

## Proper name as an object of semiotic research

Ülle Pärli

Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu  
Jakobi 2, 51014 Tartu, Estonia  
e-mail: ulle.parli@ut.ee

**Abstract.** The present article is divided into two parts. Its theoretical introductory part takes under scrutiny how proper name has been previously dealt with in linguistics, philosophy and semiotics. The purpose of this short overview is to synthesise different approaches that could be productive in the semiotic analysis of naming practices. Author proposes that proper names should not be seen as a linguistic element or a type of (indexical) signs, but rather as a function that can be carried by different linguistic units. This approach allows us to develop a transdisciplinary basis for a wider understanding of naming as a sociocultural practice. The empirical part of the article uses one certain village in Estonia in Lääne-Virumaa district as an example to demonstrate how toponyms structure the social space, how they carry the memory and how naming practice highlights such changes in the semiotic behaviour of the social life that otherwise could have remained hidden.

Naming is one of the most important problems and research questions in semiotics, containing also the core questions of the history of semiotics. To name a few: the problem of name and object; the relation between general and particular signification; rhetorical usage of the name etc.

In contemporary semiotics naming can be considered a field of study that combines sociosemiotics and cultural semiotics and unites the semiotic method of study with other disciplines devoted to culture and society. Naming is definitely one of the most important topics in studying the semiotic reality. Still, we have to agree with Vilmos Voigt's

comment, that “Good definitions or detailed descriptions are absent from semiotics handbooks” (Voigt 2007: 38).

We can, however, say that the overall interest in proper name and naming in general has increased in recent decades. We may speak about a whole wave of anthropological name research, mainly cognitive studies of naming (for example, Cohen, Faulkner 1986; Valentine *et al.* 1996; Hollis, Valentine 2001) but most overviews still present the philosophical and logical tradition concentrating on the questions of reference and truth value as if it were the general name theory (for example, Hansack 1990; Lycan 1999).

This article is not aiming to fulfil the gap that Vilmos Voigt referred to. Emanating from the pragmatics of name I will try to present some possibilities that the naming research can offer for understanding the processes in culture and society. Theoretical studies will be illustrated with how the naming of the social space in my home village reflects the changes in the society; how the actual and institutional spatial order is related to that preserved in the collective memory.

To begin with, it can be stated that compared to linguistics that deals with the morphological aspects of proper names, the description of the adequate models and the classifications of proper names (see also the new possibilities of classification offered by Van Langendonck 2007), the main interests of the philosophy of language and semiotics is naming as a process, or nomination.

### **Proper name as an identifying nomination in linguistics and the philosophy of language**

In the philosophy of language in general we can detect periods when theories of name prevail, and periods when theories of predicate prevail. More generally we can also refer to a similar change of prevailing ideas in description of cultures: nowadays interest in naming is a kind of equilibrium to studies of culture as narrative. In other words, we think about name in the categories of the space, but predicate in the

categories of duration, timing (see Stepanov 2010: 23). At the same time the strategies of naming and their changes and stratifications have a temporal dimension, and thereby enable to seize the semiotic processes in the society.

As we all know, viewing from within the system of language, proper name is the kind of name that names the unique, individual entity. Thus, it belongs to the identifying names, and carries an identifying meaning. In order to exemplify the identifying meaning of naming, it is useful to refer to the works on nomination by a Russian linguist and semiotician Nina Arutyunova, according to whom the identifying meaning is closely related to the reference, the object outside the language; the derivational nature of meaning; the certainty of reference or extensional and the uncertainty of thought or intensional; the social nature of the semantic rules of use; the heterogeneity of the meaning (made up of the data of senses; emotional, aesthetic, and evaluative symbolic associations). Competence with regard to the identifying names is grounded on knowing their reference. Arutyunova has written:

Linguistic competence with regard to names that relate to the world is different, in principle, from words that pertain to human thinking, their system of concepts. In order to operate with names that lead the addressee to the objects of reality, one must know how to find one's bearing in the world; in order to operate with semantic predicates (attributive words), one must find one's bearing among the ways of thinking about the world. In the first case, one must be familiar with reality, in the second case — with the expressed system of linguistic concepts. In the first case one must know the word's relation to the object, in the second case — understand the word's meaning. The usage of concrete names is determined by the ontology of the world, but the usage of semantic predicates — gnoseologically. (Arutyunova 1998: 24)

Here we arrive at one of the most discussed issues of the name theoreticians: what separates the proper name from the general name, where to draw the line between the two?

Does a proper name have a meaning or do they only have a direct reference and how do they fulfil their reference? Equally important is how broad is the notion of proper name, since on this depend also the answers to the above-mentioned questions. Although these questions

lead back to Plato, more often authors start their discussions from John S. Mill and his work *System of Logic* (Mill 1973). In more recent studies, the typical illustrative model used is the semantic triangle, which relates the object, the sign (name) and the meaning (relation between linguistics — extralinguistics — logics). It does not matter how different concepts and notions are used for defining the object (referent) and meaning in the linguistic, logical, philosophical and semiotic papers. It is still quite clear that proper name that signifies a unique, autonomous entity, be it the individual or a certain segment of the world around him/her, is not comparable to the general name taken into account in the semantic meaning — in order for a general name to become a proper name, it must forget its semantic meaning.

We can find a split between the proper names and the general names also in the language theory of Ferdinand de Saussure as he states that in the language more generally correlation creates a fact, thus the onomastic *seme* cannot be subjected to the general rules of creating a sign. It is true that Saussure stresses rather the unchangeable entity of the onomastic sign:

Whenever *langue* is discussed, *word* and *meaning* (or *sign* and *meaning*) make an appearance as if this sums up everything, but there are moreover always examples of words like *tree*, *stone*, *cow*, like Adam giving..., in other words what is crudest in semiology: where (through the random selection of objects cited) semiology is reduced to an onimic, in other words, for this is what is distinctive about onimics within semiology as a whole, where psychological association of the *seme* undeniably features a *third* element, namely, an awareness that this *seme* refers to something external which is sufficiently defined in itself to *elude* the general law of the sign. (Saussure 2006: 70–71)

Vladimir Toporov, an author of the Tartu–Moscow School, considers the system of proper names and its structural research possible after the exact definition of the toponomastic sign (Toporov 1962: 7), which he studies not in the framework of language but that of the text (text can also be a culture, or a subsystem of culture). Proper names create a rather independent, untranslatable subsystem in a language that does not follow the rules of syntactic order. The linguistic context is not the primary context for the proper names; they belong to another system

primarily (names of individuals, street names etc). In structural linguistics the question whether proper names form a separate subsystem within a language becomes an important problem. If the answer is yes, then they can be studied also with structural methods.

Taken from that perspective, as the most important fact for the proper name is not the meaning but meaningfulness (in the sense of Hjelmslev), the proper name as a sign can be characterized purely negatively as a regular sign of language (Toporov 1962).

I will bring one example from the Soviet times. When the kolkhozes were established in Estonia, they were given ideologically loaded names. An administrative division was set up, the names marking it created a new map placed upon the traditional toponyms. These new names (such as *Future*, *Red flag*, *Energy*, *Road to Communism*) were mostly associated with the ideology that they metonymically marked, and did not function as real toponyms. After a certain period of time the semantic meaning vanished and for example *Future* became a usual place name. When someone said he was going to the *Future* it did not create a comic effect anymore. After regaining the independence, when the Soviet life was reorganized and kolkhozes were closed down, the semantic meaning of the Soviet names became evident again. For some time parallel toponyms were used, and both were ideologically significant.

## **On the possibility of transdisciplinary name theory**

This example with kolkhoz names helps to highlight two more important theoretical aspects in addition to the above-mentioned.

Proper name is a situative sign, the motivation of which is social and historical. Hence the functional resemblance of proper names to deictic names, mostly indicative pronouns.

First, the boundaries of proper name and general name are not easy to set; the most interesting research area for semiotics is the transformation from proper to general name and *vice versa* in actual speech situation. The latter should be seen here as a sociocultural situation.

Secondly, taking Arutyunova's condensed comparison (Arutyunova 1998: 2) as a basis for the semantic possibilities of an identifying name (deictics, proper names and general names), to mark an immediate or mediated object in the field of perception can be described as the following.

(1) The choice of deictic words depends on the concrete speech act. They can be seen as moving definers that can be applied to whatever referent. Their meaning is completely defined by the attributes of the denotate.

(2) Proper names have a unique reference, their content is set by the qualities of the denotate. Though independent of the conditions of the communication, they depend on social practice and changing naming strategies in general. Like deictics, they are still semantically deficient. This is related to an aspect in logic that none of the predicates can create an analytical statement with a proper name the truth-value of which is guaranteed by the truth-value of the words within this sentence.

(3) General names have a complete semantic structure — a concept (designate, *Sinn*), that is made up of the general attributes of this class and concrete — individual content that is created in the speech act through the denotate, the attributes of the referent. Meaning that describes certain attributes is the skeleton of the general name assuring its stability, while the denotative meaning varies during the usage.

In order to describe the proper name one might add that they cannot be taxonomically put into order, the basis of their classification is extralinguistic. At the same time, paradoxically these extralinguistic systems ascribe to proper names certain meanings, or connotations. Philosophy of language is more inclined to deal with the intentional content of the name, also with the problem of correlation between identifying invariant reference and individual name usage. Hence the questions that in phenomenology touch upon the perceptive processes of the material world itself. We can draw a parallel between the concept of descriptive cluster in Searle's proper name theory (Searle 1958; 1983) and Husserl's concept of the transcendental of the object: a unified

world of perception, which enables the object to remain self-identical in this plurality of given entities (Husserl 1998: 55–79).

Thus, when we analyze the proper name not so much as an element of the linguistic system, but as an individualizing function, we may state that the function of the proper name (signifying an individual object) may be carried out depending on pragmatics of a given discourse: either the deictics that have received an identifying meaning within a certain enunciation; or the general names the semantic meaning of which is more stable and context independent.

At the same time traditional proper names (*Eigentliche Eigennamen* in the sense of Gottlob Frege) are sort of a gap that comprises the properties of deictics but also the possibilities to become a spoken general name — due to the overwhelming domination of predicative meaning over the identifying meaning. Thus, proper names have different functional possibilities and the function of the proper name can be carried out by different names.

This viewpoint can be compared to Ch. S. Peirce's understanding of proper name. He places proper name in his classifications of relations between the sign and object under indices, in the wider context of referential signs.

An indexical word, such as a proper noun or demonstrative or selective pronoun, has force to draw the attention of the listener to some hecceity common to the experience of speaker and listener. By a hecceity, I mean, some element of existence which, not merely by the likeness between its different apparitions, but by an inward force of identity, manifesting itself in the continuity of its apparition throughout time and in space, is distinct from everything else, and is thus fit (as it can in no other way be) to receive a proper name or to be indicated as this or that. (CP: 2.434)

Everything that focuses attention to itself can be viewed as an index. The names of persons and places are signs due to their relation with their objects in the same way that are personal and referential pronouns, letters in a scheme or knock on the door. Real index and its objects have to be individual objects. At the same time indexicality is a part of semiosis, the process of transmutation of the proper name as a sign:

A proper name, when one meets with it for the first time, is existentially connected with some perception or other equivalent individual knowledge of the individual it names. It is then, and then only, a genuine Index. The next time one meets with it, one regards it as an Icon of that Index. The habitual acquaintance with it having been acquired, it becomes a Symbol whose Interpretant represents it as an Icon of an Index of the Individual named. (CP: 2.329)

The movement in this case is only in one direction; from the identifying name of a single object to singular concept and then to a general term, divided predicative meaning (here we have to take into account that Peirce's notion of a proper name is wide and in English it can be any concrete name with a definite article *the*)<sup>1</sup>.

Seeing proper name as an index is also close to the understanding of Bertrand Russell (Russell 1940) the real logical proper name is the indicative pronoun *this*, or the idea of Michel Foucault that the proper name enables to point a finger at something, and therefore to transfer unnoticeably from the area of speaking to the area of watching. These spheres can be brought together as if they were adequate. On the other hand, the idea that the act of signifying transforms smoothly into an act of showing has been criticized by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1996) who describes the so-called *savage mind* as a centralized and socially conditioned naming system. Society sets the basic categories and correlation rules of classification and generalisation, as well as the spheres of general and proper names and their mutual dependence. It must be mentioned here that the views of Lévi-Strauss have also influenced the Tartu–Moscow School thinkers, namely their idea of the proper name as the social sign, as well as their view that mythological thinking bound to proper names continues to be used for interpreting the world in nowadays culture as well.

Peirce's concept of the proper name indicates an important point: analyzing the proper name we should distinguish (1) cases where we deal with the objects that are currently in the field of perception; (2) the recognition of such familiar objects or spaces of which we have

---

<sup>1</sup> See Peirce's concept of proper name in comparison with the causal proper name theory (Pietarinen 2010; see also Weber 2008).

a visual idea; and (3) objects that we can recognize and identify relying on our knowledge and that assure the mutual understanding with the partner of the dialogue, but about which we lack a personal experience, or contact.

Our personally perceived-remembered world does not require proper names and naming as it is individual, possessive, partitive, and local. Also the categorical names signifying objects function here as proper names possessing a direct reference, which is set by a situative denotation.

According to Russell real proper names *this* and *me* apply for the narrow here-and-now world.

The word “this” appears to have the character of a proper name, in the sense that it merely designates an object without in any degree describing it. It might be thought to ascribe to an object the property of being present to attention, but this would be a mistake: many objects on many occasions are present to attention, but on each occasion only one *is this*. We may say: “this” means “the object “ of *this* act of attention; but this obviously is no definition. “This” is the name which we give to the object to which we are attending, but we cannot define “this” as the object to which I now attend, because “I” and “now” involve “this”. [...] the designatum of “this” is continually changing. (Russell 1940: 109)

The world of objects under my attention is socially distributed through the names that are independent of the communication situation. The perception, *Vorstellung* that here accompanies the proper name, can be to a large extent shared within the society, in contrast to the idea that is created by an identifying general name which is paradoxically at the same time more general and more individual. In a situation where the object named or none of the objects of the given class are empirically familiar, naming does not bring along a visual effect but knowledge about the object.

Therefore, from one side we can state that no strict boundary can be drawn between the proper name and the general name. Or as the semiotician and linguist Juri Stepanov (1998: 187) writes: “Proper names (individual names) name things (and thereby can name terms and concepts), whereas common nouns name terms, concepts, and are thereby able to name things”. Still the boundary between the universal

and unique, marked by the proper and common name, cannot be levelled off, due to the general essence of language. Also the experimental cognitive psychology that deals with the processes of remembering, reproducing and forgetting, proves the importance of this boundary in our linguistic behaviour. Proper name and general name are like two registries that are united in their conflict: “Discourse flows freely from one sphere into another but the latter do not merge. On the contrary, the contrast between them is merely emphasised.” (Lotman 2000: 104).

For the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School proper names have been one of the research fields of cultural semiotics. This essentially myth-related proper name that is discussed by the authors of the Tartu–Moscow School, is based on the archaic perception-based naming of the world (compare to Cassirer 2010).

However, proper name is the carrier of the mythic conscience not only historically, but it also forms a mythological substrate in nowadays culture.

The topic of naming has always been related to the study of the myth. Different authors have stressed in their various researches the syncretism of archaic name; in our categorizing mind the boundaries of proper and common names cannot be specified (see an overview in Pärli, Rudakovskaja 2002). The name of the God is the same as the function of God. The destiny of God depends on the destiny of the name, not *vice versa*. In the current culture, proper name preserves several ways of thinking that are typical of mythological thinking: the sameness of name and object; belief in the strength of the name; the fragmentary idea of the room and hierarchization created by the name; hiding the name; making the name a taboo, and releasing it from being a taboo; changing the name as a means to change the social status; using a different name in different situations, etc. The above-mentioned topics have been discussed in various works by Uspenskij, Ivanov, Lotman and Toporov (see also Nikolayeva 2007). The function of the name, its significance in a certain sociocultural context, remains the central question. Toponyms and personal names have usually been considered

under the category 'proper name'; these are *Eigentliche Eigennamen* (rigid designators) in Frege's sense.

At first glance it seems that this myth-based cultural semiotic theory cannot be related to a name theory of the logico-semantic linguistic analysis. Starting points are so different — myth and logic. As we know, the rules of logic are based on the laws of symbolization. Knowledge here means verbal knowledge. Analytical sayings are related not to reality but to language. This means that the truth-value is based on language, which presumes the separation of name and attributes. For example, for the descriptive name theory, name acquires a meaning through description. In other words, according to Frege *Sinn* is a way of presenting *Bedeutung*. Hence we can raise a question how relevant are certain concrete descriptions in case of an identifying claim: they are used in order that all the speakers could be sure that the discussion is about one and the same person. Or as Searle (1958: 171–173) has written, culture validates the hierarchy of identifying descriptions. Every description taken separately sheds light on only one side of an object, at the same time pretending to identify the whole. Therefore, a multitude of describing properties is the source of the multitude of possible ways for identifying something, while in fact we lack the principle that would allow constructing a complete field of distinctive attributes.

Name theory based on myth does not deny the categorizing function of proper name, the logically equalling argument actually fulfils the identification of the whole through a certain attribute. We could also view this cluster of attributes as an assemblage of different objects. Thus, these approaches are not as contradictory as may seem at first glance. Altogether, we might ask how in the time of powerful mass media can we possibly distinguish to what extent descriptions define the proper name and to what extent certain concepts or stereotypes usurp proper names. We do live in the era of onomastic noise. Paradoxically ideology, advertising, and sociocultural stereotypes in a broader sense empty the proper names they exploit. We can talk about a strangely reversed type of mythological thinking created on a rational basis. The

archaic sameness of the part and whole becomes the impossibility of the whole as such.

### Example: Toponyms as structurers of sociocultural space and carriers of memory

As a continuation to my discussion I will offer a concrete empirical analysis of toponyms to demonstrate a possible application of name theory to describe specific sociocultural processes. I will employ different possible proper name functions that are realised in a certain socium.

The village — Lokosoo — of which the present study is about, is almost entirely absent from all maps. It is located in northern Estonia, in West-Viru district, Kadrina municipality, at the border of present Võiere and Kihlevere villages (Fig. 1). This name marks out an unclearly bounded region that has, in different times, connected about ten farmsteads. It is a small settlement that has usually been situated on the lands of the Aasperere manor, and as the borders have changed, it has been partially attached to the Kihlevere manor. In a 1782 census, in which

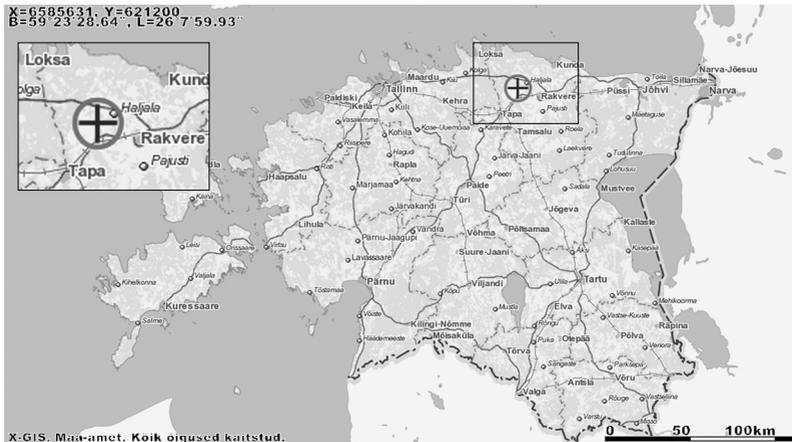


Figure 1. The location of Lokosoo village on the Estonian map.

the Aaspere manor is for the first time described village by village, this particular village is absent. The name can, however, be found on an 1875 map, but not as referring to a village, but to a bog (Lokusoo/ Lohusoo); there we can also find the names “Lohhuse Weld” (parish), “Lohusoo Mäggi” (hill). In later periods, the settlement has been divided between the Võipere and the Kihlevere (Kodasoo) villages, whereas the border of the latter has, in its own turn, marked the border of parishes. During the Soviet period, this border was also the border of selsoviets, and households situated along the border were at times part of the Aaspere, at times part of the Kadrina selsoviets. Even in contemporary Republic of Estonia, the inhabitants of this small village have had to order their newspapers and do transactions with the Estonian Postal Service either in Aaspere or in Kadrina. Accordingly, some of the farmsteads have, in different times, been related either with the Haljala or the Kadrina church. Despite all this, the people have been united by a common village space, and since the family relations between the inhabitants were also close, we may treat the village as a unified whole, indicated by the name Lokusoo during the days of the Republic of Estonia and the Soviet Union. However, in the consciousness and parlance of today’s new inhabitants, this name is no longer widespread.

In the following, I will discuss place names that designate a village and its surrounding landscapes. Some of these names may be institutionalised, some, however, are in use only within the village itself, and it is precisely these names that internally structure the village. Non-institutionalised, local names are like a cipher, only known to the devotees accepted into their language game by the village community. These names in their own turn are able to generate “shared” visual imagery.

### **Persons and place names**

For a place name to identify a particular location, there must exist a historical relationship between the name and its user — a knowledge or experienced familiarity that creates a sense of landscape as interpreted

text. If, for example, a predication related to a person's name has as a rule a narrative structure, like an event, "the one who is/ has been doing ...", then in the case of place names the predication is nominative, descriptive. However, in the present analysis the personal and place names are inseparable, since the spatial order of the village is social by its nature. For example, we can discern the following uses of personal names as place names: owner's name as a place name or farm's name that also designates the owner and the whole family. For those who remember the old names, a new dweller with whom he/ she has no contact may be nameless, or named as the "One who lives in the house of Otu Hans", at the same time, for the one not remembering older names, the house of Otu Hans can be "the house where Epp lives".

The above-mentioned examples also give evidence that the place names to be examined are inseparably connected to categorical nouns that signify elements of the village landscape (farmstead, road, meadow), and concurrently structure the system of proper names taxonomically, or, in other words, these are names that simultaneously distinguish and categorise. Genitive syntagmatic structures have indeed been used, that essentially express a relationship of belonging, possession (who has, who owns), while at the same time functioning as inseparable syntactic constructions as compound nouns. The complexity of names is associated with the dual nature of what the names indicate. For example, "Peeter's road" indicates one part of a farmstead considered as a spatial whole, as well as one of several village roads that constitute a network of roads that connects a set of farmsteads. It is interesting that in such name pairs proper names can perform signification, can render meaning and integration ("Peeter's" as a situative common noun that converges the objects belonging to that farmstead), whereas the common nouns (road, bog) can function as situative proper names as singular objects that belong to Peter's farmstead. Yet we can also take an entirely opposite view: for example, that a bog is divided into Kangro's and Peeter's bogs.

Thus, since the toponyms that identify the village landscape are primarily derived from the names of the inhabitants for the purpose of marking out their land ownership, the rearrangement and restructuring

of the village landscape during societal changes is expressed in the place names that were/ are in use. The liaison of place and personal names has likewise been changing in time. Furthermore, as we will see later on, names live their own lives, carrying memories of those structures that have been destroyed by social cataclysms or that have undergone changes over time during the village's development. The simultaneous use of names that have come into use at different times preserves the past in memory, and at the same time unites the present and the past, the current reality and remembered reality into an atemporal whole.

Saul Kripke says:

When I say that a designator is rigid, and designates the same thing in all possible worlds, I mean that, as used in *our* language, it stands for that thing, when *we* talk about counterfactual situations. [...] It is in this sense that I speak of a rigid designator [a proper name — Ü.P.] as having the same reference in all possible worlds. (Kripke 1980: 77–78)

What he means is that the name rigidly refers to that one thing. Similarly, a place name that is used in a village society can function as a rigid denominator in parallel remembered realities. Indeed, the use of the names of farmsteads does in fact indicate the reality, which for the Soviet era is what could have been, and that continues to exist and becomes marked as a “possible existence” by way of names. While Kripke, who primarily discusses personal names for expounding his views, argues that “it’s in virtue of our connection with other speakers in the community, going back to the referent himself, that we refer to a certain man” (Kripke 1980: 94), we can argue the same about the chain of communication that connects a particular object to a place name. It is especially the non-institutionalised proper names that persist as long as they are shared within the community or as long as their knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Thus we may examine the village space as a collective body of place names.

### **Individual farmsteads: The oldest stratum of toponyms**

The oldest stratum of toponyms used in the village, even during the Soviet period, were indeed the old Republic of Estonia era names for farmsteads, and the names of fields, pastures, meadows, roads, forests and bogs belonging to them.

During the period of farmsteads, the entire village landscape was named and identified (for example, Kangro talu, Kangro road, Kangro meadow, Kangro forest, Kangro bog). It was the act of naming, which is indeed an act of delineation and thereby an act of identification and acknowledgment of the continuity of the object in time, that revealed the internal order of the village. Moving around the village landscape, one constantly crossed borders; it was a movement through “alien” places. It could be argued that such a village structure is by its nature based on proper names.

First of all, the familiar landscape, one’s own farmstead as a world of exemplary, unique places and things, where everything can be referred to by using the denoting pronoun “this” — the names that signify home (for example, house, barn, granary, paddock, pasture, well) can here be treated as speech-based proper names, since their reference can be, as Kripke expresses it, “determined ostensively” (Kripke 1980: 28). Here we can also refer to John Austin’s discussion that whatever words can in a certain situation of “our presence” be defined as proper names. Concurrently, as also appears from the introductory part of this article, we may agree with Austin if he considers false the claim that all names could be seen as factual proper names. Austin considers the viewpoint that general names have a denotate similarly to proper names as false as the viewpoint that proper names have a connotation similar to the general names (Austin 1999: 313–14). In the case of our previous example of a farm family we are dealing with a temporarily and spatially localized language community which owns a common “referential space”, not occurring new in every moment but with a rather persistent nature that makes it possible to unite certain general names with a strict persistent reference (as a unique farmstead geography).

Secondly — farmstead is surrounded by similar “universes” that require naming (and for which we must name ourselves), since we must distinguish them from one another — whose village, whose pasture, whose road? This, too, is a world of proper names, consisting of singularities that in their own turn comprise the village as an ordered space. There are also elements within the complete village structure that, designated with common nouns, operate as proper names and require names only for an external point of view (school, shop, parish centre).

A fascinating topic that would require a separate inquiry is the impact of the “Estonification”<sup>2</sup> of surnames to toponyms. Frequently, members of the same family adopted different Estonian-sounding names, for which reason the places named after them lost their initial integrity, resulting in a more detailed breakdown of the village structure. An example is provided by the split in proper names within my own family: my grandfather and two of his brothers, who lived in close vicinity in the village, replaced their common surname Limann with three different names: Liiva, Liivaorg, Liimand. Accordingly, the farmsteads acquired new markers, even though in the village parlance the old surnames or given names were used to talk about farmsteads. The new names had to become rooted over the course of time.

---

<sup>2</sup> Fixed family names were given to Estonians in the beginning of the 19th century. Before that people were called after their farmstead’s name or by their father’s and first name. Since the family names were given to peasants by German estate holders, the new given names were often German. In 1930s a campaign called “Every Estonian should have an Estonian name” was carried out in order to change the German surnames into Estonian ones. Since 1934, Estonification of names became a state policy. In case of personal names, Estonification was freewilling, but in case of place names it became compulsory. Special models of name formation were created to be used for Estonification. By 1940 when the Soviet occupation started, most of the foreign surnames had been changed (Must 2000).

### Names and Soviet occupation

The Soviet occupation on 1940, the war and subsequent repression touched almost every family in the village: the owners of several farmsteads died in the war or were sent to labour camps. Almost half of the families were deported to Siberia after the war and their farms were taken over by new unrelated people. During the first decade after the war, collective farms were formed following the model of Soviet Union and for that end, the land, animals and farming tools were nationalised.<sup>3</sup> Many people left the village. Those who stayed and also the new kolkhoz workers that had come to the village, were given a small plot of land (0,6 ha) for small scale gardening. On these lands potatoes and cereals were cultivated for people themselves and their strictly limited number of domestic animals. Thus a double economy was formed: one's own fields and animals, and the kolkhoz's fields and animals.

In cases where the inhabitants changed during the Soviet times, the old, pre-war names of farmsteads are retained alongside the names of the new inhabitants (for example, Põösaste as the name for a farmstead and Haukka as the surname of the new inhabitants). In some houses, the inhabitants changed so frequently that they failed to pass on their own name to the place, and thus the farmstead continued to be named after the name of the former owner (for example, Otu Hansu). Some old Estonian names were in fact so potent that they provided the official name for the new Soviet-era buildings erected on the site of a former farmstead. An example is provided by one of the more developed farmsteads in the village — Peetri — the owners of which were repressed and deported to Siberia. The farm building now located on its lands is even today called the Peetri barn, independently of the new owner.

With the formation of collective farms, the fastest to turn anonymous were the fields, which from then on acquired annually changing

---

<sup>3</sup> Although, we have to say that very few farms had farming machines at that time since most of the work was done with horses. The nationalisation of horses was especially hard on the villagers, because horses had been a source of pride for farm owners.

names based on the crops growing there. When the exact location had to be specified, it was done by describing it, in which the names of places adjoining the field could be helpful.

The places that were less dependent on the co-operation of people retained their former names for longer and carried forward the historical structure of the village. Thus roads retained their names that originated from the period of farmsteads. At one time, there was a road passing behind the village, connecting the farmsteads and the Aaspere and Kihlevere manors. Later on, a highway was constructed on the other side of the village, and individual roads from every farmstead led up to it, which accordingly acquired their names from the farmsteads. The former intra-village road was dug up, and in its stead there slowly developed a new road, leading from farmstead to farmstead, in parallel to the highway. Still during the Soviet era, when going to school for example, I could choose between six different roads, depending on the season, weather and mood: Põllukopli road, Paju road, Jaagupi road, Põösaste road, Kangro road, Peetri road. The road that connected the farmsteads, however, had always been nameless, similar to the highway being just “the highway”.

The forest meadows also retained their names as derived from former farmsteads. Since the collective farm made practically no use of them, the village inhabitants made hay there for their animals, distributing them according to the farmstead-era borders. This did not go without disputes, however, when for example the relatives from different families of repressed owners laid claim to the hayfields of former farmsteads. This continued until amelioration works destroyed these hayfields at the very end of the Soviet period. The names of farmsteads were nevertheless preserved even in cases when the houses had been abandoned and completely decayed — what was usually preserved were the gardens that retained the memory of those who had set them up: Jaagupi garden, Mäeotsa garden, Jaani garden, Sangmanni garden. By today, even most of these gardens have completely deteriorated, and only a few village inhabitants still remember their names.

One of the Soviet-era changes was that there came into being a large-scale and homogenous “own” space, comparable to the earlier “own” of the established farmsteads. Since the households of collective farmers were also retained, it was paradoxically as if the “own” space was doubled. Pigsty, cowshed, calf shed, workshop, office, granary, grain dryer were, at least for the first small collective farm that was confined to this single village, singular places that did not require to be referred to with proper names. Later, as the collective farm grew, the village became but one of its divisions, and there appeared the necessity for naming and distinguishing those places that previously, in their singularity, did not require names (Liivari cowshed — Kihlevere cowshed; Peetri pigsty — Kihlevere pigsty).

During the Soviet period, small domestic households and kitchen gardens that are part of them are no longer adjacent to one another, they are like islands in the kolkhoz-space. Thus there is an anonymous zone between places designated with names. Moving around the village, we no longer cross borders as we used to, but rather move in the “common space” of the collective farm. The names of the village inhabitants now only identify buildings and kitchen gardens. Thus the village is now more weakly structured. Or rather, to put it more precisely, it is more strongly structured for those who remember the farmstead-era arrangements and the place names that carried them, and much more loosely arranged for those who do not remember this.

### **Anonymisation of village space**

Indeed, we could argue that over time, the village has become increasingly anonymous. By today, two new houses have been built in the village and three have been abandoned and become deteriorated. However, inhabitants have changed in most of the houses, in some of them several times. With the privatisation campaign after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the lands have usually been returned to the descendants of the former owners, only very few of whom have any connections with

their former homesteads, and who may not even know each other (during the restitution of property, part of the lands were returned to distant relatives of former owners, who lacked any connection with the village whatsoever). Almost none of them are engaged in cultivating the lands on their own. A large part of former fields are rented out to companies whose owners are not connected to the village and that own lands in various different locations. Property lines are known in the village, but this is insufficient for providing the fields with permanent names. And the names of the landholders are used to name the crops growing on the fields (Ants' barley, Aru Group's cole). Only very few village inhabitants can name both the landowner of the field and the person or group who cultivates it. The social make-up of the village is varied and the level of connectedness to the place is varies widely among the inhabitants; for many, it is just a place to live, be it permanently or temporarily. There is only one farmstead whose inhabitants are descendants of former owners and who are engaged in cultivating the land. Another family exists that settled down in the village somewhat later and is still engaged in farm work.

The connection of the rest with the village and with the land is diverse: there are landowners who live in the village either permanently or seasonally (the family lives elsewhere) and have rented their land to other landowners or farming unions; a young family working in the nearby town and who thus do not cultivate the land; a family where all the members have found work (and residence) in Tallinn and who only stay in their country home during their free time; people from Tallinn who have bought the farmstead as their summer house; a family on unemployment benefits who acquired a deteriorating house; senior citizens who have sold their city homes and moved permanently to the countryside; farmhands — who moreover come and go frequently — of a farm belonging to owners who themselves live elsewhere.

Thus we see that for many people the village is only a partially *own* place; socially, the village is an amorphous formation, and there is no common ground for communication. This lack of social connections between the village inhabitants is also expressed in name usage, in how

the spatial arrangement of the village landscape is fixed. On the one hand, earlier important mental coordinates that were able to structure the village space have sunk into oblivion, and on the other hand, the contemporary situation mostly fails to generate new ones. The chain of communication required for knowing the names has been severed. It is characteristic that not all of the villagers know other's surnames. As a rule, in order to designate households, given names are used, which, compared to the traditional place names derived from personal names, specify the place somewhat more strongly based on the particular persons themselves (compare name usage: the earlier "I'll go to Kangro's", "I was at Peeter's", "go past Rein's and you'll arrive at Põõsaste", in which case the names refer to farmstead, and the current "I was visiting Mati", "I'm coming from Epp's place", "turn right from Dalja's house", where the names of the present inhabitants function as place names. By selecting the name of the person who communicates the most with other inhabitants of the village, today's place name no longer includes the family as a whole.

Quite remarkable is the pattern that men designate neighbouring farmsteads according to men living there and women according to women living there, younger members of the village know only their contemporaries. The village landscape is mapped according to the people with whom they have a personal relationship. To put it simply, one might say that each dweller has his/ her own personal map of the significant objects and accordingly a name system that only partially overlaps with the other similar ones.

Contemporary names fail to generate a layout of the village that would articulate the village in a novel manner. There is more of the *alien*, of the unknown that detaches people from one another. The isolation is even expressed in the fact that most likely there is no one in the village who has visited all of their neighbours. Communication only takes place in the microworlds that may intersect at some places, or is missing completely in the case of certain people. As most of the dwellers use their cars for getting around in the village, the visual image of the neighbourhood is rather superficial, only a glimpse of an impression from a limited perspective.

A good example of contemporary indefiniteness has to do with roads. By today, only the road that passes through the village and leads up to the highway is still intact, all the farm roads in between have disappeared, ploughed up together with the fields. This solitary road lacks a name and its status as belonging either to the parish or part by part to the villagers is under dispute. In any case, no one feels responsibility for keeping it in proper condition. People only take care of the road near their house, or behind their fences. In between the farmsteads are brushwood areas that actually all belong to someone. During the Soviet times people still took care of the whole roadside area (making hay, herding) and based on a silent agreement people followed the old borders of the farmsteads. Nowadays, when all of the borders have been restored, part of the land is socially undesignedated and remains out of the care of the owners. The same applies to narrow areas of the fields.

Paradoxically, the Soviet understanding of the narrow “personal or own” home territory (within one’s house and garden) concept survives in this attitude, and altering it takes some time. For the time being contemporary village will only have diffused, uncertain boundaries. As stated above, there are no common activities or everyday practices that would recreate the identifying difference, also in the sense of naming and remembering. Current situation could be illustrated with an example from Michel de Certeau’s book *The Practice of Everyday Life* where he cites the words of a citizen of Rouen (Certeau 1988: 106): “no, here ‘there isn’t any place special, except for my own home, that’s all... There isn’t anything’”. Certeau comments: “Nothing ‘special’ — nothing that is marked, opened up by a memory or a story, signed by something or someone else” (*ibid.*).

## In conclusion

It may be argued that the arrangement derived from the era of farmsteads was still viable during the Soviet era, and was capable of restraining the processes of anonymisation of the village landscape.

The old personal names that are used as place names formed metonymically an interwoven network of names (the name of a farmstead gave in its turn its name to the lands, forests and roads that were part of it) This synchronic system was enriched by the historical layers of naming that survived owing to the general social organisation of the village where several generations of the same family lived in the same place. Owing to this, the semiotic potential (the ways of identification or transferring the name; developments on the reference-symbol scale) was extremely rich.

Today, where there are very few people left in the village that still have these memories (my own generation is the last one that still remembers what they, in their turn, had heard from their parents), and where people are no longer connected by a similar way of life, the deepening anonymity of the village landscape is inevitable. A substantial change in the semiotic behaviour has accompanied recent social changes, something that the examination of naming practices can reveal extremely well. Thus the personal names that are used as place names today maintain the reference to one singular person and their capacity to structure space is limited to the person's house and its surrounding garden. Shared network of names has given way to sets of idiosyncratically used names that only partially coincide with other people. This spatial fragmentation and the vagueness of the borders correspond to the loss of communally shared life rhythm that was previously shaped by farming activities. This tendency in its turn is related to the fact that the only domestic animals in the village now are modern pets that are being kept and called according to common urban patterns; traditional village dog names disappear with the appearance of breed dogs. In conclusion, we can say that instead of shared village space and shared way of life, today's naming practices delineate individual autonomous social units on one hand, and anonymous impersonal village space on the other. The names' capacity for social organisation is weakened: increasing dependence on the situation of naming and the relativity of the general background lend importance to the demonstrative aspect of names, or alternatively create a need for demonstrative

indications. Accordingly, the capacity of names to function as symbols in the broader social context is curbed. The transitions from the act of signification and the act of naming are more loosely regulated.<sup>4</sup>

## References

- Arutyunova, Nina 1999 = Арутюнова, Нина. *Язык и мир человека*. Москва: Языки русской культуры.
- Austin, John 1999 = Остин, Джон. Значение слова. In: Остин, Джон. *Избранное*. Москва: Идея-Пресс. Дом Интеллектуальной книги, 308–326.
- Cassirer, Ernst 2010. *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil. Die Sprache; Zweiter Teil. Das mytische Denken*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Certeau, Michel de 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohen, Gillian; Faulkner, Dorothy 1986. Memory for proper names: Age differences in retrieval. *British Journal of Psychology* 4(2): 187–197.
- CP = Peirce, Charles S. 1931–1958.
- Hansack, Ernst 1990. *Bedeutung, Begriff, Name*. Regensburg: Roderer.
- Hollis, Jarrod; Valentine, Tim 2001. Proper-name processing: Are proper names pure referencing expressions? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 27(1): 99–116.
- Husserl, Edmund 1998. *Analyse der Fahrnehmung. Phenomenologie der Lebenswelt: Ausgewählte Texte II*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun.
- Kripke, Saul A. 1980. *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Langendonck, Willy Van 2007. *Theory and Typology of Proper Names*. (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and monographs 168.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1996. *The Savage Mind*. Oxford: University Press.
- Lotman, Juri 2000 = Лотман, Юрий. Культура и взрыв. *Семносфера*. Санкт-Петербург: Искусство-СПБ, 12–148.
- Lycan, William G. 2000. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Mill, John Stuart 1973. *A System of Logic*. London: Longmans.
- Must, Aadu 2000. *Eestlaste perekonnaloos allikad*. Tartu: Klio.
- Nikolayeva, Tatjana (ed.) 2007 = Николаева, Т. М. (ред.), *Имя. Семантическая аура*. Москва: Языки славянских культур.

---

<sup>4</sup> This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and FLFI grant 7988, “The Power of the Nomination in the Society and in the Culture”.

- Peirce, Charles S. 1931–1958. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [Hartshorne, Charles; Weiss, Paul (eds.), 1931–1935; vols. 7–8. Burks, A. W. (ed.) 1958; In-text references are to CP, followed by volume and paragraph numbers]
- Pietarinen, Ahti-Veikko 2010. Peirce's pragmatic theory of proper names. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 46(3): 341–363.
- Pärli, Ülle; Rudakovskaja, Eleonora 2002. Juri Lotman on proper name. *Sign Systems Studies* 30(2): 577–591.
- Russell, Bertrand 1940. *An Inquiry Into Meaning And Truth*. London: Georg Allen and UNWN.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 2006. *Writings in General Linguistics*. Oxford: University Press.
- Stepanov, Juri 1998 = Степанов, Юрий. *Язык и метод: к современной философии языка*. Москва: Языки русской культуры.
- Searle, John 1958. Proper names. *Mind* 67(26): 166–173.
- 1983. *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge University Press.
- Toporov, Vladimir 1962 = Топоров, Владимир. Из области теоретической топониматики. *Вопросы языкознания* 6: 3–12.
- Valentine, Tim; Brennen, Tim ; Brédart, Serge. 1996. *The Cognitive Psychology of Proper Names*. London: Routledge.
- Voigt, Vilmos 2007. On proper study of proper names. In: Randviir, Anti; Salupere, Silvi (eds.), *Naming in Text, Naming in Culture: Conference Abstracts*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 38–39.
- Weber, Eric Thomas 2008. Proper names and persons: Peirce's semiotic consideration of proper names. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 44(2): 346–362.

### **Имя собственное как объект семиотического исследования**

Настоящая статья посвящена семиотике наименования: вводная теоретическая часть дает краткий обзор основных положений теории имени собственного в лингвистике, философии языка, семиотике. Целью данного обзора является поиск возможностей синтеза разных точек зрения для создания основ системного семиотического описания наименования. При этом автор статьи исходит из понимания имени собственного не столько как элемента языка, индексального знака, сколько языковой функции, которую могут выполнять в зависимости от контекста разные языковые средства. Именно такое понимание

имени собственного создает предпосылки для более широкого осмысления наименования как социокультурной практики.

Исследовательская часть работы иллюстрирует на примере одной конкретной эстонской деревни как наименования структурируют социальное пространство, сохраняют память о прошлом, делают явными изменения в семиотическом поведении жителей.

### **Pärisnimi semiootilise uurimuse objektina**

Käesolev artikkel vaatleb oma sissejuhatavas osas pärisnime käsitlemist keeleteaduses ja filosoofias ning semiootikas. Selle lühikese ülevaate eesmärgiks on sünteesida seisukohti, mis võiksid olla produktiivsed nimetamise praktikate semiootiliseks mõtestamiseks. Autori arvates tulekski pärisnime vaadelda mitte niivõrd keeleelemendi või (indeksiaalse) märgitüübina, kui võrd funktsioonina, mida võivad kanda erinevad keeleühikud. Selline vaatlus võimaldab kujundada transdistsiplinaarsed alused nimetamise kui sotsiokultuurilise praktika laiemale mõtestamisele.

Artikli uurimuslik osa demonstreerib konkreetse Lääne-Virumaa küla näitel, kuidas toponüümid struktureerivad sotsiaalset ruumi, kannavad mälu, kuidas nimetamispraktika teeb nähtavaks need ühiskondlikus elus aset leidvad semiootilise käitumise muutused, mis muidu jääksid ehk varjatuks.