

EXONYMS AS INDICATORS OF TRANS-NATIONAL SPATIAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: *Exonyms as indicators of trans-national spatial relations.* The article tries to confirm the assumption that apart from linguistic aspects exonyms have been formed and maintained for features with which a language community was and is closely connected in economic, cultural and political terms and that in consequence the use of exonyms reflects to some extent the network of spatial relations of a certain language community throughout history. This is done by investigating into the spatial spread of well-established German, Hungarian and Italian exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe derived from exonym gazetteers published by the relevant national boards on geographical names.

Rezumat: *Exonimele ca indicatori ai relațiilor spațiale trans-naționale.* Articolul încearcă să confirme ipoteza potrivit căreia, în afară de aspectele lingvistice, exonimele au fost formate și întreținute pentru caracteristici cu care limbajul unei comunități a fost și este strâns legat în termeni economici, culturali și politici, iar în consecință, utilizarea exonimelor reflectă într-o anumită măsură, rețeaua de relații spațiale ale unui limbaj al comunității de-a lungul istoriei. Acest lucru este realizat prin investigarea repartiției spațiale bine stabilite a exonimelor Germane, Maghiare și Italiene pentru orașe și alte locuri populate din Europa, evidente din publicațiile cu exonime ale consiliilor naționale cu privire la denumirile geografice.

Key words: *exonyms, spatial relations.*

Cuvinte cheie: *exonime, relații spațiale.*



1. INTRODUCTION

An exonym is according to the most recent definition of the United Nations (2007) a “name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken, and differing in its form from the name used in an official or well-established language of the area where the geographical feature is situated.” (UNEGN 2007: 2). This means that *Belgrade* is the English exonym for Serbian *Beograd* and *Miland* is the German exonym for Italian *Milano*.

A main reason why exonyms have been formed and maintained is the adaptation of a name in writing and/or pronunciation to a certain receiver language, when it otherwise would be difficult to be written or pronounced (and in consequence also kept in mind) for the member of a receiver community. For an Italian, *Nurimbergo*, e.g., is much easier to be pronounced than *Nürnberg*.

But apart from these linguistic aspects exonyms have been formed and maintained for features with which a language community was and is closely connected in economic, cultural and political terms. The use of exonyms reflects to some extent the network of spatial relations of a certain language community throughout history. Geographical features indicated by a lot of exonyms in different languages are usually prominent and have a long record of international relations. For this reason, some cities and regions are (with justification) proud of their exonyms, as this becomes very obvious in the case of the Austrian federal province of Styria [Steiermark], which installed road signposts with all its exonyms in various languages at its provincial boundaries (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Road signpost at the Styrian-Carinthian provincial boundary exposing the name *Styria* in several languages
(Photo: Peter Jordan, 12 July 2007)

This paper will highlight especially this latter aspect, i.e. the aspect of political, economic and cultural relations in history and present as a reason for the use of exonyms.

2. SOME GENERAL REMARKS REGARDING THE USE OF EXONYMS

Exonyms are a politically delicate matter and are (as language in general) a matter of temporal changes. Changes of a country's or language community's international position affect the attitude of publishers, scientists, media and public authorities towards the use of exonyms (see a.o. Back 2002, Jordan 2000).

This may well be proved by the example of the German language community from the period before World War I (WWI) up to present. Before WWI the German language used a lot of exonyms. This use declined after the lost war, but reached another peak in the later interwar period and during WWII, when even new exonyms were created. This corresponds to an era, in which nationalism culminated and went into the extreme. In the post-war period German exonyms were used with extreme caution. This was for the reasons that (1) National Socialism had stigmatised the German language in total, also its exonyms; (2) right there, where German exonyms had been most numerous, in East Central and Southeast Europe, political and cultural influence of German speaking countries had declined most due to the general political conditions (Communism) and the reduction of German speaking population. Also the most recent political changes, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the unification of Germany, the political integration of East Central Europe into the European Union have already had effects: German exonyms are again gaining ground.

This shows that the use of exonyms is influenced by political factors and requires in turn political and cultural sensibility to ensure successful communication.

3. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF EXONYMS APART FROM POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

Apart from political/economic/cultural relations certainly also some other factors are relevant for formation and use of exonyms. These other factors modify the effect of the political/economic/cultural relations factor and may even distort it. In mentioning these factors I confine myself on exonyms for cities and other settlements and do not take into account names of other geographical features like countries, regions, rivers, lakes or mountains and mountain ranges.

All these other factors are in fact related to linguistic criteria.

- **the endonym language is linguistically distant from the exonym language.**

Linguistically related languages are mutually at least partly understandable; their words are easier to be pronounced correctly. Thus, exonyms are less necessary. Individual languages of a language group (e.g. the Slavonic language group) have much in common and mutual exonyms are less necessary.

- **the endonym is difficult to be pronounced by speakers of the exonym language.** Apart from the general linguistic relation between languages it occurs that individual names are more difficult to be spelled and pronounced by speakers of another language. This is true, e.g., as regards *Wrocław*, *Łódź* and *Szczecin* compared to *Opole*, *Torun* or *Lublin* among Polish names for German speakers.

- **the endonym language is not a frequent secondary, educational or trade language with speakers of the exonym language.** When the community of the receiver language is well acquainted with the endonym language, since it is taught in schools and frequently used as a secondary language, it can also be expected that this community roughly knows how to spell and pronounce their names as well as to interpret the meaning of generic terms. English place names, e.g., require with German speakers the least the replacement by exonyms, while most languages spoken in East Central, East and Southeast Europe are rarely learned as a *lingua franca*.

- **the endonym language has not a specific cultural prestige among the speakers of the exonym language.** When a language has a certain prestige, in general or in some cultural or societal fields or terminologies (music, literature, diplomacy, financial sector etc.), in a receiver community, even if this language is not frequently used as a trade language, it can be expected that there is some acquaintance with spelling and pronunciation. Words of this language (also place names) sound pleasant in the ears of the receiver language speaker making him/her hesitating to replace them by an exonym. Italian and French, e.g., are today less frequently learned as trade languages, but are still prestigious. As a benchmark for the current cultural prestige of a language its acceptance as the languages of internationally marketable pop songs might be helpful.

- **the endonym is written in another script.** Transcription or transliteration means already an alienation of a name in the eyes of the endonym language speaker, although they do by UNGEGN definition not constitute an exonym. For a Russian speaker, e.g., *Moskva* is emotionally already very far from *Москва*. He/she will certainly not be offended if somebody uses *Moscow* instead.

4. THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/CULTURAL RELATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF EXONYMS EXEMPLIFIED BY GERMAN, HUNGARIAN AND ITALIAN EXONYMS

Now I am going to verify my thesis that exonyms in a certain language have been formed and maintained (in larger numbers) for features to which this language community was and is closely connected in economic, cultural and political terms. I will do this by the examples of the German, Hungarian and Italian language communities, again confined to their exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe.

This choice of languages has been made, since German, Hungarian and Italian are well-established languages and were at least at times dominant in larger parts of Europe supported and promoted by political and economic power. They dispose therefore over a large stock of traditional, well-established exonyms, representative for all kinds of economic, cultural and political relations. At the same time their spheres of political, economic and cultural influence in spatial terms differed to quite an extent resulting in divergent spatial patterns of exonyms.

As regards the question, which exonyms are currently in use in these three languages I refer to official and semi-official gazetteers and documents elaborated or approved by the respective national boards on geographical names. They contain exonyms in wider use, i.e. known to a wider range of educated people, not only to specialists or to be

used for specific purposes. These exonyms are also widely reflected by school atlases and other educational media, have in this way also some normative impact.

As regards the **German** speaking community I refer to the Proposals for the Rendering of Geographical Names in Austrian School Atlases [Vorschläge zur Schreibung geographischer Namen in österreichischen Schulatlanten], published in 1994 by the Austrian Board on Geographical Names [Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kartographische Ortsnamenkunde, AKO] (AKO 1994). These proposals have precisely been reflected by all Austrian school atlases published later. They certainly correspond to Austrian needs and have more exonyms for places nearer to Austria, but can with a few modifications nevertheless be taken as representative of the German speaking community in general. They currently approach a second revised edition, but changes will not be so many to be significant in this context.

For **Hungarian** exonyms I refer to a list elaborated most recently by the Hungarian Board on Geographical Names, i.e. Dutkó, András. List of Hungarian exonyms. Paper presented at the 5th Meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms, Prague 16-18 May 2007 (Dutkó 2007). This proposal has not yet been implemented in Hungarian geographical media for domestic use, but it will certainly have its impact in the near future.

As regards **Italian** exonyms my source is a gazetteer elaborated and published by Sandro Toniolo already some time ago [Toniolo, Sandro. Main Italian exonyms for European geographical elements. Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Berlin, 27 August – 5 September 2002, E/CONF.94/CRF 63 (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/N0245080.pdf>)], but presented in a slightly revised version at the 8th UN Conference on Geographical Names in Berlin 2002 (Toniolo 2002). Italian geographical media for national use reflect this list to a high extent.

Thus, the choice of exonyms used for my investigation may be regarded roughly as representative for exonym use in the respective language communities.

Interestingly enough, the three sources recommend the use of an almost equal number of exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe: 152 German exonyms, 169 Hungarian exonyms, and 173 Italian exonyms. The fact that right the number of German exonyms is relatively the lowest supports the assumption that German-speakers still feel a special political sensibility. Geography teaching in the early post-war period recommending utmost sensibility with the use of exonyms has obviously left its traces.

4.1 German exonyms (see Figure 2)

As can be seen on the map, the spatial spread of German exonyms reflects in the first line former German settlement or political domination or current German settlement without German as an official language.

This is true for the “former German territories in the East”, i.e. parts of modern Poland, mainly Silesia [Śląsk], Pomerania [Pomorze], Greater Poland [Wielkopolska] and Masuria [Mazury]; for the fringes of the Czech Republic, the “Sudeten Lands”, settled by Germans up to WWII; also for larger Czech cities, which hosted remarkable shares of German population up to WWII; for western Hungary and the non-Mediterranean part of modern Slovenia; for Romania inside the Carpathian arc, inhabited by a larger number of Germans up to the fall of Communism; also for Alsace and Lorraine in modern France, where Germans have a larger share in population, but German has not the status of an official language; and even for the French part of Switzerland [Suisse romande], which

partly switched from German to French only in more recent times (cantons Vaud, Valais/Wallis, Berne [Bern/Berne]).

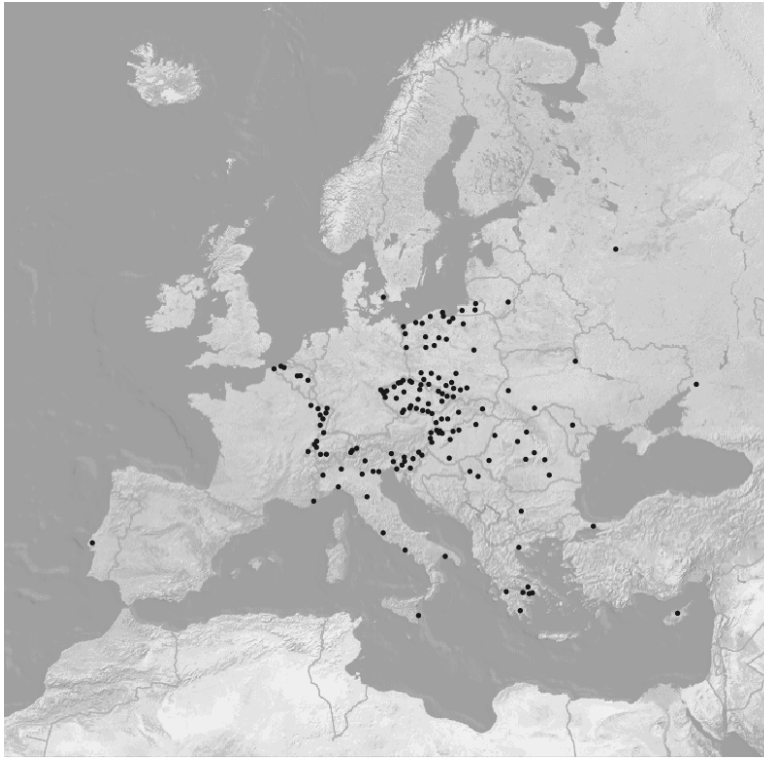


Figure 2: Spread of German exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe according to AKO 1994

By far lower in density, but still remarkable is the spread of German exonyms over East Central Europe in general as well as over Southeast Europe and Italy (especially Northern Italy). This corresponds to the main directions of political, trade and cultural interests and relations of German-speaking countries and powers for many centuries.

The only counterpart in the West are the cities of Belgium, historically important in trade with Central Europe. It has also to be taken into account that Belgium was under the title “Austrian Netherlands” a part of the Habsburg Empire.

It strikes that the British Isles and France have with the exception of *Nizza* [Nice] not a single German exonym. This cannot be explained by a lack of relations; rather by the fact that English and French are prestigious among German-speakers, frequently known as secondary languages and do (for this reason) not pose severe problems in pronunciation. As much as it is “necessary” to replace the endonyms of the unknown and small East Central and Southeast European languages by “pronounceable” exonyms, this is not “necessary”

with names in English and French. This can, of course, also be taken as a hint at the fact that exonyms indeed indicate (also) domination and subordination.

4.2 Hungarian exonyms (see Figure 3)

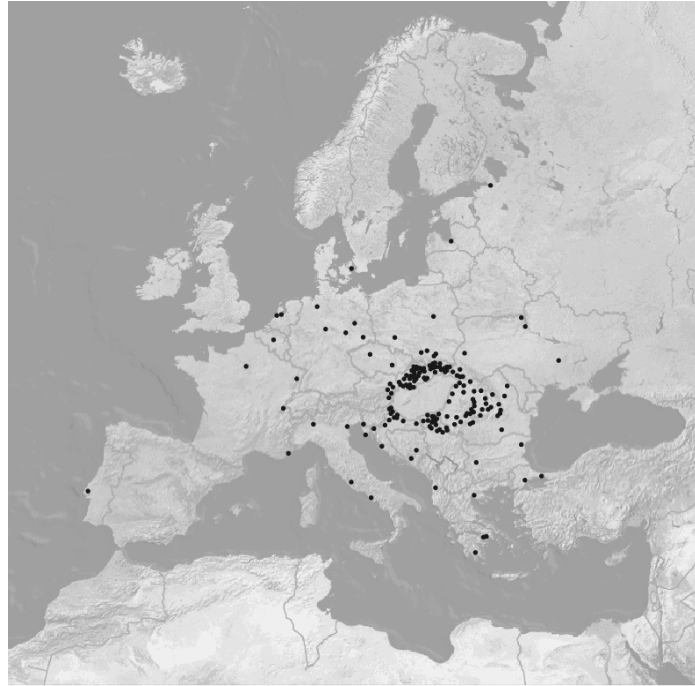


Figure 3: Spread of Hungarian exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe according to Dutkó 2007

The spatial distribution of Hungarian exonyms clearly shows the extension of the former Hungarian Kingdom, by the treaty of Trianon (1920) reduced by two thirds, with still larger Hungarian minorities in southern Slovakia, Ukrainian Transcarpathia [Zakarpattija], Romania, the Serbian Voivodina [Vojvodina], Croatia, Slovenia and eastern Austria.

Another pattern – much less significant, however – reflects the (historically) most important trade routes for Hungary, i.e. the route to the upper Adriatic across the Dinaric Range [Dinarsko gorje] as well as the route through southern Poland to Saxonia [Sachsen] (Leipzig) and the Rhine Lands.

Also Hungarian exonyms are very rare in France and on the British Isles. This might be explained in the same way as with German exonyms.

4.3 Italian exonyms (see Figure 4)

Most characteristic in this distribution are two features. The first is the crowding of Italian exonyms along the eastern coast of the Adriatic and in the Ionian and Aegean space. This is mainly due to the heritage of Venice [Venezia] which as a seafaring power had many trade posts along these coasts and whose interests were directed towards the Levant. Venetian (and also Genovese) trade and cultural influence reached even the coasts of the Black Sea. Exonyms there (Constanza [Constanța], Odessa [Odesa], Sebastopoli [Sevastopol], Yalta [Jalta]) may be attributed to this heritage. But also after the end of Venice as a political power, at first Austria supported the Venetian/Italian cultural layer and conserved Italian names at the eastern Adriatic coast. Later Italian national interests focused on these regions.

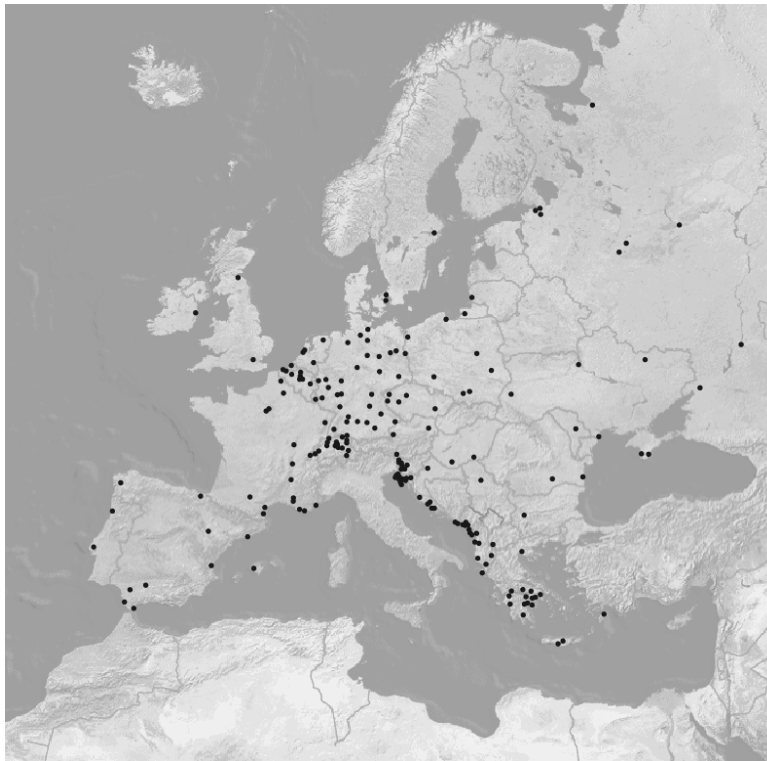


Figure 4: Spread of Italian exonyms for cities and other populated places in Europe according to Toniolo 2002

The second striking feature is the high density of Italian exonyms in German-speaking areas and in their close vicinity (especially Belgium, but also the Netherlands and Bohemia [Čechy]). One reason for this phenomenon is certainly that for centuries the Holy Roman Empire formed a political union including Northern Italy as well as the German-

speaking countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Bohemia. As a second the fact can be taken that the trade centres of Northern Italy had closest relations and their largest markets across the Alps.

5. MEDITATION BY OTHER LANGUAGES

Finally a short hint at a most interesting phenomenon may be added: the mediation of exonyms by languages that dominate(d) the trade routes between the donor and the receiver language. This is most obvious with Swedish. It adopted many German exonyms for cities in Italy, e.g., Venedig [Venezia], Turin [Torino], Genua [Genova], Rom [Roma], Neapel [Napoli].

6. CONCLUSIONS

The examples of German, Hungarian and Italian exonyms show that the spatial spread of exonyms is largely influenced by historical as well as current political, cultural and economic relations. But other factors are also effective and distort this pattern partly. Most of them are linguistic like linguistic distance between languages, difficulty of pronunciation a.o. But also seemingly linguistic factors like the use of secondary and trade languages and language prestige hint at another important factor in the background: relations of political, economic and cultural domination and subordination.

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