familiarity, warmth, and affection.

4. Discussion

In this paper, I have discussed aspects of placemaking in Finnish pharmacy names. My analysis shows that the names of modern Finnish pharmacies mainly follow naming conventions established as far back as the 19th century: the identifying name part is most often a toponym. Such names carry physical place meanings (Sixsmith 1986) by signifying the pharmacy’s physical or geographical location and operating area (Sjöblom 2006). Additionally, toponyms can function as translocal reference points (Voutilainen et al. 2024) and convey other meanings associated with the place and its name.

Place meanings can be personal or social when they relate to one’s daily life, personal history, or relationship with others (Sixsmith 1986). Gustafson (2001) suggests that smaller places, such as neighborhoods, primarily carry self-related meanings, while larger places are typically attributed to meanings related to others and/or the environment. A toponym in a pharmacy name is most often the name of a district or another smaller area within a municipality. To local residents, pharmacy names of this type may evoke feelings of belonging (Helleland 2012) and perceptions of accessibility by referring to their daily living environment.

Names that contain an index of localness have an integrating function (Sjöblom 2006). They may reinforce cultural identities and contribute to a sense of community, common ground, and authenticity (Ainiala 2020; Eckert 2019; Gustafson 2001). Cultural and regional identities are clearly reflected in pharmacy names that contain local dialect (Ainiala 2020, 2012). However, such expressions are uncommon, possibly because pharmacy is a traditional and strictly regulated profession. Playful and informal company names may be avoided because they are not considered to align with pharmacists' professional identities as knowledgeable experts and credible health professionals (Gustafsson 2021; Elvey et al. 2013). It should be noted that despite a systematic web search, some indexes of localness may have remained unidentified due to unintentional omissions or gaps in accessible information.

In summary, and in terms of placemaking, Finnish pharmacies are represented and branded primarily as local services with close ties to their immediate physical and geographical surroundings (Pike 2015). A pharmacy's role as a healthcare provider is echoed in only a few names. All names do contain a name part signifying the business concept *apteekki*, *apotek(et)* 'pharmacy', which is a service point familiar to most. However, people may attach different meanings to it because pharmacy services include both healthcare and retail of medicines and other products (Paloumpi et al. 2024; Thompson & Bidwell 2015; Elvey et al. 2013).

In Finland, health and social services are currently undergoing a reform (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2025a). At the same time, the role of pharmacies in healthcare is being refined and the current retail distribution system of medicines through privately owned pharmacies is being re-evaluated (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2025b). The place of a modern pharmacy in relation to its patients and customers within the integrated healthcare system is being renegotiated. Concurrently, the pharmacy's operating environment shows greater dispersion as services are increasingly offered online (Airaksinen et al. 2021).

Such dynamism of roles, identities and activities is an inherent characteristic of socially constructed places (Sebastien 2020) and may be reflected in the naming practices of pharmacies, offering a compelling area for future onomastic research.

5. Conclusion

This study explores placemaking in pharmacy names from different perspectives and concludes that the names of modern Finnish pharmacies primarily convey the image of a physically accessible, nearby "neighborhood pharmacy". Although some pharmacy names include lexical items that may evoke other positive mental images, only a handful of names reflect human-centeredness or emotional closeness to people in an explicit manner. In the identifying name part, references to medicines or healthcare are rare.

Endnotes

¹ In 2023, 5.10% of the population in Finland had Swedish registered as their mother tongue (Statistics Finland 2023a). The country had a total of 309 municipalities (Statistics Finland 2023b). According to the Finnish Language Act (423/2003), municipalities are classified every ten years as unilingual or bilingual based on their population structure. In 2023, 260 municipalities (84.14%) were unilingual Finnish-speaking, 16 municipalities (5.18%) were unilingual Swedish-speaking, and 33 (10.68%) were bilingual, as defined by the *Government Decree on the Linguistic Status of Municipalities (1385/2022)*.

² Of the 639 pharmacy names analyzed for this study, 168 (26.29%) belong to pharmacies located in bilingual municipalities and therefore have their official names entered in the pharmacy register in both Finnish and Swedish (e.g., *Inkoon apteekki: Ingå apotek*). Among these pharmacies, 18 (10.71%) have entered an additional Swedish name in the register, such as *Rödbergens apotek (Punavuoren apteekki, official name: Helsingin 7. apteekki: Helsingfors 7:e apotek)*.

Supplementary Online Material: Supplementary tables 1–3 are available online: https://osf.io/mdn4x/?view_only=9460de88e77f40919ae18bf32359a2a3

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