

Oceans and seas in the endonym *versus* exonym debate

1 A pristine tract of firm, flat sand exposed at the seashore by the ebbing tide presents a very tempting surface for an impromptu game of football, and in my teenage years I would frequently travel the short distance from my home in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to the seaside to engage in an evening's kick-about with my school friends. It was, unfortunately, all too apparent that none of us was ever destined for footballing greatness, and quite frequently one of our number (usually me, as I recall) would miskick the ball wildly into the sea.

2 The reader may understandably be wondering why this seemingly inconsequential tale finds itself forming the beginning of a paper concerned with endonyms and exonyms, but I believe that this little story can in fact provide us with a useful lesson. The town in which I played football was Tynemouth, and the stretch of beach was known as Long Sands. We would surely agree that the toponyms *Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, *Tynemouth*, and *Long Sands* are endonyms, and this leaves me wondering why the label I attached to the sea – *North Sea* – would in fact be any different in character. Of course as a teenager I was not so conscious of toponymic concepts, but nonetheless I certainly did not view the North Sea as being the other side of some invisible barrier that rendered it generically a different type of feature (except in so far as it was wet!). It was as much a part of my endonymic environment as were the town and the beach, and the idea that when the ball entered the sea it had been transported into another toponymic environment strikes me as inherently implausible.

3 The lesson I would draw from this story is that there are two notions that we might usefully consider in our Working Group discussions. The first is the notion introduced in the previous paragraph as the *endonymic environment*, and this in turn is based upon a notion which might be termed *propinquity*; the characteristic of closeness or proximity. Basically, I would suggest that *if a feature is close enough to you to influence your life in a meaningful and daily manner, then the chances are that the toponymic label your language has chosen for that feature is an endonym*. Perhaps we might consider this proposition in a wider context.

4 It is surely not true to say, as almost all of us in the Working Group have been tempted to say from time to time, that the oceans and seas have no human presence. There are in reality millions of people worldwide who live in an endonymic environment formed in part by the oceans and seas. Anyone who lives in Italy, Malta or Tunisia is entitled to call the Mediterranean Sea an endonym (in their own languages). Anyone who lives in Argentina, the Azores or Senegal is entitled to call the Atlantic Ocean an endonym (again, in their own languages). These features form an integral part of people's daily lives; they sail on these waters; they fish in them; their very livelihoods can depend on them and they may spend just as much time on these waters as they do on dry land. The oceans may even cause death and destruction in the form of a *tsunami*; is this any different toponymically from the death and destruction caused by a nearby volcano on land? If the Bahasa Indonesia language label for the nearby volcano is an endonym, so surely is that language's label for the nearby ocean.

5 It is important to note, of course, that *propinquity does not imply possession*. The North Sea is clearly not a purely national endonym, and in this sense it does differ from Tynemouth and Long Sands. But for me as a Briton it is an endonym nonetheless, and this label does not in any way suggest that the entire North Sea belongs to the United Kingdom. Note here the great advantage of our Working Group's revised definitions of endonym and exonym. Because we have removed any absolute dependence on sovereignty and official status from our definitions, we are able to consider the question of oceans and seas from an apolitical and purely scientific viewpoint, that of well-established settlement. Vexatious issues of whether such features are of shared sovereignty, divided sovereignty, or even (as with the oceans) beyond any sovereignty, all happily become irrelevant.

6 Propinquity is of course not the only characteristic required to determine whether the label for a particular ocean or sea is an endonym or an exonym. We need to consider the particular language too. Whereas for me the label *North Sea* is very much an endonym, on the basis of both propinquity

and language, the label *Indian Ocean* is for me an endonym on the basis of language only. I cannot claim any propinquity in relation to the Indian Ocean, but there are English-speaking communities who can do so, and that is sufficient to categorise the label *Indian Ocean*, in the English language, as an endonym. On the other hand, the label *Aral Sea* in the English language must be an exonym, since there is no justification either in propinquity or language for that label to be an endonym. There is nothing at all odd in this; we should not expect the toponyms for an entire category of feature to fall always into one category. All languages contain both endonyms and exonyms for the same type of feature; for example in French *Forêt de Compiègne* is an endonym whilst *Forêt Noire* is an exonym¹.

7 Here are some examples².

- The Danish-, Dutch-, English-, German- and Norwegian-language names for the North Sea are endonyms; the Russian- and Spanish-language names are exonyms.
- The English-, French-, Portuguese- and Spanish-language names for the Atlantic Ocean are endonyms; the Chinese- and Russian-language names are exonyms.
- The Arabic-, French-, Greek-, Hebrew-, Italian-, Spanish- and Turkish-language names for the Mediterranean Sea are endonyms; the Chinese-, English- and Russian-language names are exonyms.
- The Azeri-, Kazakh-, Persian-, Russian- and Turkmen-language names for the Caspian Sea are endonyms; the Chinese-, English-, French- and Spanish-language names are exonyms. The fact that the countries littoral to this feature have different ideas about how to tackle the sovereignty question is happily not an issue for us; because of our revised apolitical definitions of endonym and exonym we do not have to worry about “official language” or “official status”.
- The Japanese-, Korean- and Russian-language names for the body of water between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago are endonyms. The English-, French- and Spanish-language names are exonyms. Again, this is not at all an indication as to whether any littoral country possesses sovereignty over all or part of the feature; that is not a matter for our Working Group discussions. This categorisation simply reflects those well-established languages enjoying propinquity with the feature.
- The Ainu-, Japanese- and Russian-language names for the *Détroit de La Pérouse* are endonyms. The French-language name is an exonym, because – despite its being the language of European “discovery” – French is not a language spoken by any well-established settlement groups relevant to that feature.

8 The approach suggested in this paper simply adds *propinquity* to *language* as a further determining factor in the endonym *versus* exonym debate. And by considering oceans and seas in this manner we not only approach the issue scientifically but we also achieve two very positive results:

- All of the world’s features can be covered by the labels endonym or exonym, avoiding the concern that there may be a “missing term” relevant to the oceans and seas³.
- Each single feature, even one as large as an ocean, can be considered and labelled as a single discrete whole, exactly as we would wish to consider and label any other category of feature in the world. We are not placed in the invidious position of having to decide if or whether a label should stop at some (possibly disputed) sovereignty limit in the ocean or sea, and what other label should apply beyond that limit. Nor are we placed in the position of having to accept that a single maritime feature carries in the same language an endonym label for one portion of its extent and an exonym label for another.

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¹ For the endonym *Schwarzwald*.

² Note that the language examples given here are not necessarily inclusive of all possibilities.

³ Naftali Kadmon has expressed this concern in his paper *Endonym or Exonym – is there a missing term in maritime names?*, presented to the Ninth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, 2007) as paper E/CONF.98/6/Add.1.