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A Brief Glossary of Terms Employed in Geographic Names Standardization

# A Brief Glossary of Terms Employed in Geographic Names Standardization

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The following are suggested definitions for a number of terms which have been employed in the deliberations of the U.N. Group of Experts on the Standardization of Geographic Names. They proceed from the simple to the more complex; and most of the items which seem on occasion to lack precision are included.

## I. Language.

- A. sound an oral symbol which, in a given linguistic context, conveys a specific item of information.
- B. phoneme a basic irreducible unit of the phonological structure of a language.

  A phoneme is a psychological, as well as a phonological, unit. When, for instance, one reasons in silence, he employs the phonemes of a language, rather than sounds of speech or letters of an alphabet. However, in order to effect communication, these phonemes are expressed in terms of oral sound or written symbols.
- C. morpheme a basic irreducible unit of the grammatical structure of a language.

  The English word [bookcase] is an example of a word composed of two other words: [book] and [case]. Each of these is a free morpheme, which may stand alone in context. Examples of bound morphemes, which may not stand alone in context, are Spanish [nuev-], [-a], [-o]. [Nuevo] and [nueva] are examples of words, each composed of two bound morphemes. The German word [mein] is an example of a free morpheme, to which may be added the bound morpheme [-e]. Together these form a second German word [meine].
- D. syllable an arbitrary unit composed of one or more phonemes of a language, only one of which may be a vocalic nucleus.

  Spanish [a la al tal tral] are all syllables characteristic of the language. In German one might divide the word [sagen] in either of two ways: [sag-en] (employing morphological criteria), or [sa-gen] (employing phonological criteria). In English [9ab] (IPA transcription) is a perfectly acceptable syllable, although it does not appear in the lexicon of the language at all.

## II. Writing.

A. graphic symbol - a written mark which, in a given linguistic context, conveys a specific item of information. The symbol [~] has one meaning in Spanish writing and another in Portuguese. [S] has similar meanings in Hungarian and Vietnamese writing, but quite a different meaning in, for example, Polish.

The graphic symbol [6] represents the same semantic item in any number of languages, but represents widely divergent phonological items from language to language.

- B. segmental employed in linear order, i.e. left to right, top to bottom, etc.
- C. letter a segmental graphic symbol of Roman script.
- D. character a segmental graphic symbol of a script other than Roman script. The dichotomy between letter and character is somewhat arbitrary, inasmuch as one may perfectly well speak, for instance, of Cyrillic or Greek letters. The distinction is useful, however, in that it aids clarity in technical discussion of writing systems.
- E. diacritical mark a non-segmental graphic symbol, employed in conjunction with a segmental symbol, which does not in itself represent a phoneme.

Roman script diacritical marks are widely recognized. Examples of diacritical marks in other scripts are: [x] in Russian Cyrillic; [x] in Devanagari; [x x x] in Khmer; [x"] in Japanese Kana; [x x x] in Arabic script.

F. marker - a graphic symbol or combination of graphic symbols (segmental, non-segmental, or combined), which represents one or more phonemes of a language, and which is employed in conjunction with a segmental character or letter.

Exemples are: [x x:] in Devanagari script; [[x x x] x, etc.] in Thai; [x x x x] in Arabic; [x x x x] in Vietnamese Roman.

G. apostrophe - the symbol ['], which may be employed either segmentally or as a diacritical mark, and whose meaning should be unambiguous in a given linguistic context.

The apostrophe may represent, for example: consonant palatalization in transliteration of Russian Cyrillic; consonant glottalization in transcription of Quiché, Quechua, etc.; glottal stop in transliteration of Hebrew, Khmer, etc.; glottal stop or ayn (g) in transliteration of Arabic; nothing whatever in an English word such as [don't].

- H. hyphen the segmental symbol [-], which may be employed either to separate or to connect, and whose meaning should be unambiguous in a given linguistic context.
- I. soript a set of graphic symbols which may be variously employed in representation of the phonological and/or morphological elements of a language.

The items of an alphabetic script typically represent phonemes; those of a syllabic script, syllables; and those of an ideographic script, morphemes.

- J. alphabet a specific set of graphic symbols which may be employed in representation of the phonological elements of a particular language.
- K. syllabary a specific set of graphic symbols, each symbol typically (but not necessarily) representing a syllable, which may be employed in representation of the phonological elements of a language.
- L. <u>ideographic lexicon</u> a set of graphic symbols, each symbol typically (but not necessarily) representing a morpheme, which may be employed in the writing of a language.
- M. writing system (= orthography) a structure which employs in representation of the phonological and/or morphological elements of a language:
  - 1. an alphabet, syllabary, and/or ideographic lexicon, and
  - a systematic manner of application of the alphabet, syllabery, and/or ideographic lexicon.

A writing system may be relatively simple (as in Spanish), relatively complex (Japanese Kanji), relatively consistent (Hungarian), relatively inconsistent (English).

- N. transcription the process of recording the phonological and/or morphological elements of a language in terms of a specific writing system; or, an item of a language which has undergone this process.
- 0. transliteration the process of recording the graphic symbols of one writing system in terms of corresponding graphic symbols of a second writing system; or, an item of a language which has undergone this process.
- P. romanization the process of recording in Roman script either the phonological elements of a language or the graphic symbols of a non-Roman writing system.