Place Naming Strategies in Lower Tanana

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Results

In this project I analyzed 16 hours of archival recordings and annotated them using ELAN software to indicate relevant geographic information. Based on these annotations, I identify the remaining place naming strategies in Lower Tanana. These include:

- **Descriptive**: describing the geographic features
- **Incidental**: recalling something that happened or was seen at a place
- **Functional**: describing the functionality of a place
- **Metaphorical**: describing what a place resembles.

Over 1000 names have been identified in Lower Tanana. Here I list selected examples of each naming strategy.

**Descriptive**

- *Khwét menh*: the one with the young birch
- *Sonl'ok menh*: clear water lake
- *Ch'ton'sk'w Nh*: brown water creek
- *Ch'unkt'oo menh*: where there is hot water
- *K'y* Ch'edu*: tough willow
- *Nudh'n Nh*: island is there creek
- *Nudh'n menh*: island is there lake

**Incidental**

- *Yu'den Nh*: where a stream extends out (there are white rocks lined up)
- *Se'kat*: the one with the young brown bear knocked someone down
- *Seyatth'ena*: tracks)

**Metaphorical**

- *Ch'ent'n Nh*: place name
- *Nilet*: island
- *Mén*: the one who kills
- *Nilet*: island
- *Mén*: the one who kills

Outstanding Questions

What makes a place name?

Nomemr-stitton (0989a) (6026b, Kari). The speaker stresses that this is a single place containing three lakes. Previous documentation breaks these lakes up into three separate places.

Nilet Yotenma Menh (0989a) is the name for Cranberry Lake. The speaker only uses one term, but the previous documentation breaks it up into two.

There may be some discrepancy between what researchers are counting as place names and what native speakers are.

Apparent for speakers of LT a single place name can include different features in which English could each receive a distinct name. This is further evidenced by the speaker defining Dradlasya Chagot as including hill and all, and does not refer to just the stream mouth. Also, the place Tryh Chwkh Tr refers to the hill in question and all the other little hills in the area.

When is the suffix –denh a part of the place name?

A statement on the use of the suffix –denh also raises a question of what goes into a place name. When verifying Kwethmdenhdh, the speaker explains that it is Kwethmdenhdh, Kwethmdenhdh is correct, but used when you're talking to someone that doesn't know where the place is. (2565a, 2.3-4.251) This suggests that for native speakers –denh may not be a part of the place name, or at least not one-hundred percent of the time. *Tr'entokwhigch'ilDen*: is only pronounced with –denh when introducing the name, but in the five pronunciations that follow, –denh is omitted.

In the case of *Doter*: *Tr'Xwhat'ho*: another instance where the speaker doesn’t include the suffix. He states the place name as *Dotron*: *Tr'Xwhat'ho* (0989b).

References


Karin et al. (2012)

Data

The primary data source for this project is a collection of 20 recordings made between 1979 and 1999 with Lower Tanana speakers Peter John, Matthew Thompson, Robert Charlie, Margaret John, El Charlie, Lizzie Saw, Frank Jacobs, Al John, Solomon Luke, Hector Ivan, Celia Peterson, and Eliza Mahany. These recordings are primarily interviews in which speakers are asked not only to indicate the Native names and locations of Lower Tanana place but also to discuss the significance of those places and the motivations behind the names. The recordings are housed at the Alaska Native Language Archive (www.uafl.edu/anla).

Conclusions

There are multiple strategies for naming places in Lower Tanana. These include the previously documented Generative strategy, as well as a Descriptive, Functional, Incidental, or Metaphorical strategy. In many of these cases, identification of the naming strategy cannot be achieved merely by consulting the gloss of literal meanings in the place names listed. This is especially true in the case of Incidental and Metaphorical names, where it is crucial to consult archival recordings of native speakers.

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