ON THE QUESTION RAISED BY DR. HELEN MUIR-WOOD
WHETHER TWO NAMES DIFFERING FROM ONE ANOTHER
ONLY BY THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE RESPECTIVELY
OF A DIACRITIC MARK SHOULD BE REGARDED AS
HOMONYMS OF ONE ANOTHER

By E. M. HERING
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(Commission's reference Z.N.(S.)538)

(Extracts from letters dated 11th August and 26th September, 1951)

A. Letter dated 11th August, 1951

In answer to your question whether generic names differing from one another
only by the presence in one case and the absence in the other of a diacritic mark
should be regarded as homonyms, I give you my opinion on the four points raised:—

(1) Words differing by reason of a diacritic mark possess in most cases a
different pronunciation and mostly a different sense. Zoological names
differing in this manner are derived from different words and should
not be regarded as homonyms.

(2) The difference between two zoological names so created is sufficient to
make them suitable for concurrent use in every case. It is not desirable
that the Règles should provide that any pair of such names should be
treated as homonyms of one another. (Tomquist means thorn-twig,
Tornquist means literally tower-twig. In the Czechoslovak language
r is spoken = r, but ř is spoken rsh and words differing in "r" and
"ř" have a different sense!)

(3) In the example of "Miilleria" and "Mulleria" the diacritic mark is
sufficient to distinguish the two names; the difference points out also
the difference between the grandfather and grandson!* 

(4) In the present language use Tornquist cannot be regarded as a German
name; in the most cases one may assume that this is the surname of a
man, the ancestors of whom came from Sweden. But there are so many
names in German which were common to Germany and Sweden in older
times that it may be that in some parts of Germany there are to be
found families bearing names identical or nearly identical with Swedish
names. There are also many names in Sweden with alternative modes
of spelling but with the same sense, especially the composita with twig:
-quist, -qvist, -kvist, etc. All these have the same sense and the same
pronunciation, but zoological names derived from these composita
cannot be regarded as homonyms of another. There is no other possibility
than to use them as different zoological names, and the same must be
binding for the names differing by reason of a diacritic mark.

*The reference here is to a question in my letter to Dr. Hering of 5th August, 1951, regarding
a hypothetical case in which a generic name Miilleria was based upon the name of a German
zoologist and another generic name Mulleria without an umlaut based on the name of the fore-
going zoologist's grandson who was an American citizen and who had discontinued the use of the
umlaut. (Signed) Francis Hemming, 5th February, 1951.

B. Letter dated 26th September, 1951

I have corresponded with my Czech friend Dalibor Povolný and I asked him
for the name of the diacritic mark "'" in the Czech language. I now give you
his remarks on this matter. He tells me that all his colleagues at Brno hold the
same opinion as that expressed in my last letter on this matter.

The Czech name of this diacritic mark is "háčeek" (pronounced hatcheck); this name means "a little hook."
The effect of this mark which can occur above the majority of the consonants (and above some vowels also) is to soften the sound. Thus "c" is pronounced as "ts," but "č" is pronounced as "tch" or "cz" as in the word Czech (čech). The letter "š" is pronounced as "ss," but "š" as "sh." Again the letter "ž" is pronounced as "z" (in the word "zoological"), and the letter "ž" as "j" (in the word "journal"). The letter "ř" is the normal "r," but the letter "ř" is not found in the English or German languages; it comes near to "rj." The letters with the "háček" are found in other Slav languages as self-dependent letters.

It is not possible to homonymise words, in which in one case the letter is written without, in the other, with, the diacritic mark "háček." In every case the two words possess their own pronounciation and, what is more important, their own sense. There was described a Thysanopter to the honour of the paleontologist Fric (pronounced Fritch) as Thaeniothrips frici. If this name were to be written as frici, then it would be pronounced "fritsi," and this would sound as though the species had been named after a German named Fritz.

The name of the well known Czech entomologist Sulc is pronounced like the German name Schulz, and if a hypothetical generic name Sulcia were written without the hook, it would not be pronounced as in English "Shoultsia" but "Ssoultsia."

So I cannot see any other possibility than to treat two different names the one with, the other without, a diacritic mark as separate and not homonym names.

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ON THE SIGNIFICANCE TO BE ATTACHED FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE LAW OF HOMONYMY TO THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF A DIACRITIC MARK

By LEIF STORMER
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(Commission’s reference Z.N.(S.)538)

(Letter dated 29th August, 1951)

Concerning your: "Question whether generic names differing from one another only by the presence in one case and the absence in the other of a diacritic mark over one of the letters should be regarded as homonyms," my opinion is as follows:—

(1) In the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) as well as in Germany, the letters o and ő are distinctly different vowels. They are pronounced differently and words such as "stor"—meaning great or large—and "stör"—meaning sturgeon—are distinctly different words.

(2) I think, as a consequence of what is said above, that scientific names containing the letters o and ő, but otherwise similar, should be treated as separate names. This also implies that families and Orders could be established with names only separable by the diacritic mark.

(3) It may create some confusion that some persons drop the umlaut in their names. In spite of this, I would prefer to maintain o and ő, and u and ú as separate letters, distinguishing different zoological names. This would mean that, if there exists a name Mülleria it would be possible also to establish a new genera Mulleria based on a person by name Muller, even if that person or his ancestors once used the name Müller.
Hering, E M. 1952. "On the question raised by Dr. Helen Muir-Wood whether two names differing from one another only by the presence or absence respectively of a diacritic mark should be regarded as homonyms of one another." The Bulletin of zoological nomenclature 6, 252–253. https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.part.16047.