# Notes

## A PLEA FOR INVERSE NAME LISTS

The popularity of the inverse dictionary or word list seems to have passed largely unnoticed by those who labor in the field of proper names. Pioneered by Otto Gradenwitz of Leipzig at the turn of the century,[1] the inverse list was conceived as an aid in paleographic research. Armed with his inversely alphabetized Latin vocabulary, Gradenwitz was much better able to eliminate the lacunae in the Latin manuscripts he was transcribing because he could now deal more effectively with words whose first letters were illegible from the ravages of time or other damage. If, for example, he came across a word whose first four letters were illegible, leaving only a three letter ending which could be read, he could quickly find all seven letter Latin words having the aforementioned ending, and, on the basis of meaning and context, choose the most appropriate. The system was not perfect, but it definitely reduced the number of words which had to be left incompletely transcribed. The needs of paleographers, whose number is limited, would not have led to the increasing popularity of the inverse format, had not other uses been found.

The inverse format involves a simple concept: words are placed in alphabetical order moving from the last letter toward the first instead of in the usual arrangement. The words are then printed as they normally would be, but the right margin is justified rather than the left. The technique is perceived most clearly in a sample. If we take the first sentence in this paragraph and arrange the words inversely, the result will be as follows:

a
instead
placed
toward
the
simple
are
inverse
of
moving
alphabetical
usual
from
in
order
letter
words
involves
format
arrangement

[1] Otto Gradenwitz, *Laterculi vocum latinarum* (Leipzig, 1904).

concept
last
first

The value of such a listing of vocabularies is immediately obvious to the linguist. An inverse dictionary can provide invaluable insight into the structure of a language; it can facilitate the study of suffixes and the preparation of grammatical exercises; it can be more or less helpful (depending on the language) to the poet in search of a rhyme. These considerations, together with the advent of the computer, have led to the greatly increased popularity of inverse dictionaries: they are now available in most Western languages.[2]

The alert reader will doubtless already have perceived the major point of this article: the same applications that make the inverse format valuable to the linguist make it equally useful to the researcher interested in names. Once again, example will prove more persuasive than theory.

Anyone interested in Spanish toponymy (particularly that of the pre-Roman period) will sooner or later refer to a small but impressive volume by the great Spanish scholar, Ramón Menéndez Pidal.[3] Approximately one third of the work is devoted to suffixes which occur in pre-Roman Spanish place-names. An appendix, entitled "Indice de topónimos"[4] lists over 1,100 entries, alphabetized in the conventional fashion. The effort required to retrieve from this list all the proper names ending in the suffix *-toy* (Basque for "place where something abounds") is considerable. The results of such an effort are frustratingly limited:

A. Conventional order (sprinkled throughout over 1,100 entries):

Ameztoy
Aratoy
Bretoy
Taratoy
Zuastoy

B. In an inverse list all these names would appear together as follows:

Aratoy
Taratoy
Bretoy
Zuastoy
Amestoy

The number of names is not directly related to their importance; the point to be made is that these names, among many others, present evidence of the widespread Basque substratum in pre-Roman Spain and that, if an inverse listing of the 1,100 or more entries had been included, this information could have been retrieved in a few seconds. Had we been dealing with a larger list of names, such as those found in geographical atlases, for example, the task would have been impossible.

To summarize, we can surely say without question that, whenever a scholarly work on names appears, if that work includes a list of names, it would behoove the author to include an inverse listing (obtained without great difficulty in this computerized age). In the case of works already published, a supplement containing an inverse listing would be equally valuable. As research tools, these lists could greatly facilitate the investigation into names and their relationships and open up new avenues in onomatology.

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[2] William M. Russell, "The Inverse Dictionary: A New Tool for Linguists," *Studies in Languages on Linguistics, 1969–1970* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1970) pp. 201–202.

[3] Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Toponimia prerrománica hispana* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1968).

[4] In spite of the title, the list does not consist solely of proper names.

## THE GOOD OL' R & J

V-J Day, 1945, had marked the end of World War II and ships were streaming back to America from the Far East, loaded with happy servicemen. I was one of them, but unfortunately our ship had to make a sidetrip before heading homeward over the Pacific. When a noisy contingent of Australians trooped aboard in Manila, we learned our ship was to be diverted to some port in the Sulu Sea where the Australians would transfer to another vessel bound for the Antipodes.

At first this caused some gloom among the Americans, but in a day or so the good humor of the men from Down Under infected us all. They endlessly conjectured which ship would be waiting for them in Zamboanga, and all of them fervidly hoped it would be "the good ol' R & J."

Having an interest in onomastics, I naturally wanted to know what the initials meant, but none of them knew the answer. "Does the ship belong to the P & O Lines?" I asked, for the Peninsula & Occidental ships used to ply between England and Australia, but all I got was a "Dunno, mate." The R & J, I gathered, was a hospital ship, crammed with ice cream, cold beer, marvelous food along with clean beds and affable nurses.

The following day our ship arrived in Zamboanga Bay where, moored in its center, was a white ship with a red cross painted on its side. The Australians burst into cheers and whoops, slapped each other on the back and set up a chant "The good ol' R & J! The good ol' R & J!" Passing astern, I saw the Dutch flag drooping in the equatorial heat and, on the ship's transom, the name ORANJE.

"Oranje!" I yelled, for I recognized the name of the ruling family of Holland and, turning to the celebrating Australians, I tried to give them a quick lesson in onomastics: "o-RAN-yeh. It's pronounced o-RAN-yeh!" but it was no use. They jocularly replied "Suit yerself, mate. To us it's the good ol' R & J," and continued their chant. I threw up my hands in resignation.

Next morning as we steamed out of the bay, a fellow American leaned on the rail as we passed the ORANJE, and commented "Orange! What a foolish name for a ship . . . and they don't even spell it right!" But I said nothing.

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