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Exonyms

Towards a comprehensive view at the endonym/exonym divide

Submitted by Austria**

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Abstract

The paper attempts to look at the endonym/exonym divide not only from the linguistic point of view, but tries to include sociological, (cultural-)geographical, juridical and political aspects.

The paper first highlights the basic role of the local human community in the naming process and the community/feature relation 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 in the sense of names given by the community in place mark geographical features which are owned by the community or for which this group feels responsible. Exonyms in the sense of names adopted from other communities and used for features on their territory reflect the network of a community’s external relations.

Since the divide between “one’s own” and “theirs” is very general and an attitude already of individuals, not to speak of families, villages and municipalities and by no means confined to communities with different language, also the divide between “names from within” (endonyms) and “names from without” (exonyms) can exist within a given language. This means that *community* has to replace *language* as a definition criterion for the endonym/exonym divide.

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

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

Exonym = the name applied by a community for a geographical feature outside the area, where this community lives and differing in its written form from the respective endonym.

This new concept is then expemplified by several cases of transboundary features, which are very likely the most delicate field of endonym/exonomy application.

Towards a comprehensive view at the endonym/exonym divide

1 Introduction

It is my impression that we usually focus too much on language as the criterion for the endonym/exonym divide and that it would be necessary to have a more comprehensive view on this issue. We should not look at it only from the linguistic point of view, but also from the sociological, (cultural-)geographical, juridical and political angle.

This paper is based on similar papers presented already earlier, e.g. in Tainach (JORDAN 2011a, JORDAN 2011b), Barcelona (2011, not yet published) and most recently in Rennes and Tübingen (both 2012, not yet published). Those of you, who know them, will see that the concept presented in the current paper was further elaborated, not the least due to a lot of fruitful discussions following my earlier presentations.

I will at first demonstrate the central role of the (local) community in the naming process, continue with stating that the endonym is the name from within this (local) community, the name attributed by it, while the exonym is a name adopted from other communities in various ways; stress then the fact that all of us belong to several communities, have multiple identities, also multiple space-related identities, which have an additional effect on the endonym/exonym divide, and will conclude by examples demonstrating what this theoretical concept means in practice with a focus on place names for transboundary features, the most critical case in this context.

2 The naming process and the central role of the (local) community in it

Three factors are involved into the naming process (see Fig. 1): The first is the human community in the sense of a group of people, who feel to have a common identity. It can vary in size between family/partnership, nation, group of citizens, language community up to the global community („global citizens“). I do not use the term “social group” anymore (as in earlier papers, e.g. JORDAN 2011a, b), since it defines in the narrower sociological sense a cohesion group, i.e. a group of people tied by personal relations and almost permanent interaction. The term *community*, in contrast, is used for identity groups, i.e. for people feeling to have a common identity. They need not to have personal relations. They need not even to know each other or to know of each other’s existence. So, a nation forms very well a community, but is not a social group in the narrower sense.¹

The second factor is the community’s culture including language. Culture is understood here in the most comprehensive sense as the totality of all human expressions.²

¹ It has also to be remarked here that the concept of the civic nation (widespread in the francophone and anglophone world) does not differentiate between citizens and members of a nation, while the concept of the cultural nation (widespread in Central and Eastern Europe) does.

² For concepts of culture see a.o. LÉVI-STRAUSS (1949), KROEBER & KLUCKHOHN (1963), LÉVI-STRAUSS (1966), MITCHELL (2000).

The third factor is geographical space subdivided into geographical features – geographical space understood according to Wilhelm LEIBNIZ as the totality of all relations between physical-material features (quoted according to WEICHHART 2008, p. 79).

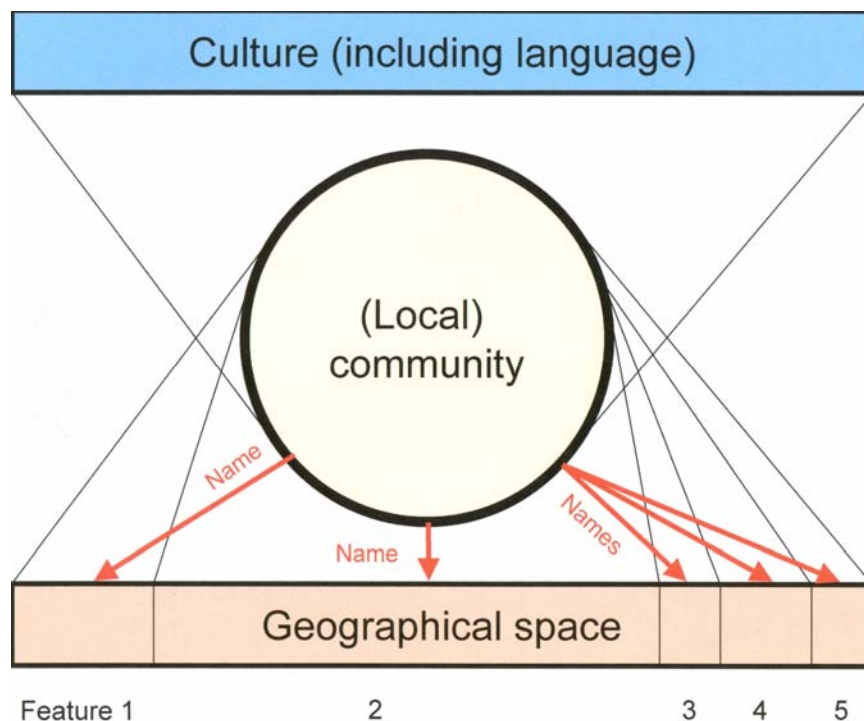


Fig. 1: Factors in the naming process

The only actor in this process is the (human) community. It inhabits a certain section of geographical space, has developed a certain culture and language and structures complex geographical space mentally into features – on the background of its culture and led by its specific (e.g. economic) interests – marking these features by place names.

Names for geographical features at the community’s own territory are endonyms (names from within). Endonyms in this social sense are symbols for appropriation. Who owns a feature, has usually the right to name it. Who has the power to attribute the name, has usually also the power over this feature or at least responsibility for it. This function of proper names in general, but of place names in particular, is also expressed by GENESIS 2:20, when it says:

“The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field.”

So names in general, but place names in particular have always and inevitably a political dimension. Under normal circumstances a community would never claim the right to attribute the primary name to features offside its own territory. It does so only when it is aggressive and expansive. (As it was with National-Socialist Germany, when e.g. the Polish city of Łódź was named *Litzmannstadt*.)

For geographical features offside its territory a community usually just adopts already existing names, translates them into its own language or adapts them morphologically or

phonetically. In contrast to names for features on its own territory (= endonyms) these are exonyms, needed by a community to mark features offside its own territory sufficiently important to it in a comfortable way (easy to be pronounced, to be communicated).

In contrast to endonyms, exonyms are not symbols for appropriation and do not express claims, but indicate the importance of a feature for this community and the relations it has with it. Exonyms just help to integrate a foreign feature into the cultural sphere of a community and help to avoid exclusion and alienation.

But it is also true that the use of exonyms is sometimes conceived as expressing claims, especially when exonyms correspond to historical endonyms. But this is a misunderstanding, which should be erased, also by a politically sensitive use of exonyms.

Naming is done either by convention between the members of the community or by an institution charged and legitimized by the community for this purpose. Of course, also an individual can attribute a name to a feature, but such a name will not get into use, assume communicative value and persist, if it is not accepted by the community. So it is at the end always the community, who acts in this process.

No community, however, is completely homogenous. It is always composed of a dominant portion and non-dominant subgroups. This is even true for the smallest human community, the personal partnership. Also here we usually find a dominant and a non-dominant part.

The dominant portion of a community is of course in the position to decree the use of a name, to oblige other community members to use a name, whether they agree or not. This certainly applies to many renamings in the Communist era and perhaps also in the years after the fall of Communism.

It is also a fact that we usually do not belong to only one community, but rather to a multitude of them – we have in fact multiple group identities (see Fig. 2). These various communities have usually also different relations to space, feel responsible for different sections of spatial reality.

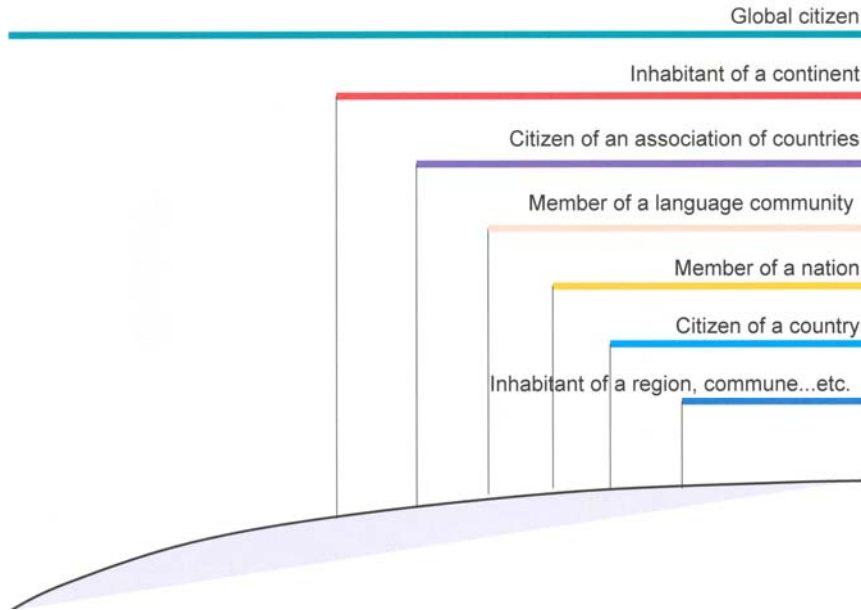


Fig. 2: Our multiple space-related identities

We are global citizens, when we engage ourselves for questions like climate change, global disparities in development etc. Global institutions and organisations support this community (e.g. the United Nations). We are inhabitants of our continent as far as we feel responsible and engage ourselves for this continent. We are citizens of an association of countries like the European Union, members of a language community (e.g. the French), members of a nation, citizens of a country. We can feel a very strong emotional attachment to our country as such (when we hear the national anthem or watch a game of our national team), while we may never have been in some parts of our country and may not appreciate the attitudes of all of our fellow citizens. We are furtheron also inhabitants of a region, a city, a commune or a village.

Almost all these communities are in a way organised and feel a responsibility for a section of space. All of these mentioned have certainly a specific relation to space. But there may also be communities with the same relation to space and different just by cultural characteristics (ethnicity, language, religion etc.) like it is in minority situations, when a given territory is settled not only by one, but by several communities.

All these communities are also active in naming. But they can attribute endonyms (= names from within) only to geographical features at their very own level (scale) – since the competence for attributing a name (for applying the endonym) is regulated by the principle of subsidiarity. It is always the smaller community, the community closer to the feature and actually responsible for it, who has the primary right to attribute a name.

Thus, the name for the Earth is certainly an endonym in all languages spoken on Earth. Names for individual features on Earth are, however, not anymore endonyms in all languages – even if we all feel to be global citizens, since there is always a smaller community in place, nearer to the feature and with a stronger emotional attachment to it and responsibility for it than

we have. We – as the outsiders – must not deprive this community of its primary right to name the feature.

Thus, the name for a certain country is certainly an endonym in the language of all communities forming the permanent population of it, while not all the names in the language of non-dominant communities for the capital of this country will be endonyms, because not all of them will be well-established in this capital.

This principle of subsidiarity is also valid within a certain language (so, not only when communities with different languages are involved). At least from my Austrian experience I know that a local population calls a village sometimes differently from outsiders (speaking the same language).

In Romanian Transylvania also, the local Germans (Saxons) call the river Mureş *Mieresch*, while the German exonym *Marosch* is derived from the Hungarian name *Maros*.

It is the name of the local population then, which is the endonym – while a name (also in the same language) from outside is an exonym.³

It is without any doubt (and in many countries explicitly supported by law) that we can name our house as we wish (in practice relevant, e.g., with isolated farmsteads in dispersed settlement), that we have the right to attribute the endonym. If our neighbour calls our house differently, his name is an exonym.

Based on this concept I would define the endonym as the name applied by the local community for a geographical feature conceived to be part of the area, where this community lives, if there is not a smaller community in place that uses a different name.

The exonym is then the name applied by a community for a geographical feature outside the area, where this community lives and differing in its written form from the respective endonym.

Endonyms are (in the word's proper meaning) names from within, i.e. names attributed by a community on features on its own territory. Exonyms are names used by a community, but received from other communities for features on their territory.

Still in other words: For the endonym/exonym divide it is essential, whether or in how far a community refers to a feature as part of its "place" in the meaning of Yi-Fu TUAN (TUAN 1977) and not, whether names are different by language or official status.

This divide is particularly delicate with transboundary features in the sense of geographical features extending across community boundaries or to areas beyond any sovereignty. Transboundary features are therefore a good test for the validity of this concept and perhaps useful to clarify it.

³ It is true, however, that such a divergence occurs much more frequently with pronunciation. So it results rather in an endophone/exophone divide than in an endonym/exonym divide.

3 The endonym/exonym divide with transboundary features: some case studies

The question with transboundary features is in our context: Up to where has a place name the status of an endonym? From where on switches the same name to exonym status?

If transboundary features on land are concerned, a name is (of course) valid for the whole feature, but has endonym status only up to the boundary and assumes exonym status on the other side (see Fig. 3).

The problem is more complex with seas. It is rather difficult to say where exactly a community's attitude of feeling responsible and emotionally attached ends. From my long-lasting experience with the Adriatic Sea I know that coastal dwellers have a profound emotional relation to their coastal waters, not in the juridical sense, but in the sense of waters between the islands and in visible distance from the coast, where fisherboats and tourist vessels are cruising. These coastal waters are as much part of their living space as land is. They are resources of food, areas for transportation, used for tourism.

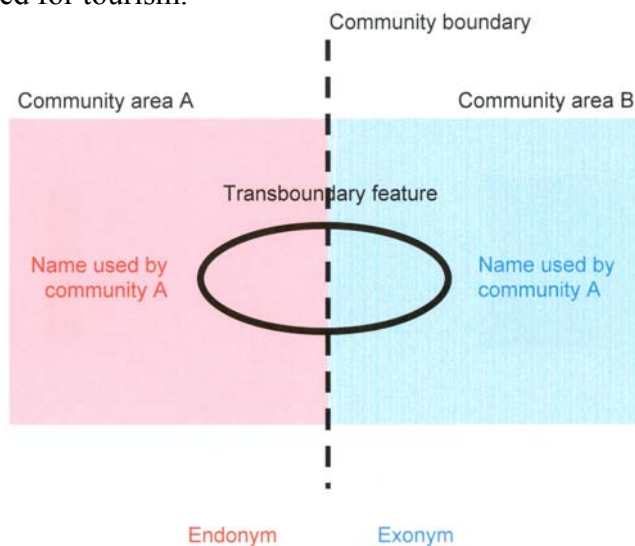


Fig. 3: Transboundary feature on land

In Opatija, at the Croatian coast, e.g., they have a tradition that at the holiday of Body of Christ the priest blesses from a fisher boat, surrounded by a whole procession of vessels, the sea “and all what lives in it.”

It is certainly justified to say that the coastal dweller community regards its coastal waters as their own.

But it is certainly different with the high sea – the sea beyond the horizon from the coast. Here – I would say – it is necessary to differentiate between the cognitive and the emotional level.

Emotionally the high sea is conceived as endless, even a narrow sea like the Adriatic, where you can look from coast to coast from a mountain top when skies are clear. This is, e.g., expressed by folk or also pop songs, which frequently use *sea* as a metaphor for the unlimited, the indefinite, the unconceivable. Endlessness is also expressed, e.g., by special words for the

high sea: e.g. *pućina* instead of *more* in Croatian, which means something like *wilderness, where the winds blow* etc.

I conclude from this attitude that, emotionally, coastal dwellers recognize no opposite coast, no counterpart beyond the horizon; would consequently also not draw a strict line between "one's own" and "the other's" somewhere out in the sea; would also not feel the necessity to confine the endonym status of their own name to some part of the sea; would possibly extend it to the sea in its entirety (because they feel that this status is not contested by anybody else).

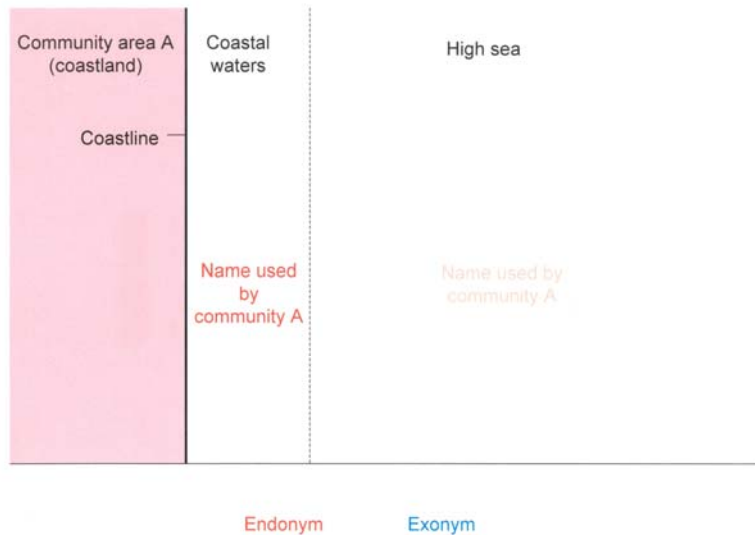


Fig. 4: A coastal dweller’s relation to the sea – emotional level

But I would also guess that the intensity of this feeling fades away more or less as a function of distance (see Fig. 4), the feeling of being the owner of the sea is relative insofar as it is combined with the other feeling that the sea is endless and unconceivable. (It is in the nature of the endless and the unconceivable that it can never be completely owned, that it is impossible to achieve full command of it.)

At the cognitive level they are anyway aware of the fact that the sea ends somewhere, that there is an opposite coast, inhabited by other people, who speak a different language and have another name for the same feature. They have learned this in schools, from maps and charts and from the media.

Based on this knowledge, they would, however, usually (with the only exception of a politically aggressive and expansive attitude) be ready to acknowledge and accept that their own name loses its endonym status somewhere in between this opposite coast and their own coast, would have no problem with accepting regulations ruling that there is some “artificial” line between where their name has endonym status and where the name of the others is valid as endonym (Fig. 5). They will usually – as in many other fields of social interaction – accept that their right ends where the right of others begins, if this avoids dispute and conflict.

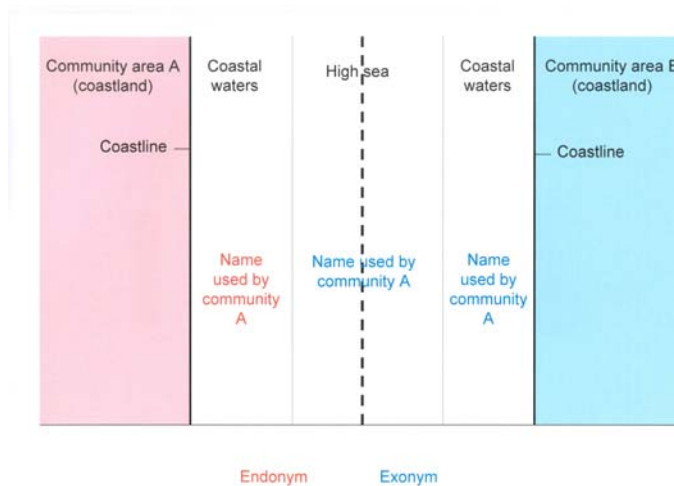


Fig. 5: A coastal dweller's relation to the sea – cognitive level

But there are also difficult cases on land, e.g., within a country with a dominant community and inhabited, spatially concentrated, by a non-dominant community. There may, e.g., be an unpopulated mountain (range) located adjacent to the area where the non-dominant community lives (see Fig. 6). This mountain range is not inhabited by the minority. It is also not administratively incorporated into their territory, i.e. not officially attributed to them. But they see it day by day; it is perhaps an area of recreation for them; it is perhaps also an economic resource for them; and they have developed emotional ties to it, i.e. it is part of their place (in the sense of TUAN).

All the same is true for the majority community at the other side of the mountain. It should be added that mountains and mountain ranges mostly look different from both sides: Dwellers on one side would sometimes not even recognize it from the other side.

This all makes it reasonable to say that the mountain is a divided property between the two communities. The minority can regard it as a part of its own territory only at its own side. The minority's name for it enjoys endonym status only on its own side (but is valid for the whole feature, of course) and becomes an exonym on the other.

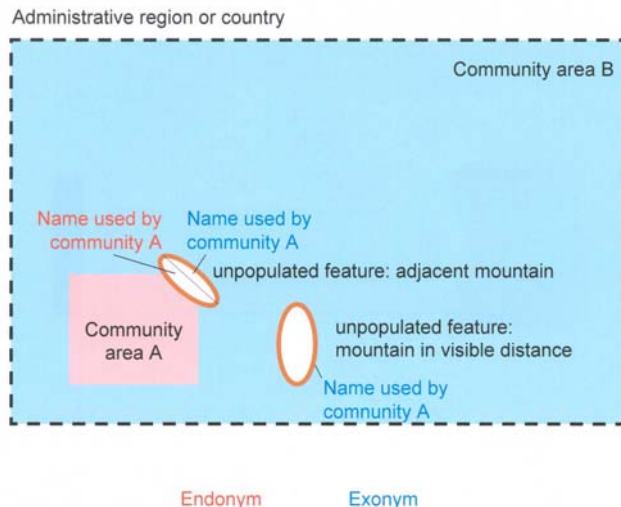


Fig. 6: Unpopulated mountain range nearby and offside a minority region

An unpopulated mountain (range) offside the minority region, but still in visible distance, is a different case (see Fig. 6). The minority community can perhaps see it day by day and has also emotional ties to it, but it does not exploit it economically and – what is the salient point – how strong the relations of the minority community to this feature may ever be, the other community is closer to the feature and has (very likely) also the stronger relations to it.

This makes it reasonable to say that the name of the minority community for this feature is only the exonym there.

But how is it, if the feature on the boundary between the two communities is a lake (see Fig. 7)? A lake has all the characteristics relevant for the local community as mentioned earlier with the mountain, except that its surface is flat and that it is mostly possible to see the opposite shore.

So the lake is much less divisible in ownership and emotional terms than a mountain. Wouldn't it be appropriate to say that it is owned by both groups likewise and the names of both groups for the lake have endonym status at every spot of the lake – even at the opposite bank?

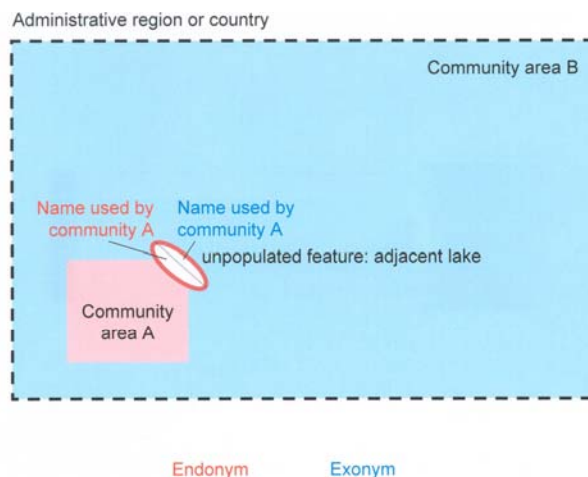


Fig. 7: Lake nearby a minority region

I would rather say “no”, since at the opposite shore the other group is nearer to the spot in question. So it has in a competitive situation between two claims (as it is) the stronger title on attributing the endonym, the primary name. This is just in accordance with many other juridical issues.

So an imaginary line has to be drawn on the lake dividing it into the endonym areas of the two groups.

The last (of many other cases) I would like to mention is a capital city in far distance from a minority region, but administratively responsible for it (see Fig. 8). This establishes a functional relation between the minority and this city, perhaps also an emotional tie. “This is our capital. The events there affect also us. The landmarks of this city have a symbolic meaning also for us.” the minority group might say.

Nevertheless, if the minority is not part of the autochthonous population there, the same argument as before applies also in this case: There is another community in place (or closer to this place) and only the name applied by this other community has endonym status.

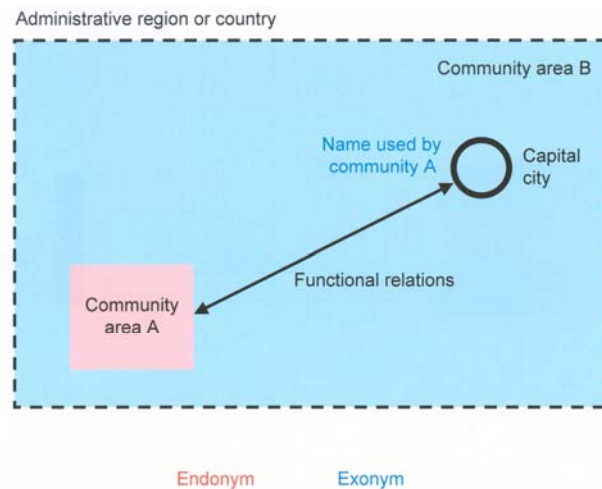


Fig. 8: Capital city in far distance from a minority region

4 Conclusions

If one looks at the naming process and the endonym/exonym divide in a comprehensive way, i.e. from the perspectives of various sciences, the (local) community is the essential player (and only actor) in the naming process using place names as mediators between man and territory to highlight characteristics of a place, to mark its territory and distinguish between “our own” and “theirs”, to structure space mentally, to support emotional ties between human beings and space (i.e. to turn “space” into “place”), in other words: to exert territoriality – an essential aspect of human life.

Place names have for this reason always and inevitably sociological, political and juridical implications. The community closer to the feature, owning it or feeling responsible for it has the right on the primary name, the endonym.

The endonym/exonym divide reflects the difference between “our own” and “theirs”. Endonyms in the sense of names given by the community in place mark features which are owned by the community or for which this group feels responsible. Exonyms in the sense of names adopted from other communities reflect the network of a community’s external relations.

Difference in language is in most cases an important aspect of the endonym/exonym divide, but not an essential criterion. The endonym/exonym divide exists also within a given language. In consequence, *community* has to replace *language* as a definition criterion for the endonym and the exonym.

5 References

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