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MULTIPLE PLACE NAMES  
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE STANDARDIZATION  
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Prepared by Marc Richard, Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada)

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1

MULTIPLE PLACE NAMES FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

1. From the very beginning of their work in 1967, those participating in the United Nations Conferences have been faced with the problem of multiple place names, which is, to this day, one of the most difficult to solve from the viewpoint of the standardization of geographical names. The general principle of univocity of a place name (one name for one place) has been recognized (resolution 4-C), and although resolution 4-D set out an exception to the principle, this exception was limited to the treatment of geographical names in multilingual areas. As a reminder, the principles adopted are the following:

Resolution 4-C

"It is recommended that each names authority formulate, adopt and define the guiding principles and practices that it will normally apply in the course of operation.

These principles and practices should cover: (...)

(b) Factors that the authority will take into account when considering name proposals, such as: (...)

(vi) Avoidance of more than one name for one feature".

Resolution 4-D

"It is recommended that, in countries in which there exist more than one language, the national authority as appropriate:

- (a) Determine the geographical names in each of the official languages, and other languages as appropriate;
- (b) Give a clear indication of equality or precedence of officially acknowledged names;
- (c) Publish these officially acknowledged names in maps and gazetteers."

To these basic principles have been added, in the course of the Conferences, resolutions dealing with reducing the use of exonyms.

2. The terminology of multiple place names prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

The members of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names established terms that categorize the various types of multiple place names and published these terms in the Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names (1986), also known as Glossary No 330. These terms are: allonym, alternative name, exonym, conventional name and variant name.

This terminology appears to pose three types of problems:

- no term seems to express, in the most general way, the reality of multiple place names;
- some definitions are apparently lacking in precision;
- the definitions do not always correspond from one language to another, at least not between French, English and Spanish, according to our observations.

Therefore, we propose an examination of these terms.

Allonyme : L'un quelconque des noms propres servant à désigner un même objet topographique.

Allonym: One of two or more names employed in reference to a single topographic feature.

#### Observations

The use of the term allonym appears limited to multiple names of natural or artificial physical geographical features, thus excluding inhabited areas, travel routes and administrative divisions. If the definition dealt with "a single geographic feature", perhaps the term could then be used as the most general reference to the phenomenon of multiple place names.

Autre appellation : Un des deux ou plusieurs noms normalisés désignant un même détail, accident ou élément.

Alternative name: One of two or more standardized names for a single feature.

Nombre alternativo: Uno de dos o más nombres normalizados para designar un mismo accidente. Por lo general, no es el de mayor uso o prestigio.

#### Observations

The Spanish definition includes a piece of information absent from the French and English definitions. Furthermore, we wonder whether it is appropriate that this term apply exclusively to standardized names.

**Exonyme :** Nom propre employé dans une certaine langue pour désigner un objet géographique situé à l'extérieur du territoire dans lequel cette langue a un statut officiel et différent dans la forme écrite en caractères latins du nom propre utilisé dans la ou les langues officielles du territoire où l'objet géographique est situé.

**Exonym:** A geographical name used in a certain language for a geographical entity situated outside the area where that language has official status and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical entity is situated.

#### Observations

No problem was found in the French or English definition.

**Nom traditionnel :** Nom qui, sous sa forme écrite, est d'un usage répandu, courant et durable à l'intérieur d'une communauté linguistique donnée, mais qui diffère de toute dénomination officielle locale. (Voir: exonyme).

**Conventional name:** A written form of a name in widespread, current use in a language community which differs from any form of the name in current use in the language community to which the name belongs.

**Nombre propio convencional:** Exónimo usado amplia y corrientemente.

#### Observations

The Spanish definition is markedly different from the French and English definitions in that it clearly establishes that a conventional name is a type of exonym. However, nothing prevents a conventional name or a nom traditionnel from belonging to the same language as the name to which it corresponds; whereas an

to which it corresponds must, by definition, belong to different languages. Note also that the French definition emphasizes the official status of the reference toponym, a piece of information absent from the English and Spanish definitions.

Variante : Forme différente d'une forme de référence, considérée comme principale, normale ou normalisée.

Variant name: A name other than that or those accepted as the approved official name.

Nombre proprio optativo: Nombre destinado del normalizado.

#### Observations

The definitions are significantly different. The English and Spanish terms apply to a name distinct from the official name, whereas the French definition seems to refer to a name related to an official name, as the expressions *forme différente* and *forme de référence* seem to prove; these expressions were used in preference to *nom différent* and *nom* or *dénomination de référence*. Moreover, the term to which the variant name corresponds is described very differently in each language. Finally, the Spanish qualifier *optativo* appears to carry an important nuance that is found neither in the French nor in the English.

By looking at the table in the appendix and its legend, the reader can easily see that the phenomenon of multiple place names extends far beyond the question of places bearing more than one name and located in multilingual areas, to which resolution 4-D of 1967 applies (specifically cases 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6 in the table); this phenomenon also extends beyond the question of exonyms (case 20 in the table).

Using a generic term to designate all these cases of multiple names appears pertinent from a terminological point of view; such a term would cover names with different roots as well as linguistic and graphic variants. Perhaps the expression allonym, if its definition were first extended to all geographic features, would be appropriate.

The expression toponymes parallèles presents some difficulties in French because of the very different meanings that it conveys. Parallèle is used to describe the direction of a line in relation to another, reference line, but it also denotes something that is taking place at the same time and dealing with the same thing. Let us suppose that a place is officially called A and that it bears the unofficial names B and C at the same time; only B and C would be toponyms that were 'parallel'<sup>1</sup> to A by virtue of the first meaning, whereas all three could be considered 'parallel' names according to the second meaning. If the expression toponymes parallèles were retained to cover all cases of multiple place names, it would be important for the definition to eliminate the ambiguity that the use of the term parallèle could cause.

### 3. Quebec and the application of United Nations resolution 4-D to multilingual areas

The treatment that the Commission de toponymie advocates for 'parallel' toponymic forms takes into account the United Nations recommendations on the standardization of geographical names and the sections of the Charter of the French language\* dealing with toponymy.

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\* This is the constituent act of the Commission de toponymie.

<sup>1</sup> Literal translation of the French word - Tr

For various reasons, the question of 'parallel' toponymic forms is not, however, at the forefront of toponymy in Quebec. The Commission takes care to evaluate the usage of geographical names and to employ this usage as a main guide to its choices before approving toponyms; thus, the probability of a commonly used 'parallel' form occurring alongside a rarely used official name is reduced. Furthermore, the Commission does not consider a toponym that differs from the official form only by the translation of the generic to be a true 'parallel' form. In that respect, the Commission supports the United Nations, which does not recognize as an exonym a name that differs from the official name only by the translation of the generic (resolution 19 of the 1977 United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names). More specifically, the Commission considers 'parallel' toponymic forms to be "national" or "domestic exonyms", the use of which should be appropriately limited, as the United Nations recommended, though not systematically excluded.

Two other factors limit, in Quebec, the appearance of 'parallel' toponymic forms. The first of these is the principle of univocity, or one name for one place, from which it follows that the Commission cannot promote the use of a form other than the one it has officialized. The second is section 128 of the Charter of the French language, which makes the exclusive use of the official nomenclature compulsory under certain circumstances: government and semipublic texts and documents, public signs, road signs, and works dealing with training, teaching and research published in Quebec and approved by the Education or Higher Education and Science ministers.

In light of the foregoing, the use of 'parallel' toponymic forms should be limited to the following cases: adapting the official nomenclature to the context of its use; using unofficial names for the sake of preserving toponyms; recycling unofficial toponyms; and mentioning the names of transborder features that are official in provinces or states bordering on Quebec.



### 3.1 Adapting the official nomenclature to the context of its use

According to a free interpretation of section 128, such adaptation seems possible as regards abbreviation, using an upper- or lower-case letter to begin the generic and writing numbers. Toponymic writing rules exist that, in Quebec, regulate such situations. Strictly speaking, toponyms so adapted are not names that differ essentially from official names; it is their graphic form that is adjusted.

Translation of the generic, even in the body of a text, cannot constitute an acceptable form of adaptation for Quebec geographic nomenclature because it gives rise to another place name, according to the Commission de toponymie. More specifically, section 128 makes the exclusive use of official names mandatory, under certain circumstances, hence the impossibility of translating the generics in Quebec. Even in circumstances to which this section does not apply, the Commission could not promote the use of a nomenclature that is not official, because it feels it must respect the spirit of the Act and the principle of univocity of a name.

The Commission believes that its position is quite compatible with the predominant side-by-side bilingualism found, de facto, in Canadian geographical nomenclature, namely, exclusively unilingual generics, sometimes French and sometimes English depending on the province or the region under consideration. Moreover, Quebec itself has certain toponyms with English unilingual generics. The opposite is also true for a number of provinces and territories in regard to toponyms with French generics.

### 3.2 Using unofficial names for the sake of toponym preservation

Such use also appears to be compatible with the Quebec legislation. The Commission must take stock of and preserve place names, according to the mandate given it by the Assemblée nationale du Québec. However, a working definition of preservation remains to be set out; it should provide for the presentation and dissemination of 'parallel' toponyms when scientific or cultural interest so justifies. Because the Commission must preserve place names, it follows that it must make them known for the sake of preservation, and in such a way as to ensure that these toponyms are perceived neither as concurrent forms of official names nor as toponyms with quasi-official or unofficial status.

As regards preservation, the circumstances of presentation and dissemination of 'parallel' names that offer scientific or cultural interest may include:

#### Archives

Computer or manual files, microfilms, microfiches, sound recordings, films, written documents, in short all the possible resources of modern records management.

#### Commission de toponymie gazetteers or toponymic dictionaries

- Répertoire toponymique du Québec [Quebec gazetteer];
- gazetteer of specialized nomenclatures: exhaustive nomenclature of a particular linguistic group, corpus of historical toponyms and so on;
- toponymic dictionaries.

### Scientific documents

These include documents prepared by the Commission de toponymie or other public or semipublic agencies, using a scientific approach which intrinsically requires the presentation of 'parallel' toponymic forms on various information storage media. Among other fields, this category includes historical, linguistic and geographical research.

### Cultural documents

Such documents are prepared by the Commission de toponymie or other public or semipublic agencies whose purpose above all is to promote the cultural viability of communities with precarious identities.

Present-day documents that use 'parallel' toponymic forms for the purpose of preservation should indicate that these toponyms are not official and, when circumstances so warrant or require (as in the case of gazetteers), direct the user to the official names.

### 3.3 Recycling toponyms

Recycling toponyms is a process whereby names are given to unnamed places, by using geographical names of places that no longer exist, names that have fallen into disuse and toponyms with no official status that are used in 'parallel' with others.

This process could contribute to eliminating difficulties that arise from the usage restrictions on 'parallel' toponyms. The recycling of 'parallel' toponyms through their application to unnamed places related to those that they designate would constitute recognition of a cultural reality whose expression has often been obscured until now by legal and administrative constraints. A toponym that is 'parallel' to

an official name would not be officially recognized, but this 'parallel' toponym or its specific element alone would play a part in the composition of a new geographical name, which would be included in the official nomenclature.

We are thinking in particular of the native toponymy for the major natural features of Quebec that was in large part replaced by a nomenclature of European origin, and we are also, to a certain extent, thinking of historical European names from the colonial period that were later replaced.

Examples: The possible recycling of the toponym Pangaliriat, the Inuit name for Lac François-Malherbe, to name a headland on this lake.

The possible use of Allezay, a name formerly given by Jacques Cartier to one of the îles de la Madeleine today called Le Corps-Mort, to designate an undersea geographical feature located near this island.

#### 3.4 Mentioning the names of transborder features that are official in provinces or states bordering on Quebec.

In the treatment that it gives to names of geographical features that overlap Quebec's borders, the Commission de toponymie allows some use, although marginal, of 'parallel' toponyms that are not included in the official nomenclature of Quebec (such as Ottawa River, Lake Champlain, Gulf of St. Lawrence and Chaleur Bay).

This treatment consists of the following:

- In a French document, it is standard procedure to make exclusive use of the official Quebec forms.

- In an English document, it is permissible to make exclusive use of the official Quebec forms - a solution that the Commission favours - or to write both the official forms of the other provinces, territories or states and, in parentheses, those of Quebec.

Examples: Baie James or James Bay (Baie James)

Monts Torngat or Torngat Mountains (Monts Torngat)

Note: When both French and English forms are used at the same time, it is important that the spelling of toponyms respects the integrity of each name. This excludes the use of a single form comprising the French and English generic elements positioned around the specific, which serves as a pivot. For example, the form Baie James Bay departs from this standard.

#### 4. Quebec and reducing the use of exonyms

The Commission de toponymie supports wholeheartedly the resolutions of the United Nations concerning the objective of limiting as far as possible the use of exonyms. It has adopted as its own the position of the United Nations Conferences in the treatment that it recommends for the names of inhabited areas and those of natural or artificial geographical features located outside Quebec and entirely within a state: to designate these places, standardized local names should be used alone or, as needed, with the corresponding exonym in parentheses. These standards may be found in toponymic guides published by the Commission, and they are particularly useful to publishers and writers of school textbooks.

Reducing the use of exonyms means completely changing age-old habits. Thus, this undertaking appears difficult to carry out on a great many fronts at the same time. In light of this situation, would it not be appropriate to concentrate efforts on certain strategic targets? Success in these areas could, as far as we can see, have positive repercussions. As our first targets, we have identified the geographic nomenclature posted in airports and railway stations and appearing in airline and railway timetables and those of other transportation companies. Promoting the use of local names in these international contexts would make it possible to prevent, among other things, users from developing the habit of using an exonym in a language foreign to them in order to designate a foreign place, when an exonym for that place exists in the user's language (for example, posting Moscow (English exonym) in the Roissy or Mirabel airport, instead of Moskva (standardized local name) or even Moscou (French exonym expected in Paris and Montréal in the absence of Moskva).

## 5. Study and recommendation proposals

The work of the Commission de toponymie on the phenomenon of multiple place names has revealed, in our opinion, a series of significant points that require special attention for the purpose of studies or recommendations by members of the Group of Experts.

These include:

- 5.1 The principle of reducing the use of exonyms should be reaffirmed in order to avoid such use becoming generalized, and especially to prevent widespread use of exonyms in languages foreign to local users.

- 5.2 The competent names authorities should be asked to develop a policy on the application of resolution 4-D of 1967 (multilingual areas), from the viewpoint of the standardization of geographical names.
- 5.3 The definitions of terms dealing with multiple place names contained in the Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names should be revised. A more thorough classification of cases of multiple place names is suggested.

The Commission de toponymie du Québec assures the world's names authorities and the members of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that they have its full co-operation with respect to working to further the standardization of geographical names and particularly to protect the principle of univocity of names, which is one of its cornerstones.

## APPENDIX

## Categories of Multiple Place Names

The search for a generic term to cover all cases of multiple place names has led us to represent these cases using a table that classifies multiple names depending on whether the names in question have official status or not and also on whether the named places are inside or outside a reference state or straddle a border.

	Official Status		Unofficial Status
Places inside a reference state and considered from the viewpoint of this state.	1-----2	3-- --4 5-- --6	7-----8
Places straddling the border of the reference state and considered from the viewpoint of this state.	9-----10	11-- --12 13-- --14	15-----16
Places outside a reference state and considered from the viewpoint of this	17-----18	19-- --20 21-- --22	23-----24



The relation x-----y means that more than one name exists to designate a given place. This relation encompasses the following situations:

- multiple place names originating from different roots;
- multiple names with a root that is common to all the names in question or that constitutes a reciprocally exact or approximate translation;
- multiple names that are graphic variants.

The following is a description of the cases of multiple names represented in the table:

1-2: a place located within a state, considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing more than one official name.

Example: None in Quebec. An observer in New Brunswick could cite the case of the town of Grand-Sault, also called Grand Falls (official).

3-4: a place located within a state, considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing an official name and another, unofficial, name.

Example: Sept-Îles (official) and Washat (unofficial) or Seven Islands (unofficial).

5-6: a place located within a state and considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing an official name and another, unofficial, name; under certain circumstances the unofficial name is substituted for the official name or appears with the official name.

Example: None in Quebec. An example in Ontario of this situation would be French River (official) and Rivière des Français (unofficial).

7-8: a place located within a state and considered from the viewpoint of this state, not officially designated, but bearing more than one unofficial name.

Example: the group of islands located opposite the city of Montmagny and called Archipel de Montmagny (unofficial), Archipel de l'île aux Grues (unofficial), Archipel de la Côte-du-Sud (unofficial) and Îles de Montmagny (unofficial).

9-10: a place straddling a border and considered from the viewpoint of the reference state, for which each state concerned has a different official name.

Examples: Lac Champlain (official in Quebec and Canada) and Lake Champlain (official in the United States).

11-12: a place straddling a border and bearing an official name in the reference state and a different, unofficial, name in the other state.

Example: possible case of a bay in the Ungava region having an official Quebec name, and at the same time bearing a different name that was not official in the Northwest Territories.

13-14: a place straddling a border and bearing an unofficial name in the reference state and a different, official, name in the other state.

Example: possible case of a bay in the Ungava region having an unofficial Quebec name but officially named by the Northwest Territories.

15-16: a place straddling a border and bearing no official name, but a different unofficial name in each state concerned.

Example: possible case of a bay in the Ungava region not being officially named but bearing an unofficial name in each state concerned.

17-18: a place located outside a reference state but considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing more than one locally official name.

Example: Genève (official), Genf (official), Ginevra (official), from the viewpoint of Quebec.

19-20: a place located outside a state but considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing an official local name (that is, in the outside state) and another name, an exonym, in the reference state.

Example: London (locally official) and Londres (exonym used in Quebec).

21-22: a place located outside a state but considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing an official local name and another, unofficial, name in the reference state; the unofficial name is not an exonym.

Example: Swansea (official) and Abertawe (unofficial), for a city in Wales (United Kingdom).

23-24: a place located outside a state but considered from the viewpoint of this state, bearing no official name but more than one unofficial name.

Example: possible case of islands in the Northwest Territories, considered from the viewpoint of Quebec, not officially named, but bearing an English name and an Inuit name, both unofficial.