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**SEMANTICS AND ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH ASTIONYMS IN
THE ASPECT OF LINGUISTIC GEOGRAPHY**

Elena A. Khomutnikova (a), Ekaterina V. Gunbina (b), Mariya S. Zhurkova (c)*, Fedor V. Fetukov (d)

*Corresponding author

(a) Kurgan State University, 63, Sovetskaya Street, Kurgan, 640000, Russia ea7878@mail.ru

(b) Kurgan State University, 63, Sovetskaya Street, Kurgan, 640000, Russia ea7878@mail.ru

(c) Chelyabinsk State University, 129, Kashirin Brothers Street, Chelyabinsk, 454001, Russia krasina87@inbox.ru

(d) The Ural State Law University, 21, Komsomolskaya Street, Yekaterinburg, 620066, Russia fetukov@inbox.ru

Abstract

The article summarizes the results of the research into semantics and etymology of English astionyms in the aspect of linguistic geography. The study presents an English astionyms card index, which provides the description of semantic properties and etymology of the most significant units. The attempt is being made to determine the place of English astionyms in the system of onomastic theory and linguistic geography. The material of the study is English astionyms in the amount of 173 units, which are the names of English cities with a population of more than 50,000 people. The card index was compiled with application of a continuous sampling method to the "Dictionary of British Place-Names" by A.D. Mills. In order to analyse and classify English astionyms the authors considered two classifications of toponyms on semantic grounds and applied them to the study material. In the course of the study an original classification of English astionyms based on etymological grounds and reflecting their language sources was developed. The findings obtained in the study of etymology and semantics of English astionyms in the aspect of linguistic geography allow including them in the range of such disciplines as history, geography, archaeology and ethnography. The results of the analysis provided in the article can serve as the material for geographical research.

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Keywords: Semantics, toponym, astionym, etymology, linguistic geography.



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1. Introduction

The term "astionym" was introduced by Russian linguist Podolskaya in 1988 and entrenched in the Russian onomastic terminology. Astionym is defined as "an oikonym, the proper name of the city" (Podolskaya, 1988, p. 49). As astionym is a subspecies of oikonym, and the latter is a subspecies of toponym, the study of astionyms generally belongs to the field of toponymy. The subject of our research is semantics and etymology of English astionyms in the aspect of linguistic geography.

Linguistic geography is "a branch of linguistics that studies the territorial distribution of linguistic phenomena" (Linguistic encyclopedic dictionary, 1990, p. 268). Names of settlements are of undoubted interest under this aspect. Looking at the map, one can see the names of countries, seas, islands, rivers, lakes, cities. Each name has its own meaning, since no nation named rivers, lakes or villages by a random combination of sounds. Therefore, even the most complex and, at first glance, incomprehensible geographical names can be explained. The origin, the semantic content, historical roots and changes of pronunciation and spelling that the names of geographical objects undergo over the centuries - all these are the subject of such science as toponymy. The fundamental unit of toponymy is a toponym - the name of a geographical object. The main function of toponyms is to individualize, identify and mark out the objects named.

Toponymy develops in close cooperation with such sciences as geography, history, ethnography and it serves a valuable source for the research into the history of the country and its language. With the course of time, a nation may disappear, but the evidence of it will remain in the topographic names. It's quite often that the lexical structure of toponyms preserves the words that are not actively used in nowadays language or have even fallen into disuse. Many geographical names can tell about the ancient customs, traditions and life of the inhabitants of the territory they name and even their ancestors. From geographical names one can also obtain such information as what the nature of a particular area was in the previous centuries.

2. Problem Statement

The research topicality is determined by the insufficiency of studies investigating the nature of English astionyms. The works of the scientists in this area are mainly devoted to toponymy in general. Many Russian and foreign linguists were engaged in analysing toponymy issues.

At the present stage of linguistics development the problems of linguogeography are not often the subject of researchers' interest. This is evidenced by a small amount of recent works of Russian and foreign scientists in this field. We shall indicate some of them below, namely those, which appeared to be the most significant for our study.

3. Research Questions

The research study is carried out in order to determine the place of English astionyms in the system of onomastic theory and linguistic geography. The material of the study is comprised by English astionyms, which are the names of English cities with a population of more than 50,000 people. The research is based on the data of the card index, which was compiled with application of a continuous

sampling method to the "Dictionary of British Place-Names" by Mills (2003). The correlation between the semantics of English toponyms and their etymology is defined. For this purpose the two most prominent classifications of toponyms on semantic grounds were compared while applied to the study material. As a result of the comparison a new classification was suggested, aiming at establishing the link between the semantics and etymology of English toponyms.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research is to describe the semantics and etymology of English toponyms in the aspect of linguistic geography.

The purpose of this article determines the following research objectives: to compile a card index of English toponyms; to study the semantic properties of English toponyms; to describe the etymology of the most significant English toponyms; to determine the place of English toponyms in the system of onomastics and linguistic geography.

5. Research Methods

Research methods applied in the course of the study are: descriptive method, comparative historical method, method of semantic reconstruction, geographical method of toponymic research.

The study material is represented by lexical units which are the names of English cities with a population of more than 50,000 people according to the 2011 census. The data was structured in a card index consisting of 173 units. The card index was compiled by applying a continuous sampling to the "Dictionary of British Place-Names" by Mills (2003).

6. Findings

Some initial theses of the study were previously given in the article "Classification of English toponyms: etymological aspect" by Gunbina and Khomutnikova (2017). In our opinion, the recent years have indicated two key directions of linguogeography research.

The first one is connected with the practical application of linguistic and geographical knowledge of toponyms. For example,

Wang et al. (2019) in the article "Spatial-temporal characteristics and causes of changes to the county-level administrative toponyms cultural landscape in the eastern plains of China" point out:

As part of the cultural landscape, administrative toponyms do not only reflect natural and sociocultural phenomena, but also help with related management and naming work. Historically, county-level administrative districts have been stable and basic administrative regions in China, playing a role in the country's management (p.1).

Vuolteenaho, Lappalainen, and Ainiala (2019) their work notice that "spatializations (discourses of ideal or stereotyped spaces) are conceptualized as powerful discourses of the surrounding society, providing resources for place-bound identity construction in interaction" (p. 140).

Roncevic and Stokov (2017) in the research "Ethnolinguistic studies and GIS (linguistic geography and ethnographic cartography)" touch upon possibilities of using the geographic information system (GIS) in ethnolinguistic studies, in particular, in linguistic geography and ethnological cartography (p. 63).

The article of Basko (2019) "Figurative names of countries and cities as a source of culturological information" (p. 350) is written in compliance with linguistic approach that aims at revealing the place of toponyms in the language picture of the world, but at the same time the author lays emphasis on the study of the semantics of metaphors that are behind the names of geographical objects.

As is stated by Gallagher and Leahy (2019), the practical application of knowledge in linguogeography is possible in the study of English. In their article the scientists set out find how to simultaneously engage learners in new content (e.g. glacial erosion, deposition, landforms) as well as in the study of language needed to convey that content (erode, pluck, ablation, hydraulics) (p. 435). Thus, the first approach mainly binds the researchers over the study of possible practical, future applications of knowledge, obtained in the research.

The second approach is associated with the traditional interest in the origin and structure of linguogeographical units. In this case no practical goals are pursued, but for the goal of obtaining a data of purely theoretical value.

Thus, Tent and Blai (2019) in their work "A Clash of Names: The Terminological Morass of a Toponym Class" address the problem of formation of toponyms from two elements, specific and generic, which refer to the same geographical object (p. 65).

Andrei Levitsky (2015) in his article "Names of the US cities through the prism of globalization" points out the contribution of various ethnic groups into the etymology of US place names (p. 598).

Rezaie (2019) in "Locating the Ancient Toponym of "Kindau": The Recognition of an Indo-European God in the Assyrian Inscriptions of the Seventh Century BC" makes an attempt to clarify the location, terminology and etymology of the toponym:

«Kindau» is the name of an ancient fortress located in the west of Iran, which has been mentioned three times in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king, Sargon II. So far, no comment has been made by researchers about the location and terminology of this toponym. The author believes that the second part of this name, i.e. "dau", represents the ancient god of the "sky" in the beliefs of Indo-European peoples. This new view opens a new perspective to the dark field of Median religion studies Rezaie, 2019, p. 1).

Dambuev (2019) investigates simple toponym-phrases, which are the nuclear type of toponym-phrases in Russian toponymy, by means of statistical analysis (p. 9).

Beloso (2019) in the research "Presares: Comitatum, Commisso, Territorio? Documentary and Spatial Dimension of a Forsaken Toponym" notes the importance of etymological research of toponyms in the aspect of their semantic connectedness with derivatives and related lexemes:

The toponym Presaras as the name of the entity in which the monastery of Sobrado dos Monxes was placed has a relevant presence in the documentation from the High Middle Ages, especially in the cartularies of Sobrado, until its almost complete disappearance from the 12th century on. Using these cartularies from Sobrado as the main source, an approach to the aforementioned reality is proposed, as well as to the different terms that are identified in the text accompanying the Latin form Presares and its derivatives (territorio, ualle, mandatione, commisso, comitatus) (Beloso, 2019, p. 77).

Our research, following on from the second direction, aims at solving the problem of semantics and etymology of English astionyms. Despite the long history of research there are still many controversial issues in the study of city names (astionyms), which require the attention of not only linguists but also historians.

The study of astionyms may contribute to compilation of etymological dictionaries, studying the historical past of peoples, as well as determining the boundaries of their settlement and the stages of language development. Besides, there is a definite need in investigating a number of unresolved issues concerning various classifications of English astionyms. Most of the classifications are currently controversial due to the wide variety of onomastic phenomena. However, there are numerous classifications that systematize the names, take into account the diversity of existing material and different approaches to its study. Toponymists have not yet come to a common approach to systematization of toponyms in general and astionyms in particular, as it is necessary to take into account not only the language data, but the data of history and geography as well.

To define a place astionyms in the system of onomastics, we shall first of all mention that onomastics is divided into several areas: anthroponymy, endonymy, ethnonymy, oikonymy, theonymy, zoonymy etc. One of the most developed areas of onomastics is toponymy, which studies the proper names of natural objects on Earth, as well as objects created by man, which are clearly recorded in the region. Toponyms, in turn, are divided into oronyms (names of mountains or a hills), hydronyms (names of water bodies), choronyms (names of geographical, historical, economic areas) etc. Toponymy also includes oikonymy that studies names of houses or other building names in general and names of settlements in particular. Oikonyms are subdivided into proper names of cities (astionyms) and names of rural settlements (comonyms) (Podolskaya, 1988).

As the material shows, most astionyms consist of two components, the first usually determining the second one. Such astionyms are called compound. Some city names consist of only one component and are defined as simple. Names consisting of three components are quite rare. Most of them are formed by having the third lexical component added to a compound astionym. In addition, there are so-called double names. The astionyms of that kind were originally simple or compound. Later, they had a suffix added to them, most often the one of the manorial type.

In order to study the semantic properties of English astionyms we have considered two classifications of toponyms on semantic grounds and applied them to the study material. One of the classifications was developed by David Mills, a lecturer at the University of London, a member of the

English Toponymic Society. He classifies English toponyms into: folk-names, habitative names and topographical names (Mills, 2003):

- Folk-names comprise the smallest group of toponyms. Toponyms of this category were originally the names of the inhabitants of this territory. Thus, the name of the tribe came to mean the territory occupied by this tribe. Names with the formant *ingas* are of particular interest, meaning "people, inhabitants" they are associated with the early stages of Anglo-Saxon settlement. For example, Hastings is derived from an Old English personal name *Hæsta* + formant *ingas*, meaning the settlement of the family or followers of a person named *Hæsta*;

- Habitative names form a larger group. They denote originally inhabited places, such as estates, farms, villages, hamlets, fortresses, houses and other types of buildings and settlements. In the names of this type, the second element describes the type of settlement. Among them such Old English elements as *hām* (meaning home, homestead; eg. Horsham), *tūn* (meaning farm; eg. Kingston upon Hull), *worth* (meaning guard; eg. Tamworth), *wīc* (meaning dwelling; eg. West Bromwich), *burh* (meaning fortress; eg. Aylesbury); Old Norse elements *bý* (meaning farm; eg. Corby), and *thorp* (meaning a remote farm; eg. Scunthorpe) are distinguished.

- Topographical names form quite a large and diverse group. Some of them were originally descriptions of some topographic object. These descriptions were later transferred to a settlement near the named site. Thus, the names of rivers, lakes, springs, streams, fords, roads, swamps, hills, valleys, forests in time became the names of settlements. Such toponyms as Oxford, Swindon, Sheffield, Stafford may serve an example of it. All of them bear a component denoting a topographic feature.

Another classification of toponyms was proposed by Selishchev (1968) in his work "From old and new toponymy". The work provided the first division of geographical names on the lexical-semantic principle in Russian linguistics. Many works of Russian scientists contain references to this classification. According to it the following groups of geographical names can be distinguished:

- Geographical names derived from a person's name, nickname or surname. In most cases, the name belonged to the owner or founder of the city. For example, Altrincham derives from a personal name *Aldhere* + *-inga* or *-ing* + *hām*;

- Geographical names derived from the kind of activity of the owners of the city or its inhabitants, for example, Swindon is derived from *swīn* + *dūn*, which means "the hill where the pigs are kept";

- Geographical names signifying a new building, as opposed to the old one. For example, Newcastle upon Tyne is formed from *nīwe* + *castel* "new castle" + the name of the river;

- Geographical names derived from Church names. For example, St Helens is named after the chapel of St Helena;

- Geographical names that reflect the specifics of the landscape. For example, Widnes is formed from *wīd* + *næss* "wide cape";

- Geographical names indicating flora details in relation to a geographical feature. For example, Birkenhead is formed from *birce*, *bircen* (with Scandinavian -k-) + *hēafod*, meaning "the cape where birches grow";

- Geographical names given after the name of the bridge. For example, Stourbridge derives from the Celtic or Old English name for the river (possibly meaning 'strong') + *brycg*, meaning "a bridge over the river Stour";

- Geographical names reflecting fauna specifics of the area. For example, Derby is derived from *djúr* + *bý* "a farm or village where deer live".

Having the two classifications compared we came to conclusion that Selishchev's classification explains the larger picture and represents the diversity of English astionyms more fully, while Mills's classification describes the semantics of astionyms only in general terms. Therefore, for any further research in this field we recommend applying the classification developed by Afanasii Matveevich Selishchev.

In achieving the research objective of describing the etymology of English astionyms, we relied on the history of England and determined what languages, in addition to English, were used by the population in this territory at certain periods of time. As a next step, we made an attempt to develop an original classification of English astionyms on etymological grounds. Thus, on etymological grounds all English astionyms can be divided into the following groups:

- astionyms of Anglo-Saxon origin. For example, Ashford is derived from the Old English *æscet* + *ford* which means "a ford next to a group of ash trees";

- astionyms of Celtic origin. For example, Wigan is derived from the Breton *wīg* "farm, settlement" in a diminutive form;

- astionyms of Scandinavian origin. For example, Crosby is formed from the Old Norse *krossa-bý* "a village with crosses";

- astionyms - hybrids, consisting of the components of different origin (Celtic and Old Norse or Celtic and Old English). For example, Doncaster is derived from the Celtic name for the river *Don* (meaning simply "water, river") and the Old English word *ceaster* meaning "Roman fortress";

- astionyms of Post-Norman period. These astionyms appeared already in the Middle English (XII-XV centuries) and New English forms of English language (from XVI century). For example, Telford is named after the Scottish engineer Thomas Telford (1757-1834), who designed the Menai Suspension Bridge — the longest suspension bridge at that time (Mills, 2003).

Astionyms – hybrids may, in their turn, be divided into the following groups:

- astionyms consisting of components of Celtic and Norse origin. For example, Oldham is derived from Celtic *alt* "slope, rock" and Old Norse *holmr* "island";

- astionyms made up by components of Celtic and Old English origin. For example, Cambridge derives from the Celtic name of the river Granta and the Old English *brycg* - "bridge". The name Grant had been changed, due to Norman influence into Cam;

- astionyms consisting of components of Old English and Old Norse origin. For example, Scarborough was formed from an Old Norse personal name *Skarði* and old English *burh* "fortress";

- astionyms made up by components of Celtic and Latin origin. Only one astionym belongs to this group — Lincoln, formed from the Celtic *lindo* - "pond" and the Latin *colonia* "Roman colony";

•astionyms consisting of components of Old English and Latin origin. For example, Rowley Regis comes from the Old English *rūh* and *lēah* "uncultivated glade". The affix is derived from the Latin *regis* "belonging to the king", since the place used to belong to the king.

The greatest part of astionyms (72%) is comprised by astionyms of Anglo-Saxon origin. They are followed by the astionyms-hybrids (18%). The astionyms of the Post-Norman period (2%) are in a minority. It should also be noted that, despite the significant influence of French and Latin on the English language in general and on English toponymy in particular, we have not found any astionyms of purely French or Latin origin. One lexical element of Latin or French origin may be found in the geographical names belonging to the group of astionyms-hybrids, but the nuclear element is most often a lexeme of Celtic or Old English origin. The reason for this could be the fact that Latin was used only as the written language of the government, and French-only as the language of the Norman nobility. English was used among the rural and urban population. In addition, by the time of the Norman Conquest, many cities already had defined names.

7. Conclusion

Analyzing the semantics of English astionyms, we reached a conclusion that it is of great importance for historians, who, using the data of these studies, can learn about the character of people's lives in a particular period of time, about how the landscape of a territory looked in the past, about economic and social changes in society, and so on.

We investigated the linguistic sources of astionyms and determined that most English astionyms derive from five languages: Celtic, Latin, Old Norse, Old English and Norman. We found out that astionyms of Anglo-Saxon origin are dominant. The studied material also included quite a large number of Scandinavian and Celtic geographical names.

In the course of the study we developed an original classification of English astionyms based on etymological grounds and reflecting their language sources. Thus, English astionyms, representing a huge historical value, reflect the historical stages of settlement of the territory, interethnic contacts, historical, political and socio-economic changes.

The obtained data may be of interest for linguistics as well as for such sciences as history, geography, archaeology and ethnography. The results of the research may serve the material for compiling etymological dictionaries and for historical and geographical studies. This work contributes to a more complete study of the English toponymic system. Linguists, studying astionyms from the point of linguistic geography, provide scientific material to historians and geographers, and those, in their turn, acquire the possibility of getting a more complete picture of evolution of peoples and nations, particularly of those who lived in England.

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