

## *Plenary Session*

### Southern African Onomastic Research

*Adrian Koopman*  
South Africa

#### **Abstract**

This paper looks briefly at the development of onomastic studies in the first three-quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, touching lightly on the work of scholars like Charles Pettman, GS Nienaber (“Oom Gawie”), and Peter E. Raper. The paper then looks at the founding of the Names Society of Southern Africa (NSA) in 1981, and the start of the NSA journal *Nomina Africana* in 1987. Using material from the several NSA conferences held to date, the 21 volumes of *Nomina Africana* so far published, and post-graduate research in onomastics at southern African universities, the paper traces the development of onomastic research in southern Africa over the last thirty years.

Specifically, the paper looks at (1) the distribution of research among the onomastic subcategories anthroponymy, toponymy, literary onomastics, onomastic theory, brand names, and “other names”, (2) the approach of the scholar (‘general descriptive’, focus on phonology, morphological analysis, historical/comparative approach, etymological, and so on), and (3) the source of data used, such as: names in a particular language (“Anthroponyms in Venda”, “Xhosa toponyms”); one single name; names from a particular region, town or village; names from a particular literary source (the Bible, the novels of X).

The paper ends with a review of the sudden and spectacular rise of research into names in African languages in the late 1980s, and a summary of the challenges facing African onomastic research today.

\*\*\*

#### **Thanks**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Sheila Embleton and York University for inviting me to be a keynote speaker at this 23<sup>rd</sup> ICOS Congress and for substantially reducing my costs by subsidizing the conference fee, accommodation and my travel.

#### **Introduction**

Perhaps the earliest record of any onomastic research in South Africa can be seen in the diaries of Robert Jacob Gordon 1743–1795), commander of the Dutch garrison at the Cape. Möller refers to these in her introduction to the Raper Festschrift:<sup>1</sup>

“ ... [Gordon’s diaries] also had the most accurate maps of South Africa drawn in the eighteenth century. Numerous notes on these maps gave place name references and the explanations of their meanings in mainly the indigenous languages such as Khoikhoi. This study provides invaluable insights into the earlier names of places, the naming customs, naming patterns and name allocations done by the autochthonous inhabitants of the country.” [Möller 2001: v]

Now I don’t have the actual date of these diaries, but I will guess they were written in the last ten years of Gordon’s life, say in the 1790s or the last ten years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some two hundred and fifteen years later – to be precise four days ago at 2pm on the afternoon of Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2008, some of you will have had the privilege and the pleasure of listening to my colleague Dr. Peter E. Raper talking on the etymology of a Khoisan tribal name.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the *most* recent example of South African onomastic research, as another South African colleague, Dr. Nobuhle Hlongwa of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, read her paper on the nicknames of South African soccer teams and players on Tuesday this week at 3 pm. And while Peter Raper was talking about Khoisan etymology, Professor Bertie Neethling of the University of the Western Cape was talking in another room about naming, identity and number plates. Still, Dr. Raper's paper can, I think, be taken as at least one example of contemporary research in South African onomastics, and it is interesting to note that what occupied South Africa's first onomastician more than 200 years ago is still occupying South Africa's foremost onomastician today.

Now I don't want to give the impression that onomastic scholars in South Africa have been doing nothing else for the last 215 years but study the etymology of Khoisan toponyms. For a start, for about 136 years after the Gordon diaries they weren't studying anything. And for the last seventy-seven years, scholars of names in South Africa have found much else to interest themselves in despite the continual attraction of the Khoisan heritage in our country's names.

It is the purpose of this paper to have a look at these scholars: who are they, or were they, and what have they been studying? What trends, shifts and developments have taken place in South African onomastics, and where are we now? And then at the end of the paper we can look at the question 'Where are we going?'

### **Onomastic research in South Africa prior to the formation of the Names Society of Southern Africa (NSA)<sup>3</sup>**

Now I am afraid I have not done any in-depth research through the diaries of travelers and explorers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to see who else may have contributed valuable onomastic data, so I am going to have to jump from the Khoisan-based research of Governor Gordon in the 1790s, to 1931, the year which saw the publication of Charles Pettman's *South African Place Names*. This excellent book is very informative about a large number of South African toponyms, including those whose origin can be found in the Khoisan, Bushman, Dutch, English, and various Bantu languages. The book looks at the syntax of place names, at morphology, at semantics, and at various etymologies. Because of popular demand, it was republished in 1985.

Pettman, incidentally, was also a valuable and early contributor to the study of multilingualism and cross-language influences, publishing the book *Africanderisms* in 1913.

1931 was also the year the renowned Afrikaans linguist and onomastician Professor G. S. ("Oom Gawie") Nienaber published his first book, entitled *De Afrikaanse Beweging*, but names scholars would have to wait until 1954 for his first onomastic publication, the book *Afrikaanse Familiename* ('Afrikaans surnames'). Oom Gawie is widely and correctly regarded as the first major onomastic scholar of South Africa, but in fact his major contribution to South African onomastics came towards the end of his career. The three volume series *Toponymica Hottentotica*, with Dr. Peter E. Raper as co-author, came to nearly two thousand pages, and appeared between 1977 and 1980. Oom Gawie's research career, which included over 30 books and over 70 articles, focused mainly on Afrikaans as a language: its historical development, its literature, its leading authors and scholars.

1965 saw the arrival of Peter Edmund Raper on the South African onomastic scene, with the appearance of his Honours research on place names in the Orange Free State. In fact the years 1965 to 1968 were important years for South African onomastics. Besides Raper's work on Free State toponymy, Nienaber was producing articles on Afrikaans etymology, and in Natal during 1968 T.J.R. Botha was doing research on Zulu hydronyms for his doctoral thesis, which would appear in 1970 as *Watername in Natal*. Also in 1968, a young boy accompanying his parents on a holiday in the south of England was doing research into the names of English pubs.

I still have that research!

And you might like to know that if you drive from Kent to Cornwall in southern Britain, you will find that the most popular name for a pub is “The King’s Head”.

In 1970 Peter Raper began his 23 year career in the Onomastic Research Unit of the Human Sciences Research Council, and, appropriately enough, the same year he published an article in the international journal *ONOMA* entitled “The South African Centre of Onomastic Sciences”. In 1971 he produced his doctoral thesis on the names of regions in South Africa and South West Africa, beginning a career which would easily match that of Oom Gawie in research output, with the difference that *all* of Raper’s publications were to be on onomastics.

By the end of 1976, Raper had published *thirty-three* articles on onomastic topics – thirty-three in a mere six years. 1976 also marked the appearance of Adrian Koopman’s Honours research *A Study of Zulu Names, with Special Reference to the Structural Aspect*, the first work on the anthroponymy of the Zulu people. This was later published in 1979 as the two articles “Nouns and Names in Zulu” and “Male and Female Names in Zulu”, and another onomastic career was launched.

And this takes us pretty much up to the early 1980’s, and we can now look at the birth of the Names Society of Southern Africa.

### **The Names Society of Southern Africa**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1981, a group of 20 academics met in Pretoria to found the Names Society of Southern Africa. In her introduction to the Raper festschrift, Lucie Möller makes him directly responsible for this:

“In 1981 [Peter Raper] visited the USA and made contact with [a number of] names scholars ... On his return he founded the Names Society of Southern Africa (NSA) and was elected its Vice-Chairman.”  
[Möller 2001: iv]

Raper and Möller were both at that meeting, and the “Presensielys van die Stigtingsvergadering van die Onomastiese Vereniging” (‘list of those present at the founding meeting of the Onomastic Society’) records the names of 18 more academics interested in names and naming. “Oom Gawie” was of course there, as well as his brother P. J. Nienaber (“Oom Petrus”),<sup>4</sup> and various professors of linguistics, of Afrikaans, and English. T. J. R. Botha (“Oom Theuns”) from Durban, who wrote the work on Zulu hydronyms, was elected the first President (or Chairman as he was at the time) of the NSA.

Most of those academics are no longer with us, having passed away, or simply retired from active research. But two of those founding members are still with the NSA, and have kept attending congresses of the society up until the most recent in 2006 – Dr. Peter E. Raper and Dr. Lucie Möller.

Professor Botha returned to the University of Natal after the founding meeting in Pretoria, and some weeks later started the Durban branch of the NSA. I do not have the “presensielys” of that founding meeting in Durban, but I do know that my name is on it. So even if I was not at that founding meeting in Pretoria, I have at least been a member of the NSA for the twenty seven years this onomastic society has been alive.

Much of the second half of this paper will analyse research patterns found in the papers presented in NSA congresses. But we will also look at other onomastic activities, such as for example the role played by NSA members in such organizations and activities as the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), United Nations Toponymical Training courses, the South African National Place Names Committee (NPNC) and its successor the South African National Geographical Names Council (SAGNC), and the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS). We will also take a brief glance at onomastic research which has been done at southern African universities in the way of onomastic modules, and post-graduate research.

### NSA Conferences

The first congress was held some seven months later, in April 1982, at the University of Natal in Durban. It was a two-day congress with 21 speakers, and those 21 speakers included Dr. Peter E. Raper, Mrs. Lucie Möller, and Mr. Adrian Koopman, who was reading his maiden paper. And, yes, it was about Zulu names. None of the other speakers at that first congress are active in onomastic research today.

That was the first congress. The following list shows these subsequent congresses, with the locations, dates, and numbers of papers presented:

2<sup>nd</sup> Congress: Pretoria in 1983: 24 papers

3<sup>rd</sup> Congress: Windhoek in 1985: 26

4<sup>th</sup> Congress: Stellenbosch in 1987: 26

5<sup>th</sup> Congress: Mmabatho, Bophuthatswana, in 1989: 22

6<sup>th</sup> Congress: Berg-en-Dal camp, Kruger National Park, in 1991: 33

7<sup>th</sup> Congress: San Lameer Holiday Resort, Natal South Coast, in 1993: 33

8<sup>th</sup> Congress: Pretoria, in 1995: 14

9<sup>th</sup> Congress: University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg in 1996: 41

10<sup>th</sup> Congress: Hermanus, Western Cape, in 1998: 28

11<sup>th</sup> Congress: at the University of Port Elizabeth, in 2000: 17

12<sup>th</sup> Congress: at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, 2002: 22

13<sup>th</sup> Congress: in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2004: 19

14<sup>th</sup>, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Congress, at Ntshondwe Camp in the Ithala Game Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal in 2006: 27

The 15<sup>th</sup> Congress will be held from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2009 at the University Conference Centre in Durban.

Up until the middle-nineties, onomastics was an “unknown” discipline restricted to the activities of the NSA. But in 1994, the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress on African Linguistics (WOCAL), which was held in Swaziland, had a session devoted to onomastics, and soon after that an onomastic session or sessions could be found in the programme of all conferences of the African Languages Association of Southern Africa (ALASA).

### Nomina Africana

*Nomina Africana*, the journal of the NSA, appeared comparatively late, in 1987. Volume 1, number 1 and 2, contained papers read at the first congress in 1982, five years previously. Curiously enough, the papers presented in 1983 appeared in print much sooner, in a separate publication entitled simply *Names 1983*.

1983 also saw the publication of *GS Nienaber: 'n Huldeblyk*, a festschrift for Oom Gawie Nienaber in his eightieth year. This fat volume, which contains no less than 83 articles from contributors, was published by the University of the Western Cape, and was not linked to the NSA.

*Nomina Africana* has appeared every year since publication began, usually each volume comprising two numbers published separately, but occasionally when material is a little thin, a volume has come out with both numbers constituting a single issue. *Nomina* Vol 1 was edited by Professor T. J. R. Botha, and Drs. Raper and Möller, and was printed by the Multicopy Centre of what was then the University of Natal. The journal has remained based at the University of Natal, with subsequent editors from the same University, although in 2003 the University of Natal merged with the University of Durban-Westville to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Fairly soon after its first appearance, *Nomina* became a Government-recognised journal, commonly known as a “SAPSE-journal”, an important status, as research-based organizations usually reward staff financially for publishing in such a journal. *Nomina* has remained a SAPSE journal, although in 2004 Government “re-arranged” all its journal categories, and *Nomina* ‘fell off the shelf’, so to speak. However, a hasty application for re-instatement to status was successful, and *Nomina* is back on track.

By the time volume 3(1) appeared, in 1989, Professor of English Johan Jacobs had taken over the editorship, and this prolific and leading South African scholar of literary onomastics stayed as editor until the end of 2002, when I took over.

Volumes 15 (1&2) and 16 (1&2) were published as special issues of *Nomina Africana*, under the titles *A World of Names 1* and *A World of Names 2*, these two together constituting a festschrift for Dr. Peter E Raper on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

Editorial policy at the beginning allowed for articles to be published in either of the two official languages of the time: English and Afrikaans. As late as 2003, NSA members started to point out that South Africa had had 11 official languages since 1994, and that the two-languages policy was discriminatory towards the official ‘indigenous’ languages of South Africa. This issue was debated at length at the Biennial Board Meeting at the 13<sup>th</sup> NSA Congress in Maputo in 2004, with two major possibilities being discussed, one that *Nomina* should become a monolingual English journal; the other that it should accept and publish articles in all the official languages of Southern Africa – not just the 11 official languages of South Africa, but the official languages of Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola, Swaziland and Mozambique.

No conclusions were reached at this meeting and I was asked to conduct an enquiry among all members of the NSA and did so by sending out a letter outlining the language issues when posting out *Nomina* 17(2). Only seven responses were received from NSA members, 2 in favour of retaining Afrikaans together with English, and five in favour of an English-only journal. The Biennial General Meeting of the NSA at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2006 confirmed that *Nomina Africana* would become a mono-lingual English journal, with authors permitted to attach an abstract in a language of their choice. A proposal was also accepted, that certain issues, given the availability of a suitable editor, could be published entirely in Afrikaans, or one of the Nguni languages, or one of the Sotho-cluster.

NSA members do not, of course, restrict themselves to publishing onomastic articles in *Nomina Africana*, and I am aware of onomastic colleagues who have published in journals like the *South African Journal of African Languages*, the *South African Journal of Linguistics*, the journal of the South African Folklore Society, *Natalia* (the journal of the Natal Society), as well as international journals like *ONOMA*, *Names* (the journal of the American Name Society), and *Naamkunde*, the journal of the Netherlands Names Society.

Members of the NSA have of course also published books on onomastics, either as sole authors, or jointly. If I mention any here, I will have to mention all, and there is no time for that.

### **Other Areas of Contribution**

Now let us take a brief look at other areas where NSA members have contributed to onomastic development in SA:

Here we need to touch on UNGEGN, UN Toponymical training courses; the NPNC and the SANGNC, ICOS, and teaching and research at University level.

### **UNGEGN: the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

The story of the NSA and UNGEGN is very much the story of Dr. Peter Raper, and the detail in this section is taken from Möller’s Introduction to the Raper festschrift.

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names is one of the standing committees of the United Nations. Dr. Peter Raper became the first representative of South Africa to this group in 1984 when sanctions against South Africa were very much in force. He was elected chairman of UNGEGN in 1991, and re-elected twice more, serving until 2002.

To give details of the work Peter Raper put into UNGEGN during his time as a member would take several pages. But perhaps to summarize as much as possible:

He has been a member of a number of working groups on various aspects of toponymy, particularly the area of Standardization of geographical names, one of the major aims of the UNGEGN. He has represented South Africa at at least three international conferences on standardization procedures, has published widely in this area, and has been the invited guest of a number of governments worldwide to discuss issues of geographical names and their standardization.

He was instrumental in establishing the Africa South Division of UNGEGN, which comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. And with the help of international experts as well as local experts, he introduced United Nations Toponymical Training Courses.

### **UN Toponymical Training Courses**

These training courses were designed to teach interested parties (onomasticians, surveyors, cartographers, librarians, etc.) such things as

“the nature and treatment of geographical names, the establishment and management of names authorities, the cartographic, cultural, political and linguistical aspects of names, digital place names data bases, and geographical information systems (GIS).” (Möller, 2001: vii)

I was on the second of these training courses, held in Pretoria over a period of two weeks, with a practical cartographic exercise in Lesotho held over the weekend in the middle of the two weeks. Drs. Raper and Möller, with experts from the University of Pretoria, and Professor Ferjan Ormeling of Holland, Professor Naftali Kadmon of Israel, and Ms. Helen Kerfoot of Canada, presented a full and fascinating course.

One of my favourite anecdotes comes from this training course: Professor Naftali Kadmon and his ‘instant’ grasp of seSotho. Naftali Kadmon was at the time (and may still be) a historical geographer (or a geographical historian – I am never quite sure) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I understand that he speaks at least ten languages: Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, German, French, Latin, English and Japanese. But at the time of this training course, his knowledge of seSotho was nil, and that was the sole language of the inhabitants of the area where the course participants were to do field research. Their task was to take a 1:50 000 topographical map of the area, from which all names had been erased, and with the help of interpreters, interview the local seSotho-speaking inhabitants and try and determine the name of each hill, mountain, field, river, ravine, waterfall, orchard, and village.

The bustrip from Pretoria to the little Free State town of Fouriesburg, on the border of Lesotho, took 4 hours. During this time, Professor Kadmon elicited the help of myself and a seSotho-speaking course participant to give him a list of seSotho terms, to cover for instance the seSotho equivalents of hill, mountain, field, river, ravine, waterfall, orchard, and village. He also wanted to know the seSotho for Hello, Goodbye, Please, Thank you, How are you? Grandfather, Grandmother, Sir, Madam, girl, boy, and the key sentences

“Can you please help me? I do not speak seSotho. Please answer slowly. Please can you tell me the name of that (space to insert hill, stream, windmill, field, etc.) over there” [pointing his finger].

Naftali spent the evening going over this list, with a seSotho speaker helping him with his pronunciation. The next morning, when maps were handed out, and interpreters assigned to each

participant, Naftali declined the use of an interpreter, and strode off with his long stork-like strides towards the nearest village. I followed behind at a discreet distance, and was just close enough to hear him address the village greybeard as follows:

“Dumela, ntate! Ojoang? Keaphela. Hakesetsebi seSotho. Bua hantle. Le bitso ya thaba leya kemang? Ke mang? Lebitso ya noka leya kemang? Le bitso ya tsimo leya kemang? Kealeboha (thank you).”

I didn't wait to hear any more. Clearly Professor Naftali Kadmon was doing fine by himself.

He was the first of the course participants to return to our guest house. He had a beam from ear to ear. He had recorded, accurately, every possible minor toponym in the local area. And he had done it using entirely a language which twenty four hours previously he had never heard of.

These toponymical training courses have, with good reason, become very popular among governments of the member countries of the Africa South Division, and many are the official government representatives who have benefited from them. Möller lists seven of these courses in her Introduction; I know of at least one more held in Mozambique immediately prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress in September 2004, and the late Mr. Luis Abrahamo of Mozambique, in 2006 the chairman of the Africa South Division, held another, also in Mozambique, in September of that year.

### **The National Place Names Committee and the South African National Geographic Names Council.**

Dr. Möller tells us (2001: iv) that Dr. Peter Raper was a member of the National Place Names Committee (NPNC) from October 1972, and chairman in 1996, when he assisted in reconstituting this committee as the South African National Geographical Names Council.

Dr. Raper is of course not the only member of the Names Society to serve on the National Place Names Committee, or on its successor, the Geographical Names Council, and Government-established councils and committees dealing with names and naming that realize the importance of keeping close links with the country's only professional Names Society.

### **ICOS**

A small group of NSA members have been carrying the South African flag to ICOS since at least 1972. Möller (2001: v) mentions Raper's presence at Sofia, Bulgaria in 1972, in Berne, Switzerland in 1975, in Cracow, Poland in 1978, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1981, in Leipzig, East Germany in 1984, in Quebec, Canada in 1987, in Helsinki, Finland in 1990, in Trier, Germany in 1993, in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1996, and in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 1999. Möller does not mention her own presence, but I am sure she has attended a number of ICOS conferences, just as she has attended many of the conferences and working meetings of UNGEGN. I am aware of attendance at ICOS conferences of NSA members Babs Meiring, Bertie Neethling, Viv de Klerk, and Cyril Hromnik at least, and when I attended my own first ICOS in Santiago de Compostela in 1999, it was in the good company of Peter Raper, Babs Meiring, Bertie Neethling and Cyril Hromnik. If I recall correctly, though, only Bertie and I were at Uppsala in Sweden in 2002, and certainly it was only the two of us from South Africa at Pisa in Italy in 2005. I have myself since presented papers at various international onomastic conferences: in Croatia in 2004, in Karasjohka, northern Norway in 2006, in Norway again in 2007 and in Ballarat, Australia also in 2007. It is sad to relate that in each of these conferences I was the sole South African. In fact, I may have been the only representative from the whole of Africa.

### **Onomastic teaching and research at Universities in South Africa**

Post graduate theses in onomastic topics at Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels have been going on in South Africa for at least the last 40 years. We heard earlier about Raper's 1965 work on Free State toponyms. Research on Zulu anthroponyms goes back to at least 1975.

But to the best of my knowledge, the first university undergraduate course work on onomastics was that offered at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg in 1991, when an Honours module in Zulu Onomastics was started. The course has been running ever since. It was swiftly followed by a similar course in Xhosa onomastics at the University of the Western Cape, and in the mid-90s Natal introduced an undergraduate course in onomastics. To the best of my knowledge onomastics is now taught at a number of universities besides the Universities of KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape. I know at least of UNISA, University of the North and the University of Zululand. Probably there are more. I have yet to hear, though, of a Department of Onomastics or a School of Onomastics, or even of a Chair in Onomastics. Europe is more than a hundred years ahead of southern Africa here.

The effect of the introduction of onomastic teaching in departments of African language before the introduction of general courses in onomastics can clearly be seen in the graph labeled comparative research outputs, based on papers presented at NSA congresses [Information given later in this paper; during the presentation, handout figure 2]. The solid line represents papers on Afrikaans and English topics; the bold dotted line papers on topics in South Africa's nine Bantu languages, and the lighter dashed line papers in other languages, or where the language was indeterminable or irrelevant. At the first NSA congress in 1981, papers on English and Afrikaans constituted 67% of the whole, while those on African languages were 29%. At the most recent congress, in 2008, African language topics accounted for 72% of the papers read, while papers on English and Afrikaans had dwindled to 11%. The number of papers on other languages and non-language-specific topics has always remained relatively low. Now the interesting point is that 1991 and 1992 were the years in which Bertie Neethling and I introduced our postgraduate courses in Xhosa and Zulu onomastics, and it was at the very next conference, in 1993, when papers on African languages overtook the ones on English and Afrikaans for the first time. As other universities in southern Africa followed suit, the percentage of papers on African language topics continued to grow. I enclose with this handout, purely for your interest, a list of papers presented at the last NSA congress so you can see the wide range of papers presented, as well as the dominance of the papers on African languages.

Post-graduate research in onomastics continues to be strong, and there can be no doubt that this has become very much of a growth discipline at universities in southern Africa in the last twenty-five years.

A problem is the writing of post-graduate research projects in the vernacular.

The South African constitution recognizes eleven languages as official languages, and of these, nine are local Bantu languages. A scholar like Nobuhle Hlongwa – a mother tongue Zulu-speaker, in a School of Zulu Studies, writing a doctoral thesis on African surnames, has every right to present her research in the Zulu language, and in 2001 did so. The title of her groundbreaking thesis is “Ukuqhathaniswa kwezibongo zabantu baseNtshonalanga-Afrika, eMpumalanga-Afrika nezaseMzansi-Afrika njengenkomba yesiko lobuzwe base-Afrika” (Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Durban-Westville, Durban).

This question of writing in one's own African languages presents a real dilemma to South African scholars. There is no doubt at all that African languages will not advance academically if senior academics refuse to write and publish in these languages. There is no doubt that when Dr. Hlongwa chooses to write her doctoral thesis in Zulu she is playing a major leadership role and becomes a role model to thousands of aspiring young Zulu-speaking academics who share with her a pride in their own language. But against this she must balance the undisputed fact that a vast



majority of academics in the world simply cannot access her research unless she undertakes to republish in part or in whole in a language like English. I doubt if more than three people in this audience, and this includes myself and the author, understood the thesis title I just mentioned. And I am equally sure that if it had appeared as “A Comparison of Surnames from West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa, as an Indication of African National Identities”, that a great number of people here present today would have liked to have read this thesis.

### **The Onomastic Studies Unit**

In the late 1990s Dr. Raper was notified that the Names Research Centre of the Human Sciences Research Council, where he and Dr. Lucie Moller had worked for several years, was to close down for lack of funding. They had to decide what to do with the accumulation of years of archival material relating to names research in southern Africa. Initially, in desperation, Dr. Raper tried storing this substantial archive in his private home, where it filled the garage and overflowed into the corridors of the house. In 1999, though, he approached the then University of Natal, and through negotiations with Professor Koopman, an arrangement was made to house the documents in a room in the Old Main Building of the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the university. This archival material became the core of the Onomastics Studies Unit, founded in the year 2000. This unfunded, semi-staffed, unit has become the effective home of the NSA, and its website, although often rather out of date, has become a focal point for onomastic queries in southern Africa.

### **Let us now move on to the last part of this paper: an analysis of onomastic research in southern Africa over the last twenty or so years.**

Here I would like to look briefly at three aspects of research:

Firstly, the *General field of onomastics covered*: toponyms, anthroponyms, literary onomastics, onomastic theory, and brand names/marques.

Secondly: *The source of the data or material discussed*: for example a particular language (English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Tswana, etc.) or a specific region: Free State, South Africa, Durban, Zululand, or some other source; and then

Thirdly: *The methodological approach to the research and the presentation*: which includes the “general descriptive” approach as well as approaches such as the aetiological, etymological, morphological, orthographic, and so on.

The analyses which follow are based again entirely on papers presented at onomastic congresses in southern Africa. These totaled 360 over 14 congresses. I could have added to this publication in *Nomina Africana*, but as over 70% of these are based on a recent conference paper, there seemed little point in this.

Let us take each of the three aspects mentioned above in turn.

### **General area of onomastic study**

The most popular onomastic category for research over the past twenty-five years has been **toponymy**, with 99 papers (27.5% of total papers) dealing with place names or geographical names (call them what you will). Of these 99, 7 dealt with odonymy (street names), but I have not looked into any further sub-divisions. So I cannot tell you here which sub-categories of toponymy were more popular: oronymy, hydronymy, names of regions, or whatever.

The next most popular category was **anthroponymy**, with a total of 90 papers, or 25% of the total. Of these 90 papers, nicknames accounted for 10, but I have no other breakdowns, so cannot tell you what the relationship was between papers on first names and papers on family names. **Literary onomastics** scored third, with 54 papers, or 15% of the total, and fourth place went to **proper names generally**, with 44 papers (12%).

Next in line was **other names**, totaling 36 papers (10%). These included the names of :birds (2), plants (6), buses (2), businesses (4), local authorities (2), schools (2), scientific nomenclature (2), number plates (2), and all sorts of odds and ends like the names of churches, moons, unit trusts, dogs and oxen, sports teams, wars, and the names of rock-climbs.

**Onomastic theory** was disappointingly low at only 25 papers – or 6% of the total.

Even more disappointing was the low figure for **brand names** or marques, or names in marketing, with a mere 9 papers over 25 years, which is only 2.5% of the total. This is surprising because since the birth of the “Rainbow Nation”, an African identity has become very important for trade and business, and firms and products alike have recreated their marques and brand names. Neethling has remarked on this in two articles, and referred to the trend, *inter alia*, as the *amabokkebokke* phenomenon. To my mind, the area of brand names is one where creative onomasticians could both contribute to a multilingual and multicultural economy *and* earn an income. Perhaps this is a future challenge for the young and up-coming onomasticians.

My last category, with a total of 4 papers, covered non-onomastic topics, for example dealing with “prison slang” under the heading of onomastics. There will be some purists who will argue that all the papers presented, say, on plant names, were dealing with non-onomastic topics, and others who say scientific nomenclature (“species names”) are not proper names either. But discussing the boundaries between what is a proper name and what is not could occupy a paper on its own – indeed, a conference on its own, as was the case in Zadar, Croatia, in 2004.

### Source of Data

Overwhelmingly, when southern African onomasticians choose a source of data, they choose a language or a cultural or religious entity. 68% percent of the papers presented at NSA Congresses have titles like “Nicknames in isiZulu”, or “Tswana Family Names” or “French farm names in the Cape”. I have subdivided these into South African languages; other African languages; and Other Languages. As might be expected, the majority of papers (83.7%) are South African languages, while ‘other African’ accounts for 8.9% and ‘other languages’ for 7.2%.

Let us look at the South African languages first, in order of number of papers:

isiZulu	46 papers
English	36
“South African” <sup>5</sup>	35
Afrikaans	30
isiXhosa	17
seSotho	13
seTswana	10
xiTsonga	7
sePedi	3
“isiNguni”	3
Khoisan	3
isiNdebele (SA)	2
tshiVenda	2
siSwati	1
“Zulu-coloured”	1

*Eight languages represent the rest of Africa:*

“African”	9
otjiHerero	2
“Zimbabwean Languages”	2
oshiWambo	1
ciThumbuka	1
ciShona	1
“Hottentot”	1
Gasa	1

*And representing the rest of the world are:*

German	3
“Non-South-African” languages	2
Islam (Arabic names)	2
Indian	
(Hindi, Gujarati, Telegu and others)	2
Latin	2
Japanese	1
Telegu	1
Jewish (Hebrew names)	1
Italian (Opera)	1
French	1
American Indian (Sioux)	1

The next biggest category is the “Unspecified Source” or “General” or “All names”. Here we find papers like “The semantics of proper names”, “Raakpunte tussen streekgeskiedenis en pleknaamstudie” (‘The relationship between regional history and toponymical study’), and “Aspects of onomastic theory”. This accounts for 44 papers, or 12.7% of the total.

Our third category deals with those papers which choose a location, with titles like “Place-names in the Orange Free State”, “Names of businesses in Pretoria”, or “River-names in Northern KwaZulu-Natal”. This is a smaller percentage of the whole, giving only 36 papers out of 344, or 10.4%.

Fourth in terms of numbers is the sub-category “other specified sources”, such as “Names of slaves in the early Cape Settlement”, “The names of moons in the solar system” and “The Names of unit trusts”. 20 congress papers have covered these specific sources, accounting for 5.8% of NSA congress research.

The last category here is “single names”, where researchers have chosen to talk about a single name. The approach here is invariably the etymological-historical approach. 10 papers have adopted this specific focus (2.9%), and some of the names selected are *Valhalla*, *San Lameer*, *Azania* (2 papers), *Tshwane* and *Gatsrand*.

**Methodological approach to the analysis of onomastic data**

Here we look basically at the different ways in which onomastic researchers have tackled their topics over the last twenty-five years.

These are my wider categories of approach:

General Descriptive	88 papers	30.2%
Socio-cultural approach	80	27.5
Linguistic approach	53	18.5
Names in time	43	14.7
Theory, Methodology, Processes	18	6.1
Cognitive	8	2.7

Let us look at each of these in turn:

*General Descriptive: 88 papers*

Under this heading I refer to papers where the author has selected a field of onomastics, and has then tackled it generally. A title like “Zulu nicknames” will generally cover all sorts of aspects: linguistic, social, cultural, and so on. A title like “The street-names of Roodepoort” does not specify whether the author is looking at semantics, history, metaphor, multilingualism, or whatever, so I have labeled it “General Descriptive”.

*Socio-cultural: 80 papers* including papers on

Name-changes	32
Socio-cultural	23
Names and identity	7
Inter-cultural	6
Comparative	3
Aetiological	3
Communicative	2
Name-sharing	1
Multidisciplinary	1
Socio-economic	1
Economics & religion	1

*Linguistic: 54 papers*

Morphological	14
Semantic	13
Orthographic	7
Derivational/	
Category change	5
Translation	3
Syntax	2
Lexicographical	2
Morpho-syntax	1
Dialectal	1
Allonyms	1
Transliteration	1
Vocalization	1
Applied onomastics	1
Socio-linguistic	1

*Names in Time: 43 papers*

Etymological	29
Historical	11
Genealogical	2
Politico-historical	1

*Theory/Methodology/Processes: 18 papers*

Research	5
Standardization	4
Systemics	3
Taxonomy	2
Cartographic	1
Government policies	1
Legal aspects	1
Methodology	1

*Cognitive: 8 papers*

Imagery/metaphor	3
Psychological/ Cognitive processes	2
Semiotic	1
Humour	1
Symbolism	1

And now, allow me to conclude by looking at Challenges for the Future in Southern African Onomastics.

**Challenges for the future**

During this overview, I have already mentioned a few areas where I thought onomastic research should develop. One important area is in the area of brand names, on the interface between onomastics, marketing and economics. Another is in onomastic theory: there is no reason why we cannot develop theoreticians who can hold up their heads with the Willy Van Langendoncks of the onomastic world. But besides the development of these two onomastic study fields, there are three real challenges, as I see it.

The first is that we must reach out. The Names Society of Southern Africa should strive to become, as was suggested at a recent congress of the NSA, a Names Society of Africa. There are onomastic scholars all over Africa. We need to make contact with them, visit them, encourage them to visit us, and encourage mutual research projects. This is one of the major stated aims of the proposed Centre for African Names Research, which I laid before the executive of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in February 2005. I am embarrassed to say that, more than three years later, they are yet to make a real decision on this centre. I have been informed that the Centre may operate as a “Proto Centre”. This means, apparently, that university staff interested in onomastics may produce as much published onomastic research as they can, and can refer to themselves collectively as a “Centre” [or “Proto Centre”], but without any salaried staff, or any operating budget. Clearly, this is less than ideal, and southern African onomasticians are yet to find a permanent and solid academic base.

Our second challenge is that once we have reached out to Africa, we need to reach out to the world. Too few of us are members of ICOS. And too few of us go to the world congresses. At the last two, in 2005 and 2002, southern Africa was represented by just two onomastic scholars. We

need to see more of our onomasticians showing the world that we too have something to say about names. We need our younger scholars going to the world conferences.

A big step forward here is that ONOMA, the journal of ICOS, is devoting Volume 44 for 2010 to the topic of African onomastics. [and you will find a call for papers attached to your handout today.] As the guest editor, I hope I will be deluged with manuscripts.

And so to my final challenge: In South Africa we need to get our universities and other tertiary institutions to recognize onomastics as the academic discipline that it is. Universities in northern Europe have had chairs in onomastics since the late nineteenth century. Why is there no chair in onomastics at a single university in southern Africa? Why is there no department of onomastics? Why must onomastics hide under the Programme for Socio-linguistics? We need to put more pressure on our University administrators and executives. With the help of the international community of onomasticians, I am sure it can be done.

### Notes

1. In 1980, Peter Raper was invited by the Brenthurst Press to translate these diaries from Dutch into English.
2. Dr. Raper was due to speak at the time and date mentioned, but was unable to attend the conference.
3. The acronym NSA, which might be expected to be “NSSA”, stands for *Naamkundevereeniging van Suiderlike Afrika* (‘Name-study-society of Southern Africa’)
4. There were in fact three Nienaber brothers, all professors of Afrikaans and Nederlands. The third brother, “Oom Stoffel”, succeeded Gawie as Professor of Afrikaans and Nederlands at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and was still there when I joined the staff in 1978.
5. It is not always easy to make out from a title like “South African farm names” whether the writer/presenter refers to South Africa as a place, or to the combined languages and cultures of South Africa. I have arbitrarily elected to place such papers under languages/cultures.

### References

- Botha, T. J. R. 1977. *Watername in Natal*. Pretoria: S. A. Naamkundesentrum; Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing.
- Hlongwa, N. P.: see Ndimande, N. P.
- Koopman, Adrian. 1976. *A Study of Zulu Names*. Unpublished Honours dissertation. University of Natal, Durban.
- Koopman, Adrian. 1979a. The Linguistic Difference between Nouns and Names in Zulu. *African Studies* 38(1), 67–80.
- Koopman, Adrian. 1979b. Male and Female Names in Zulu. *African Studies*. 38(2), 153–166.
- Möller, Lucie A. 2001. Peter Raper’s Contribution to the Study of Names. In: Möller, Lucie A and J. U. Jacobs (eds.), *A World of Names 1*, a special issue of *Nomina Africana* 15 (1 and 2), ii–xiii
- Pettman, Charles. 1913. *Africanderisms, a glossary of South African colloquial words and phrases and of place and other names*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Pettman, Charles. 1985. *South African Place Names*. Johannesburg: Lowry Publishers.
- Ndimande, Nobuhle P. 2001. Ukuqhathaniswa kwezibongo zabantu baseNtshonalanga-Afrika, eMumalanga-Afrika nezaseMzansi-Afrika njengenkomba yesiko lobuzwe base-Afrika [A Comparison of Surnames from West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa, as an Indication of African National Identities]. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Durban-Westville, Durban.
- Nienaber, G. S. 1931. *De Afrikaanse Beweging*. Pretoria: JL Van Schaik,
- Nienaber, Gabriel Stefanus. 1954. *Afrikaanse Familiename*. Kaapstad: Balkema.

- Nienaber, G. S., and Peter E. Raper. 1977. *Toponymica Hottentotica* (A-G). Pretoria: S. A. Naamkundesentrum; Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing.
- Nienaber, G. S., and Peter E. Raper. 1977. *Toponymica Hottentotica* (H-Z). Pretoria: S. A. Naamkundesentrum; Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing.
- Nienaber, G. S., and Peter E. Raper. 1980. *Toponymica Hottentotica* (A-Z). Pretoria: S. A. Naamkundesentrum; Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing.
- Raper, Peter E. 1965. Place Names in the Orange Free State. Unpublished Honours Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand.
- Sinclair, A. J. L. (ed.). 1983. *GS Nienaber: 'n Huldeblyk*. [Bellville, South Africa]: Publikasiekomitee, University of the Western Cape.

Adrian Koopman  
School of Languages, Zulu Department  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Private Bag X01  
RAS – 3209 Scottsville, KwaZulu-Natal  
SOUTH AFRICA  
koopman@ukzn.ac.za