

**Twenty-third Session
Vienna, 28 March – 4 April 2006**

**Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda:
Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

Exonyms, Endonyms and Traditional Names

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In the past, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has repeatedly stressed the need not only of reducing the number of exonyms, but of using them (e.g. in maps) in a politically sensitive way. Resolution 29 of the Second Conference on the standardization of Geographical Names, recognizing the desirability of limiting the use of exonyms, recommended “that the use of those exonyms designating geographical entities falling wholly within one state should be reduced as far and as quickly as possible”. Resolution 20 of the Fourth Conference “realizing that the reduction of exonyms used has not been carried out with the same intensity by all states.... recommends that exonyms giving rise to international problems should be used very sparingly”. Finally, Resolution 13 of the Fifth Conference “recommends a further reduction in the use of exonyms” and recommends further “that countries intensify their efforts to persuade private and public organizations, such as educational institutions and the media (*sic!*) , to reduce the use of exonyms in their publications”. But what is an exonym?

It now appears that the reduction of the number and use of exonyms is accompanied by a somewhat disturbing trend which might be “giving rise to international problems”.

The *Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names* produced by UNGEGN’s working group on toponymic terminology and published by the United Nations Secretariat in 2002, carried the following definitions:

081 exonym Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature 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 feature is situated (*here follow examples in both western and eastern languages*).... See also ? **name, traditional**.

076 endonym Name of a geographical feature in one of the languages occurring in the area where the feature is situated (*here, again, follow examples in both western and eastern languages*)....

However, there were experts who expressed a different opinion. These mainly represented countries whose borders had, in the past, extended beyond their present boundaries so that they retained in their own language a sometimes extensive body of geographical names for geographical features in those regions which are at present outside their political control. Generalizing, it can be stated that these countries are situated chiefly in west-central and central-eastern Europe.

The Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, in resolution 4, at the instigation of some of these countries, established a separate working group on exonyms. This working group proposed new definitions for the terms “exonym” and “endonym, as follows:

exonym name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken, and differing in its form from the name used in an official or well established language of the area where the geographical feature is located.

endonym name of a geographical feature in an official or well established language occurring in that area where the feature is located.

Underlined are the main changes from the current official definitions. Significantly, no examples for the use of the new definitions were given, contrary to the official definitions in the *Glossary*. The total lack of examples was one of the reasons for the replacement of the manual *Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names*, or *Glossary No. 330* for short, edited by M. Stephane de Brommer (France) and produced in 1984 by the United Nations Secretariat; another was a reference in the definitions to western languages and Roman script only. This as well as some other objections led to the forming of the present working group on terminology.

A place name which is not an exonym is an endonym by default, so the above proposals would mean that many names in certain sovereign countries would be classified as endonyms – not in their own language but in the language of a different country! The former countries probably would not welcome this or would even object to this on historical-political grounds. Defining such toponyms as traditional names would solve the problem (see below).

Let us look at a specific example which shows that these definitions are unsatisfactory. Thus, English is quite widely spoken and well established in Israel, so the above proposed new definition of an endonym would make “Jerusalem” an endonym which it is not, this being Yerushalayim (Hebrew) and Al- Quds (Arabic). The same would apply to the Greek “Hierosolyma” (there being e.g. a Greek Colony in Jerusalem). Conversely, “Jerusalem” which does not differ in its form from the name in this “well established” (English) language would therefore not be an English exonym and thus, again, an endonym, which it is not! It would, of course, be an English traditional name, found already in the earliest English Bibles. Here comes to our aid the following definition in the Glossary:

230 name, traditional an ? **exonym** in relatively widespread use by a particular linguistic community and usually found in its tradition and literature. *Examples:* Alexandrie (French) for al-Iskandariyah (Arabic); Jerusalén (Spanish) for Yerushalayim (Hebrew); Peking (English) for Beijing (Chinese).

Exonyms such as Alexandria (English), Rhodi (Italian) or Danzig (German) would then be traditional names for al-Iskandariyah, Ródhos and Gdansk, but not endonyms, to which Egypt, Greece and Poland might object.

Besides the “political” changes there is the unwarranted linguistic change from the original “situated” – unequivocally meaning being in a specific situation or place – to “located”, one of the lexical meanings of which is “to seek out or discover, or find the place of” [Oxford, Webster].

It seems that one of the stumbling blocks is the term “official” in definition No. 081, because there are countries which have no “official language”, such as the United Kingdom.

The undersigned, as convenor of the working group on terminology, now proposes for adoption by the working group either of the following solutions.

(a) Leave all three definitions (081 exonym, 076 endonym, 230 traditional name) as they are, recognizing the importance of the last.

(b) Modify the two first definitions as follows:

081 exonym Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status or (where no official language exists, is widely spoken), and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. *Examples*: Warsaw is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); Mailand is German for Milano; Londres is French for London; Quluniya is Arabic for Köln (German). The officially Romanized endonym Moskva for Москва is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form Beijing, while Peking is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage, See also ? **name, traditional**.

076 endonym Name of a geographical feature in an official or well established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. *Examples*: Varanasi (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqsir (not Luxor).

Apparently there is a certain trend of returning to the "dark ages" of Glossary No. 330 which ignored practically everything non-European. Nevertheless, these definitions will be brought as proposals (together with others) before the working group on terminology at its next meeting, during the 23rd session of UNGEGN in Vienna in March-April 2006. At any rate, whatever amended definition (if any) will be approved will be inserted in an updated version of the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*.