On the use of names, prefixes and suffixes, and adjectival modifiers in the mineralogical nomenclature

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In mineralogical nomenclature two kinds of terms are currently used, names and adjectival modifiers.

A name may be used for:
(A) a group of minerals, e.g. "mica."
(B) a mineralogical species or the end-member that is dominant in a mineral (names should not be given to end-members that are never dominant); examples are "tremolite", "glaucophane."
(C) a variety of a mineral species, e.g. "kunzite."

Mineral names may be prefixed or suffixed. A prefixed name is a name that may be split into two parts, the last being a mineral name by itself; the first part is then called a prefix. The meaning of the prefix may be crystallographic, like "clino" in "clinoenstatite," or may not have an unique implication, like "meta," "para," or "apo," but more commonly its meaning is chemical, like "ferro" in "ferroglaucophane." In what follows the use of chemical prefixes only is discussed.

A mineral name may be also suffixed. A suffix is a symbol, a chemical or a crystallographic one, which follows a mineral name and is attached to it with a hyphen. The name may always be used without a suffix to denote the species in its broadest and unrestricted sense.

An adjectival modifier is an adjective that gives some information on the chemistry of the mineral. Examples are: in English "sodian," "sodium-rich," or "sodium-bearing"; in French "ferrifère"; in German "manganhaltig," or "manganreich." As adjectives, these are not an essential part of the name, and should be ignored in the first stages of indexing; thus while "ferroglaucophane" (which implies Fe²⁺ > Mg) is indexed under F, "ferroan glaucophane" (which implies Fe²⁺ < Mg) is indexed under G.

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¹ As approved by the I.M.A. Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names.

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The New Minerals and Mineral Names Commission of the International Mineralogical Association is concerned only with mineral names, prefixed or not, suffixed or not, no matter whether they are used for a group of minerals, for a mineral species, for an end-member, or for a variety (but a new varietal name has never been approved by the Commission), and is not concerned with adjectival modifiers properly used. The Commission invites all mineralogists to pay attention in distinguishing prefixes (as here defined) from adjectival modifiers, so as to avoid the publication without prior approval of the Commission of a new prefixed name, which is considered by the author as an old mineral name with a modifier (which would not be subject to the approval of the Commission). On the other hand every mineralogist should take care not to confuse the meaning of word like “ferroglaucoaphane” with terms like “ferroan glaucoaphane.”

IMPORTANT NOTE: In some languages, for instance in English, nouns can be used in an adjectival form, so that the word “sodium,” when preceding without a hyphen a mineral name, may signify either “sodium-rich” or also “the sodium equivalent of” or “the sodium analogue of” or something of the kind. This latter use should be avoided in the future, by using a true adjective for a minor substitution or a properly prefixed name, approved by the Commission, for a dominant substitution. Similarly in German, it is important to distinguish between “Mangan-tremolit” and “manganhaltiger Tremolit.”

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