

THE USAGE OF STOKES IN THE POSSESSIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the work of George Gabriel Stokes (1819-1903) has been referred to in several different, and usually incorrect, ways. Specifically, there is considerable variation present in physical-geodetic literature for the genitive or possessive citation of Stokes.

We hope to use the International Geoid Service as a medium to encourage consistency in the citation of Stokes (1849), and other whose name end in s, by geodesists.

GRAMMATICAL RULES FOR THE POSSESSIVE

1. The Singular

Use 's for the possessive when it refers to a single person, animal, organisation, time or place (Murphy 1987, p.158). Respective examples are: William's car, the cat's tail, government's address, yesterday's news, and Canada's climate.

A fact that is not widely adhered to is that this rule extends to the singular noun, which ends in an s, especially in British English (Swan 1980, p.261). Examples of this usage include Charles's friend and Burns's poems (Strunk and White 1979, p.1). Therefore, this should be applied to the citation of Stokes.

2. The Plural

The possessive is indicated by an apostrophe alone, only when the noun plural ends in an s. For example, two surveyor's measurements, my parents' house, and seven days' work. An exception holds for the irregular plural, where the plural does not end in an s, such as in children's future (Swan 1980, p.261).

3. The Definite Article

Neither use of the possessive apostrophe nor s if the noun is preceded by the definite article. In this case, the possessive phrase is converted to a descriptive phrase. For instance, Newton's hypothesis becomes the Newton hypothesis or the hypothesis of Newton.

THE SPECIFIC CASE OF STOKES

The word Stokes is a singular noun and thus follows rule 1 above, even though it ends in an s. However, there is some quite considerable variation throughout the literature and it is common to see the possessive written as Stokes'. This is grammatically incorrect, as this type of punctuation only applies to the plural, which Stokes is not.

The correct usage in the possessive is Stokes's. Examples of the possessive include: Stokes's assumptions, Stokes's theorem, Stokes's formula, and of similar relevance to physical geodesists is Bruns's formula. Alternatively, the definite article may be used to change the possessive phrase to a descriptive phrase, specifically, the Stokes formula or the formula of Stokes.

There is one exception to this rule of modern English usage. This is the case of using the possessive for older, foreign and classical (ancient Roman and Greek) names (Swan 1980, p.261). Examples are Eratosthenes' arc, Pythagoras' theorem and Copernicus' hypothesis.

SUMMARY

This discussion is intended to generate some uniformity in the possessive usage of Stokes amongst geodesists. The author should remember that the final choice of grammatical style is made by the editor. However, if everyone is to adhere to this scheme, the often thankless task of the editor will be made slightly simpler. Finally, we would like to thank Ms. Wendlynn Wells for bringing this inconsistency to our attention.

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