Item 14 of the provisional agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Exonyms

The endonym – name from within a social group

Submitted by Austria[*]

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[*] Prepared by Peter Jordan (Austria), Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Urban and Regional Research and Austrian Board on Geographical Names

Abstract

This paper tries to show that social groups are fundamental factors and even the exclusive agents in the naming process. Having a relatively stable location in space and the attitude of discerning into "self" and "the other" as well as to regard features – also geographical features – as either "ours" or "the other's" they are the very reason for the endonym/exonym divide. This in turn means that this divide has to take into account also sociological, political and juridical aspects, that it can be problematic, if external groups claim to have an endonym, and that *endonym* and *exonym* are status categories of a name, subject to change in space and over time. Only a globally homogenous society and a well-developed feeling that we are all global citizens (and nothing else) would allow to get rid of this categorization.

The endonym – name from within a social group

1 Introduction

Place names are not just attached to certain features of the geographical space, they are not just – colloquially speaking – "hanging around" in space, but they are also attached to a certain social group in the sociological sense, i.e. in the sense of a number of people characterised by mutual relations and a common culture (ranging in size from a family or a couple of friends to a nation). They have in fact been created and are applied by a certain group.[1]

And this is the very reason and justification for dividing place names into endonyms and exonyms. An endonym is under this aspect a name applied by a social group permanently residing in a certain section of the geographical space for geographical features within this section as opposed to an exonym, which is a name used by another social group not residing in this section of the geographical space and not corresponding to the endonym.

This concept coincides with the new UNGEGN definitions of the endonym and the exonym (see KADMON 2007).[2] These definitions do, however, not mention the social group as a factor in this context.

This concept is also not opposed to the assumption that every place name – endonym as well as exonym – always refers to a geographical feature in its entirety, even if this feature crosses language boundaries and extends across the area settled by a social group, i.e. is a transboundary name according to the UNGEGN Glossary (KADMON 2007, p. 3).

English *Alps* and English *North Sea*, e.g., are certainly the names for the whole feature. German *Alpen* and German *Nordsee* refer to the whole feature, not only to the German-speaking sections of the Alps, but also to the Alps in France, Italy, and Slovenia; not only to the coastal waters of Germany, but also to parts of the North Sea, where it washes the coasts of Great Britain or Norway.

This continues a discussion in the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms (see JORDAN 2009, WOODMAN 2009). Some say that this discussion was over-sophisticated and had no practical meaning. But to the contrary: It affects the basics of the naming process and we will not arrive at a proper understanding of the meaning of place names in the social context, if we do not carry this discussion to a final clarification.

The discussion is also fundamental for the endonym/exonym divide: If we accept that a place name can be called an *endonym* also outside the area where its language is spoken, where this language is official or well-established, where the social group to whose language it corresponds permanently resides, then we soften the divide between endonym and exonym and make this divide ultimately meaningless. If we accept that place names of social groups

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[1] The social group creating and applying place names is not necessarily the same. But if a social group applies place names created by another group it has appropriated these place names and has made them lexicographically part of its own language.

[2] **Endonym:** Name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. *Examples*: Vārānasī (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix-la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqṣur (not Luxor).
Exonym: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. *Examples*: Warsaw is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); Mailand is German for Milano; Londres is French for London; Kūlūniyā is Arabic for Köln. The officially romanized endonym Moskva for Москва is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form Beijing, while Peking is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage (KADMON 2007, p. 2).

are endonyms also outside their area of residence,[3] we also risk stirring up all kinds of political disputes.

It is rather surprising that this discussion was not conducted much earlier, but that it emerged only after decades of place-name standardization, long after a comprehensive glossary of terms in toponymy had been developed and after definitions of the endonym and the exonym had been formulated and revised.

This contribution is to present a closer look at the roles of social groups in the naming process before it arrives at conclusions as regards the endonym/exonym divide.

2 Roles of social groups in the naming process

2.1 Role description

The factors involved into the naming process and shown in Fig. 1 are (1) geographical space, (2) social groups and (3) place names.

Geographical space is inhabited by social groups of all kinds, sizes and levels. Social groups have developed a certain culture which includes a certain language, a standard language, variant language or dialect, as an element of this culture.

Social groups classify and subdivide geographical space into geographical features according to their needs and cultural backgrounds. These geographical features (e.g. mountains, valleys, plains, seas, bays) then constitute sub-units of geographical space. Classification and subdivision by different social groups may result in different classifications of the same geographical space due to their divergent cultural backgrounds and divergent views on reality they may have.
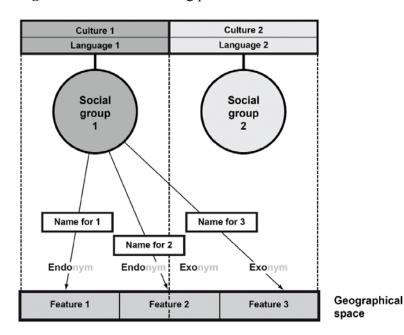
Fig. 1: Factors in the naming process

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[3] The area of residence of a social group may well include areas of recreation and unpopulated places like mountains, lakes and coastal waters of seas nearby.

As an element of language the social group then attributes a place name to a feature.[4] Among features totally outside the territory inhabited by a certain social group, especially among more remote features, a social group and its language have names only for more important features or features of special interest for the group. They may also have a name only for the more comprehensive concept of a feature, not for its sub-units (e.g. for a mountain range, not for individual peaks).

What is important to stress here is that in the naming process not only the factors "name", "language" and "feature" play a role as has been frequently argued and as it is highlighted by the current UNGEGN definitions of the endonym and the exonym. The principal factor, in fact the exclusive agent, is the social group. The social group

- **elaborates** a certain culture including language and place names;
- **classifies** and **subdivides** geographical space, i.e. complex spatial reality, into geographical features;
- **attributes** place names to them.

Without social groups place names simply would not exist. This is an apparently trivial finding, but it is far from having being adequately recognized in our ongoing discussion on the "nature of the endonym" and even less by the UNGEGN definitions mentioned above.

2.2 Meaning of these roles for the endonym/exonym divide

Social groups have usually a **stable location in space**, they reside more or less permanently in certain places, transform them and leave a certain cultural footprint, which is partly visible and termed a "cultural landscape" by geographers.

Social groups receive in turn a part of their identity from their relation to places – from the cultural landscape they inhabit and to which they have developed emotional ties.

Such emotional ties are composed of various ingredients, among which certainly memories of places, persons and events play a prominent role. But also place names are important here. Memorizing, mentioning or reading the place name may stimulate a whole set of feelings within a person who has emotional ties to that place.

It is not by chance that emigrants occasionally carry the place name of their former home to their new destination – to preserve the memory of the former place, but also to make the new place more familiar. *New Amsterdam* and *New York* are prominent examples.

Place names mark space-related identity on the one hand and support ties to places on the other. "Naming turns space into place" as Bill WATT puts it (WATT 2009, p. 21).

Another characteristic of social groups (and individuals) relevant in our context is that **they discern between „self" and „the other"**, between what is theirs and what is the other's**.** This attitude is unavoidable to preserve (group) identity, although it may look anachronistic in our globalizing world.

It is in fact practised at all levels and with all size categories of social groups: Even within the closest personal relationship partners will try to preserve their own personality (Although it is also true that some older couples get progressively more similar.), to keep some secrets and to have at least some place to store their very own belongings; at work we prefer to have our own office with a door-plate indicating that it is ours; we draw fences around our houses –

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[4] It may be argued that in fact individuals and not social groups attribute place names to features, i.e. decide which names are actually attributed. But it has also to be taken into consideration that they act according to rules, regulations or traditions of their social group and that their naming occurs under the control of the social group. If the name was not accepted by the social group or at least by the dominating force in it, the name will soon be removed.

state borders are just the consequent extension of these attitudes to one of the (by size) higher levels of social groups.

Differentiation between "self" and "the other", between "ours" and "the other's" is implemented and exerted by the definition of a territory as described above, by attributing a collective name to all the others (as it was with many national/cultural and religious groups in the past and still is with some up to the present day) or by highlighting certain elements of culture (like a certain language, denomination, mode of dining and clothing, music) as specific for a group. Social groups organised in administrative units exert some sort of jurisdiction over the territory and the population of this unit.

And also in this context place names play a role. Place names in a group's own language – let us call them endonyms – are (among other means) markers of the group's own territory.[5] Social groups claim to be entitled to have the primary name for features within their own territory, since naming is a symbol for appropriation. Who owns a feature usually has the right to name it. Who has the power to attribute the primary name usually also has the power over this feature or at least has responsibility for it. This is all but an antiquated, anachronistic concept – it vigorously persists to the present day, shows itself in many recent and current examples[6] and helps us to understand, why place names – and names in general, but place names in particular – have always and inevitably a political dimension. Social groups organised in administrative units (from municipalities upward) are usually also attributed the power to standardize names.[7]

Under normal circumstances a social group would never claim the right to attribute the primary name to features outside its own territory. It does so only when it is aggressive and expansive.

This also affects features located only partly within the territory of the social group, extending also beyond its boundaries, i.e. transboundary features. The right to impose the primary name is always conceived to be confined to this part of the feature which is in the group's own territory.

This statement is primarily based on my personal experience from my home valley in the mountains of Austrian Carinthia close to the Italian border, but has so far only been confirmed by many additional – certainly less profound – experiences during my research as a cultural geographer in the eastern part of Europe. In my home valley, the local name for the mountain range marking both country border and language boundary – although conceived as valid for the range as a whole including peaks and slopes down to the valleys on both sides – is never conceived to be the local name, the endonym, also beyond the border. Dwellers of the other side are not even expected to know it!

Indeed, a social group would feel offended, if another group would claim to have the primary name, the endonym, for features (or portions of features) on its territory. The strength of this feeling is perhaps a function of spatial distance and historical relations between the two

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[5] In cases of cohabitation of more than one social group in an area (in minority situations) every cohabitating group may, of course, have its own names – endonyms – for features in this area.

[6] The large number of place-names changes under Communism in eastern Europe and the prompt renamings after the fall of Communism (as described a.o. by BROZOVIĆ RONČEVIĆ 2009 for Croatia, DUTKÓ 2009 for Hungary or HRYTSENKO, SOSSA & SYVAK 2009 for Ukraine) can be interpreted as an expression of the dominating force in society to demonstrate its domination and to leave its cultural imprint. KLADNIK & PIPAN's 2009 description of the names conflict accompanying the conflict between Croatia and Slovenia over the Bay of Piran is another most recent example.

[7] Standardization adds to the social and political connotations of place names also a juridical and underlines in this way the endonymic quality of a name by a normative act resulting in upgrading and selection. The well-established term *standardized endonym* (KADMON 2002, p. 10) may thus well be regarded as the highest distinction of an endonym. But also a non-standardized endonym is still an endonym with all the other connotations mentioned earlier. The endonym/standardized endonym divide is therefore not suitable to replace the endonym/exonym divide.

groups involved. While it may indeed not affect Czechs too much, if English-speakers call their name *Ore Mountains* an endonym alongside with Czech *Krušné hory*, this would very likely be different if Germans claimed the same status for their name *Erzgebirge* also for the Czech side of the border.[8] While the English are conceived as distant and not at all threatening, the Germans are close and historical relations were not always unproblematic.

In contrast to the endonym the exonym does in principal not express ownership or an attitude of responsibility. In contrast to the endonym, the exonym is not the primary, but a secondary name, not imposed on the feature by the receiver (exonym) community, but just received by it.

Usually it is a derivation of the endonym shaped by translation or linguistic (phonetic, morphological) adaptation to the receiver language. Sometimes it corresponds to or is a derivation of an older version of the endonym – from times when the feature became important or when the receiver community came first into contact with it. Sometimes is has been adopted from a mediator language. Rather frequently the current exonym was an endonym in a historical period, when the receiver community had a share in the local population of this feature or was politically dominating it.

It is this latter case which is politically sensitive, since the social group currently dominating this feature may feel reminded of the former domination, when the exonym is used. It may indeed also suspect that the exonym is used at least in a nostalgic sense, if not in the sense of a latent or actual claim on the feature. Honestly speaking it can also not be denied that this is sometimes true.

All the more it is important to stress that exonyms must not be interpreted as claims for possession or domination and to emphasize the basic difference in this respect between endonym and exonym, primary and secondary name. It is also all but helpful in this context, when the divide between the two categories is smoothed. This will only prompt misinterpretations.

What exonyms really do is reflect the pattern of external features important for a social group or language community.[9] The formation of an exonym means the appropriation of the name, not of the feature. The name is incorporated into the social group's own language and culture. Simultaneously the feature marked by the name is integrated into the cultural sphere of the group. Using an exonym means making the strange familiar, transcending language and cultural boundaries, emphasizing the importance of international relations.

Having said this, it has also to be stressed that the benefits of exonym use (see JORDAN 2000) are effectuated mainly in communication between speakers of the same language, while they decline significantly in international communication, except when used by global and regional linguae francae in their very function as trade languages (e.g. English in an international conference or in air traffic) or when corresponding endonyms are not available (e.g. for high seas or historical features).

2.3 Intermediate conclusion, discussion of counter-arguments and questions still to be answered

This may have demonstrated that it is impossible to regard the name/language/feature relation apart from the social group and its relations to territory and features. It is in fact the

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[8] The endonym status of German *Erzgebirge* also on the Czech side of the mountain range may, however be justified by splinters of German minorities there (ČESKÝ STATISTICKÝ ÚŘAD).
[9] This pattern is, however, not reflected precisely. It is distorted by the fact that a need for an exonym is much less felt, when the endonym corresponds to an educational or trade language in frequent use with the receiver community or when the endonym is easy to pronounce.

relation between social group and feature which is the most crucial. And this means in turn that the difference between "self" and "the other", between "our own" and "theirs" with all its sociological, political and juridical implications remains essential and has to be considered when we talk about place names. We simply cannot escape it as long as we wish to preserve our personal and group identities.

This difference between "self" and "the other" is also the very reason that we feel the need to discern between endonyms and exonyms. The endonym is under these auspices the name a feature receives from the social group by which it is owned, i.e. the primary name. An exonym is the name for a feature used by an external group, i.e. a secondary name. If an external group were to claim to have the endonym, the primary name, for a feature, this would imply also a claim on the feature, and the local group would rightfully feel offended.

It may be argued that our personal sphere of interest usually exceeds the territorial limits of our social group and that we have multiple identities, among which the identity of a **global citizen** may even be the prevailing one. We may then with some justification also argue that as global citizens no feature on this globe leaves us (or should leave us) unaffected and that we were in fact related to all features everywhere. This point of view elevates indeed all place names to the status of endonyms, i.e. primary names. But it makes at the same time the endonym/exonym divide meaningless. All place names are endonyms then.

But this stage of human development – i.e. that all people on Earth conceive themselves as global citizens, as parts of a homogenous social group with the same culture and the same interests, and as nothing else – is not yet achieved. (And it is also a question whether it is desirable that it should be achieved – taking into account all the social, political and juridical consequences, and also how much we like it to experience other cultures as tourists.)

And even if our personal space-related identity is the one of a global citizen and if we personally disregard our national, regional, local and other group identities completely, we still have (or should still have) to accept that others have a rank list different from ours and feel primarily or at least additionally attached to smaller social groups.

It should also be noted that the acceleration of globalisation processes in recent decades has prompted various reactions in the opposite direction. In particular regional and ethnic identities are booming in various parts of the world. Also city branding – mainly for commercial reasons, but not least also to intensify the identification of citizens with their place – is very much on the agenda (see, e.g., WEICHHART, WEISKE & WERLEN 2006).

It is therefore necessary to count on the reaction of other social groups when we claim to have endonyms – names from within, primary names – for features, to which they feel to be closer and more attached. There is always and everywhere a social group in place that is not only – as we necessarily are – a temporary and occasional visitor in this place, but inhabits it permanently and has (as a rule) developed much closer ties to it than we have. It would mean an offence to this group to deny its right to the primary name and to claim it for ourselves.

Yet another question concerns **up to where a social group's attitude of feeling responsible and emotionally attached extends.** Where exactly is the line drawn between "one's own" and "the other's"?

This question is relatively easily answered at the level of nations, at least as regards land surface. The limits of responsibility and attachment of a nation are usually quite clearly defined by country borders. However, if a nation has minorities outside the borders of its nation state, if the "ethnic territory" is larger than the nation state, the nation state would be inclined to define (standardize) the place names of its minority there also. But competencies are neatly defined in this respect, and to standardize place names outside its area of legislation is not within the competence of a "mother country". And this regulation is certainly in the interests of avoiding permanent conflict.

No definite answer can be given as regards seas. Is the high sea – far beyond the horizon from the coast – still conceived as "ours" by a coastal dweller community? Does this feeling even include coastal waters at the opposite coast?

The answer is almost as indefinite when we turn to the subnational level, at least with culturally heterogeneous countries inhabited by several subgroups – e.g. linguistic minorities. Is the unpopulated mountain range, the (naturally) unpopulated lake, the unpopulated desert, the unpopulated swamp nearby and at the edge of a minority's settlement area still part of the "ethnic territory" of the minority? Has a minority perhaps even some share in the capital of a country, even if the capital itself has no minority population – just due to functional relations between minority citizens and the state capital?

All these questions are also relevant in our context, but would need a much more detailed discussion than is possible here.

3 *Endonym* and *exonym* are status categories of place names

As a result of the fact that a name is always bound to a social group and not only to a geographical feature, endonym and exonym are accidental status categories of geographical names – subject to change in space (synchronic, horizontal) and time (diachronic, vertical) depending on the spatial relation between feature and social group.

In space – i.e. synchronic, horizontal – status changes at language boundaries, when a geographical feature crosses a boundary. The German name *Donau* for the river Danube, e.g., shifts from endonym status to exonym status, when the Danube crosses the Slovak border, (but of course continues to be the name for this feature beyond the border).

The Italian name *Mar Adriatico* loses the status of an endonym, when it is not used to mark Italian territorial waters, but the high sea or Croatian territorial waters. There, in Croatian territorial waters, the Croatian name *Jadransko more* assumes the status of an endonym.

Over time – i.e. diachronic, vertical – status changes, when social groups disappear from an area, where features were bearing their names. This can happen almost overnight as it was with Germans in parts of modern Poland or Czechoslovakia after World War II. The social group using names for this area, the Germans, had to go and was replaced by speakers of other languages. This meant that the status of the German names changed from endonym to exonym (almost overnight).

Another example illustrating status change, but rather in the course of a longer span of time, are larger parts of the Eastern Alps on the territory of modern Austria. They had in the 6th and 7th centuries been settled by a Slavonic population. These Slavonic speakers had their place names – and had a lot of them as research has very well proved. The largest part of this former Slavonic settlement area, however, has later, already from the early Middle Ages onward, been settled by Bavarian/German speakers. They assimilated the Slavonic population, and only in southern Carinthia [Kärnten] and in some border regions of Styria [Steiermark] some Slavonic (later called Slovene) speakers are left. Also in this case place names have changed in status from endonym to exonym, however just gradually, due to the gradual linguistic assimilation of the relevant social group.

The Slavonic names were originally and for a longer span of time indeed endonyms, i.e. names attributed and used by the local social group, but turned in the largest part of the Eastern Alps (not where Slovene is still actively spoken) later into exonyms used by the remains of Slovene speakers in Austria, Slovenia and elsewhere.

It may be justified to term these current exonyms as "historical endonyms". But this means to move on rather slippery ground – not in the case mentioned above, where settlement history has been made transparent enough by research and is not a matter of controversial historiographies, but in many other cases – since settlement history is a favourite topic of antagonistic national historiographies and may give rise to political dispute. In many cases the question would arise, who (the speakers of which language) has once inhabited a certain territory, perhaps in a distant past, and can thus claim to have "historical endonyms" for it.

4 Conclusion

This paper has tried to show that social groups are fundamental factors and even the exclusive agents in the naming process. Having a relatively stable location in space and the attitude of discerning into "self" and "the other" as well as to regard features – also geographical features – as either "ours" or "the other's" they are the very reason for the endonym/exonym divide. This in turn means that this divide has to take into account also sociological, political and juridical aspects, that it can be problematic, if external groups claim to have an endonym, and that *endonym* and *exonym* are status categories of a name, subject to change in space and over time. Only a globally homogenous society and a well-developed feeling that we are all global citizens (and nothing else) would allow to get rid of this categorization.

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