Proposals to amend the Code by changing the definition of autonyms

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Autonyms are defined in the Vienna Code (McNeill & al. in Regnum Veg. 146. 2006) as the names of subdivisions of genera or infraspecific taxa that contain the type of the name of a genus or species with a final epithet that repeats exactly the generic name or specific epithet. Under the Vienna Code, autonyms are, after having been established, ordinary names that must, in particular, be respected in new combinations. This is implicit in Art. 11.6 and Art. 11 Note 3. It is therefore absurd that an autonym is established by the publication of a name of a subdivision of a genus or infraspecific taxon with a different type and final epithet rather than by the publication of the name that has the same type and final epithet as the autonym. My 2004 proposal (Niederle in Taxon 53: 217–218. 2004) should have changed the situation. Maybe a better-informed public would accept it this time. I propose the changes again and expect thorough consideration.

Autonyms are defined in Art. 6.8 and dealt with in Art. 22 and Art. 26. Also important are Art. 11.2, 11.6 and Art. 11 Note 3.


In 1928, Smith and Forrest recombined Primula meyeri as P. amoena M. Bieb. subsp. meyeri (Rupr.) W.W. Smith & Forrest (in Notes Roy. Bot. Gard. Edinburgh 16: 42. 1928), and this automatically established the autonym P. amoena M. Bieb. subsp. amoena according to Art. 6.8 and Art. 26.3 of the Vienna Code. Under Art. 11.6, an autonym always has priority over the name that established it. As a result, there were two names at the rank of subspecies: P. amoena subsp. amoena, dated 1928, with priority over the simultaneously published P. amoena subsp. meyeri.

In 1978, Valentine and Lamond published the combination Primula elatior subsp. meyeri, including P. amoena in synonymy, and argued that meyeri was the oldest available epithet at the rank of subspecies, whereas in reality the epithet of the autonym, amoena, had priority.

Under my proposal, the autonym Primula amoena subsp. amoena would be automatically established by, and have priority from, the valid publication of the species name P. amoena in 1808, and the autonym P. meyeri subsp. meyeri would automatically established by, and have priority from, the valid publication of the species name P. meyeri in 1863. The correct name for the subspecies of P. elatior Hill that comprises both P. amoena and P. meyeri would therefore be P. elatior subsp. amoena.

Compare the two examples. Although the correct name is the same, under the Vienna Code, the name Primula elatior subsp. amoena has to be used because publication of P. amoena subsp. meyeri established the autonym P. amoena subsp. amoena, which has priority. Without the publication of P. amoena subsp. meyeri, an arbitrary subspecific epithet could be correct, either amoena, or meyeri, or any other, which seems absurd. Under my proposal, P. elatior subsp. amoena has to be used for the simple reason that the species name P. amoena was validly published earlier than P. meyeri, which is much more straightforward.

Similarly, for subdivisions of genera, autonyms would be automatically established by the valid publication of the genus name, the date of which would decide priority.

It would be no burden for information systems because merely the name at the explicitly published rank is to be stored.

(168) Change Art. 22.1, Art. 22.3, Art. 26.1 and Art. 26.3 as follows and delete Rec. 22A.1, Rec. 22B.1, Rec. 26A.1, Rec. 26A.3 and Rec. 26B.1:

“22.1. The name of any subdivision of a genus that includes the type of the adopted, legitimate name of the genus to which it is assigned is to repeat that generic name unaltered as its epithet, not followed by an author citation (see Art. 46).

22.3. The first instance of valid publication of a legitimate name of a genus automatically establishes the corresponding autonyms of subdivisions of the genus at all ranks (see also Art. 32.8). The epithet of an autonym literally repeats the name whose publication established it.

26.1. The name of any infraspecific taxon that includes the type of the adopted, legitimate name of the species to which it is assigned is to repeat the specific epithet unaltered as its final epithet, not followed by an author citation (see Art. 46).

26.3. The first instance of valid publication of a legitimate name of a species automatically establishes the corresponding autonyms of infraspecific taxa at all ranks within the species (see also Art. 32.8). The final epithet of an autonym literally repeats the epithet of the name whose publication established it.”