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DOI <https://doi.org/10.4467/K7501.45/22.23.18058>

Metonymy in Settlement Names

Abstract

Settlement names in Britain are traditionally categorised as habitative names, topographical names, or folk names, depending on whether their generic elements denote buildings, landscape features, or groups of people. As has long been recognised, the third type represents metonymic transfer, with the name of a group of people being transferred to the name of their settlement. This paper argues that a majority of habitative names represent a different type of metonymy, variously designated ‘domain expansion’, ‘source-in-target’ or **part for whole** metonymy in linguistic scholarship. By this process, a term for a single building or other aspect of the settlement is applied to the whole settlement. The paper goes on to argue that a further type of metonymy, often designated **part for part** metonymy, is represented in topographical names, where a term for a landscape feature is applied to an adjacent settlement which forms part of the same conceptual domain. The argument is contextualised through a brief overview of metonymy in other areas of the onomasticon, and the paper concludes by proposing a new typology of settlement names. According to this model, the only literal (non-metonymic) settlement names are those whose generic element is a term denoting the entire settlement.

Keywords

folk names, habitative names, metonymy, settlement names, topographical names

1. Introduction

All English place-names, whether of Celtic, Old English, or Scandinavian origin, can be divided into three main groups: folk-names, habitative names, and topographical names. (Mills, 2011, p. xvii)

The majority of settlement names in the Western world are descriptive, characteristically referring to the settlement itself, its surroundings, or the people who lived there. In English name scholarship, they are traditionally categorised as habitative names, topographical names, or folk names, depending on whether the description relates to the built environment, the natural environment, or the lived environment: in other words, whether the generic or defining elements of the names denote buildings, landscape features or groups of people. This tidy classification is already problematised by place names describing man-made features in the landscape, such as fords and bridges, which are usually grouped with topographical rather than habitative names. Conversely, a “quasi-habitative” function has been suggested for topographical terms such as Old English *lēah*, characteristically used “for naming settlements which flourished in a woodland environment” according to Gelling and Cole (2000, p. 220).¹ Rumble (2011) too finds “a binary habitative or topographical division of the material” unsatisfactory, but his proposed system of “more subtle” categories including *Defence*, *Religion*, *Resource management*, *Structures related to manufacturing or processing*, and *Transport and communications* (pp. 40–47) is complex and has not received widespread support.²

The aim of this paper is to outline some further issues with the traditional approach, and to suggest an alternative categorisation depending on whether

¹ The meaning of Old English *lēah* is generally taken to have developed from ‘forest, wood’ through ‘glade, clearing’, to ‘pasture, meadow’ (Gelling & Cole, 2000, p. 237). According to a recent study by Wagner (2018), however, “the evidence suggests that the original meaning of *lēah* was not ‘wood’, and that its original meaning was a light, open space within darker woodland” (p. 119).

² While agreeing that “the topographical/habitative dichotomy is perhaps too simplistic”, Jones and Semple (2012, p. 6) are less than fulsome in their response to Rumble’s proposals, commenting: “Irrespective of whether one thinks that this new division of the place-name corpus aids or hinders proper analysis (...”).

the description is literal or metonymic. A proposed new taxonomy for descriptive settlement names will be set out at the end.

2. Metaphor and metonymy

Metonymy is traditionally regarded as a relationship of contiguity, defined by Geeraerts (2010) as “a semantic link between two readings of a lexical item that is based on a relationship of contiguity between the referents of the expression in each of those readings” (p. 27). Another way of putting it is that whereas metaphor involves mapping a concept from one domain to another, in metonymy the mapping takes place within a single domain:

The standard view of metonymy in cognitive semantics (...) is to define metonymy in contrast to metaphor by invoking the number of conceptual domains involved in the conceptualization process: metaphors involve two conceptual domains, metonymies only one. (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 215)

The notion of a conceptual domain is flexible, but may be thought of as an area of experience. For instance, body parts and landscape features belong to separate domains, so that where a body part is mapped onto a landscape feature in expressions like *mouth* of a river or *shoulder* of a hill, we are dealing with metaphor. By contrast, a settlement belongs to the same domain as the landscape surrounding it, so where one is mapped onto the other in settlement names such as Weymouth ‘mouth of the [River] Wey’ and Godshill ‘God’s hill’, we are dealing with metonymy.

Recent work in linguistics has highlighted the key role of metonymy in language, so that it is now regarded as even more fundamental than metaphor.³ Indeed, some metonymies are conventionalised, and thus productive. Variations on the following examples can be found in many linguistics textbooks:

³ See, e.g., Barcelona, 2003; Dirven & Pörings, 2003; Panther & Thornburg, 2007.

CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS: I'm going to buy a whole new summer *wardrobe*.

He drank the whole *bottle*.

PART FOR WHOLE: He has a new *set of wheels*. We need some new *faces*.

OBJECT USED FOR USER: The *trains* are on strike. The *violin* has the flu.

INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE: The *university* has issued new regulations. The *government* made some difficult decisions.

Conventionally, a container such as a wardrobe or a bottle can stand for the clothes or wine inside it, part of an entity such as a car or person can stand for the whole entity, an object such as a vehicle or a musical instrument can stand for the person operating or playing it, and an institution can stand for the people who work in it. These metonymies are productive, so that any of the italicised words could be substituted by others, with the same metonymic extension. For instance, *trains* could be substituted by *buses*, *taxis* or *trams*, with the same implication that the reference is to the people operating them.

The concept denoted is known as the ‘target’, represented in the above examples by the clothes, wine, car, people, train-drivers, violinist, university staff and members of the government. The concept on which the expression draws is known as the ‘source’, respectively the wardrobe, bottle, wheels, faces, trains, violin, university institution and government institution. In metonymy, therefore, the source stands for the target.

3. Metonymy in names of people and other living creatures

Metonymy has long been recognised in different types of names. Among them are surnames and bynames where a product forms the name of a person associated with the product. As Hanks and Parkin (2016) explain:

Some occupational names originated as metonymic nicknames, for example the surname *Cheese* denoted a maker or seller of cheese. The surname *Wastell*, denoting someone who made or sold fine cakes, is a metonymic nickname from a Norman French word that is the equivalent of modern French *gâteau*. (p. 216)

Other such metonymic nicknames are based on physical features, as with *Lightfoot*, “used of one with a light, springy step, a speedy runner, a messenger”, or *Smallbone*, “probably for someone with short or skinny legs” (Hanks et al., 2016, s.nn.). Similarly, Brylla (2016) observes that “In names like Old Swedish *Spiut* ‘spear’, *Alboghi* ‘elbow’ the words are used metonymically: ‘the one having a spear’, ‘the one with a peculiar elbow’” (p. 246). Both types of formations are ubiquitous in Western surnames.

References to physical features are not restricted to names of people. They also appear, for instance, in the names of horses like German *Stutzohr* ‘short ear’ and English *Long Legs* (Leibring, 2016, p. 618). Other animal names are metonymic from positive or negative behavioral qualities, as with Scandinavian cattle names from adjectives with meanings such as ‘gentle’, and Bulgarian goat names like *G'ávol* ‘devil’ (Leibring, 2016, pp. 620, 622). These find their human counterparts in surnames such as *Curtis* from Middle English *courteis* ‘courtly, refined, urbane’, and *Deeble* from Anglo-Norman French *deable* ‘devil’ (Hanks et al., 2016, s.nn.).

Aside from those metonymic names relating to physical features, the nature of the association may not always be transparent, and indeed may sometimes be impossible to reconstruct. As Hanks et al. (2016) observe:

Metonymic names are the most enigmatic. The relationship they bear to their eponymous bearers is not through a perceived resemblance (as with metaphoric names) but by a contextual connection – an idea, object, or event with which the person was associated, whether habitually or on a single occasion. (I, p. xxiv)

The difficulty is illustrated in Bramwell’s (2007) study of present-day bynaming in the Western Isles of Scotland, where examples include “a man named ‘Snooker’ since birth because of a remark made by the midwife, a man known as ‘Seal’ because of an asthma attack at primary school, and a man named ‘Fire and Theft’ because of an alleged incident” (p. 53). In a historical context, evidence would rarely be available to elucidate such names.

Metonymy extends beyond the names of individuals to the names of groups of people, as reflected in a number of the football club nicknames studied by Tyas (2013). Particularly common are metonymies based on the playing strip, including its colour, as with *The Reds*, *The Blues*, and *The Gold and Blacks*, and shape, as with *The Diamonds*, *The Spots*, and *The Stripes* (Tyas, 2013, p. 14). Although Tyas describes these as metaphors, they are in fact metonyms, using

one aspect of the club – its strip – to stand for the club itself. Indeed, some of the more complex examples appear to combine both metaphor and metonymy to give nicknames such as The Bar-Codes, The Y-Fronts, Humbugs, Tigers, and Wasps (Tyas, 2013, p. 14).⁴ A pioneering study by Sutton-Spence and Coates (2011) shows that the practice holds in British Sign Language, where the names of football clubs utilise metonymy in a range of interesting and creative ways.

4. Metonymy in commercial names and names of vehicles

Commercial names too make extensive use of metonymy. Sjöblom's (2008) discussion of multimodality in the company names of Turku in south-western Finland identifies a metonymic basis for a variety of names including those of a hairdresser called *Tukka Hyvin* 'hair well/nicely', a debt collection company called *Eräpäivä* 'due date', a café-bar called *Cup & Pint*, and a company selling clothes for large men called *Mr. Big* (pp. 358–359).

A particularly fine-grained analysis is provided by Pérez Hernández (2011), who identifies two main types of metonymies in the creation of brand names. One is 'domain expansion', where a product is named from a single element associated with it. Examples include *Bitter*, named from the taste of the beverage, *Coca-cola*, named from a compound of its two main ingredients, and *Gaudium*, named from a Latin word meaning 'joy, delight, happiness' in allusion to the positive side effects of the wine (p. 378). As illustrated by these three examples, this naming stratagem is very flexible, as "Virtually any element of the conceptual fabric that makes up the target product can be metonymically used to name it" (p. 378). The other type identified by Pérez Hernández is 'domain reduction', where a product is named from the wider framework associated with it: "*Prada handbags*, for example, will inherit notions characterizing their company such as those of *luxury* and *selectiveness*, as well as a sense of *heritage* and *family tradition* from the matrix domain of the founder" (p. 380).

⁴ Similarly, place names described as metaphorical by Tyas (2013, p. 18) should rather be regarded as metonymic.

As with many areas of linguistics, there is no single system of terminology, and what Pérez Hernández describes as ‘domain expansion’ or ‘source-in-target’ is often referred to as **part for whole** metonymy, whereas her ‘domain reduction’ or ‘target-in-source’ is alternatively known as **whole for part**.

Domain expansion or **part for whole** metonymy also underlies the locomotive names discussed by Coates (2016), who explains examples such as *Perseverance* (1829) and *Industry* (1832) as “metonymic allusion to industry in the widest sense” (p. 647). As he goes on to explain, using the example of *Vulcan* (1832) named from the element of fire, this can then lead to sets of names based on a different attribute of the smith-god Vulcan:

FIRE is essential for every steam locomotive. This may give rise to a metonymic fire-related name, such as *Vulcan* (1832), from the Roman smith-god. However *Vulcan* is also representative of another class, namely SUPERNATURAL POWER, and refocusing or switching attention from an attribute of Vulcan to his person permits the exploitation of the names of other (demi-)gods not primarily associated with fire, such as *Hecate* and *Fury*. (Coates, 2016, p. 650)

Metonymy is thus a highly productive naming stratagem.

The name Lightfoot mentioned above recurs as the name of a ship, described as “charmingly incongruous” by Jones (2000, p. 30). Like other ship names in the same article, it was clearly named metonymically in relation to speed. Faucoun, Milan and Swalewe draw on words for birds and again combine metaphor with metonymy (p. 29), as do the aircraft nicknames Blackbird and Falcon discussed by Puzey (2016, p. 608). Similarly, Fraser’s (2012) article on the names of warships identifies some “named for swift or powerful animals”, such as Gazelle or She-Wolf, and others “named for desirable qualities”, such as Courage or Victory (p. 131). All three studies also include a large number of transferred names, a type of metonymy that will be returned to below. A few examples among many are ships called the *Thomas Fyncham*, the *Thomas Bassett* and the *Martyn Baldry* after their owners (Jones, 2000, p. 35), warships called the *Philip and Mary*, the *Jeanne d'Arc* and the *Sir John Moore* after reigning monarchs, historical figures and generals respectively (Fraser, 2012, pp. 131, 134, 135), and aircraft called *River Glass*, *Glamis Castle* and *Sir Frank Whittle* in systematic patterns of naming after rivers, castles and aviation pioneers (Puzey, 2016, p. 614).

5. Metonymy in names of places and natural features

Summing up the above (necessarily brief and selective) discussion, current scholarship recognises that metonymy plays a major role in name formation across a broad spectrum of the onomasticon, with the apparent exception of toponyms. With regard to place-naming, metonymy is generally taken to occupy a fairly niche position. Ainiala et al.'s (2012) discussion of naming strategies in Finland identifies two groups of metonymic place names. One, exemplified below by 'one rowan' or 'duckboards', corresponds to the domain expansion or **part for whole** metonymy already discussed, where a single element associated with the place is used to name it. The other represents the transfer of an existing name to a different but contiguous referent – here a house given the name of a lake:

Metonymic names can be split up into two different groups. The first group includes names which are founded on an appellatival expression. These are, for example *Yksipihlaja* ('one rowan') 'an island where a rowan can be seen' and *Kapulasilta* ('duckboards') 'a bog that has duckboards.' The second group of metonymic names are formed by names which are founded on a name of an adjacent place. In this case, it is a question of the fact that the name of an adjacent place begins to be used for the place. When, for example, a house located on the shore of the lake Valkeajärvi, has begun to be called *Valkeajärvi*, this house name is a metonymic name. This phenomenon has also been deemed a *metonymic transference*. (Ainiala et al., 2012, p. 78)

In the first group, there is no generic element. In the second, the generic element does not denote the referent of the name.

Similarly, Nyström's (2013) study of metaphor and metonymy in the names of islands and natural features in three areas of Sweden identifies a wide range of metaphorical names, whereas metonymical formations represent a small minority of what he calls "special cases":

In some special cases natural features have been named by means of metonymy, for instance when only a small part of the object, some conspicuous detail, has caught the full attention of the name giver and therefore has been used to name more than just itself. (Nyström, 2013, p. 356)

In the following example from Stockholm, the “conspicuous detail” is a signal:

Signalen meaning ‘the signal’ is the name of a promontory in the Stockholm archipelago. There used to be a navigation mark there, normally causing names as *Signaludden*, *Signalviken* or the like (with a generic *-udden* ‘the promontory’ or *viken* ‘the bay’ in the end), but in this case the navigation mark itself is enough to name the whole area. (Nyström, 2013, p. 358)

Like the ‘one rowan’ and ‘duckboards’ examples from Finland, this is again **part for whole** metonymy.

The same type of metonymy has been suggested by Coates (2019) to explain the problematic name of the island of *Fetlar* in Shetland, Scotland. Among a range of tentative etymologies, he proposes a Scandinavian compound *fetil-ár* ‘strap rivers’, “a description of watercourses being applied as the name of the island which contains them” or a combination of *fetill* + *örr* ‘scar’, which “would suggest that the island is named by metonymy from (presumably) the Funzie Girt, itself understood metaphorically as the scar in the landscape in the form of a strap” (p. 46). A third metonymic solution takes the second element to be *ögr* ‘inlet, small bay or creek’ (p. 47). There can be no certainty, as Coates readily acknowledges, but any of these three interpretations would again represent **part for whole** metonymy, with a single feature being used to name the whole island.

The other type of metonymy identified by Ainiala et al. (2012) appears in the taxonomy of transferred names set out by Brink (2016), alongside analogical transfers, metaphorical transfers, psychological transfers and socially conditioned transfers:

A *metonymical* transfer of a name, due to association by connection, which is a frequent and very normal case. For example by giving a railway station the name *Big Hill*, when it is located nearby a hill called *Big Hill*, or by using the name *Bear Lake* for a settlement by the lake *Bear Lake*. (Brink, 2016, p. 164)

In such instances, again the generic element does not denote the referent of the name.

My argument in the rest of this paper will be two-fold. First, that **part for whole** metonymy underlies a much wider range of toponyms than has previously been recognised. Of these, the ‘duckboards’ and ‘signal’ examples above are simply among the more extreme and therefore most easily identified

instances. Second, that many names previously taken to be metonymic transfers are in fact primary metonymic names. My focus is on settlement names, but a similar line of reasoning could be applied to other types of toponym.

6. Metonymy in folk names

The least controversial in this context of the three categories of settlement names mentioned at the beginning of this paper are folk names. These undoubtedly represent metonymic transfers, where the name of a group of people is used for the place they inhabited. Many metonymies are based on names, and these include the most conventionalised and therefore productive types of metonymy. As with the examples in the second section above, variations on the following examples can be found in most linguistics textbooks:

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT: I'm reading an *Agatha Christie*. He owns a *Picasso*.

BUILDING FOR INHABITANTS: *The White House* has issued a statement.

CAPITAL CITY FOR GOVERNMENT: *London* is negotiating with *Washington*.

COUNTRY FOR SPORTS TEAM: *England* is playing *Germany*.

PLACE FOR EVENT: *Pearl Harbour* must never happen again.

PLACE FOR INSTITUTION: *Fleet Street* is very influential.

Conventionally, the name of any author or painter can stand for a book or painting produced by them. Similarly, the name of a building can stand for the inhabitants of the building; the name of any capital city can stand for the government of the country; the name of any country can stand for a national sports team; and the name of a place can stand for an event that happened there or an institution based there.

In many early languages, the name of a group of people could stand for the place they inhabited. This point was made nearly a century ago by the Celticist William J. Watson (1926):

In very early times the name of the tribe or population-group served as the name of the territory which they occupied. In Gaul, when Caesar wishes to

mention the country of the Sequani, he says ‘in Sequanis,’ ‘among the Sequani,’ ‘in Sequanos,’ ‘into the land of the Sequani,’ and so forth. Similarly when Ptolemy deals with the British Isles he gives no territorial names but only names of tribes, or population-groups. (p. 100)

Nevertheless, it has not always been understood. Rivet and Smith (1979) refer repeatedly to the “misreading of ethnic names as place names” in the section of the Ravenna Cosmography on northern Britain (p. 193), evidently without realising that the names of tribes were used metonymically as place names.

This system continued until at least the early Middle Ages, with names such as *Barling*, *Hastings* and *Reading* in England referring to the followers of men called *Bærla*, *Hæst(a)* and *Read(a)*, with the Old English tribal suffix *-ingas* (Cameron, 1996, pp. 66–68). The naming of a place from its inhabitants was thus a conventionalised form of metonymy.

7. Metonymy in habitative settlement names

Turning to habitative names – those describing a building or group of buildings – these are more varied. A standard definition is provided by Mills (2011), and encompasses names referring to homesteads, farms, enclosures, dwellings, cottages and strongholds:

Habitative names (...) denoted inhabited places from the start, whether homesteads, farms or enclosures, villages or hamlets, strongholds, cottages, or other kinds of building or settlement. In names of this type the second element describes the kind of habitation, and among others the Old English elements *hām* ‘homestead’, *tūn* ‘farm’, *worth* ‘enclosure’, *wīc* ‘dwelling’, *cot* ‘cottage’, *burh* ‘stronghold’, and the Old Scandinavian elements *bý* ‘farmstead’ and *thorp* ‘outlying farmstead’ are particularly common, as in names like Streatham, Middleton, Lulworth, Ipswich, Didcot, Aylesbury, Grimsby, and Woodthorpe. (Mills, 2011, p. xvii)

However, this is less straightforward than it seems. A homestead or farm, perhaps even an enclosure, may originally have comprised an entire settlement.

But what about an individual dwelling or cottage? Surely these are only part of a settlement. This is implicit in the definition provided by Jones and Semple (2012):

Habitative place-names are those which either refer rather generally to a ‘settlement’ (e.g. *þorp*, *stōw*, *stoc* etc.) or those which refer to particular physical structures that might be found there (individual buildings, enclosures etc.) or to the specific activities that may have taken place within them. (pp. 4–5)

The point at issue is not whether the settlement expanded over time, as almost invariably happens, but whether it comprised a single building at the point of naming. I suggest that it did not, but that the name referred to a single distinctive building, used metonymically to designate the settlement to which it belonged. In other words, I suggest that this is domain expansion or **part for whole** metonymy, which we have already seen to be ubiquitous in other types of names.

The case may be strengthened if we look more closely at place names from some of these apparently habitative elements. Old English *cot* has a range of meanings in place names, set out as follows by Smith (1956, 1, pp. 108–110):

- (i) ‘a cottage, a humble dwelling’
- (ii) ‘a shelter for travellers’
- (iii) ‘shed for certain crafts or the manufacture or storage of materials’
- (iv) ‘a lair, a den’.

These definitions clearly establish that the term did not refer to a high-status building. Indeed, only the first and second can be regarded as human habitations at all. Even if Old English *cot* in the senses ‘cottage’ and ‘shelter for travellers’ is to be accepted as a habitative generic, the other polysemous uses of the same element for a workshop or an animal’s lair would have to be categorised in some other way.

Old English *burh* ‘stronghold’ is equally problematic. As the editors of *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names* point out, the term was “applied to a range of defended sites, including Iron-Age hill-forts, Roman stations, and Anglo-Saxon and medieval fortifications, towns and manor-houses” (Parsons & Styles, 2000, s.v. *burh*). A hill-fort or Roman station may have provided security for a large number of people and therefore count as a habitation, and the later developments of meaning to ‘town’ and ‘manor-house’ certainly did. However, many *burh*-names refer to prehistoric sites that had long been abandoned

and were no longer used for habitation at the time of naming, as evidenced “by combination with words for animals and birds, trees and plants, and goblins and sprites” (Parsons & Styles, 2000, s.v. *burh*). As with worksheds and animals’ lairs, then, the name did not denote a settlement.

What of the “other kinds of building” encompassed within the traditional definition of habitative names quoted above from Mills? Outstandingly common are words for ‘church’ in place names from many different languages. In Scotland alone, these include Brittonic **eglēs* in *Eccles* (Borders), Gaelic *cill* in *Kilmarnock* (East Ayrshire), Old English *œrn* in *Whithorn* (Dumfries & Galloway), ON *kirkja* in *Kirkcudbright* (Dumfries & Galloway) and Scots *kirk* in *Falkirk* (Falkirk). Churches themselves often have names, with a specific typically identifying a founder or saint, so *Kilmarnock* (St Marnock), *Kirkcudbright* (St Cuthbert) and many others might fall within the category of metonymic transfer. As with *Eccles*, however, some settlement names from these generics are simplex, while others such as *Falkirk* (Scots *faw* ‘speckled’) and *Whithorn* (Old English *hwīt* ‘white’) have descriptive terms as specifics. I therefore suggest that again they can only represent domain expansion or **part for whole** metonymy, where a description of a salient building is used to name the settlement in which it lies.

This may also help to explain the occurrence of alternative generics in historical forms of individual place names, an issue discussed by a number of scholars including Ekwall (1962, 1964), Taylor (1997) and Carroll (2012). Ekwall’s view that the terms were synonyms no longer holds, and Taylor (1997) is no doubt closer to the mark in suggesting that “Names such as **Balcouty*, **Moncouth* and **Pitcouth* referred to different places, or at least to different parts or aspects of the same place” (p. 9). As Carroll (2012) points out, however, these are “potentially two different propositions” (p. 109). I would support the second, and I suggest that in such instances, a different single element has been chosen for alternative **part for whole** metonymies.

8. Metonymy in topographical settlement names

Moving on to the third group of names – those describing a settlement in terms of the surrounding landscape – topographical settlement names have become controversial in recent years. The established view in late twentieth-century scholarship was that they were transferred from the names of the topographical features in question. Thus the standard textbook on English place names explained: “When people made their homes near some distinctive feature of the landscape, they often adopted the existing name for the new settlement” (Cameron, 1996, p. 25). Similarly, the leading dictionary in the field stated:

Topographical names also form a very large and diverse group. They consisted originally of a description of some topographical or physical feature, either natural or man-made, which was then transferred to the settlement near the feature named, probably at a very early date. Thus 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 became the names of inhabited places. (Mills, 1998, p. xx)

According to this model, the names would represent metonymic transfers parallel to the example of the house name *Valkeajärvi* cited above from Ainala et al. (2012), and the examples of the station name *Big Hill* and settlement name *Bear Lake* cited above from Brink (2016).

This view was challenged in 2000 by Gelling and Cole. Pointing out that “This implies that the Anglo-Saxons gave names like Faringdon and Stottesdon to hills, those like Pusey and Charney to dry patches in marshland, or those like Harpenden and Gaddesden to valleys, and later transferred these names to settlements” (p. xvii), they argued that many of the settlements described by Old English topographical names would already have been in existence when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, and that the name was given simultaneously both to the site and to the settlement.

Both possibilities are now considered viable, potentially accounting for different subsets of topographical settlement names. Hence the passage quoted above has been revised in the latest edition of the dictionary to read as follows (changes are indicated here in bold typeface):

Topographical names also form a very large and diverse group. **Some may have** consisted originally of a description of some topographical or physical feature, either natural or man-made, which was then transferred to the settlement near the feature named, probably at a very early date. **Others may have been applied as settlement-names to already established (pre-English) settlement sites characterized by the topographical feature.** Thus 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. (Mills, 2011, pp. xvii–xviii)

However, there may be a third alternative. It seems to me just as unlikely that names were given to dry patches in marshland or to individual clearings as that they were given to sheds or to animals' lairs. Just as settlements could be named metonymically from an individual building, so too they may have been named metonymically from a landscape feature, without presupposing that the feature itself had a name either then or at any other time. This also avoids the assumption that all Old English topographical names represent settlements that were already in existence when the Anglo-Saxons arrived in Britain, which does not fit with the fact that some are datable to the later Anglo-Saxon period.⁵

This step-change in scholarly thinking has already taken place with regard to Celtic names in Britain. In England, surviving Brittonic settlement names are mostly topographical, and as Cameron (1996) explains, this used to be taken to mean that no habitation names had survived:

It was, therefore, thought that place-names did not provide us with a single example of a British habitation name. It was assumed that Celtic names were simply those of rivers and natural features some of which were transferred to later settlements nearby. Only comparatively recently has it been realised that this misinterpreted the evidence. It seems clear now that the Britons defined their settlements in terms of adjacent topographical features without using a term denoting a settlement in contrast to later Anglo-Saxon usage, when a word like *tūn* 'farm, village', 'estate', was in vogue. (Cameron, 1996, pp. 35–36)

⁵ One example among many is *Edale* in Derbyshire. Here the generic element is Old English *dæl* 'main valley', itself a loan word from Old Norse *dalr*.

Here he rejects the theory that existing names of natural features were transferred to become names of settlements – in other words, as metonymic transfers – in favour of a model whereby settlements were defined “in terms of adjacent topographical features”: in other words, as primary metonymic names. In view of this, it seems odd that he supports the theory of name transfers for corresponding formations from the Germanic languages. It seems to me that a single solution may reasonably be applied to all such topographical settlement names. This is a type of metonymy often described as **part for part**, where one element of a domain is used to name another element. Here the domain is the area comprising both the landscape feature and the settlement. One element is the landscape feature; another element is the settlement.

9. Conclusion

Summing up, I propose the following taxonomy for descriptive settlement names. A small proportion are literal. These are names whose generic designates a type of settlement. All others are metonymic. Those deriving from folk names represent metonymic transfer, as do those from other types of names. The majority of settlement names traditionally regarded as habitative represent domain expansion or **part for whole** metonymy, identifying a single element within the settlement. Those traditionally regarded as topographical represent **part for part** metonymy, identifying a single element outside the settlement. For completion, I have included domain reduction or **whole for part** metonymy, which may appear in a small number of settlement names. One possibility is *Rothesay* on the Isle of Bute, where a reference to the island (*'Ruðri's island'*, from Old Norse *ey* ‘island’) may designate the principal settlement.⁶ Similar

⁶ According to the Survey of Scottish Place-Names, “It may be that Rothesay was originally the name for the whole island of Bute, and was only later applied to the castle and its surrounding settlement which now bear that name (...). An alternative explanation is that the original fortress of Rothesay – perhaps a wooden structure now underlying the thirteenth-century stone castle on the site – might have been built on ground rising out of sea or sea-marsh round about, thus qualifying as an *ey* ‘island’” (Márkus, 2012, p. 508).

though not identical models might be developed for other types of toponym such as field names and street names, most of which again do not contain a generic designating a field or street.

A Proposed Taxonomy for Descriptive Settlement Names

1. Literal

Generic = word for settlement

2. Metonymic

(i) Metonymic transfer

Generic = folk name or other type of name

(ii) PART FOR WHOLE

Generic = word for building or other feature within settlement

(iii) PART FOR PART

Generic = word for landscape or other feature outside settlement

(iv) WHOLE FOR PART

Generic = word for area containing settlement

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