

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLACE-NAMES/ TOPONYMS IN GEOGRAPHY DIDACTICS

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**Abstract.** L'activité didactique moderne est efficiente seulement si les ressources (les toponymiques y compris), les compétences, les contenus, etc. constituent un système cohérent et convergent, indispensable à mettre en pratique du projet didactique. C'est pourquoi les nombreux rôles et fonctions des toponymes peuvent être surpris à tous les stades de l'enseignement : la planification, l'organisation, le déroulement et l'évaluation de leçon. Le rôle des noms de lieux dans la formation géographique des élèves consiste aussi dans l'habitude et la pratique du langage géographique et cartographique que dans la pratique des habiletés acquises par l'identification/ localisation/ l'hierarchisation des toponymes ; l'organisation graphique de quelques réalités sur une "carte mute" ; l'interprétation de la symbolique exprimée sur une carte ; des jeux divers. Les toponymes sont, en même temps, un facteur (élément) d'orientation spéciale (géographique) et générale.

**Keywords:** *toponyme, principes didactiques, fonctions (des toponymes), stratégies didactiques, itème d'évaluation*

### Introduction

Geographers need of studying the names of places is entirely justified as far as the task they took upon themselves is concerned, one of analyzing and presenting the terrestrial realities. On the one hand, the need of using toponymy becomes a condition of existence to any human being that interacts with other persons from different places, either near or remote, places „strained” with names. On the other hand, „the toponymic centre” represents the interference zone among *Geography* and other scientific fields, being an area of multidisciplinary research. In this context, *Linguistics* and *History* detach. Along to this „triad”, there are other scientific fields that deal with toponymy study, among them, the applied pedagogy, more precisely speaking, the *Geography Didactics*. Thus, through involving the toponyms in the learning process, they can form themes of maximum attraction for study: *inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary*.

Starting from these considerations, the approach in the roles of toponyms comes into sight for training the young generations in schools of all grades. Obviously, the approach fully depends on the students' level of knowledge and also on the formative - educational side of Geography. Therefore, in Geography Didactics the roles and functions of toponyms prove to vary, depending on their characteristics (concreteness, high frequency in speaking, motivation, unique denomination and symbolic character).

The multiple roles of toponyms can be identified through the curriculum – center in every aspect of the didactics process: 1. in teaching design; 2. in organizing the process of study; 3. in the development of the lesson; 4. in the evaluation of the teaching activity.

## 1. The Role of Toponyms in the Teaching Design

Although the study of Geography does not involve highlighting the toponyms as a true purpose in neither of the classes, the simple reading of school programs can highlight the quality of content ordinator. Starting with the secondary schools, the school program of Geography contains, among others, the following general and particular competences: 1. Correct use of proper names and terms from foreign languages (recognition of geographical names and terms and their correct reading); 2. The geographical reality reporting to a graphical and cartographical support (the analysis of the main natural elements and of the socio-economical represented on a cartographic support). Along the years of schooling (from 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade) the student's knowledge horizon amplifies inductively: local horizon = native place = county = geographical region = historical country = country = continent = planet. The geographical reality is well known because of its name, beginning from the elements of the local horizon ( microtoponyms – existential – as marks of orientation and centres of communication) and reaching to the reminded progress, from the concrete discovery, to the „analogical” one (other cities, streets, regions, buildings, types of relief, etc.) and afterwards to the abstract one ( countries, regions, continents, planet ). In time, the acknowledge and the moulding of abilities stored are substantial, making the study of relief, hydrography, population, settlements and economy, possible. From the ones ennumerated, a large amount is individualised through name: oronyms, hydronyms, oiconyms, odonyms, etc. In other words, when the teaching border takes into account the programatic documents mend for planning, they orient a lot according to the toponyms which form the main foundation structure: units of content, units of learning, homework, chapters, synthesis, etc.

The toponyms are also involved in the application of the main rules, the scientific methods of teaching Geography:

- *The principle of spatial distribution* (geographical position of a relief unity, rivers, cities, countries, etc., marked on the map with the names and symbols adjacent). From here result general competences as far as the geographical scholar program is concerned (already reminded) from where the necessity of setting up numerous exercises for identification and localization, on varied cartographical supports of the place-names, by the teacher;

- *The principle of distribution in time* (the main target is to modify the names in their diachrony). From this aspect resides the importance of using a contemporary cartographical support mend to capture the new toponyms that were just released, for example, on the political European and of the whole world map from the past two decades;

- *The causal principle* (reveals the reasons for using those toponyms when they refer to a specific feature of the specific place). Starting from this principle, there can be shown the reasons why toponyms are identical in the narrowed areas and through this manner they can be delimited;

- *The principle of structuralism* (the toponymical shell is an opened system to the exterior influences, structured, unitary, organized and hierarchical, functional and dynamical). Thus, in time it reaches to the enrichment of geographical nomenclature, through its constant adaptation of toponym to the geographical/ linguistic/ historical

reality and to the population's requirements. The functionality flows from the role that the toponyms have in the interpersonal communication and spatial orientation

- *The principle of functional integration* (applied in the mass level, but also in the subset and in the subset's components among which there are multiple relations established. We can simplify it through the territorial extend of several cities, which embedded in time a number of rural settlements from the immediate neighborhood today the cities' districts (names found as microtoponyms) or through the relation between the village, the river that crosses that specific settlement and the field found at the end of the village, all of them having the same name;

- *The diversity principle* (the multitude of geographical aspects, in which the variety of names that represent the reality). Starting from this consideration, the rule of teaching should be respected, as the simple enumeration of places is not enough as long as they are not fully explained. The presented rule proves the coherence and the interdependence of the principles written above.

Also there are other teaching principles that should not be neglected:

- *The accessibility principle* puts a lot of emphasis on the way to access information easier for the student and to create along the course of informational storage permanent connections with what they already know, an essential rule for a profound, logical and motivational learning. An inductive manner is necessary that the elements of local toponymics (and urban microtoponym), previously studied, can be used efficiently;

- *The principle of intuitive learning* is indispensable in Geography didactics, a subject that "describes Terra", but that needs concrete. As the lessons are predominantly placed in classroom, where there is no contact with reality, many ways of studying this subject should be applied by the teachers, as every used geographical element must identified according to its name, but also through the presented phenomenon;

- *The principle of learning through act* (classes must be interactive, mend to stimulate curiosity in students for discovering the scientific facts and the unknown places to be analyzed and described according to the class's algorithm;

- *The systematisation principle* provides a gradual and organized acquisition of knowledge. Thus, toponyms become organizational for the subject, providing the proposed framework for the research, then the spatial cues, which turn into themes, chapters, educational scenarios, two-way integrated, from general to particular (deductive) and vice versa, from particular to general (inductive);

- *Approach and furthering scientific principle*, expects results and sustainability over time is also substantial support in addressing "the underlying" toponymy. The merits of knowledge related to understanding the meaning and focusing on sustainable relationship that is established between a term/ toponym's mentioned characteristics;

- *The applicability principle* expresses the need for the systematical scientific presentation to have a purpose. Geography aims not only to describe the theoretical and practical observation of phenomena, but also the relations analysis established between human and geographical environment, and issues that can be taken by toponyms (building of new settlements and roads, construction of canals and lakes, drainage of aquatic facilities, etc.) comparative analysis of the maps for the same regions from different time periods.

## 2. The toponyms role in organizing the teaching process

At this stage of the educational approach toponyms acquire various functions becoming of great importance in organizing educational activities. In an integrated scheme, the *functional toponyms types* are the following: a) title toponyms; b) guiding toponyms; c) support toponyms; d) toponyms - elements of contents e) toponyms - structuring elements of contents; f) toponyms - elements of the didactic strategy; g) toponyms - elements of transfer, retention and evaluation.

a) *Title toponyms* - name the content of units in the geography curriculum. Taking these denominations, the calendar planning, can be used to localize the cut-studied phenomena in the localized space (city, county, relief unit, area, region, country, continent). Both in the physical and human geography, the spatial and sequence distribution study is the most profitable, but without neglecting, especially in final grades, the synthetic and generalized vision. In this respect toponyms become chapter headings, content units, themes, lessons that organize material in concrete units. Any academic details the project's components so that the title – toponyms reach a deep analysis of content units, which always reveals other toponyms.

b) *Guiding toponyms* serving as teacher reference material to the organization over time, to fix moments for the teaching process, strategies, methods and procedures involved in the integration of the didactic lessons and the assessment for the items of evaluation. Since the lesson is designed as a display of times, during this may be "marked out" by place-names as some points in time (during one hour of course) and even more time-action items: moments of communication for practice, independent work (e.g.: identifying on a cartographic base/scientific text, the names of places), the fixing of new names, the review, evaluation. The unit's pattern, designed as a strategic networking component and conducted during one hour of training, can become a toponym-part keyword, triggering to specific operations and work of the algorithm. Of all the pedagogical hypostasis of referential toponyms, the most common is the landmark on the map, along with the conventional signs and symbols, altogether creating a "reading map".

c) *Support toponyms*. A function less acknowledged, that emerges from the two previously analyzed, but that which does not appear in the foreground, is the language support, scientific (notional), demonstrative (practically). It is known that the relationship science → educational object is one of determination and one of the conditions sine qua non of correct reception of scientific knowledge is respect for the scientific truth. According to the scientific bases a support course is set up, as a resume, in which toponyms are a factor in organizing the course material. Toponyms as a demonstrative support are inserted in the practical demonstration of teaching, based upon exercises, on the discovery, the analysis of phenomena and their characteristics. Also, they are "points" of the route followed benchmark in extracurricular activity (excursion, expedition, etc. themed camp.). Place-names are marked on most materials that are used during the Geography classes. They help to decipher the maps, the identification of the graphic content of some materials, the separation of the constituent units of a whole, the delimitation etc. Toponyms are formed in compact series, which accompany and systematize, as graphics, logos, illustrations, pictures from textbooks, collections of rocks, etc. In the first place, the name-place is laying within the didactic content (or graphic

object) but their occurrence can not be neglected in the audio-visual forms of communication. Among the teaching materials involving place-names, the map is detached, devoid of geographical nomenclature, remains an abstract representation. The need for their inclusion in the cartographic dimensions generates a series of abbreviations, such as Mtn. (mountain), BDG (bridge) etc. Reading a map is linked to understanding its symbolism (decrypted legend), the reception and correlation proper names written in the symbolic language.

d) *Toponyms – elements of contents* that include a baggage of knowledge that the student must learn, remember and update it whenever your life requires. The core of their names should always be treated with the utmost care in the lesson: to explain on the board and in the record books, to repeat (especially if the topic name is more difficult), identify on the graphic and cartographic support, locate on the different types of maps. It is then frequently circulated in various geographical contexts, the mere ownership of the notions taught, successive and short reproduced, down to the writing of short texts by students based on words / names of key topics, then structured essays, essays, the composition of portfolios, as the "baggage" of place- names to enter the specialized vocabulary is fundamental scientific basis in Geography. In the last stage, the most productive, a reach of transferring the toponyms in daily activity (from identification / spatial localization of an event covered by the establishment - for example - the route to go on summer break).

e) *Toponyms - structuring elements of contents* through their ownership name used terms, having the status of the group, to compartmentalize, to articulate and systematize the content taught. Depending on the place-names, there can be created a logical structure of the teaching scenario, precisely dosed and placed in optimal time. Factors for stability in a continuous source of novelty (as how a lesson must be designed), toponyms components relate effectively in learning activities and give coherence in teaching.

f) *Toponyms - elements of the didactic strategy* assumes that a large number of methods make use of place-names to be able to achieve their goals. Toponyms are found not only in content ("What do we learn?"), but also in the methodology ("How do we learn?"). In this context, the epistemological approach favors toponyms route: curiosity → revelation → learning → memorize → sustainable storage → update. That is why they are found in all moments of teaching: capture attention → communication → fix and enhance → retention and transfer → assessment, stated goal being one of operating the communication staff. Place-names generate a series of concrete learning processes included in the traditional methodology and/or in the current teaching innovations. We can exemplify them according to the following teaching strategies: exposure / description, cartographic / iconic, facilitating a series of cognitive operations, such as: identifying place-names, location names topic, explanation of features, analysis of meanings, explanation, with a role in the discovery of causality – e.g.: Tuzla Lake → hydrological features → climate particularities; analysis - etymological, semantic, structural (components), distribution, systematic, chronological; *conversational problem* – e.g.: identifying names reminiscent of other localities Dobrogea region of the country → territorial mobility of population → occupations → resources, *algorithmic*: identification / localization → denomination → characterization → networking; *computer modeling* – e.g.: identification of the functional areas of a city of, landmarks indicating urban microtoponymics; *practical application/trip* - such observations made in conjunction with

information about the significance of place-names, give students the opportunity to reach out to a clear representation of the elements, processes and of the geographical phenomena, to clarify causal relationships and correlations between them.

g) *Toponyms - transfer and evaluation items* - if the objectives are formulated in terms of "potential" for behavior that represent competences (capacities): "identify", "location", "application", "comparing", "analyzing", "explanation", etc., the assessment items, which prove the capabilities acquired, are formulated as achievements: the student "identifies", "classifies", "locates", "compares", etc. Obviously, there are used names of places. The role of place-names in the compilation of evaluative tests (in the evaluation work in general) is obvious if we remember that the place-names have been identified as components of *general skills, derivatives, of the operational objectives and content*.

### 3. The role of Toponyms in the Teaching Process

Involvement of place-names in the learning units and content units are made conditional depending on the type of teaching: *theoretical* (communication, consolidation and systematization, review, evaluation/verification), *practice* (observation, analysis, experimentation, the practice, application, etc.) and *mixed*: activity that combines theory with practice. Occurrence of toponyms in each of these types of work is satisfactory and beneficial. For example, when the practice preceding the theoretical, geographical landmark (the toponym) is observed, analyzed, and then identified, defined, classified, etc., while in the theoretical presentation, in first place the identification must be done, followed by, definition, characterization and then observation and the analyze. The initial observation is beneficial for intuition, so it is mostly applied in the first classes of study, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, referring to the local toponymy (urban microtoponymics) and up to the near horizon.

Another possible identification of toponyms is done according to the distribution criterion that is achieved during classes. Their advantage over other categories of terms, lies precisely in the fact that they have no restrictions towards the teaching context. Specific character and status of proper names, individual, make them attractive to students from the moment of reception of sound (in comparison with scientific terminology). Thus, toponyms gains importance from the moment of capturing attention, and this is because the place-names are marked by persuasive qualities, which may lead to the student, mend to create a state of epistemological interest.

The main lesson, the toponym information (now part of content) has a multiple functionality. It is well known that toponymy is the border of science. It is necessary that the construction of teaching to be based on a comprehensive strategy, borrowed from the three sciences, such as geographic distribution strategy, the chronological dating and the linguistic analysis. Thus, toponyms involve multi-and interdisciplinary approach, which is actually an important advantage and a teaching benefit mend to be fully exploited, to address to the department work in a cross-curricular teaching communication. Here's how, only the legitimate style of "cross-curricular" work, holistic, interactive communication, Geography becomes the promoter of the relationship between subjects, for guiding student in the intellectual development of equipping it with what we call general knowledge.

In an operational model lesson, toponyms may occur in the following three items: a) components of teaching strategies, b) as means of teaching resources and c) as elements of assessment exams.

a) *forming teaching strategies*. As elements of content involved in the lesson of Geography, toponyms accompany the student at all times practice of teaching: communication (teaching), fixing and building, retention and transfer, evaluation. The teacher must properly exploit the geographical horizon of student knowledge, which is in fact a sequence in the toponym shell of the Earth, which the student will use for himself throughout his schooling.

In this sense, each theoretical lesson to be connected to the system by word-anchor (elements known as microtoponyms) that provide insight and inductive accessibility, that the target words (the subsequent lessons), the newly selected and explained by generalization will also apply to other realities to be learned. On this route storage, students can learn most of the place-names that must be simply listed, but understood and acknowledged by their full load values (social, economical, administrative, political, cultural).

The main teaching method in which the teacher used in communication, involving toponyms are:

- *exposure* (especially applicable to large classes). Toponyms, displayed in sets, should be set in conjunction with the explanation and the visual, so that by combining the act apperception (auditory, visual) help the profound study and memorization. That's why cartographic exposures are recommended, which largely eliminate the passive reception of the names of places;

- *description* - preferable to be used as a learning task which is solved by the students. To be effective, the site must be accompanied by a description of its peculiarities, based on the iconic material;

- *explanation* - shows both characteristics and causalities, and identifies the significance of place-names, offers a range of socio-political implications, economical, cultural. In this way, toponyms become a virtually limitless source of information, which, used effectively, can be exploited by the teacher in a global vision concerning the geographical realities described;

- *analysis* use the above methods, that you can model and related in various strategies. Based on the language, Geography and History, toponymy suits to the following types of analysis: the *etymological* (origin of place-names reflect the diverse ethnic mosaic of an area), *semantic* (a seemingly odd name will be more readily understood and accepted if it reveals the meaning), *structural* (help in finding the correct meanings and learning their sound), *distributional* (based on linguistic geography, which examines, among other things, the territorial distribution of place- names, being the most profitable distribution analysis on the map), *systemic* or *holistic* approach (taking into account the relationship between part and whole, such as classification of place-names in a range of name) and chronological (e.g.: identifying names of successive settlements);

- *conversation* - questions relating to toponymy will not refer to their knowledge in name than in the first instance and then to develop the line of causation and characteristics;

- *algorithmic* - A guarantee of high academic performance and conduct of intellectual operations in a predetermined order, properly defined, becoming a habit of thought and behavior. Logically, the study of place-names, in this operational trajectory is: identification / localization → denomination → characterization → networking.

In practical lessons conducted in the classroom, the role of toponymy in shaping students' geographical skills and practice, results from the mapping language, that the practice of acquired skills. The privileged position of place-names on the map (there are only denoted vocabulary), transparency in relation to the symbolism of the map, the specific report that signs contracts with conventional, they are all necessary for "reading" and "interpretation" of the cartographic material (map, in particular). Through toponymy it is easy to work with the map, as their presence becomes easier to orientate, the expression of symbols being done (the "translation") in words. Practicing skills is acquired through various types of exercise: *identification* of the toponym after its characteristics, its location, *hierarchy* (e.g.: number of inhabitants of cities criterion, based on the conventional symbols), graphic organization of geographical realities (and shaded relief units marked by letters, rivers and towns marked by numbers, etc.) on a contour map "moves" on a particular interpretation of the symbolism expressed sequence map, the identification of geographical landmarks marked schematic/symbolic map, etc. In the spirit of modern didactics, geography lessons and processes can call for other types such as: *crosswords, puzzles, etc.*

Practical activities involve field research strategies tailored direct with end users including: data collection, collating them (comparing, ranking, etc.) and their interpretation. Call for toponymy is crucial for orientation (primary or advanced) on the ground, being active-pragmatic side of teaching Geography. Achieving concrete forms, *walking, hiking, trip, camp, expedition*, include a series of observations and experiments, with direct effect in broadening the horizon of knowledge from the lowest classes.

b) *didactical means and resources*. Toponyms have an important functional aspect, as a medium of pragmatic instruction. They are teaching visual means (or graphic object), but also have a role in audio-visual forms of communication. Among all the teaching materials involving toponyms, the map is its first beneficiary. Cartographic representations would remain abstract (and for students, obscure) without crossing place-names on the map. Reading a map is inextricably linked with the understanding of its symbolism, the correct reception and matching names written in the symbolic language.

c) *as elements of assessment exams*.

#### **4. The Name-places in the Assessment Strategies Place**

In direct connection with the proposed objectives, the assessment is the compilation of place-names of tests, assessing the degree of assimilation of knowledge and skills training and skills for students. These arrays of items can be extremely diverse, depending on the complexity requirement, the type of responses expected, according to the formulation of oral or written, and others. In the formulation of many items are involved in different forms, names of places. In this series may include *items of identification*: "Identify, using the manual map lakes, river and sea harbors in Romania." Location item: "Locate on the map atlases cities Rhine-Ruhr industrial region", "Set Move



map worksheet cities Tokaido Megalopolis "selection items": From the following list of proper names (cities are enumerated) elect five South American cities and five cities in Southeast Asia. Type of pair / association items: "The first column is denoted the capital cities and countries on the second column. Take proper correlation country - the capital." (the terms are written in two columns), *items of comparison*: "Name two similarities and two differences between the topography and landscape of the Apennine Mountains", *items of hierarchy*: order the following cities (Mangalia, Medgidia, Ovidiu, Constanta, Negru Vodă, Cernavodă, Eforie, Hârșova), in descending order of number of inhabitants, using statistical data of the table in the worksheet, *multiple-choice items*: "On the shores of Lake Michigan is the city: a. Chicago b. Cleveland c. Detroit d. Toronto", *completing items*: "Fill in the blanks with correct information for the following sentence: Callatis current city was ranked No. ... .."; *items of problem-solving situations* that require the most complex answers based on interpretation and effect that they have integrated in toponyms (for inclusion in an assembly-language code space): "Identify (possibly in a given directory) names of villages in the county of Constanta on the trades."

## Conclusions

The overall quality of *proper names* and the *special geographical names*, toponyms are not only learning, but the premise of intellectual development, they are engaged, explicitly or implicitly, connections – thanked to interdisciplinary study. The role of toponymy in the formation of students is geographical: 1. geographic and cartographic language and practice, 2. skills acquired through practice: identifying / locating / ranking toponyms and organizing graphic realities of a "moving map" interpretation of the symbolism expressed on a map, various games. Toponyms are a special orientation factor (geographical) and in general, may become a factor in career guidance (in some jobs related to tourism, transport) and is also a foundation of lifelong learning and for further years of schooling.

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