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MINORITY TOPONYMS

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INTRODUCTION

In a number of countries more than one language is spoken, and the members of these various language communities will use their own language versions when referring to topographic objects. The German and Italian-speaking communities of Switzerland e.g. use the names Genf and Ginevra for the city of Genève in the French-speaking area. Not in all multilingual countries these languages enjoy the same official status as they do in Switzerland. Frequently, one of them has a dominant position because of the numerical or socio-economical pre-eminence of the relevant linguistic community. We will call them the majority language community, and refer to the toponyms they use as majority language name versions. This majority language community tends to impose its own name versions also on those places in their country not inhabited by members of their own linguistic community. We will call the other coherent linguistic communities in such a country minority language communities and refer to the toponyms they use as minority language name versions. A minority language area might be defined as an area predominantly inhabited by speakers of a minority language.

It is in these minority language areas that the Local Names policy, the UN guideline which recommends member states to use toponyms in their official orthography, presents cartographers with some problems: the official local name, presented by the national authorities in gazetteers, etc., may not be used locally amongst the inhabitants of the designated location when it is not inhabited by members of the majority language community.

In the Netherlands, e.g., the name of the capital of the province of Friesland (a minority language area inhabited by a Frisian-speaking majority) is referred to by its official Dutch (majority language) name Leeuwarden. The Frisian name, Ljouwert, is used only locally and in the internal provincial administration. Frisian enjoys an equal status to Dutch at the provincial level, but has no national status. The official gazetteer of the Netherlands does not refer to the name Ljouwert; only Leeuwarden can be found. The same applies to the official topographic maps, whatever their scale: only the Dutch name Leeuwarden is mentioned. It is only on some commercially published maps that both name versions are shown.

Though Frisian is officially recognized as a separate language, to be distinguished from Dutch, it is almost impossible for those outside this minority language area to obtain reference works on the official Frisian orthography for the area where Frisian is spoken by a local majority, and thus apply the Local Names policy.

CURRENT REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY TOPONYMS ON MAPS

Language communities tend to have their own, adapted name versions for important topographic objects (rivers, capitals, mountain chains) outside their language area. If linguistic and

administrative boundaries would coincide, these adapted language versions would be called exonyms. If however the political boundaries would have been stretched and other language communities would have been incorporated, these exonyms might be turned, as majority name versions, into the official toponyms. Names of less important topographic objects tend to be adapted in a similar way as soon as large-scale topographic surveys get under way (in Europe from the nineteenth century onwards).

The adaptation of minority language toponyms into the majority language might take one of several forms from a linguistic point of view, e.g.:

1. adherence to minority language orthography, but pronunciation according to the majority language
2. addition of articles in the majority language
3. addition of diacritical signs
4. addition of generics in the majority language
5. addition of nouns or adjectifs in the majority language
6. phonetic rendering in the majority language of minority language pronunciation
7. adaptation of the toponym proper to the majority language
8. (partial) translation into the majority language
9. substitution by a new name in the majority language

With the exception of the first one, all these cases tend to diminish the minority language character of the toponyms from the minority language areas.

The choice of either the original language name version or a name version adapted to the majority language, for a topographic object within a minority language area, might be institutionalized according to one of the following principles:

- I. Traditional usage principle. On the basis of traditional local usage the orthography of the toponyms is determined. The version chosen need not be in accordance with the orthography of the local minority language.
- II. Juridical principle. The language version of the toponyms is determined according to the laws of the administrative unit of which the minority language area forms part.
- III. Territorial principle. The language version of the toponyms is determined on the basis of the codified linguistic boundary.
- IV. Personal principle. The language version of toponyms is determined on the basis of the absolute and relative number of speakers of the majority and minority languages.

In most countries with minority languages the principles according to which the toponyms from minority areas are rendered on the maps are not explicitly stated, though internal service regulations might exist for the benefit of the surveyors.

A current survey of the rendering on topographic maps of minority language areas in Europe would show a predominance of toponyms adapted to the respective majority languages. This conclusion will even be stronger when based on small-scale topographic maps, because of the so-called scale-effect: on smaller scales important topographic objects will be retained

only. In minority language areas these important objects will have been the first to receive majority language name versions, and they will thus be represented by these adapted name versions on small-scale maps.

On the scale 1:50,000 the Basque-speaking areas of Europe show e.g. a predominance of original Basque names. On the scale 1:1,000,000 the area shows a predominance of names adapted to the respective majority languages.

MAP USE CRITERIA

For an evaluation of the situation sketched above two directions seem to be indicated: a functional one and a cultural one. The first one leads to a description of the name elements needed in map use.

In most cases, maps are being produced for specific goals, for instance for reference purposes, for propaganda, for the communication of knowledge on the objects represented or for orienteering. In order to be able to select a map type that fits a specific purpose, one first needs information on map series titles, for instance 'Soil map of the Netherlands' or 'Topographic map of the Netherlands at the scale 1:50,000'.

After a thematic selection has thus been made possible, one has to find the area looked for. Here we need the map-sheet title (e.g. sheet Leeuwarden or sheet Amsterdam). Generally speaking the name of the largest settlement in the area mapped within the national boundaries is selected as map title, as because of its local renown it serves as a beacon for selection purposes. In map use the name 'external orientation' is used for finding the right map sheet.

As soon as the proper map sheet has been located, one should decipher the code of the relationships between symbols and the spatial objects or processes they represent. That is, one should read the legend. For a proper interpretation one should also have information on the accuracy, updating and completeness of the map. Such information can be gathered from the map's margin. Recognition of the semantic relationships between objects to be represented and symbols representing them is called 'internal orientation'.

It is only now that one is able to look closer at the map area, and to extract knowledge from it about the relationships between the objects represented, e.g. knowledge on distances, directions, slopes, surface areas, routes, patterns, correlations, etc. These thematic data have not been anchored to topographic reality as long as they have not been named: here we need toponymy. From the cartographic point of view one does not need toponyms for historical, political or other goals, but for identification purposes only. It is by integrating thematic data and the geographical framework of toponyms and topography that map reading proper is made possible.

For a proper understanding of the functions of the names within the map area, these should be subdivided into toponyms and individua

generics, abbreviations and letter symbols. Toponyms can consist of specific and generic components (-mountain, -lake, -pass, -canal). In many countries generics will be added on the maps to toponyms whenever they lack these components. In German-language maps river names are indicated as Rhein, Inn. In French or Italian maps however, generics are added: Le Rhin Fleuve, Le Senancole Torrent, or Fiume Po. These generics can also be represented individually in order to indicate the nature of a map object, like Factory, Hospital or Sewerage plant. These generics are often abbreviated: Sce (Source), Pyl (Pylone), Sch (School), Gie (Gendarmerie), Sl (Sluice). Sometimes only the initial letters are kept, as PH for Public House or pub and T for Telephone. These letters are in use as symbols consequently.

All these descriptive elements are needed for a proper selection and interpretation of the map sheets, and both requirements, i.e. selection of the proper sheet and understanding of its contents, can be fulfilled when these descriptive elements are rendered (also) in the language of the map user.

An average map sheet of a topographic map series 1:50,000 might contain 1000 toponyms, 100 individual generics, 100 abbreviations and 100 letter symbols. The average number of words contained in the map series title might be 5, the map title 1, the legend 100, the scale 2, the impressum 10 and other marginal information 100. In a number of countries more abbreviations and letter symbols are used than elsewhere and up to 2000 of these might be used on a single map sheet. To apply all these name elements takes about 60 hours for one map sheet in the Netherlands where no automated name-placement equipment is in use yet. For the marginal information only, about 6 hours are needed.

In order to analyze the map use possibilities for members of linguistic minorities, the following questions might be asked:

- are the map series titles also rendered in the minority language?
- is the map title rendered also in the minority language?
- is the map legend also rendered in the minority language?
- is the other marginal information also rendered in the minority language?
- are the toponyms rendered in the minority language version or in a majority language version?
- are the generics rendered in the minority language?
- are the abbreviations and letter symbols also clear for minority language speakers?

CULTURAL CRITERIA

From the functional viewpoint one should thus concern oneself with the actual pragmatic aspects of the relation between the alphanumeric information on the map, toponyms included, and the local population that should be able to use the map.

From the cultural viewpoint it should be a nation's prerogative to preserve the cultural heritage of its population, its minority language population included. Toponyms are part of this cultural heritage and should therefore be preserved in their minority

language versions. The national authorities should also act as a go-between and allow foreign cultural communities to take cognizance of its minority language cultural heritage, toponyms included.

By paying taxes the members of minority language communities share in the costs of national topographic surveys and the production of topographic maps. They should have the right thereof to see their home area represented on these maps as they know it, and not disguised in an unfamiliar onomastical cloak.

CURRENT TRENDS

In most countries with a long tradition of topographic map production, nationalistic sentiments led to an adaptation of minority language area toponyms to the majority language. The concept of the national state, one and undivided, where one language had an official status only, did not allow for toponyms not adapted to that official language.

After 1945 this tendency has been countered in most European countries and the current trend is to revert to the minority language name versions for toponyms in the minority language areas. These new modifications might take different forms:

- correction of the worst mistakes in the phonetic rendering or in the translation of minority language toponyms into the majority language.
- bilingual representation of minority and majority language name versions
- unilingual representation of the minority language versions of toponyms
- rendering of generics, abbreviations and marginal map information in the minority language

In many cases these modifications are but partial, they might only be executed for specific name categories or for names of minor objects. In the Netherlands, e.g. on the topographic map 1:25,000 only the names of small canals, islands and roads can be represented unilingually in Frisian in the Frisian language minority area, while names of hamlets might be given bilingually.

This bilingual representation of toponyms in fact hampers legibility and diminishes the number of mapped objects that can be designated. It is only to be recommended as a transitory phase towards unilingual representation of minority language name versions in minority language areas.

Even if these modifications are only applied to some name categories or to less important objects at present, they are proof of a manifest wish to restore this part of the cultural identity of linguistic minorities.

Multilingual countries now providing themselves with large scale topographic maps for the first time often neglect the proper rendering of minority language name versions in minority language areas, or, for nation-building purposes, try to impose there majority-language specific and/or generic toponym components.

With a view to the functional aspects of toponyms for map use, the preservation of the cultural identity of minority language communities and the cost of later endeavours to restore the minority language toponyms, it should be recommended to ensure a proper rendering of minority language toponyms during current topographic surveys.