The Sea of the Three Endonyms

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I was born and raised in the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the north-east of England was my formative environment as a youngster. Looking back now, it is clear to me that the geographical names the toponyms that I used for the features I encountered in that part of the world were all endonyms. All the geographical names I used were in the English language and applied to features in the area where I lived, so those names fitted exactly our UNGEGN definition of an endonym:

Name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated.

In my teenage years there I would often play football on a beach known as Long Sands, located near the mouth of the River Tyne as it enters the sea at Tynemouth, in the county of Northumberland. As I played, there was land on one side of me and sea on the other. I was not conscious of any toponymically generic difference between the two types of feature. The land which I called Northumberland, and the sea which I called the North Sea, were both equally integral parts of my local environment, and looking back now with my UNGEGN experience I am certain that they are both endonyms.

When I looked out from Long Sands over the North Sea, I had in my mind the fact that way beyond the horizon, hundreds of kilometres distant at the other side of this large maritime feature, stood Denmark and Norway. But even though I could only see a few square kilometres of this huge North Sea with my eye, it never occurred to me that it could possibly be anything other than one

single feature with one single name in my language. As a corollary of this, it never occurred to me that a person living in Norway would name it anything other than Nordsjøen, the Norwegian language name for the same feature, right up to the Northumberland coast where I was standing.

Sometimes if I looked southwards from Long Sands I would be able towatch the ferry leaving the nearby River Tyne, bound perhaps for Esbjerg in Denmark. The ferry would of course soon disappear from sight over the horizon, but I knew it would remain in this same geographical feature that I called the North Sea right up to the point at which it docked in Denmark. And when the ferry from Stavanger in Norway appeared on the horizon, approaching the River Tyne, it too had crossed this same single feature, the North Sea. For me, from my perspective, my English-language endonym North Sea remained valid for the entire feature, the feature across which these ferries had sailed.In the English language, the ferry from Stavanger had not started out across the Nordsjøen but across the North Sea, and since I do not believe that one given toponym can be both an endonym and an exonym, then it follows that the English-language endonym 'North Sea' is valid for the entire feature.

This perspective is one that is entirely devoid of any questions of politics, exclusive economic zones, and suchlike. Clearly I realised even as a teenager that there were political differences between the land on one side of me and the sea on the other. The land was sovereign United Kingdom territory, the sea was not, or at least most of it was not. But that question of politics was a separate issue and it did not deflect me from believing that the geographical feature to which I applied the toponymic label 'North Sea' was one single feature right from where I was standing on Long Sands across to where the waves lapped up on to the shore in Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Calling this single feature by one single English-language name was simply the natural and logical thing to do, and did not in any way imply possession of the feature.

Now let us transfer our attention right round the globe andconsider in a similar manner the sea that stretches between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. Is it really so different from the North Sea? Let us create a situation analogous to my being on Long Sands in Tynemouth. Let us imagine a Korean youngster watching the sun rise by the seashore in Gangwon

province, South Korea. He too looks out eastwards on to a sea that stretches way beyond the horizon, in this instance all the way to Japan. And because he knows that this is all one and the same feature he calls it by one name too: Dong Hae, which translates into English as 'East Sea'. If he imagines a boat sailing eastwards out of the port of Gangneung towards Niigata in Japan, he will naturally consider that that boat is crossing what he calls the East Sea all the way to the point at which it docks at its Japanese destination.

And there in Niigata itself, a Japanese teenager stands watching that same boat dock. It is evening, and the youngster is looking westwards into the setting sun, thinking to himself that this boat has come from Korea and has crossed the entire width of the feature he knows as Nihon-kai, which translates into English as 'Sea of Japan'. Meanwhile, further north, that same sunset is being watched from the seashore of Primorskiy territory in Russia by a teenager who is admiring this evening view over the feature he knows as Yaponskoye More, which translates into English as 'Japanese Sea'.

All these people, in South Korea, Japan and Russia, are using the endonym relevant to their own language for this single extensive maritime feature. And the conclusion must therefore be that this sea has in fact three endonyms Dong Hae, Nihon-kai, Yaponskoye More and that all three of these endonyms are applicable to the entire maritime feature. This sea can therefore truly be labelled as the Sea of the Three Endonyms.

I believe we can easily reconcile this belief that there are three endonyms for this sea with our UNGEGN definition of 'endonym'. Let us look at this definition again:
Name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated.

The definition requires firstly that there should in fact be a geographical feature. Clearly that criterion is satisfied here; there is one single extensive sea forming a distinct discrete geographical feature. The definition then asks that the name or names of that feature should be in official or well-established languages of the area concerned. Again, that criterion is satisfied since Japanese, Korean and Russian are all languages immediately relevant to this particular feature they are all official and well-established along various

sections of its shorelines.

We should remember that the entire feature not a portion or section of it is the object that is named in these three languages. This too is in harmony with our definition; the relevant languages have to occur where the feature as a whole is situated, not where a certain portion of the feature is situated. So even though the three names are not all relevant to all shores they nevertheless constitute true endonyms.

I would not wish this belief to be misconstrued. It would be absurd to believe that for a person standing on the west coast of Japan the endonym Dong Haehas any local linguistic relevance. Likewise it would be equally absurd to pretend that the endonym Nihon-kai has any local linguistic relevance along the east coast of the Korean peninsula. In most circumstances no-one would choose to use the term Dong Hae in Japan or the term Nihon-kai in Korea. But if a Korean person is standing in Niigata and looking west out over the open sea, he will refer to that sea as Dong Hae and in doing so he will be using an endonym because he is using the Korean language, even though he is standing in Japan. Dong Hae is the Korean endonym for the feature in its entirety, right up to the point at which its waves lap against the pier at Niigata. Similarly, Nihon-kai is the Japanese endonym for the entire feature, right up to the harbour wall at Gangneung.

These three toponyms are endonyms in their own local languages, in the forms 日本海 , 동해, Японское море, and also in the corresponding romanized forms Nihon-kai, Dong Hae and Yaponskoye More (the romanizations can perhaps better be considered as reflections of the true endonyms). But the names for this sea in other languages, such as English, French and Spanish, are exonyms, even if they are translations of one or other of the three local endonyms on offer. This is because for those languages the criteria of the UNGEGN definition of an endonym are not satisfied. None of them English, French, Spanish occurs anywhere '*in that area where the feature is situated*.' One consequence of this is that the English-language labels 'Sea of Japan' and 'East Sea' are both exonyms.

An atlas or map publisher faced with determining the correct name for such a featuretherefore needs principally to consider the language of his target

readership. If the publication is destined for a Japanese readership, then 日本海 (or Nihon-kai if romanized) is the applicable name for the whole feature. If the publication is destined for a Korean readership, then 동해 (or Dong Hae if romanized) is the applicable name for the whole feature. As we have seen, in both instances these publications will be using valid endonyms. For those language readerships further afield, such as English, French and Spanish, the name applied to this feature will be an exonym, and will be the traditionally used name in those languages for this feature.

Finally, it is important to note just how helpful and useful this approach to the endonym is in our discussions within the United Nationsand other forums. Because it is genuinely legitimate to see even a large maritime feature as a single discrete whole, we are not placed in the invidious position of having to decide whether a particular toponymic label should stop at some (possibly disputed) sovereignty limit in the sea, and what other label should apply beyond that limit. Nor are we placed in the position of having to accept that a single maritime feature carries in the same language an endonym label for one portion of its extent and an exonym label for another.