

Is 'exonym' an appropriate term for names of features beyond any sovereignty?

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1 Exonyms: still many open questions

Although the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) has since its foundation made remarkable progress in resolving many problems of standardization and in establishing a practicable terminology, and although exonyms have from the very beginning been in the focus of its discussions, the contents of the terms *exonym* and *endonym* are still not clearly defined and there are still many open questions related to them. One of them is, whether the term *exonym* covers also features beyond any sovereignty such as international waters or the “high sea”.

Naftali KADMON, at that time the convenor of the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Terminology and the editor of the UNGEGN Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, has raised this question in his Working Paper submitted to the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 21-30 August 2007 (KADMON 2007a). Roman STANI-FERTL has recently, at the 10th Meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms in Tainach, 28-30 April 2010, urged to put this question on the agenda of the Working Group.

As with many other questions, the new UNGEGN definitions of the *endonym* and the *exonym*¹ do not provide any answer. They have by purpose been formulated in a way that makes them open for various interpretations and have – compared to their predecessors – just the advantage of not being overlapping.

2 Two contrasting views

Naftali KADMON argues in his paper quoted above (KADMON 2007a), that maritime names in a certain language were endonyms in these parts of a sea, over which a country in which this language is official or well-established exerts some kind of jurisdiction, i.e. its territorial waters. Names in languages not corresponding to the requirements of being official or well-established in this country will be termed *exonyms*.

He exemplifies this by the Korean and Japanese names for the Sea of Japan/East Sea: The Korean name *Tong Hae* has the terminological status of an endonym in the territorial waters of Korea and acquires the status of an exonym in the territorial waters of Japan, while the Japanese name *Nihon Kai* has the terminological status of an endonym in the territorial waters of Japan and

¹ **Endonym:** Name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. *Examples:* Vārānaśī (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix-la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqşur (not Luxor).

Exonym: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. *Examples:* Warsaw is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); Mailand is German for Milano; Londres is French for London; Kūlūniyā is Arabic for Köln. The officially romanized endonym Moskva for Москва is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form Beijing, while Peking is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage (KADMON 2007b, p. 2).

becomes an exonym in the territorial waters of Korea. Outside territorial waters, according to KADMON, both names have neither the terminological status of an endonym nor of an exonym, they are just *allonyms*. For KADMON it “follows that there is a need for a new term to be added to the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, namely the status of a toponym for a maritime feature in international waters.” (KADMON 2007a, p. 4).

In my opinion, this is a premature conclusion and it is also not sufficiently explained. Why can the Korean name *Tong Hae* acquire exonym status only in the territorial waters of another country, e.g. Japan? Why not also with reference to international waters? Does the acquisition of an exonym status require the existence of an endonym as a counterpart?

While I am fully in line with KADMON’s view that a geographical name for a transboundary feature can change its terminological status according to the portion of the feature to which it is applied, I would – in contrast to him – express the opinion that a name can also have exonym status, where the counterpart of an endonym is missing, e.g., with reference to international waters. I will explain this argument in more detail later.

Paul WOODMAN has in several papers (a.o. WOODMAN 2009a, b) expressed a view quite different from KADMON’s. His basic concept is that one name in one language for one feature cannot change in terminological status, cannot simultaneously be an endonym and an exonym. According to him the Korean name *Tong Hae* is an endonym all over the feature, i.e. in the territorial waters of Korea as well as Japan, but also with reference to international waters. The same is, of course, true *vice versa*: The Japanese name *Nihon Kai* has endonym status all over the Sea, no matter, which country and where it exerts jurisdiction.

This resolves our question (Is there a need for a third term besides *endonym* and *exonym* for international waters?) in a most comfortable way: There is no need for a third term, since all languages official or well-established in the coastal countries of a sea are endonyms all over the feature. Names in languages not official or not well-established in coastal countries like the English names *Sea of Japan/East Sea* in our case, have, of course, the status of exonyms, since there is everywhere the counterpart of an endonym, even in international waters, in areas beyond any national sovereignty.

Paul’s strongest argument for his view, that a name remains an endonym also outside the territorial waters of a certain country, is, that a feature is indivisible in emotional terms. The emotional affection of a certain linguistic community to the feature, e.g., a sea, cannot be divided into zones (territorial waters, international waters, territorial waters of another country), but refers to the feature as a whole and to all its parts.

Sungjae CHOO (CHOO 2009) as well as the author of this paper (JORDAN 2009a, b) have replied that people develop emotional ties rather to places in the sense of TUAN (TUAN 1977) than to geographical features, which are always constructs and abstract spatial entities. This is especially true for large natural features like seas, mountain ranges or streams. Affection of coastal dwellers to a sea, e.g., fades away when they leave the place where they live more or less as a function of distance. They are anyway unlikely to claim that coasts far beyond their horizon (inhabited by speakers of another language having their own name for the sea) were to the same extent “theirs” as the coast and the part of the sea they can watch from their houses, where they go for a swim and which is navigated by local fisher boats.

It is not the place here to mention also other arguments in this respect (cf. JORDAN 2009a, b), since our current question is a different one.

3 Proposing a synthesis

While I share Paul WOODMAN’s opinion that there is nothing besides the endonym/exonym divide and I would strongly support Naftali KADMON’s view that the endonym status of a name for a transboundary feature is to be confined to places, where a certain language is official or well-established as well as to territorial waters of countries, in which this is the case, I cannot follow

him, when he implicitly concludes that the term *exonym* cannot apply to names for international waters, since they lack the counterpart of an endonym.

Must there be a counterpart? Does our new definition of the exonym require a counterpart? Yes, it says that an exonym is a name “differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated.” (KADMON 2007b, p. 3) This may indeed be interpreted as hinting at an endonym as a requirement for an exonym. But it may also be interpreted in the opposite way: If there is an endonym, the exonym must differ in its form.

International waters are, by the way, not the only features without a corresponding endonym. There are lots of historical names lacking an adequate current endonym: *Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire, Moesia, Tauria, Noricum, Troy*, etc. Are they all something besides the endonym/exonym divide? Must we find even a fourth term for them?

I do not think so, since they all coincide with the basic concept of the exonym, i.e. to be a name from without, a name used by a linguistic community not inhabiting the place in question. Whether the place is inhabited by an endonym community or not or is under the jurisdiction of an endonym community is a separate question, which does not matter in our context.

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