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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
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CONVENTIONAL NAMES

DEFINITIONS

USAGE

Paper submitted by the Governments of Austria,  
the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland

DEFINITIONS

An exonym (this term being more appropriate than "conventional names"), as far as the purpose of standardization of geographical names is concerned, can be defined as follows:

An exonym is:

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.

Examples:

"Geneva" is the English exonym for (French) "Genève".

"Tage" is the French exonym for (Spanish) "Tajo", (Portuguese) "Tejo".

"Rakousko" is the Czech exonym for (German) "Oesterreich".

"Cologne" is the French exonym for (German) "Köln".

"Strassburg" is the German exonym for (French) "Strasbourg", the latter being the only official form.

"Luik" is the Dutch exonym for (French) "Liège".

"Anvers" is the French exonym for (Dutch) "Antwerpen".

(But: "Brussel" is not an exonym for (French) "Bruxelles", "Bozen" is not an exonym for (Italian) "Bolzano" -- Dutch "Brussel" and German "Bozen" being names officially used aside with French "Bruxelles" and Italian "Bolzano", respectively.)

#### USAGE

1. Just as any lexical unit, exonyms are part of the vocabulary of a given language. They "belong" to the language community which uses them. It is therefore neither for the nation to which the geographic entity in question belongs, nor for any international body to decide whether an exonym should be kept in use or not.

2. When viewing the situation as a whole, one finds that exonyms are on a decline. There is general tendency for exonyms for less important geographical entities to be ousted by the local official names. Many exonyms which existed in former times are not used any more. On the other hand it is safe to predict that a certain stock of exonyms will survive.

3. The present situation is unstable: constant change can be observed, and further evolution is to be expected. Moreover, conditions differ between cultural settings as well as between fields of applications. This has to be taken into consideration when attempting to formulate directives or recommendations.

4. Although the problem of exonyms is primarily linguistic, there are several more aspects that must as well be taken into account.

(i) The following can be said in favour of maintaining existing exonyms:

Exonyms being part of the vocabulary of a given language, their over-all elimination would result in impoverishment of that vocabulary and would be inconsistent with sound principles of language policy. Exonyms generally bear witness of long-lasting contacts between peoples concerned. They are valuable evidence for historical and cultural relationships. Many exonyms are deeply rooted in the lexical system of the language. This holds especially true for the names of major geographical entities. Replacement of exonyms by local official names often causes difficulties of spelling and pronunciation for the language-users.

(ii) On the other hand, exonyms may sometimes present certain disadvantages:

The occurrence of too large an amount of exonyms in the vocabulary of a given language constitutes a burden to the memories of the language-users, especially as far as the names of minor geographical features are concerned. Using exonyms rather than local official names may lead to confusion in certain international activities such as communication or traffic.

(iii) The advantages and drawbacks should be given serious consideration in each individual case.

The question of exonyms should not be treated under political viewpoints nor in terms of nationalism. The occurrence, and use, of an exonym must be no means be construed as a claim of the exonym-using language community to the geographical entity to which the exonym refers.

5. As for the attitude towards exonyms, two extremes ought to be avoided:

(i) The "romantic" attitude which tends to defend all exonyms existing in the present and past vocabulary of a given language, going to the length of reviving such exonyms as have become obsolete. This is unrealistic and unpracticable.

(ii) The "internationalist" attitude which is unfavourable to all exonyms whatever and advocates their replacement by local official names, thus introducing into the vocabulary a multitude of new foreign words, even for important and well-known geographical features.

6. Considering the complex character of the problem, no general rules can be expected to apply to the use of exonyms in every field of activity; nor is it possible to give an exhaustive list of such fields.

The following are a few instances of greater versus lesser frequency of exonyms:

They will be more frequent

In:

Spoken language

Context

Fiction

Texts for general public

Maps for general and educational purposes and for use within one language community

Than in:

Written language

Tables and maps

Technical texts

Texts for the specialist

Maps for specialized purposes (e.g. road-maps) and for international use

/...

Also, exonyms will be found more often for some classes of geographical entities than for others: e.g. more often for features of large extension or great importance such as countries, capitals, etc., than for minor features. Equally, their frequency will be higher for such entities as have been well-known for a long time within the language community.

7. Even in these cases where the use of exonyms is legitimate it may sometimes prove advantageous to add the local official name, adopting a device whereby one of the two expressions is placed in brackets or after a slanting bar, e.g.: Gênes (Genova), Genova (Gênes), Gênes/Genova, Genova/Gênes.

8. It would be very desirable for every language community to have a list published to show what exonyms are used for geographical and topographical features outside its language area, giving side by side the exonym and the corresponding local official name.

9. It should be strongly recommended to editors of cartographic works intended for educational purposes and/or use by the broad public (such as school maps, school atlases, maps in encyclopaedias etc.) to include exonyms, especially those for inhabited places and major geographical features, but to make sure that exonyms admitted are not obsolete ones nor out of common usage.

10. In all written or oral communications where use of an exonym would be detrimental to the intelligibility, i.e., to the identifiability, or where it could be expected to arouse unfriendly feelings, it is recommendable to replace the exonym in that given case by the local official name or at least to mention that name in addition to the exonym.

In view of the preceding considerations the conference should contemplate appropriate recommendations.

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