

# Documenting linguistic practices for navigating space and place in Greenland

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# The big questions

- ① What spatial relations are linguistically encoded?
- ② What gets named? What does not get named?
  - ▶ What land features are labelable?
  - ▶ What places get place names?
  - ▶ What is the role of hierarchy in naming practices?
- ③ What is the relationship between landscape/seascape, naming practices & cultural practices?
  - ▶ How are such relationships linguistically encoded?
- ④ How do these relate to the system of spatial semantics?

(see Basso 1984; Levinson & Wilkins 2006; Levinson 2008; Mark et al. 2007)

**Goal:** To establish a basic ontology of landscape terminology within the framework of the Kalaallisut spatial system

## Main points of the talk

- Linguistic patterns together form organized *frameworks of knowledge*, based on primacy of:
  - ▶ Shape & function
  - ▶ Navigation
  - ▶ Coastal landscape
  - ▶ Locality (the deictic origo)
- The linguistic sub-domains form a rich, interconnected spatial system

## Methodology:

To establish a working taxonomy of landscape terminology, we

- derived a preliminary taxonomy from *Oqaatsit* & had it reviewed by 3 native speakers
- walked the land in Sisimiut with a native speaker, asking her to point out landscape and describe it
- elicited travel narratives using landscape features as landmarks to see how they combine with the directional system

## ⇒ Land vs. water (= solid vs. liquid = kayak vs. sled)

### ● land forms

#### ▶ topological features

- ★ convexities & eminences
- ★ concavities
- ★ horizontal areas
- ★ edges

→ *pingu* 'mound'

→ *qooroq* 'valley'

→ *narsaq* 'plain'

→ *qunneq* 'cliff'

#### ▶ coastal features

- ★ projections
- ★ edges

→ *nuuk* 'headland'

→ *sissaq* 'beach'

### ● water

- ▶ waterways
- ▶ bodies

→ *kangerluk* 'fjord'

→ *taseq* 'lake, pond'

# Landscape ontology – categorization

## ➡ Shape & function over scale (in stems)

*kuuk* 'stream' or 'river'



(see also Holton 2011)

# Landscape ontology – modification strategies



*taseq* 'pond'



*tasersuaq* < *taseq* + *-suaq*  
'big pond (lake)'

The landscape terms can be further modified to add information about:

- size (*ujarassuaq* 'big rock')
- color (*ujarak qernertoq* 'black rock')
- position (*sissammi ujarak* 'rock on the beach')

➡ What gets labeled using a separate stem and what gets modified?

Take a look at rocks:

- *ujarak* 'stone' (D. sten)
- *ujarassuaq* 'big rock' (ujarak + -suaq)
- *qaarsoq* 'flat rock', 'rock surface' (D. klippeflade)
- *qaqqaq* 'mountain'
- *qaqqaaraq* 'small mountain' (qaqqaq + -araq)

# Landscape ontology - some rocks



*ujarak* 'rock'



*ujarassuaq* < *ujarak* + *-suaq*  
'big rock'

# Landscape ontology – big rocks



*qaarsoq* 'rock with flat surface'



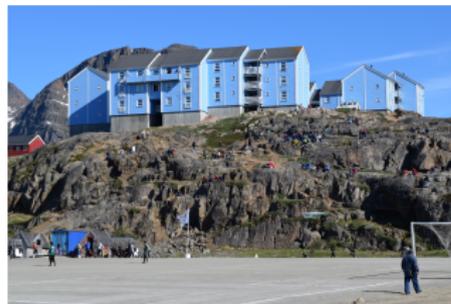
*qaarsoq* 'rock you can sit on';  
'rock without anything  
growing on it'

*ujarak* is a piece of *qaarsoq*  
*qaarsoq* is part of a *qaqqaq*

# Landscape ontology – big rocks are mountains



*qaqqaq* 'mountain'



*qaqqaaraq* < *qaqqaq* + *-araq*  
'small mountain'



## Slope terms ➡ Importance of perspective, function and shape

<i>innaarsuk</i>	'slope' ('too steep to walk on')
<i>kussangajaaq</i>	'very steep slope (downwards)'
<i>qummukajaaq</i>	'increase on a slope' ('where people go up')
<i>ammukajaaq</i>	'slope going down' ('where you go down') ('top view')
<i>majoqqaq</i>	'a river you sail up; a slope going up'

# Demonstratives and directional system

- Overlapping deictic demonstratives and larger-scale directional system
- Coastal-based (Fortescue 1988)
- Major axes:
  - ▶ Right vs. left along coastline (when facing out to sea)
  - ▶ Inland vs. seawards (up vs. down)
- Different levels of meaning
  - ▶ Local sense vs. larger geographical area
  - ▶ 'Primary' vs. 'secondary' meanings

# Demonstratives and directional system

<b>Stem</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Other meanings</b>
<i>ma-</i>	proximal	
<i>uv-</i>	neutral	
<i>ik-</i>	distal	
<i>kan-</i>	neutral/down	towards the sea; West
<i>sam-</i>	distal/down	towards to sea; West
<i>pik-</i>	neutral/up	inland; East
<i>pav-</i>	distal/up	inland; East
<i>qam-</i>	interior/exterior	
<i>kig-</i>	exterior	South; towards the sun
<i>av-</i>	right along coast	North
<i>qav-</i>	left along coast	South
<i>(im-)</i>	non-visible	

Table 1 : Demonstrative stems



**Goal:** To understand how place names function within the framework of the Kalaallisut spatial system.

- There are over 57,000 approved place names in Greenland.

# Place names

nungagis.gl – digital atlas of Greenland





- We first derived a list of all place names in *Oqaatsit*
  - ▣➔ These provide the basis for our preliminary semantic analysis
- We then retrieved 1000 place names from the Sisimiut area at [nunagis.gl](http://nunagis.gl) to supplement the data from *Oqaatsit* with more localized toponyms

# Place names – semantic categories

Place names fall into eight basic semantic categories, but:

- Landscape (or natural features): By far the largest category!

Landscape-based place names combine with other specificational features, such as:

- Size
- Color
- Relative position
- Evaluation

NOTE: we find approved place names in all ontological landscape categories (convexities, horizontal areas, etc.), and place names from each category intersect with the above specificational features

# Place names – landscape ontology

## Category

convexities

concavities

horizontal areas

edges

coastal projections

waterways

bodies of water

## Example

*pingu* 'mound'

*qooroq* 'valley'

*qassi* 'low area'

*qunneq* 'cliff'

*nuuk* 'headland'

*kangerluk* 'fjord'

*taseq* 'lake'

## Place name

*Pingu*

*Qooqqut*

*Qassiarsuk*

*Qunnermiut*

*Nuuk*

*Kangerlussuaq*

*Taseralik*

# Landscape terminology: inland waters

Landscape terminology: *taseq* 'lake, pond'  
inland waters + *size*

Toponym: *Taseq* (52° 36' 36.9" W, 66° 49' 9.4" N)  
or *Tatsip Ataata Tasii*

*Tasersuaq*

taseq-rsuaq

lake-big

'big lake'

*Tasersuatsiaq*

taseq-suaq-tsiaq

lake-big-fair.sized

'pretty big lake'

# Landscape terminology: coastal features

Landscape terminology: *nuuk* 'headland'

Toponym: *Nuuk* (52° 49' 14.1" W, 67° 44' 97.9" N)

Toponym: *Nuuk* (52° 54' 36.9" W, 66° 49' 51.9" N)

- *Nuuk Qaqortoq* < 'headland white' (color)
- *Nuummiut* < *nuuk* + *miuq* 'one from' + -t (ABS/REL.PL) (place)
- *Nuunnguaq* < *nuuk* + *nnguaq* 'small, lovable, dear' (evaluation)
- *Nuukassak* < *nuuk* + *kassak* 'bad, poor' (evaluation)
- *Nuussuaq* < *nuuk* + *suaq* 'big' (size)
- *Nuussuatsiaq* < *nuuk* + *suaq* 'big' + *tsiaq* 'fair-sized' (size)
- *Nuussuaq Kangilleq* < *nuuk* + *kangilleq* 'a neighbor to the east' (location)
- *Nuussuaq Killeq* < *nuuk* + *killeq* 'west' (location)

# Place names – multidimensional or ‘hidden’ meaning

*Usage:* questions about the “meaning” of place names invoked  
descriptions of usage:

- *Nassuttooq* < *nassuk* ‘antler’ + -tooq ‘one which has big’ = place where you go to hunt reindeer & muskox because you can find so many there
- *Savissivik* < *savik* ‘knife’ + -si ‘acquire’ + -vik ‘place’ = the place where you find iron (*savimineq*)
- *Ilimmaasaq* < *ilimmaasaq* ‘pin on the end of a harpoon shaft’ + -saq ‘alike, resembles’ = when you are there, you leave your body. In the old days, you usually go to the mountain.

- Several themes underlie and categorize Kalaallisut spatial system:
  - ▶ shape/function (navigation)
  - ▶ coastal landscape (coastal axis and elevation)
  - ▶ locality/origo
- Multidimensionality of spatial meaning
- Interconnectedness of sub-systems

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