



Conomastics: The Naming of Science Fiction Conventions

Mark A. Mandel
Linguistic Data Consortium
University of Pennsylvania

mamandel@ldc.upenn.edu -- Mark.A.Mandel@gmail.com



Definition

Conomastics: onomastics of cons



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Conomastics: onomastics of cons

Say what?

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

Sf. There is no clear dividing line between “science fiction” (the original meaning of “sf”) and “fantasy fiction”. The whole area is sometimes called “speculative fiction”, deliberately also abbreviated “sf”.



Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- *in the sense of*
“more-or-less organized gatherings”
not
“literary tropes” or “accepted norms”
- periodic, irregular, or one-off
- stationary or travelling

Conventions of national or regional scope are generally periodic and often travel from one locale to another within their geographic scope, so as to distribute both the honor and the labor between groups of volunteer con-runners.



Cons

(This "recycled-paper" background marks slides that I decided to skip during the presentation, generally because they contain more detail than would fit well in the flow and the time.)

Periodicity

- Typically annual; some are more frequent, some irregular, and some are one-shots
- Some one-shots develop into ongoing cons

◆ Organization and goals

- Typically non-profit, run by groups of fans with some continuity for the purpose of sharing and encouraging their shared interest
- Some cons are for-profit, very commercial
- This study concentrates on the first kind

Some cons are very much commercial enterprises, featuring media stars and charging for autographs. and there is a broad and fuzzy spectrum between “commercial” and “fannish”. I will concentrate here on the less commercial, more fan-run cons.



Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

including

- “hard” science fiction
- fantasy
- alternate history
- and many other subgenres that are more useful to marketers than to fans
- sf: “speculative fiction”



Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- media: movies & TV, including non-sf
- animation
- music
- gaming
- graphic fiction
- horror
- furry
- ...



This list doesn't claim to be an exhaustive categorization, or an exclusive one.

Based on *Picofarad's* list:

- General sf - your generic primarily book-oriented gathering, with panels, masquerade, video room, etc.
- Relaxacons - small cons, without all the flashy features, designed for hanging out and talking.
- Gaming
- Filk
- Costuming
- Con-running
- Fanzines
- Art
- Furry - dedicated to anthropomorphics of all sorts, from Disney cartoons to the Chanur universe.
- Anime/manga - Japanese animation and comics.
- Other media - conventions focusing on sf on TV and in movies.
- Fantasy
- Horror
- Symposia - academic gatherings.
- Miscellaneous - all sorts of stuff that doesn't fit into any of the above categories



Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- readers
- moviegoers
- TV viewers
- gamers (live action role playing [LARP], video, board, cards...)
- con organizers
- academics
- ...



Basic names: theme and variations

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Typical toponymic

Toponym + “convention” or synonym

- ◆ Chicon (Chicago)
- ◆ Nolacon (New Orleans, LA)
- ◆ NorWesCon (Portland, Oregon)
- ◆ Sydcon (Sydney, Australia)
- ◆ Finncon (Helsinki, Finland)
- ◆ Denvention (Denver) (*convention*)
- ◆ Rusfurence (Russia) (*conference, furry*)
- ◆ Disclave (Washington, D.C.) (*conclave*)



Variant toponymic

**Toponym → nickname or allusion to city
or state**

- ◆ **Magicon** (Orlando, Fla.: Disney Magic Kingdom)
- ◆ **MileHiCon** (Denver, the Mile High City)
- ◆ **LoneStarCon** (Texas, the Lone Star State)
- ◆ **SwanCon** (Perth, Western Australia: black swan)
- ◆ **SpoCon** (Spokane, Wash.)



Variant toponymic

Toponym → nickname or allusion to institution or other characteristic

- ◆ Aggiecon (Texas A&M, home of the Aggies)
- ◆ Bubonicon (Albuquerque: bubonic plague)
- ◆ Iguanacon (Phoenix, Ariz.)
- ◆ Conestoga (Tulsa, Oklahoma: settlers' wagons)
(*portmanteau*)
- ◆ Vericon (Harvard Univ.: motto "Veritas")



Puns with “con”

... and nothing else in particular

- ◆ Con*Cept
- ◆ ConClave
- ◆ ConDOR
- ◆ CONduit
- ◆ Conucopia
- ◆ CONvergence
- ◆ Conspiracy



Puns with “con” and...

...PLACE

- SpoCon (Spokane, Wash.)
- ConJosé (San José, Calif.)



Puns with "con" and... ...TIME

- Hal-Con (Saitama-shi, Saitama-ken, Japan)

- "Hal" → *haru* =

- はる 'springtime' (+ *こん kon*)

- HAL-9000 from "2001: A Space Odyssey"



- LepreCon (St. Patrick's Day)

- Millennium Philcon

- Philadelphia, 2001 WorldCon

- *Millennium Falcon*, Han Solo's ship in Star Wars



Names referring to the con's theme



Filk music: the folk music of sf fandom



Theme: Filk

USA

- **Consonance** (Milpitas, Calif.)
- **Conchord** (Woodland Hills, Calif.)
- **GAFilk** (Georgia, *this weekend!* 😞)
- **Conflikt** (Seattle) (anagram of "filk")
- **The Floating Northeast Filk Convention** (NEFilk: "any filk");
 - **ConCerto** New Jersey suburbs of Philadelphia
 - **ConCertino** Massachusetts
 - **Contata** New York City area
 - **Conterpoint** Baltimore / D.C. area
- **FilkCamp** (Muncie, Ind.)
- **Ohio Valley Filk Fest** (Columbus, OH)

(Names in red are musical terms or variations on them.)

(Data from Interfilk and NEFilk)



Theme: Filk

Outside US

- British Filk Con (traveling)
- FilKONtario (Mississauga, Ont., Canada) (KON)
- Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik (Bad Salzedtufurth, Germany) (German folk music gathering, Das Frühlingsfest der Volksmusik)
- HarmUni (Cambridge, England) (harmony, university)
- Filk Continental (Kirchen-Freusberg, Germany)

(Data from Interfilk)

Das Frühlingsfest der Volksmusik as base of Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik: GMG pers. comm.



Theme: Filk

The UK annual filk conventions

Contabile	<i>cantabile</i>	Digeri-Douze	<i>didgeridoo, douze</i>
Con2bile	<i>Contabile 2</i>	Conthirteena	<i>concertina, thirteen</i>
Treble	<i>e.g., treble clef</i>	Contabile Fortean	<i>Contabile 14</i>
FourPlay	<i>play</i>	Quinze Filk Festival	<i>Cannes</i>
Pentatonic			<i>Film,quinze</i>
Vibraphone	<i>VI</i>	16 Tones	<i>"Sixteen Tons"</i>
Transept	<i>sept</i>	Dixseption	<i>dix-sept</i>
Obliter-8	<i>8; filk song</i>	1812Tone	<i>18, 12-tone</i>
	<i>"Falling Down on Milton</i>	D'Zenove Convention	<i>Geneva</i>
	<i>Keynes" [location]</i>		<i>Conv., dezenove (Braz.Port.)</i>
HarmonIX	<i>IX, harmonics</i>	2t0nic	<i>20, tonic,</i>
Decadence	<i>dec-, cadence</i>		<i>Teutonic (w.r.t. a German guest)</i>
XIlophone	<i>XI, xylophone</i>	aXXidental	<i>XXI, # and b</i>
		Van der Filk	<i>vingt-deux,</i>
			<i>Vander Valk</i>

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Anime:
Japanese animation
(fandom overlaps heavily with...)
Manga:
Japanese comics



Theme: Anime "Anime" + location

- Anime Los Angeles
- Anime Weekend Atlanta
- Anime St. Louis (now Kawa Kon)
- Anime Boston
- Anime Festival Wichita
- Anime Detroit
- AnimeIowa [*sic*]

(Data and analysis from Petréa Mitchell)



Theme: Anime

Japanese word, often relating to anime

- **Otakuthon** (otaku [as Eng. loan] = obsessive anime/manga fan + marathon)
- **Kumoricon** (cloudy), Portland, OR
- **Naka-Kon** (middle/heart), Kansas City, KS
- **Tekkoshon** (steel industry), Pittsburgh
- **Tora-Con** (tiger), RIT (mascot: tiger)
- **Sakura-Con** (cherry blossom) (springtime)

(Most data and analysis from Petrea Mitchell)



Japanese-English pun

- Ohayocon (good morning), Columbus, Ohio
- Nan Desu Kan (nan desu ka='what is it?'), Denver
- Daikon (radish; big con) Japanese national con, held in Osaka 大阪, whose first character 大, meaning 'big', can also be pronounced *dai*, as in 大根 *daikon*, which refers to a popular type of Japanese radish but can also be understood as 'big con' or 'Osaka-con'



Theme: specific focus

- ◆ **Readercon** (printed text sf)
- ◆ **MaulCon** (gaming; held at a mall)
- ◆ **Browncoat Ball** (Firefly TV series)
- ◆ **Festival of Fantastic Films**
- ◆ **Darkover** (Marian Zimmer Bradley's Darkover novels)
- ◆ **FurcoNZ** (furry con in New Zealand)
- ◆ **Necronomicon** (roleplaying, originally focusing on horror and psychological darkness)



Cons focusing on subpopulations of the sf community

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Subpopulation cons

◆ **Gaylaxicon:** (*gay, galaxy*)

"gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people and their friends"

◆ **Sirens:** (*Greek mythology*)

"Inspired by the daring adventures of women characters and compelled by the brilliant works of women authors, Sirens is a conference dedicated to women in fantasy literature."

◆ **Smofcon:** (*acronym "smof"*)

"Secret Masters Of Fandom Convention. We are the people behind the scenes at your local Science Fiction conventions. ... It is where we gather to exchange our insights into what has happened during the previous year, at both the local level and at the most recently held meeting of the World Science Fiction Society (also known as Worldcon)."

quotations from the respective cons' websites



Language in onomastics

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 French

No “cons” in French!*

◆ Ad Astra	Toronto, ON	◆ Draconis	Montreal, QC
◆ Anticipation	Montreal, QC	◆ FanExpo Canada	
◆ CanGames	Ottawa, ON	◆ Gatecon	Vancouver, BC
◆ Convention	various	◆ Hal-Con	Halifax, NS
◆ ConAdian	Winnipeg, MB	◆ Otakuthon	Montreal, QC
◆ Con-Version	Calgary, AB	◆ Polaris	Toronto, ON
		◆ SFContario	Toronto, ON
		◆ Torcon	Toronto, ON
		◆ VCON	Surrey, BC

That's what the Anticipation folks told me. Then I found

◆ Con*Cept Montreal, ON *

Who knew? [see Notes]

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“Con” is a very vulgar word in French.

The only names on this list that contain “con” and are from French-speaking regions are Con*Cept and Draconis.

The “con” in “Draconis” is not pronounced like the vulgarity, and “concept” is standard French, meaning about the same as in English. The avoidance rule seems to be “Don’t end the name in *-con* in a French-speaking region.” (Thanks to S.Mandel, pers. comm.)



French

Anticipation > 'anticipation'

The 2009 WorldCon, held in Montreal, was called "Anticipation", which in English and French means looking forward to the future, but in French also refers to literature looking forward to the future:

un roman d'anticipation = a science fiction novel



Those UK filkers again

The UK filk cons portmanteau numbers into their names, often reaching to other languages:

- ◆ Transept *French*
- ◆ Decadence *Greek, Latin*
- ◆ Digeri-Douze *French*
- ◆ Quinze Filk Festival *French*
- ◆ Dixseption *French*
- ◆ D'Zenove Convention *Braz. Portuguese*
- ◆ Van der Filk (vingt-deux) *French*



Klingon

The Klingon Language Institute has its yearly *qep'a'* ('big meeting') and also helps members arrange local *qepHom* ('little meeting(s)').



Seriation: distinguishing this year's con from last year's



Seriation

- ◆ 1,2,3,... or I, II, III...
 - Not necessarily in sequential years, esp. with traveling cons:
 - Loncon I (1957 Worldcon)
 - Loncon II (1965 Worldcon)
 - Not always consistent:
 - Aussiecon One, Two, Three, 4
- ◆ Year number
 - Nippon2007
 - Millennium Philcon (held in 2001)



Seriation

Silicon and its successors

Society for Interactive Literature (SIL; now called LARPA):

◆ Silicon I, II, 2.5, III, 3.5, IV, V, VI.

Continued as

◆ Intercon VII, 7.5, VIII, IX, 9.5, IX, 10.5, ...
XV, 15.5, **A, B, C, ... J** (in 2010)

The lettered Intercons from B onward each have a theme beginning with that letter. (website; someone at ANS convention, please get back to me for the credit!)



Sequential themes

Con*Stellation (aka Con†Stellation) uses Roman numerals, mostly: I, II, II.V, III... Each con is subtitled with the name of a constellation:

- 2009: Con*Stellation XXVIII: Vulpecula
- 2008: Con*Stellation XXVII: Cassiopeia
- 2007: Con*Stellation XXVI: Ophiuchus

For the second Con*Stellation, Gemini (astronomical symbol: ♊) was the obvious choice.

(Not to be confused with the 1983 Worldcon, also known as ConStellation, held in Baltimore.) *...which brings us to...*



Polysemy

Unrelated cons with the same or similar names

include...

- iCON Istanbul
possibly for the dotted capital "I" of *Istanbul*
- Icon Coralville, Iowa
- I-CON Stony Brook, Long Island, NY
- ICON festival Tel Aviv, Israel

- Sydcon Sydney, Australia
- Sydcon Malmö, in the south (syd) of Sweden

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Sydcon, Sweden, from Sw. *syd* 'south': K-MJ, pers. comm.

 Allusions & cross-references

◆ When Boskone (itself a pun on *Boscon), left Boston for a few years, the gap was filled by Arisia.

◆ The Washington, DC area con Disclave (for District of Columbia and possibly also for Dante's City of Dis) spawned a couple of relaxacons called Datclave.

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A con in Boston could most simply be called *Boscon*, but instead was called *Boskone*, after the evil organization in E.E. “Doc” Smith’s classic “Lensman” novels. When that con left Boston for several years, the con that was founded to fill the gap was named *Arisia*, after the beneficent organization opposing Boskone in the books.

Relaxacon: a get-together mostly for con-runners, with little programming, for lounging around and schmoozing



Miscellany

A few bits too good to leave out

- ◆ The Second Occasional LoneStarCon Science Fiction Convention & Chili Cook-off
- ◆ The Wrath of Con (Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan)



Sources

- ◆ *Specific sources not listed here:*
 - *The home pages of many, many cons.*
 - *Personal communications with numerous individuals.*

- ◆ **North American Science Fiction Association (NESFA).**
 - The Long List of NASFiCs. <http://www.nesfa.org/data/LL/TheLongListNasfic.html>
 - The Long List of World Science Fiction Conventions (Worldcons). <http://www.nesfa.org/data/LL/TheLongList.html>

- ◆ *Picofarad ("The zine of little capacity").*
 - Sf-oriented fanzine by Petréa Mitchell. Print and online (<http://www.bidalaka.com/picofarad/index.html>)

- ◆ **Wikipedia** includes a number of lists of cons, with links, including:
 - [List_of_anime_conventions](#)
 - [List_of_multigenre_conventions](#)
 - [List_of_science_fiction_conventions](#)

and many more, to be listed in the paper