

**ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOPONYMY AND LINGUISTICS / LA RELATION ENTRE LA LINGUISTIQUE ET LA TOPONYMIE / RAPORTUL DINTRE TOPONIMIE ȘI LINGVISTICĂ<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The purpose of our paper is to demonstrate that toponymy is a science that studies place names both by considering the relationship they maintain with the geographic objects they individualize by naming, and by researching their significance, etymology and changes (phonetic, semantic, morphosyntactic and onomasiological) that occurred along their history within the process of denomination. The approach of the place names we quote (e. g. 'Obcina Bătrână') include the synchronic and the diachronic criteria, that complement each other. This assertion is supported by the fact that synchronic toponymy describes the situation at a certain point in time, i. e. in the present stage of functioning and existence of place names, whereas diachronic toponymy researches the evolution of facts and phenomena. We have analyzed the toponyms that we quote in our paper according to a series of concepts that were proposed and theorized by Dragoș Moldovanu (1972: 73-100) (such as 'toponymic field', 'polarization' and 'differentiation'), concepts that aim both at emphasizing the relationship between the name and the extralinguistic object it designates, and at presenting the significance, etymology and changes the toponyms underwent in time within the denomination process. We have also intended to prove that common names and place names do not exclude each other, but develop a relationship of reciprocity in spite of certain semantic, derivational and grammatical peculiarities that separates them. Some place names are entopic (descriptive toponyms), while there are other that come from anthroponyms (personal toponyms).*

*The linguistic material (toponyms we quote in the paper) was obtained from field surveys (in the upper basin of the river Bistrița), from the investigation conducted on historical and geographic documents, and also from the information we received from the surveyed individuals that mostly concerns the way certain place names appeared and changed in time.*

**Key words:** *toponymy, linguistics, toponymic structures, descriptive toponyms, appellatives, anthroponyms.*

Researches on toponymy capitalize results from scientific investigation in a wide range of fields, such as linguistics, geography, history, ethnography, sociology, archeology, economics, etc. As such, toponymy is to be viewed as a border domain of investigation, as it is situated at the crossroads of various disciplines. In such cases, both the methods and the results from those fields are important, so the researches so far have proven that onomastics (including toponymy) is not a separate science in itself, but is a linguistic discipline. To this regard, Romanian linguist Al. Graur affirmed that place names and person names "constitute a piece of the tradition and the history of our country as they bear information on the culture and, in general, on the way of living of those who preceded us" (Graur, 1972: 10). Since toponymy deals with the study of the origin, meaning and evolution of place names in a certain language, it will raise both the interest of the geographer and historian, and that of the linguist and philologist. Furthermore, as human speech is directly linked to a particular culture, toponymic research can help to investigate the evolution of a language, the origin of

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words, their meaning and semantic evolution, and, most important, the cultural evolution of the nation that speaks that particular language. It is common knowledge that the earliest documents written in Romanian date as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> c.; that is why Romanian toponymy is of a crucial interest to the philologist, as it may bear evidence on the types of populations that crossed the territory of our country or settled here. There is an intrinsic connection between place names and the social psychology of a people due to the importance of mapping one's ethnolinguistic microcosm, which is done by individualizing the surrounding realities (geographical, social, historical, etc.) through names. From this viewpoint, it becomes of utmost importance to study the changes toponyms have undergone from one epoch to another with regard to phonetic evolution, morphological adaptations, semantic changes, and also eventual disappearances, translations, substitutions or overlaps of terms. As for the knowledge of the past of certain regions or populations, toponymy can provide significant inputs. Furthermore, if we consider the lexis of the old language or that of regional dialects and patois, place names constitute study material both for toponymy and geography, disciplines that contribute this way, alongside history and archeology, to the discovery or reconstruction of earlier stages in the past evolution of the Romanian people and language.

As for the **linguists**, they have approached mainly the etymology of toponyms, as name places rise the same interest as any word from the common lexis. Whether it is about referring to history or 'mirroring' the environment from a geographical viewpoint, all attempts to establish the etymology of place names should take into account the researches done by linguists who have studied toponyms with the purpose of establishing their origin on phonetic, semantic, morphosyntactic and onomasiological criteria. Place names evolve in time, as proven by their linguistic structure. In consequence, a place name, as an element of the language, should be approached as such and referred to a trichotomic plan that consists in: **object – signification** (toponymic meaning) – **form**.

Social psychology, collective mentality, the original and individual way of naming the surrounding reality, human relationships and stages in the evolution of a society are involved all the way during the whole historical evolution of geographical denomination process, as well as in the moment of denomination itself, so that all of the above are also involved in the evolution of language, as they are submitted to the evolution laws of phonetics, morphology, lexis, derivation and syntax.

Much like language itself, toponymy functions in synchrony and evolves in diachrony. From a **synchronic** viewpoint, since toponymy only exists in connection with human society and history, it represents a linguistic image of the history of a certain region, so that any geographical name is history expressed by means of the laws of the language. Moreover, synchronic research highlights the means of word formation in toponyms in the current stage, which involves the analysis of the relationships between their components, of the modality and succession of combination in the process of word formation. Nonetheless, not all toponyms represent modern formations, as many are considerably old, and, in many cases, ancient toponyms contain elements that no longer exist in the modern language or are formed according to rules that are unknown to present-day speakers. This leads to the necessity for a **diachronic** approach of word formation in the case of place names, and in toponymy this diachronic aspect is included in the origin and evolution of a place name. Old toponyms that have lost the morphological connection with their basic words are studied in a

diachronic approach, and the structure of such place names is determined with the help of the etymological analysis. The diachronic research of a toponym also consists, on the one hand, in a time analysis of the changes that occurred in the relation of designation, and, on the other hand, in the investigation of the succession of relationships between the toponym in question and other toponyms which designate other elements of the same geographical or socio-geographical complex.

Let us take the example of the toponym *Obcina Bătrână* and demonstrate how toponymy functions in synchrony and evolves in diachrony. This is a descriptive toponym that designates a foothill situated on the Eastern side of the Țibău creek. The structure of this toponym is a syntagm that consists in a natural feature noun (*obcina*, approx. “foothill”) and its adjectival determinative (*bătrână*, “old”). Diachronically speaking, the toponymic noun *obcina* is attested in documents or maps as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> c.

With regard to its etymology, the noun *obcină* < Sl. *občina* “a mountain or hill ridge that is smooth and rounded, scattered with cusps, that join two peaks; a common mountainside that constitutes the boundary between two properties”; p. ext. (reg.) “a long hill or mountain ridge (with altitudes between 1,000-1,500 m) that joins two peaks and bears low cusps here and there; a timbered ridge” (translated from DEXI, 1288); “a mountain name, especially in Northern Moldavia” (Jordan, 1963: 456). Historically, the name *obcină* refers to a completely different original meaning, albeit extremely important from a socio-economical viewpoint: *obcină* < O. Slvk. *obština*, “community”, that also exists with similar meaning in other Slavic languages: Bg. *obščina*, Cz. *občina*, Rus. *obščina*, Srb. *opština* “common property” (Jordan, 1963: 522); *obcină*, *opcină* in Western and Northern Moldavia, “a hill or mountain ridge that separates two valleys and constitutes a boundary between the lands of the villages in the two valleys” (Petrovici, 1970: 189) < Sl. *občina*, cf. Ukr. *opčina*, “name of a mountain”, Rus. *občina*, “common property”.

The form *obcină* is doubled by the variant *opcina*, both in the idiolect of the elderly and in the old geographical dictionaries of the District of Suceava, defined as “a smooth ridge transited by a road up to the top” (Homorodean, 1987: 271-297). Another variant of the toponym *obcina* is *otcina*, in a document dated in the year 1820, in the toponym *La Otcina Flocească* (Bălan, 1929: 92-93).

Mapping the toponym *obcina* and its compound forms, I. Iosep has found 241, 133 in the North of Moldavia and Bukovina and 108 in Transylvania (Iosep, 1993: 157). The adjective *bătrână*, (“old”) suggest the antiquity of this landform.

On the other hand, the etymology of the adjective goes as follows: *bătrân*, *-ă* < Lat. *veteranus* (CIH., *D.*, I, 24; Șăineanu, *D.*, II, 133); O. Lat. *veteranus* “old soldier” (TIK., *D.*, I, 181); Lat. *veteranus* “old, ancient”, after *vetus*, *veteris* “who lives long” (Scriban, *D.*, II, 133); Lat. *veteranus* “veteran” (DLR, t. II, fsc. I, 528); Lat. *betranus*, *veteranus* (CAN., *D.*, 134); Lat. *betranus*, *-a*, *-um* = *veteranus* (DEXI, 207).

Independently of the differences between epochs or regions, not only **strata**, but also **structures (toponymic fields)** are to be established. Investigations on the stratification of toponyms allow the linguist to establish the layers that have configured the toponymy of a region or that of the whole country. According to age, the most important stratum belongs to the autochthonous or indigenous population; a diversity of newer strata have settled on top of the older ones, so the linguist’s task is to identify and explain (Dan, 1970: 105).

Researching these layers in toponyms helps facilitate the establishment of the Dacian, then Roman heritage, of the names given by the Romanian to the surrounding realities, of the aspects of cohabitation with other ethnic groups (some of which were assimilated, while other continue to live among and with the Romanians), so that we may assume that the most part of the toponymic vocabulary of a certain region is of a Romanian origin. Most toponyms derive from nouns that denominate natural features (*Bâtca Netedă*, “smooth slope” – Cârlibaba), shape (*Vârful Rotund*, “round peak” – Cârlibaba), position (*Dosul Muntelui*, “backside of the mountain” – Iacobeni), or color (*Piatra Roșie*, “red rock” – Cârlibaba); nouns that allude to episodes in the history of cohabitation of our people with other populations (*Tătarca*, from *tătar*, „Tatar or Tartar” *Rusaia*, from *rus*, “Russian”); nouns that are a reminder of past events from history (*La Tranșee*, “at the trenches”); nouns that suggest a certain attitude or psychological feature of the person who first used them nouns that evoke anthroponyms (*Iacobeni*).

As for **toponymic structures** and their evolution, a linguistic perspective is most appropriate. In this case, using and understanding the meaning of the toponyms may depend on the quality of our perception and concepts, and the toponymy of a region require previous knowledge of that particular region and orientation in its boundaries, as toponyms designate objects, but, in the meantime, they can constitute a description of the area, of its most striking elements that were to be preserved in the collective memory.

Another interesting aspect that deserves our attention refers to the notion and the term **polarizer** and to its influence on toponymic structures. Analyzing and fringing the geographical environment, the individual who acts as a ‘denominator’ chooses the **toponimic nucleus** that is called a **polarizer (Suhard**, “the name of a mountain”), which will attract to its sphere different geographical categories (such as *pârâu*, “creek” – *Pârâul Suhârzel*, *vârf*, “peak” – *Vârful Suhârzel*, *culme*, “ridge” – *Culmea Suhard*, *plai*, “plateau” – *Plaiul Suhard*, *trup*, “batch” – *Trupul Suhârzel* etc.), so that each and every extralinguistic object is named by alluding to the dominant geographical object. Thus, once being constituted, toponyms can act as a basis of word formation for other topographical names, i. e. other realities from the immediate vicinity of a toponym can draw its name from it; this way a toponymic **field** is formed, which is an ensemble of two or more toponyms around a basic one (nucleus), which acts as a polarizing center (Ciubotaru, 2001: 15). In this case, establishing the category (oiconym, hydronym, oronym, phytonym etc.) and type of toponym (descriptive or personal) represents the synchronic perspective, and the presentation of the toponimic field represents the diachronic study of the ensemble of place names in that particular region.

In this situation, designation becomes identification, as it changes the common name into a proper one, which provides a name that is shared by several geographical categories. In the science of toponymy we use evocative words, geographical realities or classes of objects: ‘hill’, ‘rock’, ‘creek’, and what toponymic polarization does is to cluster several geographical objects around one, which is dominant from the social and geographical viewpoints. The processes that lead to the formation of toponymic fields are **polarization** and **differentiation**. *Polarization* consists in the “concentration of the toponymic denomination of a particular geographical ensemble around a polar denomination that corresponds, generally, to the element of maximum socio-geographical importance” (Moldovanu, 1972: 81). Therefore, based on the name of a helmet, Măgura (“hill”), a wide

range of names came into being that designate certain geographical elements in the proximity: *Muntele Măgurii* (“mountain”), *Dealul Măgurii* (“hill”), *Vârful Măgurii* (“peak”), *Pârâul Măgura* (“creek”), *Drum forestier Măgura* (“forest road”). The primary toponym becomes a determinative in the structure of the secondary toponyms, while the natural features nouns (*mountain, hill, peak, creek, road*) act as the central element. The second phenomenon that leads to the formation of the toponimic fields is *differentiation*, i. e. “the process of designation, through lexical delimitations, of the parts of a denominated geographical object” (Moldovanu, 1972: 141). For example, toponyms *Botoș* and *Botoșelul* manifest a privative opposition which is performed by means of a diminutive suffixation (*Botoș* – main flow of the river and *Botoșel* – feeder). One way of exemplifying the formation of toponyms by means of polarization and differentiation is to expose the toponymic field of the toponym *Țiganii* (“the Gypsies”):

**ȚIGANII** personal toponym: 1. Oronym (Preceded by the natural features noun *vârf*, “peak”, in hetero-functional syntagm) A hill at North of the Măgurii Hill, between Rusaia Creek and Măgurii Creek, source of the creeks Țiganii de Sus and Țiganii de Jos. *Vârful Țiganilor*. Cf. Planuri directoare de tragere 1953.

a) Polarization: Hydronym (Preceded by the natural features noun *pârâu*, “creek”, in prepositional syntagm, with determinative *de sus*, “upper”) Right hand feeder of the river Bistrița Aurie, which springs from the *Țiganilor* peak, downstream from the Rusaia Creek. *Pârâul Țiganii de Sus*. Cf. Planuri directoare de tragere 1953.

b) Differentiation: Hydronym (Preceded by the natural features noun *pârâu*, “creek”, in prepositional syntagm, with determinative *de jos*, “lower”) Right hand feeder of the river Bistrița Aurie, which springs from the *Țiganilor* peak, downstream from the Țiganii de Sus creek. *Pârâul Țiganii de Jos*. Cf. Planuri directoare de tragere 1953.

- Etymology: the name is motivated by the fact that gypsies used to camp close to the DN 17 road, between the two creeks; they left a few days later, after selling their merchandise. ANCH. Cârlibaba.

The history of place names contributes to the elucidation of certain aspects of the history of the people and its language; in this respect, the most important toponyms are those that preserve a series of features that have been lost from the spoken language. In this situation, the toponymist needs to focus both on the similitudes and the differences in word formation between toponyms (derivation and compounding) and common names, taking into account the lexico-semantic, phonetic, morphological and syntactic criteria, etc. Thus, in the case of the **derivative** words, their theme and toponymic affixes will be highlighted, while **semantic** aspects mostly regard the epoch when those place names were used with a toponymic function, especially when the connection between the toponym and its designed object has weakened. This explains how river names are reassigned as town, mountain, clearings or field names. It is exactly what happened to the descriptive toponym *Șesuri*, “plains”, at first the name of a creek which led to the creation of a series of toponyms that designate geographical objects situated in the vicinity of this creek: *Podul Șesuri* (“bridge”), *Cătunul Șesuri* (“hamlet”), *Piciorul Șesului* (“foothill”), *Vârful Piciorul Șesului* (“foothill peak”), *Stâna Șesuri* (“sheepfold”). The main method of word formation for toponyms is derivation by adding suffixes. In toponymy, suffixes bear a local, personal, patronymic value;

the frequency and productivity of such suffixes differ from one epoch to another, as well as from one region to another.

It becomes obvious, then, that it is of utmost importance to study toponyms both from a phonetic and a semantic perspectives, although all sort of difficulties rise in semantics regarding the identification of the primary meaning of the toponym or the overlap between “the signification of the appellative that becomes a toponym and the quality of the denoted object” (Moldovanu, 1970: 15-47). Some difficulties are also due to the fact that the meaning of the toponym relates to the referent, which belongs to a certain geographical category, in which case it is necessary to define the nature of the relationship between a linguistic sign (a proper name) and the object it denominates. There are other situations, when linguistic analysis leads to the discovery of a previous meaning of an appellative, extinct in the modern language, by means of the etymological criterion. Establishing an etymology requires the investigation of both the form and the meaning of the word, namely, if the meaning of a lexeme is transparent, then its origin is easily established, but if its meaning is not obvious, further research is needed in order to discover the primeval value of the word or the detail that was taken into account when the name was assigned.

As we have seen, linguistic analysis of topological names requires four perspectives, namely those of phonetics, morphology, word formation, and lexis.

Two categories of terms constitute the toponymy of a region: natural features terms and appellatives, on the one hand, and proper toponyms, on the other hand.

1) **Natural features terms** and **appellatives** represent the concrete image of the region. The most important source for Romanian toponymy is to be found in terms belonging to common lexis, which are called appellatives. Toponyms originate from common names, but their specialized use led to the appearance of individualizing features, thus separating them from common nouns. Nevertheless, we need to take into account the fact that place names, albeit elements of the lexis, are not to be mistaken for common names, as they imply specific features that are different from those of the appellatives, among which designation is their most important function. This feature is more obvious in those toponyms whose initial appellative is difficult or impossible to find. The topological denomination process was interconnected to the life of the populations that lived in a certain region, as reflected by the language of the speakers who live or have lived in that territory (Iordan, 1963: 8-10), so that proper knowledge of a local dialect is crucial in the interpretation of toponymic facts. Should we consider their etymology, we notice that the central appellatives of numerous place names have diverse origins, so we need to admit that a particular dialect included both the appellative and the topological name. This made Iorgu Iordan conclude that certain place names “need to be approached in the same way as proper lexical elements, i. e. as Romanian words *stricto sensu*” (Iordan, 1963: 7). They belong both to common vocabulary, with a precise semantic sphere, and to toponymy, in a certain way. Nonetheless, appellatives have character, precise meaning, contents and area of circulation, so they **signify** and **designate**. In the upper basin of Bistrița Aurie we have identified a multitude of toponyms originated from appellatives, which are still in use today in the lexis of the region: *arșița* (“burned land”), *balta* (“pond”), *bahna* (“marsh”), *bâtca* (“slope”), *bobeica* (“clough”), *ciung* (“stump”), *coasta* (“slope”), *corhana* (“cliff”), *creasta* (“ridge”), *dealul* (“hill”), *drumul* (“road”), *fundoaia* (“back-country”), *gura* (“river mouth”), *iezer* (“tarn”), *jgheab* (“ravine”), *mal* (“river bank”), *măgură*

(“hummock”), *muncel* (“mount”), *obcina* (“foothill”), *pârâul* (“creek”), *pădurea* (“forest”), *piscul* (“peak”), *plaiul* (“plateau”), *stâna* (“sheepfold”), *vârf* (“cusp”), etc.

2) **Proper toponyms** are the result of the process we have mentioned earlier. In this toponymic process rises the issue of the difference between the semantic contents of the two names, the appellative and the toponym. Unlike the appellative, which always has a precise meaning, the toponym gradually loses its initial meaning and eventually loses any kind of lexical meaning, its only function being that of identification of a certain reality in the landscape, i. e. of designation. While appellatives have a meaning and design different objects, the corresponding toponym, once it becomes a proper name, will only design a certain individual object.

Place names have included from the beginning two basic elements:

- **the generic element**, referring to the landform or the hydrographic or orographic element: hill, mountain, plain, river, etc.

- **the specific element** that individualizes the geographical reality (description, reference to persons or socio-historical facts): Dealul *Înalt* (“tall”), Muntele *Țibău* (a proper name), Râul *Bistrița Aurie* (“golden”), etc.

One fundamental category of toponyms, alongside appellatives and place names derived from common nouns, is represented by the personal nouns. As we have seen in the case of the appellatives and place names, there is a reciprocity between toponyms and **anthroponyms** (Iordan, 1963: 54), supported by the fact that numerous place names are derived from personal names.

In Romanian toponymy, both from a linguistic-historical perspective, and from a synchronic-diachronic one, the relationship between place names and person names regards the age and circulation of a series of suffixes that are specific to the formation of settlement names (Dan, 1985: 390-395). In this respect, researches have shown that the oldest and widest spread suffixes used in the formation of Romanian settlement names are *-ești* and *-eni* (Petrovici, 1968: 33-34), as in *Ciocănești*, *Iacobeni*, and that the causes that led to such a high productivity of this suffixes in toponymy are of a historical and social nature. Romanian linguist Iorgu Iordan has demonstrated that the suffix *-ești* indicates the personal origin of the inhabitants, while the suffix *-eni* (*-ani*) indicates local origin. Historical mentions are extremely useful in the attempt to demonstrate the early presence of settlement names formed with the suffix *-ești*, and they also provide information on their evolution in time and on the differences between the situation in Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania. To this respect, we can affirm that place names deriving from personal names represent the most important group within socio-historical toponymy, alongside those derived from ethnic group names, trade names and settlement names (Eremia, 1970: 237).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we can assert that the present day system of place names has preserved up to this day a number of old and/or regional forms of Romanian or foreign appellatives; it has borrowed from other languages, through direct contact, a series of elements whose meaning overlapped sometimes on top of the Romanian elements; it has adopted as its own these foreign elements and used them to express human relations; it has ingeniously combined elements that belong to different languages, etc.

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