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NAME AND PLACE

Ten essays on the dynamics of place-names

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Possible influence of patterns in some Danish place-names*

The importance of the onomasticon for coining new names has long been acknowledged in Nordic onomastics. It has been observed that this influence may manifest itself in different ways but few actual studies have been carried out. The following contribution should be looked upon as a tentative investigation into such patterns. More specifically, it is an attempt to trace influence from one group of generics to another in a corpus of place-name material. Below, I shall use the term influence of patterns for this situation. The word pattern in this context designates ‘system, structure’.

The influence of patterns is a mental phenomenon that cannot be observed directly. It may be difficult to obtain information about the motives behind the coining of a name and other relevant circumstances pertaining to the formation that may shed light on such patterns. Thus, we have to rely on the analysis of potential results of pattern influence to render it probable that such an influence has taken place. This is usually the case when it comes to the house names investigated here. I have already presented part of this material and the related problems at the 11th Nordic Congress of Onomastics 1994 (Dalberg 1996), and the present study should be seen as a continuation of that investigation.

In the Danish house-name material from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there are large numbers of names containing abstracts as their generics. Such names even occur – though less frequently – with other denotations, e.g. larger or smaller farms, but there seems to be no typological difference between these names and those of houses.

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The custom of naming houses is now more or less extinct in Denmark, and consequently the formation of names with abstracts as specifics has dropped out of use. In 1921, when the postal address register used as a base for this investigation was published, the practice was still flourishing. The Postal Address Register for the Kingdom of Denmark 1921 contains a wealth of house names, an estimated number of more than 30,000.¹ Owing to the nationwide coverage and its large number of names, the postal address register can be regarded as a representative source, reflecting the actual stock of house names at the time of publication.

If one counts homonymous names only once, we have a total of 1,200 different house names coined with an abstract generic in the Postal Address Register 1921. The most frequently occurring generics of this kind are -minde ‘memory, remembrance’, -ly ‘shelter, protection’ and -lyst ‘pleasure, delight’. Together, they make up 80% of the total. The remaining 20% are spread over 16 different generics, among others -håb, -hvile, -ro, -fred, -blick and -sigt,² all of which are comparatively rare. The influence of pattern will be discussed particularly in the light of the generics -minde, -ly and -lyst.

Within this group, there are substantial differences in frequency. Names containing -minde make up more than half of the total number of names with abstracts as generics, namely 53%. Names containing -ly and -lyst account for 14% and 13% respectively. When it comes to different names, -minde compounds are far more common than compounds with -ly and -lyst. However, if one looks at the frequency of homonymous names, a different picture emerges, with -ly names as undisputed top scorers. On a list of the twenty most frequently occurring individual names, they occupy first, second and third position with Bakkely (284 localities)³, Granly (223 instances) and Skovly (222 instances).⁴ Moreover, names in -ly occupy positions 11, 12 and 13, namely Birkely (110 instances),

¹ Postadressebog for Kongeriget Danmark. København 1921.
³ Reciprocating names are not included, as it is difficult to determine how many original name formations should be taken into account.
⁴ Bakke ‘hill’, gran ‘spruce’, skov ‘forest’.

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Lindely (108) and Elmely (103) respectively.\(^5\) Compounds with -lyst are also included in the list, Landlyst (98) as number 18 and Sølyst (94) as number 19.\(^6\) No minde-compounds are among the top twenty. Below, I shall return to the reason why this otherwise frequent type includes fewer homonymous names than the two other groups.

In principle, homonymous names may be independent formations. However, when such overwhelming numbers of homonymous names can be observed, it seems more likely that existing place-names have acquired a new function denoting a new locality. This may be the result of naming a place after another locality, i.e. based on the name of a specific locality, or the name may have been selected among existing place-names with no specific locality in mind. When it comes to the naming of houses, the latter often seems to have been the case, as it is tends to be difficult to pinpoint the locality they are named after. In both cases, the name is taken from an existing onomasticon. In onomastic literature, the term pattern has been used to denote such naming. It should be pointed out that pattern seems to denote ‘model’ rather than ‘system’, which is the case in this study. At any rate, the vast number of homonymous names formed with terms for abstract concepts as generics reflects the popularity of this type of house-name formation.

If we look at the three generics -minde, -ly and -lyst together, a number of identical or semantically similar specifics compounded with these generics can be noted. If the generics are analysed separately, however, it turns out that the uniformity is only apparent, and that each group has its individual profile with regard to specifics.

Thus, in the case of -minde, personal names dominate as specifics. In particular, family names are a distinctive feature of this group, as for instance Andersen in Andersensminde. Christian names are also represented, such as Erik in Eriksminde and Anna in Annasminde. Incidentally, this explains why this very frequent generic does not occur on the top twenty list of homonymous place-name forms. Personal names normally refer to specific persons, and

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\(^6\) Land ‘countryside’, sø ‘sea, lake’.
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such names tend to be new coinages rather than reuse of existing place-names. When several instances of compounds in -minde with specific personal names actually occur, such as Petersminde and Christiansminde, it is in fact a testimony to the popularity of certain personal names in the period. Terms for topographical features are rare as specifics in -minde compounds, one of the few examples being Moseminde.\(^7\) We may certainly exclude the family name Mose as a potential specific, since the composition form for family names is -s- (i.e. with the genitive morpheme) in all other -minde compounds. From a name-semantic point of view, the more common compounds appear to be the most authentic. A compound of a personal name and minde ‘remembrance of’ makes sense, much more so than the compound of minde and a term denoting a topographical feature.

We shall now turn to the -ly compounds, whose specifics show nearly opposite proportions. Terms denoting topographical features such as bakke ‘hill’, strand ‘strand’ and skov ‘forest’ occur frequently as specifics, the top scorers Bakkely and Skovly belong to this group. Words denoting vegetation are also numerous, e.g. gran ‘spruce’, birk ‘birch’ and lind ‘lime’, cf. the favourites Granly and Birkely mentioned above. Personal names, on the other hand, are rare in ly-compounds. Among such compounds, female names such as Anna in Annaly are the largest group. Masculine names, such as Oluf in Olufsly are very rare, and no instances of family names have been recorded. In this case, too, there appears to be a name-semantic difference between the names compounded with the frequent and infrequent specifics respectively. As ly implies ‘protection … in particular with reference to being protected from the wind and rain, … place where shelter can be found’\(^8\), terms denoting topographical features and vegetation must have indicated the feature that yielded shelter at the moment of name formation, e.g. a hill in Bakkely and one or more spruces in Granly. When -ly is compounded with a personal name, as in the case of Annaly, the specific seems to have indicated the person receiving protection, presupposing that place-

\(^7\) Mose ‘marsh, moor, swamp’.
\(^8\) Ordbog over det danske Sprog XIII: 142.
names can actually be split up into conventional semantic units (cf. below).

Finally, we shall look at the names containing the generic -lyst. Its appellative meaning in a place-name context is ‘happiness, pleasure’. The predominant group of specifics is feminine names such as Ella in Ellalyst, but also terms for topographical features such as sø ‘lake’ and skov ‘forest’ are well represented. For instance, Sølyst is a favourite and Skovlyst is another popular compound. The occurrence of these specifics may reflect foreign patterns but unfortunately, this matter has not been subject to in-depth studies. Masculine names, such as Ejner in Ejnerslyst are much more infrequent and family names such as Lehn in Lehnslyst and terms for vegetation such as birk ‘birch’ in Birkelyst are even more unusual.

The differences in distribution become even more striking if we compare the number of terms denoting vegetation in ly-comounds, where they are frequent, and lyst-compounds, where they are rare. Thus, birk in 110 Birkely compares to 4 Birkelyst, bøg ‘beech’ in 69 Bøgely to a single Bøgelyst, eg ‘oak’ in 69 Egely to 4 Egelyst, el ‘alder’ in 20 Ellely to 2 Ellelyst, elm ‘elm’ in 103 Elmely to 2 Elmelyst, gran ‘spruce’ in 223 Granely to 4 Granlyst and lind ‘lime’ in 108 Lindely compares to 7 instances of Lindelyst.

If we assume the rare specifics in these categories of generics to be due to influence from other patterns, we can explain the occurrence of terms for topographical features compounded with -minde, e.g. mose in Moseminde, as reflecting the influence of -ly and -lyst compounds (e.g. Bakkely and Sølyst). Feminine names in -ly compounds, such as Anna in Annaly, may be due to influence from -minde compounds (e.g. Annasminde) or -lyst compounds (e.g. Ellalyst). The latter explanation is more likely, as feminine names as specifics in -ly names lack the s-morpheme in the same way as do most feminine names in -lyst compounds. Masculine names compounded with -ly such as Oluf in Olufsly can be ascribed to influence from -minde compounds (e.g. Eriksminde). Masculine names in -lyst compounds such as Ejner in Ejnerslyst can be explained in the same way. Family names compounded with -lyst such as Lehn in Lehnslyst should most likely be interpreted as reflecting pattern influence from -minde names (e.g. Andersensminde), as this is the only
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generic exhibiting family names as a commonly occurring specific. Finally, terms denoting vegetation, such as *birk* ‘birch’ in *Birkelyst*, may be due to influence from names in -ly (e.g. *Birkely*).

Additional influence from other groups of house names than the above-mentioned ones is also possible. Unfortunately, no in-depth studies of house names have been carried out but to judge from my sketchy survey, this cannot normally be the case. Personal names and terms for topographical features certainly form a part of a number of other place-names but it is difficult to point out other generics dominated by these specifics to the same extent and occurring frequently enough to form potential patterns for name formation.

This can be demonstrated by the list of the 20 most frequently occurring house names:

2. Granly 223 12. Lindely 108
5. Solbakke(n) 188 15. Hytten  102
6. Aldershvile 186 16. Virkelyst 100
7. Solhjem 165 17. Alfa    100
10. Solhøj 147 20. (The) Home 92

As noted above, the list contains six compounds in -ly and two in -lyst. Three names are coined with other terms for abstract concepts, namely no. 6 *Aldershvile* ‘Rest for the Aged’, no. 8 *Godthåb* ‘Good Hope’ and no. 14 *Aldersro* ‘Peace for the Aged’. These generics are comparatively infrequent but occur in a few common homonymous names such as the three quoted. The rest of the list includes four simplex names, i.e. no. 15 *Hytten* ‘The Cottage’, no. 16 *Virkelyst* ‘Enterprise’, which is a compound noun containing the element -lyst, no. 17 *Alfa* and nr. 20 *Home*. This leaves five compound names containing five different generics: -hus ‘house’ in no. 4 *Bakkehus(et)* ‘Hill House’, -bakke ‘hill’ in no. 5 *Solbakke(n)* ‘Sunny Hill’, -hjem ‘home’ in no. 7 *Solhjem* ‘Sunny Home’, -bo ‘abode’ in
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no. 9 Højbo ‘Hill Abode’ and -høj ‘mound, hill’ in no. 10 Solhøj ‘Sunny Hill.

Another circumstance that, in my opinion, may support the idea of pattern influence between the -minde, -ly and -lyst groups is the fact that the abstract denotations of the generics do not refer directly to specific features of the locality. This leads on to the complex question of the semantic properties of names coined according to pattern influence, and the methods of analysis required for their study. These problems have a scope extending far beyond house-names and in the present study I have only addressed them in passing. They certainly require a separate study, as well as a discussion in their own right. Still, I am convinced that the names treated will be able to contribute greatly to their elucidation.

House names formed with terms for abstract concepts have never formed a prestigious field of onomastic research. Rather, they have been regarded with disdain in traditional research (e.g. Förstemann 1863: 208; Noreen 1915: 5; Sahlgren 1916: 5; Hovda 1978 [1953]: 57). In recent research, they have tended to be treated with indifference. Such negative attitudes seem rather unjustified to me.

Bibliography


Ordbog over det danske Sprog 1–XXVIII. København 1919–56.
