Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Eleventh Session
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Item No. 15 of the
Provisional Agenda*

REPORT

ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF ANTARCTIC NAMES

(Submitted by the Dutch- and German-speaking Division)**

* WP No. I
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Federal Republic of Germany.
In September 1982 work has been begun in the Institut für Angewandte Geodäsie (IfAG) on stock-taking of the German language names and designations of topographic/geographical objects within the Antarctic region. For this purpose a digital file "Antarctic Region" has been installed.

By this file all geographical names are covered which have been given till 1945 by Germany and afterwards by the Federal Republic of Germany for objects within the Antarctic region (including the sub-Antarctic islands). Beside the names, further information is given: variant names, co-ordinates, heights or depths, date of name-giving, name-giving expedition (with mentioning of sources), etymology etc.

In order to show the historical development of the spelling and meaning, all names are taken from the original sources (expedition reports with maps). Later alterations and variant names are also covered.

The stock of 556 geographical names (as to April 1984) may be divided in two groupings:

(1) Names given till 1945: 427 names
(2) Names given after 1945: 129 names

The provisional list was submitted to the Ständiger Ausschuß für geographische Namen (StAGN) for revision.

Beside the revision by StAGN it is foreseen to make references to modern maps.

Afterwards the names will be submitted by IfAG to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (LA-SCAR), that will decide on the finalized standard forms. The result will be published in the National Antarctic Research Reports to SCAR.
We may hesitate, however, in the case of languages with a highly non-phonemic writing system, like English (non-phonemic = not having a separate letter for each distinctive sound). Indeed, No. 7 of the Third Conference refers specifically to these cases. It is clear that a letter-to-letter transliteration of English names into, for example, the Cyrillic alphabet must lead to a wrong pronunciation of a lot of them. The same is true, however, for continental Roman alphabet users who are compelled to pronounce English place-names. Moreover, transcription of English place-names according to their pronunciation would lead to a colliding of names and name-elements that are by their spelling distinguished in English (Wight - white, Knole - Knowle, Kniveton - Neaton). And last but not least, the ideal of reversibility would be entirely abandoned. For these reasons it is preferable to transcribe also English names according to a fixed key regardless of their pronunciation.

Though the Resolution No. 7 is unworkable and ought to be altered or withdrawn during the next Conference, there is of course - irrespective of the case of transcription - a need for aids to pronunciation of place-names. The signs of the Roman alphabet for example stand for different sounds in different languages and in one language a letter may have different realizations in differing surroundings.

This need can partly be met in the "Toponymic Guidelines", where a paragraph is reserved for "Aids to pronunciation of geographical names" (Report of the Fourth Conference, vol. I, p. 29). These "Guidelines" being for international use, the only adequate way to indicate the pronunciation of graphs is by means of the International Phonetic Association Alphabet. It is up to each language community to "translate" this system to its members. Of course there is much that cannot be described in this way, to wit, all that is peculiar to individual names such as stress, tone and the elision of sounds (e.g. final -s and -z in most but not all French names). Nevertheless such aids may give a general impression as to how place names ought to be pronounced.

1) Foreigners, but also most Englishmen, cannot do without works like Klaus Forster's A Pronouncing Dictionary of English Place-Names including standard local and archaic variants (London-Boston 1981).