Is *exonym* an appropriate term for names of features beyond any sovereignty?

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Abstract

This paper deals with the question, whether the term *exonym* covers also features beyond any sovereignty such as international waters.

After definitions of some basic terms it discusses at first Naftali Kadmon’s view (Kadmon, 2007), who argues that maritime names in a certain language were endonyms in these parts of a sea, over which a country in which this language is official or well-established exerts some kind of jurisdiction, i.e. its territorial waters, and turn into exonyms in the territorial waters of other countries. In sea areas beyond any national jurisdiction, i.e. international waters, the name for the sea meets no endonym. This means for him that the name cannot be termed *exonym*. For Kadmon it “follows that there is a need for a new term to be added to the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, namely the status of a toponym for a maritime feature in international waters.” (Kadmon, 2007, p. 4)

The paper then refers to Paul Woodman’s view (Woodman, 2009a) that one name in one language for one feature cannot change in terminological status, cannot simultaneously be an endonym and an exonym, which means that all languages official or well-established in the coastal countries of a sea are endonyms for the whole feature, i.e. for the sea in its entirety, also for international waters. Names in languages not official or not well-established in coastal countries have according to him the status of *exonyms* all over the sea, also in international waters, since nowhere the counterpart of an endonym is lacking.

The paper ends with a synthesis of these two contrasting views postulating that while there should indeed be nothing besides the endonym/exonym divide (following Woodman), the *endonym* status of a name for a sea is confined to these parts, for which the community using the name feels responsible or emotionally affected – which is near to Kadmon’s view. This leaves parts of a sea, i.e. more or less international waters, for which no name is an *endonym*. But this does not cause a problem for the *exonym* status of names from without, since an exonym does not require the counterpart of an endonym.

Resumée

Ces papiers traitent avec la question, si le terme *exonym* des couvertures objets aussi au-delà d'une souveraineté comme des eaux internationales. Après les définitions de quelques termes principaux il discute à l'avis de premier Naftali Kadmon (Kadmon, 2007), qui soutient que des noms maritimes dans une certaine langue étaient endonyms dans ces parties d'une mer, sur laquelle un pays dans lequel cette langue est officielle ou bien établi exerce une sorte de jurisdiction, c'est-à-dire ses eaux territoriales, et la tournure dans exonyms dans les eaux territoriales d'autres pays. Dans des zones de mer au-delà de n'importe quelle juridiction nationale, c'est-à-dire des eaux internationales, le nom

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pour la mer ne respecte aucun endonym. Cela signifie pour lui que le nom ne peut pas être nommé *exonym*. Pour Kadmon il "le suit il y a un besoin d'un nouveau terme à être ajouté au Glossaire de Termes pour la Standardisation de Noms Géographiques, à savoir le statut d'un toponyme pour un objet maritime dans des eaux internationales." (Kadmon, 2007, p. 4)

Le papier se réfère alors à l'avis de Paul Woodman (Woodman, 2009a) qu'un nom dans une langue pour un objet ne peut pas changer du statut terminologique, ne peut pas simultanément être un endonym et un exonym, ce qui signifie que tout l'officiel de langues ou bien établi dans les pays côtiers d'une mer est endonyms pour l'objet entière, c'est-à-dire pour la mer en entier, aussi pour des eaux internationales. Les noms dans des langues pas l'officiel ou non bien établi dans des pays côtiers ont selon lui le statut d'*exonyms* partout la mer, aussi dans des eaux internationales. Des noms dans des langues pas l'officiel ou non bien établi dans des pays côtiers n'a selon lui le statut d' *exonyms* partout la mer, aussi dans des eaux internationales, depuis nulle part la contrepartie d'un endonym manque.

Le papier finit avec une synthèse de ces deux vues contrastantes postulant que tandis qu'il ne devrait en effet y avoir rien en plus du fossé d'endonym/exonym (après Woodman), le statut *endonym* d'un nom pour une mer est limité ces parties, pour lesquelles la communauté utilisant le nom se sent responsable ou avec émotion affectée – qui est près de l'avis de Kadmon. Cela laisse les parties d'une mer, c'est-à-dire des eaux plus ou moins internationales, pour lesquelles aucun nom n'est un endonym. Mais ceci ne cause pas de problème pour le statut *exonym* de noms de dehors, puisqu'un exonym n'exige pas la contrepartie d'un endonym.

1. The endonym/exonym divide: still many open questions

Although the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGGN) has since its foundation made remarkable progress in resolving many problems of standardization and in establishing a practicable terminology, and although exonyms have from the very beginning been in the focus of its discussions, the contents of the terms *endonym* and *exonym* and thus the endonym/exonym divide are/is still not clearly defined and there are still many open questions related to them (see Jordan, Orožen Adamič & Woodman, 2007; Jordan, Bergmann, Burgess & Cheetham, 2011; Woodman, 2012a). One of them is, whether the term *exonym* covers also features beyond any sovereignty such as international waters.


As with many other questions, the new UNGEGN definitions of the *endonym* and the *exonym* as they have been passed by the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 21-30 August 2007¹, do not provide any answer. They have by purpose been formulated in a way that makes them open for various interpretations and have – compared to their predecessors – just the advantage of not being overlapping.

1 *Endonym*: Name of a geographical feature in an official or well-established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. *Examples*: Vārānasī (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix-la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqṣur (not Luxor).

*Exonym*: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. *Examples*: Warsaw is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); Mailand is German for Milano; Londres is French for London; Kūlūniyā is Arabic for Köln. The officially romanized endonym Moskva for Moskva is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form Beijing, while Peking is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage (UNEGGN, 2007, p. 2).
As a starting point and basis for further discussion it is nevertheless necessary to recall the concepts of the endonym and the exonym as well as of the transboundary feature in their most basic versions, which are perhaps acceptable for everybody irrespective of all divergent opinions.

The endonym can in a very simplified and basic manner be defined as the place name used by the (local) human community, while its counterpart, the exonym is the place name used by non-locals.

A transboundary (geographical) feature is a feature exceeding the limits of a community and shared between different communities.

Human communities can have all sizes, from a family to the community of global citizens, and kinds, from a cohesion group like a family via an identity group like a nation.

The name for a transboundary feature is an endonym, if the community using the name is part of the feature (the World, a continent, a mountain range, a country inhabited by various communities using different names for it) or is an endonym at least for a section of the feature, if the community resides along the feature (a river, lake or sea).

Thus, the name for the World is an endonym in all languages on Earth; and the names used by coastal dwellers of the Pacific Ocean are endonyms at least for their respective territorial waters of this sea.

What was said represents very likely the smallest common denominator of all opinions currently on the table of UNGEGN and more specifically its Working Group on Exonyms.

Names for transboundary features are certainly the most salient point as regards the endonym/exonym divide and the topic on which opinions diverge most. This refers even more to the subcategory of sea names, which will be in the focus of my further elaborations.

2. Two contrasting views as regards status of sea names related to the endonym/exonym divide

Naftali Kadmon argues in his paper quoted above (Kadmon, 2007), that maritime names in a certain language were endonyms in these parts of a sea, over which a country in which this language is official or well-established exerts some kind of jurisdiction, i.e. its territorial waters. Names in languages not corresponding to the requirements of being official or well-established in this country will be termed exonyms.

Translated into the terminology presented before (see Fig. 1) this means that the name used for a sea by Community A has the terminological status of an endonym in the territorial waters of Community A and acquires the status of an exonym in the territorial waters of Community B, while the name used by Community B has the terminological status of an endonym in the territorial waters of Community B and turns into an exonym in the territorial waters of Community A. Outside territorial waters, according to Kadmon, both names have neither the terminological status of an endonym nor of an exonym, they are just allonyms. For Kadmon it “follows that there is a need for a new term to be added to the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names, namely the status of a toponym for a maritime feature in international waters.” (Kadmon, 2007, p. 4).

In my opinion, this is a premature conclusion and it is also not sufficiently explained. Why can the name used by Community A acquire exonym status only in the territorial waters of another community? Why not also in international waters? Does the acquisition of exonym status require the existence of an endonym as a counterpart?

While I am fully in line with Kadmon’s view that a geographical name for a transboundary feature can change its terminological status according to the portion of the feature to which it is applied, I would – in contrast to him – express the opinion that a name
can also have exonym status, where the counterpart, the endonym, is missing, e.g., in international waters. I will explain this argument in more detail later.

Paul Woodman has in several papers (among others Woodman, 2009a, b) expressed a view quite different from Kadmon’s. His basic consideration is that one name in one language for one feature cannot change in terminological status, cannot simultaneously be an endonym and an exonym. According to him (see Fig. 2) the name used by the coastal dweller Community A is an endonym all over the feature, i.e. in the territorial waters of Community A as well as of Community B, but also in international waters. The same is, of course, true vice versa: The name used by coastal dweller Community B has endonym status all over the sea, no matter, whether and where it exerts jurisdiction.

This resolves our problem (Is there a need for a third term besides endonym and exonym for international waters?) in a most comfortable way: There is no need for a third term, since all names used by coastal dweller communities are endonyms all over the feature. Just names used by communities not residing along the coasts of a certain sea are not endonyms. But they meet everywhere their counterpart, the endonym, even in international waters, in areas beyond any national sovereignty. So they can without any problem be called exonyms.

Exemplified by the Pacific Ocean this means that the English name as a name used by a coastal dweller community is an endonym for the entire ocean, while just names used by communities residing offside the Ocean, like Pazifischer Ozean in German, have exonym status.

Woodman’s strongest argument for his opinion, that a name remains an endonym also outside the territorial waters of a certain community (country), is, that a feature is indivisible in emotional terms. The emotional affection of a certain community to the feature, e.g., a sea, cannot be divided into zones (territorial waters, international waters, territorial waters of another country), but refers to the feature in its entirety and to all its parts.

My twofold first argument against Woodman’s view (see also Jordan, 2009a, b, 2011, 2012) is that

- attributing a new name\(^2\) to a feature is an expression of ownership or at least of a feel of responsibility – often supported by emotional ties between a community and a feature;
- people develop emotional ties rather to places in the sense of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) than to the entirety of geographical features, which are always constructs and rather abstract spatial entities. This is especially true for large natural features like oceans and seas, mountain ranges or long rivers. For many of them names have been introduced rather late, since they were not perceived as spatial entities before the emergence of modern maps and the expansion of modern communication networks.

But it is, of course, rather difficult to say where exactly a community’s attitude of feeling responsible and emotionally attached ends, where place turns into space. This is difficult enough with features on land, but even more so related to seas.

It corresponds to a frequent experience that coastal dwellers have a profound emotional relation to their coastal waters – coastal waters not in the juridical sense of territorial waters, but in the sense of waters in visible distance from the coast, where fisherboats and vessels are cruising. They are as much part of their living space as land is. They are resources of food,

\(^2\)“New name” in the sense of the primary name attributed by the local community to a feature. Also exonyms express relations between a community and a feature, but – if they are not historical endonyms – they are just translations or adaptations of names attributed by other communities – they are the primary names of other communities.
serve as transportation routes, assume in some cases also functions in tourism. It is justified to say that the coastal dweller community regards its coastal waters as its property.

But it is certainly different with the high sea – the sea beyond the horizon from the coast. Here it is necessary to differentiate between the cognitive and the emotional level. Emotionally the high sea is conceived as endless (Fig. 3). This is, e.g., expressed by folk or also pop songs, which frequently use sea as a metaphor for the unlimited, the indefinite, the unconceivable, as, e.g., Charles Trenet in his famous song “La mer”

La mer
Au ciel d'ete confond
Ses blancs moutons
Avec les anges si purs
La mer bergere d'azur
Infinie

The Sea
In the summer sky merge
Its white sheep
With such pure angels
The sea, shepherdess of azure
Infinite

or Gianna Nannini in her song “Alla fine”

Davanti a me si perde il mare
io sto con te senza lacrime
tu come fai a darti pace
in questa immensità in questa solitudine.

In front of me the sea gets lost
I stay with you without tears
How can peace be added
To this immensity, to this solitude?

Endlesness is also expressed by special words for the high sea, e.g., pučina instead of more in Croatian, which means something like ‘wilderness, where the winds blow’, etc.

It can be concluded from this attitude that, emotionally, coastal dwellers recognize no opposite coast, no counterpart beyond the horizon and would consequently also not draw a strict line between "one's own" and "the other’s" somewhere out in the sea, would also not feel the necessity to confine the endonym status of their own name to some part of the sea, would possibly extend it to the sea in its entirety – because they feel that this status is not contested by anybody else.

But it is also very likely so that the intensity of this feeling fades away more or less as a function of distance, that the feeling of being the owner of the sea is relative insofar as it is combined with the other feeling that the sea is endless and unconceivable. (It is in the nature of the endless and the unconceivable that it can never be completely owned, that it is impossible to achieve full command of it.)

At the cognitive level they are anyway aware of the fact that the sea ends somewhere, that there is an opposite coast, inhabited by other people, who speak a different language and have another name for the same feature. They have learned this in schools, from maps and
charts and from the media. Based on this knowledge, they would usually (with the only exception of a politically aggressive and expansive attitude) be ready to acknowledge and accept that their own name loses its endonym status somewhere in between this opposite coast and their own coast, have no problem with accepting regulations ruling that there is some “artificial” line between where their name has endonym status and where the name of the others is valid as endonym (see Fig. 4). They will usually – as in many other fields of social interaction – accept that their right ends where the right of others begins, if this avoids dispute and conflict.

This brings me to my second argument against Woodman’s view. When he says that the name of a coastal dweller community has endonym status all over the sea, i.e. also in parts of the sea far away from it, perhaps even at the opposite coast of an ocean, he takes too little account of the fact that in other coastal sections of a sea or ocean another community is in place using a different name; and that this community is closer to this portion of the feature, conceiving this portion of the feature as its place in the sense of Yi-Fu Tuan and feeling an emotional relationship to it as it was highlighted before. It is therefore the name of this community, which has exclusive endonym status there and not the name washed to this coast “from across the sea”.

With reference to the Pacific Ocean and the relation between the English name Pacific Ocean and the coastal waters of Japan this would mean that in contrast to Woodman just the Japanese name for the Pacific Ocean has endonym status within the coastal waters of Japan, while the English name is an exonym, although it is an endonym along some other (English speaking) sections of the Pacific coasts.

The linguist Philip W. Matthews (Matthews, 2012, pp. 37ff) has recently contested my statement on emotional ties between coastal dwellers and the sea by arguing that it was not justified postulating in general that coastal dweller communities had emotional relations to coastal waters or felt some responsibility for them. Such a position would not take into account the various views of individuals and subgroups, which could differ (e.g. between fishermen and farmers on the coast), as well as the fact that a relation to coastal waters may already be absent in the immediate hinterland of the coast, perhaps behind a first mountain range, but well within the same community. So a statement of this kind could not be made without comprehensive investigation and asking every individual.

His opinion, however, disregards that place names are always part of a language and achieve their function just by communication, i.e. when they are not only known by an individual, but used by a community. So place names are a matter of communities and not of individuals. And so it is not relevant what individuals, but what the community as such or at least the prevailing/dominating part of it thinks and feels about a name and its relation to a feature. If the community has the administrative status of a state or country, its relation to territorial waters is anyway defined by international law, i.e. territorial waters are subjected to its jurisdiction. If the community is of a subnational nature and not in this way supported by law, its relation to the sea can be derived from cultural traditions such as songs, tales and other literature, customs or religious practices expressing a common or at least prevailing attitude.

3. Proposing a synthesis

While I share Paul Woodman’s opinion that there should be nothing besides the endonym/exonym divide and I would strongly support Naftali Kadmon’s view that the endonym status of a name for a transboundary feature is to be confined to places, in which the
community using the name is the closest (including of course the territorial waters of a country), I cannot follow him, when he concludes that the term *exonym* cannot apply to names for international waters, since they lack the counterpart of an endonym.

Must there be a counterpart? Does even the definition of the exonym as it was passed in 2007 require a counterpart? Yes, perhaps. It says that an exonym is a name “differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated.” (UNGEGN, 2007, p. 3) This may indeed be interpreted as supposing an endonym as a prerequisite for an exonym. But it may also be interpreted in the opposite way: If there is an endonym, the exonym must differ in its form.

Visualized, this synthesis would result in what is represented by Fig. 5: The names used by Communities A and B, resp., have endonym status in the waters under their jurisdiction or to which they feel emotionally attached and where they are not contested in this respect by another community in closer relation to them. Outside, also in international waters, they assume the status of *exonyms*.

International waters are, by the way, not the only features without a corresponding endonym. There are lots of historical features lacking an adequate current endonym: Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire, Moesia, Tauria, Noricum, Troy, etc.³ Do they all escape the endonym/exonym divide? Must we find even a fourth term for them?

I do not think so, since they all coincide very well with the basic concept of the *exonym*, i.e. to be a name from without, a name used by a community not inhabiting the place in question. Whether the place is inhabited by an endonym community or under the jurisdiction of an endonym community is a different question, which does not matter in our context. It only matters, when it comes to define, whether a name is an *endonym*.

4. References


³ They mostly had a historical contemporary endonym. In some cases the current exonym was the historical endonym (Noricum, Moesia).


