Onomastics Online
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"Speaking with names": On the origins, aims and methods of Interactional Onomastics

YouTube link: https://youtu.be/urlOh5ElySk

Abstract: Language philosophers and onomasticians of different approaches have variously emphasised the centrality of usage in ascertaining the nature and functions of proper names (see Coates 2017 for a recent discussion). Surprisingly, however, onomastic scholars have scarcely ever tried to document and examine how speakers actually use proper names in their everyday lives, i.e., in naturally occurring interaction. As a consequence, the discussion revolving around the qualities of proper names often remains confined to theoretical considerations, which – although highly captivating and a source of intellectual enrichment – falls short of the appropriate empirical evidence. This talk gives an introduction into a method that offers researchers a practical toolkit for analysing proper names in ordinary and institutional social interaction. Interactional Onomastics (De Stefani 2012, 2016) addresses research questions arising from contemporary name theories by studying language in the natural habitat of its occurrence, in accordance with the conversation analytic line of thought (Sacks 1992; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). Indeed, Conversation Analysis developed an early interest in proper names, which have been analysed as resources for establishing reference to space (Schegloff 1972) or to persons (Sacks and Schegloff 1979). But proper names may serve a plethora of other purposes in social interaction. One of the goals of Interactional Onomastics is therefore to examine how interactants use proper names to accomplish socially relevant action (such as categorising a person or a place, organising topical talk, or producing stigma). Moreover, the analysis of spontaneous talk-in-interaction allows researchers to reflect on the relevance of the category 'proper name,' as speakers sometimes use the label 'name' for language material that presumably would not fall into that category for many linguists. On that account, Interactional Onomastics also draws on anthropological work, which has examined the cultural significance of names. Finally, this talk gives an overview of studies offering a contextualised analysis of proper names, from Basso's (1988) anthropological work to recent research in Interactional Onomastics (Droste 2020; Günthner 2020; Debois and De Stefani 2022).

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