

Addressing Maghrebian place names from a Hungarian perspective

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Abstract:

It is known that names yield a linguistic frame of reference and that place names possess a human-like character in the sense that they evolve and change.

It exists many ways that geographical names can vary. Hence, given the many sources of variation, it is not unreasonable for a single geographical place to have several ways of being represented textually. Consequently, it may cause problems for full-text searching since searchers tend to enter only one form as the search term; thus, resources using only variant forms are not retrieved in the search. Therefore, information retrieval systems that use cross-references or systems such as the Semantic Web that automatically search or link geographic place name variants are essential in enabling quality geographical research.

The necessity for better identification of the toponym can be achieved by adhering to correct toponym usage in both written and spoken practice. Thus, this study aims to identify the toponym variants in Hungarian publications; school atlases, world atlases, and globes. A distinction from the historical atlases has been made since the latter, in principle, tends to show the name as it was used in the time. The collected variants are characterized, categorized, and presented in a timeline of change, allowing us to correspond to any pattern in the foreign place names adaptation and hence emphasize the importance of their pronunciation. Identifying, processing, and normalizing place names and their numerous variants is valuable in various applications, such as advancing the efficiency of machine translation, place name dictionaries for human translators, segmentation and morphological analysis of Arabic/French–Hungarian texts, and as a database for gazetteers.

Furthermore, the toponymic corpus is being expanded, continuously updated, and in a manuscript format. Data from various sources such as history books and official letters were collected from both the national library in Rabat and the royal library Al-Hasaniyya on the etymology of Moroccan place names. In addition, more readings and literature cross-checking were done to either enrich or modify that data. Besides the qualitative characteristics shown in the data (precision, origin, country code), individual characteristics (alternative forms of the name), linguistic properties (language, dialect), and historical properties (date/year), a variation property is added. It deals with the changes that occurred to the toponym.

Moreover, teachers' pronunciation plays a crucial role in foreign name adaptation, providing a more profound impression on young people. Hence, interviews with geography students, particularly teacher trainees, will help us better appreciate the relevance of understanding why certain toponyms are spelled differently. Since what the geography teacher says is usually what the students believe to be authentic, the recommendations should be relevant not only for the publishers but also for the teachers and geographic teacher training. The adopted semi-structured interviews will accentuate the need for accurate foreign toponym pronunciation. Other interviews will be conducted in Morocco and Hungary to tackle the complexities and sensitivity of dealing with foreign toponyms, specifically Maghrebian place names. Finally, this study will attempt to provide requests and recommendations to help guide and improve the teaching of Maghrebian place names in Hungarian schools.