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The Alternate Form/Equivalent form dichotomy in the
province of Ontario, Canada

(Submitted by Canada)**

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THE ALTERNATE FORM / EQUIVALENT FORM DICHOTOMY IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO, CANADA

Paper submitted by Canada

A potential source of toponymic conflict may arise when there are two or more speech communities within a given jurisdiction. This situation was addressed in the province of Ontario by an interministerial working group, including the Geographical Names Board. The working group looked at various questions relating to the translation into French of the province's geographical names in order to develop a policy for the linguistic treatment of its French toponymy. UN directives for the standardization of names in multilingual areas were a source of inspiration for the working group. What resulted were the *officially recognized alternate form* and the unofficial *equivalent form* (for use in French texts). A glossary of these French text equivalent forms was published in 1995.

The presence of two or more speech communities within a given jurisdiction can sometimes translate into a potential source of toponymic conflict whenever more than one linguistic form applies to the same geographical entity. In addressing such problems, naming authorities must take into account several factors, the most important of which are the official status of geographical names and the local usage in the speech communities located within the same jurisdiction.

In contrast to the federal government and the provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick, Ontario has no specific linguistic legislation. Although English has long been the dominant language in the province as well as the language of government administration, Ontario has no declared official language. In 1986, in order to meet the requirements of its French speaking minority, the province enacted legislation, the *French Language Services Act*, that requires the government to provide services in the French language to its Franco-Ontarian minority. This population of roughly one half-million francophones is scattered throughout Ontario, but concentrated mainly in the eastern and northern portions of the province. The *Act* recognizes the contribution of Franco-Ontarians to the province's development, and commits the government and its agencies to providing them with services in their native language. Interestingly, the law is selective in application: it is implemented only in urban centres with 5,000 or more francophones, as well as in areas with a francophone population of at least 10%, for a total of 22 designated districts or regions. In most districts, this law controls the activity of a population where Franco-Ontarians actually constitute the large majority of the population. The *Act* thus assumes an important role in terms of geographical nomenclature, which is a vibrant constituent of French heritage and culture in these designated areas.

Among other advantages for Franco-Ontarians, the *Act* provides for the translation into French of all of the province's statutes and legislation. The translation process began during the three-year implementation stage of the *Act*. Statutes involving geographical names posed a particular linguistic problem to translators as the province had no policy for the linguistic treatment of geographical names. For example, could an official name such as **Georgian Bay** be used in a

French text aimed at a francophone population when the official form had been replaced long ago in that speech community by the form **Baie Georgienne**, a form confirmed in local and common usage? Furthermore, how could translators produce acceptable texts in French with English geographical names, with the knowledge that the insertion of such forms in French prose text betrayed, in several cases, the rules of French idiomatic grammar? And finally, would the use of French variant forms not also entail the risk of giving *de facto* recognition to non-official forms?

Towards a Policy for the Treatment of Franco-Ontarian Toponymy

In order to address these questions and to provide Ontario with a policy for the linguistic treatment of its French toponymy, the province created the *Interministerial Working Group on Bilingualism in Toponymy* (IWGBT) in 1988. This body was made up of representatives of various Ontario ministries, including Francophone Affairs, Natural Resources, the Office of the Attorney General, Government Services, Municipal Affairs, Education, Transportation, and the Geographic Names Board. The IWGBT, under the supervision of its Chair, Dr. André Lapierre, developed a policy for the linguistic treatment of toponyms of French origin in the official publications and texts of the Province, including maps, legal texts incorporating geographical names, government publications, and road signage. This protocol was accepted by the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB) in 1992 and has since been used for the linguistic treatment of the province's French geographical nomenclature. Since the development of this protocol has been previously discussed, I will only summarize the salient aspects in this paper.¹

Inspiration from the United Nations 1967 Geneva Conference

During the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which took place in Geneva in 1967, the univocity principle of the geographical name was confirmed. At the heart of this principle was the recognition that there should be only one official toponym for any given geographical entity. The IWGBT endeavoured to incorporate this principle into the development of its policy but at the same time recognized that given the linguistic pluralism of Ontario's geographical nomenclature, it would require careful implementation.

While the official nomenclature in Ontario comprises a vast majority of names that belong to the English tradition, there is a considerable number of French forms such as **Lac des Chats**, or Anglo-French hybrid forms like **Lake Talon**, that have been given official recognition. Ontario official nomenclature also includes a substantial core of Aboriginal names but these were not included in the mandate of the IWGBT. With regard to French names, in addition to the official

¹ Lapierre, André (1984): *Un modèle particulier d'aménagement linguistique: la planification toponymique en milieu minoritaire*, Actes du Colloque sur la problématique de l'aménagement linguistique; J. Dolbec (ed.), Québec, Office de la langue française / Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, p. 91-100.

nomenclature, there was also a large number of non-official toponyms, especially in the 22 regions designated by the *French Language Services Act*, which were found to be in common and/or current usage within the Franco-Ontarian minority.

All French toponyms, official and non-official, were examined by the IWGBT. Given the nature of linguistic pluralism, the working group was inspired by the UN directives for the standardization of names in multilingual areas. The 1967 Geneva Conference communicated very precise directions for the treatment of toponymy in multilingual regions, recommending that, in this type of environment, the status and precedence of forms be clearly indicated. The policy developed by the IWGBT, and accepted by the OGNB in 1992 is an interpretation of these guidelines, as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

The Concept of *Alternate Form*

In order to recognize the vitality of Franco-Ontarian toponymy and grant it appropriate recognition, the IWGBT developed a concept which was applied to francophone-designated regions while respecting the directives of the 1967 UN Conference. This concept is called the *officially recognized alternate form* and applies to the use of a French-language name that is in current usage within the francophone population and that differs from the official English name. Thus, alongside the official designation **French River**, the name which applies to a long body of water joining Lake Nipissing and Georgian Bay, the OGNB recognizes *Rivière des Français* as the form used by the French population of the region. Needless to say, if field work were to demonstrate that the official English form was no longer in use and that the French form was recognized by the entire population of the locale in question, the Board would be called upon to change the status of the name from *alternate* to *official* status. *Alternate forms* as well as *official forms* are ministerially sanctioned and constitute the Province's official nomenclature.

In cartography, the precedence of forms is established as follows. In principle, only official toponyms can be used on Government of Ontario maps. However, scale permitting, an *alternate form* can also be used on the map, in parentheses beside the *official form*. Therefore, *alternate forms* with high recognition among Franco-Ontarians - such as **Lac Supérieur, Lac Huron, Lac Sainte-Claire, Lac des Bois, Lac à la Pluie**, etc. - can now be found on the official road map of Ontario beside the *official forms* **Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake St. Clair, Lake of the Woods, and Rainy Lake**.² The use of alternate forms in prose-text applications requires the introduction of another concept, the *French equivalent form*.

The Concept of *Equivalent Form*

² The forms **Lac Supérieur, Lac Huron, Lac Sainte-Claire, Lac des Bois** and **Lac à la Pluie** are considered to be *parallel forms* by Ontario, but are also *official forms* at the federal level, as they are on the list of names of pan-Canadian interest.

With regard to textual applications, the OGNB policy is based upon the same principles, and takes the linear character of linguistic discourse into account. For example, in French-language texts, officially recognized *alternate forms* are expected to replace the *official forms*. Furthermore, the same directions that govern the translation and writing of geographical names in Canada at the federal level can be applied to French-language government texts.³ For example, in order to preserve the integrity of a geographical name, the specific form of a toponym must be maintained, but the generic part can be translated. **Dudley Bay** can thus be written as *baie Dudley* in a French-language text. Forms obtained through the application of translation rules make up the category called *equivalent forms*. Nonetheless, where an *alternate form* is in practice among Franco-Ontarians, it will take precedence over any translated form, since it is supported by actual usage and has ministerial approval: **French River** will become *rivière des Français* (*alternate form*) instead of *rivière French* (*equivalent form*). French unilingual maps used in bilingual government publications, as well as maps prepared for the exclusive use of the francophone population follow the same rules. In terms of precedence, it is especially important to note that, unlike *alternate forms*, *equivalent forms* do not have official status and are not included in the province's official nomenclature.

In order to assist working translators as well as other individuals interested in Ontarian toponymy, all of the province's geographical nomenclature (some 57,000 toponyms in all) has been translated according to federal rules, which were adjusted to the Ontario context, and published as a glossary.⁴ This sizeable work, unique in its kind in Canada, includes all of the *official forms*, along with their *equivalent forms* obtained through translation and, where applicable, the *alternate forms* recognized by the OGNB.⁵ Moreover, the entity designation and the geographic coordinates for each toponym can be found in the glossary.

Conclusion

The OGNB policy constitutes a protocol for the linguistic treatment of geographical names in multi-lingual jurisdictions, introducing the dichotomy of *alternate form* and *equivalent form* alongside the concept of *official form*. While promoting the interests of a minority linguistic group, this model observes the spirit and the letter of the 1967 Geneva Conference. Interestingly,

³ Gélinas-Surprenant, Hélène (1991): Uniformisation de l'écriture des noms géographiques au Canada, *Canoma* 17(1), p. 1-13.

⁴ MNR/MRN (1995): *Bilingual Glossary of Ontario's Geographical Names - Lexique bilingue des noms géographiques de l'Ontario*; Ministry of Natural Resources / Ministère des Richesses naturelles, Toronto, 2 vol. See also Lapierre, André (1999): "Geoname Translation in Ontario: Adjusting Rules to Linguistic Usage". *Onomastica Canadiana* 81/2: 77-85.

⁵ Ontario decision lists since publication of the glossary in 1995 indicate the French text equivalent of each name for which a decision has been made.

the Ontario experience has come to the attention of another government with similar problems of nomenclature treatment. The Italian *Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano / Südtiroler Landtag*, has sought the advice of the OGNB for the management of official, Italian-language toponymy in an environment which comprises a substantial core of minority German names. The Ontario protocol demonstrates that there is no incompatibility between the univocity principle and linguistic pluralism. Furthermore, it shows that the coexistence, within a given jurisdiction, of more than one designation for a single, identical entity does not present any insurmountable difficulty of toponymic management.