

COMPARING SELF-ATTRIBUTED CARNIVAL PLACE NICKNAMES WITH NICKNAMES ATTRIBUTED BY NEIGHBORING TOWNS: DO THEY REFER TO THE SAME SPATIAL UNIT?

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Comparing self-attributed carnival place nicknames with nicknames attributed by neighboring towns: Do they refer to the same spatial unit?

Abstract: Insulting names for inhabitants of towns, attributed by neighboring settlements, are widespread in the Netherlands. Sometimes, a cluster of two or more towns shares an *inhabitants'* nickname.

In due course, many inhabitant nicknames turned into honorary nicknames which, in their turn, formed the basis for self-attributed *place nicknames*, used during the Dutch carnival season.

Dutch carnival is a typically local feast. Carnival nicknames can thus be supposed to reflect the spatial unit the inhabitants identify themselves with most. On the contrary, insulting inhabitant nicknames seem to reflect the spatial unit perceived by the 'neighbors'.

The paper demonstrates that outsiders often perceive clusters of adjoining towns as two of a kind, whereas the towns themselves see differences. This is probably the result of the out-group homogeneity effect.

Keywords: nicknames, carnival, toponomastics, out-group homogeneity effect, spatial identity.

Introduction¹

Since at least the Middle Ages, nicknames for inhabitants of towns have been (and sometimes still are) a widespread phenomenon in the Netherlands, Germany and many other countries;² they often have an insulting connotation. This paper focuses on the Netherlands. Some nicknames refer to the profession of the majority of the inhabitants, others allude to the food they used to live on, their poverty, their supposed aggressive nature etc. For example, the inhabitants of the village of Berkel (province Noord-Brabant) are (or were³) traditionally called *Keientellers* ('people counting cobble-stones'). In some

¹ Thanks to prof. dr. Jos Swanenberg for his critical comments on an earlier version of this text. The views expressed in the final text remain my responsibility.

² On inhabitants' nicknames in Germany, see Moser (1950).

³ In many cases, the written sources are not unequivocal about the actual use of nicknames. The RND (dialect atlas) data, based on linguistic fieldwork, are reliable on this point; some other sources seem just to copy data from earlier sources without crediting the source. For example, the inhabitants' nickname *Zandknauwers* ('sand eaters') has been documented in Cornelissen (1930

cases the inhabitants of a certain town possess more than one nickname, mostly because several neighboring villages have attributed nicknames to them. The inhabitants of the village of Hooze Zwaluwe, for example, are called *Muggenzifters* ('nit pickers'), *Vliegenvangers* ('flycatchers'), *Berelaaiers* (possibly 'people who make bears do tricks') or *Donkerlanders* (probably referring to the black colored peat bogs nearby).

In the Netherlands, these nicknames have lost their pungency over time. Currently, they are perceived as an amusing relic of a hostile past. During **the 20th century** they frequently developed into honorary nicknames,⁴ which in turn frequently formed the basis for self-selected⁵ place nicknames during the carnival season: in that period (from 11 November until Ash Wednesday), more than 500 cities, towns and villages in the Netherlands bear, alongside their official name, a carnival nickname. Self-mockery had replaced mockery. For example, the village Aarle-Rixtel, whose inhabitants are nicknamed *Ganzemelkers* ('goose herds'), has the carnival place nickname *Ganzegat* ('hamlet of geese'). Self-attributed place nicknames are pre-eminently a Dutch phenomenon,⁶ and, within the Netherlands, almost half of them can be found in the province of Noord-Brabant. Place nicknames have only recently been attested in written sources, the earliest records dating back to the third quarter of the 19th century.

Not all place nicknames originate from inhabitants' nicknames. The city of Eindhoven (former seat of Philips company, manufacturer of light bulbs) is nicknamed *Lampegat* ('bulb hamlet'). Some other place nicknames have been (partly) derived from the official place-name, like *Baviaonenland* ('baboon country') for the village of Bavel and *Leutjesdijk* (dijk = dike, leutjes = people having fun?) for Poeldijk, each of these nicknames sharing a syllable with its official counterpart.

The basic assumption in this paper is that Dutch carnival is a typically local feast: outsiders are, generally speaking, not welcome.⁷ Carnival nicknames for cities, towns and villages can thus be supposed to reflect the spatial unit the inhabitants identify themselves with most. Inhabitant nicknames, however, stemming from an older period of animosity, and attributed by adjacent towns, may be supposed to reflect the spatial unit as the neighboring villages see or saw it.

(III): 147, *Zandknauwers*) and Sinninghe (1934: 102), but is not mentioned in RND 10 (1966: 476). Nevertheless, Van der Heide (1998) mentions this nickname without any reference to earlier sources, suggesting that it is actually being used.

⁴ Wikipedia (Dutch version) s.v. *locofaulisme*. Haverkamp (1948: 50) illustrates this acceptance of inhabitants' nicknames by the following example: the nickname *Stokvissen* ('stock fishes') for Deventer inhabitants has been attributed by people in the city of Zutphen, but has been fully accepted in Deventer. Some Deventer inhabitants who write letters to newspapers sign with the name *Stokvis*.

⁵ As far as I know, carnival place nicknames have always been attributed by the city, town or village itself, especially by carnival clubs (see also Van der Voort 1994: 12). For example, it was the carnival club *Nachtuuln* ('night owls') in Aardenburg which named this town *Uulehat* (gat = hamlet) (e-mail message 11-06-2009, from Mr. Germen Modde, Aardenburg).

⁶ To a lesser degree, carnival nicknames can also be found in Germany. For example, Regensburg (Bavaria) is *Narragonia*, Dülken (Rhineland) *Narrenhofburg*. In 1827, Koblenz (Rhineland-Palatinate) was nicknamed *Jocusstadt* (Fransen 1996: 32).

⁷ Wijers (1996). An exception to the 'outsiders not welcome'-rule is the habitual visits carnival clubs pay to fellow societies, e.g. as part of a twinning.

Formulation of the problem

The paper investigates the relationship between nicknames for inhabitants attributed by outsiders (out-group-attributed nicknames, or shortly out-group names) and carnival place nicknames attributed by sources within the group (in-group-attributed carnival place-names, shortly in-group names). The question is: do the out-group nicknames, attributed by more or less hostile neighbor towns, refer to the same geographical area as the in-group nicknames?

Method

With the aid of Van der Heide (1998), a list of 146 adjoining residential nuclei (towns, cities, hamlets etc.) has been made, which share an out-group nickname. The underlying idea here is, that such “friendly” neighbors will never insult each other by one and the same insulting nickname. “Adjoining” towns are regarded as those settlements that have been rendered as such – i.e. without a bigger settlement being situated between them – in Kuyper (1861–1869). This municipality atlas of the Netherlands dates from the pre-industrial era, and thus reflects roughly the geographical situation in which out-group-attributed nicknames came into being or were used as such, before changing into honorary nicknames. “Shared” nicknames are considered to be those which are either identical, or which are at least similar. Some shared nicknames, for example, are compositions that share the first or second word element. This can be illustrated with the inhabitants’ nickname *Juinen* (‘onions’), referring to the village of Demen, while *Juinpijpen* (‘green onion stems’) refers to inhabitants of the adjoining village of Dieden.⁸ These names share the first word element. The second word element is shared by inhabitants’ nicknames like *Heikneuters* and *Boerenheikneuters* (primarily ‘linnets’, also ‘louts’).⁹ It seems quite legitimate to abstract from such relatively slight differences, considering that this type of variation also occurs very often with regard to one and the same town. For example, the inhabitants of Nuenen are nicknamed *Botteriken* as well as *Botters* (both meaning ‘louts’), and the Onstwedde inhabitants are *Dikkoppen* as well as *Diksteerten* (both referring to a specific breed of sheep).¹⁰

Secondly, a chart of 556 carnival place nicknames (in-group names) and their official counterparts (names of cities, towns, hamlets etc.) has been compiled from Van de Laar (2011), the *Wikipedia* list of carnival names, and a few accidental sources. Based on these sources, the paper compares the geographical areas the out-group names (for inhabitants) refer to, with the geographical areas the in-group names (carnival place nicknames, self-attributed) refer to.

Results

In total, 32 out-group nicknames have been collected (see Table 1, column 1), which refer to inhabitants of two or more adjoining towns, and of which one or more carries a place nickname (see Table 1, column 2); some of the 32 items include slight name

⁸ Van der Heide (1998: 283).

⁹ Adjoining settlements with this type of name variants do not, however, carry carnival place nicknames.

¹⁰ Van der Heide (1998: 280).

variations as demonstrated above. All of these inhabitants' names reflect the perception of the neighboring outsiders, who obviously consider such town clusters as a whole. But the inhabitants themselves often see differences where the outsiders do not. For example, the inhabitants of Monster and Poeldijk, although sharing the out-group-attributed nickname of *Blauwkonten* ('blue asses'), do not share an in-group place-name. In the carnival period, Monster is nicknamed *Munsterdonck* (donk = sandy hill), Poeldijk *Leutjesdijk*.

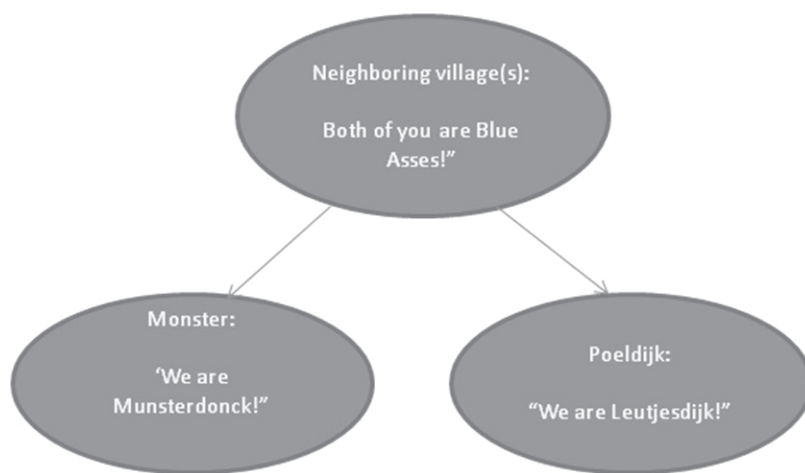


Table 1. Inhabitants' nicknames referring to two or more adjoining towns

Inhabitants' nickname	Adjoining towns	Carnival place nicknames
1) Berelaaiers (possibly 'people who make bears do tricks')	Hooge Zwaluwe Lage Zwaluwe	Berenland ('land of pigs') Biesboschrakkersrijk (empire of Biesbosch rascals'; Biesbosch is a region)
2) Blauwkonten ('blue asses'; the name is supposed to refer to farm laborers dressed in blue working clothes)	Monster Poeldijk	Munsterdonck Leutjesdijk
3) Boenderbinders ('brush binders')	Bergeijk Riethoven	Teutengat ('hamlet of wandering peddlers') Bremspoersengat ('hamlet occupied by lesser whitethroats')
4) Bokken ('male goats'; also 'grumpy people')	Aarle Beek en Donk	Ganzegat (Aarle-Rixtel; 'hamlet of geese') Ganzendonck ('sandy hill populated by geese')
5) Bokken ('male goats', also 'grumpy people'), Snevelbokken ('drunks')	Schijndel (Bokken) Sint-Michielsgestel (Bokken) Sint-Oedenrode (Bokken) Son en Breugel	Schorsbos ('bundle of oak bark') Bokkendonk ('sandy hill populated by grumpy people') Papgat ('porridge hamlet') Krutjesgat ('hamlet populated by people who burn fir-cones to heat their fire in winter time')

	Heeswijk-Dinther (Bokken, Snevelbokken 'grumpy people distilling gin')	Snevelbokkenland ('land of grumpy people distilling gin')
6) Braandstichters ('fire-raisers')	Enschede Losser	Krekkelstad ('city of cracknels') Aöskes dorp (dorp = town; aöskes = ?)
7) Brokken ('louts')	Lith Lithoijen	Veldhazerijk ('empire of hares living in farmland') Verekes en Waterrattenrijk ('empire of pigs and water rats'; this place nickname refers to Lithoijen plus its neighbor Teeffelen)
8) Dringers ('people pushing their way out, i.e., out of the narrow church door')	Alphen Gilze Rijen	Struivenlaand ('land of omelets') Dringersgat ('hamlet of people pushing their way out') Wringersgat (same meaning as <i>Dringersgat</i>)
9) Ganzemelkers ('goose herds')	Aarle-Rixtel Beek en Donk	Ganzegat ('hamlet of geese') Ganzendonck (see above)
10) Geiten ('goats')	Lierop Mierlo	Kaauwvoetenland ('land of cold feet?') Kersepittenrijk ('empire of cherry stones'; the town was well known for a particular cherry variety)
11) Gruppendrieters ('people who relieve themselves in a channel')	Losser Oldenzaal Vasse Harbrinkhoek	Aöskes dorp (dorp = town; aöskes = ?) Boeskoolstad ('city of cabbages') Spekscheetersdoarp ('town inhabited by bacon eaters'; the Vasse people used to slaughter a fat pig every year, just to make it through the winter) Dubbelkiekersdorp ('town of people who see double after having had a drop too much')
12) Hangkonten ('women in thick clothes, with salient bottoms')	Best Oirschot	Klompengat ('hamlet of wooden shoes') Skôn orregat (<i>gat</i> = hamlet; <i>skôn orre</i> = pretty ears; <i>skôn</i> alludes to the first syllable of the official toponym which is pronounced likewise; also, it is a shibboleth; elsewhere, <i>sch</i> is pronounced /sx/)
13) Jeneverneuzen ('red noses, as a result of alcohol consumption')	Rotterdam Schiedam	Dwalmdam (dwalm = fool) Brandersgat ('hamlet of distillers')
14) Juinen ('onions'), Juinpijpen ('green onion stems')	Demen (Juinen)	Schottelzakkenrijk ('empire of dish washers'; possibly an allusion to the inhabitants' supposed habit of licking the dishes)
	Dieden (Juinpijpen)	Schottelzakkenrijk
15) Keieschieters ('people shitting cobble-stones')	Vierlingsbeek Well	Keieschietersriek ('empire of people shitting cobble-stones') Joertseriek (meaning unknown)

16) Klokke-daiven ('bell thieves')	Appingedam Delfzijl	Narrenstad ('city of buffoons') Krabbeziel (krabben = crabs; <i>ziel</i> is dialect for <i>zijl</i> 'sluice')
17) Knollen ('turnips that are cultivated after the grain harvest')	Berghem Heesch	Knollenrijk ('empire of turnips') Krullendonk (donk = sandy hill; krullen = ?)
18) Kruikezeikers ('people who piss into a jar'; the urine was used in the textile industry)	Dongen Oosterhout Tilburg	Peejenrijk ('empire of carrots') Kaaiondonk (donk = sandy hill, kaaïen = cobbles) Kruikenstad ('city of jars')
19) Mèèlbuul'n ('flour sacks')	Melbuul'ndurp (‘village of flour sacks’)	Borne (O)
	Windbuul'ndurp (‘village of wind bags’)	Hengelo (O)
20) Messestekers ('knife fighters'), Messtrekkers (same meaning)	Oud Gastel (Messestekers)	Vasteaovedzottelaand ('land of Shrove Tuesday fools')
	Steenbergen (Messtrekkers)	Strienestad ('city on the Striene river')
21) Moes, Moesboeren, Moeskoppen, Moeskrabbers, Moeskrappers ('people producing vegetables')	Den Dungen	Krabberdonk ('sandy hill inhabited by '(moes)krabbers')
	Berlicum (Moeskoppen)	D'n Birrekoal (birren = pigs (?), kool = cabbage)
22) Moeskoppen, Moesstempels, Moeszakken (see above)	Schaijk (Moeskoppen, Moesstempels, Moeszakken)	Moesland ('land of kale')
	Oss (Moeszakken)	Ossekoppenrijk ('empire of ox heads'; <i>Osse</i> alludes to the first element of the official place-name, that etymologically has nothing to do with oxen)
23) Muggen ('mosquitos')	Haarlem Heemstede	Muggendonk ('sandy hill with mosquitos') Biggenstede ('piglets town')
24) Muggenzifters ('nigglers')	Hooge Zwaluwe Lage Zwaluwe	Berenland ('land of pigs') Biesboschrakkersrijk ('empire of Biesbosch rascals'; Biesbosch is a region)
25) Papvréeters, Papzakken ('porridge gluttons')	Oeffelt (Papvréeters)	Leemkuul ('loam pit')
	Rijkevoort (Papzakken)	Blubberdam ('mud dam')
26) Peelhazen ('hares in the Peel region')	America Horst	Turftreiersriek ('empire of peat stampers') Dreumelsrijk ('empire of snipped-off threads'; an allusion to local weaving mills)

27) Peeltuten ('curlews in the Peel region'; curlew means also 'lout')	Bakel	Pierewaaiersrijk ('revealers' empire'; an allusion to a story which has it that the local soil is so poor that no angleworms can live here; once a worm was found in the sink of the presbytery: the only greasy spot in the whole of Bakel)
	Milheeze	Veenmollenrijk ('mole crickets' empire')
28) Schijters ('people who shit')	Hoogerheide	Wjeeldrecht (< <i>Wjèl</i> , name of a swamp, and <i>drecht</i> , the final syllable of <i>Woensdrecht</i>).
	Woensdrecht	Wjeeldrecht
29) Schotelwassers ('dish washers'; possibly an allusion to a supposed habit of licking the dishes, instead of washing them)	Dennenburg Deursen	Schottelzakkenrijk Schottelzakkenrijk
30) Spekstruifeters, Spekstruiven ('people eating pancake with bacon')	Haaren (Spekstruifeters, Spekstruiven)	Struivendurp ('town of pancakes')
	Udenhout (Spekstruiven)	D'n Haozenpot ('form of a hare')
31) Spreeuwen ('starlings')	Alem Maren	Spreeuwendurp (durp = town) Maren + Kessel are nicknamed <i>Kleidonk</i> (klei = clay, donk = sandy hill)
	Gerwen Stiphout	Narregat ('hamlet of buffoons') Spurriezeiersland ('land of spurrey sowers')

The outside world thus mostly sees larger areas with a shared identity more so than the inhabitants do. But in a few cases, which will be discussed presently, it sees more or less the same areas the inhabitants see. This might indicate that old socio-psychological differences have gradually vanished. Some examples may illustrate this. The towns Gilze and Rijen share an out-group name: *Dringers*. Curiously their respective in-group nicknames are very similar in sound form as well as in meaning: *Dringersgat* and *Wringersgat*, respectively (meaning 'hamlet of people pushing their way out').¹¹ Another example is the settlement couple Aarle and Beek en Donk, of which Aarle shares the out-group-attributed nickname *Bokken* with Beek en Donk¹²; but there is a slight difference in their in-group nicknames:

¹¹ The striking similarity between the two out-group nicknames has even led to some confusion among experts in the carnival field. According to some (Van Miert 1920: 72; Cornelissen 1930: 172; Heerkens 1940: 12; RND 1952: 160), the Gilze people were or are called *Wringers* (or *Vringers*), while others maintain that this nickname belongs to the Rijen neighbors – and, conversely, that the Gilze people are *Dringers* but the Rijen people *Wringers* (Sassen 1884 (M4); Heerkens 1940: 12; Hallema 1946: 71). According to RND (1952: 160), the nickname has been attributed by the Dongen neighbors. The dominating opinion is at present that Gilze people are *Dringers* and the Rijen people *Wringers* (or *Vringers*) (Van Hezewijk and De Vet 2002: 13). Anyway, the confusion is an extra indication that the relationship between the villages concerned was and is uncomplicated.

A similar confusion has happened in the case of Aarle-Rixtel and Beek en Donk. According to Peters (1985: 40), the Aarle-Rixtel inhabitants were erroneously called *Ganzegatters*; in his opinion this nickname referred to the inhabitants of Beek.

¹² Rixtel has no place nickname of its own.

Aarle (together with its twin town Rixtel¹³) is called *Ganzegat* ('hamlet of geese'), whereas Beek en Donk is called *Ganzendonck* ('sandy hill populated by geese').¹⁴

The coincidence is even complete in the case of Woensdrecht and Hoogerheide. These towns share not only an in-group nickname (*Wjeeldrecht*), but also an out-group nickname (*Schijters*).

As mentioned above, some settlements, although having different in-group nicknames, share even more than one out-group nickname. Lage Zwaluwe and Hooge Zwaluwe share two out-group nicknames (*Muggenzifters* and *Vliegenvangers*). This points to a large degree of unanimity on the part of their respective neighbors, which is not equaled, however, by the self-image of the two insulted parties, who chose to have different in-group nicknames: *Berenland* ('land of bears') and *Biesboschrakkersrijk* ('empire of Biesbosch rascals'; Biesbosch is a region). An additional indication that the two settlements do not quite feel a unity is that Hooge Zwaluwe carries an in-group nickname, *Berenland*, which originally, and rather exceptionally, has been attributed by this very neighbor.¹⁵

A few out-group nicknames cover a relatively large area: the nickname *Gruppendrieters* relates to no less than five towns. Three of them bear in-group nicknames (*Vasse*, *Harbrinkhoek* and *Oldenzaal*).

The town couple Maren and Alem share an out-group nickname but have different in-group nicknames; all the same, Maren does share an in-group nickname with Kessel: *Kleidonk* (*klei* = clay, *donk* = sandy hill).

The situation is even more complicated in the case of Losser, which bears two out-group names. This town shares one out-group nickname (*Braandstichters*, 'fire-raisers') with the town of Enschede, and another with the towns of Oldenzaal, Vesse and Harbrinkhoek, but has an in-group nickname of its own: *Aöskes dorp* (*dorp* = town; *aöskes* = ?).

Only one example of a town cluster gives a differing result: the out-group name refers to a smaller area than the in-group name does. The four towns Demen, Dennenburg, Deursen and Dieden, share an in-group-attributed nickname, *Schottelzakkenrijk*, and thus seem to share a feeling of identity, but – surprisingly – the outside world does not quite agree with this. The towns Dieden and Demen share the out-group-attributed name *Juinen* ('onions'), whereas the other two towns share a different nickname: *Schotelwassers* ('dish washers'). Curiously, the self-attributed spatial identity covers a much larger area, here, than the spatial identity as perceived by the neighboring towns.

Conclusion

Out of 146 cases in which two or more towns share one or more out-group nicknames, attributed by neighboring towns, 29 concern two or more towns which during carnival carry a self-attributed in-group place nickname.

¹³ RND 10 (1966: 476).

¹⁴ Although the similar in-group names *Ganzegat* and *Ganzendonck* display a more or less shared identity, there are traces of a more hostile past: according to RND 10 (1966: 476), the inhabitants of Beek carry (or carried) a nickname *Katten* ('angry women'), attributed by their Aarle neighbors.

¹⁵ RND 9 (1952: 104).

The overall picture is that the out-group nicknames refer to a larger geographical area than the in-group place-names.

Looking for an explanation, it could be suggested that this fits into a general psychological pattern. People belonging to a given social, religious, racial etc. group, looking at people from a different group, tend to see less differences between individuals belonging to the other group than they do with regard to their own group: within their own group they have less difficulty in seeing individual differences. In other words, we see the out-group homogeneity effect at work here (Quattrone 1980). People perceive out-group members as more similar to one another than in-group members. "They are alike, we are diverse!"

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