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English only

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Standardization of Geographical Names**
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Item 14 of the provisional agenda*
Terminology in the standardization of geographical names

United Nations Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, past and current problems

Submitted by Israel

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  ** Prepared by Naftali Kadmon, Convenor, Working Group on Terminology.

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Introduction
Given the deadline for the presentation of papers to the 8th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the information below reaches only up to mid-May, 2002.

Following a close scrutiny of the United Nations Glosssary No. 330, "Technical Terminology employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names", Israel submitted to the 14th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in May 1989 Working Paper No. 4, under the title "Some remarks on Glossary No. 330 – Technical Terminology". This paper pointed out deficiencies in the glossary which comprised 175 terms and their definitions in the six official languages of the U.N. The comments touched upon four topics, viz. the lack of precision in some of the definitions, the lack of uniformity of definitions in some of the six languages, the lack of completeness with many modern terms missing, and finally a certain redundancy of unnecessarily-included terms. In each case relevant examples were quoted. However, the author pointed out two further (and perhaps most important) deficiencies of Glossary 330. One was the complete lack of examples for the definitions, and the other – a total disregard of languages and scripts other than European ones. After discussing the issue the Group of Experts decided to set up a Working Group on Terminology, with Prof. Naftali Kadmon (Israel) as convenor and editor of the new glossary. Initial members were Ms. Kerfoot, Ms. Narhi, and Messrs. Ficor, Gonzales, Hornansky, Lapierre, Lewis, Payne, Raper and Sievers. These were later joint by additional experts.

Early versions of the glossary
The convenor then prepared a first draft of the new work. with 286 entries together with their definitions. These had to be as precise as possible on the one hand, but concise andbriefly formulated on the other. For the first time examples were included at the end of the definitions; another innovation was the inclusion of examples in non-Roman and non-European languages and writing systems. The final 342 linguistic examples introduced by the convenor as editor were taken from the following languages and scripts:
– Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Inuktitut
– (Eskimo), IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), Italian, Japanese Kanji, Katakana and
– Hiragana, Korean, Polish, Persian (Farsi), Russian Cyrillic, Spanish and Thai.

The basic form of the new glossary (version 1.1) was then sent to the U.N. Secretariat in New York with the request to distribute it to the members of the Working Group on Terminology, asking them for comments and, chiefly, for additions. Members of the Working Group but also other experts then offered much valuable input, chiefly by the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Hungary and the Dutch- and German-speaking division, as well as the late Prof. Josef Breu. After two meetings of the Working Group, a first report was made to the 15th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in Geneva in October 1991. At this stage the Glossary, in English only, comprised 328 entries.
Also included in the report was an outline of the target population of users of the glossary, and the following observation:

> "It should be remarked that widespread distribution and utilization of the glossary should be aimed at … [This] will depend very much on "marketing effort", a point that should be borne in mind at the stage of publication."

This point is again becoming of practical relevance today, with publication imminent.

Besides dealing with new entries, some problems of a more general character were presented to, and dealt with by, the Working Group. One was numbering, indexing and cross-referencing of the terms. Others were word order of composite entries, the hierarchical differentiation of writing systems and scripts, the distinction between toponym and geographical name and the inclusion of certain language-specific terms.

After a further two meetings of the Working Group version 2 of the glossary now held 336 entries. Following the convenor's report to the Sixth U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York in August-September 1992, the Conference officially installed the Working Group on Terminology through its resolution No. 11. This resolution recommended

> "that the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology be asked to continue to function, with the aim of producing a multilingual dictionary of toponymic terminology to include the remaining five official languages of the United Nations",

and further

> "that the United Nations Secretariat be asked to supply, within an agreed time-frame and within existing resources, a translation of the new Glossary from the English text into each of the five other official United Nations languages."

Problems of translation

At a number of meetings of the Working Group the Glossary was further modified through version 3 (1996) and increased in scope, and then submitted with 375 entries, as version 4, to the Seventh U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in January 1998 which, after some more deliberations, finally approved it for publication.

Already by 1993 the problem of translation entered the frequent communications between the convenor-editor and the UNGEGN Secretariat in New York. As recommended in resolution 11, it was proposed that the U.N. Secretariat Translation and Documentation Service be requested to perform this task. But after a year or two it became clear that this was not being done, among others because of financial limitations. The editor then asked for volunteers from among the members of his Working Group to take this work upon themselves. First to do this successfully and in a short time was Prof. Du Xianming, assisted by Mr. Wang Shuping (China). A France-Canada team headed by Mme Sylvie Lejeune and Prof. Henri Dorion then did the translation into French (but see below). Later, the translation into Spanish was submitted by Sr. José Cruz Almeida. The translations into Russian and Arabic presented a problem, but were finally performed after a couple of years by a team under Prof. Boginskiy and by Mr. Nasser Al-Harty, respectively.

Late problems

By September 2001 all five translated versions were in hand, but when checked by the editor the following problems were encountered.

1.   Alphabetical order. While Chinese, Spanish and Arabic adhered (as stipulated) to the alphabetical order of the English original, the French and Russian versions listed the terms in the order of their particular language.

2.   The index was missing in Russian and was differently arranged and un-numbered in Spanish and Arabic.

3.   The different translations carried differing introductions, and these had to be brought to a uniform text.

4.   Cross-references within the body of the glossary referred either to the English term (as in Chinese), to the term in the particular language (French, Spanish), or to a numbered item only (Russian).

5.   Many examples in non-Roman script were missing and had to be re-introduced.

6.   However, the chief difficulty was encountered with the French version which differed significantly from the others, as follows:

      6.1   The definitions of numerous terms were quite different from those provided by the five other languages (which were more or less identical). Thus, among other "deviations", UTM grid was equated with UTM projection, toponymy with toponomastics, font with typeface, etc. For some of the terms, additional definitions were given (e.g. 003, 004….).

      6.2   Numerous examples, especially English and German, were either omitted or replaced by French ones. Some good and valid examples in the original were replaced by less suitable ones (e.g. in terms 113, 195, 286, 381).

      6.3   Whereas for non-Roman toponyms in the examples U.N. approved romanization was used in the original and in all other language versions, French transcription had been substituted in some cases (e.g. Djezair for Jaza'ir or Hadj for Hajj).

      6.4   Concerning the acronym UNGEGN it was stated that French does not use the form GENUNG. But the latter form is indeed found in various French documents to the Group of Experts and the Conferences.

      The above points were brought to the attention of the Secretariat with the request for amendments. Items 1 to 5 were indeed corrected, with the U.N. Secretariat doing a good job in re-arranging the French and Russian versions. But items 6.1 to 6.4 were not corrected, or only in part. Therefore the editor "gave in" and decided not to deal any further with the French translation, but to add in the Introduction to the French version – and only to this – a note to the effect that

      "this version of the Glossary has been specially adapted to French usage in toponymy".

Use of the glossary in training literature

      Already in 1992 version 1.2 in English was incorporated in the training manual "An introduction to Toponymy – theory and practice of geographical names" produced by the present writer for the first United Nations Training Course in the Standardization of Geographical Names for Southern Africa, held in Pretoria. It was reprinted (University of Pretoria, 1993, 56 pp., ISBN 0-86979-905-3) and again used at the second U.N. course in 1993, also held in Pretoria. On both these occasions some of the practical exercises were based on the glossary. It then appeared in 1996 in "United Nations documents on geographical names" by Dr. Peter Raper, chairman of UNGEGN. Lately the final version 4 of the glossary was printed

as Annex C in the textbook "Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names" by Naftali Kadmon (Vantage Press, New York 2000, 333 pp., ISBN 0-533-13531-1).

Finally it should be stressed that among the documents and publications produced by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the *Glossary of Terms used in the Standardization of Geographical Names* is the one which had the widest exposure to, and the most input by, members of the Group and delegates to the Conferences. It should indeed contribute to standardization and, especially, to the training of persons concerned with the treatment of geographical names.

Already at this stage, before final production, I wish to express my thanks and appreciation for the work performed by the U.N. Secretariat and the great help rendered by the UNGEGN Secretariat, in particular by Mr. Amor Laaribi, by Ms. Jennifer Javier who acted as a graceful clearing house for the "to and fro", and to Ms. Helen Kerfoot, vice-chairperson of UNGEGN, whose involvement in furthering the project is very much appreciated.

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