Names | A Journal of Onomastics


# 2025 Award for Best Article in *NAMES: A Journal of Onomastics*

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At the start of each year, the member of the *NAMES* Editorial Board review all of the articles[1] that were published in the volume of the previous year to determine which works stand above all the rest.[2] Thanks to the increasingly high standards which submissions are expected to meet before being accepted for publication, the quality of each year's candidates is exceptionally high. Consequently, the selection process is notoriously difficult for the Board. As one of the evaluator's observed: "the range of topics, the global diversity of scholarship, and the overall quality of the articles make evaluation very difficult. All 2025 entries are worthy". Ultimately, the difficulty in making a decision is directly correlated with the quality of the journal. The more arduous the selection process, the higher the scholarship of the submissions accepted for publication.

To help ensure that the assessment procedures are both transparent and consistent, all potential candidates are evaluated across the following three criteria: (1) creativity and originality; (2) potential scholarly contribution to onomastics; and (3) writing style and organization. The use of these pre-determined standards is particularly important given the tremendous variety in the subject-matter and approaches utilized in the publications under consideration. After reading each article, the Board members are asked to cast their vote for the three articles they identified as achieving the highest scores for the above-mentioned criteria. They are asked to provide an explanation of the exact reasoning for their selections. Once they have completed their evaluations, the Board members are asked to submit their ballots to the Editor-in-Chief by a specified deadline.

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This year, the deliberations were particularly difficult due to the sheer number of articles that were eligible for consideration. In total, 18 different publications were in the running for this year's award. Despite this unusually large number, the independent voting yielded results so clear that it was unnecessary to hold a run-off, as has been the case in the past. Coming in third place was "*Monroe Lake* or *Lake Monroe*? Prosodic, Grammatical, and Semantic Influences on Word Order in US Place Names" (volume 73, no. 4: 40–52) by Independent Scholar Michael H. Kelly. As one Board member observed:

> The choice between 'X Lake' and 'Lake X' is a clear cut and seemingly simple research question, which in the paper is followed by excellent, straightforward and well-motivated analyses on possible explanations in prosody, grammatical structure, prominence and lexical accessibility, which show that such a binary choice may have a complex basis. The research data and methodology are of high quality, and an example for subsequent or other studies in different domains.

Kelly's uncommon ability to communicate complex onomastic findings in a manner which was informative, concise, and compelling was also highlighted by other Editorial Board members who selected this submission.

Another work which earned high praises for both the author's exceptional to make a lasting and significant contribution to the field of onomastic research was "Bias and Progressiveness in Textbook Naming Patterns" (volume 73, no. 1: 61–74). Contributed by Emilia Aldrin, Associate Professor of Sweden's Halmstad University, this outstanding piece of scholarship represents yet another stellar contribution from Scandinavia. Just one of the many accolades this work received is presented below:

> This article provides a clear and well-designed study of how three Swedish language textbooks use names to represent gender and cultural diversity for pupils. Using a Progressive Discourse Analytic approach and a careful mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the author shows who is considered important enough to be named and which identities are highlighted or hidden. The article is especially valued in its concern for young readers, recognizing the strong influence textbooks have at this age. Its discussion of naming within a multi-semiotic textbook context is insightful and convincing.
>
> The article provides strong evidence of how significant names can be as indicators and constructors of power structures, ideologies, and minority–majority relations. The content of school textbooks, including the entities they name and the choices of names, can in many ways shape the attitudes and perceptions of young people—and adults as well. The article is methodologically skillful and insightful, and it is very well written and structured.

As indicated above, Aldrin's work was not only distinguished by the quality of the research and writing. This study was also appreciated for the way in which it demonstrated how onomastic research can be effectively used to address real-world issues. Accordingly, this investigation helps to counteract the all-too-common bias that onomastic research is elitist with its relevance limited only to those within the confines of the proverbial Ivory Tower. For all these reasons, this article was awarded Second Place.

The publication which was selected as the winner of the *NAMES* 2025 Best Article of the Year was the collaborative investigation conducted by researchers at Germany's Kiel University: Dr. Søren Wichmann and PhD candidate Lennart Chevallier. Their innovative work is entitled "Mapping Place Names" (volume 73, no. 2: 1–19). Contrary to its deceptively simple title, this piece of research utilizes a highly sophisticated computational analyses to provide readers with fascinating insights into toponymic patterns exhibited by Xincan placenames in Guatemala and Slavic place names in eastern Germany. Featured below is a small sampling of the explanations the Board members provided to explain their selection of this work for the award.

> The article is fluent and articulate throughout; it is well organized in every section; it drives its argument from thesis to conclusion.
>
> This article shows how new tools, in this case custom software, can be leveraged to analyze onomastic data in order to examine proposed hypotheses. The tool and data discussed here are particularly well suited to toponyms, a well-studied area, and yet the authors manage to reveal new insights into two very different geographical areas of research. The paper is well-written and well-organized. The method discussed here shows much promise for future work in toponymy and beyond.


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> A novel toponymic study using state-of-the-art computational tools (R programming language) on the GeoNames data.
>
> It offers a novel methodology for place names' extraction that could have potentially broad ramifications and applications. Almost all the articles from this year's *Names* volume provided innovative and useful methodologies, but this article introduces perhaps the most general and/or innovative methodology. The wealth of examples/results discussed in support of this methodology also offer strong evidence for this claim, in my opinion.

As can be seen in the selection of comments provided above, the international team of *NAMES* onomasticians felt strongly that Wichmann and Chevallier's investigation was of such exceptional quality that it had the potential to have a lasting impact on the onomastic research. Importantly, as many evaluators noted, this projected sphere of influence was by no means limited to the area of toponymy. Instead, the investigation was felt to be a powerful example of the ways in which current and future names researchers can use software to analyze and visualize onomastic data stores, both large and small.[3] Given the technological advances which continue to take place in AI, Wichmann and Chevallier's research powerfully demonstrates that the onomastic community need not shy away from embracing this revolution. With the proper training, these new analytical approaches can enrich our collective understanding of complex onomastic processes, at the same time that they may assist us in communicating these insights to the research community and the public at large. As Winners of the 2025 Best Article of the Year Award, Wichmann and Chevallier will be issued a special commemorative plaque and invited to present a paper at the upcoming ANS annual meeting.

## Notes

[1] Book reviews, notes, and contributions by the Editor-in-Chief are ineligible for consideration.

[2] Detailed reports on the Articles of the Year are available in online archives of the *NAMES* website. A complete list of past winners for this award can be found here: https://www.americannamesociety.org/the-journal/article-of-the-year/

[3] Interested readers are encouraged to consult the Authors' methodological note which appeared in *NAMES* in 2024.

## References

Chevallier, Lennart, and Søren Wichmann. 2024. "A Note on the 'Toponym' R Package: A Practical Introduction". *NAMES: A Journal of Onomastics* 72, no. 3: 76–83.

## Notes on the Contributor

**I.M. Nick** holds a BA (Germanics), a BSc (Clinical/Abnormal Psychology), an MA (German Linguistics), an MSc (Forensic and Investigative Psychology), and a PhD and the German "Habilitation" (English Linguistics). Her research includes forensic linguistics, language policy, and onomastics. She is the President of the Germanic Society for Forensic Linguistics (GSFL), the Past President of the American Name Society (ANS), and the current Editor-in-Chief of *NAMES*.

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