

Letters

To the Editor:

from PROFESSOR LUCIANO CANEPARI, Dipartimento di Italianistica e Filologia Romanza,
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I have read with very great interest the report by Ladefoged and Roach on the future of the International Phonetic Association. I completely agree about the necessity and usefulness of including the phonetic descriptions of languages and dialects, and also something like the old 'partie des élèves' in *Le Maître Phonétique*. I am convinced that they should be something regular and consistent, not just occasional and short, and besides they should also show intonation and assimilations, elisions, and of course 'weak forms', not only colloquial but even rapid-familiar ones, and for many languages. I also agree about book reviews and notes, but not about the inclusion of spectrograms to be decoded and too many acoustic data. I think that articulatory and auditory phonetics should have the widest space. (Professor Canepari's letter also contained detailed comments on the proposed revision of the Association's alphabet. These are to be found in his note 'The revision of the IPA' in this issue of the Journal — Ed.)

To the Educational Phonetics Editor:

from MR. GEORGE L. BAURLEY, Kleinring 44, Dessau 4500, D.D.R.

I am not convinced that this is the most appropriate forum, but the opening of a new chapter in the history of *JIPA* provides an auspicious occasion to raise a matter much in my mind. If I can provoke discussion, I will have achieved my aim.

It has been suggested that the phenomenon which made 'Livorno' *Leghorn* for the English, and 'München' *Munich* for the French would not nowadays be tolerated, being Linguistic Chauvinism. Possibly this particular form really has died out, but should we sit back smugly and assume that onomastic chauvinism is totally dead? Indeed, surveying the historical situation, is it perhaps reviving after a stage of thanatosis? The cut-and-dried rule that I received as a younger man was appealingly simple: a name imported from a different alphabet or writing system had to be transliterated for library purposes and transcribed for everyday use; a name from within the same system (usually assumed to be the Latin alphabet) was to be regarded as sacrosanct and left untouched. Beatific simplicity!

Today, it seems, we have a new problem. It is no longer sufficient to invoke the inviolability of names from within the same writing system, and it is by no means clear how reliable the other old rule-of-thumb is that when a foreign word is adopted, the pronunciation attempts to approach the original pronunciation as closely as is possible within the adoptive sound system.

Lest anyone should think that a modest molehill is being inflated into a full-scale mountain, let me point out that the problem is everybody's responsibility: the person,

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newsreader or newspaper reader, who declines to attempt to cope with foreign names is displaying a lack of culture, not to say discourtesy. It is, moreover, a problem spread throughout the world. The British have a reputation for being insular and arrogant. The reputation is not entirely undeserved, except in so far as the Briton has thus become stamped as the archetypal philistine chauvinist. Yet he is no worse than many others. A small number of examples may serve to indicate the intricacies involved in finding a solution, if we assume that those in a position to do so will offer guidance that it is possible for others to follow and put into practice.

I confess to great irritation when BBC speakers stress Czech names (as of tennis players) as if the names were Polish, for the obvious reason that stress in these languages is so very regular and simple: the BBC should take this regularity and simplicity into account and guide the public, even if it means exceeding the limits of 'closest approximation' by the introduction of what appears to be for the average English speaker an 'unnatural' stress pattern. It pains me to hear German newsreaders terminate Italian and Spanish names in -e with [ə]. I agree, English speakers do not adopt the native pronunciation, but is it merely my subjective English ear that finds superior results in the English 'closest approximation' version?

I weary of hearing a Japanese Prime Minister referred to by German and Danish newsreaders as if he hailed from another planet and by British newsreaders as if he came from Cardiff or Bolton. On whether or not it is chauvinistic, or perhaps patronising, when a British broadcaster speaks of : / kɪ:njə / or as we are supposed to call it now /kɛnjə / I will withhold an opinion, but it does show some awareness of the changing world.

The foregoing are minor irritants. What deserves the attention of us all is the fundamental issue. We all have to 'place' foreign names in both spoken and written form, and that instantly. Secondly, in today's world, the world of computers and word processors, the Latin alphabet reigns supreme. In regard to this second point, I assume, however naïvely, that when an African country shakes off its colonial name or form of name it will hardly be likely to retain or introduce the Arabic script as its vehicle of written communication. Instead, a former French colony can be expected to use the Latin alphabet with a French-based orthography, a former British colony the same with an English-based orthography. For this reason I decline to believe that such names as Zambia and Zimbabwe are anglicisations from Arabic or any other script, and I cannot accept the Germanisation of these names. Certainly, in the light of the German sound and orthographic systems, there arises a conflict between what the consumer hears and what he sees, when the original orthography is not tampered with, but what has in fact happened? One may perhaps tolerate *Sambia* as eliciting the optimum pronunciation from a German newspaper reader. *Simbabwe* on the other hand does nothing of the sort. To produce the desired result, it is difficult to accept anything short of **Simba Buää*, but that is a bit too hideous for mortal man to swallow.

I am not picking on the Germans in particular. It just so happens that so many former colonies have an English-based orthography, and so there is less scope for conflict in the British media. But certainly the majority of unnecessarily deviant pronunciations I complain of come from the lips of supposedly well trained professional speakers from Britain. On the other hand, I am filled with admiration for those BBC newsreaders who approximate to the original pronunciation of rarer names, from the Chinese, for example, with dignity and aplomb, in marked contrast

to some speakers' treatment of names from a language like Spanish, made to seem the butt of the brilliant wit of every other news presenter.

If the will or the authority to set out principles is lacking, can it be established that the adopters of a foreign name have a responsibility they cannot shrug off? Modern life demands so much ability, so many skills: why not in this respect too? British and American names seem to be spoken with fair accuracy throughout the world; shamefully, others are grossly distorted. If the Germans have had to learn to 'place' English names (*Reagan* seems to be about the only one that absolutely defeats German media presenters), let them, and English-speakers too, learn to acquire a reasonably accurate pronunciation of names from the rest of the world. Common courtesy dictates it.

from PROFESSOR DAVID CRYSTAL, P.O.Box 5, Holyhead, Gwynedd LL65 1RG, U.K.

I have recently completed work on the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, out in September 1987, in which a substantial section is devoted to phonetics. The book contains many illustrations, both line-drawings and photographs, and I thought the phonetics section would be one of the easiest to illustrate, being, as it were, an eminently photographable subject. It proved not to be the case. The picture-researchers were unable to find standard photographs of even quite basic phonetics equipment and activities. For example, it proved impossible to find a photograph of an electromyographic experiment in this country. The problems in obtaining a lateral X-ray of the vocal organs were almost insuperable. And try finding a body plethysmograph anywhere in the world! In the end, we had to ask various colleagues to take photographs for us, which took a great deal of time and money. All of which makes me wonder why there isn't a photographic archive of phonetic material that could be used not only by authors involved in publishing work in phonetics but by lecturers and anyone involved in publicising the subject in the educational domain. There must be lots of excellent photographs lurking in phonetics labs and files around the world. Could the negatives not be centralised in some way, and a catalogue devised? I am sure the facility would be greatly used.

from PROFESSOR DING LIAOSHENG, Department of Russian, Peking University, People's Republic of China

English is the first foreign language for most Chinese students, followed by other languages such as French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese. The dictionaries and textbooks show pronunciation by means of IPA notation. So the International Phonetic Alphabet is really quite popular in our country now. There are more and more people interested in learning the sound values of the IPA.

As it happens, there recently appeared a manual *Teach Yourself the International Phonetic Alphabet*, with a cassette made by the author, Zhou Dianfu. Zhou's recording illustrates not only the symbols on the IPA chart, but also the particular vowels, consonants, and prosodic possibilities of Chinese.

In addition to the discussion of the primary and secondary cardinal vowels, retroflex and nasalised vowels, much attention is paid to the typical Chinese apical

vowels¹. The author also lays stress on the voiced consonants, which are difficult for most Chinese. Besides the IPA (revised 1979), we have as an appendix to the manual a Chinese version of the IPA table.

From my point of view, it would be of great use if the IPA could organise or produce a series of teaching recordings which illustrate the particular vowels and consonants, and the prosodic varieties, of different languages. Perhaps they could be based on the recordings of J. C. Wells and S. Ramsaran. This would give an indication of the phonetic flavour of the different languages like the Chinese version mentioned above.

Notes

1. There are four Chinese apical vowels. They are all very close, and the rounded /y/, /ɥ/ are used in certain dialects only:

	front	back
unrounded	ɿ	ʮ
rounded	ʏ	ɥ