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Young Scholars of Onomastics: Introduction to the volume

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Young Scholars of Onomastics: Introduction to the volume

LASSE HÄMÄLÄINEN

1. ICOS Student Network and Summer School

For a young scientist, one major challenge is to become part of the international scientific community. Creating networks with colleagues in other countries is an important aspect of contemporary academic life, though it might not be easy for inexperienced scholars. Limited knowledge about the academic community and its conventions, combined with a possible lack of language proficiency, might impair a young scholar's self-confidence and therefore prevent him/her from becoming acquainted with experienced and renowned scholars.

Supporting young scholars with their integration into the academic community is important not only for the scholars themselves, but also for the scientific organisations, as new members are constantly needed for such organisations to continue and develop their work. The International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) has recognised this challenge and attempts to help young onomastic scholars by financially supporting students' participation in ICOS congresses and by having included a postgraduate representative position on the ICOS Board of Directors since 2014. The main responsibility of the postgraduate representative is to take care of the ICOS Student Network, a group that seeks to increase and support communications between young onomasticians, especially PhD students. I have held the postgraduate representative position during the term 2017–2020.

One of the main objectives for the term was to organise the ICOS Summer School. The idea was presented at the ICOS General Assembly 2017 in Debrecen, encouraged by the positive experiences of two international onomastic intensive courses arranged in 2014 by the Universities of Copenhagen and Glasgow. The ICOS Board agreed with the idea and decided to financially support arranging it.

The 1st ICOS Summer School was organised on 26–30 August 2019 at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Twenty-one students from 15 different countries participated in the Summer School. Most of them were PhD students, but a few undergraduates and recently graduated PhDs were also involved. The responsible teachers of the course were senior lecturers Paula Sjöblom (University of Turku) and Terhi Ainiala (University of Helsinki).

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PhD Lasse Hämäläinen (University of Helsinki) worked as the course coordinator. In addition to support from the ICOS, the course was financially supported by the University of Helsinki.

The theme of the course was Methods of Onomastics. The aim was to increase students' knowledge and awareness of the research methods they use in their work as well as to introduce them to some other methods they might find useful. This kind of methodological perspective often receives relatively little attention in onomastics, as the branch of science has mostly been divided into subcategories by the types of referents, for instance place names and personal names. Searching for common ground between different name categories from a methodological point of view would be, however, quite useful, and recently there have been attempts to form methodologically focused types of co-operation. For example, the scholars of literary names and socio-onomastics have recently begun co-operating via networks and publications.[1]

The programme for the five-day intensive course consisted mainly of lectures dealing with onomastic methodology from various points of view. The course began with an overview lecture about onomastic methods by Ainiala and Sjöblom, after which several methods were investigated more closely by the visiting teachers. Janne Saarikivi introduced methods of toponomastic fieldwork and contact onomastics. Unni Leino and Jaakko Raunamaa presented ideas on how to conduct computer-assisted toponomastic research. Johanna Virkkula discussed anthroponomastic fieldwork and the related research ethical questions. Ainiala presented the methods of urban toponymy studies and Väinö Syrjälä provided a linguistic landscape studies approach to onomastics. Sjöblom focused on names from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics and Hämäläinen discussed experimental studies that can be used to support the cognitive approach. The course ended with Hämäläinen's considerations about some possible future methods of onomastics, followed by a closing discussion.

Students' role in the course was not only to listen. Already on the first day, each student gave a Three-Minute Thesis presentation. The notion of introducing one's PhD thesis in three minutes has become widely popular among young scholars in various academic disciplines around the world, often via numerous competitions devoted to the concept.[2] No awards were granted in the ICOS Summer School, as the focus was on getting to know the other course participants and their research topics in a concise but informative manner. The third day of the course was devoted to text workshops, where

[1] To mention some examples, see *The Journal of Literary Onomastics* (https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jlo/) and *Onoma* 53 (https://doi.org/10.34158/onoma.53/2018) as well as the research network New Trends in Nordic Socio-Onomastics (www.nordicsocioonomastics.org/).

[2] For examples, search for "Three-minute thesis" or "3MT" on Google or YouTube.

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students' work-in-progress manuscripts were discussed in groups of five or six persons, led by the course teachers (Ainiala, Sjöblom, Virkkula, Hämäläinen). Many of the texts, after being refined based on the comments and peer reviews, can be found in this volume (see the introduction of the articles below).

Recreational activities outside the classrooms also had a significant role in the course. The somewhat tight schedule of the course offered only a limited amount of time for informal discussions and getting to know other students personally. Therefore, voluntary social evenings were arranged in bars and restaurants, or just in parks to enjoy the warm and sunny weather. Students also had opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Institute for the Languages of Finland and the University of Helsinki Almanac Office as well as to explore the historical fortress island of Suomenlinna.

The feedback for the course was predominantly positive. Students expressed a strong desire that another Summer School will be arranged in the near future. As the organiser and ICOS Student Network leader, I definitely agree with this assessment. Spending a whole week together, including outside the classroom, is the most effective and enjoyable way of learning to know more about one's colleagues. I sincerely hope that the Summer School will become a tradition, perhaps arranged every three years like the ICOS congresses. Organising the Summer School might require some financial support from ICOS, but it is a vital investment for the future of the organisation.

2. Articles in this volume

This *Onoma* volume has the theme Young Scholars of Onomastics. The articles in the volume have been authored by early-career researchers, meaning either PhD and master's students or recently graduated PhDs. The volume theme was principally inspired by the ICOS Summer School and its text workshops, where eight of the ten articles were presented in their early forms. It should be mentioned that even though some of the authors might be inexperienced with publishing in international journals, the articles have gone through the normal peer-review process and fulfil the standards of *Onoma* (https://doi.org/10.34158/onoma).

The volume begins with Sara Racca's article about microtoponyms in Marene, northern Italy. The linguistic situation in the research area is characterised by the use of two overlapping language forms: the Piedmontese dialect, mostly used by the elderly, and the standard Italian used by the youth. This often results in using various names for each place as well. Racca seeks a new methodological approach to analyse her diverse corpus of place names, collected through in-depth interviews with local residents. Taking Aldo Prosdocimi's Proper Name Theory as a starting point, she suggests dividing the toponym development

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process into the levels of physical, cultural and linguistic individuation.

Methodological considerations are also present in Soňa Wojnarová's article about the challenges of research when dealing with place names in two languages. Taking examples from her ongoing PhD thesis work about colour terms in Finnish and Czech place names, she discusses some issues related to the different languages, cultures, scientific traditions and even biological and geographical characteristics of the two countries. Despite all these challenges, such a comparative approach is important to better understand the ultimate nature of place names and their relation to human cognition.

The next two articles focus on the connection of place names to local identity. Wen Ge examines the appearance of dialectal features in official address names in Hardanger, western Norway. Norway is often considered "a dialect paradise", as he puts it, accepting the use of different dialects even in public domains. It is therefore perhaps surprising that dialectal features appear quite rarely in address names. Ge provides a few explanations for that, including practical issues at several administrative levels as well as the special role of proper names in the language.

Dorcas Zuvalinyenga and Alan Libert examine how official place names construct local identity in Bindura, Zimbabwe. The article broadens the perspective of critical toponymy and linguistic landscape studies to include the global south. Street names in Bindura are an illustration of local and national history, often commemorating important events and individuals, especially related to the colonial period and the fight for independence. The authors also note the lack of women's names in commemorative names, an issue which has recently been pointed out elsewhere as well.

The two subsequent articles deal with commercial names. Fatemeh Akbari examines the names of restaurants and supermarkets run by Iranian immigrants in Vienna, Austria. Most of the names in her data are in Persian and include references to Persian culture, history or geography, the reason being that the business owners want to emphasise the authenticity of their businesses, and thus, attract customers. Moreover, the name givers most easily avoid unintended meanings and connotations when using their native language.

Oleksandra Kuzmenko discusses names in video games, a cultural arena that has been the subject of very few onomastic studies, even though it increasingly plays a crucial part in contemporary culture and the economy. She argues that the names of virtual products have a major role in constructing the post-apocalyptic world of *Fallout* roleplaying video game series. In this sense, the names used in video games can be seen as somewhat similar to literary names (see *Onoma* 53, https://doi.org/10.34158/onoma.53/2018). They both function as pieces of an immersive, meaningful and enjoyable fictional world, affecting the entire work of art – or product, depending on the point of view – as well as its response and success.

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The remaining four articles in the volume focus on personal names, also serving as a prelude to the upcoming *Onoma* 55 with the theme Personal Names and Cultural Reconstructions. The theme can be interpreted in two ways, from both historical and contemporary points of view: Personal names can be utilised to shed light on past cultures, as they often play a considerable role in historical documents. On the other hand, they can also help reconstruct the cultural background to contemporary society, as they are often linked to the linguistic, ethnic, social or cultural background of their bearers. In this volume, two articles represent each perspective.

Simone Gentile examines personal names in Mitanni, an ancient realm that flourished in the area of contemporary Syria during the 2nd millennium BC. The names found from old documents are among the best information about this culture. They include references not only to valued property, like horses and chariots, but also to important ideologies of the culture, for example hospitality and truthfulness. However, Gentile reminds us that names cannot tell the whole story of the culture, because the preserved names represent only the small minority from the highest social strata.

Elisabetta Rossi investigates the given names of those in the upper social classes in the 16th century in Chieri, northern Italy. Her study shows that the aristocrats were eager to adopt names from classical culture and literature in the spirit of the Renaissance. Meanwhile, the ordinary people still gave their children mostly religious names. Consequently, the name choices emphasised the gulf between the classes.

Anna Elizabete Griķe examines the given names in contemporary Latvia by combining quantitative population data and qualitative remarks from interviews with four new mothers. She discusses the name choices for the infants and the motivations for them, the name-day calendar tradition and geographical and ethnic differences in name choices within the country, concluding that the issues are even more diverse and complicated than is usually perceived.

Finally, Ksenia Eskola and Lasse Hämäläinen analyse the given names of Russian-speaking children born in Finland in the 21st century. Using comprehensive population data, they present a new way of examining the practice of name giving among linguistic minorities, a topic that has been of interest to many onomasticians recently. The study finds that most name givers have retained their Russian background, but many also follow international name trends and some have also adopted traditional Finnish names.

Altogether, the articles in the volume represent a wide range of different types of names, cultural contexts, research questions and research methods. They are strongly based on the tradition of previous onomastic studies, but they also aim to renew and further develop the branch of science.

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3. Final thoughts

The future of ICOS seems promising at the moment. It is important, however, to continuously keep working for the future. Organising the ICOS Summer School is a good way to do that, but as travelling to different countries is not always possible for budgeting, scheduling or other reasons, other kinds of events could also be added to the list of ICOS Student Network activities. Nowadays, connections can easily be established via the multiple services of the Internet. For example, the Student Network's own Facebook group[3] or scholarly social media can be utilised to find other scholars interested in similar onomastic phenomena. Perhaps future Student Network leaders might consider arranging virtual seminars or informal live meetings for the young onomasticians.

The new ICOS Board, including the next postgraduate representative, will be elected by the ICOS General Assembly in August 2021, at the ICOS Congress in Kraków[4]. In handing over the post, I would sincerely like to wish all the best to my successor as well as to the ICOS Student Network as a whole.



Figure 1: Participants in ICOS Summer School. Photo ©: Väinö Syrjälä. For more photos and a blog post on the Summer School, see: https://www.nordicsocioonomastics.org/icos-summer-school-in-helsinki/ (accessed 2020-04-02).

[3] If you are willing to join, please contact the author.

[4] The Kraków congress, originally scheduled for August 2020, has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. See https://icos2020.ijp.pan.pl/archiwa/2011 (Accessed 2020-04-27.)

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