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Trend Analysis of Toponymic Competence: Returning to Tépe, Hungary

Abstract

The results of the previous research conducted by the author in Tépe, Hungary, in 2013, suggested that the population of the village was acquiring fewer and fewer toponyms. This paper provides empirical confirmation of this phenomenon through a follow-up trend analysis carried out in the same village ten years later, in 2023. In both surveys, four generational groups were involved, comprising a total of 7% of the inhabitants. Men and women participated in almost equal numbers. The follow-up study confirms the initial hypothesis: the average toponymic competence (i.e. the relative number of familiar local toponyms) across all generational groups, and in most cases, even individual results of people questioned ten years earlier are now lower than they were in the 2013 survey. Only the group of the youngest participants (those under 20) represents an exception: in their case, we see no difference compared to the earlier data. When examining toponymic competence from the perspective of the name corpus, some changes can also be observed: the proportion of names known to everyone is lower in all generational groups in 2023 than in 2013. The analysis shows that there are more and more place names that can be located by less than half of the respondents. The progressive loss of placenames in Tépe is explained by the author as a result of various natural, economic, and social factors.

Keywords

toponymic competence; toponymic loss; trend analysis; socio-onomastics; Hungarian language; toponymy; oikonymy

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Тренд-анализ в изучении топонимической компетенции: возвращение в Тепе (Венгрия)

Аннотация

Результаты предыдущего исследования, проведенного автором в венгерском селе Тепе в 2013 г., показали, что население деревни овладевает все меньшим количеством местных топонимов. В настоящей статье представлены результаты тренд-анализа, проведенного в ходе исследования в том же селе десять лет спустя и подтвердившего гипотезу. В обоих исследованиях, осуществлявшихся опросным методом, приняло участие 7 % от общего числа жителей села. Опрос проводился среди людей разных возрастных групп. Мужчины и женщины составили почти равные доли в общей выборке. В 2023 г. топонимическая компетенция (т. е. относительное количество знакомых жителям местных топонимов) в среднем оказалась ниже, чем в опросе 2013 г., в большинстве случаев даже индивидуальные результаты людей, опрошенных десятью годами ранее, стали хуже. Исключением является только группа самых молодых участников исследования (младше 20 лет), результаты которых в целом совпадают с данными, полученными десятью годами ранее. С точки зрения корпуса топонимов, использованных в опросе, также можно отметить некоторые изменения: в частности, доля имен, известных всем респондентам, оказалась ниже во всех возрастных группах по сравнению с результатами исследования, проведенного в 2013 г.; при этом стала больше доля топонимов, которые могут идентифицировать менее половины респондентов. Эрозию топонимикона в языковом сознании жителей села автор объясняет рядом естественных и социоэкономических факторов.

Ключевые слова

топонимическая компетенция; утрата топонимов; тренд-анализ; социономастика; венгерский язык; топонимия; ойконимия

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1. In this paper I explore a hypothesis that I proposed ten years ago. In 2013, I conducted a toponym survey in the small Hungarian settlement of Tépe [see Györffy 2015], and the results of that survey suggested that the members of the Tépe community were acquiring fewer and fewer place names, which inevitably led to a loss in the toponymicon as it is reflected in the toponymic competence of the village dwellers. In order to confirm or refute this hypothesis, I repeated that survey on toponymic competence in 2023. Methodologically, I relied on the concepts of *apparent time* and *real time*. The concept of apparent time is based on the terms of age and generation. These interlinked concepts form the basic units of the construct, by which differences observed in the present can be identified as a process taking place in time, i.e., as historical change, if the differences occur between language users of different ages [see Bodó 2013: 8].

The purpose of the present study was to empirically test whether the significant difference in toponymic competence between age groups recorded in 2013 necessarily represents a generational change. The number of local place names known to village inhabitants may naturally increase with age, so if it turned out that the representatives of different age groups know a similar number of names as compared to the 2013 survey, this would mean that there is no loss in toponymic competence. The tracking of changes provides us with a method that can therefore give us real information about whether and to what extent a loss in the toponymicon is taking place in Tépe. To do this, we need to carry out studies in real time, which can be done by comparing the current results with data from previous research.

Another method that I used is the follow-up study, in which the research is repeated in part or in whole. Real-time studies can be completed by examining the relative toponymic competence of the same generations but born at different times — this is called trend analysis. We can also aim to repeat the survey with exactly the same individuals as before — this is called a panel analysis. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages, so it is best to use a combination of the two [see Bodó 2013: 8–16]. In her socio-toponymic research, Katalin E. Nagy conducted a panel analysis in the municipality of Pród, Hungary [E. Nagy 2021: 120–133], and I undertook both, a trend and a panel analysis in Tépe. In this paper I summarize the results of the trend analysis. For the results of the panel analysis see [Györffy 2024].

As for the methodology of the surveys, Bailey et al. [1991] formulated the following principles: (1) minimum of ten years should elapse between the two studies, (2) the same variables should be measured, (3) the respondents should be chosen from the same population, and (4) the methods should be identical or at least comparable. Bodó [2013: 55] adds to this that (5) the research should involve several generations. The present study in Tépe meets all five criteria.

2. Tépe is a settlement in Hajdú-Bihar County, Hungary, with an area of 23.22 km² and, like many other small settlements, is losing its population. While at the time of the 2013 survey the village had a population of 1,150, ten years later this number has decreased by more than 100 to 1,041, or 10% [see Statisztika]. In the village, I learned that this number had sometimes fallen below 1,000 over the years, and started to increase only due to the newly arriving young families, mostly commuters. This is an important change for the village, as these people did not have enough time to get involved in the life of the settlement. This is also a significant phenomenon from a socio-onomastic point of view, as it may be a breeding ground for a loss of local names as these families do not adopt and thus do not pass on the toponyms of the village.

Closely related to the decrease in population is the fact that while I conducted the survey in 2013 with 80 participants, in 2023 I only included 72 people. I saw this as appropriate because it meant that I was working with the same proportion in the two surveys, i.e. approximately 7% of the population.

In both surveys, I built on four age categories: (1) inhabitants under 20, (2) those between 21 and 40, (3) those between 41 and 60, and (4) people above 61. For each generational group, in my first survey I questioned in an informal interview 20 respondents and, in this survey, 18 interviewees (for the methodology see [Györffy 2015]). In selecting the respondents, I also tried to ensure that the ratio of men to women was almost equal: 41 to 39 in 2013 and 37 to 35 in 2023. The distribution of respondents by age and gender is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by age and sex

Age group	2013				2023			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
Under 20 years old	0–10:	2	0–10:	1	0–10:	0	0–10:	5
	11–20:	9	11–20:	8	11–20:	8	11–20:	5
21–40 years old	21–30:	6	21–30:	3	21–30:	3	21–30:	7
	31–40:	4	31–40:	7	31–40:	6	31–40:	2
41–60 years old	41–50:	3	41–50:	4	41–50:	3	41–50:	3
	51–60:	9	51–60:	4	51–60:	6	51–60:	6
Above 61 years old	61–70:	4	61–70:	7	61–70:	4	61–70:	2
	71–80:	4	71–80:	5	70–80:	7	70–80:	5
	41		39		37		35	

Previous research conducted both by myself and others has shown that age represents an important factor in the development of toponymic competence: as an individual ages, the number of place names known naturally increases (and only towards the end of the individual's life course does it decline). Both studies confirm this, however, there is a difference in the proportion of place names learned and the number of place names known to all (see Table 2).

Table 2

Average toponymic competence and the percentage of place names known to all respondents

Age group	Average of the toponymic competence		Place names known to all respondents	
	2013	2023	2013	2023
Under 20 years old	18%	17.5%	1%	< 1%
21–40 years old	50%	38%	8%	6%
41–60 years old	63%	46%	18.5%	7%
Above 61 years old	81%	68%	52%	22%

In the first age group, I found no difference in toponymic competence: the youngest know less than a fifth of the names on average in both surveys, and the number of place names shared by all is only 2–3, or 1%. Among those aged 21 to 40, earlier we saw that on average they knew half of the place names, but in 2023 this applies only to just over a third of the names. However, the proportion of place names known to all respondents is still similar: 8% in 2013 and 6% in 2023. The gap between the data for the next generation is substantial in both respects: in 2013, respondents could locate 63% of names, while in 2023 only 46%, the generation's shared knowledge of names was 18.5% ten years earlier, while now it barely exceeds that of the 21–40 age group at 7%. There is a similar difference for the oldest age groups: in 2013, the 81% average toponymic competence rate was associated with 52% of place names known to all, but in 2023, with an average of 68%, only 22% of place names are known to all.

3. In what follows, I provide a comparison of the different age groups. I have previously explained in detail the reasons behind each of the data sets [see Győrffy 2015], now I will not do so but will focus on the trends instead.

3.1. As I indicated above, I found the smallest difference in the toponymic competence of people under 20 (see Fig. 1). In the 2013 survey, the respondent who knew the fewest place names was familiar with 2% of the toponyms, while the child with the most place names known was aware of more than half of the names (52%), these correspond to 5% and 46% in the current group.

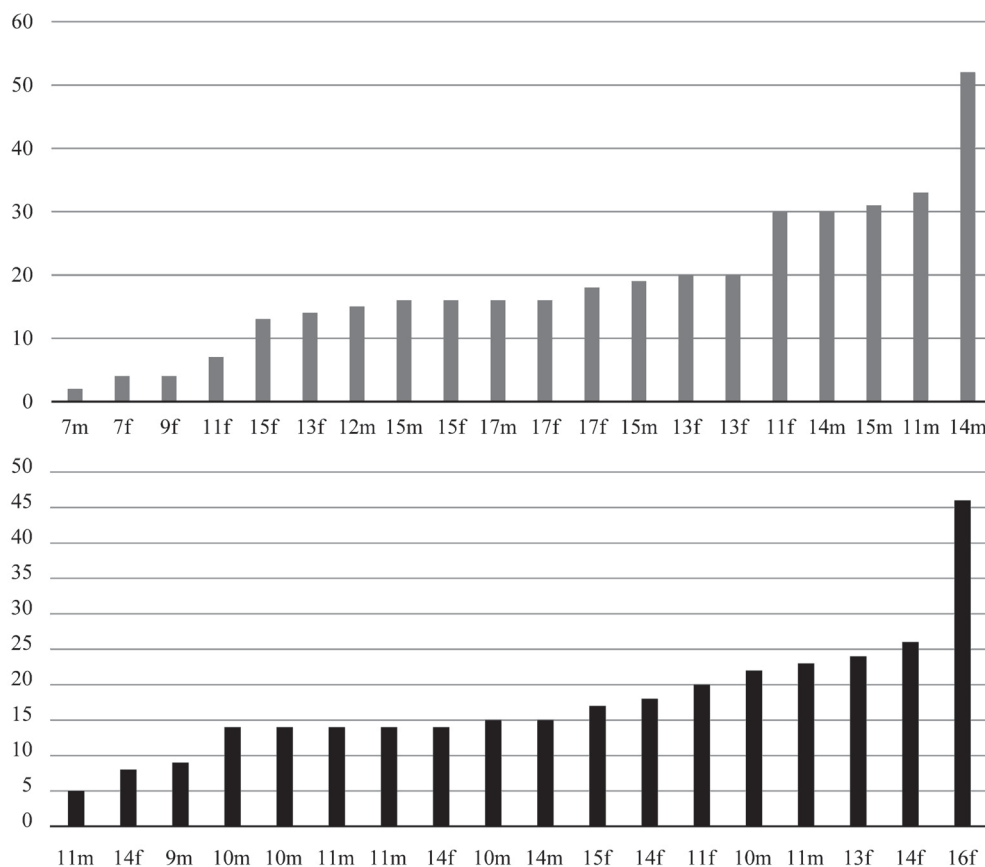


Fig. 1. Toponymic competence for under-20s in 2013 (grey above) and 2023 (black below)¹

¹ Here and in the diagrams below, *m* stands for male, *f*— for female.

The place names that all respondents are familiar with include the name of streets (2013: *Dózsa György utca*, *Felszabadulás utca*, 2023: *Béke utca*) and the name of the hill used for sledding and called *Halom-domb*. Compared to the names that were universally known in 2013, there is only one name that is known to everyone in both groups, the name of the sledding hill. Their locations are shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Location of the place names known to all respondents under 20s (red: in 2013 and 2023, black: in 2013, blue: in 2023)

3.2. The next generations' toponymic competence shows more differences in all respects compared to the one just described.

Among those aged 21 to 40, the most striking difference is that I spoke to several respondents whose name awareness is below the average of children (see Fig. 3). Whereas in the past, almost a third of names (29%) were known to any Tépé resident who could locate the fewest names in their age group, in 2023 this figure is only 13%, five other respondents being below 20%. However, the latest survey also shows that there are individuals in this age group who are interested in the land, possibly involved in farming, and thus are familiar with many place names. The figure related to people who could locate most names was 76% in 2013 and 81% in 2023.

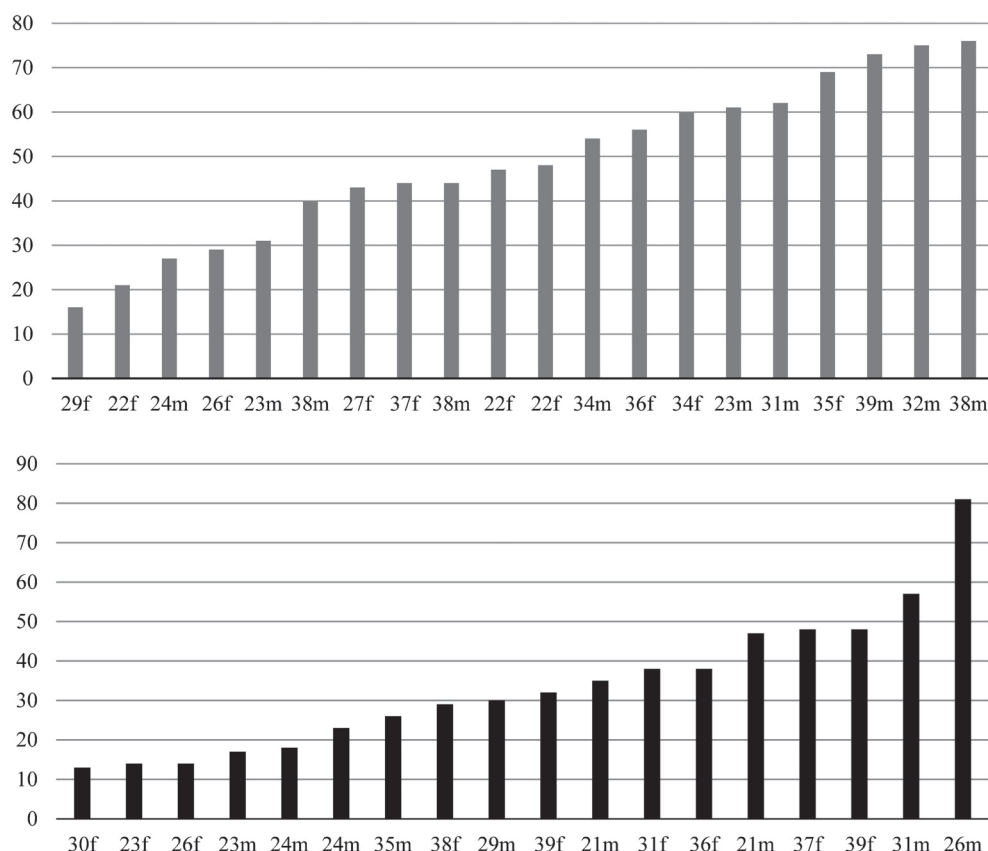


Fig. 3. Toponymic competence of respondents aged 21 to 40 in 2013 (grey above) and 2023 (black below)

There are also some surprises in the group of place names that are uniformly known across this age group. The names known to all respondents in the two surveys contain only street and road names: *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca*, *Béke utca*, *Dózsa György utca*, *Péterszegi út*, *Petőfi utca*, *Rákóczi utca*, *Táncsics utca*. And while in 2013 every respondent was aware of several place names in the outskirts, in 2023 only a few street names (*Felszabadulás utca*, *Fő utca*, *Hunyadi utca*, *József Attila utca*), the name of the *Halom-Domb* and two farms are on everyone's mental map (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Location of the names known to all respondents between 21 and 40 (red: in 2013 and 2023, black: in 2013, blue: in 2023)

3.3. The data for the third age group are similar to those for the previous one (see Fig. 5). The resident with the fewest place names known was familiar with 30% of the toponyms asked in 2013, in 2023 this figure is almost halved at 18%, and six other respondents also fall below 30%. Previously, half of the respondents had mastered two-thirds or more of the names, while in the 2023 survey this is true for only a quarter of the surveyed. In addition, we found that in both groups we encountered individuals who were very familiar with the names: respondents who could locate most of the names and who otherwise worked on the land knew between 86% (2013) and 88% (2023) of the place names.

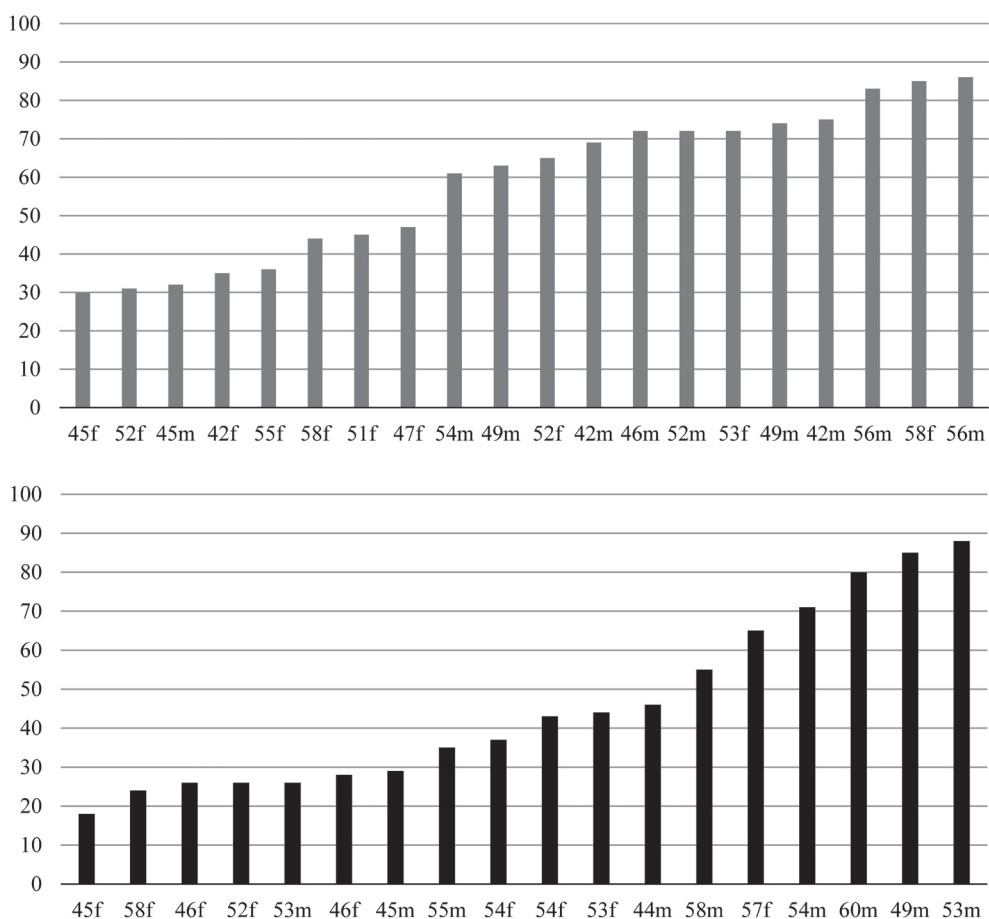


Fig. 5. Toponymic competence of respondents aged 41 to 60 in 2013 (grey above) and 2023 (black below)

Again, the cross-section of names known to all contains few elements, which is also due to the small number of names known to the respondents to the 2023 survey (see Fig. 6). These are the following: *Dallasz ~ Dallasz-tanya, Deák-tanya, Dózsa György utca, Felszabadulás utca, Fő utca, Gázcseretelep ~ Gáztelep, Görbe-kert, Halom-domb, Öreg-kert, Péterszegi híd, Péterszegi út, Petőfi utca, Rákóczi utca*. Beyond that, only the names *Hunyadi utca* and *László Ernő tanyája* are on everyone's mental map.



Fig. 6. Location of the names known to all respondents between 41 and 60 (red: in 2013 and 2023, black: in 2013, blue: in 2023)

3.4. There is also a decline in toponymic competence among the oldest age group, although the difference between the two surveys is the smallest (see Fig. 7). It is striking that the individual with the least knowledge of place names can locate less than half of the names (46%) in the 2023 survey, whereas previously even the lowest ‘performing’ respondent knew more than two thirds of the names (67%). Nevertheless, an equally outstanding result is also found among the current oldest generation: one man can locate 97% of the names, compared to 89% in the 2013 survey. Comparing the charts, it is also striking that while fourteen of the twenty respondents (70%) previously scored 80% or above, only around a quarter of the current residents of Tépe surveyed (4 respondents, i.e. 22%) know place names to this extent.

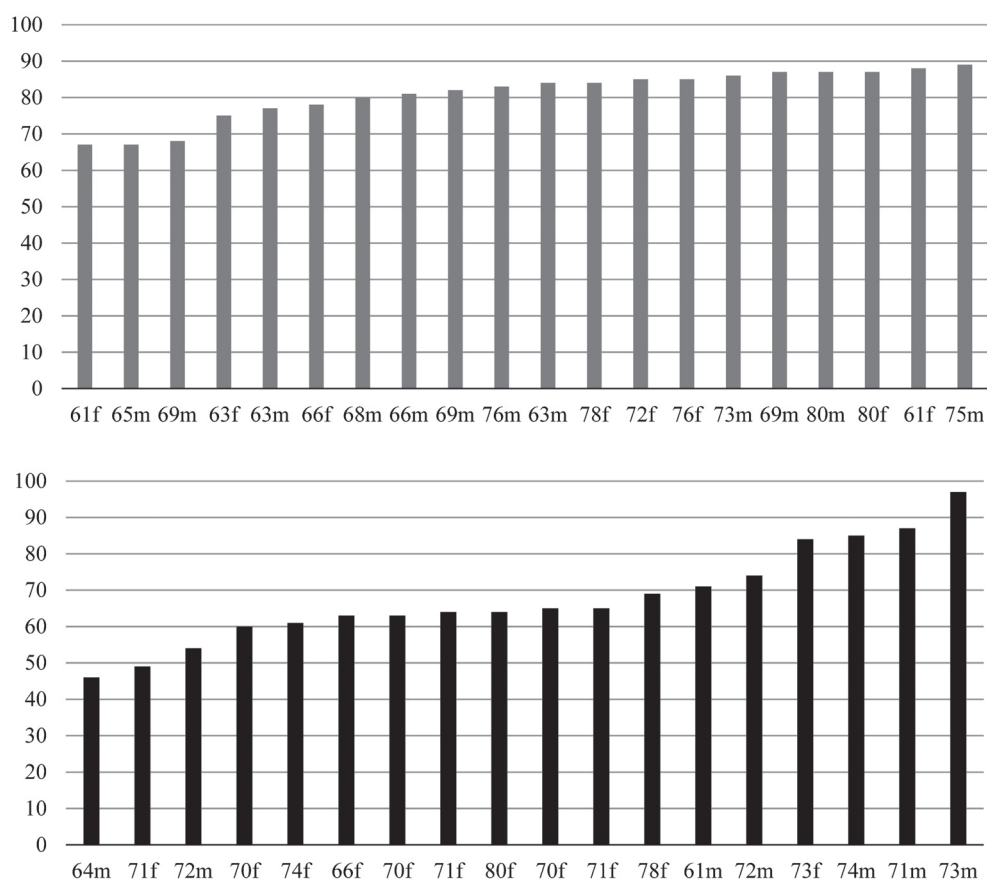


Fig. 7. Toponymic competence of respondents aged above 61 in 2013 (grey above) and 2023 (black below)

Looking at Fig. 8, we can see that compared to the other age groups, the set of place names known to all respondents is the greatest, it includes names from both the outskirts and the village center area. In 2023, the set of universally known oikonyms comprised the names of some places closer to the inner areas of the village, e.g. *Ady Endre utca*, *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca*, *Bikaistálló*, *Cigány-ér*, *Dózsa György utca*, *Felszabadulás utca*, *Hunyadi utca*, *Imre sor*, *József Attila utca*, *Két-kert közti kút*, *Pulyka-erdő*, *Táncsics utca*.



Fig. 8. Location of the names known to all respondents above 61 (red: in 2013 and 2023, black: in 2013, blue: in 2023)

4. When examining gender in relation to toponymic competence, my previous research found that men knew more names in Tépe (see Table 3): men were familiar with 8–19% more names than women in three age groups, while the average rate for the oldest was the same. The 2023 survey generally confirms this trend. The only age group in which women show better results is the youngest, however, when individual data are closer examined (female: 21.5%, male: 15%) the difference is turned out to be due to the two outstandingly high (16f: 46%) and low (11m: 5%) results. The exclusion of these results from the calculation does not affect the overall superiority of women, but the difference is found to be smaller: the average toponymic competence of women is 17% and that of men 14%.

Table 3

Distribution of toponymic competence by gender

Age group	2013		2023	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Under 20 years old	14.8%	22%	21.5%	15%
21–40 years old	46.4%	54%	30%	37%
41–60 years old	49.4%	68.7%	34%	57%
Above 61 years old	81%	81%	64%	73%

5. It is also worth comparing the survey data in terms of toponym set. The two charts illustrate a shift in toponymic competence in this area between 2013 and 2023 (see Fig. 9). To illustrate the distribution of toponymic competence across the entire toponymicon, I divided the place names into four groups. Place names in the first group are known to all respondents. In the second group, the names are known to at least three quarters of the respondents. In the third group, at least half of the respondents are familiar with the names. Finally, names known to fewer than half of the respondents belong to the fourth group.

While in the 2013 survey the number of place names known to all respondents was growing dynamically throughout the age groups, and in the oldest age group, it exceeded half of the names (1% — 8% — 18% — 52%), in today's Tépe there is a much smaller increase (1% — 5% — 7% — 22%), with only less than a quarter of the names known to all respondents aged 61 and over.

Observing the other data for the two youngest age groups, we see that the two surveys are almost identical: in 2013, 5% of the names were known to at least three quarters of the respondents, in 2023 this is 3%, while 7% and 6% can locate at least half of them respectively. The majority of the names (90% and 87%) are known to less than half of the young people in both surveys.

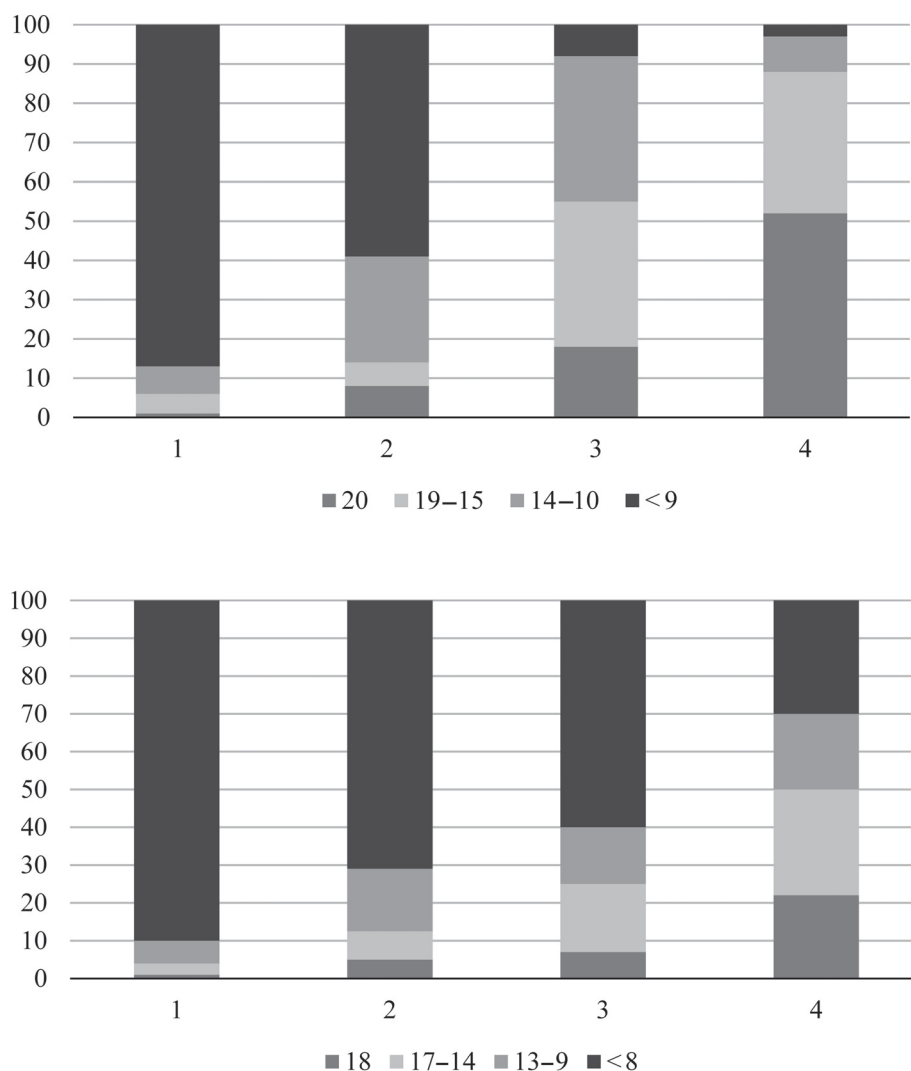


Fig. 9. Distribution of toponymic competence in terms of the whole toponymicon (above: 2013, below: 2023; 1–4 represent age groups)

The proportion of place names known to at least three quarters of respondents is similar for those aged between 21 and 40: 7.5% and 6%. In this group, there is a difference of around 10% when looking at the number of the oikonyms known to at least half of the respondents: 27% in 2013 and 16.5% in 2023, and the percentage of place names that can be located by less than 50% of the group: 59% in 2013 and 71% in 2023.

The results for the third age group show similarities in the number of place names known to at least three quarters or at least half of the respondents: 37% of the names were recognized by 75% of the respondents in both 2013 and 2023; at least 50% of the interviewees could recognize 18% of the names in 2013 and 15% — in 2023. However, there is a huge difference in the fourth group of names. In 2013, only 8% of the place names could be located by less than half of the respondents aged 41 to 60, whereas in 2023, 60% of the names fell into this category.

In 2013, due to the good toponymic competence of the oldest people, slightly more than a third of the names (36%) were known to at least three quarters of the senior respondents, while the other two sets contain only 9 and 3% of the names. By contrast, in 2023 we see a more even distribution. 28% of place names are known to at least three quarters of respondents and 20% to at least half of the interviewees. And almost a third of the place names (30%) are items that less than half of the oldest respondents are able to locate.

6. In conclusion, the trend analysis for 2013 and 2023 in Tépe highlights a change at the community level. It can be seen as a natural process that there is an increase of toponymic competence up to a certain point as age increases. If this increase were at the same rate over time, then the name awareness of today's residents of Tépe should have shown similar results across generational groups. However, the results of the 2023 survey are lower, so we should expect some (a good part) of the former toponymicon to disappear from the citizens' mental map in the future.

There are various natural, economic and social reasons for this. The natural landscape itself is also changing, with water bodies (streams and canals) drying up and temporarily running out of water. The former wells and ruins of farms are also disappearing. And the land is now being ploughed as one unit, thus the formerly individually-named fields and roads lose their names. Several people in the survey also complained that community spaces in the village have diminished, people do not get together, and so communication about the village, its past, places and place names has also lost ground.

It is also worth examining which names are more familiar to the respondents. Most place names known to at least half of the interviewees are located within the village itself, specifically in the inner area. These include street names (though not all of them) and public places such as the playground, school, mayor's office, and social care home. Locations and names outside the village that were recognized by the respondents are generally situated close to the inner area, usually within walking distance (e.g., *Békás*, *Görbe-kert*, *Halom-domb*, *Mérges*, *Mérges-kert*) or

visible from the main road (e.g., *Farkas-tanya*, *Szabó-tanya*). Additionally, some hydronyms, such as *Horgas*, *Kálló*, and *Szalányos*, should be mentioned here, as the names of larger watercourses remain widely recognized.

The trends observed in Tépe may not be unique and likely reflect broader patterns of mental map impoverishment in similar small settlements (however, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether microtoponymy in rural areas erodes more rapidly than in larger settlements). This issue is particularly pressing when considering the changing linguistic environment and the loss of toponyms, emphasizing the urgency for researchers to document as many place names as possible before they are forgotten. One of the primary missions of the *Hungarian National Toponym Registry Programme* [MNHP] is precisely this: to collect all place names within the Hungarian linguistic area. This includes not only Hungary but also regions of Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Austria, where Hungarian was or is still spoken.

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