

Place Name Restoration in Haudenosaunee Territory

A Master's project in progress, by Sophie Brown
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Introduction

This poster explores the proposed research design and theoretical implications of my ongoing research into Haudenosaunee toponymy in the Upstate New York area, with specific focus on the place names of bodies of water in the Oswego River/ Finger Lakes Watershed. The aim of this project is to compile, map, and translate Haudenosaunee place names; in doing so, this project seeks to linguistically and conceptually analyze the ways these names work to describe, define and create the landscape of the region. This proposed research works to acknowledge and support indigenous relationship with the land, as well as to resist colonialist forces of erasure and distortion as they are enacted on the place names of Haudenosaunee Confederacy territory.

The Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy

The territory of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is located within what is called Upstate New York. Before the loss of much of their ancestral territory to colonialist occupation, the Haudenosaunee lived on 49, 526 square miles of land, from the Adirondack Mountains to Lake Erie and from the Susquehanna to the St. Regis River (Haudenosaunee Confederacy, 2017).

Although the Confederacy's land holdings are much reduced, this research takes the Haudenosaunee worldview as its reference, and considers the Haudenosaunee to be the lawful title holders to their original territory, and much of Upstate New York to be occupied land. Haudenosaunee place names exist across the entirety of this territory, although the names have often suffered historic and contemporary erasure and distortion at the hands of colonialist occupation. It is the violent distortion and erasure of language in the land that this restoration seeks to address.

Language Endangerment

This project by necessity navigates conditions of critical language endangerment. The six Haudenosaunee languages are the native languages of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. Some of these language communities possess native speakers in the single digits. The languages belong to the Northern Iroquoian linguistic branch, 'Iroquois' being the exonym for the Haudenosaunee people. The word 'Haudenosaunee' means "they made the house," a symbolic reflection of the unity of the Confederacy (Haudenosaunee Confederacy, 2017).

This research will examine the ways that the presence, absence, distortion and survival of place names affect and create the cultural and physical landscape. One of the goals of this research in navigating these conditions is to support the Haudenosaunee people through respectful alliance in assertion of their sovereignty.

Theoretical Underpinnings/ The Importance of Language to Study of Place

Scholarship and past work involving toponymy reflect the depth of possible meanings carried by place names; V.R. Savage suggests that these knowledges are various, and may include "landscape histories, settlement origins and patterns, physical geographies of places, sequent occupation, ethnic and political changes, nationalistic sentiments, human activities, and cultural diffusion processes" (Savage, 2009). Other scholars connect place names to memory; for example, anthropologist Nathan Wachtel writes that "the preservation of recollections rests on their anchorage in space" (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). In this way place names allow a deep historicization or a density of landscape – both of broad ecological trends and particular ecology of place – which can powerfully inform efforts of conservation and restoration.

One of the premises of this research is that damage to connection to place often translates to damage to place itself, and that the accuracy and authenticity of our environmental language is compromised when colonialist language and place names are used rather than indigenous paradigms. In Haudenosaunee territory, as elsewhere, the renaming of geographies by occupiers has been part of imperialist expansions. Names that may exist unanchored in time and space (such as Syracuse, Ithaca, Homer, and Virgil imposed on the Central New York landscape) do little to describe place itself: its ecology, its topography, or the available natural resources. These names detract from our ability to see our landscape authentically, representing what Mark Rifkin calls "the imposition of an alien set of orientations that have effects on everyday experience and regularities" (Rifkin, 2017).

This research examines the ways that Haudenosaunee place names are descriptive of memory, ecology and identity in this particular landscape. Haudenosaunee languages are temporally and spatially embedded in this region, and reflect a corresponding intimacy with particular landscape – in morphemic structure, meanings, and contextual uses. These languages originated in this North American landscape, and are thought to have evolved from the Proto-Lake Iroquoian languages, splitting into North and South Iroquoian languages 3,500 years ago (Lounsbury, 1961) – in contrast to the English that most occupants of New York State speak on an everyday basis, with origins in a Germanic linguistic corridor along the coast of the North Sea.

Methodology and Implementation

The methodology of the project will include four primary components:

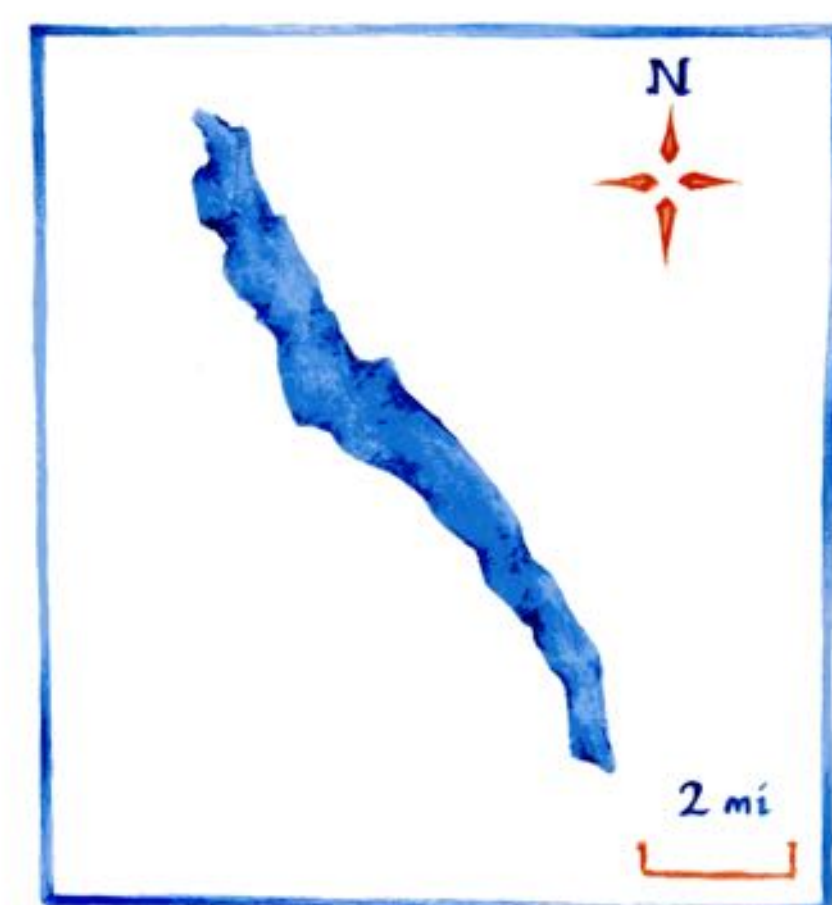
- ❖ gathering of Haudenosaunee place names from various ethnographic sources
- ❖ linguistic analysis of place names
- ❖ mapping of place names in geographical space
- ❖ community implementation of findings through education and re-naming, perhaps in support of the adoption of Haudenosaunee place names into common use.

Place name data gathering: locating Haudenosaunee place names in their most accurate geographic and linguistic form. This involves archival research into available historical sources, including historic maps (i.e. those made by French Jesuits), journals (i.e. "A Journal into Mohawk and Oneida Country," by Van den Bogaert), and other atlases or available compilations (i.e. Beauchamp's "Indian Names in New York"). Further data collection will include interviews and oral histories with native speakers or other members of the Haudenosaunee Nations, dependent on the availability and interest of the speakers and language communities.

Linguistic analysis: the translation and closer analysis of the language of the Haudenosaunee place names, under the direction of linguist Percy Abrams. The six languages are almost identical in linguistic structure, but have orthographic differences. A standard translation of Haudenosaunee language deconstructs Haudenosaunee word units into individual morphemes, and translates those morphemes both separately and in the context of the larger word. I use the 'five line translation' method, explained further below, taught by Percy Abrams; this method is thorough, visually accessible to non-Haudenosaunee speakers, and expressive of the internal mechanisms of the language.

Mapping: the production of digital and physical maps that situate the place names and corresponding geographic features within the Haudenosaunee landscape. This component works to record and situate place name data, and describe the spatial dimension of place name relationship with land. The research works in parallel with and hopes to complement indigenous mapping projects such as the Gwich'in Place Names and Story Atlas; the Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names in Canada project; and The Decolonial Atlas.

Community implementation: sharing data and conclusions with communities of interest. This component will work to support efforts of decolonization through (re)visualizing and (re)naming the landscape. The research is designed to incorporate indigenous goals into the project, and in its structure invites future collaboration. The restoration works in parallel with and hopes to complement indigenous language revitalization programs such as Percy Abram's Iroquois Linguistics program at Syracuse University; language classes at Kanatsiioharake Mohawk Community, and the immersion program at the Akwesasne Freedom School, among others. It is one of the underpinnings of the research that using oppressive languages enforces oppressive paradigms, and that a decolonization of landscape includes efforts towards a decolonization of language.



SKaniata:ra:es

According to The Decolonial Atlas (Delaronde, Engel, 2015), the Mohawk name of Skaneateles Lake is Skaniatares. We can break down this name as follows:

S – ka – niatar – es
S – 3NA – lake – be long
"the lake is long, being long, or in the state of being long"



Kaniatarisio
Ganyadaio'

According to The Decolonial Atlas (Delaronde, Engel, 2015), the Mohawk name of Lake Ontario is Kaniatarisio. According to the Cayuga Dictionary, the Cayuga name of the lake is Ganyadaio'. We can break down these names as follows:

Ka – niatar – isio (Mohawk)
3NA – lake – nice

Ga – nyada – iyo – ' (Cayuga)
3Z/NA – lake – be nice/good – inchoative
"the lake that is nice, or 'nice lake"



The Finger Lakes Region of New York, part of traditional Haudenosaunee territory. Image: Sasha Brown, Robin Marks Tily

Pilot Project

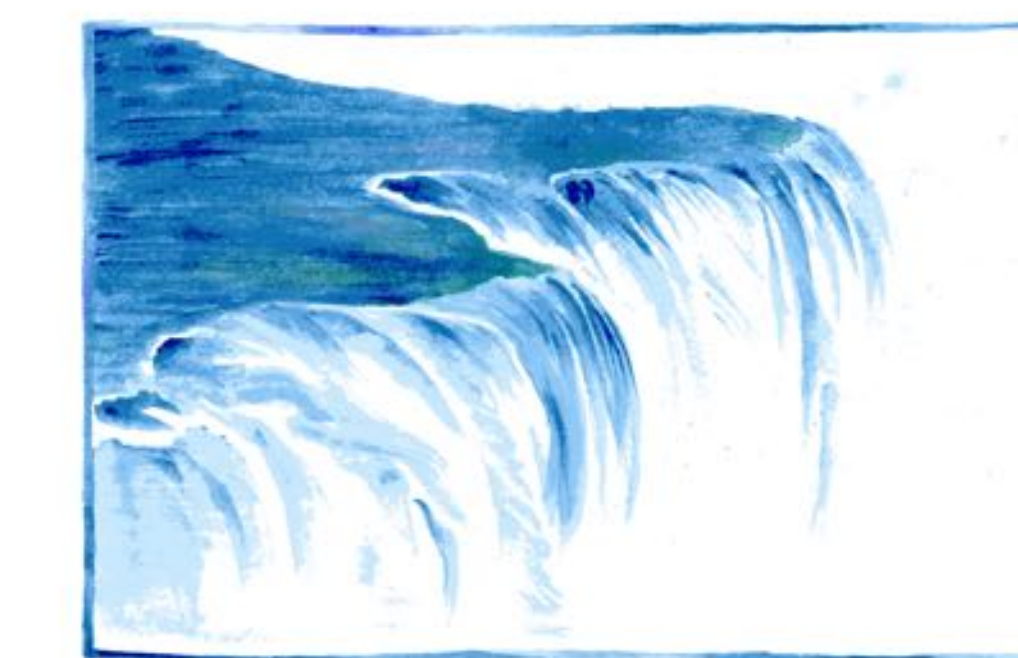
In the winter of 2016-17 I conducted a pilot project focused on the Haudenosaunee names of a few large bodies of water in Haudenosaunee territory. You will find preliminary parts of this research (the lakes, their names, and a basic linguistic analysis) included on this poster. The extended linguistic and theoretical analysis will be available on request.

Five Line Translation Model

The five line translation method that I use here in the pilot project and in the larger research includes 1) the Haudenosaunee text, 2) the Haudenosaunee word unit broken down into morphemes, 3) the identification of the morphemes as parts of speech and their individual translations, 4) the translation of the word units and 5) a 'free' or discretionary translation of the line of text, which takes context and syntax into consideration. Below is an example of a five-line translation, excerpted from my translation of a traditional Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (Brown, 2017):

swatahuhsi:yóst
swa – at – ahuhs – iyo – st
you3-SRF-hearing-be.good-CAUS-IMP
make your ears good
'Listen well'

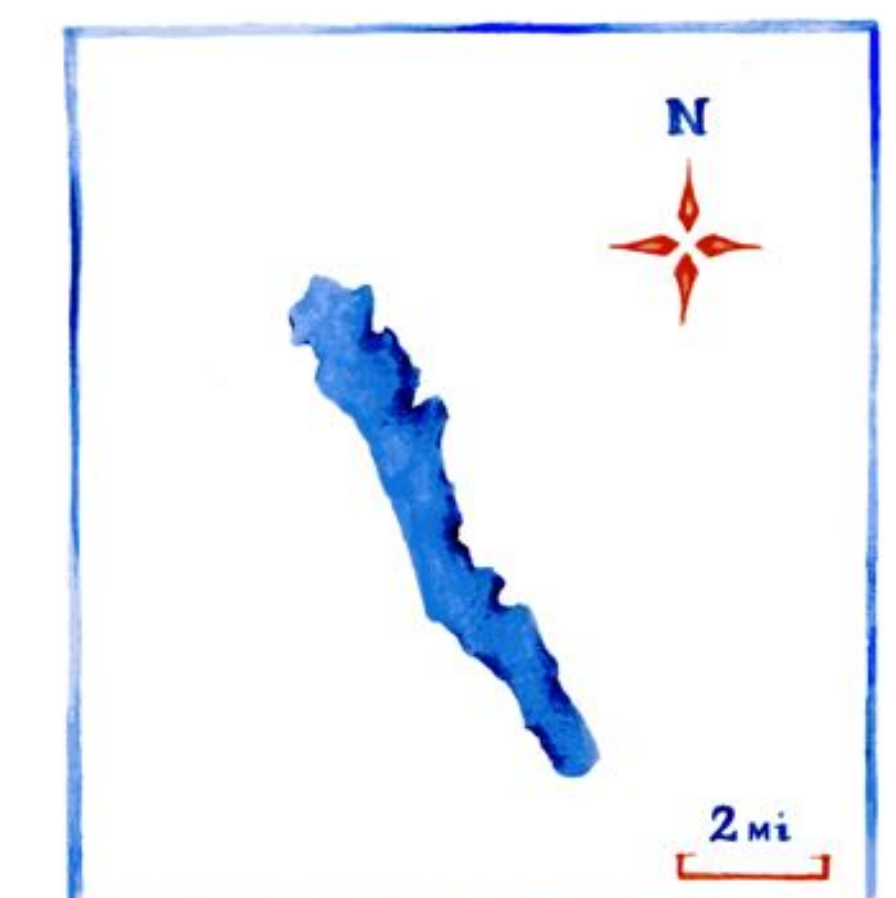
*Haudenosaunee text
breakdown into morphemes
identification of morphemes
translation of word units
free/ discretionary translation*



Tgahnáwēhta'

According to the Cayuga Dictionary (Froman et al), the Cayuga name of Niagara Falls Tgahnáwēhta'. We can break this name down as follows:

T – ga – hnaw – ē – ht – a'
Cislocative – 3N/ZSA – rapids – descend – Causative – Factual
'rapids are caused to descend here'



Tewaskóhon

According to The Decolonial Atlas (Delaronde, Engel, 2015), the Mohawk name of Owasco Lake is Tewaskóhon. We can break this name down as follows:

T – w – askw – o – hon
Cislocative – 3NA – roof – be in water – distributive
'roofs in the water here'

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