



Close to my heart: Meanings associated with places near and far

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State of the art

'Place' is space with associated meaning (Massey, 2000). There is very little linguistic research into place language (Tenbrink, 2019) despite the clear role of language for place concepts (Cresswell, 2014).

Corpus

Bilingual data: Welsh and English.
72 respondents (21 in Welsh; 50 in English; 1 in both).
3648 Welsh words, 9491 English words.
Questions on demographics/background and perceptions of three local areas.

- Each area individually
- Differences between areas
- Effect of location on meaning
- Place boundaries
- Effect of potential changes on perceptions

References

Cresswell, T. 2014. *Place: an introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.
Massey, D. 2000. Living in Wythenshawe. In Borden, I., Kerr, J., Rendell, J. and Pivaro, A. (eds), *The Unknown City Contesting Architecture and Social Space*. London: MIT Press.
Tenbrink, T. 2020. What spatial environments mean. *JOSIS Journal of Spatial Information Science* 20:57:63

Aims

We aimed to identify the contribution of **spatial proximity terms** to the expression of appreciation of place. This is part of a larger project aiming to explore and understand the language of place attachment.

Method

Language indicating spatial proximity and accessibility was identified and analysed relative to language indicating place appreciation/attachment, using Cognitive Discourse Analysis (CODA) – i.e., identifying patterns in linguistic expression beyond capturing content of discourse data.

Results

Proximity terms: 1.12% of Welsh words, 0.9% of English words

near, close, doorstep, local, access, proxim-, here, not far (and Welsh equivalents), used in the following ways:

- purely spatial “a lot to see here”,
- purely attachment based “I couldn’t live anywhere but here”,
- a mixture of both “I live near[by]...so it means more to me than the other areas”.

Expressions of emotional closeness are associated with evidence of personal experience in an area, and with time spent in the area.

Terms expressing distance were rare, but tended to be metaphorical uses expressing an appreciation of being ‘away’ from modern life.

Next steps

Identify further features and patterns of the language and discourse of place attachment.
Identify and distinguish culturally meaningful places based on how people talk about them.

Conclusion

This study suggests a qualitative difference between appreciation of location generally and ‘place’ associated with spatial proximity and entrenched experience.

