

A Protocol for Placename Standardization in a Bilingual Context

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Introduction

On June 5, 1982, at the conclusion of its annual meeting at the University of Ottawa, the Canadian Society for the Study of Names conducted a toponymic excursion under the direction of both myself and well-known toponymist Alan Rayburn in the general area east and south of Canada's capital city. Among the fortysome participants, mostly name scholars from Canada and the United States, was Bill Nicolaisen and his wife who were on their first visit to Eastern Ontario. I will always remember Bill's fascination as the tour bus went back and forth between English and French-speaking areas. At one point, Bill gave everyone a short lecture on what we were all experiencing. He explained to us the notion of *isonym* as a name boundary identifier and its relation to that of *isogloss* in dialect studies. As my book on French Placenames in Ontario (Lapierre 1981) had just been published, Bill then turned to me and asked whether the Province of Ontario had developed a protocol for the linguistic treatment of French minority names. Much to my embarrassment, I had to reply that I was not aware of such a policy. On the occasion of this special issue of *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* in his honor, I am now in a much better position to respond to Bill's question and to give an outline of the protocol that the Ontario Geographic Names Board developed over the years since the CSSN toponymic tour. In fact, I was called upon to play an active role in the development of this protocol.

I Developing a policy

In 1986, the Ontario Parliament enacted the French Language Services Act in order to answer the needs of its francophone population. One of the main features of this legislation was to provide services in the French language in areas where francophones constituted at least 10% of the population. Some 22 districts were so identified, mainly in the East and Northeast areas of the province. The area surrounding Ottawa is one of these areas.

One of the tasks involved in implementing the policy was the translation of all provincial statutes and legislation into the French Language. Of particular onomastic concern were pieces of legislation such as the Land and Territorial Division Act which included a substantial number of geographical names. Although professionals in their area of expertise, translators often were unable to provide the French form of an English toponym because of discrepancies between the form obtained by federal government translation rules (Gélinas-Surprenant 1991) and the form actually used in the speech community. Franco-Ontarians are for the most part Anglo-French bilinguals and are known to alternate from one language to another in their everyday discourse. In many cases, names translated into French coincided with locally used forms in the francophone speech community. But this was not always the case. For instance, applying translation rules to an official name such as *French River* would normally yield *Rivière French*. Field work revealed that local usage was *Rivière des Français*, an integral translation of both the generic and the specific elements of the name. In other cases, it was found that Franco-Ontarians used the official English name such as in *Mondor Creek* in lieu of the French translation *Ruisseau Mondor*. It soon became clear that the translation process could not go ahead without a prerequisite assessment of linguistic usage in the francophone communities of the province and the establishment of some kind of protocol for the linguistic treatment of French geographical names within a more general policy of placename standardization.

To assist in providing the necessary ground work for a comprehensive policy on French naming in Ontario, I was invited to chair an Interministerial Task Force on Bilingualism in Toponymy which was struck in 1988. At the same time, systematic field work in the 22 districts was undertaken in order to determine actual linguistic usage and provide the necessary information for the development of a comprehensive protocol.

Policy discussions (Smart 1990) supported by field work (Lapierre 1990) underlined the necessity to recognize not only one but several categories of names - official and non-official - in bilingual areas. In this regard, conformity with the principle of univocity, i.e. one geographical name for one geographical feature, as invoked by the 1967 United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, was of paramount importance. This policy takes into account the existence of multilingual areas and recommends that in such cases, name authorities "give a clear indication of equality or precedence of officially acknowledged names" (CPCGN 1968:101).

After several years of deliberations and consultations, the Task Force recommended that three types of names be recognized: a) the *Official Name* as approved by the appropriate authorities and listed in the provincial gazetteer, b) the *Officially Recognized Alternate Name*, i.e. a

name other than the official name in use in the francophone community for the same feature and c) the *French Equivalent*, i.e. a non-official translation of the official name for use mainly in prose-text applications. What follows are the results of discussions by members of the Task Force, a protocol for the linguistic treatment of French geographical names in Ontario.

II The Ontario Protocol

A. PREAMBLE

Under the ONTARIO GEOGRAPHIC NAMES BOARD ACT of Ontario, the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB) reports to the Legislature through the Minister of Natural Resources. The OGNB is the sole statutory authority in Ontario vested with the responsibility for recording, processing and recommending to the Minister for adoption the names of geographical entities including extents of same for official use.

The provincial toponymic database maintained by the Geographic Names Unit, Office of the Surveyor General, Natural Resources Information Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources, is, under the OGNB Act, the official repository of geographical names in Ontario. As official record, the database contains all geographical names approved for use in government produced maps, charts, gazetteers, signage, and similar publications and applications of Ontario, with pertinent coordinate information (geographic, UTM, etc.).

Names alternate in status to the official forms, known as *Alternate Names* are approved by the OGNB. Forms adopted as *French Language Equivalents* by MNR are also entered into the provincial toponymic database.

B. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy,

"Minister" means the Minister of Natural Resources.

"Board" means the Ontario Geographic Names Board, created under the OGNB Act (R.S.O. 1990, C.O. 16)

"Official Name" means a geographical name which has been approved by the Minister of Natural Resources upon recommendation of the Ontario Geographic Names Board and designated for publication in the *Gazetteer of Ontario*. Names of unincorporated entities are entered into the official record by the Board. In accord with the univocity principle, confirmed by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Geneva, 1967), there can be only one official name for a given geographical entity. Official names in Ontario usually belong to the English, French, and Aboriginal linguistic traditions.

"Alternate Name" means a geographical name which is different from the official name and which is in common and/or local use in the

Francophone community. In accord with the requirements of the French Language Services Act, such names are recommended by the Board for adoption by the Minister as officially recognized alternate names. The 1967 United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names provides for the use of such names in multilingual areas.

"French Equivalent" means a translation or an adaptation into the French language of an official name which is provided by the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources. These equivalents are not necessarily supported by local usage and do not require ministerial approval. They are to be used for specific purposes outlined in this policy.

C. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1) As provided by the French Language Services Act, this policy reflects the need to respect and promote French heritage in Ontario. At the same time, it seeks to preserve the integrity of geographical names. More specifically, it is designed to meet the needs of the francophone population of Ontario in the areas of mapping, publications and signage as they relate to geographical names.

2) In recommending official and alternate French names to the Minister, the Board shall ensure that the rules governing French orthography and punctuation are brought to the attention of all interested parties.

3) The Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources shall provide French equivalents for all official names which are not of the French linguistic tradition except in those cases where alternate names have been approved by the Board. In these cases, alternate names will be used in lieu of French equivalents.

4) Any problem concerning official and alternate names in the French language should be addressed to the Board. Problems concerning French equivalents should be addressed to the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

D. NAMES ON MAPS

1) Geographical names shown on Government of Ontario maps should be only official names approved by the Ontario Geographic Names Board.

2) Where an officially approved alternate name exists for a feature or place having an official name, both the official name and the officially approved alternate name (in bracketed form) will, map scale permitting, be shown on government maps. The Board will periodically update its list of officially approved alternate names.

Examples:

Detroit River	<i>(Rivière Détroit)</i>
Lake St. Clair	<i>(Lac Sainte-Claire)</i>
Niagara Falls	<i>(Chutes Niagara)</i>

Protocol for Placename Standardization 295

3) Where a map forms part of a unilingual French publication or part of the French text of a back-to-back bilingual publication, as in brochures, reports, etc., or when a map has been prepared specifically for the Francophone population and incorporates text in the French language, the rules governing treatment of names in prose text (see E) shall apply.

4) In the case of maps which are part of a side-by-side bilingual publication, official names shall be used together with alternate names or French equivalents in bracketed form.

E. NAMES IN PROSE TEXTS

As official repository of geographical nomenclature of the province, the database of the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources contains some 57,000 official names. In addition, it contains the corresponding French language forms to be used in connection with these names in various areas of application as set out in this policy. These alternate names or French equivalents are the only forms to be used in government publications to be translated into French.

- 1) In publications prepared for the Francophone population, only the alternate names approved by the Board or the French equivalents provided by the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources shall be used.
- 2) In accord with the requirements of the French Language Services Act, the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources shall make alternate names and French equivalents available to all government ministries and agencies. The Ministry should consider the publication, for the general public, of a listing of official names, alternate names and French equivalents. This list could be published as a Glossary or as an extended version of the *Gazetteer of Ontario* which would include both the official names and their corresponding French forms.

F. NAMES ON ROAD SIGNS

In the 22 designated areas of the French Language Services Act, only official and alternate names approved by the Board may be used on G.I-3 (Hamlets) and G.I-6 (Rivers or Lakes) highway signs. French equivalents are not to be used. Questions concerning the implementation of the above guidelines are to be addressed to the Geographic Names Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

G. REVISION

This policy shall be reviewed as required in order to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the francophone population of Ontario.

III Conclusion

The Ontario protocol, officially adopted in 1992 by the Ontario Geographic Names Board, serves today as guide for all decisions concerning French geographical nomenclature in the province. Three years after the adoption of the policy, the Glossary mentioned in E (2) was published (MNR 1995) and is now available to government services and to the general public. It might be interesting to add that the Ontario *modus operandi* has attracted the attention of name authorities outside Canada, namely the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Austria's Österreichische Kartographische Kommission and the Kultur Institut und Landesverband für Heimatpflege in South Tirol, as one possible way of dealing with issues relating to the linguistic treatment of names in multilingual areas.

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