

Vibeke Dalberg

NAME AND PLACE

**Ten essays on the dynamics
of place-names**

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Bent Jørgensen and Berit Sandnes on the occasion of
Vibeke Dalberg's 70th birthday, August 22nd 2008*

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Copenhagen 2008

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Det Humanistiske Fakultet
Københavns Universitet

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Freely available internet publication,
the Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen 2008

ISBN 978-87-992447-1-3

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.

* A revised and translated version of: “Mulig mønsterpåvirkning i nogle danske stednavnetyper”. In: Nyström, Staffan (ed.) 2005: *Namnens dynamik. Utviklingstendenser och drivkrafter inom nordiskt namnskick. Handlingar från den trettonde nordiska namnforskarkongressen i Tällberg 15–18 augusti 2003. NORNA-rapporter* 80. Uppsala, pp. 101–111.

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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*, *-blik* 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.

² *håb* 'hope', *hvile* 'rest', *ro* 'tranquillity', *fred* 'peace', *blik*, *sigt* 'view'.

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 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

⁵ *Birk* ‘birch’, *lind* ‘lime’, *elm* ‘elm’.

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.

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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*-compounds, 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 *Granlyst* 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:

1. Bakkely	284	11. Birkely	110
2. Granly	223	12. Lindely	108
3. Skovly	222	13. Elmely	103
4. Bakkehus(et)	191	14. Aldersro	103
5. Solbakke(n)	188	15. Hytten	102
6. Aldershvile	186	16. Virkelyst	100
7. Solhjem	165	17. Alfa	100
8. Godthåb	152	18. Landlyst	98
9. Højbo	149	19. Sølyst	94
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.

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