

Geographical markers in church names: A synergy of corpus linguistics and linguistic landscape methodologies

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Geographical markers in church names: A synergy of corpus linguistics and linguistic landscape methodologies

Abstract: This paper combines approaches in corpus linguistics and linguistic landscape to examine *geographical markers* (GMs) in church names. Specifically, the study seeks to identify, classify and determine the “grounding” or positioning of GMs in church names. The study is based on the first-ever specialized corpus of 6600 running words of church names and Linguistic Landscape data of approximately 1000 posters gathered from multiple sources in Ghana. I read through the data, manually prepared a list of the GMs and converted the data into computer-readable format. After

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this, the concordance tool in *AntConc* (v. 3.5.8) was used to search for the GMs in the corpus. The identified GMs were manually examined in the concordance lines to determine their forms, classifications and grounding in the church names. The study found globe, continent, nation, city and institution-oriented GMs. Further, the GMs were found to be either fore, mid, or backgrounded in the church names. The study proposes a method for combining CL and LL in onomastic research and a cline to guide in determining whether a corpus linguistic study in onomastic is corpus-based, driven or mixed.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, linguistic landscape, church names, onomastic research, theme.

Marqueurs géographiques dans les noms des églises : une synergie de la linguistique de corpus et des méthodologies en paysage linguistique

Résumé : Cet article combine des approches en linguistique de corpus et en paysage linguistique pour examiner les « marqueurs géographiques » (MG) dans les noms des églises. Plus précisément, l'étude vise à identifier, classer et déterminer le « fondement » ou le positionnement des MG dans les noms des églises. L'étude est basée sur le tout premier corpus spécialisé de 6600 mots courants de noms des églises et de données sur le paysage linguistique d'environ 1000 affiches recueillies auprès de sources multiples au Ghana. D'abord, nous avons lu les données, préparé manuellement une liste des MG et converti les données en format lisible par ordinateur. Ensuite, l'outil de concordance dans *AntConc* (v. 3.5.8) a été utilisé pour rechercher les MG dans le corpus. Les MG identifiés ont été examinés manuellement dans les lignes de concordance afin de déterminer leurs formes, classifications et leurs enclaves dans les noms des églises. L'étude a révélé des MG axés sur le globe, les continents, les nations, les villes et les institutions. En outre, les MG se sont avérés être soit, au premier plan, au milieu ou en arrière-plan dans les noms des églises. L'étude propose une méthode pour combiner LC (linguistique de corpus) et PL (paysage linguistique) dans la recherche onomastique et une ligne de guidage pour déterminer si une étude linguistique de corpus en onomastique est basée sur un corpus, pilotée par un corpus ou hybride.

Mots-clés : Linguistique de corpus, paysage linguistique, noms d'églises, recherche onomastique, thème.

Geographische Markierer in Kirchennamen: eine Synergie aus Korpuslinguistik und Methoden der linguistischen Landschaft

Zusammenfassung: Der vorliegende Beitrag kombiniert Herangehensweisen der Korpuslinguistik mit denen der Sprachlandschaft zur Untersuchung von geographischen Markierern (GM) in Kirchennamen. Ganz spezifisch nimmt sich die Studie vor, die Grundlagen bzw. die Positionierung von GM in Kirchennamen zu identifizieren, zu klassifizieren und zu bestimmen. Sie basiert auf einem – erstspezialisierten - Korpus von 6600 für Kirchenamen geläufigen Wörtern aber auch auf Daten der Sprachlandschaft und zwar beinahe 1000 Poster aus den verschiedensten Quellen in Ghana. Die erhobenen Daten wurden durchgesehen und zu einem für den Computer lesbaren Format verarbeitet und eine Liste von GM wurde manuell erstellt. Darauf wurde das Konkordanz-Programm *AntConc* (v. 3.5.8) zur Suche nach GM im Korpus verwendet. Die identifizierten GM wurden mit Hilfe des

Konkordanz-Programms manuell untersucht, um ihre Formen, Klassifikationen und Grundlagen mit Blick auf die Kirchennamen untersucht. Die Studie fand globus-, kontinent-, nation-, stadt- und institutionsausgerichtete GM heraus. Außerdem erwiesen sich die GM entweder als im Vordergrund oder in der Mitte oder im Hintergrund stehend in den Kirchennamen. Die Studie schlägt eine Methode für die Kombination der Korpuslinguistik mit der Sprachlandschaft in der Onomastik-Forschung ebenso vor wie einen Gradienten, der dazu wegweisend dienen sollte, zu bestimmen, ob eine Onomastik-Studie in der Korpuslinguistik korpusbasiert, analytisch-interpretatorischer Art oder gemischt ist.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Korpuslinguistik, linguistische Landschaft, Kirchenamen, Onomastik-Forschung, Thema.

Geographical markers in church names: A synergy of corpus linguistics and linguistic landscape methodologies

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1. Prolegomenon

Almost every field of study grapples with issues on methodology. The field of onomastics in general plus ecclesionymy (the study of church names) in particular is no exception. Over the years, several methods have been employed in onomastic research to meet the growing intricacies in names (see [Kotilainen 2011](#)). [Motschenbacher \(2020a: 89\)](#) asserts that “onomastic research has drawn on a broad range of methods to shed light on topics such as the history and etymology of names, the meaning and grammar of names and the social relevance of naming practices.” Researchers continue to adapt methods foreign to onomastics towards the development of appropriate methodologies to meet the growing interest and diversities in the field. In recent times, scholars have employed Corpus Linguistics (CL) to offer computerized investigation into names ([Motschenbacher 2020a, 2020b](#); [Nick 2017, 2020](#)) (for details on onomastic studies that have employed CL, refer to [Motschenbacher 2020a](#)). [Puzey \(2011\)](#) also examined the possibilities of employing linguistic landscape methodology in onomastic research.

Another emerging methodological paradigm in onomastics research is the combination of theoretically distinct methodologies. This paper, thus, combines CL and Linguistic Landscape (LL) which are distinct in relation to their respective approaches that are influenced by their diverse theoretical orientations ([Baker et al. 2009](#)). The synergy of CL and LL will offer a “more detailed, more complex and descriptively more adequate picture of names in actual language use” ([Motschenbacher 2020a: 97](#)). Whereas CL ensures strict compliance to the “principle of total accountability” ([Leech 1992: 112](#)) in order to avoid cherry-picking which hitherto characterized onomastic research ([Baker et al. 2009](#)), LL corroborates the corpus evidence with language in display ([Puzey 2011](#); [Tan 2011](#)). These approaches are combined to explore an unstudied onomastic phenomenon, *geographical marker* (GM), defined as any word or string of words that indicates the location/geospatial or operational jurisdiction of a church.

Previous researchers on church names have focused on the use of saint names ([Zelinsky 2002](#); [Fairclough 1960](#)), the patterns and structure ([Awukuvi & Israel 2018](#); [Kouega 2018](#); [Zelinsky 2002](#)), translation ([Pan 2018](#)) and language choice ([Akoto & Afful 2021](#)). These studies, generally, provided

insights into the grammar of church names (Awukuvi & Israel 2018; Kouega 2018; Zelinsky 2002) and the effect of socio-cultural factors on the meaning and structure of church names (Akoto & Afful 2021; Awukuvi & Israel 2018; Kouega 2018). Much is still, therefore, left to be explored about church names, particularly how certain onomastic resources are employed to present the socio-geographical identity of churches. Thus, the present study will reveal how church namers employ GMs to project themselves, the churches and the church members. Similarly, it will also boost the scholarship on church names which has, in the last decade, seen resurgence, particularly in Africa (Akoto & Afful 2021; Awukuvi & Israel 2018; Kouega 2018).

The subsequent section offers an overview of the religious landscape in Ghana. It is followed by the corpus and the procedure for analysis, and then the analysis and discussion. Finally, a conclusion, implications of the findings and recommendations for future research are offered.

2. Ghanaian socio-religious landscape

Ghana has an interesting religious demography. Nonterah (2016) asserts that religion is central in the consciousness and private and public lives of almost every Ghanaian. Atiemo (2010) thus describes religion in Ghana as a spiritual capital, which refers to “the widespread belief in Ghana that spiritual power resides in the invisible world and can be accessed for improving the quality of life, and the influence this belief has on private and public life in Ghana”. Ghana, then Gold Coast, practiced several forms of spirituality before the introduction of Christianity and Islam. The country is now characterized by religious pluralism with three leading religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. There, however, exist some syncretistic bodies that combine elements of other religions such as Christianity and Islam with traditional religious practices and beliefs. The 2010 population census shows the religious demographics as follows.

Table 1: Religious demographics of Ghana. (Source: Government of Ghana 2012.)

Affiliation	2010 census
Christian	71.2%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pentecostal • Charismatic • Evangelical 	28.3%
Protestant	18.4%
Catholic	13.1%
Other Christian	11.4%
Muslim	17.6%
Traditional	5.2%
None	5.2%
Other	0.8%

The figures reveal Ghana's high religiosity index (Nonterah 2016) and also affirm Sarpong's (1977: 1) assertion that "the Ghanaian is by nature highly religious". The constitution legislates religious liberty or freedom of worship, by allowing religious diversity. The laws of the country prohibit or detest all forms of discriminations or abuses based on religious affiliations. This has culminated into minority religions such as Judaism, Hindu, Shintoism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Interestingly, there has been a peaceful co-existence between the followers of these religions and has resulted into interfaith bodies (e.g. National Peace Council) and intermarriages. This is evident in the high religious tolerance in the country. It is common in Ghana to find people from varied religious backgrounds coexisting in politics, education, business and governance. The state recognizes the major celebrations of the two major religions (i.e. Christianity and Islam) as national holidays – Christmas, Easter Monday and Good Friday for Christians; and Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, for Muslims. In recent times, the leaders of the African Traditional Religions have also agitated for a similar recognition but has not yet received government approval.

Christianity was introduced into the then Gold Coast by the European missionaries in the 15th century. Since then, it has spread rapidly to become the leading religion in Ghana. Interestingly, all the presidents of the country since its independence have belonged to the Christian faith. Table 1 reveals that Christianity constitutes over 70% of the country's total population. Christians in Ghana belong to different denominations such as Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Baptists and Charismatics. Within each denomination are defined organizations/institutions with their doctrines and leaderships informed by foundational traditions of their respective denominations. These *organizations* are what we refer to as *church*.

Church has multiple meanings and the context of use reveals the one implied. It could refer to a community of believers, a building in which Christians worship, and Christian institution with its own administrative structures and ecclesiastical polity (Zelinsky 2002). This indicates that a church has narrow and broad definitions. This paper, however, subscribes to the broad one which concerns Christian believers with distinct name (registered or unregistered), liturgical practices, doctrines and designated place of worship. Hence a distinction is made between *church* and *para-church organizations* that are inter-denominational in nature and hence members of these belong to their *mother churches*. Again, a distinction is made between a *main church* and a *branch*. The main church has a central administration that controls all the *branches*. However, the branches, depending on the sub-naming policies of the *main* can also adopt a name but must certainly include the name of the *main church*. For example, all branches of *The Assemblies of God Church* add identity markers as markers of distinctiveness to distinguish one branch from the other, hence, *Miracle Temple Assemblies of God*, and *Assemblies of God Ghana (Liberty Assembly)*. In this study, the corpus built contain names of the main churches only.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus linguistic landscape

This paper combines approaches in Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Linguistic Landscape (LL) to examine geographical markers (GMs) in church names. Interestingly, both CL and LL are inspired by qualitative and quantitative paradigms to undertaking linguistic research (Motschenbacher 2020a; Tufi & Blackwood & Robert 2010; Leeman & Modan 2009; Teubert 2005; Meyer 2002).

CL arguably is neither a branch nor a theory of language but a methodology to language study (Leech 1992), which relies on “large collections of electronically stored, naturally occurring texts” (Baker et al. 2009: 274). Hyland (2009: 28) submits that “corpus studies are therefore based on both qualitative and quantitative methods, using evidence of *frequency* and *association* as starting points for interpretation.” Generally, there exist corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches in CL (Tognini-Bonelli 2001). The two approaches differ in terms of their goals (Biber 2009; Tognini-Bonelli 2001). Essentially, the corpus-based approach seeks “to analyze the systematic patterns of variation and use for those predefined linguistic features” to validate a pre-existing theory/hypothesis. However, with corpus-driven approach, linguistic constructs themselves emerge from the analysis of a corpus to draw a new conclusion, which may result in a new theory (Biber 2009; Tognini-Bonelli 2001). Frankel & Devers (2000) maintain that “distinct goals require distinct research design.” Consequently, in both corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches, there is a difference in the design to the research that adopts any of the approaches (Biber 2009). In a corpus-based study, the size and composition of the corpus may be modelled after previous studies (Akoto 2020; Biber 2009), or if the sizes differ, a common nominalization base may be used. The second difference is based on the logic underpinning the two approaches. Corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches are informed by deductive and inductive logic respectively (Biber 2009). Studies that adopt corpus-based approach are based on pre-existing theories, implying that relatively much is known about such studies’ problems. On the other, in corpus-driven approach, less or nothing is known about the problem being investigated, given that it attempts “to uncover new linguistic constructs through inductive analysis of corpora” (Biber 2009).

Although there are arguably clear-cut conceptual distinctions between these two approaches, there are no parameters for defining the extent to which a study is termed corpus-based, corpus-driven or mixed. The difference between them is, therefore, a matter of degree, suggestive of a continuum –an issue this study addresses. A study may be said to be consistent with any of the approaches based on how much of it is already known, and how much emerges from the

an easy way of defining the approach adopted in an onomastic study. With the above parameters, one can consider the dominant features of a study to label it appropriately as either corpus-based approach, corpus-driven approach or mixed. On the mixed, the predominant features will determine whether there is a balance or imbalance in favor of one of the approaches. The use of corpus-based or corpus-driven approach borders on pragmatism since, in some cases, exclusive use of one may not sufficiently reveal all that there are about a phenomenon (Tognini-Bonelli 2001).

Linguistic Landscape (LL), on the other hand, is construed as the “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 23) or “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 25). Over the years, the scope of LL has developed beyond language use in public space only to semi-public and non-public spaces (Gorter 2018). Interestingly, this development supports the multidisciplinary nature of the field which is described as “somewhere at the junction of sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and media studies” (Sebba 2010). LL relies on photographic, visual and sign data (Gorter 2018; Taylor-Leech 2012). In LL research, a distinction is made between two actors: top-down (institutional) and bottom/down-up (individual) in the “symbolic construction of the public space” (Shohamy & Gorter 2009: 10). The top-down actors involve government, or government-related “agencies which in one way or another act under the control of local or central policies. On the other hand, the down-up actors concern private institutions or individuals or “associative or cooperative actors who enjoy the autonomy of action.” In this study, the church falls within the down-up category of LL actors. The names of churches constitute part of LL since it (LL) involves all “the linguistic items found in the public space” (Shohamy 2006: 110).

Distinct theoretical frameworks inform both CL and LL, “their respective approaches to analysis are influenced by their informing theoretical concepts” (Baker et al. 2009: 274). It is important to note that whenever two distinct approaches are synergized in research, one will likely be subservient to the other or there will be a balance (Baker et al. 2009). The former results in a corpus-assisted LL study and the latter LL-assisted corpus study. The present study draws on approaches from these two fields for its analysis. It can thus be said that the present study is an LL-assisted corpus-driven study since the LL data are only employed to corroborate the conclusions drawn from the corpus. In a nutshell, while I relied on the CL for the quantitative part of the study, I also relied on LL data to provide evidence of the geographical markers from signage to give an actual display of these in the socio-religious landscape in Ghana.

3.2. Corpus and LL data

The study uses a corpus (CNGhana Corpus) of 1654 church names with 848-word types, and 6600-word tokens, and approximately 1000 LL data gathered over a ten-year period (2009–2010) from Ghana. The data of church names were gathered from both online (i.e. websites of the three leading Christian church councils which are Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Ghana Christian Council, National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches) and news outlets such as *Ghanaweb.com*. Generally, the data from these sources constitute almost 15% of the gathered church names. The remaining 85% were collected from offline multi-sources involving billboards, posters, banners, souvenirs and funeral posters, and a directory of church names in Ghana (Opoku 1970). It must be noted that only the names of the main churches (see Figure 2) were included in the corpus, contrary to Pan (2018) and Zelinsky (2002).



Figure 2: The names of a main church and a branch

Figure 2 indicates that the name of the main church is *Global Evangelical Church* with a branch named *Bethel Chapel* located at Cape Coast. One key reason for excluding the names of the sub-branches was that they were almost always followed by city-oriented GMs, as shown in Figure 1. This will unduly affect the frequency profiling of the GMs in favor of the city-oriented ones.

3.3. Procedure for analysis

The present study has a three-pronged focus: to identify GMs in church names, classify them and discuss their “grounding” or positioning. Therefore, I manually searched through the corpus and identified all GMs for a complete prelist of them. After that, I used the concordance tool in *AntConc* (v. 3.5.8) (Anthony 2018) to search for the individual GMs. Thereafter, I classified all the GMs following the “form-to-function” principle (Motschenbacher 2020a: 98). I further examined the concordance lines to determine the “grounding” of

all the GMs. In the discussion, I relied on the LL data and the corpus to support the GMs' use in church names.

GM is defined as any word or string of words that indicates the location or the geospatial or operational jurisdiction of a church. Against this, for the first focus, I identified all such expressions that communicate or reveal the defined operational confines of the church. After identifying the themes, I classified them based on their geographical boundaries. Some were found to be limited to institutions, cities, countries, the continent and the globe. Therefore, I classified them into institution-oriented, city-oriented, nation-oriented, continent-oriented and globe-oriented, as shown in [Table 2](#) (the numbers in parentheses represent the occurrences of the respective GMs in the corpus).

On the third focus, the present study operated on the assertion that church names have patterns ([Zelinsky 2002](#); [Awukuvi & Israel 2018](#)). Hence, I adopted Anderson's concept of *theme* ([Anderson 2007](#)) to examine the church names' patterns. The GMs are used as boundary indicators such that the position of the GMs determines the number of themes in a church name. Consequently, church names with zero GM are all monothematic names. Thus, GMs add to and increase the number of themes in a church name. The approach adopted in this study runs contrary to the "basic onomastic principle that names comprise two components –the specific and the generic" ([Zelinsky 2002](#)). There are, therefore, three possible themes in a complex church name positioned at the fore, mid or back. The church name *Universal Praise Chapel International* is thus a trithematic church name comprising *Universal*, *Praise Chapel* and *International* as fore, mid and back themes respectively.

The number of GMs in a church name revealed two structurally diverse forms of church names: mono- and multi-GM church names. While all mono-GM church names are bithematic as shown in the church name in [Figure 2](#), the multi-GM ones have more than two since each GM is a theme in itself. The church name *Agape Gospel Mission International, Ghana* has three themes. It has *Agape Gospel Mission* as the fore-theme, *International* as mid-theme and *Ghana* as back-theme. The grounding of the GMs was determined by critically examining the concordances lines (see [Figure 3](#)).

It can be observed from lines 1 and 2 in [Figure 3](#) that the GM *International* is positioned at the back of the church name, hence a backgrounded theme. Those at the fore and middle were also respectively tagged foregrounded and midgrounded themes.

Whereas the GMs in *Nsuaem* (city-oriented) in *Nsuaem Christian Church*, and *Ghana* (nation-oriented) in *The Sacred Cherubim and Seraphim Church of Ghana* onomastically restrict their geographical scopes of operation, the globe-oriented ones *Global* and in *Miracle Global Ministries* and *Cosmopolitan* in *Christ Cosmopolitan Church* suggest otherwise.

Generally, the globe-oriented markers index the churches as having a multinational aura. They reveal the churches' desire to be seen as part of the *virtual* family of world churches. It was realized from the corpus that there are webs of the globe-oriented GMs which belong to the same semantic field of multinationality. These are *international*, *global*, *world*, *worldwide*, *universal*, *catholic* and *cosmopolitan* (see Table 2). The present study shares some similarities with Zelinsky (2002) who also found *All Nations*, *Universal*, *World* and *Cosmopolitan* in his study. The present study and Zelinsky (2002) differed with respect to the use of *Catholic*, *International*, *Worldwide*, *Global*, *All Souls*, *Christians* and *Saints*, on the one hand, and *All People* on the other respectively. What is more surprising is the absence of *international* in Zelinsky's (2002) study. Kouega (2018) as well as Awukuvi & Israel (2018) who used data of church names from Africa (Cameroon and Ghana respectively) also found "international" usage in their studies.

The next category of the GMs is the continent-oriented one. The only one found in the data is *African*, which communicates and reveals possible "ancestral African cultural systems" (Zelinsky 2002: 96) within which the churches are rooted. This is followed by the country-oriented ones. Again, the only country found in the data is *Ghana*. Moreover, there are city-oriented and institution-oriented which respectively show the towns and institutions within which the churches are located. The GMs in the continent, nation, city, and institution-oriented generally resonate with the host locations of the church. The host continent and country for the study and, therefore, the churches are Africa and Ghana respectively. Further, all the cities found are toponyms within Ghana, indicating that the GMs in the present corpus are "domesticated". Contrarily, Fairclough's (1960) directory of churches in the USA showed that other countries and continents were represented in the church names. This suggests that the dominance of a particular nationality in a country can also affect the employment of GMs in church names.

Table 2: Detailed information on geographical markers

S/N	Geographical Marker	Foregrounded	Midgrounded	Backgrounded
	Globe-oriented (520)			
	International (428)	22	71	335
	Global (19)	12	7	0
	World (26)	7	19	0
	Worldwide (19)	1	0	18
	Catholic (3)	0	3	0
	Universal (9)	6	3	0
	Cosmopolitan (1)	0	1	0
	The “Alls” (15) (Nations, Souls, Christians, Saints)	12	0	3
	Total/%	60 (9.88%)	104(17.13%)	356(58.65%)
	Continent-oriented (5) (Africa)	2	3	0
	Total/%	2(0.33%)	3(0.49%)	0(0%)
	Nation-oriented (55) (e.g. Ghana)	6	1	48
	Total/%	6(0.99%)	1(0.16%)	48(7.91%)
	City-oriented (10) (e.g. Accra, Nsuaem and Abasua Mountain)	10	0	0
	Total/%	10(1.65%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Institution-oriented (2) (Legon and University)	2	0	0
	Total/%	2(0.33%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

I observed that there were churches with zero GMs and those with GMs. Fairclough (1960) asserts that church namers have the freedom to choose the various components for their churches. What are some of the likely factors that influence the choice of GMs? Azieb & Mahmoud (2018) argue that these factors are socio-religious in nature. One, churches with explicit GMs as part of the onomastic formula may want to project a specific ethos or identity, which is geographically defined (Aldrin 2019; Emmelhainz 2013; Stronks 1962, 1964; Whitcher 2014). This onomastic strategy allows a church to position itself through self-definition/expression in order to project a kind of “us-them” distinction (Aldrin 2019; McCormick & Agnihotri 2009; Stump 1988). A church that seeks to project itself as limited to the members of a university community, hence adopts the names *Legon/University Interdenominational Church*.

Meanwhile, a particular church would also want to project a place-bound or otherwise identity (Akoto 2018). Additionally, some churches would strategically want to preach a gospel or theology for a defined group of people. If the church has a message with a definite audience, a more restrictive GM would be employed. On the other hand, if the person has a message for the

whole world, a certain kind of GM would also be used. For example, the *Roman Catholic Church* suggests that the church upholds doctrinal worldviews that cut across cultural, national, racial, and ethnic boundaries (Slíz 2013). This supports the assertion that toponymic expressions attached to church names mirror the churches' religious practices and theologies (Rogers 1963; Stump 1988). Pearce (1966: 156) emphatically states that “onomastics reinforced theology”. This factor ties in with the vision/mission of some church founders. Some founders of churches consider themselves as national, global, or ministers of God for certain defined groups of people. For example, in the Bible, Paul is defined as an Apostle to the Gentiles in line with the task assigned him by God. Most likely, if Paul were to establish a church, it would be named either *The Church for the Gentiles* or *All Gentiles Church*.

4.2. Grounding of geographical markers

A critical examination of the concordance lines in the corpus reveals intriguing information about the “grounding” or positioning of GMs in church names. It was realized that GMs are either grounded at the beginning (fore), middle (mid), or end (back) of the church names, culminating into foregrounding, midgrounding and backgrounding of GMs. These are discussed in the following subsections.

4.2.1. Foregrounded geographical markers

The analysis of the concordance lines showed that some GMs were foregrounded in the church names. As shown in Figure 4a and b, foregrounded GMs occur as the foremost theme in the ecclesionymic string. I found in the corpus that all the church names with foregrounded GMs had two themes: the GM which is the fore-theme and the remaining part as the back theme.

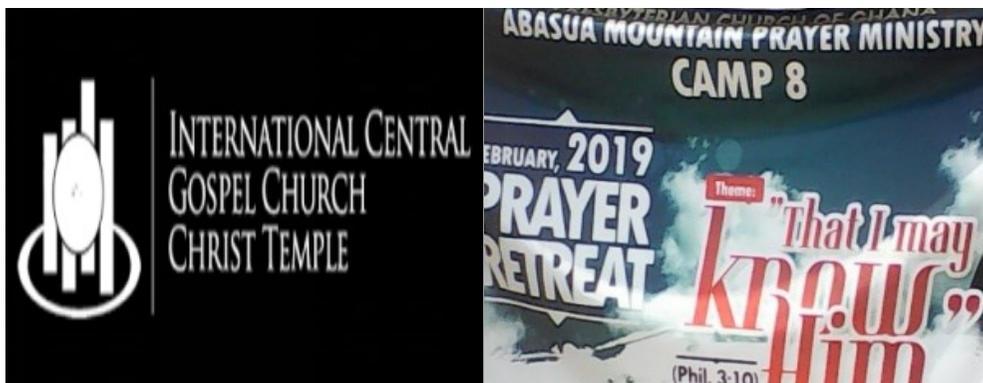


Figure 4a and b: Posters showing foregrounded GMs

In the church names (*Abasua Mountain Prayer Ministry* and *International Central Gospel Church*), we notice that *Abasua Mountain* and *International* appear as fore-themes, while *Prayer Ministry*, and *Central Gospel Church* appear as back-themes respectively. Table 2 indicates that 9.88%, 1.65%, and 0.99% of globe, city and nation-oriented GMs were respectively foregrounded in church names; both continent and institution-oriented categories recorded 0.33% each at the foreground. Aside from the cross-category quantitative variations regarding the GMs' foregrounding, there are some revealing intra-category variations, especially regarding the globe-oriented ones. There are eight globe-oriented GMs, and out of these, six (international, global, world, worldwide, universal and The All's) occurred at the fore position, but two (Catholic and Cosmopolitan) did not. This suggests that some onomastic variables do not fit into certain parts of the name pattern.

The foregrounded GMs may "expand" to modify all the items in the back theme. In the church name *International Central Gospel Church*, *International* modifies all the items that constitute the theme *Central Gospel Church*. However, in some instances, they resulted in ambiguity in the names. The church name *World Harvest Church* suggests that the church aims to "harvest" (in other words, win or evangelize) the world, or it is a Harvest Church that is worldwide. These meanings lead to the polypragmatic functions of the GMs (Kouega 2018). Moreover, the foregrounded GMs project a kind of ethos of the church to the general populace (Bölskei 2013). A globe-oriented GM foregrounded, for instance, readily portrays the church by pitting it against other churches by projecting its "universal ethos". In this regard, the foregrounded GMs strategically make the projected identity of the church more visible and salient (Akoto 2018; Landry & Bourhis 1997).

4.2.2. Midgrounded geographical markers

The corpus analysis indicated that GMs are midgrounded in patterning the themes in the church names. As noted already, GMs serve as boundary markers such that a church name with a midgrounded GM has more than two themes, which are fore, mid and backgrounded, as shown in Figure 5a and b.



Figure 5a and b: Photograph showing midgrounded GMs

The church name in the LL evidence in [Figure 5b](#) shows that *International* is midgrounded, making the church name a trithematic one where *Eagles' Network*, and *Ministry* are fore and backgrounded respectively. [Table 2](#) shows that globe-oriented GMs were the most frequent midgrounded ones, as they constituted 17.13% of the overall GMs in the corpus. This was followed by continent-oriented GMs (0.49%), and nation-oriented (0.16%) in that order. Both city- and institution-oriented GMs recorded zero occurrences at the midground. Of the 8 forms of globe-oriented GMs, only two (i.e. *worldwide* and the *All's*) were not midgrounded. It is, therefore, clear that GMs are context-dependent as some do not fit into some onomastic environment in the patterns in church names.

The midgrounding of the GMs evokes a “semantic attitude” ([Pearce 1966: 155](#)) toward the names since their positioning in some instances leads to ambiguity. It was noted that the church names with midgrounded GMs are trithematic, making it possible for the midgrounded GM to be aligned to each of the flanking themes. And when it is limited to either of them, there is a different interpretation. The name in [Figure 5b](#) is *Eagle's Network International Ministry*. Does *International* postmodify *Eagle's Network* or pre-modify *Ministry*? As suggested by [Zelinsky \(2002: 87\)](#), readers are tempted to exercise the “Solomonic judgment” for the interpretation they deem appropriate. Furthermore, the midgrounded GMs also perform complementation function in some cases, especially when the GM is immediately preceded by a preposition as in *House of Prayer for All Nations Family*, where the GM *All Nations* adds to *House of Prayer for* to make it complete.

4.2.3. Backgrounded geographical markers

The GMs that occurred as the last theme of the church names are said to be backgrounded. Out of the five categories of the GMs, only globe-oriented and nation oriented occurred as back themes in the church names. These overwhelmingly together constituted approximately 66% of the total GMs in the corpus. The remaining three categories recorded zero occurrence each at the backgrounded. This suggests that it is less likely to find a church name with the formula or pattern: Fore-theme (which may or may not be a GM) + mid-theme (which may or may not be a GM) + back-theme (which is continent, city or institution-oriented GM). It should be noted that city-oriented GMs occurred as back-themes, but in almost all cases, they occurred in names of branches of churches as shown in [Figure 2](#). Out of the 8 globe-oriented GMs, only three involving *international*, *worldwide* and *The All's* were backgrounded such that there was no church name with global, world, cosmopolitan, catholic or universal backgrounded.

Two forms of backgrounded GMs were realized from the corpus. There were those that occur in mono-GM church names as shown in [Figure 6a and b](#).



Figure 6a and b: Photograph showing backgrounded GMs

In the church name *Calvary Life Chapel International*, there are two themes: *Calvary Life Chapel* and *International*, whereby *International* postmodifies the fore-theme *Calvary Life Chapel*. On the other hand, *People of God Ministry Ghana International* in Figure 7 has three themes: *People of God Ministry*, *Ghana* and *International*.

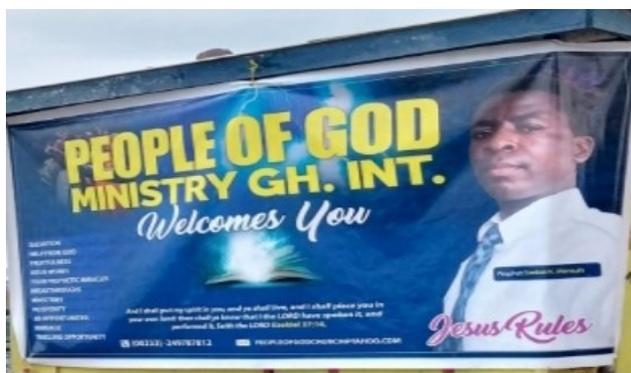


Figure 7: Poster with a multi-GM church name

In this case, the backgrounded GM, *International* postmodifies the two themes. Whereas the midgrounded nation-oriented GM indicates the place of origin of the church, the globe-oriented one either reveals the church's presence in other countries, desire to spread to other countries, or identity as having representation of members from other countries.

The backgrounded GMs retrospectively modify the preceding theme in the case of mono-GM church names and themes in the case of multi-GM church names. Grounding the GMs at the back results in onomastic clarity since its modification function does not lead to ambiguity. Further, placing the GMs at the back of the church names also increases their visibility and salience to catch the attention of the general public who reads the church names as part of the language in display (Akoto & Afful 2021; Landry & Bourhis 1997; Sliz 2013).

5. Conclusion

This study combined approaches from Corpus Linguistics and Linguistics Landscape to examine geographical markers (GMs) in church names. Corpus and LL data of church names from Ghana were used for the study. The paper generally focused on the form, classifications and grounding of GMs in church names. The GMs were generally classified into institution-, city-, nation-, continent- and globe-oriented ones. These GMs have three groundings in the church names. They were either fore, mid and/or backgrounded, which are informed by the kind of identity church namers seek to construct for the church as an institution and the members in the church.

The study has implications for the theory on church names and methodology, especially in combining CL and LL. Hence, to undertake a corpus linguistic landscape study in onomastics, one would have to first decide whether the study is corpus-based, driven or mixed. Similarly, one would also have to clarify whether the LL data to be collected are from top-down, or down-up actors. The individual would then have to collect the data on the name type and develop a corpus for the purposes of the corpus linguistic investigation. The person would also have to develop a parallel LL data that would be used to corroborate the corpus evidence for a more nuanced.

Another ecclesionymic inquiry can be taken into the geographical markers (GMs) across time to ascertain whether there are qualitative and quantitative differences in the use of the GMs in the Ghanaian socio-religious landscape. This will reveal whether the use of the GMs in the church names is “decreasing, increasing, or remaining stable over time” (Zelinsky 2002: 100). Further, it will be intriguing for a study to investigate the use of the GMs across denominations: Pentecostal, charismatic, orthodox, African Independent churches to find out a variation in the use of the GMs. This will further reveal the effect of the various doctrinal/theological orientations on the naming practices, principles and policies of the Christian groupings.

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