

## AGENDA ITEM 10

### Geographical terms

- (a) Classification of geographical entities and geographical names
- (b) Glossaries
  - (i) Process of compilation
  - (ii) Uniformity of presentation
  - (iii) Generic terms
  - (iv) Designations
  - (v) Coded items
  - (vi) Abbreviations
  - (vii) Other

#### PREPARATION OF TOPOGRAPHICAL GLOSSARIES: SOME PROBLEMS WITH AFRICAN TOPONYMS\*

##### Report presented by Kenya

###### INTRODUCTION

At the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held at Geneva in 1967, a resolution was adopted which recommended that national gazetteers should include a glossary.<sup>1</sup>

A glossary was defined for this purpose as a "collection of generic terms with their meanings in geographical names".

A generic term was defined as a "term included in a geographical name, indicating the type of the named entity and having the same meaning in current local use".

The resolution did not make any reference to languages, but at the United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale, held at Bonn from 3 to 22 August 1962, it was recommended that a producing country should give on each map sheet a glossary "with a translation into one of the official languages of the United Nations".<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the pioneers of modern glossaries was to enable map-users to understand the significance of generic terms found on maps of foreign countries. Thus General Parmentier in 1881 published a *Vocabulaire arabe-français des mots qui entrent le plus fréquemment dans la composition des noms de lieu*, one of a series

\* The original text of this report, prepared by John Loxton, University of Nairobi Kenya, was contained in document E/CONF.61/L.2.

<sup>1</sup> *United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*, vol. 1, *Report of the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.68.I.9), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale*, vol. 2, *Specifications of the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 63.I.20), p. 17.

of glossaries for French use abroad. In 1904 Alexander Knox published in London a *Glossary of Geographical and Topographical Terms* explaining in English the meanings of generic terms used in many parts of the world for which maps existed, notably including most of Asia and parts of Africa. Some more recent glossaries of world-wide coverage have been published by the geographer L. D. Stamp<sup>3</sup> and by the British Hydrographic Department.<sup>4</sup>

However, the need for glossaries is not confined to the international field: they are also valuable for internal use in multilingual countries. There are few countries in the world which do not have minority-language groups and some have a great many. For example, the people of Kenya spring from four main ethnic groups and within each group many vernaculars are in use. There are more than 30 main languages. Probably no more than a few score of the half-million inhabitants (mainly Bantu and Nilotic) of Nairobi know the meanings of the terms used on the maps of the north-eastern half of Kenya, inhabited predominantly by Hamitic people.

Even apparently monolingual countries need glossaries. An investigation in the United States of America into the local meanings of common generic terms disclosed an astonishing range. For example, the word "glade" is locally applied to such diverse features as swamps, streams, forest clearings, upland meadows, and patches of smooth ice or of unfrozen ground.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> L. D. Stamp (ed.), *Glossary of Geographical Terms* (New York, Penguin Books, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> *Glossary of Terms used on Admiralty Charts* (London, Hydrographic Department, 1953).

<sup>5</sup> M. F. Burrill and E. Bonsack, "Use and preparation of specialized glossaries", *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 1962.

It should be evident that any toponymic exercise must be an interdisciplinary project.<sup>6</sup> The basic requirement before any work can begin is a reasonably accurate and up-to-date topographic map at a suitable scale, to which have been added as many geographical names as the mapping authority can collect. The foundation-member of the toponymic team must be a topographer with intimate knowledge of the detailed geography of the area being studied — in other words, either a native of the area or an expert prepared to spend some time there. He should know the local language of daily use; if he does not know it, a linguist must be the next member of the team. Historians and anthropologists may be needed in a consultative capacity.

Although a national authority on geographical names is obviously the most appropriate body to arrange for the preparation of a glossary, it is important to avoid confusion between this work and the main function of such an authority, which is the standardization of names. The execution of the process of standardization may involve changing spellings, changing the generic terms used or changing positions on maps, for example. Preparing a glossary is not a similar dynamic exercise, but a presentation of facts as they are. M. Arousseau, a distinguished former secretary of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) of the United Kingdom emphasized that, "if it is to be of any use, a glossary to maps must be first of all a list of the very words found on maps. Map language often confronts the linguist with obsolete spellings, archaic words, dialect words, words not in dictionaries, or words used in senses not given in dictionaries".<sup>7</sup> Examples from the maps of Kenya are presented in several reference works prepared by the present author.<sup>8</sup>

#### SCOPE OF A GLOSSARY

A start has been made in preparing some local glossaries of Kenyan generic terms, with a view to producing a comprehensive national glossary. This preliminary exercise has thrown up some problems, the solution of which will affect the form of the final product.

One such fundamental problem is to decide the coverage of a glossary. "Coverage" does not mean here a geographical area but what a "generic term" comprises. By the definition given above, a generic term indicates the type of a "geographical entity". Arousseau's useful definition of a geographical entity<sup>9</sup> includes "any feature

of the earth's surface or any bounded unit of human organization". But this is not restrictive enough: a puddle of water on a road is a feature, a room in a hotel is a bounded human unit. The limit of admissible entities must clearly be drawn at a more practical level. One obvious criterion is the degree of permanence, but here again it is difficult to establish a critical minimum duration for "permanence". As all geographers know, everything on the face of our earth is in a state of evolution, albeit some rates of change are extremely slow.

The first step is, of course, to examine all the place names in the area of study and to list the generic parts. This is simple enough with a name like "Indian Ocean", where "Ocean" is the generic term and "Indian" the specific term. But many specific terms include a generic element — for example, "Kilimanjaro" could be written "Kilima Njaro" ("Mount Njaro")—and in many place names a generic is used alone as a specific term—there are villages in Kenya named "Lwanda" (Luo for "a rock"), "Soy" (Nandi for "a low hot plain") and "Kianda" (Kikuyu for "a valley with water"). These are clear and obvious cases, but it is probably true to assert that a very high proportion of place names contain a generic element; this is often not apparent without research, because the generic term may be no longer in daily use, or distorted out of immediate recognition. If the scope of a glossary is too extensive, it will be longer than the gazetteer which it seeks to explain and will tend to become a place-name dictionary.

Having listed all the apparent generic terms from the names of the area under study, the next step is to classify them. It will then be easier to decide which are acceptable for inclusion in the glossary and which are not. Classification also has its problems, since many features do not fall into a single, clear-cut category but have characteristics of more than one: a canal, for example, is a product of land shape, water movement, and development by man.

However, most features appearing on maps may generally be classified as either natural or cultural. Natural features can be subdivided into physical features (land forms), water, vegetation and climatic features. Examples will illustrate this division:

- (a) Land forms : mountain, valley, plain;
- (b) Water forms : spring, river, lake;
- (c) Vegetation forms : forests, prairie, mangrove swamp;
- (d) Climatic forms : desert, tundra.

Purists will no doubt object that desert and tundra are more vegetational than climatic forms. Better examples of this last category are found in the *Gazetteer of Kenya*:

Olenkijape	(Maasai for "windy")
Boji	(Boran for "dusty")
Sinet	(Nandi for "cold")
Olo-ikurukurr	(Maasai for "where there is thunder")

How effectively do such climatic attributes define geographical entities? If the definition is considered inadequate they should not be classed as generic terms or included in the glossary.

As mentioned above, some names do not fit into a single category. "Subuko" (with variant spellings) is a

<sup>6</sup> J. Loxton, "Administrative structure of national names authorities", *United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*, vol. 2, *Proceedings of the Conference and Technical Papers* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.69.I.8), pp. 103-104.

<sup>7</sup> M. Arousseau, *Rendering of Geographical Names* (London, Hutchinson, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> J. Loxton, *Names on the Map* (Corona, 1959, and Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1959); "Geographical names in emergent multi-lingual countries", *First United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa*, vol. 2, *Proceedings of the Conference and Technical Papers* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 66.I.13), pp. 298-299; "Geographical names", in W. T. W. Morgan, *Nairobi City and Region* (Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1967), chap. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Arousseau, *Rendering of Geographical Names*.

fairly common area name in Maasailand and it denotes a high, cool place good for summer grazing. It is thus a compound of (a), (c) and (d) above, with cultural activity added.

All entities that can be classified as (a) or (b) can go into the glossary without question. Class (c) provides some marginal examples. A large number of Kenyan place names, especially in the Ukambani districts, are names of trees. The origin is obvious: probably a prominent tree (or sometimes a group of trees) of a particular species, standing perhaps at a track junction, became a local geographical reference point, and the subsequent settlement adopted the name. Thus we have villages named

Mukuyu (Kikuyu and Kamba for "wild fig-tree")  
 Tarakwet (Nandi for "cedar-tree")  
 Ol Tukai (Maasai for "palm-tree")

Other kinds of wild vegetation also give their names to areas:

Mutwot (Nandi for "papyrus")  
 Ogada (Luo for "Napier grass")

to cultivation:

Sukari (Swahili for "sugar-cane")  
 Kyanga (Kamba for "cassava")

and also to cultural activities:

Ithembo (Kamba for "sacred grove")

If individual items of vegetation are admitted as generic terms, what of animals? Very many places in Kenya are named after animals:

Simba (Swahili for "lion")  
 Kinyang (Turkana for "crocodile")  
 Nganga (Kamba for "guinea-fowl")

and some from animal activity:

Kithumba (Kamba for "termite nest")

But in assessing such meaningful toponyms as indicating geographical entities it is necessary to apply criteria not only of permanence but also of limited mobility. Features such as glaciers or marine sandbanks are mobile, but usually within definable limits. The continuous presence of some form of animal life within a particular area must be considered as uncertain and not therefore acceptable as defining an entity.

The classification of cultural features, that is, of man-made development, parallels that of natural features and includes some items that must be inserted in the glossary and some that are dubious. There is no argument about generic terms such as quarry, dam, bridge, prison, farm and airport. The problem comes with names like

Muthaiga (a suburb of Nairobi) (Kikuyu for "medicine")  
 Ikutha (Kamba for "arrowshot")  
 Bahati (Swahili for "luck")  
 Il-ainyamok (Maasai for "thieves")  
 Chisa (Boran for "sleeping-place")

The criterion of permanence in time and place will eliminate all of these.

It is in the description of cultural features that most geographical neologisms (newly coined words) are found: for example, "car park", "lay-by", "heliport". In Kenya such words are usually corruptions of foreign words, such as *kampi* (Swahili for "camp-site"), or *bunta* (Swahili for "jetty", from English "pontoon").

Most of the names noted above are nouns. Frequently the specific part of a name is an adjective—"Long Island", for example. Such adjectives usually indicate size, shape, colour, number, position, or some other quality (hot, pleasant, grassy, spotted). Sometimes a place name is an adjective standing alone, that is, a specific without a generic term. In most such cases "place" is the implied generic, as for example:

Rongai (Maasai and Turkana for "narrow")  
 Baragoi (Massai for "brown")

In some cases we can trace the lost generic term: for instance, the city of Nairobi ("cold") took its name from "Enkare Nairobi"—"the cold river" in Maasai.

In many languages this indefinite generic may be replaced by locative suffix (-*ni* in Swahili and Kamba, -*ini* in Kikuyu) or a relative possessive prefix (*oloo-* in Maasai). Examples are:

Kilindini (Swahili for "by the deep water")  
 Njogu-ini (Kikuyu for "place of elephants")  
 Oloo-nongot (Maasai for "which has valleys")

The last-mentioned word is usually printed in its corrupted form, "Longonot", the name of a ridged mountain.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is hoped that the above analysis will clarify the nature of the problem of selecting terms to be included in a glossary. The factors which affect the final choice may now be considered. Each compiling authority will have to make its own decision.

A prime factor is, inevitably, economy. If there are no restrictions on time and money and the objective is to produce a comprehensive work of reference, then all terms, of however marginal generic significance, will be included.

If production conditions are less than this optimum, the next factor is, probably, frequency of occurrence. If a term occurs only once or twice in a national gazetteer then its inclusion in a glossary is of less use than the inclusion of a term of high frequency.

The other main factor, mentioned frequently above, is permanence: will the explanation of a generic term made now assist a future user of the glossary? Kilima Kiuu (Kiuu Hill) is a permanent feature of the Kenya landscape, hence *Kilima* must be included in a glossary. But there may no longer be sugar-cane at Sukari or Lions at Simba; there is therefore little value in including such terms.