

Officializing Indigenous Place Names: from Toponymic Silencing to Toponymic Decolonization

Kaisa Rautio Helander

Professor of Sámi Onomastics

Sámi allaskuvla | Sámi University of Applied Sciences

kaisa-rautio.helander@samiskhs.no

In the keynote presentation, I shall investigate current official use of Indigenous language place names and the effects of toponymic history on the process of officializing Indigenous place names (or toponyms). Challenges involved in the official recognition and restoration of Indigenous language toponymy will be discussed and analyzed within the framework of contemporary place name policy research and linguistic landscape theory.

I shall use examples from the Sámi region of the Arctic as a starting point when discussing the politics of place naming in Indigenous areas. I shall, in addition, also highlight the way in which naming process reflect asymmetrical power relations, the history of toponymic silencing and the impact of toponymic colonialism.

In order to be able to interpret and better understand current opposition to Indigenous place names, it is necessary to consider the role of toponymic history, which has a significant influence on the contemporary situation. As Byrnes (2001: 13) notes, "history is never a linear narrative of the past, disconnected from the present. [...] The stories of the past are inextricably connected to those of the present."

The presentation will be an example of how, in the field of place name research, new approaches are being employed in the study of questions relating to Sámi and other Indigenous place naming. The presentation will, therefore, be an example of the decolonization process in this particular field of research, a process that I have chosen to call *toponymic decolonization*.

Byrnes, Giselle 2001: *Boundary Markers. Land surveying and the colonization of New Zealand*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.