

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

(SOME PERSONAL THOUGHTS)

Johann Strauss

William Shakespeare said:
"What's in a name?
That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet.
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name
And for thy name which is no part of thee
Take all myself."
(Romeo and Juliet, by Maskew & Miller)

Abstract

Name changing goes hand in hand with new governments; this has happened all over the world. Name changing has become part of South Africa in recent times and seems to continue in the near future. Name changing confuses the man on the street, teachers and learners. Text books and atlases become outdated and this involves costs. Most names represent the history, people and topography of the area.

Introduction

In other words Romeo can just change his name and Juliet will still love him, because he is still the same person.

Once upon a time there was a man called John Smith and his wife Jenny. He was sent by the DEIC to build a refreshment station at the Cape of Winds in South Africa. He came from Holnether with 5 ships named V, W, X, Y and Z ... Do you know this part of history? Did you immediately recognize the Jan Van Riebeeck story.

A name tells a story. Everybody is known by a name. Sometimes even a nickname. This person stays in a certain street (a street with a name) in a

town known as ... (name). If the name/s change to something else there is confusion as well as costs involved. New atlases or text books will “change” the history. Tourism could be affected. Supporters of the current regime would be happy with the new names, but the opposition will be upset.

Consequences of name changing

Let us take a look at five of the possible consequences: Confusion; Costs; Atlases and text books; Tourism and dissatisfied citizens:

Confusion

The proteas played cricket in Chennai (India). In my atlas there was no such a place, until I found out it used to be Madras. You are driving in Che Guevara Street in Durban, but you are looking for Moore Street, which actually is the same street. Durban, according to me, is the pioneer in name changes, because, at the moment, they indicate both names. The old name has a thin red line through it, to make it easier for the visitor. The new technology of the GPS is outdated and you will have to rely on coordinates instead of names. Emergency services such as the police, ambulance, and fire brigade rely on the correct addresses to deliver a service otherwise it could be fatal. But what is the effect on learning. Atlases are outdated. So if teachers are not aware of name changes, how will they be able to guide the learners?

Costs

According to the Beeld newspaper it will cost R1,2 million to change the names of Groblersdal and Marble Hall. R400 000 will be needed just to start a committee and to do research on the proposed names. Opposition usually feels the money is wasted and could have been better spent on housing and urban services. The changing of the name of Cape Town will affect almost the whole of South Africa, because every road sign with the name of Cape Town must be replaced. Once again, how will it affect the learners and the schools? Name the school with enough funds to replace atlases and textbooks regularly.

Atlases and text books

With the rate of names changing in South Africa, almost all atlases and text

books will be outdated. We must remember that most households will not buy atlases on a regular basis, meaning your atlas at home is outdated.

Tourism

The general feeling is not to change brand names like Kruger Game Park, Robben Island and Sutherland, because it can be the reason for a decrease in tourists to our beautiful country.

Dissatisfied citizens

Usually the change of names by the newly elected government is a display of power. The opposition has just lost the power and now the changing of names is to rub their noses in it. This usually leads to a divided population instead of a united population and an increase in the sales of spray-paints.

As soon as a new regime takes over, the names will or might change. The new regime wants to give credit to loyal supporters by using their names. Their names can be used to name or rename a street, suburb, airport, park, hospitals, etc.

Name changing as a broad phenomena

The changing of names is a world wide phenomenon, but takes place most of the time in under developed and developing countries. The reason is that in under developed and developing countries the government changes frequently or more often. The more developed countries are politically more stable and only minor changes will take place if any. Do you still remember places like Nieu Amsterdam (today called New York), Peking (Beijing), Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Bombay (Mumbai), Birma (Myanmar), Olijvenhoutdrift (Upington), University of Potchefstroom (NWU), RAU (UJ – University of Johannesburg). In Sebokeng in the Vaal Triangle people stay in Zone 7 and house or stand 14930. (Vaal Triangle Telephone Directory 2006/7) It is an address without feeling/emotion and rather boring. This is where new names can make a difference.

Compare name changing to the changing of our flag and the Coat of Arms and our motto. The flag wasn't accepted easily, while the Coat of Arms did not stir much emotion, but is still unknown to a lot of South Africans and the

motto is almost the same as it used to be.

Interesting names in South Africa are:

- Cape Town (Kaa**p**stad) – Cape is a landform into the sea and town is a small urban settlement, while “Kaap” is a cape, but a “stad” is a large/big urban settlement. Which one – Cape Town or Kaa**p**stad – is the correct one?
- De Deur – used to be De Deurgang, the Dutch word for gateway
Vereeniging – The last part of the original name of the first mine in this area used to be vereeniging (the Dutch word for union) and the locals start to call the settlement Vereeniging. Confusion occurred and eventually the mine changed its name and the name stuck to the settlement. (Vereeniging, Ramon Lewis Leigh, p22, Courier-gazette Publishers, 1968)
- Soweto – **S**outh **W**estern **T**ownship So – we - to Amanzimtoti – sweet water – Located where a river (sweet/fresh water) runs into the sea (salt water)
- Hotazel – Hot as hell – located in the warm Kalahari in the Northern Cape
- Augrabies – from Korana Khoikhoi word aukurabis – place of the loud noise or water that thunder. (Op pad in Suid-Afrika, BPJ Erasmus 1995, p334)
- Oviston – Acronym for **O**ranje – **V**is – **T**onnel – (O - vis - ton)
- Emfuleni – In Vaal Triangle meaning at/by/close to the river

In the beginning of the twentieth century, in Vereeniging the west-east avenues were renamed from Fourteenth Avenue to De Villiers Avenue and all the north-south streets were renamed from First Street to Union Street. Maybe we should thank those who changed the boring street names. In another Vaal Triangle town, Meyerton, the streets were renamed to current members of the leading political party.

The policy on changing names include aims, avoiding insensitive names, guide-lines with the choice of names, processes to be followed and evaluation of proposal to name changes. (Beleid op die naamsverandering van strate, openbare plekke, natuurgebiede, en geboue, fasiliteite en artefakte in raadsbesit. Goedgekeur 30 Augustus 2005. C32/08/05)

The change of names leads to the changing of data. But is the change of names a good or a bad thing? It can be either – good or bad – it all depends on your view of the subject. May I dare to say that women will accept name changing easier than men? In some cultures, after women got married, they will accept the surname of their husbands. Sometimes the ladies are quite eager to get rid of the old surname and to start a new life. This also includes a lot of paperwork, but is accepted.

Since 1996 at least 800 names have been changed. Sometimes the names are changed just for sake of change. (X-kit FET, History grade 12, p132) The popular Marine Parade in Durban is now called O R Tambo Street. Marine Parade said so much more. Everyone knew exactly where it was situated due to its name.

Conclusions on the possible effects of name changing

Although one of the seven roles of the teacher is that all teachers should become “life long learners”, the question can be asked as how many teachers keep up with name changes. Here I don’t only refer to worldwide or national name changes, but also to local name changes. Most people only notice changes of names once it appears on street corners and bill boards. A small scale research project among prospective teachers revealed that the concept of “life long learner”, does not apply when it comes to name changes. If teachers are not aware of name changes, teaching and learning will be influenced over a wide spectrum. In languages, in a comprehension, learners (as well as the teacher) might not know what places are referred to. Geography and history lessons will be outdated and confusing. (Dr. Louisa Meyer, NWU)

Murphy’s Law states that if something can go wrong, it will.

My law (Strauss’s Law) states that if a name, in South Africa or Africa, can change, it will.

Perhaps our next conference should be in Mokopane (Potgietersrust), Mogwadi (Dendron), Morebeng (Soekmekaar) or “Tswane” (Pretoria), if only all of us will be able to find our way there.

References

- Beleid op die naamsverandering van strate, openbare plekke, natuurgebiede, en geboue, fasiliteite en artefakte in raadsbesit. Deur die raad goedgekeur:30 Augustus 2005. C32/08/05
- A Boddy-Evans. *New names in South Africa*, About.com, African History, Internet.
- BPJ Erasmus, 1995. *Op pad in Suid-Afrika*, p127, p231, p274, p322, p334. Jonathan Ball Uitgewers.
- R Lewis Leigh, 1968, Vereeniging, p. 22. Courier-gazette publishers.
- M Louw-Carstens, Beeld, 8 September 2008. R1,2m. vir naamsveranderinge in arm streek.

L Meyer, Dr. North West University, 2008.

News 24. http://www.news24.com/news24/south_africa. (R Fourie and S Samayende).

W Saunders, 2008. *Romeo and Juliet in modern English*, Act 2, Scene 2, p. 60.

Yellow pages and Telephone Book, Vaal Triangle 2006/7, p. 161.

X-Kit. History, Grade 12, p. 132.