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SOME GOOD REASONS FOR RENAMING PLACES, AND SOME NOT SO GOOD ONES: A CROSS-CULTURAL SKETCH In honour of Canada's 150th Birthday and the Year of Reconciliation

The note focuses on the initiative of renaming some places in Canada to celebrate the year of Canada's 150th anniversary, as well as the Year of Reconciliation (2017). The initiative aims at revitalizing the original names given by the First Nations, i.e. coming from the Cree, Salish and other Aboriginal languages. The author cites examples proving that such initiatives are not always shared by the public due to the pronunciation difficulties new names may cause (such is the renaming of *Mount Douglas* to Saanich *Pkols* [pkʰals] and *Mount Newton* to Saanich ŁÁU, WELNEW_, that had been in the works for quite a while before 2017). In some other cases, the renaming turns out to be controversial, inconsistent or incomplete: like Fort *Amherst* that still retains its name after an 18th-century British Army Officer guilty of extirpation of indigenous people (Parks Canada having opposed the removal of the name *Amherst* since 2008), or *Fushimi* Lake, formerly known as *Pewabiska* by its Ojibwa / Cree origins, and whose name was changed in the early 20th century to commemorate the visit of prince Hiroyasu Fushimi (some other places in his honour being renamed as far back as during World War II). The author also points out that the need for renaming has gone beyond the concern of the First Nations and presently affects some groups of immigrants, which is the case with the name of *Berlin* (*Kitchener*) in Ontario.

Keywords: place names of Canada, Salish languages, Cree languages, Mount Douglas, Mount Newton, Tsilhqot'in.

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In her address at the celebration of the start of Canada's 150th birthday on December 31, 2016, in Victoria, Mayor Lisa Helps pointed out that this will also be the year of reconciliation between its indigenous people and the conquerors. So, among other things, she suggested "changing the names of some places" [quoted from Bell, 2016]. Now, Victoria has actually not been too active yet in this field. The name of a mountain, Mount Douglas, has been changed to *Pkols* [pkʔals], meaning 'White Head' (in Salish SENĆOŦEN¹).

Another mountain, Mount Newton, is in the process of being renamed, provided that three municipalities can agree on the process [see Lavoie, 2013]. The mountain is located on the Saanich Peninsula, and the proposed Salish name ŁÁU,WELNEW_, already decorates the entry sign to the parking lot of a Salish high school by that name. The name ŁÁU,WELNEW_ actually stands for 'Place of Refuge,' because as the legend goes, about ten thousand years ago, the mighty Fraser River overflowed its banks and flooded the northern part of the Saanich Peninsula, the only refuge being the ŁÁU,WELNEW_.

Seeing that Victoria covers the original territory of the Lekwungen Nation (presently without any living speakers), it would really make good sense to start renaming a few places downtown to names in Lekwungen, e.g., as in Edmonton, Alberta, where an entire section of a downtown street was renamed into Enoch Cree MASKÊKOSIHK Trail (Cree for 'muskeg spruce,' pronounced MUSS-KAY-GO-SEE). There was a bit of complaining in the population that these names were hard to pronounce. But is "muss-kay-go-see" really so difficult for non-native speakers?



Picture 1. Mayor Don Iveson and Chief Billy Morin at the ceremony in the City Hall

¹ Also known as the Saanich dialect of the Northern Straits Salish language.

Besides, one can only agree with a statement in a paper by William J. Poser:

Everywhere in the world immigrants are expected to learn the language of their new country. <In Canada> non-native people now so outnumber native people, and the First Nations languages are in most cases in such a state of decline, that it is no longer realistic to expect large numbers of non-native people to learn them, but for non-native people to learn a few words of the First Nations languages, such as the names of the languages and their speakers, and of important places, would be a small gesture of respect for their hosts [Poser, 2009, 18].

Actually, it seems that the First Nations presence in Alberta is much stronger than the one in British Columbia. Perhaps this is because of the larger number of Cree speakers there as compared, for example, with the much smaller groups and sub-groups of Salish speakers that are often more spread out geographically, ranging from Seattle up to the Island, the British Columbia interior right up to the border with Alberta. For example, almost downtown on Airport Road at the now defunct Municipal Airport in Edmonton, Alberta, there is the AMISKWACIY Academy (*amiskwaciy* means ‘beaver hill’ in Cree) with its imposing Cree-design exterior and interior. The students come from across Edmonton and surrounding areas as well as from First Nations communities and Métis settlements throughout Western Canada and the Northwest Territories. Most are First Nations, Métis or Inuit, but the Academy welcomes students of all cultures. Subjects taught include the Medicine Wheel and, in addition to the academic programming, the Academy offers CTS programs such as Cosmetology, Construction Technology, and Foods and Fashion Studies.



Picture 2. Amiskwaciy Academy
(photo taken from greenwichwindfarm.com)

The Province of British Columbia had another challenge in this year of reconciliation: there is the name of Justice Matthew Begbie (1819–1894), the “hanging judge,” attached to a statue in New Westminster and a plaque in Victoria as well as a couple of streets. He got this epithet because of his role in the hanging of six Tsilhqot’in chiefs

in 1864. While this judge was otherwise known for his sympathy for the First Nations, and while hanging was the typical sentence for severe crimes, in the year of reconciliation the hanging of the chiefs would have stood out as something deserving punishment, such as changing the street names and removing both the statue and the plaque in Victoria's Bastion Square.

And renaming a lake in Ontario from one with an Ojibwa / Cree name, *Pewabiska* Lake, to *Fushimi* Lake [see Leclerc, 2015] is further evidence that often not much thought is given to renaming processes. Many of them will as a result often require subsequent renaming. The name *Pewabiska* is Ojibwa / Cree for 'white water' or 'clearwater,' and we have here an early case for the replacement of an indigenous name by the name of a dignitary of a foreign power — a process that, I believe, would be unthinkable in Canada today. When World War II was in progress the name *Fushimi* (also in honour of prince Hiroyasu Fushimi), a railroad stop on the CPR line east of Regina in the Province of Saskatchewan, was changed, as a result of Japan being on the wrong side of the war in 1942, to *Kearney*, a Canadian Pacific Railway official; the name received official recognition on July 8, 1954, by the Government of Saskatchewan. The other extant places named *Fushimi* in Ontario, i.e., the township Fushimi in Northern Ontario, Fushimi Road, and Fushimi Lake Provincial Park have never been renamed.

Respect for indigenous names did not prevent the well-known arctic explorer Dewey Soper in the early part of the 20th century to rename a prominent peak in a river known to the Inuit as *Kenowaya* Mountain arbitrarily Mount *Joy* in honour of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police inspector, so we have here a second example of replacing an indigenous name with that (in this case) of a Canadian dignitary from Ottawa [Dalton, 2010, 202]. Perhaps the present renaming and name-finding activities in Nunavut will return that prominent peak to its Inuit name.

Finally, there is the name of Fort *Amherst* just across the Charlottetown waterfront. For John Joe Sark, a Keptin of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council, it is a monument to a tyrant because Amherst was an 18th-century British Army Officer who conspired to infect indigenous people with smallpox-laced blankets so as to "extirpate the execrable race."

Now, John Joe Sark has given back his Order of Prince Edward Island, arguing that if Parks Canada "doesn't change the name, the Canadian government is complicit in perpetuating the racist attitudes of Amherst and his ilk" [quoted from Edmiston, 2017]. It is interesting how the Government (Parks Canada), since 2008, has resisted Sark's demands to change the name. They suggested, for example, to add the Mi'kmaq name to the now official French-English name Port-la-Joye / Fort Amherst title. Not acceptable, says Sark: "We look at it as an insult and a disgrace to have a Mi'kmaq name alongside the name of Gen. Amherst" [Ibid.]. More detailed evidence of Amherst's "smallpox-induced" eradication of indigenous people can be found in [d'Errico].

In conclusion one must point out that name-changing in Canada and elsewhere is not restricted to recovering names of indigenous peoples in colonized systems. It can also occur as the result of local preferences (as in Germany) or of events far away due to undesirable political events (as in the case immigrant voices). Thus, a street in Zwickau in Southwest Germany where a relative of this author lives is called *August-Schlosser-Straße*. But checking an old map of this city in the former German Democratic Republic did not contain the name of this street, and this author also did not remember such a street from his high-school years in the GDR. A Google map instead showed *Ernst-Thälmann-Straße* and that one this author remembered. But one must wonder, of course, why the name of the leader of the Communist Party of Germany during most of the Weimar Republic had been replaced by the name of August Schlosser. An e-mail to the Zwickau Town Council cleared this all up within 24 hours. August Schlosser was also a Communist but, as a local, his story had precedence [for his story, see Winkelhöfer, 1968]. The town council in their reply added the two previous names of the street, none of which this author remembered: until 1945 the street was named *Adolf-Hitler-Straße*, and before the Nazi take-over *Schulstraße* (School Street).

Last year there was an article in the *Globe & Mail* that it might be time to rename Kitchener (Ontario) back to Berlin because the growing self-confidence of the “Germanic” people in that area demanded it [see Allemang, 2016]. As a protest against German militarism, the name *Berlin* had been changed to *Kitchener*. “Some 3,057 city ratepayers cast their ballots on 19 May, 1916. Those in favour of changing the name narrowly won the day by eighty-one votes” [Hayes, 1999, 136]. Berlin became *Kitchener* on 1 September, 1916 (after Lord Kitchener, who had gone down with a British warship on June 5). In all this new Germanophilia no attention has been given to the fact that although *Berlin* is the name of a German city it is not a Germanic word. The citizens of Berlin would like, of course, to believe that **berl-* is derived from the same root as *Bär* (they have Master Bruin in their city heraldry) — but it is not, the word is derived from Polabian (an extinct West Slavic language) and denotes ‘swamp’ (a hint to name-changers: get your etymology right).

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**НЕСКОЛЬКО АРГУМЕНТОВ ЗА И ПРОТИВ ПЕРЕИМЕНОВАНИЯ
ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ ОБЪЕКТОВ: КРОСС-КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ОЧЕРК
По случаю 150-летия Канады и Года примирения**

Статья посвящена переименованию некоторых географических объектов в Канаде, которое приурочено к празднованию 150-летия этого государства, а также к Году примирения (2017), объявленному по этому случаю. Инициатива направлена на возрождение исконных названий на языках коренных народов Канады. Автор приводит примеры, демонстрирующие, что жители страны далеко не всегда встречают подобные начинания с энтузиазмом, в частности из-за трудностей произношения новых имен (так, довольно значительное время заняло переименование *Горы Дугласа (Mount Douglas)* в салиш. *Pkols* [pkʰals] и *Горы Ньютона (Mount Newton)* в салиш. ŁÁU, WELNEW_). В ряде случаев переименование имеет непоследовательный и неполный характер: так, форт *Амхерст*, названный в честь британского офицера XVIII в., участвовавшего в истреблении коренного населения, все еще носит это имя (государственное агентство «Парки Канады» начиная с 2008 г. активно сопротивляется попыткам переименовать форт), то же можно сказать об озере *Фушими*, чье исконное оджибве название *Pewabiska* в начале XX в. было изменено в память о визите японского принца Хироясу Фусими (некоторые другие объекты, ранее

названные в его честь, были переименованы еще во время Второй мировой войны). Автор также обращает внимание на тот факт, что потребность в переименовании перестала быть традиционной проблемой защиты прав коренных народов, сегодня она касается также некоторых иммигрантских диаспор, как это происходит в случае с *Берлином (Китченером)* в Онтарио.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: топонимия Канады, салишские языки, языки кри, Гора Дугласа, Гора Ньютона, чилкотин.

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