Interdisciplinary Approach to British Place-Names Studies

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Abstract

Realization of culture, history and geography in the morphological structure of British place-names is observed. New tends of the interdisciplinary approach to place-names system development, the relationship of place-names and vocabulary words, archaic Indo-European roots, universal and ethnic features of place-names are considered in complex with historical and cultural impact.

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1. Introduction

It has long been recognized that detailed study of the names of places brings an important perspective to history. The serious academic study of place-names began among medievalists, because the geographical and historical record of names can supplement other historical evidence, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Place-name scholars collect spellings of place-names (including the names of old places that have been lost) from charters, court records and other ancient documents. The names of small places can be especially important in studying family names of local origin: some families took their name, not from a village but from an individual house in which they lived, e.g. Blakeway or Copplestone (Hanks et. al, 2002).

Culture, history, geography and linguistic analytical methods have found successful application in place-names studies. The origin and borrowings of geographical names are considered to be cultural heredity. We suppose the variability of the linguistic forms of place-names is linked with the history of the country, whether it describes some topographical objects either natural or man-made, which were then transferred to the settlement: Bourton-in-
the-Water; object quality: Leeds Castle; Gidea Park; Chidwell; or historical occasions: Brentwood; Barnstaple, Brittas Bay (briotas).

Place-names research including ethno-cultural and sociological aspects is an applied autonomous discipline, which observes cultural heredity of the society.

The aim of the article is to show the structure, origin, common and ethno-specific features of place-names existing in modern English, using cultural, historical and geographical data as interdisciplinary approach.

Place names, their functioning, meaning and origin, structure and the area of distribution, historical development and semantic changes, the relationship of names and vocabulary words are studied in various cultures (Mencken, 1921; Dorward, 2001; Frolov, 2005). Place-names response to the sociological changes is immediate so they can serve as chronological units as well. Ancient Indo-European elements are presented in place-names being an informational source.

2. Methodology

The traditions of names giving are specific in each culture. It is closely connected with the history of the country: personal names and nicknames, place of birth and living, lands owning, family relations, culture and labour (Cresswell, 2009; Delahunty, 2006). Individual creative features of the place-names giving are considered in complex with mental cognition and cultural effect (Fauconnier, 1999). Interrelation of languages in the conditions of ethnic contacts initiates existence of territorial universal units, which participate in word compositions. Special attention is paid to singling out universal and dialect features of place-names in our research. Scientists try to reconstruct archaic forms and Indo-European roots which are saved in modern place-names (Mullonen, 2000; Murzaev, 1995; Mills, 2003).

Table 1. Indo-European roots in modern British Place names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Indo-European roots</th>
<th>Graphical variants</th>
<th>British Place names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aber</td>
<td>-ber - ber</td>
<td>Aberford, Berwick, Barmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abh</td>
<td>-awn - own</td>
<td>Awn, Owenweg, Aubwee, Almond</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-aub - alm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Avon</td>
<td>-eva - ive</td>
<td>Avonmore, Evan, Ive, Anne, Inney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-anne - inney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bel</td>
<td>-bell - ball</td>
<td>Belfast, Belleek, Ballyshannon, Belcoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Borg</td>
<td>-bury - brough - barrow</td>
<td>Conisbrough, Glastonbury, Kingsbury, Irthlingborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Boil</td>
<td>-bottle - battle - boot</td>
<td>Newbottle, Newbattle, Bootle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Burn</td>
<td>-bra - bro</td>
<td>Bruton, Brockworth, Broxbourne, Kilburn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Caer</td>
<td>-car - cath</td>
<td>Caernarvon, Carlile, Carstairs, Carn, Carnedd, Carnlea, Carron, Caimtoul, Careg (cerrig), Carrigafoyle, Craigavad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caol</td>
<td>-kyle - killy</td>
<td>Caolispot, Killisport, Kyles of Bute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cluain</td>
<td>-clon - clin</td>
<td>Clincycracken, Clan, Cloncaird, Clunes, Clonmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dair</td>
<td>-dar - der</td>
<td>Daar, Derinish, Adare, Darrach, Edendarrock, Deer, Londonderry, Dernagree, Dirrie More, Derry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Deas</td>
<td>-ass - des - dis</td>
<td>Ratass, Deskart, Diskir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dol</td>
<td>-dale - dal</td>
<td>Deloraine, Kendal, Arundel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Es</td>
<td>-esk - usk</td>
<td>Thames, Ash, Ouse, Wach, Ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-exe - axe</td>
<td>Doonass, Ballysadare, Askeaton, Feteresso, Easdale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Universals are often observed in Germanic languages: place / palace, poll / pool, scoll / school, strath / street, tri / three, thorpe / trop. Indo-European roots are the most popular components still used in modern languages (Mills, 2003). Their analysis allows finding out adstrate forms, close in meaning to modern English elements (Hampton, Dryfield, Marbury); substrate forms, which has no correlation in modern English, but are widely used in Germanic languages (Lamlash, Kildare, Oxford); superstrate forms, ancient Indo-European borrowings saved in old Slavonic languages (Murrey, Diskir, Derry) (Mullonen, 2000; Golomidova, 1987).

Our research allows showing place-names origin manifested in the morphological processes as well (Khvesko, 2012).

3. Research and discussion

3.1. Morphological forms

Linguistic creativeness as manifestation of nominator individuality is observed in morphological forms. The morphological processes which take place in the original and borrowed place-names are analysed in diachrony. In the British place-names the following morphological processes take place:

- hybridization, e.g.: Silverstone ← Sewulf's + ton; Yelverton ← Ella s + ford + ton; Glamorgan ← glan + more + geni; Godmanchester ← Lat.Godmund+cestre;
- reduction: Fotheringhay ← forth + here + ing + eg; Glen Affric ← glen + a + the + break;
- doubling: Torpenhow Hill ← tor + pen + how + Hill;
- adaptation: Conisbrough; Glastonbury; Gold’s + pie (E) ← by (ON ).

Such modifications as stone → ton, borough → burg, chester → set cause the loss of primary meaning and appearance of naive folk interpretation of the new form, e.g. Brownsea Island → Brunkeseye, where the final component E eye ← OE ieg. Folk interpretation of Brownsee is: brown + sea.

3.2. The structure of British place-names

Most English place-names are compounds, that is they consist of two elements, the first of which usually qualifies the second. The first element in such compounds may be a noun, an adjective, a river-name, a personal name, or a tribal name. Typical examples of compound place-names formed during the Old English period are: Daventry, Coventry, Oswestry (Dafa s tree, Cofa s tree), dat/der: Derwent, Daren’t, Dart, Darly, Darvel (celtic: deruenta → dar/der); beith (Gaelic: beither → E birch): Dalbeattie; ash: Knotty Ash, etc.
However some place-names consist of one element only, at least to begin with: examples include names like Comb ('the valley'), Hale, Lea, Stoke, Stowe, Thorpe, Worth, and Wyke. Less common are the names consisting of three elements such as Claverton (burdock ford farmstead), Redmarley, Woodmansterne, and Wotherton; in most of these the third element has probably been added later to an already existing compound. There are kinds of place-names composition, one of the most frequent being the use of the medial connective particle -ing in Paddington, probably best explained as estate associated with a man called Padda. Some compound place-names in the western parts of England are so-called name-phrases in which the usual order of elements is reversed following Celtic practice: Aspatria ('Patricks ashtree'), Bewaldeth, Brigsteer, Landulph, and Tremaine (Mills, 2003; Dorward, 2001).

3.3. Ethno-cultural features of British place-names

Comparative analysis of Indo-European roots as place-names components shows that changes are mainly caused by the semantic dynamics. Many old place-names have undergone some degree of reduction in the long period since they were first coined. The meanings of topographical terms can vary a good deal from name to name, for some elements used over a long period in the formation of English place names underwent considerable changes of meaning during medieval times: Old English feld originally 'open land' developed a later sense 'enclosed plot', Old English wald (forest) came to mean 'open upland', and Old English leah (wood) became 'woodland clearing' and then 'meadow' (Dorward, 2001; Mills, 2003). The choice of the most likely meaning for one of these elements in an individual name is therefore a matter of judgment, based among other things on locality, the nature of the compound, and assumptions about the age of the name. Moreover recent research has increasingly shown that what seem to be similar terms for hills or valleys, woodland or marshland, or agricultural land had fine distinctions of meaning in early times. Different Old English terms for 'hill' like dun, hyl, hrycg, hoh, heafod, and ofer are far from being synonymous, seem to have had their own specialized meanings. In addition these and other common topographical elements like eg (island), hamm (enclosure), and halh (nook) were each capable of a wide range of extended meanings according to date, region, and the character of the landscape itself (Khvesko, 2013).

Place-names form very large and diverse groups, representing description of some topographical objects either natural or man-made, which were then transferred to the settlement, probably at a very early date, e.g. Bourton-in-the-Water; Bourton-upon-Trent; Bourton-in-the-Hill; Black Bourton; Burton Constable; Clayton-le Moors; Clayton-le-Dale; Clayton-le-Wools.

The names for rivers and streams, springs and lakes, fords and roads, marshes and moors, hills and valleys, woods and clearings, and various other landscape features are also the names of inhabited places: Sherborne, Fulbrook, Bakewell, Tranmere, Oxford, Breamore, Stodmarsh, Swindon, Goodwood – all have second elements that denote topographical features.

4. Conclusion

The system of place-names is closely connected with the history of the country: personal names and nicknames, place of birth and living, lands owning, family relations, culture and labour. The tradition of names giving is specific for each culture. Place-names play an important role in the process of communication. Globalisation presents a unique opportunity for the universal structure forming. Currently new trends of place-names studies are observed. Interdisciplinary approach to place-names shows what historical events take place in diachrony. Comparative analysis of the morphological structure of British place-names shows the presence of ethno-specific features in them realized in such morphological processes as reduction, duplication, hybridization and adaptation.

References


