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Criteria for the use of exonyms

1 Introduction

This paper specifies and elaborates more systematically, more completely and not confined to a specific language community, but for general application, a scheme of criteria that has already rudimentarilly been presented and discussed at the GeoNames meetings in Frankfurt am Main (2000)[1] and Berchtesgaden (2001) as well as at the Working Group on Exonyms meeting in Prague (2003). It is essentially founded on the works of Josef BREU[2] and Otto BACK[3] as well as on guidelines for the use of exonyms published in BACK et al. 1994, pp. 9f[4]. It also adopts many ideas expressed by other prominent exonym experts like Paul WOODMAN and Roman STANI-FERTL. Many stimulations were further received through the author's co-operation in a working group of the Austrian Board on Geographic Names (AKO) devoted to a 2nd edition of Guidelines for the Use of Geographical Names in Austrian School Atlases together with Otto BACK, Lukas BIRSAK, Michael DUSCHANEK, Isolde HAUSNER, Ingrid KRETSCHMER and Roman STANI-FERTL.

The following proposal of a list of criteria for the decision whether to use an exonym or an endonym in naming a certain geographical feature departs from the assumption that there is not a single criterion on which the decision can be felt (e.g. all countries are to be named by exonyms), that to the contrary in every individual case the complete list of criteria has to be checked and the final decision is up to the overall result. This means again weighing. But the list of criteria may help to arrive at a well-founded and rational decision.

It has also to be stated in advance that whenever an exonym is used, the endonym should also be communicated; at least in the largest map scale of an atlas or with the first mentioning of a name in a text. It is always useful to know, how a geographical object is named by the local population.

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[1] JORDAN, P. (2000): The Importance of Using Exonyms – Pleading for a moderate and politically sensitive use. In: SIEVERS, J. (ed.): Second International Symposium on Geographical Names „GeoNames 2000" Frankfurt am Main, 28-30 March 2000. = Mitteilungen des Bundesamtes für Kartographie und Geodäsie, vol. 19, pp. 87-92.

[2] See especially BREU, J. (1959): Probleme der Schreibung südosteuropäischer Ortsnamen in österreichischen Mittelschulatlanten. In: Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft, vol. 101, pp. 97-117; BREU, J. (1981): Ausgewählte Probleme der Beschriftung und Namenschreibung in Schulatlanten am Beispiel der neuen österreichischen Unterstufen-Schulatlanten. In: ARNBERGER, E.; BREU, J.; FINK, J. (eds.): Kritische Betrachtungen zu den österreichischen Unterstufenschulatlanten. Wien, pp. 18-41.

[3] BACK, O. (1983): Übersetzbare Eigennamen. Eine synchronische Untersuchung von interlingualer Allonymie und Exonymie. Salzburg. 2nd edition Klagenfurt (1991) = Österreichische Namenforschung, Sonderreihe 5.

[4] BACK, O. et al. (1994): Vorschläge zur Schreibung geographischer Namen in österreichischen Schulatlanten. Wien. = Wiener Schriften zur Geographie und Kartographie, vol. 7, 75 p.

2 List of criteria

(1) Feature-related criteria

The use of exonyms is more appropriate for **geographical features** that

- **are important**

  The argument: These features form the basis of topographic knowledge and it should be easy to keep them in mind. It is easier to keep a name in mind which is easy to spell and pronounce. Names of these features are also the most frequently used. It is therefore favourable especially with names of these features that adjectival derivations can be formed easily and according to the rules of the speaker's language.

  Examples: Continents and large regions exceeding country boundaries (e.g. Central Europe), countries, country capitals and other large cities, larger physical-geographical features like mountain ranges, landscapes, major rivers and lakes.

- **extend across language boundaries**

  The argument: These features are geographically conceived as one object, but have in most cases not a single endonym. In order to communicate the geographical concept properly it is then even necessary to apply an exonym.

  Examples: Continents and large regions, larger physical-geographical features like mountain ranges (e.g. Alps, Carpathians), landscapes (e.g. Pannonian Basin, Great Hungarian Plain), major rivers (e.g. Danube, Rhine) and lakes (e.g. Lake Victoria, Lake Ohrid), (historical) trade and military routes (e.g. Silk Road, Via Egnatia, Via militaris), mountain passes and gates (e.g. Iron Gate, Hungarian Gate), motorways (e.g. Alps-Adriatic Motorway), railways (e.g. Orient Railway, Baghdad Railway), transmission lines and pipelines (e.g. Friendship Oil Pipeline, Brotherhood Gas Pipeline, Transalpine Oil Pipeline).

- **belong to the nature sphere**

  The argument: Natural features are not associated to specific cultures (and their languages). They have already seen many cultures come and go and are less regarded the "property" of a certain culture and language.

  Examples: Mountain ranges (e.g. Southern Carpathians or Transylvanian Alps [Carpații Meridionali]), swamps and marshes (e.g. Pripyat Marshes), lakes (e.g. Lake Constance [Bodensee], Lake Geneva [Lac Léman, Lac de Genève])

- **have longer historical continuity**

  The argument: By their historical continuity these features have become a common heritage of mankind or at least of a larger region. Many of these features have aleardy seen several cultures and languages come and go and very often their current endonym was not the endonym in former periods.

  Examples: historical cities (e.g. Cracow [Kraków], Cologne [Köln], Salonica [Thessaloníkí]), historical-cultural landscapes (e.g. Moravia [Morava], Tuscany [Toscana], Dalmatia [Dalmacija])

- **are exclusively historical and do not correspond to current features**

  The argument: A corresponding endonym is not available, not fully congruent with the historical place or with its historical meaning. In many cases there is no other choice than to use an exonym.

Examples: historical empires and states (e.g. Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union), exgravation sites (e.g. Troy, Pompeii), historical-cultural landscapes (e.g. Moesia, Hellespontus, Jedisan, Silistre)

- **have close and traditional relations to the community of the exonym language**

  The argument: These features are important for the community of the exonym language, even if they are not as important from a general and global point of view. It therefore applies what has been said for generally important features: these features are part of basic topographic knowledge (in the community of the exonym language) and it should be easy to spell and pronounce them, to keep them in mind, to form derivations and to use them in any context.

  Examples: Communities of the current global languages have close and traditional relations to their former colonies; for the German language community this applies to Central and Eastern Europe due to former settlement, cultural and political influence as well as trade relations; for the Italian community the eastern Mediterranean is a special region of reference due to former political and trade relations; the Polish and Hungarian language communities cultivate still close contacts to what were earlier parts of their much larger states.

  Danger: To outline historical borders or historical ethnic situations in a politically insenstive way.

- **are located in close distance to the community of the exonym language**

  The argument: These features are frequently better known by their exonyms than by their endonyms at least close to the language boundary, even if the features are small and unimportant. It would leave the impression of hypercorrectness and an attitude of intellectual arrogance to use endonyms, especially in oral communication.

  Examples: Many small settlements at the Italian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Slovakian and Czech side of the Austrian border.

- **are located in an area, were the language of the exonym is or was used as a family or educational language**

  The argument: This is just a specific case of close and traditional relations to the community of the exonym language, for which the argument was brought before. Historical or current use of the exonym language as family language in the area indicates former or current settlement of exonym language speakers; its use as educational and secondary language indicates close cultural, economic or political ties.

  Examples (related to the German and Hungarian speaking community): larger parts of Transylvania.

  Danger: To outline historical borders or historical ethnic situations in a politically insenstive way.

- **are named by the exonym, when a publication in the exonym language appears in the country of the endonym language**

  The argument: If even the community of the endonym language uses and promotes the exonym in contact with speakers of the exonym language, this can be taken as an indication that (1) the exonym is from a purely pragmatical point of view the more appropriate for communication and that (2) the use of the exonym is not politically problematic.

  Examples: The German exonym *Karlsbad* is used for Karlovy Vary in Czech tourism advertisements written in German for the German market. The Italian (and lexicographically German) exonym *Abbazia* is used for Opatija in

Croatian tourism advertisements written in German for the German and Austrian market.

(2) Language-related criteria

To have an endonym accompanied by an exonym is more appropriate if

- **the endonym is composed of a specific and a semantically transparent generic word than if the endonym is just one word without a generic component**
  The argument: By translation of the semantically transparent generic word the category of the feature is clearly communicated to the exonym language speaker. This is not as important on maps, where feature category if indicated by cartographic symbols.
  Examples: Thuringian Forest [Thüringer Wald], Danube Bend [Dunakanyar], Iron Gate [Porţile de Fier]
  Dangers: When the specific and the generic parts of the name are related to each other like adjective and noun, it is not possible only to translate the noun. But to translate also the specific part (the adjective) may not be appropriate, since the name could lose its identiy (e.g. Great Canal [Canale Grande]), or may even be impossible, since the meaning of the specific part is not transparent or known.

- **the endonym is written in another script**
  The argument: Transcription or transliteration means already an alienation of a name in the eyes of the endonym language speaker, although transcription or transliteration as such does not constitute an exonym. But the step from a transcribed or transliterated endonym to an exonym is only a short one in the mind of the endonym language speaker.
  Example: For a Russian speaker *Moskva* is emotionally already very far from *Москва*. It will certainly not offend him/her to use *Moscow* instead.

- **the endonym language is linguistically distant from the exonym language**
  The argument: Linguistically related languages are mutually at least partly understandable and their words are also easier to be pronounced correctly. The formation and use of exonyms, which owe their existence at least partly to linguistic adaptation from hardly understandable and pronounceable languages is therefore less necessary.
  Examples: Languages of the Slavic, Romance or Germanic language groups have much in common and the formation/use of mutual exonyms is less necessary.

- **the edonym is difficult to be pronounced by speakers of the exonym language**
  The argument: Apart from the general linguistic relation between languages it occurs that individual endonyms of a certain language are more difficult to be spelled and pronounced by the speaker of the exonym language.
  Examples: *Wrocław, Łódź* and *Szczecin* compared to *Opole, Torun* or *Lublin* among Polish names for German speakers.

- **the endonym language is not a frequent secondary, educational or trade language with speakers of the exonym language**
  The argument: When the community of the exonym language is well acquainted with the endonym language, since it is thaught in schools and frequently used as a secondary language, it can also be expected that it roughly knows how to spell and pronounce their names as well as to interpret the meaning of generic terms.

Examples: English place names as parts of the most widespread trade and secondary language in the German speaking community require the least the use of exonyms (e.g. to add *Felsengebirge* to *Rocky Mountains*), while this is different with most languages spoken in East-Central, East and Southeast Europe, which are only learned by a relatively small number of German-speakers.

- **the endonym language has not a specific cultural prestige among the speakers of the exonym language**

  The argument: When a language has a certain prestige in some cultural or societal fields or terminologies (music, literature, diplomacy, financial sector etc.) among the members of an exonym community, even though this language is not frequently used as a secondary language, it can be expected that (1) there is some acquaintance with spelling and pronounciation and that (2) words of this language (also place names) sound pleasant in the ears of the exonym language speaker making him/her hesitating to replace them by an exonym.

  Examples: This refers among the German speaking community certainly to Italian and French. A rather useful benchmark in this respect are the languages in which pop songs are widely accepted and successful.

(3) Audience-related criteria

The use of exonyms is more appropriate if the **audience** (or the partner in conversation) is

- **monolingually speaking the exonym language**

  The argument: This is the language community acquainted with the exonyms and drawing all the benefits from using them: pronounciation, declination and derivation according to the rules of the exonym language.

  Examples: School atlases or school text books.

  Not appropriate for exonyms: mapworks in more than one editorial language or in a global language for international use; road signs, traffic information at airports and railway stations addressing in fact the international community of travellers; communicative situations, when the exonym language is used and understood by the audience, but at least a part of the audience's first language is not the exonym language.

- **well-educated, especially well-acquainted with history**

  The argument: Educated people know places from many different sources (not just from a certain map or a certain gazetteer) and under different aspects. They are also well aware of a place's history. When a place is mentioned, they have most of its history in mind, not just the current state. But endoyms have changed and also the current endonym may be young. The exonym, however, is (in many cases) more stable and in a diachronic perspective more comprehensive, i.e. more capable of encompassing all what a place means.

  Examples: When an Austrian uses the German exonym *Triest* for the Italian city Trieste, the meaning of this name refers not only to the current Italian city, but comprises also to the former Austrian seaport, the southern terminus of the Southern Railway etc. When the British use *Cologne* for Köln, they refer not only to the current German city, but include all its proud history starting from Roman times.

- **not historically or politically offended by the use of the exonym language or the specific exonym**

The argument: It happened that place names were introduced in an imperialistic or nationalistic attitude or were forcefully adapted to the language of the ruler in a certain period of history and abolished later. There exist also former endonyms reminding of tragic historical events, of expulsions, resettlements etc. Other names have been introduced under political dispute and are still not generally accepted. It could mean an offense to mention them ostensively and consequently in addressing an audience involved or struck by these historical events or involved into the political dispute.

Examples: When a German speaker uses consequently all the German place names in the Czech Republic or in Poland in addressing a Czech or Pole (even when the Czech or Polish partner speaks German and the conversation is in German); when a Hungarian speaker uses consequently and by purpose all the Hungarian place names for southern Slovakia introduced under the Horthy regime in the interwar period in addressing a Slovak, this could be understood as offensive and should be avoided. This can also apply to individual names: to the use of *Macedonia* (instead of *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*) in conversation with a Greek; when an Italian uses ostensively *Quarnero* (or even worse: *Carnaro*, the name introduced under Italian fashism) for the Croatian Kvarner region etc.

- **addressed in an unofficial or informal way**

  The argument: Unofficial and informal communicative situations require less political correctness, are less "in danger" to be reported to a wider public, involve an audience well-known to the speaker, and need for these reasons not necessarily the use of the "official" name.

  Examples: Conversation in a round of friends versus an official speech at a conference.

(4) Medium-related criteria

The use of exonyms is more appropriate

- **with the spoken word or in texts composed of complete sentences than with more technical means and modes of communication like maps, diagrams, tables, registers etc.**

  The argument: Most of the benefits of using exonyms (easy spelling and pronounciation, declination and derivations according to the rules of the exonym language) are consumed when exonyms are used in spoken or written sentences. These are also much more frequently the inofficial and informal applications. When place names occur in isolated form and not bound into a sentence (like on maps and diagrams, in tables and registers), some benefits decline. Such means of communication have also much more of an official, technical or scientific character and may also easily be interpreted by speakers of other languages, even if these cannot understand the accompanying texts.

- **with means of communication used exclusively outside the area of the endonym language than with means of communcation to be used in the area of the endonym language**

  The argument: Means of communication for use in the area of the endonym language need in the first line the endonym, since the user is at the spot exclusively confronted with the endonym.

  Examples: School and other atlases versus road maps or city plans.