PROPOSALS TO AMEND THE CODE

Edited by Dan H. Nicolson (US)

(01-02) Two proposals concerning confusingly similar epithets in the genitive case

P. S. Green, W. T. Stearn & R. K. Brummitt

(01) Add a new paragraph after and a new example to Art. 53, and delete part of Art. 60 Ex. 19 after the semi-colon.

“53.7. When the final epithets of heterotypic names of species in the same genus, or of infraspecific taxa in the same species, are substantives in the genitive case and based on the same personal name, they are to be treated as homonyms if they differ only in the genitive termination of these epithets.


When personal names are Latinized, the stem of the latin word is the personal name itself, while its termination depends on gender, number and case. It follows, therefore, that the stems of epithets based on an identical personal name are undeniably the same, even when the individuals with the same name being commemorated are different people. Names in the same genus which have epithets based on the same stem plus a genitive termination may therefore be treated as homonyms. We may note that in the different but closely allied situation where one such epithet has been published with an incorrect termination, Art. 60.11 treats all such terminations as interchangeable, whether they be male or female, or singular or plural, and the names involved are mere variants of one name.

We consider that in the case of the proposed example above, Podlech & Kirchhoff were right to publish a name with a new epithet, Astragalus victoriae, rather than allow the names A. matthewsiae and A. matthewsii to exist together in the genus Astragalus. Such pairs of names are indeed confusingly similar, particularly since most people, irrespective of their native tongue, would pronounce them in the same way, or either of them in either of two opposite ways.

Up to and including the Sydney Code (1983), the Code gave no direct indication of whether such names, when heterotypic, should be treated as homonyms or not.

1 The Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AE, U.K.
However, many might have regarded the provision that when two names are so similar that they are likely to be confused they should be treated as homonyms (now Art. 53.3) as applicable in such cases. The report of the Special Committee on Orthography prior to the 1987 Berlin Congress considered the matter and discussed the case of *Astragalus matthewsiae* (see Taxon 35: 799. 1986). Their conclusion was, however, curiously ambivalent, because their proposal 188 (later Art. 73 Prop. N) dealt only with correctability of one name and not with homonymy or otherwise of two heterotypic names. The report commented that *A. matthewsiae* was not a homonym (of *A. matthewsiii*) but was possibly a confusingly similarly spelled name. It was then stated that one half of the committee believed that *matthewsiae* was correct under the Code (i.e. that *A. matthewsiii* and *A. matthewsiae* should not be treated as homonyms), and then, illogically, that the other half opposed Prop. 118 (which concerned correctability and not homonymy). The Rapporteurs’ comments (in Taxon 36: 246-247. 1987) did not refer at all to the question of homonymy, nor did the discussion at the Berlin Congress (in Englera 9: 187-188. 1989). Proposal N was accepted at the Congress, but its wording was irrelevant to the homonymy question. Nonetheless, in the Berlin *Code* (1988) a new Example was added (now Art. 60, Ex. 19) which states that *A. matthewsiae* is not a later homonym of *A. matthewsiii*. This was apparently inserted by the Editorial Committee despite half the Special Committee apparently disagreeing, and without the matter having been voted on or even discussed at the Congress. We feel justified, therefore, in putting the question of homonymy to a vote of a Congress for the first time.

(02) *Modify Proposal 01 above by adding, after “in the genitive case” the words “and either both singular or both plural”.*

While, in our opinion, it is very desirable that heterotypic names which differ only in the termination of a genitive epithet in the singular should be treated as homonyms, to avoid confusion, there might be doubt as to whether pairs of names involving one genitive singular and one genitive plural should be treated the same way. Such names would be less confusable in either the written or spoken form. Nonetheless, the stem is the same and only the termination differs. In the analogous situation of correction of a mis-spelling, Art. 60.11 treats these terminations as interchangeable. Fiala (Lilacs: 48. 1988) proposed the name *Syringa debelderi*, but this has to be corrected to *S. debelderorum* since the author clearly stated that the plant was named after Robert and Jelena de Belder. By analogy with such epithets in the singular only, we would accept that if *S. debelder* and *S. debelderorum* had been published as heterotypic names they should be treated as homonyms, but we recognize that others might disagree here while agreeing in the case of singular epithets. Plural genitive epithets are rather uncommon, and we know of no case where the question of homonymy with a singular epithet has ever arisen, but in case others consider this important we offer a let-out.