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**Exonyms**

**The endonym/exonym divide – Questions resolved and still open  
at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Working Group on Exonyms**

**Submitted by Austria\***

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## Summary

At the occasion of its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the paper highlights achievements of the Working Group on Exonyms as well as questions still open. As achievements, the paper mentions the series of workshops offside UNGEGN sessions and UN conferences that had always around 30 participants from up to 20 countries and functioned as fora of profound discussions on the endonym/exonym divide as well as criteria for the use of exonyms. Ten workshops of this kind were organized between 2003 and 2017 in various places. What provided these workshops with special added value was the participation of former UNGEGN experts, who had ceased to be delegates of their countries to UNGEGN sessions, but augmented the events with their valuable experience and expertise, but also the participation of scientists from the place. Another achievement is very likely the series of proceedings emanating from these workshops and precisely documenting discussions and findings. These achievements compensate partly the lack of results in terms of UN resolutions, recommendations and guidelines – the conventional ‘products’ of UNGEGN and its working groups. Indeed, the WG’s only result in this conventional respect are the new definitions of endonym and exonym as documented in the amended version of the UNGEGN Glossary of Terms. These new definitions avoided the shortcomings of their predecessors to overlap, but were again soon criticized for being unpracticable for purposes of standardization.

As questions still to be resolved the paper addresses the following:

- Are place names (a) differing from the official name only by the omission, addition or alteration of diacritics or the article, (b) differing from the official name only by declension or derivation; (c) created by the translation only of the generic term to be regarded as exonyms?
- Does phonetical transcription create exonyms?
- Can the endonym/exonym divide be confined to the written form of the name?
- Is there a need for an additional term for sea names?
- Is the endonym/exonym divide solely defined by the spatial/territorial relation between the community using the name and the feature marked by this name?
- Where ends a community’s own territory, when the endonym is defined as the name attributed to features on a community’s own territory?
- What is an indigenous community? For how many generations has it to be present in its current homeland to qualify as indigenous?
- How can exonyms be categorized? Various aspects may be relevant, e.g. the aspect of the feature category, semantics, linguistic configuration, relation to the endonym.

# The endonym/exonym divide – Questions resolved and still open at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Working Group on Exonyms

## 1 Foundation and tasks of the WG

Our Working Group was formed in September 2002, as recommended by Resolution 4 of the Eighth Conference in Berlin, 27 August - 5 September 2002.

Resolution VIII/4 (Berlin 2002)

The Conference,

Recalling resolutions 28, 29, 31 and 38 of the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, resolutions 18 and 19 of the Third Conference, resolution 20 of the Fourth Conference and resolution 13 of the Fifth Conference, as well as resolutions 4 and 10 of the First Conference, resolution 35 of the Second Conference, resolution 7 of the Third Conference and resolution 4 of the Fourth Conference,

Noting that, notwithstanding the general goal of limiting the use of exonyms, in several countries there has been a tendency to increase their number,

Recognizing that measures such as the categorization of exonym use, the publication of pronunciation guides for endonyms, and the formulation of guidelines ensuring a politically sensitive use of exonyms would help in the reduction of the number of exonyms,

Recommends the establishment of a Working Group on Exonyms of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, with the aim of preparing such measures as mentioned above.

The need for such a group had already been expressed at earlier discussions at the GeoNames symposia in Frankfurt am Main (2000) and Berchtesgaden (2001) (see SIEVERS 2000). The main argument was indeed – as mentioned in the Resolution – that in contrast to the intention of earlier resolutions<sup>1</sup> the reduction of exonyms had not proceeded. Especially many former Communist countries that had for several decades practiced a policy of (Communist) internationalism, with which the use of exonyms was not regarded compatible, had converted at least to ‘normality’, if not to a very intensive use.

Partly due to this conversion of exonym use in the former Communist sphere, partly also due to a more intensive scientific reflection of the function of exonyms (see e.g. BACK 2002), exonyms were now also regarded from a different angle – or in other words: the number of experts regarding exonyms from a pragmatic perspective, i.e. as useful means of communication, and not just as expressions of political claims and nostalgia, had grown (see also WOODMAN 2007a). Discussions on exonyms were for some time characterized by two fractions: by a fraction regarding the use of exonyms as politically incorrect and advocating to

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier UN resolutions on exonyms: II/28 (London 1972): List of exonyms (conventional names, traditional names); II/29 (London 1972): Exonyms; II/35 (London 1972): Interim lists of standardized names; III/18 (Athens 1977): Study of exonyms; III/19 (Athens 1977): List of exonyms; IV/20 (Geneva 1982): Reduction of exonyms; V/13 (Montreal 1987): Precedence of national official forms of geographical names

avoid them as much as possible and a fraction regarding them as useful means of communication and as parts of the cultural heritage. The Zagreb workshop in 2015 revealed for the first time a clear dominance of the pro-exonym fraction.

The field for a new approach had also been prepared by UN resolutions on minority names.<sup>2</sup> They had accepted the use of two and more names, if a feature had not only a name used by the dominant local community, but also one or more names used by non-dominant local groups. This affected the United Nations' strict "one feature – one name" policy and let the question arise, why not also exonyms could be accepted as additional names. A "one feature – one name per language" principle appeared as a realistic alternative. It seemed anyway necessary to discuss the exonym question more comprehensively and to widen the scope to the endonym/exonym divide including the meaning and functions of the exonym as well as the endonym.

## 2 What the WG accomplished so far

This discourse proceeded in a series of extramural workshops, i.e. workshops offside UNGEGN sessions and UN conferences for the standardization of geographical names. The Working Group developed indeed, much more than other UNGEGN working groups, a culture and tradition in this respect, not the least because one of its initiators and driving forces, and in fact its scientific core, Paul WOODMAN, was not anymore able to participate in UNGEGN sessions and UN conferences.

Extramural workshops with paper presentations and intensive discussions were thus held in

- **Prague [Praha]**, Czechia, 2003, in conjunction with a meeting of the UNGEGN East Central and South-East Europe Division;
- **Ljubljana**, Slovenia, 2005;
- **Prague [Praha]**, Czechia, 2007, in conjunction with a meeting of the UNGEGN East Central and South-East Europe Division;
- **Timișoara**, Romania, 2008, in conjunction with meetings of the UNGEGN Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, and the ICA Commission on Atlases;
- **Tainach**, Austria, 2010, in conjunction with meetings of the UNGEGN East Central and South-East Europe Division, the UNGEGN Dutch- and German-speaking Division and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (StAGN);
- **Vienna [Wien]**, Austria, 2011, in association with the 26<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Session, but located offside the UN premises;
- **Gdańsk**, Poland, 2012, in conjunction with the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems;
- **Corfu [Kérkyra]**, Greece, 2013, in conjunction with the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Terminology;
- **Hermagor**, Austria, 2014;
- **Zagreb**, Croatia, 2015.

Thus, from 2007 onward – with the only exception of 2016, when in Bangkok [Krung Thep] the 29<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Session took place – the WG had workshops every year with a usual participation of around 30 experts from up to 20 countries. What provided these workshops with special added value was the participation of former UNGEGN experts, who had ceased

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<sup>2</sup> Already Resolution II/36 (London 1972) "Problems of minority languages" had recommended to publish names in minority languages on official maps and in national gazetteers, but Resolution V/22 (Montreal 1987) "Aboriginal/native geographical names" put even more emphasis on this issue.

to be delegates of their countries to UNGEGN sessions, but augmented the events with their valuable experience and expertise, but also the participation of scientists from the place.

A lasting impact of these events results from the fact that most of the papers were published in proceedings:

JORDAN P., OROŽEN ADAMIČ M., WOODMAN P. (eds.) (2007), *Exonyms and the International Standardisation of Geographical Names. Approaches towards the Resolution of an Apparent Contradiction* (= Wiener Osteuropa Studien, 24). Wien – Berlin, LIT.

JORDAN P., BERGMANN H., BURGESS C., CHEETHAM C. (eds.) (2011), *Trends in Exonym Use. Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Tainach, 28-30 April 2010* (= Name & Place, 1). Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovač.

WOODMAN P. (ed.) (2012), *The Great Toponymic Divide. Reflections on the definition and usage of endonyms and exonyms*. Warszawa, Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography.

JORDAN P., WOODMAN P. (eds.) (2014), *The Quest for Definitions. Proceedings of the 14<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Corfu, 23-25 May 2013* (= Name & Place, 3). Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovač.

JORDAN P., WOODMAN P. (eds.) (2015), *Confirmation of the Definitions. Proceedings of the 16<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Hermagor, 5-7 June 2014* (= Name & Place, 4). Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovač.

JORDAN P., WOODMAN P. (eds.) (2016), *Criteria for the Use of Exonyms. Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Zagreb, 14-16 May 2015* (= Name & Place, 6). Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovač.

This series of publications compensates partly the lack of results in terms of UN resolutions, recommendations and guidelines – the conventional ‘products’ of UNGEGN and its working groups.

Indeed, the WG’s only result in this conventional respect are the new definitions of endonym and exonym as documented in the amended version of the UNGEGN Glossary of Terms (UNGEKN 2007). These new definitions avoided the shortcomings of their predecessors to overlap, but were again soon criticized for being unpracticable for purposes of standardization. An extended discussion on new definitions up to 2014 explored all the aspects and facets of the endonym/exonym divide and lead certainly to a much better understanding of this comprehensive and complex topic. This discussion arrived also at the conclusion that the endonym is the basic status category of places names – not only due to the much larger number of endonyms compared to exonyms, but also due to the various roles endonyms play in relating persons and human communities with territory or geographical space (see, e.g., HELLELAND 2009; JORDAN 2009, 2015; WOODMAN 2007d). The discussion is also precisely documented in the proceedings. But it did not result in an agreement on new definitions, rather in the confirmation of those existing.

Also, another of the WG’s basic tasks (as mentioned in Resolution VIII/4 and its terms of reference), i.e. the definition of guidelines or criteria for the use of exonyms, could not be accomplished. It was discussed in the Tainach meeting (2010) and again in the Zagreb meeting (2015). But finally, it was found that it would not be appropriate to pursue the normative approach, to formulate guidelines, but to accommodate to an empirical, receptive approach, i.e. to note the smallest common denominator of actual exonym use in the various countries of the world, to document it and just to offer it as a guideline for those asking for advice.

So, it must be stated that the WG – despite serious efforts and of having penetrated deeply into the essence of the endonym/exonym divide in an interdisciplinary approach – has not delivered what is usually requested from an UNGEGN working group: to produce resolutions, guidelines and recommendations.

Thus, the WG faces – besides the tasks mentioned before (definitions, criteria) – still many open questions and a rich agenda, of which some is to be addressed in the following paragraphs.

### 3 Questions still to be resolved

Resolution III/19 (Athens 1977) defines as exonyms (which need, however, not to be documented in concise lists of exonyms in order not to make them too abundant) also names (a) differing from the official name only by the omission, addition or alteration of diacritics or the article, (b) differing from the official name only by declension or derivation; (c) created by the translation only of the generic term. Although names deviating in these ways from the endonym are by the UN Resolution defined as exonyms, this classification is still not unanimously accepted, e.g. not by Paul WOODMAN (2007c, p. 15), when he argues that the omission of diacritics may not happen intentionally, but, e.g., just for technical reasons, while the intention to render the endonym is obvious. This view is also supported by Peeter PÄLL (2015), when he states that spelling differences like the different use of upper- and lower-case letters between donor and receiver language are sometimes unavoidable due to the linguistic properties of individual languages and pleads for considering unavoidable changes not as producing exonyms (PÄLL 2015, p. 116). Our late colleague Ojārs BUŠS has repeatedly (2012, 2014, 2015, 2016) drawn our attention to the fact that some languages like Latvian, Lithuanian, Azerbaijani or Albanian have – due to their intrinsic linguistic structure – in practice no other choice than to convert almost every name into an exonym in the understanding of Resolution III/19 and to increase in this way the number of exonyms substantially. He proposes for these cases the term *endonymoid* and would classify, e.g., the Albanian names *Parisi* [Paris], *Berlini* [Berlin], *Amsterdami* [Amsterdam], *Budapesti* [Budapest], *Dublini* [Dublin], *Zagrebi* [Zagreb], *Beogradi* [Beograd] or *Madrdi* [Madrid] as belonging to this category, while *Londra* [London], *Varshava* [Warszawa] or *Moska* [Moskva] were ‘real’ Albanian exonyms.

Also in the field of script conversion the endonym/exonym divide is not as clear-cut as it looks at first glance. Peeter PÄLL has highlighted this problem several times precisely (PÄLL 2000, 2014, 2015), in 2007 together with Phil MATTHEWS (MATTHEWS & PÄLL 2007). Also, Sungjae CHOO (2014), Jarno RAUKKO (2007) and others have substantially contributed to its clarification, Herman BELL and Bogusław ZAGÓRSKI most specifically in relation to the Arabic script (BELL 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016; ZAGÓRSKI 2012, 2014, 2015). It would need, however, a focused discussion to draw an exact line between the two status categories here. While it is our prevailing understanding that transliteration from non-Roman scripts into Roman-script alphabets does not create exonyms, this is different with phonetical transcription. But, how is it, when the donor country/language offers a phonetical transcription to the English alphabet like Pinyin for Chinese? Isn’t it creating alternative endonyms? Paul WOODMAN (2007b, p. 16) regards anyway phonetical transcription into the alphabet of any receiver language not as creating exonyms. He argues that such a procedure reflects the intention to stick to the endonym as much as possible and that classifying

phonetically transcribed names as exonyms would increase the number of exonyms indefinitely.

It is our usual understanding that names need to differ from the endonym in writing to be classified as exonyms, not just in pronunciation. But this principle does not work in the sinosphere, where names written by the same ideographic signs (in Kanji) have different counterparts in spoken language as mainly Sungjae CHOO (2012, 2015) and Hiroshi TANABE (2015) have demonstrated this convincingly. Thus, the endonym/exonym divide emerges only at the level of the spoken language and cannot be derived from written forms. It may be another aspect in this context that there are still scriptless languages and names in dialects/vernacular languages without a written form. Defining the endonym/exonym divide just at the level of the spoken language would, however, mean that practically every endonym turns into an exonym, when it is spoken by a non-local: Only very skilled speakers of foreign languages hit exactly the local pronunciation and intonation.

Experts are also all but unanimous about the classification of sea names. Do we need an additional term for them, as, e.g., Naftali KADMON argues, because this kind of features escapes the endonym/exonym divide (He proposes *thalassonym*.) (KADMON 2007)? More recently his view has with some variation and a focus on large seas been supported by Hiroshi TANABE and Kohei WATANABE (TANABE & WATANABE 2014; WATANABE 2016). Can a certain sea name be termed *endonym* in all parts of the feature, if a coastal dweller community uses this name – as Paul WOODMAN suggests (WOODMAN 2009)? Or needs a sea to be partitioned into endonymic coastal waters and international waters, where names are just exonyms – as Peter JORDAN proposes (JORDAN 2010)? Would it perhaps even be useful to introduce an umbrella term – not excluding that such names fulfil at the same time endonym and/or exonym functions – for names used by international authorities for purposes for international communication (JORDAN 2016).

It is also still debated, whether endonyms and exonyms are status categories of geographically names solely defined by the spatial/territorial relation between the community using the name and the feature marked by this name. Paul WOODMAN, e.g., would hold the view that *Labe* is an endonym for this river not only on Czech territory, where the Czech community resides, but also in Dresden or Hamburg, where German-speakers are the local community using a different name (*Elbe*). The other, perhaps prevailing opinion is that place names have endonym status only there, where the local community uses them, while they acquire exonym status, where the local community uses a different name. In any case, they are names for the entire feature. Thus, the Czech name *Labe* would from this other point of view have endonym status only where Czech speakers reside, while it would turn into an exonym at the German border and be replaced by *Elbe* as the endonym. Both *Labe* and *Elbe* would, however, figure as names for the entire river – from its sources up to its mouth.

A very interesting, purely linguistic and from the mainstream of our discussions clearly deviating opinion was introduced by Phil MATTHEWS, who neglects the spatial relation between name users and feature completely and regards only the linguistic correspondence of a name to a certain language as relevant for the endonym/exonym divide: An endonym is a name conforming to the norms of the language, an exonym deviates from these norms (see MATTHEWS 2012, 2014, 2015).

The exclusiveness of the spatial relation principle is also questioned by the opinion that language is a criterion for the endonym/exonym divide. Other names in the same language for a certain feature with a local name in this language would then always be endonyms. Names in non-local languages would then implicitly be exonyms. But especially

Paul WOODMAN has demonstrated that names in the same language, but not in local use, are rather exonyms – e.g. by the town Aqtöbe in Kazakhstan, which is by the local Russian community called *Aktobe*, while Russians in Russia call it *Aktyubinsk* (WOODMAN 2007c, p. 86). He also shows that names corresponding to non-local languages, but in use by the local community are rather to be classified as endonyms, e.g. if a restaurant in Germany is named *Pizzeria Vesuvio* and this name is accepted and used by the local community, or if a house-owner in England calls his villa *Mon repos*. Also nicknames, very frequent in rural areas for villages in the neighbourhood, are a proof of this thesis. They have frequently an ironical or sometimes even pejorative meaning and are certainly not used by the inhabitants of the village in question, i.e. by the local, endonym community. The complexity of this subfield has very precisely also been illustrated by Staffan NYSTRÖM (see NYSTRÖM 2014, 2015).

Another questioning of the strict spatial relation principle is elevating officiality of a name to a criterion for the endonym/exonym divide. Is every official name *eo ipso* an endonym? Or does it remain an exonym, if it is just imposed and not accepted and used by the local community? Again, Paul WOODMAN has demonstrated the problem impressively by the example of the German name *Litzmannstadt* imposed to the Polish city of Łódź by the German occupation regime. It was never used locally, not even by the local German community, who preferred the traditional German transcription of the Polish name, *Lodsch*. But the problem is not as clear-cut as it looks at first sight. A smaller part of the local population may indeed use the imposed name. Or the name may be used also by the local community in certain communicative situations, e.g. in contact with the occupiers, with public authorities or in public speech.

It is also difficult to draw an exact boundary of a community's own territory, where the names used by this community for features are endonyms (see JORDAN 2007, 2015). Is the community's own territory confined to the residential area just including built-up and traffic areas? Or does it include also the (uninhabited) forest nearby, the mountain, the lake or the sea? And how far extends the area on sea, how far reaches the emotional relation of coastal dwellers to the sea? Perhaps just up to the horizon?

Another question related to the local, the endonym community refers to its local tradition. What is an indigenous community? For how many generations has it to be present in its current homeland to qualify as indigenous? Minority legislation in several countries defines very precisely the range of autochthonous groups or minorities and lists them up. But criteria vary from country to country and there is no international agreement on them. Would Hispanics in the United States qualify as indigenous or autochthonous? Very likely not. Would African Americans in the United States qualify? Rather yes.

Categorization of exonyms is a task of the WG explicitly mentioned in its terms of reference. The WG has not presented any agreed proposal so far. But individual experts have enlarged on this topic in our meetings and proceedings, e.g. Jarno RAUKKO (2007) from the linguistic point of view or Drago KLADNIK (2007) with a comprehensive approach by the example of Slovene exonyms. Exonyms may, of course, be categorized under various aspects, e.g. under the aspect of the feature category, of their semantics, of their linguistic configuration, of their relation to the endonym and so on. It is again a wide and complex field of research.

## 4 Conclusion

At the occasion of its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary it can be stated that the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms has indeed explored the wide field of the endonym/exonym divide very thoroughly and comprehensively, but was much less successful on the normative side, i.e. in generating resolutions, guidelines and recommendations. The vast amount of empirical and analytical work lead to a much better understanding of this basic divide, which Paul WOODMAN even called “the great toponymic divide” (WOODMAN 2012), as well as of the specific roles and functions of endonyms and exonyms in relating man to territory, but did not allow us so far to proceed to unanimous conclusions safe enough to be converted into norms. But isn't this anyway the necessary, correct and logical sequence?

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