German speech area in the North (Bavaria, Alemannia) and the Romance speaking South, the place-names of the valley show different strata of languages (pre-Roman, Latin and German) and report different modes of linguistic integration changing within short distances. So the areas near the big transalpine routes were very conservative in preserving the existing place-names and using the traditional language. Nevertheless, here we find the first indications of linguistic interferences in the Early Middle Ages. In comparison, the other parts of the Inn-valley show a lot of place-names of Old High German origin, but no example for early phonetic alterations.

The results of a research-project at the University of Innsbruck combining archaeological, historical and philological questions are able to explain the phenomena. Regarding the types of the place-names (German/pre-German; personal/non personal) and their semantics one can notice that in the Roman and Early Medieval period new names not necessarily prove the arrival of people speaking another language, but very often indicate new organisation of land and new structures of settlement. So the names of Latin origin in the central part of the valley around modern Innsbruck mark the establishment of Roman troops ("militärisches Nutzland"), whereas the local population remained and preserved many place- and field-names of pre-Roman origin. In the 7th century a new group of Old High German-speaking landlords gave patronymic German names to settlements in the upper part of the valley, even to those who had existed without interruption from Roman times so far. Those names don't indicate a German "Landnahme" but represent rule and power of the landlords. On the other hand, along the transalpine routes, the strong tradition of toponymy and spoken language has been caused by the continuation of fiscal rights and administrative structures from Roman to Medieval times. Here, members of a German-speaking upper class only left phonetic traces. According to this study, the language of place-names (not of the micro-toponymy!) took place due to political factors such as spatial organisation, representation of power or legitimation of rule on the right of a prior authority and less to the spoken language of the people. So it seems that in a region like the Inn-Valley the toponymy tells more about the continuity or discontinuity of power and rights than about the contact of languages.