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Culture, heritage and language recognition: Exonyms

Visualizing place-name qualities on maps and in texts

Submitted by Austria **

Summary:

The difference between endonym and exonym is not just a marginal aspect of place names – it has consequences for space-related identity and the pragmatics of place-name use. It can also be politically sensitive. The same applies to place names of linguistic majorities and minorities and their relative legal status.

Therefore, the typographical representation of endonyms and exonyms, as well as of place names of linguistic majorities and minorities on maps and in texts, is not just a marginal aspect. Cartographic practice, however, varies widely in both respects, and standardization efforts are scarce or have not been successful thus far. The same is true for representing the endonym/exonym divide, as well as the majority/minority name dichotomy, in written texts.

When majority and minority names are legally at the same level (e.g. both are official), they would have to be represented in the same way, namely by using the same font type and size, separated by a slash. Most frequently, however, the minority name appears in brackets, in a smaller font size and/or in a different font type. That approach would also be appropriate for endonyms of the same legal status as an inseparable name compound that had to appear also in written texts invariably in the same way. With exonyms used in a written text of the context language, in contrast, consideration could be given to adding the endonym only upon first mention of the feature in an article or a book chapter, for example in square brackets (square to indicate the special quality of the divide). Subsequent mentions would not feature the corresponding endonym, only the exonym.

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Visualizing place-name qualities on maps and in texts

The problem

The dichotomies of endonyms and exonyms as well as place names in the majority language and in minority languages are frequently discussed topics in UNGEGN and other toponymic meetings. Rather exceptionally, however, the consequences of these dichotomies for the rendering in texts and on maps are on the agenda and actual practice in these fields is diverse and lacks standardization. The importance of these dichotomies nevertheless calls for standardization since it would be a great gain to see in a text and on a map at first glance which of the names is the exonym and the endonym, the majority and the minority name and whether the latter has the same legal status.

This paper will comment on and discuss current practices in both fields and then proceed to proposals for standardization starting with the majority and minority name dichotomy followed by the endonym/exonym dichotomy.

Majority and minority names

On maps

When minority place names are represented on topographical maps (see also ORMELING 1983), they are most frequently shown in smaller font size and in brackets behind the majority name (see Fig. 1). This may correspond to the numerical proportion between majority and minority population (although the local situation may deviate from the proportion in the wider region). It conveys, however, the impression that majority and minority names had not the same legal status (which is indeed so in some countries).

If minority place names are legally at the same level with majority names, it would be preferable and is proposed as the standard to render them in the same font size divided by a slash with the majority name in the first position and the minority name in the second (see Fig. 2). Should more than one minority name have the same legal status as the majority name, this practice is to be extended to all these names as exemplified by the Romanian cases of *Braşov/Brassó/Kronstadt*, *Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt* or *Sighişoara/Szegesvár/Schässburg*. Names with a lower legal status (e.g. non-official names) can indeed be added in brackets and also in smaller font size.

Lack of space on a map is no valid excuse for confining the representation to the majority name and omitting the minority name(s). Majority and minority name(s) of the same legal status are to be regarded as an indivisible unit. If a geographical feature on a map is labelled, this labelling has to comprise all names of the same legal status. If cartographic generalization requires omitting names or features, the feature has to be represented without names or not to be represented at all.



Fig. 1: Bilingual (German/Slovene) rendering of populated places in the Sattnitz/Gure on the Austrian Map 1:50,000 (Source: BEV 2020)



Fig. 2: Bilingual (German/Slovene) rendering of populated places in the eastern Jauntal/Podjuna on the Austrian Map 1:250,000 (Source: BEV 2024)

In texts

The practice of rendering majority and minority name(s) divided by a slash can also be applied to texts and is to be maintained throughout the text (article, book) without variation, majority and minority name(s) regarded as an indivisible unit like elements of a compound word. If the context language corresponds to one of the minority names, it is advisable to present this name in the first position, e.g. *Hermannstadt/Sibiu/Nagyszeben* in a German text.

Exonyms and endonyms

On maps

While a map or mapwork with titles, legends and accompanying texts in several languages, thus embedded into a multilingual context, for an international audience can certainly get along without exonyms (see Fig. 3), exonyms in the language of titles, legends and accompanying texts are to be placed in the first position, if the map or mapwork addresses prevalently an audience speaking this language – as it is, e.g., with school atlases (see Fig. 4). This is to effectuate all the benefits of exonym use such as

- (1) Exonyms can be pronounced according to the rules of one's own language.
- (2) Exonyms can easily be converted into adjectives, inhabitant names and declined according to the grammar of the receiver language.
- (3) Exonyms have a stronger historical continuity than endonyms.
- (4) Exonyms can be used in topical as well as in historical contexts.
- (5) Exonyms relate between external features with features on the territory of the receiver community.
- (6) Exonyms frequently replace official endonyms that are actually rarely used.
- (7) Exonyms provide easier access to catalogs and databases.

If the exonym is 'hidden away' in the second position behind the endonym, the reader's attention is captured by the endonym and he/she will, e.g., try to derive adjectives from the endonym, not from the exonym. This recommendation contradicts UN resolutions IV/1982/20 "Reduction of exonyms" and V/1987/13 "Precedence of national official forms of geographical names" but conforms to Resolution II/1972/29 "Exonyms".

Actually conforming with Resolution II/1972/29 "Exonyms" the endonym is to be added in brackets. Since a map represents certainly also features without a well-known exonym in the receiver language and these features are then designated only by the endonym (in the first position, see Fig. 4), it is true that this practice leaves doubts about whether a name is an exonym or an endonym. But this uncertainty is the lesser evil compared to hiding away the name to be regarded and remembered in the first line. (Map making always prompts compromises!)

In texts

In contrast to maps, where this is not always possible, it is recommendable to design texts – which can always be attributed to a certain spoken and written language – in such a way that the endonym-exonym divide becomes fully transparent. This can be done by integrating the exonym into the running text, while the respective endonym is added in square brackets with the first mentioning of a name in an article or a book chapter.

Square, not round brackets are to indicate that the element in brackets is not perhaps an explanation or a translation (as it would be added in round brackets), but something very specific, i.e. the corresponding endonym.

Adding the endonym only with the first mentioning of a name in an article or a book chapter is sufficient and avoids repetition and overburdening a text. (Authors have always to be careful not to overstrain the patience of their readers.)

If for the feature not only one endonym exists – as in minority situations – the endonyms in square brackets are to be divided by slashes. Differentiating between cases, in which a local name has endonym quality all over the feature covered by the exonym and cases, in which the local name has endonym quality only in parts of the feature, would be too difficult and hardly practicable, since precise information on minority situations would be required. The examples further below taken from texts of the author divide therefore the names in square brackets always by a slash and not – in cases, where the names are endonyms only on one side off the border – e.g. by a comma. With the examples presented (*Carnic Alps*, *Julian Alps*, *Iron Gate*, *Bukovina*) it is always so that the endonym language on one side of the border is a minority language on the other side but not always vice versa. Serbian, e.g., is the endonym language on the Serbian side of the Iron Gate, but also of a Serbian minority on the Romanian side, while no Romanian minority exists on the Serbian side. But this is not always easy to verify and would overburden the author of a text not dealing with the very topic of languages and minorities.

“Val Canale is a high Alpine valley, in the North confined and separated from Austrian Carinthia by the Carnic Alps [Alpi Carniche/Karnische Alpen] rising in this section up to 2,195 m, in the South by the Julian Alps [Alpi Giulie/Julijske Alpe] reaching altitudes even up to 2,753 m.”

“The Carpathians are in this context understood in the usual topographical sense as the arc-shaped mountain range from the Danube at the Hainburg Gate [Hainburger Pforte] east of Vienna [Wien] and near Bratislava down to the Danube at the Iron Gate [Porțile de Fier/Đerdap] at the border between Romania and Serbia, although they include in the geological sense also the Hainburg Mountains [Hainburger Berge] in Austria south of the Danube as well as the Serbian Carpathians [Srpski Karpati] south of the Iron Gate and up to the Nišava valley.”

“In the same period, under Austrian rule, German immigration affected to a smaller extent also the Maramureș region in the North of present-day Romania and the Bukovina [Bucovina/Bukovyna], in 1775 acquired by the Austrian Empire, today divided between Romania and Ukraine.”

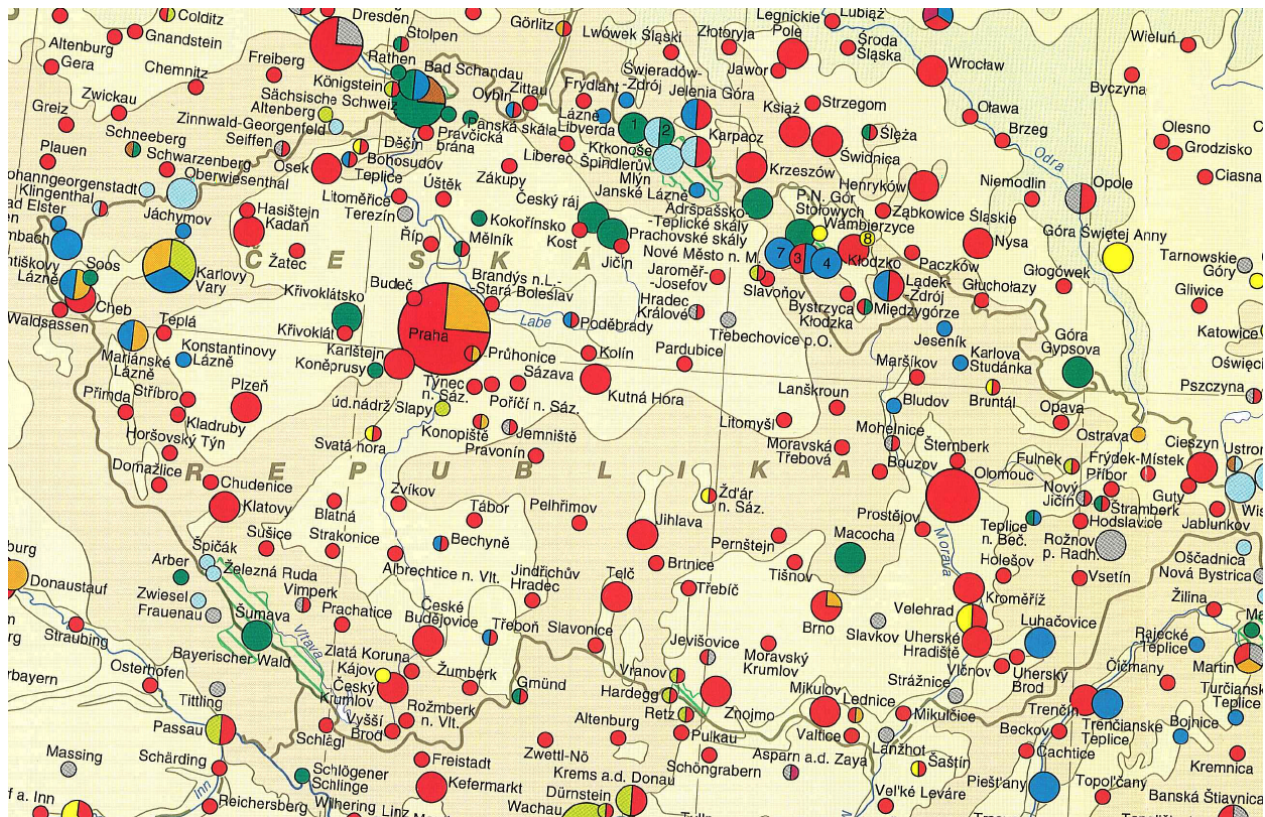


Fig. 3: Section Czechia of the map “International tourism attractions” in the Atlas Eastern and Southeastern Europe (AOS)

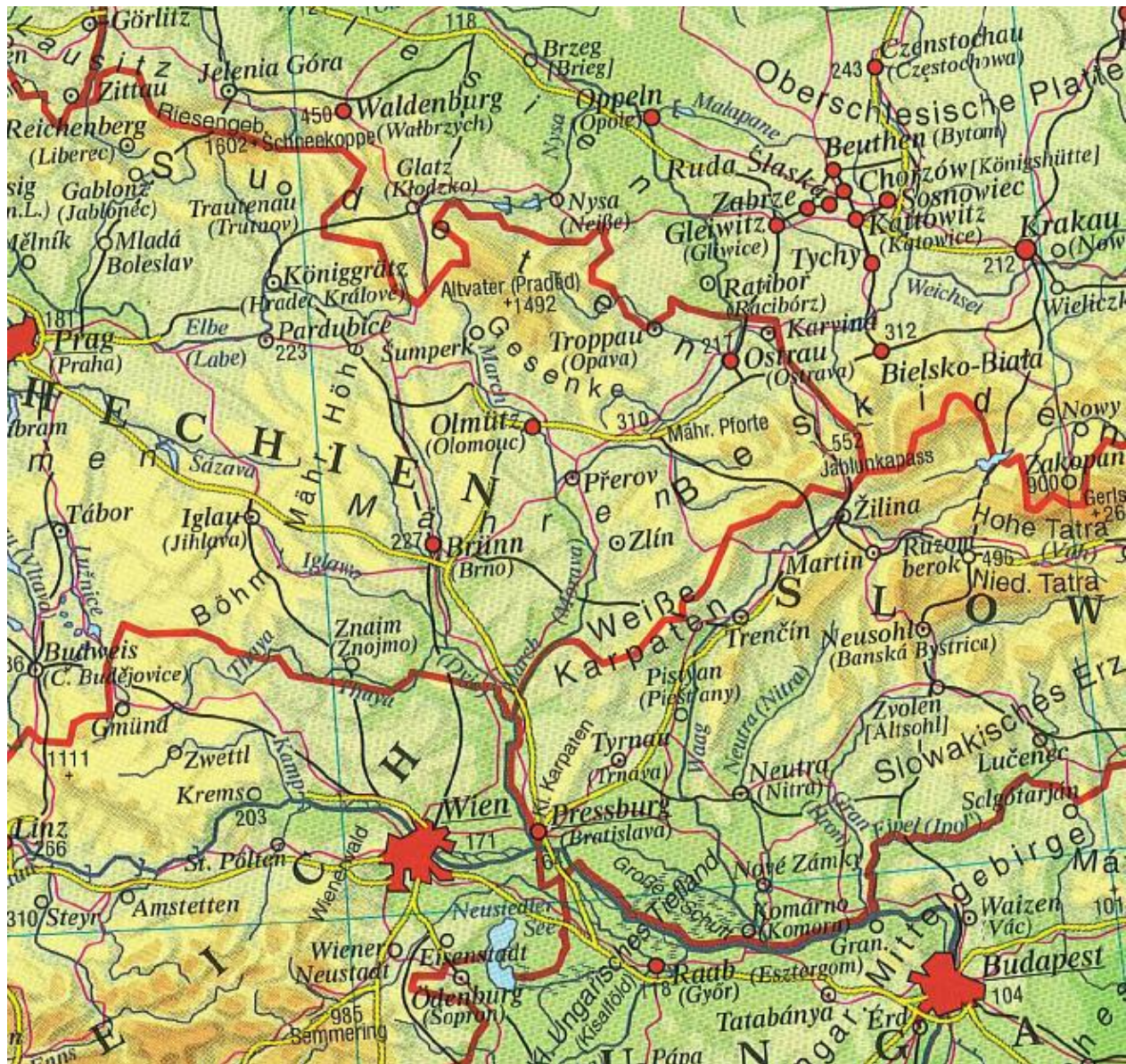


Fig. 4: Section showing parts of Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria of an Austrian school atlas (Source: Hölzel)

Conclusion

Standardization of the endonym/exonym divide as well as of the dichotomy of majority and minority place names has not yet advanced to a consistent visualization or typographic representation of these divides on maps and in texts and meets there still a wide variety of practices. It would therefore be worthwhile for UNGEGN to take an effort also into this direction, since visual representation is at the end the way to disseminate and popularize theoretical considerations and norms.

References

- JORDAN, P. (2023). Adequate Minority Place-Name Representation on Topographic Maps. In: Kartographische Nachrichten/Journal of Cartography and Geographic Information 73: 289-299.
- ORMELING, F.-J. (1983). Minority Toponyms on Maps. The Rendering of Linguistic Minority Toponyms on Topographic Maps of Western Europe (= Utrechtse geografische studies, 30). Utrecht.

The Group of Experts is requested to:

- (1) take note of these recommendations and discuss them;
- (2) consider ways of standardizing the visualization of the majority/minority and endonym/exonym divide on maps and in texts;
- (3) effectuate them by appropriate measures.