

A POX ON NEW KARST TERMS

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Karst has long been recognized as having unique characteristics relative to other terranes. The dissolution process of the underlying soluble bedrock is responsible for the development of solution conduits and caves, sinkholes and swallets, springs (resurgences, exurgences, etc.), uvalas, poljes, various types of karren, and other specific features not commonly found in other terranes.

The paragraph above contains several specific karst terms. These and many of the terms found in various karst glossaries (e.g., Cullingford 1962, pp. 559–568; Mohr & Poulson 1966, pp. 218–226; Monroe 1970; Sweeting 1973, pp. 332–335; Lowe & Waltham 1995; Field 1999; 2002) have been mostly established decades to centuries before present time because of a perceived need to be able to identify and define specific observed features or measurements. To a large degree, the development of these older karst terms was entirely appropriate. I would suggest, however, that the development of newer karst terms is not so readily warranted.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a deliberate attempt by modern karst investigators to continue establishing new karst terms. In many instances, the terms chosen appear to be not well thought-out, duplicative of older terms, overly confusing in an attempt to be “all encompassing,” or based on limited observations and/or measurements. Given these problems, I suggest that would-be karst linguists step back and “take a deep breath” prior to inventing additional new karst terms.

I am not suggesting here that there aren't newly discovered features, observations, or measurements that do not warrant developing new karst terms. To the contrary, I am sure that just the opposite is true. However, as the compiler of one of several karst glossaries, I want to recommend that modern-day karst investigators put more thought into the need for one or more new karst terms rather than just the formality and complexity of the new terms.

I further recommend that would-be karst linguists take more time to look through the existing literature for one or more karst terms or combination of karst terms that already adequately describe the features, observations, or measurements that the new term is intended to describe. If no existing karst terms or combination of karst terms appear to adequately meet the investigator's current observations and/or measurements, I also recommend that karst investigators expand their observations and measurements to better verify the necessity of creating a new term. If a new karst term is determined to still be necessary, the new term should be understandable by the international community (e.g., colloquial and poorly translatable terminology should be avoided) and should have a Latin or Greek root. Lastly, as no formal body exists, I would like to put forward the idea that all newly-proposed karst terms be subject to review and approval by an acceptable “board of experts” to ensure the appropriateness of the new terms.



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