

DOES GOOGLE SERVE AS A MODEL FOR USING PLACE NAMES?

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GrácMező instead of Feldkirchen bei Graz.

Does Google serve as a model for using place names?

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the reliability of geographical names published on various internet platforms and seeks to improve the place-name content of internet maps. Hungarian examples of incorrect place names from various online maps draw attention to the need for cooperation between those that provide internet maps or map-based applications and relevant national or professional institutions.

KEY WORDS: geographical name, Hungarian name, place name, toponymy, internet, Google

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1 Introduction

Not only have printed maps been losing importance, but several traditional tools that help in correctly understanding and interpreting place names on maps, such as names indexes and legends, also seem to be disappearing from everyday use. In the world of computers, most map users are turning to online methods or mobile applications when they look for any spatial information. This approach has also become the primary source of information for places and place names. Unfortunately, automatic and non-critical acceptance of names from the web is everyday practice; therefore, it is very important that the names available from these sources be reliable and correct in all aspects, including linguistics, science, and administration, and that the names be professionally verified.

2 Examples of misused place names

This article presents the most common types of names arranged according to type of mistake. These examples are mostly taken from Google Maps and Google Earth pages and from applications based on them accessed from Hungarian IP addresses. These place names demonstrate a lack of critical use of sources or distortions of names due to various technical reasons. The most common mistakes are missing diacritics, use of historical names without modern equivalents, use of names never approved, false linking of exonyms, and automatic translations of place names.

2.1 Missing diacritics

The name of the Hungarian village *Kővágószőlős* appears in the form *Kovágószolos* (Figure 1), although the correct spellings of all town and village names can be accessed freely and without any restriction (e.g., from the homepage of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office). It is worth mentioning that no other alphabet uses the letter *ő* but the Hungarian alphabet.

2.2 Historical names without modern equivalents

The name of the capital city of the Italian region Piedmont is unanimously *Torino* in Hungarian today. This form has been used consistently in the press, schoolbooks, and atlases. Only well-educated people and the older generation with some knowledge of German can match the form *Turin* (Figure 2) on this Google Earth map with *Torino*.

Similarly, a major historical site for Hungarians is *Rodostó* in Turkey, but *Tekirdağ*, the Turkish form, has geographical relevance. There are several similar cases. The Croatian town of Opatija has always been a popular holiday resort for Hungarians. Its exonym is *Abbázia*, which obviously exists for Hungarians,

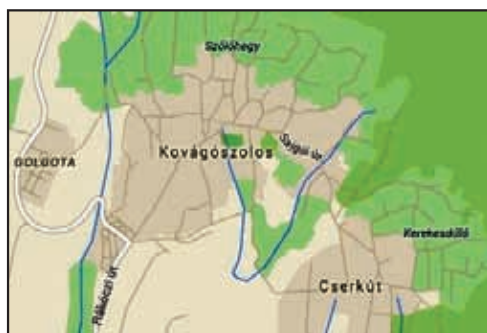


Figure 1: Kővágószőlős with incorrect diacritics. Meanwhile, this mistake has already been corrected on the internet (Internet 1).



Figure 2: Turin; the old Hungarian form of Torino. This mistake has already been corrected on the internet (GoogleEarth, 4. 10. 2013).

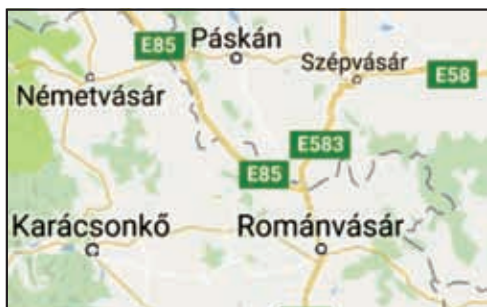


Figure 3: Only historical names in Moldavia (Internet 2).



Figure 4: Kisjenő in place of Chişinău (Internet 3).

but is passing out of use (this exonym is not listed in the official catalogue of approved place names; Pokoly 2012). It is interesting to note that some town names that reflect German and Italian influence and belong to the same name type appear in Hungarian (*Zára* for Zadar and *Zengg* for Senj), whereas others are shown without their historical exonyms (*Raguza*, *Trau*, and *Spalato*) and only the modern Croatian names appear (*Dubrovnik*, *Trogir*, and *Split*, respectively). These examples demonstrate the inconsistent use of place names.

Hungarian names used in medieval sources are revitalized in those areas of Romania that were outside the territory of historical Hungary (e.g. *Karácsonkő* for Piatra Neamţ, or *Németvásár* for Târgu Neamţ; Figure 3). These forms do not respect the requirement of correct information and they also do not follow the modern use of these geographical names by the Hungarians living in Romania (Mikesy 2014, 219).

It seems that the use of historical names depends on the country concerned. We found that name forms that can be considered either exonyms or historical exonyms are less frequently shown, although their appearance would be much more reasonable for Hungarian readers (e.g. *Boroszló* for Polish Wrocław, *Lemberg* for Ukrainian Lviv, *Drinápoly* for Turkish Edirne, or *Spárta* for Greek *Spárti* »Sparta«).

2.3 Names never approved

Newly created Hungarian names have begun to appear on online maps (Hlács 2015). Some of them come from false etymologies or incorrect associations. Reliable sources indicate that the Moldovan town of Chişinău never had a Hungarian exonym, although the form *Kisjenő* (Figure 4) can be seen increasingly frequently today. This name is based on a false etymology.

However, the historically ethnically Hungarian settlement of *Kisjenő* in Transylvania has an official Romanian name, *Chişineu*, which is indeed spelled almost in the same way as the name of the capital city of Moldova (Kiss 1987, 230). The Hungarian name comes from the ancient Hungarian tribal name *Jenő* and the modifier *kis* »little«.

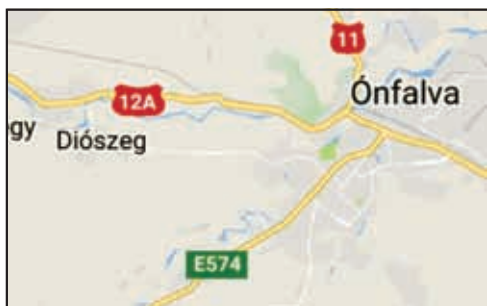


Figure 5: Ónfalva in place of Oneşti/Onyest (Internet 4).



Figure 6: Magyarsárvár in place of Uherský Ostroh (Internet 5).

The Romanian settlement of Onești is a place with a considerable number of Hungarian speakers. Its Hungarian forms *Onest* and *Onyest* are justified by old documents. The name *Ónfalva* (with the meaning »tin village«) appeared in the first half of the past century, but there are no historical or folk data to confirm this name as an exonym (Figure 5). The Hungarian ethnographer Pál Péter Domokos presumed that the first part of *Onest* includes *ón*, the Hungarian word for »tin« (Domokos 1987, 179). The new name was developed from this explanation. The renowned etymologist Lajos Kiss derived it from the personal name *Ion* (Kiss 1988, 746).

The name *Magyarsárvár* (Figure 6) can be found in place of the Czech settlement Uherský Ostroh. The Czech word *uherský* means »Hungarian« and relates either to the nearness of the Hungarian border or to the fact that the place was controlled by the king of Hungary for a short time at the end of the fifteenth century. The use of the Hungarian exonym is justified by nothing else than an association based on the meaning. There are no traces of any Hungarian population here or in the area that could have provided the name. The common word *ostroh* »enclosed place«, »fence« was replaced by Hungarian *sárvár* »mud castle« because an early medieval chronicle mentions a place called *saruuar* (Anonymous c. 1200) that might have been located there. However, this name had no any relevance in later documents. The new name is a combination of a vaguely justified anterior constituent and a questionable medieval item.

2.4 False linking of exonyms

Urziceni is an important Romanian place north of Bucharest in Ialomița County. Its name on the internet is *Csanálos* in Hungarian (Figure 7). However, there is a Hungarian village named *Csanálos* (»nettle place«) near Carei in the Romanian part of the former Hungarian Szatmár County (Figure 8); its name was directly translated into Romanian as *Urziceni*, which is an officially established name. Because the makers of the electronic map probably had no available sources that would have provided coordinates for the location of *Csanálos*, they applied it to both places named *Urziceni*.

A similar mistake was made in the case of two Ukrainian settlements, both named *Новоселиця* (*Novoselytsya*). One of them lies in Zakarpattia Oblast, in the area of historical Hungary, and the other in Chernivtsi Oblast. The former settlement has the Hungarian name *Taracújfalu*; however, it is not shown there (Figure 9) but on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains (Figure 10). The Hungarian name of the place was incorrectly assigned to another place due to their identical forms in Ukrainian.

2.5 Automatic translations?

The question mark in the header of this section indicates that the authors can only guess at the reasons for the creation of sometimes comic Hungarian names, which absolutely depart from correct Hungarian place-name practice. These strange names typically appear on the web pages of Austrian and Slovenian territories. For instance, the Austrian name Leitersdorf im Raabtal near Feldbach was replaced by the name *Rábakarmestere*, which means »conductor of the Rába River«; instead of Raabau one finds *Rábaakadálymentes*, which roughly means »obstacle-free Rába River« (Figure 11); the name Radkersburg/Gornja Radgona on



Figure 7: Csanálos in place of Urziceni (Internet 6).



Figure 8: Csanálos in the correct location (Internet 7).

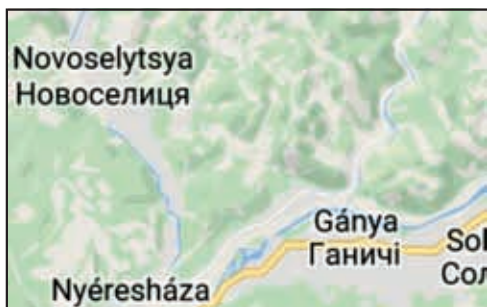


Figure 9: Only the Ukrainian form for Taracújfalu (Internet 8).

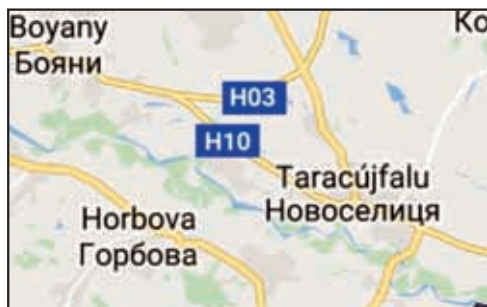


Figure 10: Taracújfalu in the incorrect place (Internet 9).

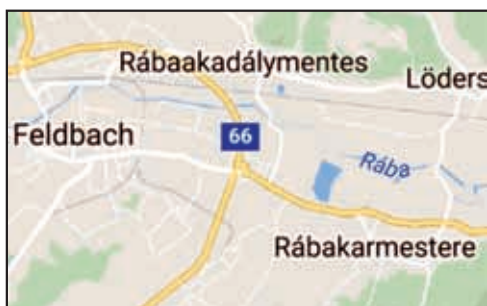


Figure 11: Incorrect names for Raabau and Leitersdorf in Raabtal (Internet 10).



Figure 12: Incorrect names for Radkersburg and Gornja Radgona (Internet 11).

the Austrian–Slovenian border is translated as *Kerékerősítővár* («wheel-strengthening castle»), and the name Podgrad on the Slovenian side is *Keréknépfel* («up on the wheel») in Hungarian (Figure 12).

Another strange example is the Hungarian exonym *Élőbecsület* («living honesty») for the southern Austrian settlement of Ehrenhausen (Figure 13). The meaning of certain elements of the original names can be identified in unjustified Hungarian forms; therefore, it may be presumed that a translation program was active in the background when the Hungarian names were uploaded, and these names were generated by a computer. In any case, a map with this «Hungarian» place name comes up with the hits for *Ehrenhausen*.

The major problem here is that the names were not checked at all. When we searched for further information on the false names above, it turned out that various applications using computer procedures disseminate these names; for instance, we were able to find offers for transportation services to the «aforementioned» places (Internet 13; Internet 14).



Figure 13: Incorrect name for Ehrenhausen (Internet 12).

3 Conclusion

It is no exaggeration that, based on the examples discussed above, the birth of false geographic names in large numbers in popular media represents a considerable linguistic, cultural, informational, and economic danger, partly because the false names are mixed with relevant data. The authors believe it very important that there should be institutional contact between the responsible geographical name authorities and the developers of online maps. It is advisable to monitor and examine the use of place names on the internet. Geographical name committees and national cartographic services will do the most to disseminate and popularize correct forms of geographic names if they make increasingly more standardized databases of such names freely available on the internet.

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