

Endonyms or Exonyms: How map purpose, data source, and map language impact place naming on maps

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Abstract:

Labelling *endonyms*, the native names for places used by the local people, on the map has multiple advantages. By using endonyms, we can better preserve and represent native cultures. These names are often deeply meaningful for those who have inhabited the land (Nna, 2015; Macha & Krtička, 2016; Jordan, 2020). Implementing endonyms is also considered by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) to be a useful way to enhance international communication and minimize confusion (Ormeling, 1993).

While using endonyms on maps is common in many places, there are remaining challenges for standardizing endonyms, such as using endonyms on transboundary features (Choo, 2009; Kladnik, 2009) and identifying endonyms in regions with high linguistic complexity (Dhieb, 2018). As a result, certain place names are often labelled by their *exonyms*, the common and non-native names for locations. Some claim that exonyms are often more well-known and distinguishable. This includes the composite toponym (Jordan et al., 2007), with terms such as “mountain”, “sea”, “airport” when used alongside the more specific toponym (Jordan, 2009). Exonyms also reflect political and historical contexts of places (Saparov, 2022). In particular, it is well known that locations that have been colonized throughout the world are often labelled with exonyms (Giraut, 2022).

Choosing to use endonyms or exonyms is influenced by the following factors:

- **Map Purpose.** Exonyms are often more prevalent in educational materials, for instance, due to the national stances on political, economic, or cultural contexts. While for travel maps, more endonyms are often present to better guide travellers to and at their destinations.
- **Geographic Data Sources.** Certain datasets only support exonyms, while other datasets present both endonyms and exonyms (e.g., OpenStreetMap).
- **Language Used on Map.** The toponym transliteration of different languages and text systems is a decisive factor on whether cartographers use endonyms or exonyms under certain scenarios.

This research explores how the use of endonyms in maps that are disseminated via Twitter relate to the 1) map purpose, 2) data source, and 3) the language of the map. Through systematic content analysis of around 250 continental-scale maps across the globe, we will evaluate the purpose, data source, and language of the map to assess whether the naming conventions are tied to these factors. While collecting and analysing data, we will pay attention to the variance between maps depicting Europe and other continents, as well as maps using different languages, such as English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, and Korean to better highlight the inherited colonialism narratives in the place naming.

While toponymy has been explored on individual atlases (e.g., Michna, 2009; Jordan, 2005; Jordan, 2011), far less research has focused on maps that are disseminated across the social media space. We chose to explore the use of endonyms on social media maps because these maps, and the toponyms on these maps, are seen by far more numerous and diverse audiences. They also are where public debate happens on issues such as native land sovereignty (Native Land Digital) and water rights, climate change (Pearce et al., 2019), and the spread of disease (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2022). Social media, and the maps that disseminate across it, are also valuable for knowledge sharing (Ahmed et al., 2019) and subconscious learning (Deibert, 2019).

Exploring place naming conventions on social media maps can help us better understand how the purpose, data, and language impact the use of endonyms. This will help us to identify ways in which map makers can be more inclusive in their naming of places on maps. For instance, results of this research will help us to explore whether it makes sense for

future for GIS datasets that cartographers often use on maps to better support multiple languages, naming conventions, translations, text systems, and endonyms. In addition, the results of this research will be a set of potential ideas on how we can decolonize maps through the meaningful inclusion of endonyms to better communicate and encourage readers to engage with local places depicted.

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