



People and places: naming the environment in Dhofar

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From Environment to Landscape

- Environment ≠ Landscape
- “A landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a synthetic space, a man-made system functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community” (Jackson 1986: 68).
- Consequence of the interaction between man and the environment



Landscape

- Conceptualization of space and social landscape
- Landscape as a humanized, acted-on, and defined space
- “Engagement gives and is defined by the way we give cultural meaning to the location of our existence - so that even the trees and the rocks mean different things to different people.” (David & Thomas 2008: 36)

Studying landscapes: multiple approaches

- Historical and Comparative Linguistics and Semantics
- Anthropology and Ethnology
- Landscape Archaeology
- Cultural Geography
- Biology, Zoology

Landscape and lifestyle

- Social construction of landscape
- Language as body

Naming the environment: the importance of toponyms

- Toponyms as the relicforms of human geography
- Place names – in different areas and times – often allow the linguists to trace back the origins of languages and to go back to the remote roots of a toponymic system and of a language, giving the opportunity to confirm or to deny theories and hypotheses and to establish an ‘onomastic stratigraphy’ of toponyms, hydronyms, and oronyms
- Not only anthropic elements

Naming the environment: the importance of toponyms

- Toponyms preserve impressions, knowledge, and cosmovisions held by the societies that have at some point coined them
- Toponyms reflect the social constructs of the human groups inhabiting the landscape
- Language documentation and spatial localization of traditional life

Documentation of Baḥari folk toponomastics and beyond

- Research proposal submitted to ELDP (SOAS)
- Multimodal documentation of Baḥāhira folk toponomastics and social functions of space
- Creation of an interactive map of Baḥari toponyms with the use of GIS (Geographic Information System) technology

Why document and study Baḥari toponyms?

- Official land mapping (i.e. GoogleMaps) makes use of Arabic names only
- Radical and fast change of social environment and lifestyle
- Complementary to culture documentation

Language documentation and place names

- Narratives often involve spacial informations which cannot always be put in direct visual relation with the environment → comprehension of data can be partially hindered
- Geographic localization of place names allows a better comprehension of people movements and possibly hint important clues about lifestyles in undocumented times

Storytelling and spatial reference

- People movements in which all the tribe was involved (seasonal movements, nomadic grazing)
- Travelling around Dhofar of lone travellers or smaller groups (es. going to Muscat or Dubai for any reason or trading)
- Survival and daily life: es. fetching water, harvesting frankincense, going hunting or fishing...
- Social life: gathering with other tribal chiefs or tribes

Expected outcomes

- test the semantic shift also through the lens of evidences from historical geography and landscape analysis, establishing the agreement of linguistic data with the topographic ones.
- reconstitute not only the 'remote stratigraphy' of place names, hydronyms, and oronyms, but also the speakers' interpretation of the environment, their perception of landscape, and their description of territory.
- possibly shed some light on the ancient origins of the analyzed languages
- provide valuable data about people's movements and settlement dynamics over time.

Naming the
environment:

 a few
examples

Description of environment

'Transparent' place names

Primary goods: water

Figurative language use

Description of the environment



šīdər

kərmaym



Description of the environment

arśəmūt



baṭn ḥawōdi

Description of the environment

nīḥār
tlε?
śīsa?
ṭīfīḥ
wōdi
amalkūt



Water: *Ṣayn rzāt*



Water: *śtrī*



Water: *maḥsāt*



Water: *nōṭaf*



Figurative language



Figurative language





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