A PLEA AGAINST THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF INCORRECTLY
SPELT NAMES: ON ARTICLE 32a (ii) OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CODE OF ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE. Z.N.(S.) 1880

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Pour qu'on suive une loi sans rancœur ni contrainte.
Il faut qu'aux droits acquis elle ne porte atteinte.*
P. Bonnet, De la Nomenclature en Sciences Naturelles, p. 7

The discussion which has taken place on the subject of the spelling of the
generic name *Liphistius* (Araneidae) and which I have summarized elsewhere

Previously the corresponding Article 19, of the old Code, in taking into
account what had been done up to its elaboration at the Paris Congress (1889)
and the Moscow Congress (1892), states: “the original orthography of a name is
to be preserved unless an error of transcription, a lapsus calami or a typographical
error is evident”. That is to say that incorrect names should be corrected.

And that is why, in the case of the Spiders, citing only a few examples:
-Micromata Latr., 1804, was corrected to *Micrommata* by its author in 1806;
-Argyope Sav. & Aud., 1826, was corrected to *Argiope* by its authors in 1827;
-Lipistius Schiodte, 1849, was corrected to *Liphistius* by Thorell, 1869;
-Ozyptila Simon, 1864, was corrected to *Oxyptila* by Thorell, 1869;
-Isopeda L.K., 1875, was corrected to *Isopoda* by Thorell, 1881;
-Sulsula Simon, 1882, was corrected to *Salsula* by its author in 1893.

There are thus, in zoological nomenclature, several thousand incorrectly
spelt generic names which have been corrected (see Nomenclator Zoologicus
Neave) and very many taxonomists approve of these corrections.

Today Article 32a (ii) has restricted the correction of faulty names, stating
that it is proper to correct the original name only, “if there is in the original
publication clear evidence of an inadvertent error, such as a lapsus calami, or a
copyist’s or printer’s error (incorrect transliteration, improper latinization, and
use of an inappropriate connecting vowel are not to be considered inadvertent
errors)”.

I do not think that the nomenclators who drew up this text wanted all the
thousands of faulty names which had already been corrected, over the past 200
years, to be re-established. That would be monstrous. And yet, this is the
present situation, for there are authors capable of re-establishing corrected names
in their original incorrect form.

Thus I think it right to say at once that it would have been wise to have ended
the statement in parenthesis by adding: “nevertheless, mis-spelt names that
have already been corrected are not to be re-established in their incorrect form”.

Besides, to re-establish errors is to go against the express wish of authors who
have corrected a faulty name that they have published themselves. Thus
Latreille, and Savigny & Audouin, corrected *Micromata* to *Micrommata* and

* To be obeyed without resentment or constraint, a law must not infringe established rights.
Argyope to Argiope, two years after having proposed them, having recognized that the names were erroneous. Similarly Simon corrected his Salusa to Salsula, a case certainly of a printer’s error. Subsequently these corrected names, especially Micrommata, Argiope, and Oxystila, have each been used thousands of times with their correct spellings. And now we are asked to use them again with their original errors of spelling! I can only repeat that that would be contrary to sound sense and even monstrous!

But where a faulty name has remained unnoticed for many years it should be wrong to correct it. For example Argyroneta Latreille, 1804 is a lapsus for Argyronecta, but for 160 years this error has been overlooked and the faulty name has been used thousands of times. In this case it would be evidently absurd to establish the correct spelling now. The stability of nomenclature depends on this procedure.

Besides—and it is in this sense that the wording of Article 32a (ii) is strongly debatable—it is reasonable to ask what is the kind of mistake that exists in a faulty word? For example, in the case of Micromata, Ozyptila and Lipistius, are these cases of lapsus calami or errors of transcription of printers’ errors? If even on reaching an understanding of the difference between a lapsus and an error of transcription,* who could say for certain, apart from the authors themselves? We ourselves support the idea that these are cases of lapsus calami and that it was only by inattention that Latreille forgot an ‘m’ in Micromata, that Simon put a ‘z’ instead of an ‘x’ in Ozyptila and that Schiede left out the ‘h’ of Lipistius although he knew quite well that he was in error. In consequence we were within our rights to correct these mistakes and having done so, to maintain the correct spelling of these names (Micrommata, Oxyptila and Liphistius). But, apparently, some people pretended that these were errors of transcription and because of this could not be corrected and they therefore re-established the original mistakes although these names had been rectified long ago. Thus we have, following the interpretation of the authors, names which with the support of Article 32a (ii) would officially be spelt in two different ways! That is not possible or where would stability in nomenclature be? I would like to think that the good sense of the majority of zoologists will lead them to maintain the correct spelling of the names emended before 1961. But, further, I think that one ought not to allow the errors of transcription that can be made by some living authors. Two examples: since all names formed from the Greek word οφθαλμος are spelt ophthalmus (there are certainly many) it would be abnormal to allow a microphthalmus to be written by a zoologist in 1968. Similarly the Latins say quadrangulatus (or better quadrangularus, to suppress the hiatus); it would not be possible to validate a quadroangulatus which, while arising from the use of an inappropriate connecting vowel, would be none the less a gross spelling mistake. For us, microphthalmus and quadroangulatus would be cases of lapsus calami which it is necessary to correct. Thus all spelling mistakes which are errors due to carelessness or ignorance ought to be corrected without exception.

* Indeed, what does one call a lapsus? Etymologically, it is an error in writing (an error due to a slip of the pen); in that case everything written incorrectly is a lapsus calami, the inadvertent spelling and the error due to ignorance of the proper transcription of Greek and Latin words.
It is the duty of authors not to make these mistakes and of those who discover them to correct them and when that has been done, nothing more should be said.

Finally, we emphasize that the application by certain authors of the wording of the parenthesis of Article 32a (ii) leads to a lively reaction and even to indignation amongst those who favour correct names, and one can be quite sure that many zoologists, of whom I am one, will always refuse to write a faulty name especially when the correct spelling has been established for a long time. Accordingly they are obliged to disobey the rules.

Yes, I know one can do what Dr. Levi has done for Liphistius, ask the Commission on Nomenclature to confirm the correct spelling of Liphistius and to reject the original but erroneous Lipistius.

But what is one to do about each of these thousands of incorrect names which have been emended and re-established, make an application to the Commission? As I have already said this would be an amusement unworthy of scientists and one has other things to do in Zoological Nomenclature than to pass the time arguing about the correctness and the incorrectness of names, when a simple rule could solve the problems at one blow. When a rule is badly drafted it is the rule that should be corrected. The answer is, quite simply, to suppress the contents of the parenthesis to the Article as drafted, to bring it into the form of the old Article 19; thus all incorrect names could no longer be re-established in the erroneous form. This measure would reinforce the stability of zoological names, which is the principal aim of our Code as is rightly written in the Preamble.

I think that all Members of the Commission will be of my opinion. I, therefore, ask them to adopt the following motion:

The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, having considered the grave inconvenience which has followed the strict application of Article 32, paragraph (a)(ii), which allows the re-establishment of many thousands of incorrectly spelt names to the detriment of their correct emendations, has decided to suppress the words, "(incorrect transliteration, improper latinization, and use of an inappropriate connecting vowel are not to be considered inadvertent errors)". The term lapsus calami suffices of itself to permit the correction of all sorts of spelling mistakes, errors of transcription and printers’ errors.

Note by the Secretary

The parenthetical clause in Article 32a (ii) dates back to the Copenhagen Decisions, 1957, para. 71(1)(a)(i) and para. 93 stemming from various proposals under “Case No. 5” (agenda) published in Bulletin 10 : 61–166, 1953. It was reproduced in the Bradley Draft, Article 11 Section 1(a) (Bull. zool. Nomencl., 14 : 88) and descended virtually unchanged into the 1961 Code now in force. It would be difficult to get such an entrenched clause removed.

The only problem requiring attention as I see it is the safeguarding of emendations that have entered into established usage. This was not taken care of by either Copenhagen or London.

Hemming in his ‘Monograph’ on the emendation of names (Bulletin 7 : 4–59) seems to have made two different proposals about it. The first (p. 15) is
that zoologists should apply to the Commission for a ruling that such emendations should be accepted (this presumably implies a ruling under the ordinary powers to put particular names on the Official List).

The other (p. 29) was that a Recommendation should be inserted after what is now Article 32a (ii) to the effect that an emendation in current use should not be changed without consulting the Commission, which puts the accent rather the other way. A third possibility is that words could be added to Article 32a (ii) to make it clear that Article 23b applies to the incorrect forms of names that have been corrected and of which the corrected forms are not themselves nomina oblitera.

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