

ON EXONYMS AND THEIR USE IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE

Béla POKOLY

Department of Land Administration and Geoinformation
Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Budapest
bela.pokoly@fvm.hu



AZ EXONIMÁKRÓL ÉS HASZNÁLATUKRÓL A MAGYAR NYELVBEN

Összefoglalás

Az exonimák olyan nyelvi közösség által használt földrajzi nevek, amelyek különböznek a megnevezett alakzat környékén beszélt helyi nyelvtől. Az ENSZ a hivatalos nyelvhez köti a kifejezés meghatározását. A cikkben az exonimák használatáról általában, valamint egyes magyar sajátosságokról esik szó. A szerző kitér az exonimahasználat szűkítésének olyan lehetőségeire, mint a kifejezés meghatározásának lazítása, illetve egyes kisebbségi nyelvek helyi hivatalos státusának elismerése.

Summary

Exonyms are geographical names that are used by a language community different from the local language used at the named feature. The definition applied by the UN is tied to official language. Exonym use in general and some Hungarian cases in particular are highlighted in the article. The author touches on the possibility of reducing exonyms by amending its present strict definition, and by the recognition of local official status of certain minority languages.

Exonyms: Why they are used

Ever since the emergence of international cartography, but notably since Albrecht Penck's proposal in 1891 of the 1 : 1 m scale International Map of the World, cartographers have faced the challenge of putting names on maps of foreign territories. The idealistic approach of placing geographical names in their original forms on globes or world atlases is logical, but only at first sight. Logical, because different foreign territories are inhabited by peoples of different languages and features (waters, hills, streams, settlements etc.) are obviously named in these local languages. But at second sight it is easy to understand that such a polyglot map work would not only be immensely difficult and expensive to make, but it would be of little use. Individual persons do not speak all the languages of the world, they usually speak and understand their own mother tongue. However, it would be also silly to try to translate all features into the mother tongue. Such „translated“ maps would only be of some use to people sitting at home in their armchairs and not wishing to visit those distant lands that maps would present this way. They would not be very useful on the spot as names would have to be retranslated to be able to identify them. A British alpinist e.g. would have difficulty finding his best route if he spoke about „Mt. White“ instead of *Mont Blanc*. In reality it is usually the generic part of a geographical name (if there is one), which is quite often translated, so the British would say *Lake* (instead of *Lago*) *Titicaca* in South America or *Gulf of* (instead of *Golfo di*) *Taranto* in Italy. In most other cases the name stays in its original form or is transliterated (rewritten) in a commonly accepted system if the original name is in a script other than that of the user community: *Massif Central* (mountains in France) or *Tianjin* (city in China transliterated to Roman from Chinese script).

Major land features (like *Black Forest* /Schwarzwald, Germany/, *Plain of Lombardy* /Pianura Padana, Italy/, *Corsica* /Corse, France/) several large and historic cities (e.g. *Prague*/Praha, *Venice*/Venezia, *Vienna*/Wien) and many of the country names (like *Sweden*/Sverige, *Germany*/Deutschland, *Hungary*/Magyarország) are having their unique name forms in the different languages, that are not necessarily translations but names that better fit the cultural traditions and linguistic rules of the user (in the examples: the English) language community.

These name forms described loosely above are called exonyms by experts of geographical names. The accurate definition, used from the early 1970s by the United Names Group of Experts on Geographical Names, reads as follows:

Exonym: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated.

International contacts require a sensible limitation to the use of these name forms. Careless inclusion of all possible historic variants and translation of even the specific parts of names do create serious confusion and make identification difficult. Certain exonyms however, form living and vital parts of language, as was recognized by the United Nations.

In the following parts some examples of exonym use in the Hungarian language are highlighted.

Earliest Hungarian geographical names.

It has been the language of the Magyar people settling in the Carpathian basin in the late 9th century. The first famous written fragments of the Hungarian language date from the 11th century. Incidentally the often quoted few coherent words from the deed of foundation of

the Abbey of Tihany issued in 1055 contain a geographical name. In the words *Feheruuaru rea meneh hodu utu rea* (modern Hungarian: a *Fehérvár*ra menő hadiútra/on the military road to *Fehérvár*/) the name refer to the present town of Székesfehérvár (medieval Latin *Alba Regalis*). As Hungarian first became the official language in the Kingdom of Hungary (then part of the Austrian Empire) in 1844, oddly enough *Fehérvár* can be regarded as an exonym.

An early cartographic display of the Latin name of Hungary, *Ungaria* figures in the Ebstorf World Map (1234).

Map of Lazarus

Without question the most important map in Hungarian cartographic history from the early 16th century was that of secretary Lazarus. His *Tabula Hungariae* shows the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary and surroundings shortly after the ill-fated battle of Mohács (1526). As the official language in Hungary was Latin until 1784, names given in other languages (besides local names) may be considered exonyms. In this Rome edition of the map from 1559 only a few exonyms appear in today's sense, like *Vienna* [Italian for Wien], *Figure 1*. Even this name is sometimes regarded as Latin.

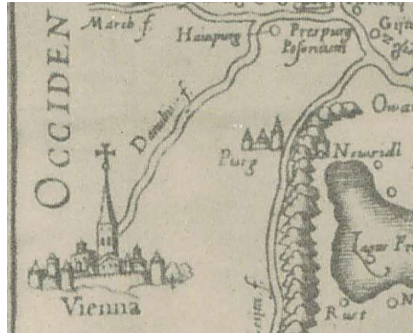


Figure 1. Extract from the Rome edition (1559) of Lazarus' *Tabula Hungariae*

Early Hungarian exonyms

When Latin was replaced by German in 1784 as official language in the Kingdom, which was then part of the larger Austrian (Habsburg) Empire, Hungarian was already making headway in literary and scientific works (like maps). Following the first major Hungarian geographical textbook with abundant geographical names during the reign of Maria Theresa (Bertalanffi, 1757), the first maps with Hungarian names were published in 1760 (Peter Bod's Maps of Europe), like *Korsika* (Corse), *Skotzia* (Scotland), *Olá Ország* (Walachia), *Lengyel Ország* (Polska/Poland), *Neapoly* (Napoli/Naples), *Neszter* (Dniester).

The appearance of Demeter Görög's maps signalled a marked improvement in cartographic quality. His finely engraved works, like his map of Europe (1790) contained country names that are still familiar to Hungarians (with slight orthographic alterations) like *Német Ország* (Germany), *Tseh Ország* (Bohemia), *Lengyel Ország* (Poland), *Nagy Britannia* (Great Britain), but also *Wallis* (Wales), *Sz(ent) Pétervára* (St. Petersburg), *Britanniai Tsatorna* (English Channel), *Álep* (Halab, Italian Aleppo), or *Vogulitzi Pogányok* (Vogul pagans East of the Urals).

The old Hungarian exonym *Bess* is traced back to records dating 1356, and is comparable to the Croatian *Beč* and the old Ottoman *Beç*.

Ézsaiás (Isaiah) Budai's New School Atlas

In 1804 a fine atlas was published by Ézsaiás (Isaiah) Budai in Hungarian for students of secondary schools. Titled *Oskolai új Átlás* (New School Atlas), it contained 12 finely engraved maps, mostly of European countries, but also of the continents. His treatment of foreign geographical names reflected the initial dilemma of early cartographers: to make strange sounding names more familiar without loss of identification. So he translated and transcribed to Hungarian pronunciation what he thought useful. His world map denotes the Rio de la Plata (River Plate) as *Ezüst fv. torka* (=mouth of the Silver River), the Azores are named *Ölyvök Sz(igetei)* (Islands of Buzzards), and the distant Cook Strait in New Zealand is written as *Kuk szorossa*.

To quote a few lovely other examples he used names on the map of Great Britain like: *Napkeleti Szaksz(onia)* (Saxony where the Sun rises = Essex), *Kentörbörri* (Canterbury), *Csicseszter* (Chichester).



Figure 2. SE England on Ézsaiás Budai's map of Great Britain (from his *New School Atlas*, 1804)

On the map of France we find *Sáránt* (Charente) north of Bordeaux, *Dörgő Hegy* (Mont Tonnerre [=Mount Thunder] in the Vosges Mountains, while Côte d'Or and Mont-Terrible (old French Département) are translated as *Aranyhát* (Golden Back) and *Rettenetes Hegy* respectively. The endonym forms are usually also given to facilitate identification.



Figure 3. A portion of eastern France on Ézsaiás Budai's map of France (from his *New School Atlas*, 1804)

Of course such transcriptions of specific (proper) elements of geographical names as *Kolmár* (Colmar) or *Nánszi* (Nancy) have long been abandoned in Hungary for features lying in areas using the Roman alphabet.

Hungarian exonyms within the Carpathian Basin

As is well known to specialists of the region, most Hungarian exonyms are found in countries neighbouring Hungary. This is due to historical circumstances (reduction of the country to a third of its former area), and to the presence of sizable Hungarian minorities that continue to live in these countries. As the Hungarian language is only official within Hungary, geographical features named in Hungarian in these neighbouring countries and used in Hungary are to be regarded as exonyms.

To put it simply we are dealing with three major types of Hungarian exonyms in the neighbouring countries. In the first case the share of the ethnic Hungarian population in the town is fairly high, e.g. in the case of *Érsekújvár* (Nové Zámky, Slovakia). In the second case this share is much lower, but historical attributes strongly entrench the exonym in the Hungarian language, e.g. *Vajdahunyad* (Hunedoara, Romania, original stronghold of King Matthias Corvinus' father). The third category holds names with hardly any local Hungarian population, like *Károlyváros* (Karlovac, Croatia).

Prior to World War I practically all place names within the territory of historical Hungary were given Hungarian names. The measure partly served the goal of better identification (prevention of errors), as no two settlements had the right to have the same name (exclusion of homonyms). Another important target was forced Magyarization: settlements with very few Hungarian inhabitants were also given Hungarian names. Some experts in Hungary nowadays regard this pre-World War I list as the standard, when dealing with place names of historical Hungarian territories. Others would prefer a differentiated approach, that would fully back the minority name if there is a sizable local population, but would not support this name use when the number of local Hungarians are low.

Status of Hungarian exonym place names in Austria, Romania, Serbia & Montenegro, Slovakia and Slovenia

In Austria a recent (2000) legislation permits the use of roadside nameplates of place names for 4 Hungarian settlements in Burgenland and the use of these names in certain local administrative matters (*Felsőpulya*/Oberpullendorf, *Felsőőr*/Oberwart), *Alsóőr*/Unterwart and *Órisziget*/Siget in der Wart).

Romania adopted a law in local administration in 2001, which – if the local minority population exceeds 20% – calls for the use of nameplates and also allows limited use of the minority language in the local administration. The supplement to the law lists the settlements in question in both Romanian and in the minority language.

In Serbia and Montenegro an act of the Province of Vojvodina passed in 2003 resulted in similar measures as those above.

Slovakia passed an act in 1994, which also permits limited local use of place names (notably the placing of nameplates) in the minority language if the minority has a share of over 20% of the total population. Its attached list of minority place names could not include names established between 1867–1918 and 1938–45. Local use of alternative minority language variants of commemorative place names was also outlawed.

In Slovenia legislation allows the local use of place names in the two largest minorities, Italian and Hungarian, in their respective geographic areas. Roadside nameplates and official maps denote the place name both in Slovenian and in the minority language, in the same character (showing equal rank), divided by a slash (e.g. Dobrovník/Lendvavásárhely).

These legal developments may pave the way for the recognition of the status of these minority names as not being exonyms.

A recent proposal by the UN Working Group on Exonyms

Recognizing the overlap whereby certain toponyms can be both an endonym and an exonym at the same time the working group proposed the following new definition:

Exonym: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken, and differing in its form from the name used in the official or well-established languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated.

Maps without exonyms?

An attempt at a political world map for the international market (The World – Political map – (Cartographia/Budapest), 1998) was made with names in endonymic forms. Despite the tremendous work with toponymy, several mistakes were left on the map („Chanel” Is., Germany, Ljubljaua, Gälve/Sweden/, etc.). With more checks most of these mistakes could have been overcome, but at what price? Few international organizations would really be interested, the efforts are not worth the costs.



Figure 4. Part of the Political World Map by Cartographia, Budapest, 1998

Recent Hungarian developments

Some Hungarian publishers these days are trying to make their products more popular and thus increase their market share by offering maps with „more Hungarian names”. These include atlases and maps with nearly-forgotten historical exonyms (e.g. *Szörényvár* / Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Romania), and an especially huge number of translated specific elements of physical features, particularly from more familiar languages. So for example on the American continent they put such names on their maps besides the familiar Hungarian *Sziklás-hegység* (Rocky Mountains) and *Tűzföld* (Tierra del Fuego) as *Két testvér-hegység*

(Serra Dois Irmãos in Brazil) and *Kúszósül-fennsík* (Porcupine Plateau in Canada/U.S.). The lack of the original name at least in brackets hampers identification.



Figure 5. Part of Brazil in the World Atlas and Country Lexicon, Topográf/Nyír-Karta, Nyíregyháza, 2004

A more balanced approach is reflected in the practice of putting the local official name first, followed by the Hungarian exonym in brackets (Nápoli [Nápoly], Tiranë [Tirana] etc., except in school atlases, where exonyms may take priority to the local forms. For physical features, usually only the generic part is translated (*Otrantói-szoros* [Stretto di Otranto]).

Chances of reducing the number of exonyms

With the wider recognition of certain exonyms being rather of historical value, and the handicap of having maps with many translated Hungarian names but with little use to help local orientation may increase the chances of reducing Hungarian exonyms in use. Legal developments already mentioned may also facilitate excluding many names from this category. The latest proposal by the UN Working Group on Exonyms may also help to remove from exonym category many of the geographical names used in Hungary.

References

- POKOLY, B.: *On Exonyms of the Hungarian Language*, United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), 22nd Session, New York, 20-29 April 2004, 3. p.
 POKOLY, B.: *Further Thoughts On Exonyms of the Hungarian Language*, Meeting of UN Working Group on Exonyms, Ljubljana, 19-21 May 2005, 5. p.
 KERFOOT, H. (ed.): *Resolutions Adopted at the Eight United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, GEGN/22/6 Exonyms*, 2004. 60-63. p.

