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Exonyms

Working Paper on Exonyms

Submitted by Lebanon**

WORKING PAPER ON

EXONYMS

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The problem of the standardization of geographical names, of which the discussion of exonyms forms a large part, is an extensive and complex one.

United Nations resolutions recommend the reduction of the number of exonyms as far and as quickly as possible.

An **exonym** is a name for a place that is not used within that place by the local inhabitants, or a name for a people or language that is not used by the people or language to which it refers. The name used by the people or locals themselves is an **endonym** or autonym [1].

For all Semitic people, including Arabic people, place names are related to an expression of a religious or an emotional thought. Like wishing and seeking blessings.

Geographic names are as old as humanity, and more mysterious, because they date back to far periods when human discovered the agriculture as food resources.

Hence, people found themselves forced to have their own home, their own field and their own food, so it was incumbent on them to give a name for these places to distinguish each from others.

So, geographic names are to be a description that remains and never changes despite of the try of invaders to change them like when the Grecians and Romans have changed

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[1] Wikipedia online encyclopedia.

names of Baalbeck, Beirut, Jbeil, Akka, Hamat and Bissan into names non-Semitic, but people didn't consider these strange names. That's why when the invaders have left, these names returned for what they used to be previously.

Names of places may be :
1- Geographic description.
2- Religious nomination.
3- Persons names or precise accidents memory.
4- Animal or vegetation names.

Historical value for geographical names
- Religion
- Socio-cultural
- Political

Geographical names in Lebanon follow the same rules:
- Geography, topography: Heights, valleys, fertility…
- Religion
- Accidents
- People

Exonyms are pronounced like their original language. Some rules are considered when writing exonyms.

So, Exonyms may derive from distinct roots, or may be cognate words which have diverged in pronunciation or orthography.

Some languages use the same spelling as the endonym but change the pronunciation, thus making it an exonym.

Exonyms can also be divided into native and borrowed (i.e., from a third language).

In earlier times, the name of the first tribe or village encountered became the exonym for the whole people beyond

Most productively, the Germanic invaders of the Roman Empire apparently encountered a Latin-speaking Celtic tribe named the Volcae and this evolved in West Germanic languages as a generic name for all non-Germanic speakers.

Sometimes, nicknames or pejorative appellations became standard exonyms.

Two millennia earlier, the Greeks thought all non-Greek speakers spoke gibberish like bar-bar-bar, so they called them all barbarians, which eventually gave rise to the exonym Berber.

In the late 20th century the use of exonyms often becomes controversial. Groups often prefer that outsiders avoid exonyms where they have come to be used in a pejorative way; for example, Roman people prefer that term over exonyms like Gypsy (from Egypt), or the French term bohème (from Bohemia), or the Spanish term flamenco (from Flanders). People may also seek to avoid exonyms due to historical sensitivities, as in the case of German names for Polish and Czech places which used to be ethnically or politically German (e.g. Danzig/Gdansk), much like Russian place names being used for locations once under its control (e.g. Kiev/Kyiv).

In the recent years, geographers have sought to reduce the use of exonyms to avoid these kinds of problems. For example, it is now common for Spanish speakers to refer to the Turkish capital as Ankara rather than use the Spanish exonym Angora, still in use for types of cat, goat and rabbit.

But according to the United Nations Statistics Division: "Time has, however, shown that initial ambitious attempts to rapidly decrease the number of exonyms were over-optimistic and not possible to realize in the intended way. The reason would appear to be that many exonyms have become common words in a language and can be seen as part of the language's cultural heritage."

In English, attempts to skirt a familiar exonym in order to accurately reproduce an endonym often appear pretentious.

Other difficulties with endonyms have to do with pronunciation, spelling and word category. The endonym may include sounds which are highly unfamiliar to speakers of other languages, making appropriate usage difficult if not impossible for an outsider. Over the years, phonetic changes may happen to the endonym either in the original language or borrowing language, thus changing an endonym into an exonym. In many cases no standardized spelling is available either because the language itself is unwritten (even unanalyzed) or because there are competing non-standard spellings.

Use of a misspelled endonym is perhaps more problematic than the respectful use of an existing exonym. Finally, an endonym may be simply a plural noun and does not extend itself to adjectival usage in another language like English which has a propensity to use the adjectives for describing culture and language. The attempt to use the endonym thus has a bizarre-sounding result.

The name for a language and a people are often different terms, of course, which is a complication for an outsider.

Sometimes the government of a country tries to endorse the use of an endonym instead of traditional exonyms outside the country:

In 1985 the government of Côte d'Ivoire requested that the country's French name be used in all languages instead of exonyms such as Ivory Coast, so that Côte d'Ivoire is now the official English name of that country used by the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee.

The Ukrainian government maintains that the capital of Ukraine should be called Kyiv in English because it considers the traditional English exonym Kiev to be derived from the Russian name Kiyev (Киев).

The Belarusian government argues that the endonym Belarus should be used in all languages and has been rather successful in English, where the former exonym Byelorussia, still used with reference to the Soviet Republic, has virtually died out, whereas in other languages exonyms like German Weißrußland, Danish Hviderusland, Swedish Vitryssland, Dutch Wit-Rusland, Icelandic Hvíta-Rússland (all literally 'White Russia') or French Biélorussie are still much more common than Belarus.

Exonyms and endonyms must not be confused with the results of geographical renaming as in the case of Saint Petersburg, which became Petrograd in 1914, Leningrad in 1924, and Saint Petersburg again in 1991. In this case, although St Petersburg has a German etymology, this was never a German exonym for the city between 1914 and 1991, just as New Amsterdam, the Dutch name of New York City until 1664, is not its Dutch exonym.

The old place names outdated after renaming are afterwards often used as historicisms. Consequently, even today one would talk about the Siege of Leningrad, not the Siege of St. Petersburg, because at that time (1941-1944) the city was called Leningrad. Sometimes, however, historical names are deliberately not used because of nationalist tendencies to linguistically lay claim to a city's past. As a case in point, the Slovakian article on the 1805 Peace of Pressburg does not use either of the city's names then in use (the Slovakian Prešporok or the official, that is German, Pressburg) but today's name Bratislava that became the city's name only in 1919.

Likewise, Istanbul   is still called Constantinople (Κωνσταντινούπολη) in Greek, despite the name having been changed in Turkish (and other languages) between 1923 and 1930.

Conclusion

  Many difficulties are confronted when searching in the history of names and Exonyms. But this study and the rules of the standardization of the geographic names is a major step into the big development of the world.