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**Exonyms as a reflection of cultural heritage**

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# EXONYMS AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In fulfilling the many obligations related to the standardization of geographical names, Croatia lags behind not only in comparison with other European countries but also in comparison with countries in the region. Namely, not only that there is still no uniform standardized list of Croatian geographical names, but there is no uniform list of Croatian exonyms.

## 2. LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

From a linguistic perspective, all names referring to geographical objects outside the area where the language is spoken are called exonyms, and this category includes many oikonyms (names of towns), hydronyms (name of water objects including the sea), oronyms (names of hills and landforms), names of historical or contemporary administrative regions, but also all country names that have a customized Croatian form. According to the classification of the UNGEGN, country names are a separate category from the rest of the exonyms and there is a special working group dealing with this issue since country names are official names that have to be codified in official diplomatic communication. Therefore, the official list of country names, their full and abbreviated forms in Croatian and English is run at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (<http://www.mvpei.hr/MVP.asp?pcpid=1185>).

This list holds an official status, but some of the official names differ from the forms that are traditionally used in the Croatian language because some countries asked that their Croatian names be approximated to the name of the country in their own language. Thus, for example, Moldavija became Moldova (Moldova), Bjelorusija Bjelarus (Belarus), and Letonija Latvija (Latvia). Such changes cause unnecessary confusion in the public use of country names, and due to ignorance the media would now and then report of the Baltic states Litva, Letonija and Latvija. Some country names have dual orthographic forms, for example Hungary is officially written Mađarska, but Madžarska can also be found. However, this is an orthographic issue and has to be solved by the Croatian linguists.

Much more serious problem in terms of exonyms are disparities in the spelling of federal countries, states and provinces because here there is no systematic and uniform approach, and that creates serious problems not only for the media but especially for the

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education system where there are examples of one administrative unit being spelled both as an exonym and in its original form in the same textbook (e.g. Kalifornija and California, Katalonija and Catalunya, Furlanija and Friuli etc.). In Croatia, several institutions have lists and databases of foreign geographical names (especially The Lexicographical Institute “Miroslav Krleža”), but there is still no single, universally accepted list of foreign toponyms. A shortened list of such toponyms has been compiled as a part of the School Dictionary that will be published this year by the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics and Školska knjiga. The list also contains names of inhabitants (in Croatian ethnics) and adjectives (in Croatian) ketetics derived from the Croatian and foreign geographical names since these word formations are extremely important in name usage.

What we are particularly interested in, of course, are the principles for standardization of exonyms from a linguistic perspective, but so far exonyms were not given proper attention in Croatian linguistics. Although it is primarily an onomastic, thus interdisciplinary issue, in the Croatian linguistics exonyms have almost exclusively been dealt with as an orthographic issue. Efforts to deal with exonyms interdisciplinary, taking into account their emergence, their historical and geographical context, and to compile and classify the Croatian exonyms systematically have been very scarce.

As in most European languages, exonyms occur in Croatian in the earliest, even oral literary tradition, sometimes as the first words of foreign origin to gain a Croatian form. For the most part, however, they have emerged in the course of literacy development in Croatia and thus a large number of exonyms is found in the oldest Croatian translations of the Bible, missals, lectionaries, but also valuable historical works of the Croatian lexicography. Even the slightest analysis of the exonyms from the seventeenth century for instance, shows that many of them were an inseparable component of the folk tradition and have, as such, survived to this day as a part of the standard Croatian language. We cannot, of course, give individual examples, but it should be noted that the majority of early lexicographers and translators made an effort to note down the forms for exonyms that had been in usage for centuries, especially in literature. Of course, there are exceptions, and sometimes new name forms were created in translations, regardless of the already existent forms in the folk language. However, in lexicography and literary translations, new exonym forms are created mainly for those names that do not have Croatian forms already, and are usually modeled after the language from which they are being translated, most commonly Latin, Italian or German.

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There is no point, of course, to cite examples, but only to warn that the issue of exonyms should be dealt with separately for each language and it is almost impossible to systematically implement the guidelines recommended by the UNGEGN. The use of exonyms often raised contrary opinions. The first one, that is mostly supported by linguists and historians, that each language has a right to its own lexical corpora, which should be true even for proper names, and the second one, that the name bearer, in our case “geographical object” has its own rights. This view is, of course closer to a legal perspective, and is often supported by geodesists and map producers.

Furthermore, the wide use of exonyms has often been identified with a kind of linguistic imperialism that was, of course, as a rule influenced by the politics. So for decades, since the first session in 1967, the main efforts of the Expert Group at the UNGEGN have been directed towards the reduction and eventually abolition of exonyms, which was sometimes explicitly requested via a series of resolutions. Namely, the resolution II/28 (*List of exonyms: conventional names, traditional names*) of a second London conference held in 1972 states that there is a need for facilitating international standardization of geographical names and in this matter point out that some exonyms still make a living part of a certain language even after there is no more need for their usage. This, to some degree negative attitude towards exonyms prevailed until recently, which may be explained by the fact that discussions on the use of geographical names, and especially exonyms, were mainly led by geodesists, geographers, cartographers and even politicians, who often, not knowing enough about the historical and cultural environment in which a particular name emerged, for pragmatic reasons believed that the standardization process implies only one single name for a particular geographical object. Only in recent years has a more moderate approach developed, and it has been recognized that exonyms cannot be viewed only as an instrument of political imperialism, which was undoubtedly often the case in areas of former colonies (especially through English, French and Spanish language), but also, from a historical perspective, especially in the European region, as intangible cultural heritage, i.e. the witnesses of centuries old ethnolinguistic permeation.

A few examples of the Croatian exonyms for cities in neighbouring or nearby countries confirm this since they are generally accepted (and mostly the only existing forms): Beč (Vienna), (Budim)Pešta (Budapest), Rim (Rome), Prag (Prague), Pečuh (Pecs), Venecija (Venice), Solun (Thessaloniki), Bukurešt (Bucharest) as well as historical exonyms Mle(t)ci (Venice), Stambol (Istanbul), Jakin (Ancona), Požun (Bratislava), Gradec (Graz), etc. It is

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obvious that most of exonyms in Croatian are related to the neighbouring countries, especially for settlement names and names of regions in Austria, Italy and Hungary. For states that emerged from the former Yugoslavia, normally there are no exonyms, but there are number of cases that each constituent nation has their own name for a same settlement (i.e. Uskoplje / Gornji Vakuf) and those could not be considered as minority names.

From a linguistic perspective it is also important to point out that in all languages there is a large group of exonyms that are often not regarded as such. Those are so called ‘phonic (sound) exonyms’ that show the very “low level” of linguistic adaptation. Namely, in written form those names do not differ from an original name (endonym) but their official phonic realization in standard language is often quite different (eg. *London*). That is of course, due to a fact that most languages differ, at least partially in their phonemic repertoire, which prevent the original pronunciation. Although this problem has been widely discussed even by UNGEGN, those exonyms are not that relevant with respect to standardization since their written version remains the same as in original language.

### **3. STANDARDIZATION OF EXONYMS AND FOREIGN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

It has already been singled out that in Croatia there is still no official list of foreign geographical names, neither of exonyms. Furthermore, there are still no explicit guidelines with regards to linguistic adaptation of foreign names, except for those that are originally written in other scripts but Latin. However, even in those cases, orthographic manuals frequently offer different solutions, which often leads to a confusion in the public usage of various names.

At this moment, the only official state body whose principal duty are issues related to language standardization is The Croatian Language Council (Vijeće za normu hrvatskoga standardnog jezika). The Council was founded by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia in 2005. The Council consists of 12 members who are all representatives of Croatian universities, scientific and other institutions whose main research area is the Croatian language. One of the main tasks of the Council are to discuss current dilemmas and open issues of the Croatian standard language, to promote the Croatian standard language both in written and oral communication, to decide on possible further standardization processes of the Croatian standard language and to keep up with language issues and set principles for the orthographic standardization.

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Due to large disparities found in the Croatian textbooks with regards to writing foreign geographical names, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, requested in May 2010 that the Croatian Language Council holds a debate and adopts conclusions on the standardization in spelling of foreign geographical names, including exonyms. However, due to objective circumstances, in May the Council had to discuss the Draft of the Act on the Public Use of the Croatian Language that was supposed to be sent to parliament for discussion. Therefore, the issue of standardization of geographical names and the spelling of foreign geographical names was discussed at the meeting of the Council held on 2 December 2010. Council's President Academician Radoslav Katičić addressed the Council with the following words:

"The first item on the agenda of our session today is dedicated to an important and very challenging practical issue. For it is a major challenge to orthographically regulate the spelling of geographical names.

I have to say this so that everyone can hear it, I will not allow our esteemed colleagues the geographers to ban me or anyone else from using the beautiful and honourable Croatian word *zemljopis*. They may, of course, name their profession in the way they find most appropriate, but the word *zemljopis* should stay in use, as well as *geografija*, to which I have no objection as long as it does not replace *zemljopis* in full, and that it seems is precisely what the geographers have been trying to achieve for the past several decades. For this I find no excuse.

Orthographic standardization of geographical names is a difficult task because this area does not possess the systematic quality inherent for the written language, but does however offer tradition. Every attempt of standardization and regulation therefore must be seen as an act of linguistic violence with all its undesirable implications, from the pragmatic to the psychological ones. When dealing with this issue, one must show a great deal of sensitivity, one must listen and be able to validly assess what is gained and what is lost with each move."

At the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics extensive materials have been prepared for discussion and some general principles and particular issues of the standardization in spelling of foreign geographical names considered. The Council concluded the following:

"The Council eventually agreed on the following principles of standardization of geographical names:

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- in Croatia only the Croatian forms of the country names, exonyms, are to be used,
- it is not wrong to use endonyms for federal states, towns and other toponyms, oronyms and hydronyms, but
- when cultural and historical bonds with the named geographical areas are strong, it is more common to use already existent exonyms (Beč, Rim, Budimpešta, Petrograd ...) than the endonyms, but when exonyms are used in text for the first time, endonyms should be indicated in brackets,
- in case of equal names in multilingual areas they should be cited in a row separated by a slash (Bruxelles / Brussel, Gent / Gand ...),
- in accordance with the UN recommendations, it is not advisable to introduce new exonyms.

With regard to discussions on detailed principles and individual cases, the Council concluded the following:

- more detailed discussions should be based on various databases (e.g., the SGA databases), and
- this should be the task of the body the Government should appoint, and which should be consisting of the representatives from the SGA, the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, the Lexicographic Institute, the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and with regard to professions: of geographers, geodesists, linguists, historians. The Council will send an official letter to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports with a proposal to establish and appoint such a government body for the standardization of geographical names.

The Council President, Academician Radoslav Katičić sent a letter to Minister Radovan Fuchs in December 2010, in which it is proposed that the Government establishes the body for standardization of geographical names. A reply from the Ministry arrived on 14 January and in it the Ministry asked for a more detailed explanation "why it is necessary that a new body engage in the task of standardization of geographical names, and not one of the already existent institutions (for instance, the Croatian Language Council itself or the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics)" and that "a more detailed elaboration of the purpose and scope of activities of the body" be delivered.

Given that the Council will have to submit a further statement to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports at its session in March, we believe that the time has come for the Croatian Language Council and the SGA, who are responsible for the creation and maintenance of the Croatian toponyms database, address a joint letter to the Croatian Government.

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