

UNITED NATIONS

**GROUP OF EXPERTS ON
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

Working Paper No. 4

**Twenty-first Session
Berlin, 26 August and 6 September 2002**

Original: English

Item 3 of the Provisional agenda"

REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report of the Working Group on Terminology

(Submitted by Israel)"*

* GEGN/21/1

**Prepared by Naftali Kadmon. Emeritus Professor of Cartography and Toponymy, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Reports of the Working Groups

Report of the Working Group on Terminology*

Summary

This paper reviews the history of the Working Group on Terminology since its inception in 1989 and its formal adoption by the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992. This conference recommended that the Working Group produce a glossary of terms used in the standardization of geographical names in all six official languages of the United Nations. The original English version presented by the convenor was discussed at numerous meetings of the working group and widened in scope. However, the chief difficulty was found to be the problem of translation into the remaining five languages. Since this could not be done by the U.N. Secretariat, the translations were finally performed by volunteers among the Working Group members. The paper describes some of the specific problems encountered, and stresses the importance of the Glossary as an aid in training toponymists and others involved with the standardization of geographical names.

Introduction

In order to conform with the dates set by the Secretariat of the United Nations for the submission of papers to the Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the 21st session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, the information in this report reaches only up to mid-May, 2002. A more detailed paper dealing with the production of the *Glossary of Terms used in the Standardization of Geographical Names* will be presented to the Eighth Conference under item 14 of the provisional agenda.

Following Working Paper No. 4, with the title "Some remarks on Glossary No. 330 – Technical Terminology" submitted by Israel to the 14th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in May, 1989, pointing out deficiencies in the Glossary No. 330 – "Technical Terminology used in the Standardization of Geographical Names" which comprised 175 terms and their definitions in the six official languages of the U.N., the Group of Experts decided to set up a Working Group on Terminology, with Prof. Naftali Kadmon (Israel) as convenor and editor of the new glossary. Initial members were Ms. Kerfoot, Ms. Narhi, and Messrs. Ficor, Gonzales, Hornansky, Lapierre, Lewis, Payne, Raper and Sievers. These were later joined by additional experts. The comments on Glossary No. 330 had touched upon four topics, namely the lack of precision in some of the definitions, the lack of uniformity of definitions in some of the six languages, the lack of completeness, and finally a certain redundancy of unnecessarily-included terms. In each case relevant examples were quoted. However, the paper pointed out two further (and perhaps most important) deficiencies of Glossary 330. One was the complete lack of examples for the definitions, and the other – a total disregard of languages and scripts other than European ones.

Early versions of the glossary

A first draft of the new work. (version 1.1) with 286 entries together with their definitions was sent by the convenor to the U.N. Secretariat in New York with the request to send it to the members of the Working Group. For the first time examples were included at the end of the definitions; another innovation was the inclusion of examples in non-Roman and non-European languages and writing systems. The final 342 linguistic examples introduced by the editor were taken from the following languages and scripts:

Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Inuktitut (Eskimo), IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), Italian, Japanese Kanji, Katakana and Hiragana, Korean, Polish, Persian (Farsi), Russian Cyrillic, Spanish and Thai.

Members of the Working Group but also other experts then offered much valuable input, chiefly by the U.S. , Canada, the U.K., Hungary and the Dutch- and German-speaking division, as well as the late Prof. Josef Breu. After two meetings of the Working Group, a first report was made to the 15th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in Geneva in October 1991. At this stage the Glossary, in English only, comprised 328 entries. Also included in the report was an outline of the target population of users of the glossary, and the following observation:

"It should be remarked that widespread distribution and utilization of the glossary should be aimed at... [This] will depend very much on "marketing effort", a point that should be borne in mind at the stage of publication."

This point is again becoming of practical relevance today. with publication imminent.

After a further two meetings of the Working Group, version 2 of the glossary now held 336 entries. Following the convenor's report to the Sixth U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York in August-September 1992. the Conference officially installed the Working Group on Terminology through its resolution No. 11. This resolution recommended

"that the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology be asked to continue to function, with the aim of producing a multilingual dictionary of toponymic terminology to include the remaining five official languages of the United Nations"

and further

"that the United Nations Secretariat be asked to supply, within an agreed time-frame and within existing resources, a translation of the new Glossary from the English text into each of the five other official United Nations languages."

At the suggestion of Dr. Gerd Quinting (U.S.), the term "dictionary" in the resolution was later changed to "glossary".

Problems of translation

At a number of meetings of the Working Group the Glossary was further modified through version 3 (1996) and increased in scope, and then submitted with 375 entries, as version 4, to the Seventh U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in January 1998 which, after some more deliberations, finally approved it for publication .

As recommended in resolution 11 of the Sixth Conference, it was proposed that the U.N. Secretariat Translation and Documentation Service be requested to perform the translations into the remaining five languages. But after a year or two it became clear that this was not being done, among others because of financial limitations. The editor then asked for volunteers from among the members of his Working Group to take this work upon themselves. First to do this successfully and in a short time was Prof. Du Xianming, assisted by Mr. Wang Shuping (China). A France-Canada team headed by Mme Sylvie Lejeune and Prof. Henri Dorion then did the translation into French (but see below) Later, the translation into Spanish was submitted by Sr. José Cruz Almeida. The translations into Russian and Arabic presented a problem, but were finally performed after a couple of years by a team under Prof. Boginskiy and by Mr. Nasser Al-Harty, respectively.

Late problems

By September 2001 all five translated versions were in hand, but when checked by the editor the following problems were encountered.

- 1 Alphabetical order. While Chinese, Spanish and Arabic adhered (as stipulated) to the alphabetical order of the English original, the French and Russian versions listed the terms in the order of their particular language.
- 2 The index was missing in Russian and was differently arranged and un-numbered in Spanish and Arabic.
- 3 The different translations carried differing introductions. *and* these had to be brought to a uniform text.
- 4 Cross-references within the body of the glossary referred either to the English term (as in Chinese), to the term in the particular language (French, Spanish), or to a numbered item only (Russian).
- 5 Many examples in non-Roman script were missing and had to be re-introduced.
- 6 However, the chief difficulty was encountered with the French version which differed significantly from the others. In particular, the definitions of numerous terms were quite

different from those provided by the five other languages (which were more or less identical). And numerous examples, especially English and German, were either omitted or replaced by French ones.

The above points were brought to the attention of the Secretariat with the request for amendments. Items 1 to 5 were indeed corrected, with the U.N. Secretariat doing a good job in re-arranging the French and Russian versions. However, the French version was still left to differ considerably from the other five. Therefore the editor decided not to deal any further with the French translation, but to add in the Introduction to the French version – and only to this – a note to the effect that

"this version of the Glossary has been specially adapted to French usage in toponymy".

Use of the glossary in training literature

Already in 1992 version 1.2 in English was incorporated in the training manual "An introduction to Toponymy – theory and practice of geographical names" produced by the present writer for the first United Nations Training Course in the Standardization of Geographical Names for Southern Africa, held in Pretoria. In 1993 it was reprinted (University of Pretoria, 56 pp., ISBN 0-86979-905-3) and again used at the second U.N. course conducted in this year, also held in Pretoria. On both these occasions some of the practical exercises were based on the glossary. It then appeared in 1996 in "United Nations documents on geographical names" by Dr. Peter Raper, chairman of UNGEGN. Lately the final version 4 of the glossary was printed as Annex C in the textbook "Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names" by Naftali Kadmon (Vantage Press, New York 2000, 333 pp., ISBN 0-533-13531-1)

It should be pointed out finally that among the documents and publications produced by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the *Glossary of Terms used in the Standardization of Geographical Names* is the one which had the widest exposure to, and the most input from, members of the Group of Experts and delegates to the Conferences. It should indeed contribute to standardization and, especially, to the training of persons concerned with the treatment of geographical names.

Already at this stage, before final production, I wish to express my thanks and appreciation, also in the name of all members of the Working Group, for the work performed by the U.N. Secretariat and the great help rendered by the UNGEGN Secretariat, in particular by Mr. Amor Laaribi, by Ms. Jennifer Javier who acted as a graceful clearing house for the

glossary material, and to Ms. Helen Kerfoot, vice-chairperson of UNGEGN, whose involvement in furthering the project is very much appreciated.

Jerusalem, 31 May 2002