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Microtoponymic Fieldwork and Place-Naming Patterns in the Kalocsa Region, Hungary*

1. Introduction

In this paper I will explore the cultural significance of collecting, describing, and analyzing toponyms. I will also demonstrate how the Hungarian National Toponym Registry, established in 2022 by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Debrecen (HOFFMANN 2022), serves as a foundation for preserving toponyms as part of our cultural heritage (cf. JORDAN et al. 2009). The data I will discuss are drawn from our fieldwork conducted for the mentioned Program (mostly) in Bács-Kiskun County, specifically in the city of Kalocsa (a historically important city in its region; with a current population of approx. 14 000 people) and its surrounding settlements. The paper will mainly focus on microtoponymy. In the following I will introduce the cultural functions and scientific significance of place names, the difference between official and vernacular place naming practices, the importance of collecting place names thorugh examples of naming practices and changes in name usage, and the role of the Hungarian National Toponym Registry in preserving toponymy. (More generally, on the history of Hungarian place names, see HOFFMANN–RÁCZ–TÓTH 2017).

2. Function and meaning of place names

The first and most fundamental question in toponymy is: *Why do we name places?* What is the function of place names? The straightforward and widely accepted answer is that place names facilitate orientation and the identification of different objects; in other words, they help distinguish locations from their surroundings and define their position in space. In recent times, linguistic scholarship has increasingly emphasized the idea that the ultimate reason for naming lies in human communicative needs; that is, the need for names is determined by emerging communicative demands (E. NAGY–SZILÁGYI-VARGA–KIS 2022). The naming of places is never carried out using random sequences of sounds but is always motivated by some kind of semantic consideration. Consequently, the person or community responsible for naming plays a crucial role in the act of naming, and so do their linguistic, cultural, and identity-related characteristics, as well as the specific feature or circumstance

being expressed in the name. The significance of these factors and their interrelation was already highlighted by LAJOS LŐRINCZE in 1947.

The toponym *Erdő alja* 'bottom of the forest' in Fajsz (WENDL in press a), for instance, which refers to an arable field, expresses the spatial relationship of the area in question to a nearby forest. In this case, *alja* ('bottom') indicates that the designated field lies to the south of the forest. The related name *Erdő aljai kút* 'well at Erdő alja' includes the element *kút* ('well'), denoting the type of the place, while the adjective-like form *Erdő aljai* (with the suffix *-i*) specifies that the well is located in the *Erdő alja* field. Another example is the name *Cigány-Vajas* 'Gypsy Vajas' (DUDÁS–WENDL in press b) from Dusnok, which refers to a section of the *Vajas* stream surrounding the settlement. Here, the modifier *Cigány* ('Gypsy') reflects the social circumstance that Roma people live along that stretch of the stream.

Based on the above, examining the function of a place name seems inseparable from determining its meaning. Within some circles of linguists, the idea has long persisted that the meaning of proper names can be reduced to the simple statement that *this name refers to this object*. According to this view, the semantic content of the name (for example) *Helsinki* could be described merely as "the capital of Finland," or that of the microtoponym *Lányos-kobolya* in Fajsz (WENDL in press a) as "a lake on the southwestern part of Fajsz's outskirt." However, the name's first element, *Lányos* ('of the girls'), preserves the memory of two girls who once drowned in the lake, while the second element, *kobolya,* is a dialectal word for a 'flood-formed pit along the riverbank that accumulates water'. So this type of basin typically forms along rivers, and this particular form of the word is used in the Kalocsa region (elsewhere, the variant *kopolya* is used). Even without precise local knowledge, one can infer from these elements that the name refers to a riverine lake near the Danube, named by Hungarians, and likely associated with a local legend or explanation.

The meaning of a proper name thus extends beyond simple denotative reference; it is complex in nature. This view was already stated by ANDRÁS MARTINKÓ in 1956, and later developed extensively by KATALIN J. SOLTÉSZ in her 1979 monograph, in which she analyzed the structure of meaning in proper names. This structure includes components such as the principle of arbitrariness and motivation inherent in the naming act, the informational content that relates to the connection between name and referent, and, beyond denotative meaning, also etymological meaning, which reveals the linguistic origin of the name, and so on.

And contemporary research in onomastics and linguistics has established that place names also play a crucial role in shaping personal and collective identities. This dual function of place names, particularly their identity-forming

role, has become a significant focus within the sociological study of names (e.g. GYŐRFFY 2018: 28; CAIAZZO–NICK 2020; but cf. PERONO CACCIAFOCO–CAVALLARO 2023: 221). The cultural (and often political) significance of these names is also considerable, as the choice of a particular variant or form of a name can reflect and influence identity and societal relationships.

Furthermore one of the most important concepts related to toponymic research today is interdisciplinarity. When examined through the lenses of linguistics, ethnography, history, archaeology, or geography, toponyms often reveal themselves to be rich and unique sources of information for these disciplines (cf. PERONO CACCIAFOCO–CAVALLARO 2023: 2, 158). This is especially true for microtoponyms, such as names of specific plots of land and boundary markers. The disciplinary connections of onomastics in general—particularly the relationship between onomastics and other fields of linguistics, as well as between onomastics and historical studies—are discussed in more detail by HOFFMANN (2015).

3. Naming and Name Usage Patterns in the Kalocsa Region

The diversity of naming patterns is hardly describable in its entirety within the scope of a short study such as this, thus I have chosen to focus on a specific category of microtoponyms. Microtoponyms refer to names designating entities smaller than a settlement, the knowledge and use of which are typically limited to a single village or town, and, at most, extend to neighbouring settlements (for definitions and criteria of microtoponymic research, see e.g. HOFFMANN–RÁCZ–TÓTH 2017: 255 or HOFFMANN–RÁCZ–TÓTH 2018: 435–443 and E. NAGY 2023: 597). Typical examples of microtoponyms include names of small streams, bodies of standing water, arable lands, small roads, wells, wooded areas, shrubbery, orchards, vegetable gardens, small hills and valleys, and pits. In the present study, I focus on a less prototypical group of microtoponyms in terms of taxonomic determination and number of items: street names.

In what follows, I aim to illustrate—drawing on examples from my own fieldwork conducted in the Kalocsa region—the types of motivational differences that can be identified between official and vernacular street naming practices. These distinctions may provide valuable insights into the significance of collecting, preserving, and disseminating such names, which also contribute to the richness and complexity of the local toponymic system. The overwhelming majority of microtoponyms lack official equivalents or alternatives; where such official forms do exist, they are often less familiar to and less frequently used by members of the local speech community. For instance, the name *Kőgyes*, designating a part of the settlement and its adjacent

lands in Uszód (WENDL in press c), has no official counterpart. It derives from the Hungarian dialect word *kőgy*, meaning 'reed sweet-grass', and refers to the vegetation characteristic of the area. An illustrative example of an official toponym that remains unused in vernacular language is the hydronym *Vajas*, to be discussed in the next section. By contrast, in present-day Hungary, nearly all streets have official names, yet only a small proportion possess vernacular variants that are widely known and used within the local community.

3.1. Microtoponyms with official and vernacular origin

It is important to note here that a distinction must be made between the official status and the official origin of the place names. In the case of the names discussed below, "official" refers to the fact that the name was not created by the local speech community but was instead selected by an official authority, quasi from a list, based on administrative naming patterns. In general, the official status of a name does not necessarily pertain to its origin. As will be demonstrated in a later chapter, many names with official status (and even names created through official designation) can trace their roots to earlier vernacular names (more on the term *official name*, see GYŐRFFY 2013).

Street names nowadays are typically selected and made official by municipal or town councils. Many examples can be cited from among these. The practice of official street naming generally follows established conventions and patterns, often drawing on existing names. In the following we can see examples of some types of official street naming. With the following enumeration, I have no intention of creating the impression of a typology. The order of the types mentioned as examples is entirely arbitrary, and the examples themselves by no means exhaust all possible types of the phenomenon. My sole aim is to illustrate the distinction between the patterns of vernacular and official toponyms coexisting within a single naming system, including, where relevant, the semantic differences in their informational content.

Naming after an event vs. naming after the function of the place. An official name, *Béke utca* 'peace street' in the village of Foktő, and its vernacular name, *Mosó utca* 'washing street' (WENDL in press b). It was named so because the women used to go down to the river to wash on this road.

Naming after an event vs. naming after the shape of the place. An official name, *Béke utca* 'peace street' in the village of Kaposszekcső, and its vernacular name, *Kutyaszorító* (BMFN. 1: 69)*,* that is a geographical common word (FKnT. *kutyaszorító*) meaning 'tight spot, e.g. a narrow street' (literally 'dog squeeze'; where a dog can be trapped).

Naming after a person vs. naming after other characteristics of the place. An official name, *Dózsa György utca* 'Dózsa, György street' in the village of

Dusnok, and its vernacular name, *Folyócska* 'little river' (DUDÁS–WENDL in press b). It was named so because the water from the nearby river overflowed during floods and flowed through this street. Another official name, *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca* 'Bajcsy-Zsilinszky street' in Szakmár settlement, and its vernacular name *Fostenger* 'mud or sludge sea'. The word *tenger* means 'sea', while *fos* figuratively means 'mud' in Hungarian, but it literally and firstly means 'liquid feces'. This street was often muddy when it was raining.

Naming after a person vs. naming after the function of the place. An official name, *Deák Ferenc utca* 'Deák, Ferenc street' in the village of Uszód, and its vernacular name *Dög utca* 'carcass street' (WENDL in press c). The motivation for the name may have been that the deceased were once transported to the funeral home on this road. Another official name here is *Táncsics Mihály utca* 'Táncsics, Mihály street' in the village of Fajsz, and its vernacular name *Marhák utcája* 'cattle street/street of cattles'. And it was named so because the cattle were driven to the pasture through this street

Naming after a person vs. naming after the shape of the place. An official name, *Széchenyi utca* 'Széchenyi street' in the village of Dunaszentbenedek, and its vernacular name *Gatyaszár utca* 'pantleg street' (BÁRTH M. in press a). The motivation for the name is that the shape of the road resembles the legs of a pair of trousers.

Naming after a plant vs. naming after a "characteristic" of the place. An official name, *Nyárfa utca* 'poplar street' in the village of Bátya, and its vernacular name *Pelenka sor* 'diaper row' (DUDÁS–WENDL in press a). And they started calling it that way because many families with small children moved here.

After that, let's see an example from the field of water names. The second most significant river in the Kalocsa region is officially named *Csorna–Foktői árapasztó főcsatorna*, which essentially means: 'flood relief channel between Külsőcsornaszállás and Foktő settlements'. However, locals have known this watercourse (at least the section running through Kalocsa and extending westward) by the name *Vajas* (WENDL in press a) for a thousand years. The word *vaj* means 'butter', and the *-(a)s* is an adjectival suffix. So *Vajas* literally means 'buttery'. This name suggests that the waters surface often glistens with oil floating on it.

But the most noticeable difference lies in the naming of the boundary areas of a settlement. In most cases, officials do not assign names to the features that make up the boundary, such as hills, fields, meadows, or paths. To illustrate this, here is a short excerpt from an interview with an informant during a local place-name collection project (in the village of Dunapataj). The discussion centered on how various parts of the boundary are named.

> **Interviewer**: *És ezt a részt itt hogy hívják?* [What do you call this part of the boundary?]
> **Informant**: *Hát, mi csak úgy, hogy* F1. [Well, we just call it *F1*.]
> **Interviewer**: *Azt nem mondják, hogy Felső-járás?* [Don't you also call it *Felső-járás*?]
> **Informant**: *Hát úgy mondtuk. Az* F1 *akkor lett az új neve, amikor a téesz megalakult.* [Well, we used to call it that. It was renamed *F1* when the cooperative was established.]

Felső-járás (BÁRTH M. in press b) here quasi means 'upper area'. When the local agricultural production cooperative was founded and private lands were liquidated, the sign of the territory become *F1* (here the *F* refers to *felső* 'upper').

3.2. Preserving vernacular names in official names

Additionally, many official names of public spaces preserve earlier microtoponyms, some of which were in use before the area was developed. In the city Kalocsa for instance, names like *Árendás utca* 'tenant street', *Szérűskert utca* 'threshing floor garden street', and district names such as *Szénáskert* 'haygarden', *Eperföld* 'strawberry field', and *Szőlőkköze* 'lane of grapes' are excellent local examples. The name *Árendás utca* 'tenant street' reflects the historical presence of a district called *Árendás*, where leased lands were located. *Szérűskert utca* 'threshing floor garden street' indicates that this area was once known as *Szérűskert*, where grain was threshed on the outskirts of the settlement. The district names *Szénáskert* 'haygarden', *Eperföld* 'strawberry field', and *Szőlőkköze* 'lane of grapes' all refer to the former agricultural use of the land, parts of which are now developed with houses and streets. We can observe that the cultural leaders of the city recognized the importance of preserving vernacular toponyms and utilized official channels to ensure their survival in the modern register. An important area for the preservation of place names, particularly microtoponyms, is cartography, the theoretical and methodological background concerning which names (and in what form) are included on various maps. For an exploration of this topic, see for example JORDAN–ORMELING 2013.

Based on the above, we may already outline the conclusion that, although street names as a type are not prototypical elements of the toponymic system, and although it is generally among street names that we find the least onomastic excitement in relative terms (since the majority of them are list names following certain naming patterns), street naming (and we could mention other types of public spaces here as well) nonetheless offers an excellent opportunity to preserve microtoponyms of vernacular origin, which form part of our cultural heritage. Moreover, we must also recognize that in those cases where

a street name is not merely the continuation of an earlier, non-street vernacular toponym, but is itself of vernacular origin, it is equally possible to outline the structural types and the categories of semantic motivation that commonly underlie the naming of streets. Naturally, this chapter was not written with the intention of creating a typology, as even the study of the naming system of a single, smaller region would require research based on a significantly larger dataset and a more in-depth analysis.

4. Survival of microtoponymy

The two most significant events in the life of place names are their creation and their possible disappearance. Both are natural processes, and this is particularly evident with microtoponyms. The process of name disappearance is as complex as their creation and can result from both human activity and deliberate decisions. Even today, names of public spaces are being erased, and the official names of streets, squares, and bridges are being changed. These changes typically affect names with cultural, political, or ideological significance rather than those of vernacular origin. Although this is not a widespread phenomenon in present-day Hungary, the issue of street names and their renaming remains more significant in the outer regions of the Hungarian language area, currently within the territories of neighboring states. In the early 1990s, following the political regime change in Hungary, a demand emerged to rename major and well-known public spaces. For instance, *Népköztársaság útja* ('People's Republic Avenue') in Budapest was renamed *Andrássy út* ('Andrássy Road') in 1990. Most streets, squares, parks, etc., that had been named after twentieth-century communist figures for ideological reasons were also renamed. In the 2010s, legislation was even passed requiring the renaming of public spaces that had received their names on ideological grounds during the previous regime. Streets (*utca* in Hungarian) named after twentieth-century communists—such as *Ságvári Endre utca*, *Sallai Imre utca*, and *Fürst Sándor utca*—were renamed in most settlements. A few examples from my own fieldwork include: in Dusnok, *Sallai Imre utca* became *Bárka utca*, and *Ságvári Endre utca* was renamed *Mátyás király utca* (Dudás–Wendl in press b); in Fajsz, *Ságvári Endre utca* also became *Mátyás király utca* (Wendl in press a); and in Foktő, *Sallai Imre utca* was changed to *Híd utca* (Wendl in press b). However, *Ságvári Endre utca* still exists today in Uszód, and *Sallai utca* and *Marx utca* are still present in Fajsz (Wendl in press a), although it is worth noting that Marx himself was not a twentieth-century communist. Numerous onomastic studies examine cases of name changes driven by ideological and political factors, often concentrating on specific regions or phenomena in their analyses (e.g. Gnatiuk–Melnychuk 2023).

However the majority of toponyms do not fade away due to deliberate efforts at name-cleansing. Instead, the lifespan and eventual disappearance of a toponym can be influenced by various factors and external changes, either directly or indirectly. To fully understand these changes, it is crucial to thoroughly document the history and meaning of the name (about changes in place names and the factors influencing these changes also see JORDAN– WOODMAN 2016). The disappearance is often due to a lack of conscious preservation efforts. The survival of a toponym is always tied to the community that uses it. When the people who knew and used the name migrate or pass away, the toponym often disappears.

Two other main factors that contribute to the disappearance of a toponym are the destruction of the denotatum (the physical place) and changes in its function. When a denotatum is destroyed, its associated name typically fades over time. In the outskirts of settlements, changes in land use are relatively common. This can include the clearing and conversion of pastures and meadows, the uprooting of orchards and vineyards, or the construction of buildings on land previously used for agriculture (such as pastures, arable land, or vegetable gardens). For example, a large area near the city of Kalocsa and the village of Uszód was once locally known as *Ökörjáró* (WENDL in press c), meaning 'cattle pasture' a name derived from the term "ox-walker", traditionally referring to a grazing area for cattle. However, in 1951, the Kalocsa airport was constructed in this area, representing a significant change in its function. Since then, the local population has referred to the area as *Reptér* (meaning 'airport', WENDL in press c). Today, only older residents remember the name *Ökörjáró*, and even fewer can accurately locate it.

Given the context, it becomes clear why the metaphor "we are in the twenty-fourth hour" is frequently used by linguists studying the living language. When it comes to collecting toponyms, this phrase underscores the urgency of gathering data from living sources before it's too late. Microtoponyms—names known only to the inhabitants of one or two settlements—are particularly at risk of disappearing. Among these, names associated with landforms that serve as enduring landmarks have a better chance of survival. This is significant for documentation purposes. While the names of settlements are typically preserved in written records, the names of smaller geographic features, such as plots of land, hills, and ponds, are rarely recorded in official documents, if at all. For instance, a boundary survey conducted in 1734 (TIMÁR 1937) in the village of Fajsz near Kalocsa mentioned only thirty-four of the hundreds of named features in the area. Even this modest list is an invaluable resource for our research.

5. An article in the dictionary

Here is an example of a dictionary entry presented in both Hungarian and English (WENDL in press c).

Varjános 2022: *Vargyános* (ÉGy.), 1977: *Varjános* (Szabó 1977), 1955: *Varjánosi-dűlő* (T21.TT.35-344/1982), 1839: *Varjános oldala* (T14.PMT.18/9), 1827: *Varjános* (DM. 1615), ?1061/1272/1327: *Voryanus* (Győrffy 2: 442). — A település Hormány határrészének délkeleti területén fekvő szántó. Nevét a tőle délnyugatra húzódó egykori vízmederről kapta (később Pecze-fok). A *vargyas* szó a köznyelvi *varjas* tájnyelvi változata lehet, tehát varjak jelenlétére utal. (A *j ~ gy* váltakozásra lásd: *borjú ~ borgyú*.) A nevet ma már csak a szántó viseli, a vízre, amely a 19. század második felében végleg eltűnt, a helyiek nem emlékeznek. A név eredetét sem ismerik, de kérdésre egy **Var János* személynévvel magyarázzák. Bodroghalmon ugyancsak él a néphagyomány, amely szerint hajdanán egy Varga János nevű ember mentette meg a falut azzal, hogy lépre csalt és egyesével ölt bele 150 tatárt egy tóba, amelyet azóta is *Varjános-tó*-nak hívnak (NAGY 1989: 130). Korábban előfordult a név **Varjánosi-dűlő,** illetve **Varjános oldala** változatban is. A *Varjános* víznév minden bizonnyal összekapcsolható egy 11. századi, többszörös átiratban fennmaradt oklevél, a halomi uradalom határát körülíró szöveg *Voryanus* adatával, amely a határjárás logikája alapján a területet nyugatról, északnyugatról lezáró vizeket, a Varjánost és Árpást *(Alapas)* említi.

Varjános 2022: *Vargyános* (ÉGy.), 1977: *Varjános* (Szabó 1977), 1955: *Varjánosi-dűlő* (T21.TT.35-344/1982), 1839: *Varjános oldala* (T14.PMT.18/9), 1827: *Varjános* (DM. 1615), ?1061/1272/1327: *Voryanus* (Győrffy 2: 442). — A ploughland located in the southeastern part of the Hormány land section of the settlement. It takes its name from the former water bed to the southwest of it (later Pecze-fok). The word *vargyas* may be a colloquial variant of *varjas*, referring to the presence of crows. (For the alternation *j ~ gy* see: *borjú ~ borgyú* ['calf'].) The name is now only used for the ploughland; the water, which disappeared in the second half of the 19th century, is not remembered by the locals. They do not know the origin of the name either, but when questioned, it is explained by a personal name **Var János.* There is also a folk tradition in Bodroghalom, according to which a man called *János Varga* once saved the village by luring 150 Tatars one by one into a lake, which has been called *Varjános-tó* [*Varjános* + 'lake'] ever since (NAGY 1989: 130). The name **Varjánosi-dűlő** [*Varjános* + *-i* adjectival suffix/'field'] or **Varjános oldala** [*Varjános*/'side'+ *-a* possessive suffix] also appeared earlier. The water name Varjános can certainly be linked to the data of *Voryanus* in a document of the 11th century, which has survived in several transcriptions, describing the boundary of the Halom manor, which, according

to the logic of the border description, refers to the waters closing the area from the west and north-west, the Varjános and the Árpás *(Alapas)*.

6. The Significance of the Hungarian National Toponym Registry Program

After three decades of limited support and financial resources a large-scale, national-level toponym collection project launched in 2022, the Hungarian National Toponym Registry Program. The initiative serves as an excellent example of international academic cooperation and provides a significant platform for advancing linguistic research. One of the key principles of this research program is that toponym collectors not only collect toponyms, by guided interviews in the relevant settlements and through archival research but also analyze the name collections. The program encompasses the entire Hungarian-speaking area within and around the Carpathian Basin, including Moldva.

The collected data is systematically recorded in an Excel spreadsheet with a uniformly defined field structure (see chapter 10. A magyar nemzeti helynévtár adatbázisának építése [Constructing the Digital Database of the Hungarian National Toponym Registry] in the online textbook: E. NAGY–SZILÁGYI-VARGA–KIS 2022), where the expected data types for each field are clearly specified. The collection includes all available historical and contemporary data, along with variants of the names, their spatial representation, the scientific etymology of the names, and any possible motives behind their naming.

Additionally, it records the type and denotative meaning of the names, the linguistic origins of the name (particularly relevant in bilingual toponym systems), the geographic coordinates of the denotatum, and, when possible, photographs of the location. Other relevant information, such as the history of the place and the name, including any associated sayings, legends, or anecdotes, is also documented.

The outcomes of the collection and processing work conducted under the program include dictionaries (with accompanying maps) available in both digital and printed formats, and a searchable online annotated name database. On the research program, its objectives, and the usage levels of the Toponym Registry, also see its website (MNH.).

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Abstract

The emergence and disappearance of proper names are natural processes. This holds true for toponyms as well, especially microtoponyms. Human activity and changes in people's relationship with the environment and nature can either slow down or accelerate these processes. From the perspective of cultural sustainability, this paper introduces a recently initiated Hungarian research program focused on collecting toponyms, which aims to compile the online database titled Hungarian National Toponym Registry. Beyond its important cultural heritage preservation mission, this research program also plays a crucial role in strengthening national and local identity. Comparing the historical and current linguistic data of a particular region, and analyzing interviews provides insight into the processes that influence changes in the knowledge of toponyms. In relation to the changes in microtoponyms, this study also aims to illustrate, through several examples, the different patterns of official and vernacular naming for the same object in various instances.

Keywords: place names, cultural heritage, Hungarian National Toponym Registry