AGENDA ITEM 12[1]

Conventional names

(*a*) **Definition**
(*b*) **Usage**

CONVENTIONAL NAMES, DEFINITIONS, USAGE*

Report presented by Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland

DEFINITION

An exonym (this term being more appropriate than "conventional name"), for the purpose of the standardization of geographical names, can be defined as a geographical name used in a certain language for a geographical entity 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 entity is situated. The following are examples:

"Geneva" is the English exonym for (French) "Genève".

"Tage" is the French exonym for (Spanish) "Tajo", (Portuguese) "Tejo".

"Rakousko" is the Czech exonym for (German) "Österreich".

"Cologne" is the French exonym for (German) "Köln".

"Strassburg" is the German exonym for (French) "Strasbourg", the latter being the only official form.

"Luik" is the Dutch exonym for (French) "Liège".

"Anvers" is the French exonym for (Dutch) "Antwerpen".

(But: "Brussel" is not an exonym for (French) "Bruxelles", and "Bozen" is not an exonym for (Italian) "Bolzano", since Dutch "Brussel" and German "Bozen" are names officially used beside the French and the Italian names.)

USAGE

Just like any other lexical unit, exonyms are part of the vocabulary of a language. They "belong" to the language community which uses them. It is therefore neither for the nation to which the geographic entity in question belongs, nor for any international body, to decide whether an exonym should be kept in use or not.

When viewing the situation as a whole, one finds that exonyms are on a decline. There is general tendency for exonyms for less important geographical entities to be ousted by the local official names. Many exonyms which existed in former times are not used any more. On the other hand it is safe to predict that a certain stock of exonyms will survive in the world's languages.

The present situation is unstable: constant change can be observed, and further evolution is to be expected. Moreover, conditions differ between cultural settings as well as between fields of application. This has to be taken into consideration when attempting to formulate directives or recommendations.

Although the problem of exonyms is primarily linguistic, there are several more aspects that must also be taken into account.

The points can be made in favour of maintaining existing exonyms. Exonyms being part of the vocabulary of a given language, their general elimination would result in the impoverishment of that vocabulary and would be inconsistent with sound principles of language policy. Exonyms generally bear witness to long-lasting contacts between the peoples concerned. They are valuable evidence for historical and cultural relationships. Many exonyms are deeply rooted in the lexical system of the language. This holds especially true for the names of major geographical entities. The replacement of exonyms by local official names often causes difficulties of spelling and pronunciation for the language-users.

On the other hand, exonyms may sometimes present certain disadvantages. The occurrence of too large a quantity of exonyms in the vocabulary of a language constitutes a burden on the memories of the language-users, especially when the names of minor geographical features are concerned. Using exonyms rather than local official names may lead to confusion in certain international activities such as communication or traffic.

The advantages and drawbacks should be given serious consideration in each individual case. The question of exonyms should not be treated from a political viewpoint or in terms of nationalism. The occurrence, and use, of an exonym must by no means be construed as a claim of the exonym-using linguistic community to the geographical entity to which the exonym refers.

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[1] A paper presented by Israel pertaining to this item is reproduced under agenda item 7 above.

* The original text of this paper was contained in document E/CONF.61/L.24.

In seeking an appropriate attitude towards exonyms, two extremes ought to be avoided: the "romantic" attitude, which tends to defend all exonyms existing in the present and past vocabulary of a given language, going to the length of reviving such exonyms as have become obsolete—an attitude which is unrealistic and unpracticable; and the "internationalist" attitude, which is unfavourable to any exonym whatever and advocates the replacement of exonyms by local official names, thus introducing into the vocabulary a multitude of new foreign words, even for important and well-known geographical features.

Considering the complex character of the problem, no general rules can be expected to apply to the use of exonyms in every field of activity; nor is it possible to give an exhaustive list of such fields.

The following examples compare the frequency of exonyms in parallel fields.

They will be more frequent in:	Than in:
Spoken language	Written language
Continuous text	Tables and maps
Fiction	Technical texts
Texts for general public	Texts for the specialist
Maps for general and educational purposes and for use within one linguistic community	Maps for specialized purposes (e.g. road-maps) and for international use

Then, exonyms will be used more often for some classes of geographical entities than for others: more often, for example, for features of large extent or great importance, such as countries or capitals, than for minor features. Similarly, their frequency will be higher for such entities as have been well known for a long time within the linguistic community.

Even in those cases where the use of exonyms is legitimate, it may sometimes prove advantageous to add the local official name, possibly placing one of the two forms in brackets or after an oblique stroke, thus: Gênes (Genova), Genova (Gênes), Gênes/Genova, Genova/Gênes.

It would be very desirable for every linguistic community to have a list published to show what exonyms it uses for geographical and topographic features outside its language-area, giving side by side the exonym and the local official name.

Editors of cartographic works intended for educational purposes, for use by the general public, or both (such as school maps, school atlases and maps in encyclopaedias) should be strongly recommended to include exonyms, especially those for inhabited places and major geographical features, but to make sure that the exonyms admitted are not obsolete ones nor out of common usage.

In all written or oral communications where the use of an exonym would be detrimental to intelligibility, i.e., to the identifiability of the location in question, or where its use could be expected to arouse unfriendly feelings, it is advisable to replace the exonym in that particular case with the local official name or at least to mention that name in addition to the exonym.

Taking account of the preceding considerations the conference should contemplate appropriate recommendations.

FORMER CONVENTIONAL NAMES DROPPED BY THE UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES*

Report presented by the United States of America

The names on this list were formerly approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names as conventional names for optional use. In the course of the review leading to publication of the Conventional Names Gazetteer in March 1972, these names were judged no longer required.[1] Not included are names of former entities permissible for use in a historical context only (e.g. Armorica), and still valid names of entities whose labels were changed from "conventional" to "English" or to "long form" and "short form" (e.g. Cameroon, Ireland, Gambia).

Conventional name	Area
Abadan	Iran
Abadan Island	Iran

Conventional name	Area
Abkhazia	USSR
Adzharia	USSR
Aegean Islands (administrative division)	Greece
Älvsborg	Sweden
Amsterdam Island	Indian Ocean
Anadyr, Gulf of	USSR
Arabs Gulf	Egypt
Archangel	USSR
Armorican Massif	France
Bahr el Ghazal Province	Sudan
Bakhtiari	Iran
Barents Island	Norway
Bashkiria	USSR
Basra	Iraq
Bear Island	Norway
Belts	Denmark
Benghazi	Libya
Bessarabia	USSR
Blekinge	Sweden
Blue Nile Province	Sudan