

# Nomenclature

by Amos Gil'ad

Back in the fifties there was a big disagreement in the world of judo: Should we use the Japanese names for the various techniques, words we often did not understand, or adopt the method developed in France by M.Kawaiishi and his disciples, and number the techniques, call osotogari the 1st leg throw, hizaguruma the 3d leg throw and so forth. That disagreement is now dead. By abandoning the numbers, we avoided dictating the proper order of learning techniques; it also turns out that names are better for remembering the nomenclature than numbers, and when learning the Japanese names together with a translation of the name into the vernacular, we also gain some sharing of Japanese culture. But all is not well with naming techniques.

Some time ago, a friend lent me a videocassette of the Kodokan, presenting the 40 throws of the Gokyo, and 25 further throws. At the end of the cassette, we were told something like this: "In Judo, new techniques may appear from time to time. When such a new technique appears, we will not invent a new name for it, but rather use one of the existing names." In my humble opinion, that approach confuses the end with the means. It is not the throws which serve the names, but the names which should serve the throws, or, more accurately, serve the judokas by providing them with a language identifying, clearly and unequivocally, the techniques we use.

There is no "Te guruma" among those 65 names; so, people subscribing to the policy represented by the above quote from the Kodokan's videocassette, call the throw most of us know as teguruma – "Sukuinage". But there already is a sukuinage, and it is quite different from teguruma; what should we call the "old" sukuinage? Are we back to numbers – sukuinage 1, sukuinage 2? And 2 are not enough, for there is wakiotoshi, which also is not on the list of the 65 throws (it is a kind of marriage of sukuinage with a yokosutemi), so maybe it will be sukuinage 3?

The inevitable conclusion must be: When a new technique is developed, it must receive a new name, for any existing name serves to define an existing technique, so that if we were to apply it to the new technique, we would have one name defining two different techniques, and there would be confusion, which runs counter to the purpose of names in the first instance.

There is nowadays a tendency to name techniques by the name of the judoka who introduced the technique: thus, the "Habbarelli". This can cause difficulties, when there is more than one judoka with a "claim" to the technique: a "Totekashvili" or a "Laats" yokosutemi? My personal preference would be for a Japanese name, which should give some hint, possibly (when feasible) an outright description of the technique: for example, "gyaku uchimata" for "Habbarelli"? (*Since this was written, it seems that the "Powers that be" have decided to name the Habbarelli "Obitori-gaeshi"; this name was in use for two different techniques: one, old, was a kind of reverse teguruma, the other, more recent, sumigaeshi with an over-the-back belt hold and roll on top of uke. Another instance of overworking names! Now, when you read of "obitori gaeshi" you have to find out when this was written in order to get the meaning.*) I have seen a kami-sankaku-gatame being described (in a Japanese Judo periodical) as "Kuzure-kamishiho-gatame"; to me, those are quite different techniques!

Allied to this is the use of names of existing techniques to describe fundamentally quite different ones; look, for example, at the following series of pictures, taken off a videotape from European championships:



This technique is usually referred to as "Taniotoshi". But it is something quite different: it is a one-handed variety of sukuinage (scooping throw – you can see the scooping action!) or, perhaps, of wakiotoshi (armpit drop – you could see that as the main element). So, I would choose to name it – Katate-Sukui.

But, while being open to inventing new names, we should cast a critical eye on the question: What constitutes a new technique? In other words: Is the candidate for a new name really a new technique, or is it just a variation on an existing one? Thus in the Kodokan book "Illustrated Kodokan Judo", we find four techniques – Ouchigaeshi,

haraigaeshi, hanegaeshi and uchimatagaeshi – which are virtually the same technique, applied as a counter to four different attacks; and it is even possible to view this one technique as a form of kosotogari...

There are further problems connected with this question of the proper naming of techniques. For example, Anton Geesink has pointed out the difference between Ouchigari and Ouchibarai; but in many cases, these two techniques blend one into the other, so that a difference of a fraction of a second in the “ashikari” movement determines which throw was actually used. To me, the more important question would be – is the ashikari action directed against the shank or against the back of the knee: the first instance would result in a “roller”-type ouchi, the second – in a “driver”-style ouchi; and there are no separate names for these two variations... Another question would be – what determines the difference between a Hanegoshi and a koshi-style Uchimata? To me, the question would be decided mainly by the action of tori’s hands – pulling up and forwards for hanegoshi, forward and slightly downwards for uchimata; but many coaches would say – straight sweeping leg – uchimata, bent sweeping leg – hanegoshi, or, outer leg being swept – hanegoshi, both legs or inner leg swept – uchimata. But, while these questions are certainly serious and worthy ones, I would defer them until after the other questions which I have raised here are settled.

A good start has been made in this matter by Syd Hoare in his book “The A-Z of Judo” (1994, published by Ippon Books, Britain). I am not in full agreement with all that is presented there, but it could certainly serve as a base on which a comprehensive guide to the names of judo techniques could be constructed, which the IJF could then distribute as a contribution to better understanding between judokas of all nations.