

“CONVENTIONAL” AND “NON-CONVENTIONAL” IN MICROTOPONYMY. A CASE STUDY IN CATALONIA (SPAIN)

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Abstract: The “conventional” and the “non-conventional” are, from the point of view of knowledge in general, highly complex categories heavily loaded with ambivalence. This contention, which takes on particular relevance in all questions relating to *language*, is expressly manifest in the field of onomastics. To what extent can a name – a toponym or an anthroponym – be considered a simple convention? There is no straightforward answer to this question if we consider the infinite variability of names – be they place names or names of people – in space, through time and across languages. From the perspective of the philosophy of language, the multiplicity of names is equal to the multiplicity of meanings (that is, the infinite diversity of meanings with which reality presents us). And to reduce this multiplicity to a simple outline, to a list of conventions, is ultimately to reduce the possibilities of language to express the essential diversity of the world through names. In the context described, this paper seeks to explore the extent to which, in toponymy, the theoretical juxtaposition between the “conventional” and the “non-conventional” can be justified in a study conducted at the *micro* scale. That is, when we concentrate on the field of *microtoponymy*; i.e., the quantitatively most significant type of toponyms but, at the same time, the most complex to study because of their intrinsic multiplicity, variability and diversity. The study takes as its point of reference the microtoponymy of a small area of the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula: the *comarca* or district of *el Baix Camp* (in the province of Tarragona, Catalonia), comprising 29 municipalities, with a total area of 695 km² and a population today of nearly 200,000 inhabitants. In this territory a total of 16,500 current place names have been recorded (in the main, *microtoponyms*), which, duly organised and geographically located, form the basis of our analysis. An examination of the results is conducted around three questions of particular significance: a) the idea of a *toponymic system* as a possible means to organise toponyms and to facilitate our understanding of them; b) the interaction of the *physical environment* and the *human environment* as an underlying explanation of toponymic diversity; and c) the dialectal variation of toponyms depending on the variation of the geographical characteristics of the territory. Finally, two important conclusions are drawn: the first, that in microtoponymy, the “conventional” and the “non-conventional”, far from being differentiated, merge and blend together; and the second, that the study of the microtoponymy of any region in the world requires, by way of methodological principle, unifying two perspectives of analysis: the philological and the geographical.

Keywords: microtoponymy, *micro* scale, toponymic system, Catalonia, Baix Camp (*comarca*), geography and onomastics.

Introduction

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¹ The global analysis was undertaken in the author’s doctoral thesis (*Els noms de lloc i el territori. Una interpretació geogràfica de la toponímia del Baix Camp, Tarragona*), which involved, in part, a detailed examination of the microtoponymy of El Baix Camp. This article is based on chapter 5, entitled *L’estudi de la toponímia del Baix Camp. Consideracions metodològiques*, and on chapter 6, entitled *El Baix Camp com a sistema toponímic: estudi dels topònims de la comarca, la seva distribució i la seva significació territorial*. See Tort (2002 and 2014).

On the “conventional” and the “non-conventional” in toponymy (and microtoponymy). A preliminary reflection

It would seem that the problem of the distinction between the “conventional” and the “non-conventional” in toponymy is related to a prior question, namely the complex (and unresolved) definition of the concept of the toponym. On this point, it is interesting to consider the reflection made by Moreu-Rey in one of his theoretical studies of toponyms, in which he seeks to provide a broad characterisation of the notion of place names (where this concept is an essential explanatory tool of the world understood in a global sense):

Place names – or geographical names – in their broadest sense, are understood as all the simple and compound names and expressions that designate inhabited places, both today and in the past (the names of countries, of counties, of all kinds of territory, urban and rural agglomerations – cities, towns, villages and hamlets, as well as subdivisions of these agglomerations – neighbourhoods, suburbs, streets, squares, and isolated buildings of all kinds, etc.); as well as uninhabited places (...); the names of inland and coastal relief features (also known as “oronyms”): of mountains, plains, high plateaus, islands, heads, coves, bays; the place names associated with water (also known as “hydronyms”), be it flowing or still, inland or maritime: seas, lakes, rivers and streams, torrents, springs, ponds, marshes; the names given to lines of communication. And, naturally, not only names that are still in use but also those that have fallen into disuse (Moreu-Rey 1965: 7–8).

To a certain degree, we might conclude that the toponym points out the *universality of meanings* because, in fact, its potential referent is the geographical environment understood in its entirety. From here the problem arises when the scholar decides to shift to a specific level of analysis and he encounters the inescapable need to delimit his field of study. Here I believe it is worth turning once more to Moreu-Rey, who identifies (1982: 13) two main groups among geographical place names: a) Place names whose meaning is clear and readily understood (and which usually comprise the largest group); and b) Place names that are apparently without any meaning, “because they do not correspond to any word or expression of the language spoken in the geographic or linguistic area of study”. Moreu-Rey adds that “these toponyms, in reality, would have had a meaning in languages that have disappeared. They are referred to as ‘fossils’ because they are old common names that have become crystallised or petrified, and some have been preserved for millennia.”

This universality of meanings, mentioned above, together with the diversity of scales at which a toponym can manifest itself, means that in practice toponymy is a highly complex science. Hence, from the perspective afforded by geography and the regional sciences in general, the distinction drawn between *conventional toponyms* and *unconventional toponyms* appears virtually irrelevant. What matters, from the perspective of these sciences, is that the place names provide the broadest and most detailed information possible about the geographical reality. And this information, in fact, is

what microtoponymy can best provide; that is, the place names that enable us to associate “names” with “spatial meanings” with the maximum level of detail. Understood in this way, microtoponymy becomes an important tool of understanding for the geographer (and for the scholar of the territory in general) – a tool that can potentially provide a “global description of the world”.

A case study: the *comarca* or district of Baix Camp (Catalonia, Spain)

Introduction to the territory

El Baix Camp, defined in administrative terms as the *comarca* that has the city of Reus as its capital, is one of the largest and most highly populated of the *comarcas* of southern Catalonia. However, in order to characterise this territory, reference must be made to a broader territorial unit – that of the *Camp de Tarragona*, of which *el Baix Camp* occupies the southwestern section. Strictly speaking, *el Baix Camp* is a geographically mixed *comarca* inasmuch as it includes a mountain sector, a broad plain and a coastal strip of 25 km in length. It comprises a total of twenty-eight municipalities, of which only three have a coastal character. Most of the municipalities are scattered in the interior, while those furthest from the coast occupy the foothills of the pre-coastal mountains and present clearly mountainous characteristics.

According to the data presented in Table 1 (all the tables are placed at the end of article), the *comarca* of *el Baix Camp* with its 28 municipalities occupies a total area of 695.30 km² and has a population in 2014 of 190,249 inhabitants.² These figures represent 44.6% of the area of the *Camp de Tarragona* and around 40% of its population.

The *comarca* borders the *comarcas* of Conca de Barbera to the north, el Alt Camp and el Tarragona to the east, and Priorat, Ribera d'Ebre and el Baix Ebre to the west and south. In the southeast, the *comarca* shares a boundary with the Mediterranean, a coastline that stretches from the beaches of Vilafortuny (in the municipality of Cambrils) to that of Almadrava (in the municipality of Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant).

The municipalities occupy areas that range between 3.55 km² in the case of Maspujols and 101.99 km² in that of Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant, with a mean area of 24.80 km². However, these figures are not particularly expressive of the reality of the municipalities of *el Baix Camp*. Indeed, Table 1 shows that there is, on the one hand, a remarkable number of municipalities – no fewer than 11 – occupying less than 15 km² (a threshold which, in relation to the municipal division of Catalonia, means they can be classified as “small” or “relatively small”). On the other hand, only three municipalities occupy more than 50 km² – and which as such can be classified as “large”: Vandellòs, Mont-roig del Camp and Reus. The remaining fourteen municipalities (i.e., half of the *comarca's* total) are intermediate in size: between 15 and 50 km²,

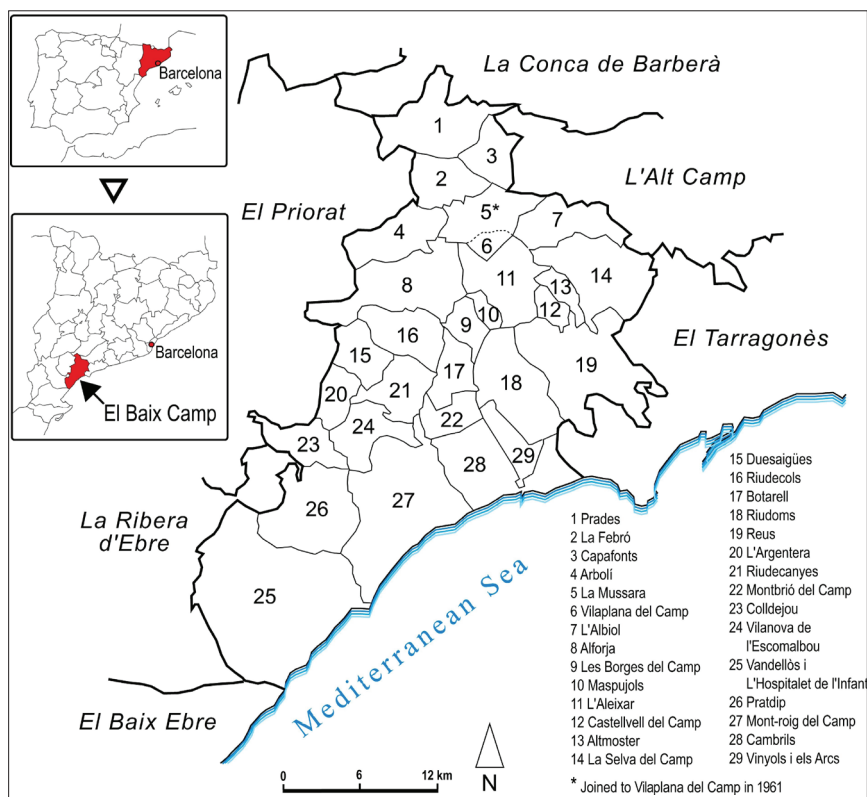
² The specific administrative changes to which *el Baix Camp* has been subject over the last 60 years are the merging of les Irlles with Riudecols in 1940; the merging of la Mussara with Vilaplana in 1961, and the incorporation within the *comarca* in 1990 of Arbolí, hitherto part of the *comarca* of Priorat.

and can be classified as “medium” or “medium-large”. Thus, rather than a marked contrast in their respective areas, there are two main groups of municipalities (small and medium-large) in the *comarca*, each of which is characterised by a certain similarity in their surface areas.



Figure 1. *El Baix Camp*. General map

Source: Own elaboration from primary cartography of ICGC (Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya).

Figure 2. *El Baix Camp*. Map of municipalities

Source: Own elaboration

The differences between the municipalities in terms of their respective number of inhabitants are generally much more marked than those in relation to their surface area; indeed, we might even speak of a high degree of irregularity. The largest of the municipalities is the capital, Reus, with a number of inhabitants (104,962) that represents 64.70% of the *comarca's* total population. At the other end of the scale, eleven municipalities have a population of fewer than 700 inhabitants – in all cases these municipalities occupy the most inland and mountainous areas of the *comarca*. Between these two extremes, we find the remaining eleven municipalities, which also present marked contrasts in their numbers: on the one hand, Cambrils has 33,301 inhabitants, and a further four – Mont-roig del Camp, Riudoms, Vandellòs and la Selva del Camp – have populations between 12,500 and 5,500, all of which either extend along the coastline or are adjacent to the capital. Finally, the remaining eleven municipalities have populations between 700 and 2,900 inhabitants, and their distribution on the map appears to be more random than that of other municipalities, though the majority are located in the middle of the *comarca*.

The study of the toponymy of el Baix Camp. Basic information

The starting point for this study was the creation of a general corpus of place names for the *comarca*. This corpus, based on an exhaustive study (cartographic survey, bibliographic research, onomastic inventories at the local scale), seeks to reflect the *basic toponymy* (or *living toponymy*), that is, the place names used on a daily basis in the *comarca* of *el Baix Camp* at the moment of undertaking the research. In short, the aim was to record in detail the present-day toponymy of this district (a toponymy which should largely be classed as a *microtoponymy*).

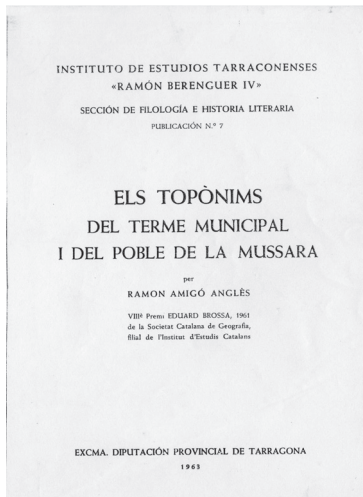


Figure 3. Onomastic inventory of La Mussarra (1963). Cover page.

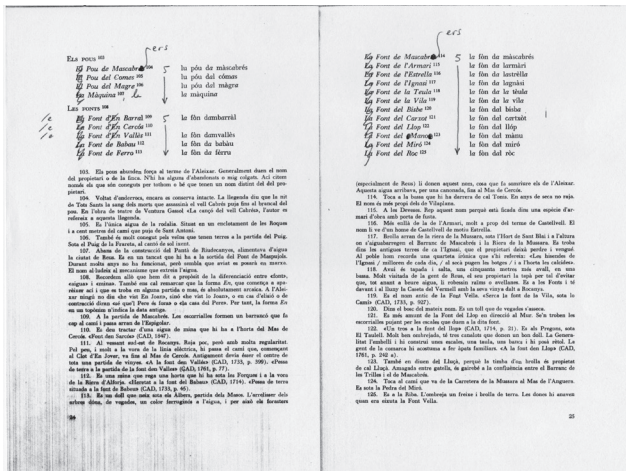


Figure 4. Onomastic inventory of La Mussarra (1963). Sample content (two pages).

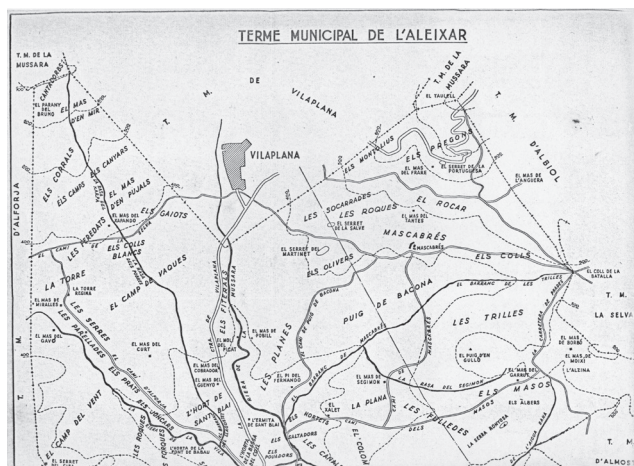


Figure 5. Toponymic map attached to the onomàstic inventory of L'Aleixar (1962).

Table 2 provides a summary of the data contained in this general corpus of place names in *el Baix Camp*. Overall, the corpus contains a total of 16,483 toponyms. This figure, divided by the *comarca's* 695.27 km² of surface area, represents a “toponymic density” of 23.70 toponyms per km². This is quite a considerable figure, given that if we extrapolate it to the 31,931.83 km² of the whole of Catalonia, it would give us a total of 756,784 toponyms, much higher than the highest estimates made to date.³

a) The toponymy of the physical environment: basic features of its distribution

Here we focus on the pattern and intensity of the distribution of the toponymy of the physical environment in the *comarca*. We begin by referring to the data shown in Table 3. The 5,249 toponyms in this group represent almost a third (31.8%) of the *comarca's* total. Indeed, this is highly indicative of the balance between physical and human elements of toponymic importance in *el Baix Camp*. If we compare these figures (and, more specifically, their breakdown at the municipal level, as shown in the table) with the *comarca's* general physical characteristics, a number of significant correlations emerge. For example, the municipalities in which the significance of these names is greatest are those occupying the mountainous sector of the *comarca*, extending across the west from the Muntanyes de Prades to the sierras of Vandellòs. In contrast, the coastal area of Mont-roig and Cambrils, together with the municipalities situated in

³ To the best of our knowledge, the highest estimate of toponyms in Catalonia to date was made by the Cartographic Institute of Catalonia, based on its mapping conducted at a scale of 1:5,000. Specifically, in two articles drawing on the Institute's toponymic database it was reported that for the 6,331 sheets of Ortophotomap of Catalonia (1:5,000 scale), the average number of toponyms was about 60 per sheet. Based on these figures, a simple calculation would give us a total of 379,860 names. For details see Lleonart (1993) and Lleonart and Parella (1994).

the flattest part of el Baix Camp (Reus and the surrounding area), present the lowest number: this is precisely the area of the region that has undergone the most significant changes from a human point of view (demographic, socio-economic, urban). Below we analyse the parameters that appear to be most relevant at the municipal level.

Among the absolute values, mention should first be made of the 559 names registered in la Mussara, which is the highest figure in the whole of the *comarca*. This figure is relevant in several respects: because it corresponds to a municipality with a medium-small surface area (16.05 km², giving it a density of about 35 toponyms referring to the physical environment per square kilometre); because the territory of la Mussara falls almost entirely within the abrupt, precipitous relief of the Muntanyes de Prades; and, finally, because the municipality is today largely depopulated, albeit forty years ago (when place names were first systematically collected) it was very much a living territory like any other in the *comarca*.

Of the 559 names referring to the physical environment detected in la Mussara, a large part – 339 (60%) – corresponds to the class of oronyms; here again this absolute number and proportion are unequalled by any other municipality in the *comarca*. Moreover, this oronymy presents a considerable degree of detail with regards to the generic names employed. The presence of hydronyms, although important, is less significant. We recorded a total of 49, which is considerably fewer than in the neighbouring municipality of Prades with 74. This, in addition to the extension of the *comarca*, should be seen in the light of the bare, dry land of la Mussara and the scarcity of springs.

The numbers of toponyms referring to the physical environment are also notable in Prades (480 toponyms accounting for 40.4% of all place names), Riudecols (372 and 32.3%), Vilanova d'Escornalbou (326 and 32.9%), l'Albiol (239 and 54.8%), Arboli (249 and 43.7%), l'Aleixar (246 and 30.9%), Riudecanyes (293 and 31.1%), la Febró (141 and 43.3%) and Capafonts (151 and 36.7%). In each case, we are speaking in the main of municipalities occupying the most inland sector of the *comarca*, followed by the mountainous, northwestern border (Muntanyes de Prades and the massif and sierras of the periphery).

b) The toponymy of human activity

This class is quantitatively the most significant – i.e., names referring to man and human activity in general. As Table 4 shows, the overall number of toponyms in this section is 11,234, that is, slightly more than two-thirds (68.2%) of the total. This means these toponyms constitute the majority in the whole set as well as at a more detailed level: only five municipalities (l'Albiol, l'Argentera, Colldejou, Duesaigües and la Mussara) record percentages of these names that are less than half the total. Moreover and paralleling the description provided in our analysis of the toponyms of the physical environment, it should be noted that the preponderance of names in this group is especially relevant in the municipalities lying to the east of the *comarca* – that is, the flattest sectors and those closest to the coast. Thus, significantly high percentages are recorded in Reus (91.3%) Riudoms (90%), Maspujols (84.2%) and Mont-Roig

del Camp (79.5%), but no less significant is the fact that 18 (out of 29) municipalities exceed the figure of 60%.

If we analyse the number of toponyms of this type by municipality, the most notable finding are the 1,742 names recorded in Reus, considerably more than those recorded in the municipalities that follow it in the ranking: thus, in Mont-Roig del Camp we identify 928 such toponyms and in Riudecols we find 779. In general, although there is a tendency for the municipalities with the most toponyms of this type to be the most populated, we are unable to establish a strict correlation in this regard – Cambrils, for example, which ranks second in terms of population in the *comarca* presents a much smaller number (489) of these toponyms than are found in less populated municipalities, such as Riudecols (779) Riudoms (777) and Vilanova d'Escornalbou (664).⁴ It is also significant, albeit in a different sense, the fact that a number of municipalities with a low number of inhabitants present numbers of toponyms that are comparable with those found in much larger municipalities: this is the case of Arbolí (321 names and just 131 inhabitants in 1996), Capafonts (261 and 105), la Febró (185 and 55), and, interestingly, we have the case of la Mussara (318 names in the period in which it was last inhabited). Likewise, mention should be made of Prades (708 names and 510 inhabitants) and of Vilanova d'Escornalbou (664 and 462, respectively).

In the case of toponyms referring to economic activity, there appear fairly marked differences between the municipalities in terms of the “relative significance” of these names. Thus, while in l'Aleixar, les Borges, Capafonts, Riudecanyes and Vilaplana there is a general tendency for a correlation to be established between the number of toponyms in this group and the size of the population, in Alforja, Almoester, Cambrils, Mont-roig and Reus i Riudoms, population size is considerably higher; and, finally in Arbolí, la Mussara, Prades, Riudecols and Vilanova d'Escornalbou, there is a marked predominance of this second group of names. The reasons for this uneven behaviour are varied and not easily reduced to one or two general principles. Thus, while in Reus, Cambrils and Mont-roig the weight of toponyms of primary elements related to human settlement (678) is clearly most significant, in la Mussara there is a predominance of references to complementary elements of population (we have counted a total of 64 man-made sources of water)⁵ and to farming (corrals, threshing floors, orchards, meadows and land plots, totalling 73); a similar pattern, albeit with differences reflect-

⁴ When making such comparisons it is important to bear in mind the “subjective bias” often associated with these figures; a bias that often affects not so much the number of existing names as their inclusion within a particular class or type.

⁵ Due to the high altitude of la Mussara and the dry character of its lands, we interpret the profusion of toponymic references to these springs as a clear manifestation of the “principle of relative negativity”. This principle, formulated by the Russian toponymist F.P. Savarensky in the early twentieth century refers to a particular type of toponymic behaviour that can be described as follows: in certain contexts, place names tend to express first and foremost the “unique features” of the environment as opposed to their “typical features”. For more on this principle, see Dorion and Poirier (1975: 93), Dorion (1998: 8) and Tort (2006: 78–79).

ing specific local characteristics, is found in Arbolí, Prades, Riudecols and Vilanova d'Escornalbou.

A brief interpretation of el Baix Camp based on the names of its settlements

In this section we undertake a broad geographical interpretation of the settlement names of *el Baix Camp*, based on the previously undertaken analysis. Basically, we characterise the origin of the names of the *comarca's* settlements in seven main groups, which we examine in detail below.

First, the group of *names related to physical appearance* are particularly numerous; that is, the toponyms that etymologically refer, in one way or another, to the most visible features of the place in question. Some names refer to a settlement's topographical characteristics: for example, its altitude (*Gallicant*); panoramic views (*la Mussara*); the mountain slopes (*Fatxes*), the colour of the slopes (*Argentera*), the steepness of the slopes (*Escornalbou*), the profile of the ridge – shaped like a high collar (*Colldejou*) or its location on the plain (*Vilaplana*). Other names refer to the presence of forests, whether remote in time (*la Selva*) or to the prevalence of a given plant species in the physical environment (*Vandellos*, *l'Arbocet*).

A second group, which complements in certain respects the first, is that of *names related to the hydrography*. In the main the settlement toponyms in this group express specific characteristics of a river course: *Riudecanyes*, *Riudoms*, *Riudecols*; or they refer to the location of the settlement: between two currents, *Duesaigües*, or at the head of the valley, *Capafonts*. Finally, the remaining two names refer to the shape of the river bed or its banks: *les Irlles* and *l'Albiol*.

Thirdly, the group of *names related to farming and other economic activities in general* has a fairly large and diverse significance across the *comarca*, with names alluding to areas of pastureland (*Prades*, *Pratdip*, *l'Aleixar*), names of farm outbuildings (*les Borges*, *Cortiella*, *Cambrils*) and names referring to specific activities or productions (*Aleixar*, *Almóster*, *Vinyols*).

The group that includes *names originating from isolated individual settlements* also presents a marked significance: *Maspujols*, *Mascabriers*, *Masriudoms*, *Masboquera*, *Masvalentí* and *Gavadà* are the six toponyms that, despite referring in modern times to collective settlements or villages, bear testimony to the presence of what was originally an isolated settlement or *mas* (traditional farmhouse).

A fifth distinct group comprises *names related to paths and roads*. Here, the most obvious example is that of Reus, a town that has always played an important role as a crossroads and market centre in the territory. *Alforja* and *l'Hospitalet de l'Infant*, on the other hand, are names that are intrinsically linked to two centuries-old roads (the road from Reus to Lleida and the road from Tarragona to Valencia, respectively). Finally, *Bonretorn* and *les Voltes* can also be considered within this group, albeit with a more indirect or metaphorical meaning.

In sixth place, we have established a separate group for *names of anthroponymic origin*: *Arbolí*, *Botarell*, *els Arcs* and *Remullà*. Indeed, many compound toponyms

include elements of an anthroponymic nature. In the case of the names of settlements in the *comarca*, we find *Montbrió* and toponyms formed from the root word *mas*: the case of *Mascabrers*, *Maspujols* and *Masvalentí* and [*Mas de*] *Gavadà*.⁶

Finally, there is a group of *names related to defensive settlements*: *Castellvell*, *Montbrió*, *Mont-roig* and *Castelló*. The origin of all these settlements can be attributed to their occupying a defensive or strategic site and to which their names refer. In *Castellvell*, unlike the other three toponyms, the name cannot be linked to the existence of a specific fortification; but, as we have pointed out elsewhere, the name might be indicative of the characteristics of comparable sites.

To conclude this section, it is worth considering the extent to which the *comarca's* settlement toponymy complies with the principle of territorial significance. In our opinion and in accordance with the analysis undertaken, it does so insofar as it allows us to identify seven different levels of meaning; that is, the seven “onomasiological groups” described above. There is, in other words, a significant pre-eminence of the physical environment in the western half of the *comarca*, while in the central sector, this pre-eminence is held by the rivers (despite their limited importance in terms of discharge). Likewise, there are many places (with a highly dispersed pattern around the *comarca*) in which the most significant territorial element has been an economic activity or resource or a particular element associated with pathways and roads. Elsewhere, the most significant factor originates not so much in the geography as in the history: namely, in the strategic importance of some settlements, or in the way the process of colonisation or resettlement has evolved. Finally, there are places in the region where ownership relations (typically expressed using a person's name) have been the “significant factor” when naming the settlement.

Discussion: questions that require special attention

The idea of a toponymic system as a possible means to organise toponyms (and for looking beyond the conventional/non-conventional distinction)

We begin, in this regard, from an essential premise: that, given the relative nature of all methods for organising toponyms, we shall adopt the idea of the *system* as a permanent framework of reference. In other words, what really interests us, and what underpins this study, is not the idea of obtaining a precise definition of the concepts and the categories analysed, but rather of employing these concepts and categories to further our understanding of the territory under analysis. Thus, we conceive our area of reference, *el Baix Camp*, as a *toponymic system*; that is, as a territory (understood to constitute an individual entity solely for the purposes of this specific study) for which there

⁶ We have not included *Masboquera* or *Masriudoms*. In the first case, because there are grounds for believing that *boquera* is a name alluding to the topography of the area (see Coromines, *OnoCat V*: 214), although an anthroponymic origin cannot be ruled out completely. In the case of *Masriudoms*, it is unclear as to whether *riudoms* is originally the name of the village or a person. It is plausible to think that the name is associated in some way with the town of Riudoms, given the physical proximity to this settlement in the centre of the *comarca*.

is a specific set of toponyms that refer to it and which in global terms constitute the linguistic expression of its geographical diversity in both physical and human terms.⁷

The notion of a *toponymic system* allows us to overcome the contradictions that arise from the usual ways – in our view, overly rigid – of understanding and conceptualising space. It allows us, above all, to avoid falling into the conceptual distinction that within geography has often been adopted to the exclusion of all others: the “physical” environment, on the one hand, and the “human” environment, on the other. Our position on this issue is clear: when it comes to analysing the toponymy of a given territory there can be no strict separation between one environment and the other. On the one hand, all the toponymy is “human”, because it is a creation of man; on the other hand, it should be acknowledged that, in a certain sense, all the toponymy is “physical”: that is, each toponym has a given physical referent. This referent is that portion of space, at whatever scale, that is identified using a toponym. The toponymy, therefore, as a genuine human creation (that is, as a “linguistic fact”) has an inherently physical nature in its very *raison d’être*: without space (that is, as a “physical fact”) there would be no toponymy. Or put another way: without “place” there would be no “place names”.

The interaction of the physical environment and the human environment as an underlying explanation of toponymic diversity: the example of the name pla (plain)

The term *pla*, with all its variants⁸, is one of the best examples from the toponymy of the *comarca* to illustrate the interaction between the *physical environment* and the *human environment* that manifests itself continuously in the place names. Indeed, it is a very widespread, pervasive term in the toponymy of all the Catalan-speaking territories, which might suggest that very little of relevance can be said about its presence in *el Baix Camp*. However, there is one specific observation worth recording concerning its spatial distribution. Specifically, what is most notable is that this word occurs much more frequently in the *comarca*’s mountainous and more inland areas than in the flatter area of the territory. This is clear if we look at the respective figures.⁹ In the mountainous sector of *el Baix Camp* we find most notably Prades (with 33 names), Arbolí (23), l’Albiol (22) and la Mussara (17) and, at some distance, Capafonts (9 names).

⁷ For the purposes of this study, we use the notion of the *system* in a philosophical sense, understood as an “integrated whole” and applied, in this case, to the overall corpus of toponyms in *el Baix Camp*. For more details on this concept and its specific application, see Tort (2000, 2002 and 2014).

⁸ As variants of *pla*, we have detected in the toponymy of the *comarca*, the following: *plans*, *plana*, *planes*, *planet*, *planeta* and *planot*. In practice, the variations in meaning between them do not appear to be sufficiently significant to have to speak of different categories.

⁹ In general, we refer to “plans” in their topographic sense: that is, places that are predominantly flat with a toponym that includes the generic word *pla* (or any of its variants). Although we wanted to consider separately those *partides de terra* – land divisions or sites that include in their name the term *pla*, we are aware that it is often very difficult – if not impossible – to distinguish one class of toponym from the other.

Vandellòs can also be considered relevant, despite the limited toponymic record, with 11 instances. In what we refer to as the “intermediate sector”, adjacent to the mountainous border, the figures recorded by the municipalities are also quite high: Vilanova d’Escornalbou (22), Riudecols (16), Mont-roig (14), Riudecanyes (12), Alforja (12) and l’Aleixar (9). In contrast, in the municipalities clearly lying on or near the plain, the number of occurrences is very low: 2 cases in Botarell, one in Reus (and four more if we consider the names of the “partides de terra” – land divisions or sites – that include the term *pla*), another one in Cambrils (name of a *partida de terra*) Maspujols, Riudoms (name of a *partida de terra*), la Selva de Camp (name of a *partida de terra*) and Vinyols and els Arcs (which is also the name of a *partida de terra*). In Montbrió we have not recorded any cases be they topographic names or names of *partides de terra*.¹⁰

The conclusion we draw from this toponymic distribution of the term *pla* in *el Baix Camp* is that it adheres fully to the “principle of relative negativity”: that is, the tendency of place names to bear testimony first and foremost to the “exceptional features” of the environment as opposed to its “typical features”. In this regard it is significant that in the area where the plains are exceptional in character (Prades, la Mussara, Arbolí, etc.), there are a large number of toponyms that refer explicitly to them; however, in the municipalities where the flat morphology is predominant (the case of Reus, Riudoms, Vinyols, Montbrió and Cambrils, above all), the toponymic references to the *pla* are minimal (or even non-existent).

The dialectal variation of toponyms depending on the variation of the geographical characteristics of the territory/land/region/place

Below we present three specific cases, taken from the microtoponymy of *el Baix Camp*, of toponymic diversification, based on differences of a dialectal nature in the Catalan language in this territory: toponyms formed from the base of the generic name *cingle* (in English, ‘ridge/cliff’); toponyms formed from *costa* or *coster* (‘mountain slope’); and, finally, toponyms that correspond to the generic pair *obac/solà* (in English, ‘shaded/sunny’).

Cingle

According to the work of Coromines (DECat II: 711), the term *cingle* (from the Latin *cingulum* ‘girdle’, ‘cliff’) has provided a large number of variants in the mountainous zones of Romania and in countries lying beyond. Coromines, in the aforementioned study, cites examples of terms formed with the same root in Swiss German (*tschingel*), northern Italian (*scengli*), Gascon (*selh*) and in Aragonese (*cinglo* o *cillo*). The author explains that the analogy with the concept of the “girdle” or “belt” has led to the diffusion of this root in mountainous areas, above all in sectors dominated by slopes or

¹⁰ The only exceptions to this general trend of the municipalities of the plain are Almoester (9 cases) and Castellvell (6). However, as shown by their cartography (see, for example, the general map), both municipalities have, especially in the northern part of the two territories, a fairly rugged relief.

strips of very steep land or even vertical cliff formations, which are often referred to by this name. In *el Baix Camp* the diffusion of this term is quite remarkable, concentrated above all in the mountainous areas in the north and northwest of the *comarca*. The name is especially common in la Mussara, l'Albiol and Prades, and of lesser importance in Arbolí, la Febró and Capafonts; moving south from this sector the name disappears dramatically, at the same time as the relief becomes less mountainous (note that in Vilaplana, neighbouring the municipality of la Mussara, the name is non-existent). To the southwest, although the relief remains quite mountainous, the occurrence of the term falls dramatically, disappearing almost from the map – three cases are found in Pratdip and two in Colldejou, but none are recorded in Vilanova d'Escornalbou or in Vandellòs.¹¹ In some of the municipalities of the *comarca* we find a few sporadic variants of *cingle* (*cingla*, in Arbolí; *cinglada*, in Prades).



Photo 1. Cliffs (*cingles*, in Catalan) in the municipality of Vilaplana. According to Amigó, the term CINGLE identifies “wide belts of land, slightly sloping and usually under cultivation that lie above the ridges, but which are sometimes found at the foot of a cliff. They are also known as *recingles*” (Amigó 1963: 30). *Photo:* Courtesy Ernest Costa.

¹¹ Note that in the case of Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant, the fact of not having a comprehensive compilation of names requires us to be very cautious when considering its toponymy, be it globally or partially.

However, these variants are most predominant in la Mussara (which reflects the fact that this is undoubtedly the most rugged area of the mountains of Prades). In addition to the 35 cases of *cingle* (understood in the sense afforded to it in Fabra (1968: 381), that is, a “rocky crag forming a precipice”) we have detected 16 cases of *cingla*¹² and 9 of *cinglall* (including the variant *cinglalló*).¹³



Photo 2. *Cinglalls* are “higher belts of cliff forming sets of successive steps that are irregular, narrow and of little height, between which it is possible to walk but not cultivate” (Amigó 1963: 25). We find different examples of the term CINGLE and its derivatives in the toponymy of El Baix Camp (in the image, La Miranda, in the municipality of Colldejou). *Photo:* Courtesy Ernest Costa.

¹² According to Amigó, in la Mussara the term identifies “wide belts of land, slightly sloping and usually under cultivation that lie above the ridges, but which are sometimes found at the foot of a cliff. They are also known as *recingles*” (Amigó 1963: 30).

¹³ *Cinglalls* are “higher belts of cliff forming sets of successive steps that are irregular, narrow and of little height, between which it is possible to walk but not cultivate” (Amigó 1963: 25). Likewise Manent reports that “a *cinglall* is stepped and a *cingle* is a smooth wall” (Manent 1973–1974: 168).



Photo 3. *Cinglalls* in the old municipality of La Mussara. According to the local toponymic use, a *cinglall* is stepped and a *cingle* is a smooth wall (Manent 1973–1974: 168). *Photo:* Courtesy Ernest Costa.

Costa/coster

In the mountain municipalities of the *comarca*, the terms *costa* and *coster* have a notable presence in the toponymy; in some cases, remarkably so (9 *costers* in Vilanova d'Escornalbou, 8 *costes* and 23 *costers* in Prades, 8 *costes* and 11 *costers* in la Mussara). In general, we note that, regardless of which of the two terms is used, the meaning of the term is always the same: virtually all the *comarca's* toponyms that include this generic name refer to the flanks or slopes – be they large or small – of a mountain. However, we detect a tendency for one or other of the terms to be preferred depending on the municipality of *el Baix Camp*. This suggests the possibility of the occurrence of a lexical isogloss (*costa/coster*) in this territory. On this subject Ramon Amigó wrote “[In la Mussara] most of the *costers* and *costes* are found on the slopes of the sierras of Pou and Fita Vella (...). These mountainsides are crossed diagonally by the Febró way (...). To the west of this path, all the place names are *costes*; in contrast, to the east, where the waters run down into the Camp de Tarragona, they are all *costers*” (Amigó 1963: 23).

Obac/solà

This pair of generic terms appear, according to our observations, in close correlation – thus, where we find *solans*, we usually also find *obacs* (with several variants of

each of the terms.) However, the correlation is seldom perfect: in la Mussara there are 6 *obacs* (plus an *obagada*) and 3 *solans*; in Prades there are 19 and 11, respectively. In other municipalities, the numbers are much lower, but the ratio is usually similar: with some exceptions, there are generally two *obacs* for every *solà*.¹⁴ Yet, we should stress that the presence of these oronyms is linked to the mountainous and precipitous nature of the relief of the area in question – logically, that the land is “exposed” to or “sheltered” from the sun depends directly on the physical relief: the more undulating and sinuous its profile, the more likely, a priori, are such toponyms to appear. Additionally, we wish to point out that in relation to these geomorphological determinants, we have opted to include these two terms within the class of oronyms; although, in fact, there are reasons why many toponyms based on the term *obac* are more properly treated as the names of woods or forests. As Coromines noted, the word *obac* “has acquired the meaning of woods, in a very natural semantic shift, since shaded sites are generally more luxuriant than sunny sites and often covered by woods” (DECat VI: 9–10).

Concluding remarks

Below we identify the most significant conclusions of our study of the microtoponymy of the *comarca* of *el Baix Camp*:

a) Toponymy has a geographical dimension that is not limited solely to aspects of a purely “locational” nature. Each name is underpinned by a *genealogy* which, above and beyond its strictly philological content, has a direct relationship with the *space*, with all that this implies. The strictly locational nature of toponymy can be represented on a map, whereas the “genealogical” aspects can, in the main, only be addressed through a broad and detailed knowledge of the territory. In this sense, we should stress that, in relation to our work, the study of the toponymy of *el Baix Camp* was feasible to the extent that we have had access to some very detailed toponymic sources, which have provided us with broad and diverse information about the specific characteristics of the territory and about the meaning and history of each toponym.

b) In terms of methodology, it proved essential to build a corpus of place names that met our research needs and which was highly operative in practice. The corpus to which we refer constitutes the *basic toponymy* (or *living toponymy*) of the *comarca*. As defined above, it comprises that set of place names that can be considered as being in use today in the study area. Overall, it includes a total of seventeen thousand toponymic units occurring in the twenty-eight municipalities of the *comarca*. From the perspective of the thematic distribution, one third of the *basic toponymy* corresponds to elements

¹⁴ It would appear that the greater presence of *obacs* in the toponymy has a geographical explanation: the shaded area, by definition, being less exposed to the sun, is more likely to be exploited for agronomic advantage (e.g., forestry). In contrast, a *solà* – a place characterised by its exposure to the sun, when coinciding also with stony and dry soils, cannot usually be exploited agronomically. This would explain why in general there are more names alluding to the former than the latter circumstances: man does not usually name those areas of the territory that he considers to be of no interest.

in the physical environment, while the other two thirds refer to human activity, in the most general sense of the expression. Despite this marked quantitative difference, we have noted (and reported in this study) that its territorial significance does not always have the same value. The toponymy of the physical environment is more varied at the micro level; it has a greater lexical diversity and it also presents marked differences between the municipalities (depending on the variation in the physical environment itself). In contrast, the toponymy of human activity responds to a more general pattern of organisation and presents a much lower degree of internal diversity.

c) The study of the *comarca's* toponymy at the micro level has also allowed us to identify some particularly notable similarities and differences in the use of certain generic terms. In so doing, we have been able in some instances to offer a number of detailed clarifications regarding the specific distribution of certain terms of a geographical character (something which to date has remained largely unclear in available toponymic studies and dictionaries). The conclusions of a number of authors on this point is especially useful: "It is often very difficult to assess the real geographical value of a place name" (Rousseau 1960: 171); "(...) no two of the terms [in the sense of 'generic geographical names'] have identical or even nearly identical patterns of distribution (...) because of the areal non-equivalence of the various phenomena named" (Zelinsky 1955: 346); "Every name tends to adopt a specific and limited meaning in space, and to vary from one zone to another. Only a convention held between geographers and lexicographers would allow us to achieve a standard and extensive meaning for the generality of a language domain" (Casanova 1991: 586).

In the frame of the general reflection that we have carried out throughout this study, the above conclusions can be summarised in the following two points:

- The "conventional" and the "non-conventional" in microtoponymy, far from being differentiated, merge and blend as one.
- The study of the microtoponymy of any region in the world requires, by way of methodological principle, the unification of two perspectives of analysis: the philological and the geographical.

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Table 1. El Baix Camp (comarca). Basic geographical data

Municipality	Area (km2)	Population (2014)
l'Albiol	20,22	458
l'Aleixar	26,09	891
Alforja	38,32	1859
Almoster	5,89	1396
Arbolí	21,11	105
l'Argentera	9,84	146
les Borges del Camp	8,14	2077
Botarell	11,98	1100
Cambrils	34,76	33301
Capafonts	13,28	114
Castellvell del Camp	5,31	2869
Colldejou	14,20	172
Duesaigües	13,51	239
la Febró	16,05	40
Maspujols	3,55	782
Montbrió del Camp	10,59	2650
Mont-roig del Camp	63,19	12148
Prades	33,11	626
Pratdip	36,05	685
Reus	52,71	104962
Riudecanyes	16,54	1142
Riudecols	19,38	1254
Riudoms	32,39	6546
la Selva del Camp	35,18	5598
Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant	101,99	6047
Vilanova d'Escornalbou	17,51	540
Vilaplana	23,49	630
Vinyols i els Arcs	10,89	1872
TOTAL BAIX CAMP	695,27	190249

 Source: Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, *Base de dades de municipis i comarques*.

Table 2. Toponymy of El Baix Camp. General parameters

Total n° of toponyms:	16,483
Area of the <i>comarca</i> :	695.27 km ²
Toponymic density (toponyms/km ²):	23.70
Extrapolated to whole of Catalonia (31,931.83 km ²):	756,784 toponyms
Total n° of toponyms referring to the physical environment:	5,249
Toponymic density (toponyms/km ²):	7.55
Total n° of toponyms referring to the human environment:	11,234
Toponymic density (toponyms/km ²):	16.16
Total n° of toponyms taken from onomastic inventory:	15,063 (91.4% of total)
Territory covered (km ²):	451.04 (64.9% of the total)
Toponymic density (toponyms/km ²):	33.4
Extrapolated to whole of Catalonia:	1,066,523
Total n° of toponyms taken from map sources:	1420 (8.6% of total)
Territory covered (km ²):	244.23 (35.1% of total)
Toponymic density (toponyms/km ²):	5.8
Extrapolated to whole of Catalonia:	185,205

Source: Based on information contained in Tort's onomastic appendix (2002)

Table 3. El Baix Camp. The *basic toponymy*. Distribution of municipalities

Municipality*	Number of toponyms	Municipality area (km²)	Toponyms/km²	% of El Baix Camp toponymy
l'Albiol	436	20,22	21,6	2,6
l'Aleixar	797	26,09	30,5	4,9
Alforja	855	38,32	22,3	5,2
Almoster	395	5,89	67,1	2,4
Arbolí	570	21,11	27	3,5
l'Argentera	73	9,84	7,4	0,4
les Borges del Camp	486	8,14	59,7	2,9
Botarell	91	11,98	7,6	0,6
Cambrils	676	34,76	19,5	4,1
Capafonts	412	13,28	31	2,5
Castellvell del Camp	309	5,31	58,2	1,9
Colldejou	129	14,20	9,1	0,8
Duesaigües	146	13,51	10,8	0,9
la Febró	326	16,05	20,3	2
Maspujols	285	3,55	80,3	1,7
Montbrió del Camp	79	10,59	7,5	0,5
Mont-roig del Camp	1167	63,19	18,5	7,1
la Mussara	877	16,71	52,5	5,3
Prades	1188	33,11	35,9	7,2
Pratdip	218	36,05	6	1,3
Reus	1908	52,71	36,2	11,6
Riudecanyes	942	16,54	56	5,7
Riudecols	1151	19,38	59,4	7
Riudoms	863	32,39	26,6	5,2
la Selva del Camp	201	35,18	5,7	1,2
Vandellòs i l'H. de l'I.	393	101,99	3,9	2,4
Vilanova d'Escornalbou	990	17,51	56,5	6
Vilaplana	430	6,78	63,4	2,6
Vinyols i els Arcs	90	10,89	8,3	0,5
TOTAL BAIX CAMP	16483	695,27	23,70	100

* The municipalities of Vilaplana and la Mussara (merged at 1961) have been considered here separately.

Source: Own elaboration from Tort's onomastic appendix (2002).

Table 4. El Baix Camp. Toponymy of the physical environment

Municipality*	Toponyms related with the physical environment	% of total toponymy	Oronyms	Hidronyms	Spot names**
l'Albiol	239	54,8	133	32	74
l'Aleixar	246	30,9	54	39	153
Alforja	270	31,6	89	53	128
Almóster	129	32,7	27	27	75
Arbolí	249	43,7	110	37	102
l'Argentera	50	68,5	17	6	27
les Borges del Camp	136	28	28	23	85
Botarell	35	38,5	2	13	20
Cambrils	187	27,7	8	20	159
Capafonts	151	36,7	54	19	78
Castellvell del Camp	97	31,4	32	13	52
Colldejou	88	68,2	38	18	32
Duesaigües	84	57,2	11	15	58
la Febró	141	43,3	75	14	52
Maspujols	45	15,8	8	11	26
Montbrió del Camp	25	31,6	-	10	15
Mont-roig del Camp	239	20,5	73	41	125
la Mussara	559	63,7	339	49	171
Prades	480	40,4	242	74	164
Pratdip	103	47,2	34	14	55
Reus	166	8,7	11	58	97
Riudecanyes	293	31,1	75	60	158
Riudecols	372	32,3	93	73	206
Riudoms	86	10	3	16	67
la Selva del Camp	94	46,8	6	13	75
Vandellòs i l'H. de l'I.	194	49,4	85	40	69
Vilanova d'E.	326	32,9	84	44	198
Vilaplana	140	32,6	45	26	69
Vinyols i els Arcs	25	27,8	-	7	18
TOTAL BAIX CAMP	5249	31,8	1776	865	2608

* The municipalities of Vilaplana and la Mussara (merged at 1961) have been considered here separately.

** "Spot: A small space or extent of ground" (as English word, quoted in 1440. The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated).

Source: Own elaboration from Tort's onomastic appendix (2002).

Table 5. El Baix Camp. Toponymy related with the human activity

Municipality*	Toponyms related with the human activity	% of total toponymy	Toponyms concerning settlement	Toponyms concerning economical activities	Odonyms
l'Albiol	197	45,2	60	92	45
l'Aleixar	551	69,1	230	259	62
Alforja	585	68,4	282	194	109
Almóster	266	67,3	122	72	72
Arbolí	321	56,3	104	166	51
l'Argentera	23	31,5	7	10	6
les Borges del Camp	350	72	136	145	69
Botarell	56	61,5	14	20	22
Cambrils	489	72,3	205	100	184
Capafonts	261	63,3	108	104	49
Castellvell del Camp	212	68,6	64	75	73
Colldejou	41	31,8	3	15	23
Duesaigües	62	42,5	10	37	15
la Febró	185	56,7	64	92	29
Maspujols	240	84,2	121	92	27
Montbrió del Camp	54	68,4	13	24	17
Mont-roig del Camp	928	79,5	523	257	148
la Mussara	318	36,3	70	168	80
Prades	708	59,6	251	332	125
Pratdip	115	52,8	17	36	62
Reus	1742	91,3	722	405	615
Riudecanyes	649	68,9	243	294	112
Riudecols	779	67,7	287	357	135
Riudoms	777	90	391	219	167
la Selva del Camp	107	53,2	50	17	40
Vandellòs i l'H. de l'I.	199	50,6	53	82	64
Vilanova d'E.	664	67,1	200	362	102
Vilaplana	290	67,4	115	130	45
Vinyols i els Arcs	65	72,2	32	13	20
TOTAL BAIX CAMP	11234	68,2	4497	4169	2568

* The municipalities of Vilaplana and la Mussara (merged at 1961) have been considered here separately.

Source: Own elaboration from Tort's onomastic appendix (2002).