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Interactive comment on “Brief Communication: Getting Greenland’s glaciers right – a new dataset of all official Greenlandic glacier names” by A. A. Bjørk et al.

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The number of publications on glaciers and other cryospheric phenomena in Greenland has increased significantly in recent decades. At the same time, the political system in Greenland has changed and so has the use of Greenlandic place names. However, this linguistic development is not reflected in the growing international scientific literature on glaciers in Greenland, and available information on the internet is not very helpful. Hence, it is very relevant to inform editorial teams of cryospheric journals and researchers, who work in Greenland or apply Greenlandic glacier data, about the correct use of Greenlandic place names in international literature.

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Reviewer Hester Jiskoot has already made some excellent suggestions for how the database and paper can be improved, so there is no reason for me to repeat these. However, I do find the usefulness of the data rather limited. The database only contains information on 733 glaciers out of approximately 20300 Greenlandic local glaciers and ice caps (Rastner et al., 2012) and hundreds of outlet glaciers from the Greenland Ice Sheet/Indlandsisen (?). A more useful database would include all glacier names shown on the 1:250,000 topographic map series with updated orthography and correction of misspellings, and an indication of whether the name is official or unofficial.

Below I have listed some suggestions for improving the impact of the paper and database:

CHAPTER 1

1. It seems relevant to mention in this context that there is precedence in the international scientific literature for using local glacier names (e.g. Vatnajökull, Longyearbreen, Storglaciären, Aletschgletscher, . . .). Hence, there is no excuse for not using official Greenlandic names internationally.

2. If it is the official recommendation from NAA, then just say it straight out: Do not anglicize Greenlandic glacier names. Then, we will know that we should not write Helheim Glacier, Petermann Glacier etc. in international publications. The primary aim of this communication is to change the way that researchers spell Greenlandic glacier names. Then we need to know, what we do wrong, and how we should do it correctly.

3. It is also worth mentioning that the widely used USA National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency GEOnet Names Server (<http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>), which includes official geographic names authorized by the United States Board on Geographic Names (US BGN), has not been updated by the most recent (i.e. last 20 years) changes in Greenlandic orthography and single authorization of place names, and this database contains errors (e.g. that Russell Glacier is a variant name of Isunnguata Sermia).

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CHAPTER 2

The latest and most relevant changes of Greenlandic place names are not included in the text. I think that many readers of this paper will find information about these changes interesting.

1. Insert 1-2 sentences about the language reform of 1973 and exemplify the new orthography by the common misspelling of Kangerlussuaq Gletsjer (old orthography: Kangerdlugssuaq Gletscher).
2. In 1996 single authorization of place names was introduced in Greenland, so that the many places, which previously had both official Greenlandic and Danish names, now only have an official Greenlandic name. For instance, the only official name of the ice stream, which in scientific literature often is referred to by its old name Jakobshavn Isbræ, is Sermeq Kujalleq.
3. In 2001 the word gletsjer became the only official way to spell glacier in Danish. This change was implemented in Greenland by NAA. This could be exemplified by Helheimgletsjer (old spelling: Helheimgletscher). It is very important to emphasize this change in the text, as researchers almost never use this new spelling of glacier names in scientific literature.
4. It will also be very useful for many colleagues and editorial teams to know that in 2008 the Greenland Home Rule (now Greenland Self-Government) approved a new law that divides Greenland into three official regions: West Greenland (Kitaa), East Greenland (Tunu) and North Greenland (Avannaarsua). These three regions should be used, when researchers refer to the location of glaciers, instead of the old colonial division of Greenlandic regions that is applied in scientific literature today (see e.g. Encyclopedia of Snow, Ice, and Glaciers, page 479, figure 1). Please add these regions to Figure 1 and to all online maps (see comments by Hester Jiskoot).

CHAPTER 3

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1. I could only find two ice caps in the database (Sermersuaq and Flade Isblink). I was under the impression that more ice caps have official names. Could you please recheck whether this is correct? Anyway, make a comment (maybe in a new column) in the database that these names refer to ice caps.

2. What I really miss in this paper is a set of recommendations on what we as researchers should do, when we want to name either an unnamed glacier or an unofficially named glacier in our publications. With approximately 20000 glaciers without an official name, this issue will continue to exist for decades. We would like to know, what NAA (or Oqaasileriffik) wants us to do. For instance, (1) should we use the unofficial names from the 1:250,000 topographic map series; (2) if so, should we update the orthography and correct misspellings; and (3) should we use “Sermia”, “Gletsjer” or “Glacier” as part of the name, when we name a previously unnamed glacier in a publication?

3. The idea of inviting the scientific community to send you suggestions of glacier names (with references) may seem appealing at first, but local use of glacier names and historic glacier names should have precedence over glaciers named by the scientific community. How do you think that people in a Greenlandic village will react if a glacier close to their village suddenly is given an official name by some foreign researcher, who has named the glacier in a remote sensing study? I don't think that this is the way to proceed. I suggest that you compile the unofficial names of glaciers and ice caps used in the 1:250,000 topographic map series, update the orthography and correct misspellings, and then send the list to NAA. NAA will most likely need a long for carefully checking every single name and make decisions. Thereafter, it will make sense to add more names to the list by asking the local population and check historical and scientific literature. Also, it is relevant to record the meanings of glacier names for cultural history reasons. Otherwise, we may end up in the same situation as the astronomy community in 1988, when they had to establish a group of scientists to compile a database of the meanings of asteroid names (Schmadel, 1992).

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MINOR CORRECTIONS

P. 1595, l. 9: Collected by whom?

P. 1595, l. 14: It is a bit confusing that you refer to non-Greenlandic glacier names as “Danish/foreign” names. Here in line 14, it makes sense to write “foreign” as most non-Danish expeditions named glaciers in their mother tongue. In contrast, it makes most sense that the title for column C in the database is “Danish” name, as the only non-Danish name in column C is Glacier de France (Kattilersorpia) and that name is not official.

P. 1595, l. 26-27: Why do you refer the “Berthelsen List” in past tense? The list still exists, although it has been updated.

P. 1595, l. 27: Provide an example of an error in the Berthelsen List.

Database, cell C535: I guess that the glacier name should be either “Pasterzegletsjer” or “Pasterze Gletsjer”?

Database, cell C572: Please correct typo.

Database, cell B569: Delete this cell text or move B569 to D569.

Database, cell B641: Delete this cell text or move B641 to D641.

Database, cell A651 and B651: If you should the general format, then A651 should be move to C651, and B651 should be moved to D651 or be deleted.

Database, cell D653: Why do you include the old spelling “Illluarsuit Gletscher” for this glacier?

Database, cell C710: Revise cell text.

REFERENCES

Rastner, P., Bolch, T., Mölg, N., Machguth, H., Le Bris, R., and Paul, F.: The first complete inventory of the local glaciers and ice caps on Greenland. The Cryosphere, C632

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