

Minority toponyms - the western European experience

Ferjan Ormeling*Geographical Institute; University of Utrecht; PO Box 80.115; 3508 TC Utrecht; The Netherlands.

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ABSTRACT

Autochthonous minorities that are geographically concentrated tend to develop a set of geographical names or toponyms of their own. When topographical maps were produced of European minority language areas, these minority language toponyms were often faultily recorded (through ignorance, indifference or political motives), and many were adapted to the majority language. Since 1945, this practice has been discontinued in a number of European countries and changed for a representation of toponyms more adjusted to the minority languages involved, such as bilingual toponyms and partial or complete restoration of the name versions in the minority languages.

In the era in which topographic maps (as we know them) have been produced, say, since approximately 1750, very little attention has been paid until recently to the language of geographic names. Topographic endeavours were usually organized by the state and served military purposes; the toponyms collected by topographers had only to fulfil the task of roughly identifying localities-distinguishing them from others. Certainly in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the question of whether the local inhabitants, let alone linguists, felt at ease with this military orthography was never tested (or not heard of, at least). Moreover, it was no threat to local usage because these maps were used only by the various national military services.

This changed in the second half of the 19th century, when the use of topographic maps was no longer reserved for military purposes; they were re-leased for administrative and engineering purposes and to the public at large. Names of municipalities were standardized, as were those of streets and places; among the sources for these names were topographic maps. Local populations were thereby confronted for the first time with the many inconsistencies in topographic orthography (*ie*, Standard usage of words and letters, and the symbols used to represent language sounds).

Apart from errors, in many cases toponyms were subjected to systematic distortion, for example by rendering names in what was considered the state language (*ie*, the King's English, Hochdeutsch, the French of the Ile de France, Castilian) instead of the local language (Welsh, Frisian, Provencal or Catalan). This led to distortions characterized by the addition of name elements, adaptation to the structure of the state language, or even translation into it. In some cases, new state language toponyms were substituted for local names. By this process, maps of areas where the state language (hereafter called "majority language") was not indigenous came to contain names adapted to the state language. Consciously or unconsciously, this process accompanied the emergence of national states in Europe, each containing-according to the maps-a linguistically homogeneous population. For example, according to Deslandes, the map of France needed geographical names that were as French as possible because the maps should be suitable for all French people and not just the local population. Maps depicting French national territory should be seen as a national product by other countries, and only French orthographies could satisfy these needs [6].

THE RESULTS

In Europe in the 1950s, after 200 years of topographic mapping, linguistic minorities were either disregarded or relegated to a dialect status, negating the right to be regarded as (part of) a separate Standard language region. In those areas of Europe where minorities were contiguous with countries where their languages had majority status (as in Italy, France, Austria or Sweden), the minority languages

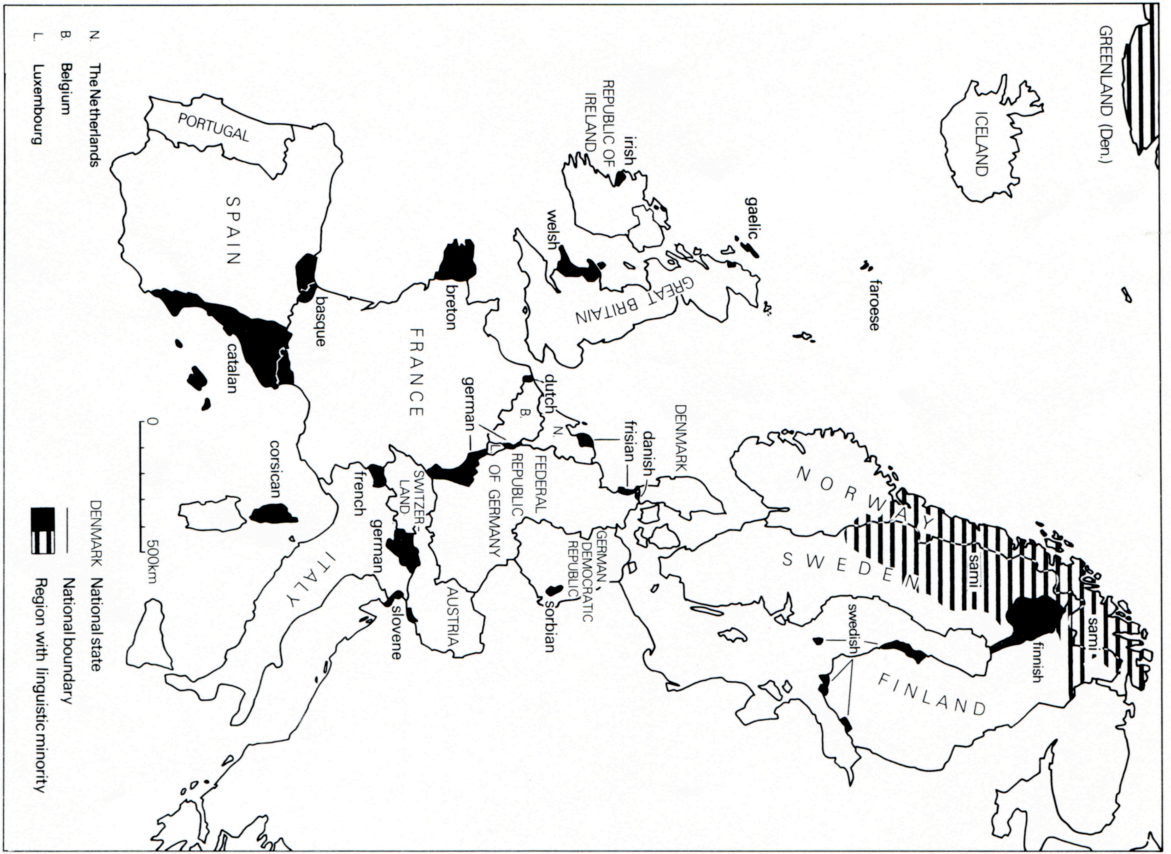


FIGURE 1 Linguistic minorities in Western Europe

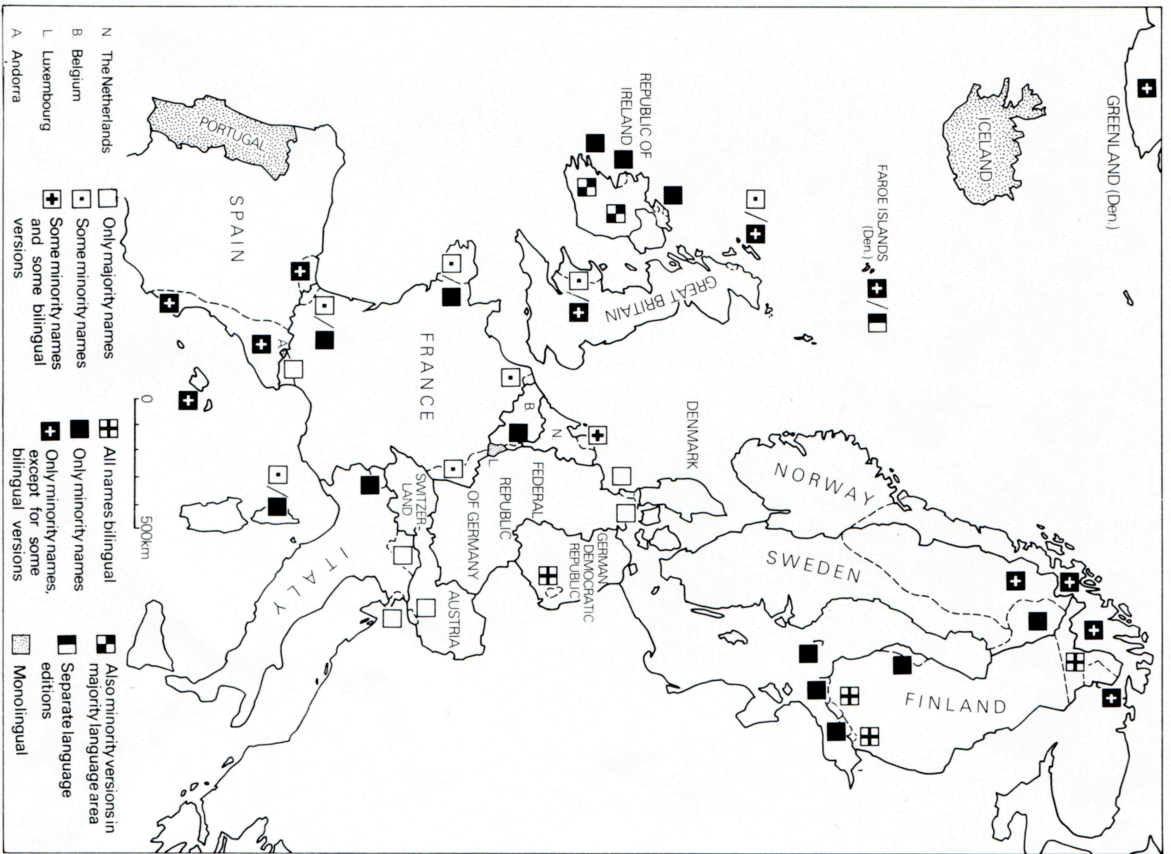


FIGURE 2 Treatment of toponyms of linguistic minorities on topographic maps

were assigned the role of local dialect and their toponyms were treated accordingly. Some minority languages, such as the Celtic ones, were sometimes completely disregarded. Italian topographic maps of South Tyrol, incorporated into Italy in 1919, showed no German toponyms in the 100 percent German-speaking country-side; French maps of Alsace-Lorraine showed German names in a French transcription of the German dialect, dissimilar from German names at the other side of the French-German border. According to their respective topographical maps, Frisian names in the Netherlands, Germany or Denmark did not exist. Some of the effected areas are shown in Figure 1.

It is not for lack of a proper example that this situation developed. In the 1890s, the multinational Habsburg monarchy in central Europe - which contained (in addition to Austria) parts of present-day Yugoslavia, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union, Hungary and Romania-had developed a liberal linguistic policy towards the various "nations" or language groups that peopled the realm. It consisted of:

- (1) A "Roman alphabet rule" in which diacritical marks not used in the majority languages (German or Hungarian) were used on maps of language areas that did use them.
- (2) Attempts to stimulate a correct pronunciation of non-German alphabets by incorporating pronunciation rules in the maps.
- (3) The use of two or sometimes three different name versions for the same geographical feature in multilingual areas. The order in which the names were presented on the map depended upon the relative magnitudes of the language groups.

With the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy in 1919, this situation changed; even in present-day Austria, which retained a small Slovenian-speaking minority, the topographic maps contain fewer Slovenian names than they did before 1919.

It is not only within the map area that minority languages were not taken into account. Map series, titles, legends and marginal information were presented only in the majority language; so only English appeared on the maps of Welsh-speaking Wales, only Dutch on maps of the Frisian-speaking Netherlands, and only Castilian Spanish on maps of the Basque and Catalan-speaking areas of Spain. This meant that the prospective map reader from a minority language area faced documentation problems even in procuring the right map sheet. In the internal identification process, *ie*, map reading with the help of the legend, similar constraints would occur. Because the inhabitants of most linguistic minority regions in Europe have been living within the present political boundaries for more than 40 years, this means that they were (and are) in practice-bilingual. Still, to see their familiar surroundings labelled on the map in a strange language would cause a feeling of displacement and thus reduce map use.

REACTIONS

Despite these negative effects, there were some positive efforts, especially in France and the United Kingdom where procedures were developed for collecting geographical names and checking their orthography. After 1750, name files were prepared by parish, with names grouped according to mapped features, checked and countersigned by representatives of the local gentry and clergy [2] (who were later replaced by "educated persons"). In 1810, it was decided that when these worthy persons contradicted each other, the spelling according to the majority of sources should be accepted [9]. After 1835, the name files were pre-printed on special forms and collected into books. At that time, even name models were prepared for the engraver for accurate positioning [10]. By the end of the 19th century, it was a Standard procedure in some countries to consult scientific bodies on the names' orthography.

Despite these efforts, the 19th century toponymical codification of Europe in topographic maps came under increasing criticism-first from linguists and later from language minorities. The fact that topographers had "murdered" place names was a recurrent item in linguistic studies from 1750 onwards [4, 12, 11, 16, 8, 13, 1], and local geographic or linguistic organizations tried to exert pressure on governments to gain some influence in toponymic matters [7, 14].

Later, members of minority groups, either individually or in movements, strived for recognition of their language rights, including the use of their own place names.

In the United Kingdom, there is still a continuous stream of protests from the Welsh-speaking population about the inconsistent spelling of their place names [15]. Legal action has been taken

by municipal councils from Lapland (Kautokeino has been changed into Guavdogaaidnu) to Catalonia [3] (including Friesland in the Netherlands). Slovenian activists in Austria have been publishing pamphlets and taking legal action to overcome juridical obstacles to the official use of Slovenian place names - to date without any cartographic results.

THE COSTLY PROCESS OF "DEMAJORIZING" TOPONYMS

"Demajorizing" is the process of restoring a geographical name to its original orthography in the minority language. Since 1950, there has been a rapid increase in Europe in the number of regions where the spelling of the minority language names has been restored to its original form. In a number of areas, bilingual representation (in both majority and minority languages) has been initiated. In some areas, such as Brittany, the worst errors in rendering minority language names in the majority language alphabet have been rectified as topographers try to correct their phonetics.

In addition to these costly changes, map series titles and legends are also being published in minority language (*e.g.*, Ireland, German-speaking Belgium, Faroe Islands, Greenland). Map sheet titles also contain minority language toponyms in Wales and in Norwegian and Swedish Lapland. Marginal information is provided in the minority language in Ireland. Designations and abbreviations, however, are given in the minority language only in the Faroe Islands and in Swedish-speaking Finland. For German-speaking Belgium, they are envisaged for the next edition of the 1:25000 scale topographic map.

Belgium is a good example of administrative resistance and delay in conforming to "linguistic equal rights" on maps. Though the Dutch-speaking community in the northern part of Belgium formed the majority in the country, the language of government after 1830 was French- throughout the country, not just in the southern part where French was spoken. Thus all topographic maps were in French. Dutch became obligatory in public administration in 1882, and attempts were made from 1886 to standardize the spelling of municipality names in the Dutch-speaking region according to the generally accepted spelling of the Dutch language. Although the country officially became bi-lingual in 1898, it took until 1937 before these Dutch versions were generally accepted and declared compulsory for all government departments [18]. It was only in 1949 that Belgium started to publish a new series of 1:25000 topographic maps with these approved municipality names. The adoption of equal rights on the map was complete only in the second edition of the map series 1:25000 (1970-1980) where the abbreviations and designations on the map of the Dutch-speaking area were no longer in French but in Dutch. This was no insignificant feat, since one map sheet can contain as many as 800 abbreviations. In the United Kingdom, where still more abbreviations are used, the costs of such a conversion into the minority languages were deemed prohibitive [15].

In Ireland, the Ordnance Survey in Dublin started a programme in 1920 to de-anglicize Irish place names. In 1946, a special toponymic committee was appointed by the Government for this purpose. The names on all topographic and cadastral maps were to be bilingual; if no original Irish versions of English toponyms existed, these were to be reconstructed by translation.

Until 1979, the internal regulations of the Topographic Service of the Netherlands stipulated that topographers should translate or adapt Frisian names to the Dutch language; from that year onwards, they were allowed to retain names of minor objects in Frisian on the maps.

The Danish Faroe Islands had separate Faroese and Danish editions of topographic maps 1:100000 and 1:200000 from 1932 to 1970. In Scandinavia, toponyms in the Lapp-speaking area are being adjusted to the new common orthography adopted for Scandinavia in the 1970s.

There are various solutions to attain a complete restoration of minority languages. The most important are:

(1) Bilingual representation. In most countries, this is still tied to specific categories of toponyms. It appears to be used mostly for objects of lesser importance, such as fields, isolated buildings or small hamlets, forests and (minor) relief elements. Because names of municipalities have been standardized in most countries and codified in official and/or legal documents, they are usually retained in the majority language version on maps.

(2) Partial restoration of minority toponyms. Though topographers try to present a correct phonetic rendering of the minority names in the majority alphabet, generic name elements are usually retained in the majority language.

(3) Complete restoration and exclusive use of the minority language toponyms in their own alphabet. This is a relatively rare occurrence.

In Canada, with an English-speaking majority and a French-speaking minority, a French language version of the official map of Canada 1:6 336 000 was published in 1953, followed in 1958 by a French edition of the National Atlas. The sheets of the large scale topographic map series were gradually made suitable for both languages. The extra costs for publishing two separate editions of the relevant 5000 topographic map sheets were estimated to be C\$ 4 million [5].

Whatever the solution-monolingual or bilingual maps, bilingual or monolingual legends-the costs of the original decision to publish the maps in only the majority language have been high, in both vexation and subsequent revision.

HOW TO PREVENT SIMILAR CASES

Giving in to minority group claims that their toponyms should be restored is never entirely satisfactory. It is not always possible to rescue names from the minority language which have been codified in an adapted version in the majority language and have become known in this form the world over. Though this means a permanent injury to the cultural heritage of the minority group-a heritage for which the majority group is responsible-such codification may be irreversible.

In countries that are still preparing their first medium or large scale maps of their surface areas, scores of toponyms must be collected and edited. There is a natural preference to spend as little time as possible on map names and to concentrate on other map features with their far greater relevance to development planning. The results of similar actions in 19th century Europe in the patchwork on language areas should provide a good example of how not to proceed.

Many of the countries now preparing large scale topographic maps have linguistic compositions much more complex than Europe. Part of the process of nation-building often includes a definition of a national language-the language of the largest or most important component in the nation's population, some artificial compound, or a widely-spoken second language (*eg*, French, English, etc). This then becomes the language of administration, education and commerce. It is obvious that maps-as part of the administrative infrastructure-will tend to be carried along with this trend, and that toponyms will suffer in the process. This introduction of a single official national language in a multilingual country poses a severe threat for survival of many existing toponyms of minority language areas.

A good example of artificial compounds can be found in the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) toponyms. Ciliwung (the Liwung river on which Jakarta is located) is indicated on present-day topographic maps as Sungai Ciliwung (Sungai is the Bahasa Indonesia word for river; Ci is the prefix meaning river in the Sundanese language), thus making the original prefix redundant.

Similar examples could be cited from other countries, and not all toponymical actions should be judged negatively. The artificial separation of the Malayan and Indonesian names, caused by their transcription into either English or Dutch, has been removed by the Malaysian and Indonesian states in choosing a common spelling system.

Recommendation 4b of the first UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Geneva 1967) states:

"For each geographical name which is to be standardized, it is to be recommended that there be as complete a field and office research as pertinent to provide information on the following points: (1) written and spoken form of the name and its meaning according to local inhabitants.... (2) The local spoken form of the name be recorded on tape and written in the phonetic notation approved by the national names authority and the meaning of the generic terms used locally be clearly defined. If possible, at least two local independent sources be consulted for each inquiry" [17].

This leads to the choice of either bilingual (majority *and* minority) or monolingual minority toponyms. If there is a history of adaptation of minority language toponyms to the majority language, the bilingual solution can make map readers familiar with the minority language names. Bilingualism, however, tends to lead to illegible maps for densely-populated areas. In Western Europe, official and complete bilingualism is found only in maps of thinly populated Finnish Lapland, the large scale map series of Ireland, of Lusatia in the German Democratic Republic, and the area near Brussels (see Figure 2). For other, more densely-populated regions, bilingual representation is possible only by reducing the number of named objects on the map. The bilingual solution may therefore be more satisfactory as a transitional phase.

If minority monolingual toponyms are preferred (*ie*, one name in the minority language), it is necessary to first delimit the language boundaries of the linguistic minority areas. A transitional period of map bilingualism is useful, if not mandatory, followed by officially changing those names in the

minority regions which have been codified in a majority language back into the minority language versions.

Names of larger settlements, in particular, are often officially codified in the majority language on maps because these names are used in administration. Getting them back into the minority language can require a complex system of planning and organization—often designated by the term "official naming policy". Because it is essential to link map use with actual orientation, it is also necessary to change place name signs and sign posts to the minority languages, consistent with the map. Series and map titles, marginal information and legends should also be changed to the minority languages.

For countries starting new map projects, the European experience suggests that if the toponymical "wrongs" committed by (non-linguist) topographers in the 18th and 19th centuries are to be avoided (along with the extra investments in time and money to correct their errors), language policy for toponyms should be resolved very early in the mapping process.

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RESUMÉ

Les minorités autochtones qui sont concentrées géographiquement, tendent à développer une série de noms géographiques ou toponymes qui leur sont propres. Lorsque Ton a dressé des cartes topographiques des régions habitées par des groupes linguistiques minoritaires en Europe, ces toponymes particuliers ont été souvent faussement enregistrés (par ignorance, indifférence ou pour des motifs politiques) et beaucoup d'entre eux ont été adaptés à la langue majoritaire. Depuis 1945, cette pratique a été arrêtée dans la plupart des pays européens et changée pour une représentation de toponymes plus proches des langues minoritaires impliquées, ainsi que des toponymes bilingues et une restauration partielle ou complète de la version des noms dans les langues des minorités.

RESUMEN

Minorías autoctonas que están geográficamente concentradas tienden a desarrollar un conjunto propio de nombres geográficos o toponimios. Cuando se produjeron mapas topográficos de áreas europeas con lenguaje minoritarios, estos lenguajes fueron con frecuencia defectuosamente consignados (hecho por ignorancia, indiferencia o por motivos políticos) y muchos fueron adaptados al lenguaje mayoritario. Desde 1945, en un número de países europeos, esta práctica ha sido suspendida y cambiada por una representación de nombres geográficos más ajustados a los idiomas minoritarios implicados, tal como toponimios bilingües y restauraciones parciales o completas de la versión de nombres del lenguaje minoritario.