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Place name morphology and the people of Los Angeles[1]

One element of derivational morphology that receives little attention is the morphology for place of residence or origin, usually involving an affix on a stem consisting of the name of the place. Perhaps the consistency of this morphology in many well-known languages makes much discussion of this topic moot. The Romanic languages share the (-*an*-) suffix, as in *Mexicano*, *Italiano*, *Parisian*. German retains the (-*er*), in *Berliner*, *Hamburger*. A number of languages that are spoken in an area extending from India, Western Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula use the suffix (-*i*), *Hindi*, *Afghani*, *Tehrani*, *Iraqi*, *Israeli* — this sharing of the morpheme is not a surprising outcome after millennia of language contact, resulting from trade and conquest, across the region. Northern Chinese compounds *ren* 'person' with the place name, as in *Zhonguoren*, (center kingdom person) 'Chinese' and *Beijingren*.

In the case of English, though, the situation is considerably more complex, with an item-oriented assortment of morphemes, borrowed and inherited, applied to the purpose. English employs the Latinic affixes (-*an*) and its allomorphs and (-*ese*), as in *American* and *African*, *Chicagoan* and *Ohioan*, *Canadian*, and in *Chinese*, *Vietnamese*, *Senagalese*, along with the inherited (-*er*), in *Londoner*, *New Yorker*, and *Detroiter*, and (-*ish*) in *English* and *Flemish*. English inclines to retain native suffixes along with place names, such as (-*i*) in items from the aforementioned Central and Western Asian languages and those of the Arabic Peninsula. In other cases it borrows the morpheme along with the name of the place, (-*ite*) as in *Muscovite*, from Russian, and (-*er*) in German place names, *Hamburger*, *Berliner*.

Another element of the picture in English involves morphophonemic variation in the place name morpheme system. We have *Oregon* and *Boston*, but *Oregonian* and *Bostonian* [‘orəgən ~ orə‘goʊniən], [‘bastən ~ bas‘toʊniən], with alternation in stress and in the final vowel, *Florida* and *Canada*, but *Floridian* and *Canadian* [‘florədə ~ flər‘ɪdiən], [‘cænədə ~ cə‘neɪdiən], employing the palatal allomorph, with alternation in stress and in the penultimate vowel, and the aforementioned *Moscow* and *Muscovite* [‘mascaʊ ~ ‘məscəvaɪt], among numerous others.

A central principle holds that our knowledge of the morphology system, including these place name morphemes, is part of our knowledge of our language. This principle is unequivocal when applied to languages with one single morpheme to serve this function; no question can arise about which morpheme is to be supplied in these languages. In contrast, taken as a whole, the English system contains a good deal of material to acquire, and some of it is accessed in the learned stratum. Can we have the same confidence in English, where the system is considerably more complex?

Because the English system is item oriented, and subject to morphophonemic alternation at that, the accepted morpheme applied to any particular place name does not result from rule application (e.g., supply [-*i*], as in Persian), but has become conventional throughout the overall speech community. What we find, however, is that some items have not enjoyed a sufficiently wide currency over a long enough period to have become associated with a conventional morpheme. *Denver* (Colorado) is said not to be associated with a conventional place name morpheme, and certainly no one I am familiar with could supply such a morpheme with the assurance that that is *the* morpheme for it in English. *Tustin*, the name of a small suburban city in Orange County, California, also lacks a recognizable morpheme that can be supplied. While in China, I was asked by a number of English learners what to call someone from Beijing

(Shanghai seems to be served conventionally with [-*ese*], *Shanghainese*); my English produces *Beijinger*, but it is not clear that that is broadly accepted. In these cases, when the communicative need arises, we supply the morpheme that our English suggests to us on the spot, but we can have no confidence that the outcome is the conventional or accepted word.

This question occurred to me some while back when I was somewhat rudely advised that the place name morpheme my English competence supplied for natives of the city of Los Angeles was "wrong." *Angeleno*(*s*), I was advised, is the "correct" form. Since I was born, and have lived for most of my life, in the Los Angeles area, I found this surprising indeed. So I decided to study the question.

The dictionaries did not offer much useful help. The *World Book Dictionary* lists *Angeleno*, as does the *American Heritage Dictionary* and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers *Angeleno* [ænʤəlinəʊ], a borrowing from the Spanish [-ano] with the default grammatical masculine inflection, but the pronunciation cited reflects unmistakable anglicization in the reduction of the final vowel. The first citation noted, from *California of South* II, is dated 1888, at least two generations after English speakers occupied the area in any numbers. The publication appears to be a travelogue type magazine with scintillating information about an exotic location in this new state. As used in the sentence cited, "Governor Pico is still a resident of Los Angeles, and any Angeleño will cheerfully point him out to the inquiring stranger," the word cited smacks of a fashionable sounding neo-hispanicism.

A subsequent entry in *OED* from *Chamber's Jrnl.* in 1922 appears to follow the fashionable travelogue trend, "A true Angelenos [sic] will hardly ever admit the fact." ('Sic' occurs in OED citation.) Here, despite the presence of the singular indefinite article, the plural

form is cited, a highly anomalous outcome for a conventional item in the morphology. If we take the (-*s*) plural as supplied by English, we must believe that a writer in an established English language publication would use the singular article with an indefinite plural noun (where no article at all would be called for). It seems more likely that the usage is an imitation of the Spanish word, and that the writer does not recognize that the Spanish (-*s*) at the end marks plural. *OED* also cites *Webster* in 1934 with *Angeleno*, and we see that the item was elevated to the editorial policy of the Los Angeles Times in 1948.

Another interesting development is another form cited in the *OED*, *Los Angeleno* [las ænʤəlinəʊ] from a 1960 *Guardian* article, along with later citations from the *New York Review of Books*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and the *Times*. Citations for this form are not limited only to locales outside of the United States or even outside of California. A sportswriter for a major Southern California newspaper for over thirty years uses *Los Angelenos* in an article[2], as does a television personality on a Los Angeles network affiliate[3]. This raises even more questions. How is it that the article *Los* is supplied? This strikes me as a hypercorrection, perhaps originated at a copy editor's desk: "Well, gee, the name of the city is *Los Angeles*, shouldn't we put *Los* in the word?" And if *Angeleno* were the settled norm, how is it that a competing form springs to life, at least in print journalism, within only a few decades? Given the word's short and peculiar history in English, it strikes me more and more as the product of editorial desks, not the outcome of borrowing by native speakers of the sort we see in *taco* and *Anglo*.

AHD lists *Angeleno*(*s*), as does *Meriam-Webster* and *Encarta World Dictionary*, each assigning the etymology to Spanish *angeleño*. But here we encounter a very strange datum. The initial citation in *OED*, also *Angeleño*, with *ñ*, signifying the palato-alveolar nasal of Spanish. This spelling alone is curious; other known Spanish loans use English orthography, that is, -ny-,

to represent the pronunciation, e.g., *canyon*. But even more peculiar is the fact that while (*-eño*) occurs in Spanish for a number of items, such as *malagueño* for the inhabitants of Malagá, Spain, or *salvadoreño* for El Salvador, and *madrilène*, Madrid,[4] it does not occur in *Los Angeles*; Spanish applies the (*-eno*) allomorph to *Los Angeles*, [anxeleno]. Furthermore, the *OED* citation transcribes the first suffix vowel as [*i*], not [*e*]. Not only had the Great Vowel Shift been complete for most English dialects for three hundred years (that is, an original [*e*] would not have shifted to [*i*]), a spelling would not have been selected that further contradicts conventional contemporaneous transcription norms. It strikes me as very strange indeed that English would have (1) borrowed the word but with a form — the pronunciation including *ñ* — that did not occur in the source language for that item, and (2) used the source language orthography to spell it, or (3) represented the English vowel (*-i*) pronunciation contrary to conventional spellings.

These facts constitute evidence that the form, as represented, can not have resulted from a language contact situation where a spoken form was acquired by members of another language community in contact and then transcribed. This form appears to be a self-conscious and intentional (but erroneous) emulation of a Spanish looking and sounding form, a kind of fashionable hypercorrection, garnishing an article in a trendy publication like a dab of orthographic *salsa*.

After mulling this question for a while, I commissioned a group of students to help me conduct some field research among Southern California English speakers. This came about after a class discussion in which I posed the question, "People from New York are called *New Yorkers*, people from Chicago are called *Chicagoans*, but what are people from Los Angeles called?" Members of my class, General Education students taking an Introduction to Language and

Linguistics course, did not have a consensus in their responses, so I gave them a list of five cities and asked them to interview their friends to find out what they call persons from those locations.

Ideally, one would like to have a control feature in such a study to ensure that only native speakers, or native speakers born in a certain location, supply data for the study. Among my students, and in the Southern California environment, one can have no assurances about satisfying this condition, especially when informants are selected by untrained undergraduates being bribed with extra credit. These reservations notwithstanding, I was able to eliminate data from international students and members of known immigrant speech communities, and while the data surely includes some responses from informants who grew up around immigrant, non-English speaking families, the body of data gathered gives a good picture of the output of the Southern California speech community. The results may be surprising.

Informants were asked to supply the word for a person from New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Tustin. A total of 401 responses were logged for *Los Angeles*. Of those, 140 responded with *Angeleno* or *Los Angeleno*, while 168 used the (-*an*) suffix, or a variant — *Angelan*, *Angelean*, *Los Angelan*, *Los Angelean* (and a few *LA'an*). (Some respondents offered [-*er*] and [–*ite*]). I do not think the specific numbers are important, nor is it possible to absolutely ascertain which responses were produced by native born speakers. But the data certainly show that the putatively borrowed morpheme (-*eno*), albeit pronounced [ino], is far from universal in Southern California.

Despite the support of dictionaries and newspaper editorial policy, a substantially greater number of the respondents report using the more traditional (-*an*) morpheme. This variation in morphemes supplied for Los Angeles does much to confirm the position that the (-*eno*) morpheme originates in the learned register, not in the acquired (spoken) morphology. It does

appear to me that the spread of the morpheme with (*Los*) *Angeles* is the product of a prescriptive trend.

The results of my little study have further implications regarding the principled assumption that the acquired knowledge of our language includes morphemes of this type. The fact that fewer than half the respondents supplied the morpheme cited in dictionaries and favored by copy editors, while greater than half produced a traditional English morpheme with the name of a principal United States city, suggests that, at least in English, where the place name morphology system is item-oriented and morphophonemically variable, knowledge of this part of the morpheme system is often more learned than acquired, and that output from the two categories of knowledge, the learned and the acquired, can conflict.

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[1] This is a modified version of the paper that first appeared in *California Linguistic Notes*.
[2] Whicker, M. (1999)
[3] Weir, B. (1999)
[4] I am indebted to Jack Miles for these data.

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