

# THE VALUE OF TOPONYMY IN TEACHING

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## Toponymy

Giving names to natural and cultural facts is an ancient practice. Names have been referred to as "fossils of human geography" and it is necessary to know them in order to comprehend their deep, particular histories. Therefore, it is useful to understand the process of naming to recover ancient and/or disappearing languages.

### Place names: definition and classification

The Geographic Name is a category in itself. It is composed of one or more words, whether simple or compound, which specify an entity, fact, object or geographic feature. It is formed with two elements:

- a generic term which specifies the kind of feature mentioned, for example a river, hill, cattle station, city;
- a specific term which determines the proper noun which is going to distinguish that geographic feature, for example, "de los Sauces," "de Velasco," "Chancay Chico," "La Rioja."

The analysis of geographic name takes on toponymical character when there is research about origin and meaning. The research would investigate the reasons behind that name selection, and any linguistic, graphic, and phonetic evolutions that may have occurred.

Characteristics which pertain to geographic elements being named classify these place names into six generic terms:

- Oronames: related to orographic features;
- Hydronames: related to hydrographic features;
- Phytonames: related to floristic names;
- Zoonames: related to fauna names;
- Eponymic: related to national heroes;
- Odonymic: related to means of communication.

Geographic names are, therefore, of top importance when indicating features, whether urban or rural, in a geographic or cartographic setting. In addition, these names are also paramount in preparing a general history of an area and its residential communities. Original names, substitutions, spelling and phonetic distortions imposed by former inhabitants at each battle, conquest or colonization have shaped the toponymy of a given area. The toponymy provides a means of knowing the evolution of people and experiences with the aid of cartographic and geographic data.

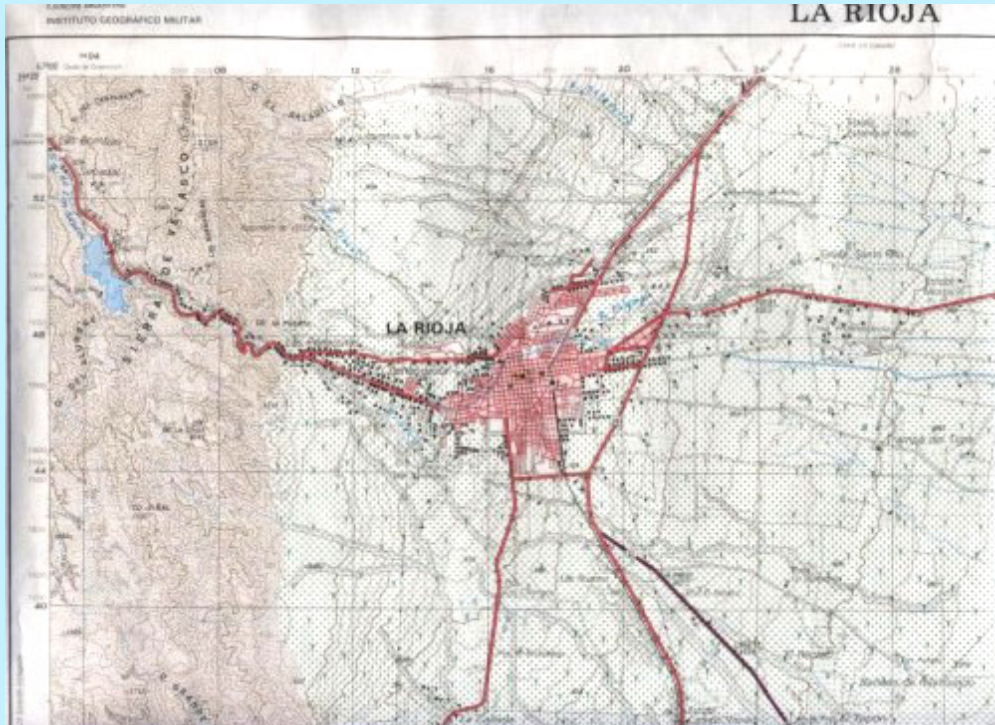
### Toponymy, cartography and education

Cartography is the graphic register of the natural and cultural processes of an area. Therefore, there is an existing relationship to toponymy. An examination of names indicates that these names also evolve as inhabitants take possession of their environment. The process of naming is also conditioned culturally and reflects a number of concerns which are recorded into plans, charts and maps. Names are necessary to show the symbology of a map. So, why not make maps speak, and why not teach children the use of this substantial language? This will allow students to understand the knowledge of the environment in which they live and to negotiate distances that are both nearby and far away. This will also provide an understanding of different places, cultures and other areas. How can we know different territories if not through names? To examine the origin of names is to highlight the importance of those who first identified and named those geographical features, giving identity and meaning to them. This is relevant to current

pedagogical practice. The generic and specific terms contained within names reveal a great deal of critical information important for educational purposes. Therefore, including toponymy in education gives life to Geography and History.

Teachers can familiarize students to the names of streets, squares, the distance travelled from their houses to the kindergarten, corners, and different rooms during the Initial Level (NI) of children (3-5 year olds). But, it is in Basic General Education (EGB) with students (6-14 year olds) where stress must be placed on the knowledge of the geographic area. Questions related to the district, city, area, country, continent, and planet, with a progressive vision of linguistic and ethnic differences can be addressed. This is particularly important as they are reflected in names and possession of the "abstract area" through Cartography. The addition of terminology such as toponymy will provide teaching with meaningful content which will cut across all levels (NI, EGB, Polimodal), and fields, such as Geography, History, Linguistics and Cartography, as well as Anthropology, Law, Surveying, and Folklore.

### **An example: La Rioja**



*Figure 1: Fragment of La Rioja 2966-26 topographic map*

How can we understand toponymy? This will be produced by using a practical example with the analysis of the LA RIOJA 2966-26 topographic map (Figure 1), produced by the Military Geographic Institute. This example will develop a gradual understanding, which becomes more complex in pedagogical application according to student age and level. A suitable management of the "map" with the teacher as mediator for the different educational areas involved is also necessary.

### **Geographic Placement: La Rioja, Argentina**

Borders: Chile in the Andes Range, with the Provinces of San Juan, San Luis, Córdoba and Catamarca.

Surface: 89 680 Km<sup>2</sup>

Overall Population: 220 729 inhabitants

Capital: La Rioja

Population: 104 494 inhabitants

Characteristic: 2966-26

Surface covered: 1787,1 Km<sup>2</sup> Capital City Coordinates: 29° 25' south, 66° 52' west. Height and Rainfall: 430 meters above mean sea level / 314 mm a year.



Figure 2: La Rioja, view of the city

### **Geographic Names Related to Natural Features**

#### *Oronames:*

del Campamento, quebrada	de Cuchaco, quebrada
Punta del Agua, quebrada	de Velasco (Oriental),
del Alumbre, quebrada	sierra
Las Barrancas, quebrada	de la Cruz, cerro (1648
Grande, quebrada	m)
El Saladillo, quebrada	Viñas, cerro (1797 m)
El Puestito, quebrada	Llanos de la Rioja
	La Puerta, cerro

#### *Hydronames:*

de los Sauces, río	del Vínculo, arroyo
Los Sauces, dique	Mal Paso, río
Saladillo, río	del Río Salado, desagües
Seco, río	Tajamar, río

### **Geographic Names Related to Cultural Features**

#### *Population:*

La Rioja, provincial capital

#### *Area Names:*

Las Bombas	Trampa del Tigre
Saladillo	La Ramadita
Cochangasta	Pozo de los Carreño
Las Padercitas	El Estanquito Colonia
La Canada	Tres Pozos
Los Ruartes	El Recreo
Secadal	Bañado de Raymundo
El Tala	El Topón

*Settlements:*

La Huella	Estanque Viejo
Chancay Grande	Santa Rita
La Buena Suerte	Campo Varela
Maray	

*Cattle Ranch:*

Los Nogales	La Represa de los Vegas
San Nicolás	San Francisco
El Barrialito	El Quemado
El Estanque	

*Cattle Stations:*

La Aguadita de Brizuela	Cabrera
Aguadita del Vínculo	Tala de Abajo
Los Changos	Chañar de Viña
El Gran Chaparral	El Minero
La Bartera	El Vallecito
Cuchaco	Duarte
Los Mellizos	Los Aybas
Chancay Chico	Don Genaro
Loma Blanca	El Andariego
Pampa Blanca	

*Religious References:*

Virgen del Cerro

*Means of Communication:*

Nro. 3, ruta provincial	Nro.38, ruta nacional
Nro. 5, ruta provincial	General Belgrano, ferrocarril
Nro. 6, ruta provincial	Capitán Vicente Almandos
Nro. 7, ruta provincial	Almonacid, aeropuerto
Nro. 25, ruta provincial	Campo Durán - Buenos Aires, gasoducto
	Faldeo de Velasco, acueducto

*Unnamed Geographic Features:*

Colonia Frutihortícola	Club Náutico
Autódromo	Parque Industrial
Estación	Antena Satelitaria
Vivero Provincial	

## Graphic Representation:

Los Ayba

Figure 3 shows the relationship between named and unnamed features on the La Rioja map. It also shows how the cultural and natural features intersect.

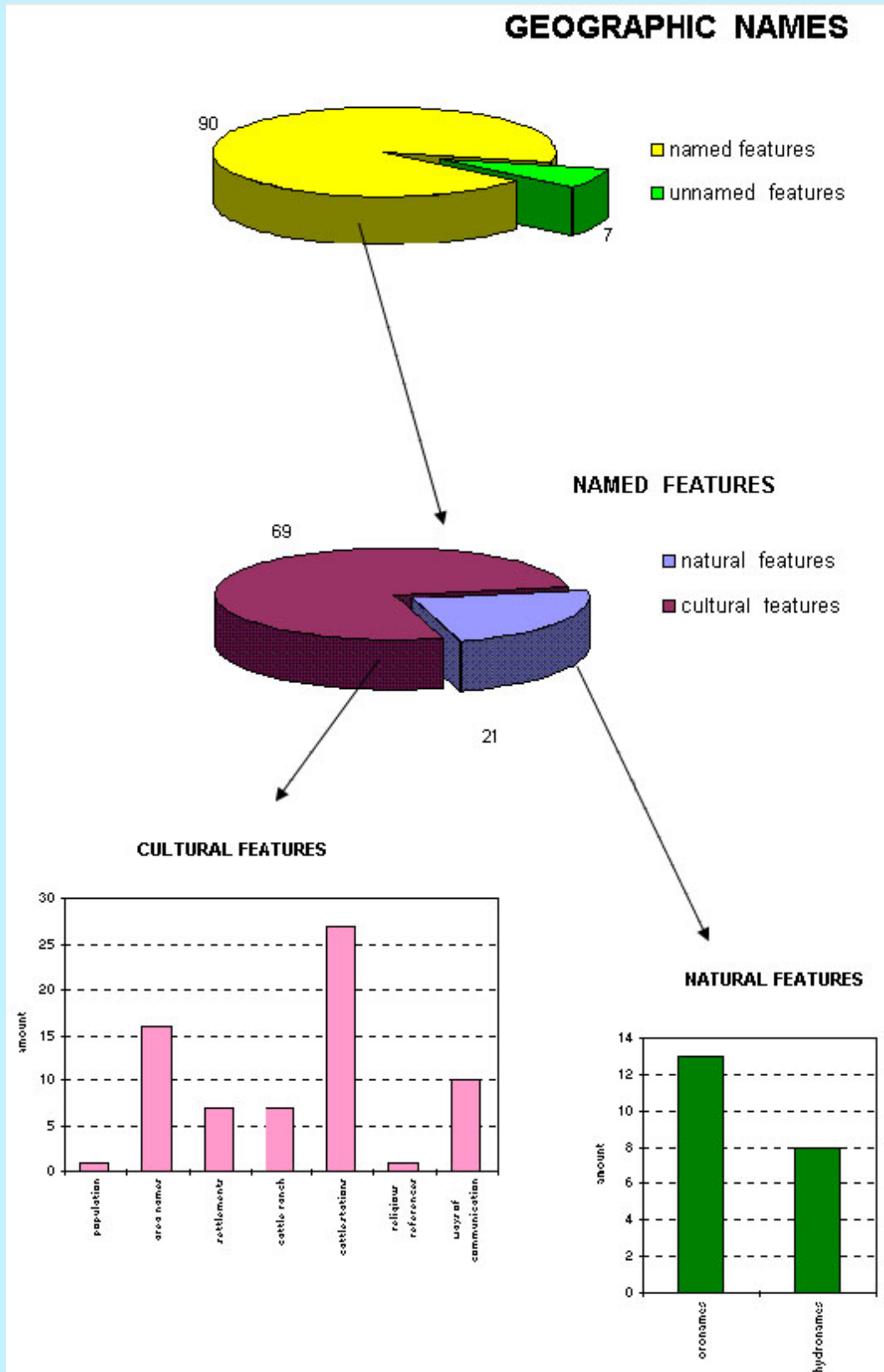


Figure 3: Relationships between named and unnamed features as well as cultural and natural features

## Toponymic layers

Spanish conquest and colonization of the area is deeply rooted. The degree of culturization is very important, with a minority of aboriginal names placed in the foothill and the hilly area strips, with evidence in six place names. The colonized languages were oral, and the lack of written documents also contributed to the decline in language use.

Three layers can be identified, which include:

- Caca'n;
- Quichua;
- Spanish.

*Caca'n* As the Spanish arrived, they found different aboriginal communities with greater cultural development. They discovered the Diaguita people who populated the whole valley-hill region. Their language was Caca'n. The endurance of these agriculturally untamed, sedentary people was politically, socially and religiously won by the Spanish. This is also reflected in the toponymical point of view. The Caca'n language remained to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It later disappeared as a native language, with the extinction of their people who left evidence of very few place names. The name Maray in the study area and the hybrid name Cochangasta are examples. This language was later replaced by Quichua.

### *Quichua*

In 1553, the Spanish arrived to the Fatina mines, west of the area under study. At this time, and in 1591 when the city of La Rioja was founded, there was a process known as Incaing. This process imported cultural elements of the Inca and its Quichua language from Cuzco (Tuahantinsuyo) via the so-called Inca Way, to the interior of La Rioja. This resulted in the homogenizing of many different people. The expansion, which began in 1480 approximately, could not produce a complete cultural revolution as the Spanish entered the territory. But, conquerors used the Inca roadway as an invasion means. They also used the Quichua language for communication and to teach religion (Bazan, 1979). Their use became more general during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Remaining evidence of this language is only represented by "Cuchiyaco" or "Chuchaco," "Chancay Grande y Chico," and the hybrid "Cochangasta."

### *Spanish*

The last step involves 93% of place names, and occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century during the founding of "Todos los Santos de la Nueva Rioja" on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1591. This covered the oral names of various aboriginal groups with different cultural developments that were dwelling the Tucumán, Omaguacas, Lules, Tonocotés Juríes, Comechingones, and, of course, the Diaguitas, at that time.

## Place names analysis belonging to the La Rioja (2966-26 map)



Figure 4: Other view of La Rioja and the Andes

**Case A: La Rioja (Figure 4)**

La Rioja: capital of the province with the same name.

Location: 29° 25' south and 66° 52' west, placed at the southwest of Sierra de Velasco (2128m), crossed by National Route No. 38.

Population: 104 494 inhabitants; 47.7% of the total in the province.

La Rioja was the birthplace of its founder Juan Ramírez de Velasco, in Castilla La Vieja - Spain. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1591 he founded the City in the Yacampis (Agampis or Acampis) valley under the name of "Todos los Santos de la Nueva Rioja." This name was shortened to La Rioja due to custom, and was dedicated to San Pedro Mártir.

Cartography: 2966/2966-26.

Source: de la Vega Díaz, Dardo (1956 and 1994) / Bazán, Armando (1979).

**Case B: Chancay**

Chancay Grande (Chanckay), settlement.

Location: 29° 35' south and 66° 50' west. Capital District

Province: La Rioja placed at the south of the Capital City.

This has a Quichua place name which means the action of breaking, grinding, and coarsely grinding grains or other objects. In the Araucano language, Chancay means island.

Cartography: 2966/2966-26.

Source: de la Vega Diaz, Dardo (1994) /Bravo, Domingo (1986).

**Toponymic analysis: a research guide**

There are several activities to incorporate into toponymic analysis toward incorporating cartographic elements in a pedagogical framework. Some activities are suggested below:

- Survey all the names that appear in the map, including the generic and specific terms;
- identify the geographic names related to natural features: oronyms, hydronames, phytonyms, zonyms;
- identify the geographic names related to cultural or anthropic features: populations, area names, settlements, cattle stations, ways of communication, or ononymy;
- identify unnamed features that refer to human activities as already mentioned by generic terms: farm, car race track, station, greenhouse, industrial park, satellite antenna;
- quantify and evaluate the weight as a percentage, or the toponymic density of the aforementioned categories in the whole of the map;
- graph the percentages obtained in order to understand the degree of culturization in a particular area;
- research the different toponymic layers present in the area, the dominating and dominated languages involved, and their placement and expansion;
- know the origins, meanings of toponymy included in the area by means of the history of those people with substitutions, permanence and hybrid namings in the name's evolution;
- interpret the landscape by means of names, with the aid of cartographic signs;
- compare maps of different times in order to assess the loss of names resulting from processes of urbanization, changes in human activities or ownership, and other sociological factors.
- in geographic, historic and linguistic ways, analyze the map's the most important place names;
- to end, assess the terminology of the map from a toponymic point of view.

The individual analysis of place names is also an important factor in these activities. Analysis would include examining the following:

- the official name of the place (proper noun or specific term);
- the generic term or type of feature;
- the name variations in parenthesis;
- the province and geographic coordinates;
- other nearby reference points;
- the general characteristics of the feature;
- the reason for the naming;
- the historic and linguistic background;

- the cartography and placement of the name;
- and the bibliography or place name record.

## Conclusion

With toponymy, it is possible to analyze the relations between and among people, history, geography and culture. As a discovery tool, cartography along with the closer investigation of place names facilitate a broader spectrum of information which has important impact on education and pedagogical practice. In this way, toponymy and its interpretation may be a significant means, especially for the considered educational levels, for students and teachers to multiply their ability to form meaningful and interdisciplinary activities. Teaching students how to research names and allowing them to develop these critical skills in a spirit full of curiosity gives them the ability to improve their knowledge of history, culture and people gradually. Knowledge of area, time and social order, provided through toponymic approaches instill three fundamental concepts for the development of every individual.

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