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Exonyms

Towards a comprehensive view of the endonym/exonym divide

Submitted by Austria**

Summary***

The report attempts to look at the endonym/exonym divide not only from a linguistic point of view but also from a perspective incorporating sociological, cultural, geographical, juridical and political aspects.

The report highlights the basic role of the local human community in the naming process and the community/feature relationship as the essential and decisive criterion for the endonym/exonym divide. The endonym/exonym divide reflects the difference between what a community conceives as “its own” and “as theirs”. Endonyms refer to names given by the community for geographical features that are owned by the community or for which the community feels responsible. Exonyms refer to names adopted from other communities and to names used for features on their territories that reflect the network of a community’s external relations.

The divide between “one’s own” and “theirs” is very general and already reflects an individual attitude, not to mention that of families, villages and municipalities. It is by no means confined to communities with different languages. In addition, the divide between “names from within” (endonyms) and “names from without” (exonyms) can exist within a given language.

Consequently the following new definitions of “endonym” and “exonym” are proposed:

* E/CONF.101/1.

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*** The full report is available in the language of submission only from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>.



Endonym. The term refers to the name applied by the local community for a geographic feature conceived to be part of the area where the community lives, if there is not a smaller community in place that uses a different name.

Exonym. The term refers to the name applied by a community for a geographic feature outside the area where the community lives and which differs in its written form from the respective endonym.

The new concepts can be applied to several cases of transboundary features, which very likely constitute the most delicate field of endonym/exonym application.
