



The problem of hemihomonyms and the on-line hemihomonyms database (HHDB)

Alexey SHIPUNOV

Department of Biology, Minot State University, 500 University Ave. W, Minot, North Dakota 58707, USA.
<dactylorhiza@gmail.com>.

Abstract

Hemihomonyms (same nomina which are used for taxa from different nomenclature jurisdictions) are an overlooked but genuine nuisance in biological nomenclature. We compiled the first list of hemihomonyms for nomina in bacteriological, botanical and zoological nomenclatures and prepared an on-line database, the “Hemihomonym database” or *HHDB* (<<http://herba.msu.ru/shipunov/os/homonyms/index.php>>). *HHDB* now includes 1164 nomina, including 12 triple hemihomonyms. A simple suffix-based solution (like “*Oenanthe* (z)” for *Oenanthe* in zoology) could be used in case of hemihomonymy. More effort should be afforded towards the resolution of long-standing nomenclature confusing situations such as hemihomonymy, including regarding the nomina of higher taxa, nomina of intermediate ranks and ambiregnal nomina.

Keywords: hemihomonyms, homonyms, biological nomenclature, databases

Introduction

If a scientific name or nomen is used for more than one species, genus or other taxon, this nomen is considered to be a homonym. The common opinion is that homonyms are invalid in biological nomenclature. However, historical development of biological taxonomy led to the establishment of different Codes of nomenclature. Homonyms are “illegal” within every Code (i.e., “*incorrect*” in botanical nomenclature, “*invalid*” in zoological nomenclature” or “*inadequate*” according to the terminology of Dubois 2011*b*), but what happens if the nomina in question are under the jurisdiction of different Codes? This situation is not regulated by any Rules and therefore the same nomina for different taxa are not homonyms in the strict sense. Starobogatov (1991) proposed the term “hemihomym” for such situations. Hemihomonyms (like the plant generic nomen *Oenanthe* and the bird generic nomen *Oenanthe*) are often considered as nomenclatural curiosities which probably was the right approach in previous centuries. *The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Anonymous 1999) simply states that “*The name of an animal taxon identical with the name of a taxon which has never been treated as animal is not a homonym for the purposes of zoological nomenclature*”. However, contemporary large-scale databases and search engines revive the problem of hemihomonyms. The simple experiment with Google image search for *Oenanthe* will immediately show the problem: whereas scientific names are often considered to be unique identifiers, the hemihomonyms will spoil the result: the user will retrieve images for both the plant and the bird. Therefore, as long as hemihomonyms exist, and the result of such a search is not unambiguous, we cannot achieve the ultimate goal of nomenclature, i.e., a one-to-one relation between nomen and taxon. In large databases, hemihomonyms will not only hamper the effectiveness of the system, but could also be misleading. Computer-based tools do not

“understand” the jurisdictions of the Codes, so any database which contains nomina from different Codes will always be a potential “security hole”. Databases like *USDA Plant*, *IPNI* or *Index Fungorum* become now commonly used scientific tools, and without a hemihomonyms check, they may be a source of mistakes similar to well-known cases related with the use of office software (Zeeberg *et al.* 2004).

The level of hemihomonyms knowledge is, however, surprisingly small. Before this work, nobody knew the number of hemihomonyms or even its order of magnitude, and no published list of hemihomonyms did exist. This could have the same reason as the existence of hemihomonyms themselves: interdisciplinary researches employing many nomina following different Codes are still rare. Nevertheless, I am almost positive that, as these investigations will become more common in the near future, the problem of hemihomonyms should be solved as soon as possible.

It is worth mentioning here that Codes like those of nomenclature of bacteria (Lapage *et al.* 1992), animals (Anonymous 1999) and plants and fungi (McNeill *et al.* 2006) have slightly different approaches regarding “normal” homonyms. For example, the zoological Code distinguishes between primary and secondary homonyms, and also strictly regulates the use of similarly spelled nomina in some cases (“parahomonyms”). This Code regulates only nomina up to the level of superfamily, which means that nomina of higher taxa (e.g., orders and classes) may in theory be “legal” homonyms. Among different Codes, the bacteriological one has probably the most advanced approach saying that “*The name should not be a later homonym of a previously validly published name of an alga, bacterium, fungus, protozoon, or virus...*” This has, however, only limited consequences since other Codes do not do the same, and even the bacteriological Code does not consider the nomina of higher plants or animals.

The idea of making a single Code for all biological nomina (the “*BioCode*”) have a tough history. The most recent proposal (Greuter *et al.* 2011) does not deal with hemihomonyms, but if the *BioCode* was to be finally implemented, clarification of hemihomonyms would become unavoidable. Instead of a published text, the future *BioCode* could also become an overlaying Web service maintaining all Codes’ Rules together (Shipunov *et al.* 2009), and in this case the service will need a hemihomonyms database.

Materials and methods

The starting list of nomina was compiled from different and unequal sources: the *Catalogue of Life 2008 Checklist* (Bisby *et al.* 2008), the *Wikispecies List of Valid Homonyms* (Anonymous 2009b), the *Taxacom archives* (Anonymous 2009a) and a variety of personal communications and individual submissions directly to me.

All lists were normalized: converted to comma separated text format with standardized columns (nomen, ancestry, rank, source and ID) and merged. For merging, a specific R (Anonymous 2011) program was written. The database itself uses flat text file as a data source, PHP interface to the flat list plus DataTables JavaScript application (<<http://datatables.net/index>>), which produces the spreadsheet-like output interface. There is also a simple submission page which accepts comments from users, and rudimentary API allowing the checking of single nomina with two possible answers (“yes” if the nomen is in the database, and “no” if it is not).

We also found that several large name databases like *CU*STAR* (<<http://starcentral.mbl.edu>>) or *GNI* (<<http://www.globalnames.org/GNI>>) were not simple to analyze, probably due to the vast amount of misspellings listed. These databases were not used for the primary list.

Nevertheless, since not all reliable nomen sources were analyzed, we cannot be sure that our database is complete. If a nomen is not in the database, there still is a possibility that it may be a hemihomonym. Another approach to the hemihomonymy problem is now being implemented in *IRMNG* (<<http://www.cmar.csiro.au/datacentre/irmng/homonyms.htm>>).

Results

As for 1st August 2011, the “Hemihomonym database” (*HHDB*; <<http://herba.msu.ru/shipunov/os/homonyms/index.php>>; mirror: <<http://ashipunov.info/shipunov/os/homonyms/index.php>>) has 1164 nomina. Most hemihomonyms are results of clashes between the botanical and zoological Codes (1113 nomina, i.e. 96 %), and much less are between bacteriological and botanical nomina and between zoological and bacteriological nomina (8 nomina, i.e. 1 % and 31 nomina, i.e. 3 %, respectively). Twelve nomina (1 %) are triple hemihomonyms.

The shortened variant of *HHDB* including only nomina is given here in Table 1. On the Web site, it is also possible to retrieve so-called “ancestry”, i.e., the data about the taxonomical position of the nominal taxon.

Discussion

Since the hemihomonym database is now established, it is possible to identify the situations of hemihomonymy between the three Codes considered. In order to avoid ambiguity, I propose here that whenever a nomen is a hemihomonym, it should be followed with a postfix “(b)”, “(p)” or “(z)” for nomina covered by the bacteriological, botanical and zoological Codes of nomenclature, respectively. To check the possibility of being a hemihomonym, one could use Table 1, the main Web page of *HHDB*, or the proposed *API* (<<http://herba.msu.ru/shipunov/os/homonyms/index.php>>).

A few additional situations which may cause ambiguity in nomenclatural research are not yet resolved:

(1) Nomina of higher taxa. This is an “Achilles heel” of modern nomenclature. Multiple efforts were done towards a resolving of higher taxa problem, rule- or database-based (Reveal 2008; Shipunov 2009; Kluge, 2010 and his earlier Russian publications; Dubois, 2011*a* and his other publications) but the current Codes still almost completely ignore the problem.

(2) Nomina of “intermediate levels” of nomenclatural hierarchy. It is common for most databases and sometimes even monographs to skip tribal, section or other levels intermediate between the “main” ones. This is often considered as a fundamental problem for all rank-based nomenclature (R. Olmstead, pers. comm.). As a result, we simply do not know how many homonyms are hidden here.

(3) The nomen could be an “unstable” hemihomonym if it is unclear which Code should be used for it (“ambiregnal names”; see Patterson 1991). Many protists’ nomina are ambiregnal.

(4) Three other Codes of nomenclature exist which may also contain hemihomonyms: the Codes for viruses (Anomymous 2002) and cultivated plants (Brickell *et al.* 2009; it does not control nomenclature at the generic level), and the *PhyloCode* (Cantino & de Queiroz 2010; it is not an officially recognized Code). The nomina recognized under these Codes may later be added to the *HHDB*.

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TABLE 1. Hemihomonyms from realms of three main codes of nomenclature (according to HHDB, last accessed 1st August 2011).

Bacteriological Code	Botanical Code	Zoological Code
Abas	Abas	Abas
Aberia	Aberia	Aberia
Abietinella	Abietinella	Abietinella
Abronia	Abronia	Abronia
Acantharia	Acantharia	Acantharia
Acanthocarpus	Acanthocarpus	Acanthocarpus
Acanthoccephalus	Acanthoccephalus	Acanthoccephalus
Acanthopale	Acanthopale	Acanthopale
Acharia	Acharia	Acharia
Achleena	Achleena	Achleena
Achiya	Achiya	Achiya
Acheta	Acheta	Acheta
ACS	ACS	ACS
Acrasia	Acrasia	Acrasia
Acrocephalus	Acrocephalus	Acrocephalus
Acrophylum	Acrophylum	Acrophylum
Acrotylus	Acrotylus	Acrotylus
Adaeaa	Adaeaa	Adaeaa
Adactium	Adactium	Adactium
Adindendron	Adindendron	Adindendron
Adinopellis	Adinopellis	Adinopellis
Adamsia	Adamsia	Adamsia
Adenophora	Adenophora	Adenophora
Aegle	Aegle	Aegle
Afzelia	Afzelia	Afzelia
Agarista	Agarista	Agarista
Agathis	Agathis	Agathis
Agnesia	Agnesia	Agnesia
Agnis	Agnis	Agnis
Alania	Alania	Alania
Alaria	Alaria	Alaria
Albertinia	Albertinia	Albertinia
Alectoria	Alectoria	Alectoria
Alberitia	Alberitia	Alberitia
Alina	Alina	Alina
Allotropa	Allotropa	Allotropa
Alpighia	Alpighia	Alpighia
Alsophila	Alsophila	Alsophila
Amama	Amama	Amama
Amanyllis	Amanyllis	Amanyllis
Amnophila	Amnophila	Amnophila
Amorpha	Amorpha	Amorpha
Amphiarthus	Amphiarthus	Amphiarthus
Amphibolia	Amphibolia	Amphibolia
Amphinema	Amphinema	Amphinema
Amphorula	Amphorula	Amphorula
Anabasis	Anabasis	Anabasis
Ancistrodes	Ancistrodes	Ancistrodes
Ancistrophora	Ancistrophora	Ancistrophora
Ancylistes	Ancylistes	Ancylistes
Andersonia	Andersonia	Andersonia
Andrea	Andrea	Andrea
Andresia	Andresia	Andresia
Andrewsiella	Andrewsiella	Andrewsiella
Anaura	Anaura	Anaura
Angelina	Angelina	Angelina
Anisocaela	Anisocaela	Anisocaela
Anisocycla	Anisocycla	Anisocycla
Anisoptera	Anisoptera	Anisoptera
Anisofrux	Anisofrux	Anisofrux
Anomara	Anomara	Anomara
Anomalasia	Anomalasia	Anomalasia
Anthella	Anthella	Anthella
Antillea	Antillea	Antillea
Antonia	Antonia	Antonia
Anura	Anura	Anura
Aotus	Aotus	Aotus
Apheila	Apheila	Apheila
Aphrodite	Aphrodite	Aphrodite
Apluda	Apluda	Apluda
Apodasmia	Apodasmia	Apodasmia
Apona	Apona	Apona
Apostates	Apostates	Apostates
Appendicularia	Appendicularia	Appendicularia
Archonis	Archonis	Archonis
Archologia	Archologia	Archologia
Archidia	Archidia	Archidia
Archophila	Archophila	Archophila
Arctaria	Arctaria	Arctaria
Argania	Argania	Argania
Argentaria	Argentaria	Argentaria
Aria	Aria	Aria
Ariadne	Ariadne	Ariadne
Arlopsis	Arlopsis	Arlopsis
Aristolella	Aristolella	Aristolella
Articulata	Articulata	Articulata
Ascoidea	Ascoidea	Ascoidea
Ashtonia	Ashtonia	Ashtonia
Asterina	Asterina	Asterina
Asterococcus	Asterococcus	Asterococcus
Asterodon	Asterodon	Asterodon
Astraea	Astraea	Astraea
Ateleia	Ateleia	Ateleia
Attractomorphia	Attractomorphia	Attractomorphia
Augusta	Augusta	Augusta
Auricularia	Auricularia	Auricularia
Auriculina	Auriculina	Auriculina
Autroee	Autroee	Autroee
Azilia	Azilia	Azilia
Bacillus	Bacillus	Bacillus
Bacteridium	Bacteridium	Bacteridium
Baileya	Baileya	Baileya
Bailella	Bailella	Bailella
Baloghia	Baloghia	Baloghia
Banksia	Banksia	Banksia
Barnardia	Barnardia	Barnardia
Baronia	Baronia	Baronia
Bartramia	Bartramia	Bartramia
Bartschella	Bartschella	Bartschella
Bassia	Bassia	Bassia
Batesia	Batesia	Batesia
Batis	Batis	Batis
Beaufortia	Beaufortia	Beaufortia
Becqueriella	Becqueriella	Becqueriella
Bedfordia	Bedfordia	Bedfordia
Belaridia	Belaridia	Belaridia
Belonidium	Belonidium	Belonidium
Berkeleya	Berkeleya	Berkeleya
Berlesiella	Berlesiella	Berlesiella
Betula	Betula	Betula
Beyeria	Beyeria	Beyeria
Bimuria	Bimuria	Bimuria
Binghamia	Binghamia	Binghamia
Blachia	Blachia	Blachia
Blancoa	Blancoa	Blancoa
Bodo	Bodo	Bodo
Bogoriella	Bogoriella	Bogoriella
Bokolia	Bokolia	Bokolia
Bonamia	Bonamia	Bonamia
Bonatea	Bonatea	Bonatea
Bonia	Bonia	Bonia
Bornelia	Bornelia	Bornelia
Bostrychia	Bostrychia	Bostrychia
Bougainvillea	Bougainvillea	Bougainvillea
Brachypezza	Brachypezza	Brachypezza
Bremia	Bremia	Bremia
Breyria	Breyria	Breyria
Briaria	Briaria	Briaria
Brooksia	Brooksia	Brooksia
Broughtonia	Broughtonia	Broughtonia
Bruchia	Bruchia	Bruchia
Buchanania	Buchanania	Buchanania
Buchholzia	Buchholzia	Buchholzia
Burchella	Burchella	Burchella
Burenia	Burenia	Burenia
Burmannia	Burmannia	Burmannia
Bursaria	Bursaria	Bursaria
Burfitia	Burfitia	Burfitia
Buriera	Buriera	Buriera
Byblis	Byblis	Byblis
Calamus	Calamus	Calamus
Calanica	Calanica	Calanica
Callicarpa	Callicarpa	Callicarpa
Calliderma	Calliderma	Calliderma
Callilepis	Callilepis	Callilepis
Calopteryx	Calopteryx	Calopteryx
Calospatha	Calospatha	Calospatha
Calycella	Calycella	Calycella
Calyptopogon	Calyptopogon	Calyptopogon
Calyptra	Calyptra	Calyptra
Camensia	Camensia	Camensia
Camparella	Camparella	Camparella
Campoloma	Campoloma	Campoloma
Campylotropis	Campylotropis	Campylotropis
Canarium	Canarium	Canarium
Candelabrum	Candelabrum	Candelabrum
Caneophora	Caneophora	Caneophora
Cantharellus	Cantharellus	Cantharellus
Carnegiea	Carnegiea	Carnegiea
Carperteria	Carperteria	Carperteria
Catena	Catena	Catena
Catenococcus	Catenococcus	Catenococcus
Catenula	Catenula	Catenula
Catinella	Catinella	Catinella
Cavernularia	Cavernularia	Cavernularia
Cavia	Cavia	Cavia
Celestina	Celestina	Celestina
Centropogon	Centropogon	Centropogon
Centropoda	Centropoda	Centropoda
Cerapoda	Cerapoda	Cerapoda
Cerataulina	Cerataulina	Cerataulina
Ceratocephala	Ceratocephala	Ceratocephala
Ceratocebox	Ceratocebox	Ceratocebox
Ceratosigma	Ceratosigma	Ceratosigma
Cerastoma	Cerastoma	Cerastoma
Cereus	Cereus	Cereus
Cerion	Cerion	Cerion
Chaetacanthus	Chaetacanthus	Chaetacanthus
Chaetoceras	Chaetoceras	Chaetoceras
Chaetoderma	Chaetoderma	Chaetoderma
Chaetonema	Chaetonema	Chaetonema
Chaetophora	Chaetophora	Chaetophora
Chaetopsis	Chaetopsis	Chaetopsis
Chaos	Chaos	Chaos
Chara	Chara	Chara
Charaybdis	Charaybdis	Charaybdis
Chavinia	Chavinia	Chavinia
Chelidonium	Chelidonium	Chelidonium
Chemnitzia	Chemnitzia	Chemnitzia
Chenia	Chenia	Chenia
Chivalerella	Chivalerella	Chivalerella
Chione	Chione	Chione
Chiondophora	Chiondophora	Chiondophora
Chloracantha	Chloracantha	Chloracantha
Chloris	Chloris	Chloris
Chondracanthus	Chondracanthus	Chondracanthus
Chondrilla	Chondrilla	Chondrilla
Chosena	Chosena	Chosena
Chrysonema	Chrysonema	Chrysonema
Chrysopogon	Chrysopogon	Chrysopogon
Cicaris	Cicaris	Cicaris
Cinclidium	Cinclidium	Cinclidium
Cladonema	Cladonema	Cladonema
Clappa	Clappa	Clappa
Clathrella	Clathrella	Clathrella
Clathrus	Clathrus	Clathrus
Clausia	Clausia	Clausia
Clavulina	Clavulina	Clavulina
Clemontia	Clemontia	Clemontia
Cleavelandia	Cleavelandia	Cleavelandia
Climacoptera	Climacoptera	Climacoptera
Clivia	Clivia	Clivia
Clusia	Clusia	Clusia
Cypsolea	Cypsolea	Cypsolea
Cypselum	Cypselum	Cypselum
Cyrestium	Cyrestium	Cyrestium
Coccoldea	Coccoldea	Coccoldea
Codon	Codon	Codon
Codonorchis	Codonorchis	Codonorchis
Coemansia	Coemansia	Coemansia
Coenonia	Coenonia	Coenonia
Colax	Colax	Colax
Collaria	Collaria	Collaria
Collinsia	Collinsia	Collinsia
Colocasia	Colocasia	Colocasia
Cometes	Cometes	Cometes
Comperia	Comperia	Comperia
Compsoneura	Compsoneura	Compsoneura
Coniophora	Coniophora	Coniophora
Conostoma	Conostoma	Conostoma
Contaminia	Contaminia	Contaminia
Coolella	Coolella	Coolella
Cora	Cora	Cora
Cordia	Cordia	Cordia
Cordyla	Cordyla	Cordyla
Coris	Coris	Coris
Coronilla	Coronilla	Coronilla
Cortium	Cortium	Cortium
Corymaea	Corymaea	Corymaea
Coryme	Coryme	Coryme
Corynephorus	Corynephorus	Corynephorus
Corynophora	Corynophora	Corynophora
Cota	Cota	Cota
Cowania	Cowania	Cowania
Crambe	Crambe	Crambe
Crassula	Crassula	Crassula
Cremmophila	Cremmophila	Cremmophila
Crepidulus	Crepidulus	Crepidulus
Cressa	Cressa	Cressa
Crocidium	Crocidium	Crocidium
Crosslandia	Crosslandia	Crosslandia
Crossosoma	Crossosoma	Crossosoma
Crucianella	Crucianella	Crucianella
Crucibulum	Crucibulum	Crucibulum
Cryphaea	Cryphaea	Cryphaea
Cryptochloris	Cryptochloris	Cryptochloris
Cryptococcus	Cryptococcus	Cryptococcus
Cryptobolchia	Cryptobolchia	Cryptobolchia
Cyrtomeria	Cyrtomeria	Cyrtomeria
Cyrtoporus	Cyrtoporus	Cyrtoporus
Cyrtophlebe	Cyrtophlebe	Cyrtophlebe
Ctenophora	Ctenophora	Ctenophora
Ctenopsis	Ctenopsis	Ctenopsis
Cucumella	Cucumella	Cucumella
Culcita	Culcita	Culcita
Cyanea	Cyanea	Cyanea

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