

JULY 2010

◆ WHAT'S IN A NAME DEP'T. ◆

Toponymy is the scientific study of place names (toponyms) and their origins, meanings, use and spellings. The word 'Toponymy' is derived from the Greek words *tópos* (τόπος, place) and *ónoma* (ὄνομα, name) and is itself a branch of onomastics, the study of names of all kinds. Toponymy may often be confused with etymology, which is the study of the history of languages themselves – another love of ours!

Though it's fun that there's a Paris, TX and a Rome, NY, etc., place names can naturally be confusing in many ways. Someone boarding a plane for Auckland, New Zealand wound up in Oakland, CA – was it due to an Aussie's accent or a boarding pass typo? Do Georgia peaches in Atlanta rival those in Tbilisi, Georgia? We linguists love these questions but are especially careful on all international documents, of course.

While many famous place names (Chicago, Madrid, Rio) pretty much stay the same internationally, most do change in languages other than that of the location itself. For example, Paris (whether in France or Texas) in French is indeed spelled the same as in English but pronounced "Par-ee," whereas in Italian, it's called Parigi ("Pa-ree-gee") and in Chinese, it's called Ba-Li. "München" in German is Munich in English, and Bruxelles, Belgium (pronounced "Brewks-ells" in French) is Brussels in English.

While visiting Italy on vacation, our staff noted that Monaco di Baviera was not the little principality on the cliffs of the Mediterranean, but rather the Bavarian capital.

And while we are all familiar with Philadelphia, PA and the State of California, you might be surprised to find two villages in Germany with exactly these names!



◆ FEATURE ◆ Lingua Quiz!

1. The most translated document in the world is:
(a) The Bible (b) The Magna Carta (c) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2. Mix & match!
(a) Granada (1) Caribbean isle invaded by US military in 1983
(b) Grenada (2) Archipelago off St. Vincent
(c) The Grenadines (3) Home of the Alhambra in Southern Spain
3. Which of the following is not an official language of South Africa?
(a) Zulu (b) Xhosa (c) Amharic

ANSWERS:

1. (c) Written by the United Nations in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been translated into 321 languages and dialects.
2. (a) = (3); (b) = (1); (c) = (2)
3. (c) South Africa has 11 official languages; Amharic is not one of them.