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

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Definition

Conomastics:
onomastics of cons

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Conomastics: onomastics of cons

Say what?

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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”.

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests
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.
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.
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”
Conventions of fans of sf
& related interests

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

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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
- Fantasy

- Horror
- Furry
- Symposia
- Medieval/Renaissance
- ...
Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

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

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Basic names: theme and variations
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)
◆ Disclace (Washington, D.C.) (conclave)
Variant toponymic

Toponym \rightarrow 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 $\rightarrow$ 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”)

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Puns with “con”
... and nothing else in particular

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

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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)*

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Das Frühlingsfest der Volksmusik as base of Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik: GMG pers. comm.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Filk</th>
<th>The UK annual filk conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contabile</td>
<td>cantabile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Con2 bile</td>
<td>Contabile 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treble</td>
<td>e.g., treble clef</td>
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<tr>
<td>FourPlay</td>
<td>play</td>
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<td>Pentatonic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vibraphone</td>
<td>VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transept</td>
<td>sept</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obliter-8</td>
<td>8; filk song</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Falling Down on Milton</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Keynes” [location]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmonix</td>
<td>IX, harmonics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decadence</td>
<td>dec-, cadence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xilophone</td>
<td>XI, xylophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digeri-Douze</td>
<td>didgeridoo, douze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conthrirtena</td>
<td>concertina, thirteen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contabile Fortean</td>
<td>Contabile 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinze Filk Festival</td>
<td>Cannes</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Tones</td>
<td>“Sixteen Tons”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dixseption</td>
<td>dix-sept</td>
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<tr>
<td>1812 Tone</td>
<td>18, 12-tone</td>
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<tr>
<td>D’Zenove Convention</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conv., dezenove (Braz.Port.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2tonic</td>
<td>20, tonic, Teutonic (w.r.t. a German guest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aXXI dental</td>
<td>XXI, # and b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van der Filk</td>
<td>vingt-deux, Vander Valk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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
- Anime Iowa [sic]

(Data and analysis from Petreà 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
- **Tekkoshocon** (steel industry), Pittsburgh
- **Tora-Con** (tiger), RIT (mascot: tiger)
- **Sakura-Con** (cherry blossom) (springtime)

*(Most data and analysis from Petréa Mitchell)*

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Theme: Anime

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
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).”

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quotations from the respective cons’ websites
Language in conomastics
“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

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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*

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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)
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!)
Seriation

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...

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Polysemy

Unrelated cons with the same or similar names

include...

- iCON  İstanbul
  possibly for the dotted capital “ı” of İstanbul
- 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

Sydcon, Sweden, from Sw. syd ‘south’: K-MJ, pers. comm.
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)

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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 World Science Fiction Conventions (Worldcons).
    http://www.nesfa.org/data/LL/TheLongList.html

◆ Picofarad (*The zine of little capacity*).
  ● SF-oriented fanzine by Petreia 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