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English

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Item 11 of the provisional agenda [*]
Toponymic terminology

Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology 2021-2023

Submitted by the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology [**]

Summary:

The full report provides an overview of the activities of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The Working Group met for the first time since 2019, holding a joint meeting with the Working Group on Exonyms in Ljubljana from 31 August to 3 September 2022. The report provides information on that meeting and the future plans of the Working Group.

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[*] GEGN.2/2023/1
[**] Prepared by Mr Trent Palmer (USA), Convenor
Note: The views expressed in this report are the author's and not necessarily those of the U.S. Government.

Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology 2021-2023

Background

The Working Group on Toponymic Terminology (WG TT) was established by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) at its 14th session in Geneva in May 1989. In 2002, the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical, including 375 terms and their definitions in the six official UN languages, was published in one combined volume with appropriate cross-referencing. At the ninth UNCSGN in New York (2007) an Addendum with a total of 23 entries was ratified and approved for insertion in the Glossary. The revised Glossary (that includes the Addendum as a separate Annex) is available for download from the UNGEGN website (on the UNGEGN Publications page). An online database of toponymic terminology (www.ortsnamen.at/ungegn_glossary)[1] was established in 2019.

Recent Activities

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Convenor's lack of available time has impacted the work of the Working Group in many ways. The Working Group met for the first time since 2019, holding a joint session with the Working Group on Exonyms in Ljubljana, Slovenia in late summer 2022. Other than some email communications, the meeting was the only substantive activity since the 2019 UNGEGN session. Several new members attended the 2022 meeting and actively contributed to the topical discussions.

The Working Group maintains a docket of proposed changes to the glossary/database. The docket contains more than 100 terms subject to a range of actions (addition, modification of a definition, deletion, etc.). Several recommendations remain incomplete (e.g., a proposed term with no associated definition) and will not be considered by the Working Group until fully composed.

At the 2022 meeting, the working group discussed several papers and considered a small set of changes to the content of the terminology database. Approved changes include the addition of two terms (*exophone* and *tripthong*) and editorial corrections to the definitions of three terms. The changes approved by the WG are submitted for endorsement by the Group of Experts and are listed in the Annex. In addition, some omissions and errors (six) in the data base are included for the record. Discussion occurred about the following terms: *diacritic, geographical name, lingua franca, microtoponym*, *oronym*, and *urbonym* without reaching a consensus decision.

As noted in the 2021 report of the Working Group, its page on the UNGEGN website was updated and improved. However, no progress has been made towards establishing a working group website.

UNGEGN 2021 and the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029

Decision 2/2021/10 called for an evaluation of the possibility of the terminology glossary publication. The understanding of the Working Group is that the development of the online terminology database was intended to supersede the publication. An effort to produce a basic PDF compilation of the terms and definitions might provide an interim solution, if necessary. In general, the Working Group believes that time, resources, and effort should be placed on the online database vice maintaining and/or producing a hard-copy publication. It is acknowledged that users may be confused by the fact that the glossary available at the UNGEGN website is the 2002 is not current due to subsequent terminology changes. The Convenor took an action to look into possible solutions.

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[1] The database is graciously supported by the Austrian Board on Geographical Names (Arbeitsgemeinschaft fūr Kartographische Ortsnamenkunde) hosted by the University of Innsbruck.

The strategic plan and programme of work include several references to the Working Group, as follows:

> 3-ii-2 "Review the current versions of UNGEGN publications, establish a plan to revise or add to them, and implement it." Comment: For the WGTT, this is the terminology glossary (see above).

> 3-iii-7: "Review the function and operation of Bureau, Working Groups and Divisions and consider any change in the organizational structure of UNGEGN." Comment: No plans exist for making changes to the WG TT.

> 3-iii-9: "Encourage WG convenors and Division chairs to share and develop ideas of linking and cooperating with each other." Comment: the 2022 joint meeting with the Working Group on Exonyms is a good practical way to encourage cooperation. A proposal to hold a joint meeting in 2024 was discussed at the Ljubljana meeting.

> 3-ii-2 refers to the same issue as Decision 2/2021/10 (see text above).

Online Terminology Database

Some database work remains to be done, notably on translations of terms and definitions and some harmonization with the and other clean-up work.

When initialized, the database contained the 2002 Glossary plus the 2007 Addendum, with the exception of Chinese and Arabic terms from the 2007 Addendum. Since then, additional changes approved by the Working Group have been added, but only with the English terms and definitions. The WG TT would welcome assistance from Experts to translate glossary terms and definitions to fill in the gaps.

One of the presentations at the Ljubljana meting focused on the future of the terminology datbase. There are a range of security, software, and other issues that need to be considered in order to maintain a healthy, useable, and data base/service. Data standardization is especially important. Modernization of the data base should be tracked in the strategic plan and programme of work. As yet, no substantive discussion or action has been taken to address these concerns

Upcoming Actions for 2023 – 2025

• The Working Group will continue to address the docket of proposals for the glossary.

• The Working Group will consider how best to address the issues related to the successful sustainment of the database.

• The Working Group will evaluate the possibility of holding an in-person meeting in 2024, most likely in conjunction with other Working Groups.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

(a) Take note of the report of the Working Group;

(b) Volunteer to assist with translations of terms and definitions missing in the terminology database;

(c) Submit proposals for changes to the terminology database; and

(d) Endorse the Working Group's recommendations for additions and changes to terminology database.

Glossary/Database changes approved by the Working Group

Additions

TASK NO.	TERM	DEFINITION	COMMENT
72	triphthong	Combination of three (or two, in → **diphthong**) vocalic elements in a single syllable. Examples: 'uay' in Paraguay.	
85	exophone	Is a form which is pronounced differently from the original, but written the same as the original.	Discussed and agreed to during joint WG meeting

Changes

TASK NO.	NO.	TERM	FORMER DEFINITION	NEW DEFINITION	COMMENT
6	247	odonym	Name of a street or road. Examples: Champs Elysses, Broadway.	Name of a street or road. Examples: avenue des Champs-Élysées, Broadway.	Correct spelling of example
74	028(A)	choronym	Name of a large geographical or administrative unit of land. Examples: Yorkshire; الربع الخالي (Ar Rubʻ al Khālīl); Missiones;	Name of a large geographical or administrative unit of land. Examples: Yorkshire; الربع الخالي (Ar Rubʻ al Khālī); Misiones; Αττική (Attiki).	Correct spelling of examples

TASK NO.	NO.	TERM	FORMER DEFINITION	NEW DEFINITION	COMMENT
81	080	epotoponym	A → **toponym** that constitutes the basis or origin of a common noun. Examples: Jerez (for sherry); Olympía (for Olympiad); al-Burtughāl, the Arabic name of Portugal (for Burtuqāl, also Burtuqān, i.e. an orange in Arabic); Geysir (for geyser).	A → **toponym** that constitutes the basis or origin of a common noun. Examples: Jerez (for sherry); Olympia (for Olympiad); al-Burtughāl, the Arabic name of Portugal (for Burtuqāl, also Burtuqān, i.e. an orange in Arabic); Geysir (for geyser).	Correct a misspelling in an example

Database corrections

TASK NO.	NO.	TERM	FORMER DEFINITION	NEW DEFINITION	COMMENT
4	na	settlement name		→ **proper noun** referring to all kinds of human settlements of a more or less permanent nature (cities, towns, villages, hamlets, farms, ranches, houses, etc.). Examples: Paris, Turku, Yokohama, Nofim (a house).	Included for the record; approved in 2013; not yet in DB
7	246, 270	proper noun	A linguistic expression that uniquely identifies an individual person, place or thing. Examples: Albert, Beijing, Snoopy (a dog), Titanic (a ship)	A linguistic expression that uniquely identifies an individual person, place or thing. Examples: Albert, Beijing, Snoopy (a dog), Titanic (a ship).	Included for the record; add period (.) to definition in DB
9	249	onomastics	(a) The science that has as its object the study of → **names** (b) The activity or process of giving names.	(a) The science that has as its object the study of → **names** ~~(b) The activity or process of giving names~~.	Included for the record; approved in 2013; not yet in DB.

TASK NO.	NO.	TERM	FORMER DEFINITION	NEW DEFINITION	COMMENT
14	A343	toponymization	The act of producing a → **toponym** (i.e. a proper noun) from a common noun, a proper noun other than a toponym or any other part of speech. Examples: producing the toponym Bath (England), place of Roman baths, Vilhemina (Sweden, a town) from a personal name, Ira... etc.	The act of producing a → **toponym** (i.e. a proper noun) from a common noun, a proper noun other than a toponym or any other part of speech. Examples: producing the toponym Bath (England), place of Roman baths, Vilhelmina (Sweden, a town) from a personal name; Iraq from 'Iraq (Arabic, waterside of a sea or of a large river). Toponymization generates the opposite to an →epotoponym such as geysir or meander.	Included for the record. Entered into the DB with an error (truncated).
80		thalassonym	A subset of → **macrotoponym**: the name of an ocean or large sea. Examples: Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, North Sea, Bay of Bengal.		included for the record; approved in 2019; inadvertently omitted from WG report to 2021 UNGEGN session; to be added to DB

TASK NO.	NO.	TERM	FORMER DEFINITION	NEW DEFINITION	COMMENT
na	224, 264	place name	(a) Proper noun applied to a → **topographic feature**. Comprehensive term for → geographical names and → extraterrestrial names. (b) → **Synonym** used by som writers for name of populated place.	(a) Proper noun applied to a → **topographic feature**. Comprehensive term for → geographical names and → extraterrestrial names. (b) → **Synonym** used by some writers for name of populated place.	Included for the record. Entered into the DB with an error