

**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)**  
**East Central and South-East Europe Division (ECSEED)**

---

**The Twentieth Session of the  
East Central and South-East Europe Division  
of the UNGEGN**

Zagreb, Croatia, 9 – 11 February 2011  
Item 3 of the agenda

Document Symbol: ECSEED/Session.20/2011/26

**The relationship between standard-language and original toponymic  
forms**

Submitted by Dunja Brozović Rončević\*

---

\* Prepared by Dunja Brozović Rončević, Ankica Čilaš Šimpraga, Domagoj Vidović, Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, Croatia

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STANDARD-LANGUAGE AND ORIGINAL TOPONYMIC FORMS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Croatia is one of few European Countries that still does not have an official body for the standardisation of geographical names. That is due to the fact that the task should be done in cooperation of various relevant institutions that are responsible for gathering, maintaining and analysing geographical names. According to the best practice of the UNGEGN, developing the relevant legislative should be initialized and organized by both linguists and geodesists (and geographers).

At the moment there are two basic levels of standardization that should be considered:

- standardization of national geographical names
- standardization of foreign geographical names and exonyms

The first level is, according to the Croatian legislative, greatly in the hand of the State Geodetic Administration that is in charge of developing the data base with all official Croatian geographical names. However, due to the fact that in the past major geodetic work has been done by foreigners that did not have Croatian as their maternal language, and of course they were not familiar with the Croatian dialectal diversity, many names on the maps do not correspond to the real fact. Furthermore, during the time of both former states of Yugoslavia in the past, many geographical names were written down in the accordance to the standard language based on the Štokavian dialect and thus they do not reflect the original linguistic variant.

The second level is however more cultural and linguistic problem that has to be done in cooperation of various experts, above all linguists, historians, geographers and relevant scholarly and cultural institutions. Till now there are still not officially accepted rules for the transcription and orthography of foreign names from all languages, and therefore many foreign names are written in different ways in various Croatian orthographic manuals.

Here we shall not discuss the need of establishing the national body for the standardization of geographical names, but try to point out to some problems of names standardization from a linguistic perspective, especially with regards to the relation between the standard Croatian language and local dialects.

---

\* Prepared by Dunja Brozović Rončević, Ankica Čilaš Šimpraga, Domagoj Vidović, Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, Croatia

Although in Croatian there is no problem with the transcription and orthography of geographical names, there are many problems in developing the rules for standardization that should be in compliance with the Croatian language standardization tradition but also with the recommendations of international organizations for geographical names such as UNGEGN. Those rules should be approved by the Croatian Language Council since it is the only official body for the Croatian language standard and language planning. Once approved, they should be compulsory for all institutions that use geographical names, and of course the State Geodetic Administration that is responsible for developing the official, normative data base of geographical names.

## 2. TOPONYMIC STANDARDISATION IN THE PAST

Standardisation harmonises toponyms with the standard language. We can judge their relationship towards toponymic forms in the past by comparing their recorded forms with their modern forms. Toponyms are first attested in various documents, legal and other texts, dictionaries and then on maps. Depending on which language the author of the text or map was using (e.g. Latin, German), toponyms are recorded in accordance with the orthographic rules of the given language at that time. Throughout history, Croatian toponymic heritage was brutally altered, mainly through the Hungarization of names in Međimurje and Italianization in Istria (especially in the period between the two World Wars).

*Lexicon Latino-Illyricum* by Pavao Ritter Vitezović was the first lexicographic work to provide Croatian onymic material. After Vitezović, the JAZU Dictionary played, and still plays, a vital role with its high percentage of onymic entries. However, alongside the decision to systematically include names in the dictionary, it was also decided that these names be adjusted to the standard Štokavian ijekavian language. Thus, in the first volumes geographical names are Štokavianized and ijekavianized, along with a denotation of their original form (e.g. the entry for *Dankovac* notes that it is called *Dankovec* in Kajkavian; JAZU Dictionary, II vol). Precedence was thus given to the Neo-Štokavian toponymic forms — *Delnice* was standardized as *Dionice*, *Bobovišća/Bobovišće* as *Bobovište*, *Belec* as *Bijelac*, *Črnomerec* as *Crnomerac*, *Leskovec* as *Hrvatski Leskovac*, *Reka* and *Rika* became *Rijeka*, *Osik* became *Osijek*, etc. However, those name changes did not affect only place names in Croatia, thus *Beograd* became *Biograd*, and so in order to distinguish it from the city of *Biograd* in Dalmatia, the Dalmatian city's name was changed to *Biograd na Moru* (Biograd on the Sea) which was only recently changed to the original name. This unification of names and their

---

\* Prepared by Dunja Brozović Rončević, Ankica Čilaš Šimpraga, Domagoj Vidović, Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, Croatia

reduction to the standard language's Štokavian form coincided with the idea of unifying the languages and alphabets of Croats and Serbs. The controversy of whether *Split* should be *Spljet* also arose at this same time.

Thus, the following processes were carried out:

- phonological standardization: (a) ijekavisation (*Reka, Rika* > *Rijeka, Tisno* > *Tijesno*), (b) vocalisation (*Delnice* > *Dionice*), (c) *e* (< *ə*) > *a* (*Čakovec* > *Čakovac, Đurđevac* > *Đurđevac, Leskovec* > *Leskovac*), (d) consonant group *čr-* > *cr-* (*Črnomerac* > *Crnomerac*), consonant group *šč/šć* > *št* (*Bobovišća/Bobovišće* > *Bobovište*)
- morphological standardisation: *Bilišane* > *Bjelišani*.

### 3. THE MODERN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LINGUISTIC NORMS AND TOPONYMS

The relationship towards standardising names, including toponyms, eventually changed in the way that their original forms are normed to the standard language phonologically and accentually.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, it is held that all three dialects shape the Croatian standard language, i.e. that they are its active components both on the lexical and onymic level. Therefore, it is important to know the original form, which, of course, can be confirmed in the field. Since it is normal today to enter autochthonous onymic material into dialectal dictionaries, especially comprehensive ones such as *Dictionary of the Speech of the Island of Vrgada* by Blaž Jurišić (*Rječnik govora otoka Vrgade*, 1973), *Dictionary of the Kajkavian Speech of Varaždin* by Tomislav Lipiljin (*Rječnik varaždinskoga kajkavskog govora*, 2002), *Dictionary of the Čakavian Speeches of Brač* by Petar Šimunović (*Rječnik bračkih čakavskih govora*, 2006), they are valuable sources of names in these specific speeches.

It is important to identify the kind of standardisation being carried out when standardising place names. Since linguistic characteristics convey important information about which dialect (and region) a toponym belongs to, standardisation should not lose this information. For example, the oronyms *Plješivica, Plešivica, Plišivica* (in the coastal region

---

<sup>1</sup> «Proper names and their morphological and graphic construction have strong cultural, historical, linguo-historical and social value: they retain information about their origins, about the language and culture of the peoples they belong to, about the cultural, linguistic and national identity of the people who bear them, and they are interwoven with various graphic principles (phonological, morphological, historical) and orthographical traditions. Because of these values that retain and carry this information, the grammatical and orthographic norming of proper names, especially personal names, should be approached differently than the grammatical and orthographical norming of general names. Proper names should retain their expressive identity since those very values are stored within them.» (HJS, 112)

of Pirovac), all come from the Old-Slavic stem \**plěšb* ‘treeless region, bold’, while the varying reflex of the vocal *jat* tells us that the first comes from the (i)jekavian, the second from the ekavian, and the third from the ikavian region.

Standardisation in Croatian mainly relates to the phonological linguistic level, and so official names do not contain semi-vowels, diphthongs, open and closed vowels, or specific consonants (e.g. *ʒ*, *š*, *ž* etc.) that do not exist in the standard language.

Simultaneously, in phonology:

3. the reflex of *jat* /*ě*/ is retained (e.g. *Tisno*, *Sveta Nedelja*)
4. dialectal conditions are retained where former schwa /*ə*/ (< *ь*, *o*) once appeared, (*Nova Ves* u Zagrebu, and not \**Nova Vas*, *Vrbovec*, and not \**Vrbovac*)
5. dialectal groups /*šč*/ and /*čr*/ are retained (*Ščit* in Rama, *Črešnjevo* in Zagorje, *Črnomerec* in Zagreb) as are šćakavian forms with suffixes *-išće/-išče* (*Gradišće* near Duga Resa), *-ščak* (*Medveščak*), *-ščina* (*Laščina*)
6. missing consonant /*h*/ is not restituted in names from regions where it does not exist in the dialect: *Rašević* (not \**Hrašević*), *Cista Provo* (not \**Cista Prhovo*), *Magića Mala* (not \**Magićeva Mahala*)
7. groups *vj*, *pj* are retained without the artificial *-l-* (*Oroslavje*, not \**Oroslavlje*, *Krapje*, not \**Kraplje*)
8. names in plural are retained without sibilisation (*Čehi*, *Novaki*)
9. the dialectal development of lexemes specific to a particular region are retained (e.g. *Crikvenica*, not \**Crkvenica*) etc. (v. Šimunović 2009: 125).

However, standardisation does not relate to morphology and word formation, and so *Pakoštane* is not changed into *Pakoštani*<sup>2</sup>, *Vela Luka* is not changed into *Velika Luka*, etc.

Those who are familiar with the situation on the field will notice that autochthonous toponyms are not always the same as official ones. For example: the official name is *Hlebine* while the autochthonous name is *Lebīne*, official *Čabar* – autochthonous *Čēber*, official *Lobor* – autochthonous *Lōber*, official *Lukovdol* – autochthonous *Ĺŭkovdol*, official *Sutivan* – autochthonous *Stivōn*, official *Biokovo* – autochthonous *Bijakova*, etc. These official names

---

<sup>2</sup> Toponyms ending in *-jane* are among the oldest kinds of Slavonic toponyms, and they are found in the Zadar-Biograd hinterland, in Poljica, along the Dinaric range, through Lika to southeastern Istria: Babjane, Jelšane (today: Jošani), Lešane (today: Lišane), Petrčane, Varikašane, Šaplane, Žejane (Ćičarija). These toponyms retain the N-declination ending for neuter plural nouns, a paradigm that has been lost from the Croatian language which encompassed masculine and neuter gendered nouns. In the plural, nouns were formed with *-inъ* and *-janinъ*, and some with *-telъ* and *-ar*.

represent a different standardisational tradition, that of respecting tradition.<sup>3</sup> Tradition is also respected in the hydronym *Sutla*, the name of a river that is called both *Saukla*, *Soukla*, *Sokla*, and *Sotla* in the settlements it flows through. It could also be said that the use of the official name *Rijeka* instead of *Reka* and *Osijek* instead of *Osik* also respects tradition, albeit a tradition of just over a century, although returning the old forms to official use today would cause difficulties.

The Kajkavian dialect for the most part does not retain the difference between *č* and *ć* - instead it has only one non-vocal fricative *č'*, however in regions where Kajkavian is spoken the standardised suffix *-ić* (*Desinić*) is used in both toponyms and in family names.

#### 4. DEBATABLE SOLUTIONS

Despite this, some names decided upon as official names respect neither the principle of autochthonism nor tradition. In the Kajkavian region, the names of two mountains are obviously problematic. These are the oronyms *Ivanščica* and *Strahinjščica*<sup>4</sup>, which contain consonant group *šč* which has not been confirmed in the field. This has likely occurred because of the perception of *šč* as an expressly Kajkavian characteristic, which led to an attempt to apply Kajkavian characteristics to these toponyms. However, there is no linguistic reason here for the use of *šč*, but rather it should be as people from the region say it: *Ivančica*, a mountain near Ivanec, and *Strahinjčica*, a mountain near the village of Strahinj.

The aforementioned examples are mostly from the Kajkavian region, where autochthonous names were significantly affected by forced Štokavianisation in the past. However, the existence of standardisation problems concerning names in Štokavian regions is frequently overlooked.

However, problems have also been noticed concerning the recording of Štokavian toponyms relating to both small and large geographical objects, i.e. referents, and the following are but a few of them:

At the phonological level, the following inconsistencies are concerned:

a) phonemes that are not part of the standard language phonological system have been inconsistently standardised: *Sjekose* < *Šekose*, *Šenik* (on maps) < *Šenik*

---

<sup>3</sup> "What linguistic practice has accepted and confirmed as general tradition should not be changed. Thus: Hvar, not For; Milna, not Mlno..." (Težak 1974.–1975: 25).

<sup>4</sup> V. *Veliki atlas Hrvatske*

b) the phoneme *h*: *Orav*, *Rasno*, *Rašćane*, *Umčane* are found in regions where the phoneme *h* is not pronounced, while *Orah*, *Hrasno* etc. are found in the same regions.

c) simplified consonant groups: *Pojezerje* (< \**Podjezerje*), but *Podžablje* (even though it is pronounced *Požablje*)

d) dual name sets that mix palatal and non-palatal roots: *Medarevine/Medarovine*, *Tuštevac/Tuštovac*

e) official names on signs for entrances to settlements and names of bridges and tunnels on roads: at the southern entrance to the village of *Badžula* the sign reads *Badžula*, while the original form is found at the northern entrance; the toponym *Peruča* is a similar case, which appears both as *Peruča* and *Peruća*, as is *Čilipi*, which is frequently referred to and written as *Čilipi*; a sign reading *Šestanovec* was placed near the village of *Šestanovac*; on the exit from the Ploče - Vrgorac state road, the bridge over *Crna rika* carries the ijekavianised name *Crna rijeka*, while only a few hundred meters further a tunnel carries the original ikavian name *Vrilo*; on the other hand, the village of *Bijeli Vir*, inhabited by speakers of ijekavian, was marked as *Bili Vir* until 2001.

The following have also been noticed:

a) the shirking of Croatian naming tradition in naming new settlements: two-noun compound settlement names (oikonyms) are given such as *Buk Vlaka* (to a settlement previously called Buk) or *Plina Jezero* b) unnecessary changes to names for the purposes of tourism: the inlet of *Bad* in Neum was renamed as *Tiha luka* (Quiet Harbour); the entire *Dubrovačka rivijera* (Dubrovnik Riviera) is referred to by its residents as (*Dubrovačko*) *primorje*. A list of similar, unnecessary place name changes is very long, and especially endangered is the coastal region of Croatia.

## 5. STANDARDIZATION OF TOPONYMS

The standardisation of toponyms is an active process in the Croatian language, and the aforementioned errors in this process must be corrected. The coming tasks in standardisation should not ignore what has been said here about the two principles which should be respected in standardisation -- preserving autochthonous names and respecting traditional ones. It is the task of linguists to complete the compilation of toponymic dictionaries which will provide official toponyms and their autochthonous forms and proper declension, something that, based upon what can be heard and seen in the media, presents a large problem to speakers of the Croatian language. It should, therefore, be written in such a dictionary that the proper genitive

---

\* Prepared by Dunja Brozović Rončević, Ankica Čilaš Šimpraga, Domagoj Vidović, Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, Croatia

declension of the names *Mācelj*, *Tuhelj* is *iz Maclja*, *iz Tuhlja*; that, according to the proper declensional form for i-declension feminine plural nouns, the proper declension of *Sali*, *Kali* is *iz Sali*, *iz Kali*, *u Salima*, *u Kalima*; for *Brinje* – *iz Brinja*, *u Brinju*, i.e. as neuter singular nouns, but for *Buje*, *Kistanje* – *u Bujama*, *u Kistanjama*, as e-declension feminine plural nouns.

It has been shown, with only few chosen examples, how important the linguistic competence is with regards to place name standardisation. That is especially true in Croatia, which has extraordinary complex dialectal situation. Therefore, basic standardisation rules have to be compiled by linguists. However, that demanding task has to be done in cooperation with institutions in charge for developing and maintaining toponymic databases (State Geodetic Administration) and other relevant experts or institutions. The Croatian Language Council, that is still the only official state body in charge of language standardization, on several occasions discussed problems of standardization of names, including toponyms. The Council has been established on 14th April 2005 by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. It consists of 12 members who are all representatives of Croatian universities, scientific and other institutions whose main research area is the Croatian language, and the president appointed by the Minister.

The main tasks of the Council are as follow:

- to tend to the Croatian standard language
- to discuss current dilemmas and open issues of the Croatian standard language
- to warn against the noncompliance with the constitutional decree that states the Croatian language as the official language of the Republic of Croatia
- to promote the Croatian standard language both in written and oral communication
- to tend to the status and role of the Croatian standard language in light of Croatia's integration into the European Union
- to decide on possible further standardization processes of the Croatian standard language
- to keep up with language issues and set principles for the orthographic standardization

Already in 2008 the Council discussed the establishment of body responsible for the official standardization of geographical names. The Council suggested that, in accordance with the experience in other countries, the members of this body be top notch professionals from the State Geodetic Administration, the Croatian Geodetic Institute, the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, the Croatian Hydrographic Institute, the Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute and the Committee of Onomastics of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

## REFERENCES:

- HJS = Barić, Eugenija i dr. (1999) (u redakciji izvršnog uredništva Lane Hudeček, Milice Mihaljević i Luke Vukojevića): *Hrvatski jezični savjetnik*, Zagreb: Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje – Pergamena – Školske novine.
- Borovac, Ivanka (ur.) (2002): *Veliki atlas Hrvatske*, Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga d. o. o.
- Hraste, Mate (1964/65): Tvorba etnika i ktetika u hrvatskosrpskom jeziku, *Jezik*, god. XII, Zagreb, 97–101.
- Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, JAZU, Zagreb, 1880.–1976.
- Šimunović, Petar (2009): *Uvod u hrvatsko imenoslovlje*, Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga.
- Šimunović, Petar (2005): *Toponimija hrvatskoga jadranskog prostora*, Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga.
- Težak, S. (1974.–1975.): O poštokavljivanju mjesnih imena i prezimena, *Jezik XXII* (1): 18–25.