

2 July 2002

English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 11 of the provisional agenda*

Reports on programmes to assist with pronunciation of names

**Standardizing the pronunciation of geographical names for
use in radio and television programmes in Germany**

Submitted by Germany**

* E/CONF.94/1.

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1. Basics of pronunciation: German geographical names and “standardized articulation”¹

In principle, the pronunciation of German geographical names follows the rules of articulation of the German language. The guideline for broadcasting houses is the “standardized articulation”² described in a standard work about the German language. It is based on Prof. Mangold’s studies and the results of numerous phoneticians, who — independent of each other — have dealt with and are still dealing with various aspects of German pronunciation. As a supplement, the book “Das Große Wörterbuch der deutschen Aussprache”³ is still used today. This book was written by a collective of authors in the former German Democratic Republic and has not been revised since 1974. E. g. with respect to the transcription of German diphthongs the book differs from DUDEN, but this is not essential for the realization of sounds in radio or TV programmes.

“Standardized articulation” is not actually spoken language, which can be heard in this form in one or several regions of our country. “Standardized articulation” is an abstract, supraregional variety, which has a decisive advantage as opposed to regional pronunciations: It is understood everywhere. The name /München/ is understood everywhere in Germany; every speaker will immediately and clearly identify it as a city in Southern Germany. Of course the additional connotations of the name for each speaker depend on his or her individual educational background. In Hamburg the name is pronounced in a slightly different way than in Munich itself, where the phonetic variant is even supplemented by a lexical variant — but it will always be understood everywhere in Germany.

If we look at a map of German dialects we see that the German linguistic area is very much diversified and harbors a wealth of dialects. In particular the question which syllable should be stressed can often only be answered with etymological reasons and cannot be explained by rules. Therefore, other methods have to be found to reach phonetic unambiguity.

ARD’s individual broadcasting houses have long since started to keep card indexes with names of places for their transmission areas. These card indexes were integrated into ARD’s pronunciation database and are permanently available online to all colleagues. An example will show why dialect or regional pronunciations should imperatively be taken into account: In some programmes the names of the towns of /Guntersau/ and /Neckarsulm/ are mispronounced; in both cases it is important to observe the syllable limits: Gunters-au and Neckar-sulm. The mispronunciation “Gunter-sau” suggests that we are talking about Gunter’s sow (German “Sau” = sow). The incorrect pronunciation “Neckars-ulm” refers to a part of a town called Ulm, which might be part of Neckar. This is wrong, because these names, these places do not exist.

2. Deviations from “standardized articulation”

In the past the German language has been influenced by other languages again and again. There was a time when French had a strong influence. Today some language preservers criticize the fact that English is too dominant and that the German language unreflectedly borrows many words or pronunciations from the Anglo-American language. These observations might apply to the lexical area — they do not play an important role in

¹⁾ These explanations apply exclusively to the programmes of the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten in Deutschland (ARD, Broadcasting Houses by State Law). The pronunciation of geographical names of places in Austria, Switzerland and German language exclaves in neighboring European countries is not dealt with. Neither is the pronunciation of Sorbian geographical names dealt with in this treatise.

²⁾ Duden (1990): Aussprachewörterbuch. Wörterbuch der deutschen Standardaussprache. 3. Ausgabe, bearbeitet von Max Mangold, Dudenverlag, Bibliographisches Institut, Mannheim/Wien/Zürich (Dictionary of standardized German pronunciation. 3rd edition, revised by Max Mangold)

³⁾ Autorenkollektiv (1974): Das Große Wörterbuch der deutschen Aussprache. VEB Bibliographisches Institut, Leipzig

pronunciation, however. To the contrary: Again and again we can observe that words taken from foreign languages are subject to certain, typically “German” articulation mechanisms. In this context above all the “Germanic stress of the word”, i. e. the tendency to stress the first syllable of words, is an interesting phenomenon. Today, we can often hear that speakers stress the first syllable of words like /progressiv, konservativ/. Correspondingly, this applies to the pronunciation of geographical names, even if — according to the rules — their last syllable is stressed, as in names of French towns or cities. E. g. according to the rules, the French stress the last syllable of the name /Orléans/, whereas German speakers often stress the first syllable.

Many of ARD’s radio programmes broadcast traffic news. The pronunciation of geographical names must enable the driver to identify the place quickly and clearly. In no case must regional variants deter his or her attention or even prevent him or her from allocating the name to the correct spot on the map. In our traffic news we may therefore replace a regional pronunciation by a pronunciation that is accepted in a wider region. In doing so we do not only pay regard to the citizens of the place in question, but also the many road users who are strangers to these places and who drive through our transmission area. In such cases ARD’s pronunciation database always documents the original pronunciation as well.

On the other hand it may very well be the case that only a regional pronunciation renders a clear identification possible: A nice example is the pronunciation of /Sanspareil/ in the German region of Upper Franconia. In this region the underlying French pronunciation is misleading and is replaced by the regional variant.

With regard to entries in ARD’s pronunciation database it was agreed that every single modification should be examined carefully and agreed upon on an ARD-wide basis before it is entered into the database.

3. The pronunciation of geographical names of foreign origin

In principle foreign names, including of course very many geographical names, are entered or pronounced, respectively, according to the following principle: “As originally as possible and as German as necessary.”

As a general rule geographical names of foreign origin are pronounced as authentically as possible. The following rule applies: If a sound contained in the foreign word is also contained in the German inventory of sounds, it should be pronounced. If a sound does not exist it should be replaced by a sound which to the most possible extent resembles the original sound with respect to its auditive or articulatory quality. Apart from that, the position of a sound may necessitate a modification, e. g. when in original pronunciation a consonant like /j/ is spoken in a series of sounds which cannot be realized by German speakers. The capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, /Kasan/, which in original sound values is pronounced [ka'zanj], is [ka'za:n] for speakers of German radio and TV programmes.

ARD’s pronunciation database contains numerous examples for the adoption of original pronunciations to the most possible extent. In addition, there are original pronunciations which might be realized by German speakers without any problems, but which should be gently adapted to “standardized articulation”. This applies above all to differences in the vowel qualities; e. g. many Italian names contain the letter /e/ which is pronounced in the form of a long [ɛ:]; in German, however, its vowel quality is adapted and changed to a long [e:]. The name of the Italian town of Siena is pronounced ['sɛ:na] in Italian sound values, for German speakers it becomes ['sɛ:na]. Independent of the above mentioned principle to pronounce the names “as originally as possible and as German as necessary”, which applies to all newly entered names, the German language — and of course this also applies to other languages — has an inventory of geographical names, which have experienced an adaptation to German pronunciation over a long period of time. For example we say ['lɔndɔn], not ['lɔndən], [pa'ri:s], not [pa'ri]. Disputed or uncertain pronunciations of words are agreed upon on an ARD-wide basis. Once a year the representatives of the individual houses come together in a “user’s meeting” to discuss the uniform pronunciation of names, including geographical names. Whenever topical problems arise these representatives agree on the recommended pronunciation via telephone conference. At the annual user’s meetings ARD’s representatives also agree upon rules for the adaptation of foreign languages to the German language, which are then used uniformly in all ARD houses.

4. The pronunciation of geographical names contained in the list of exonyms of the Federal Agency of Cartography and Geodesy

The application of the rule that foreign names should be pronounced “as originally as possible, but as German as necessary” and the permanent coordination of ARD’s houses made it possible to achieve an extensive standardization on a high, authentic phonetic level for the first time.

The cooperation with StAGN in the preparation of the “List of selected German-language exonyms” is the logical continuation of the work done up to now. In coherent form, the list contains information on “endonymic pronunciation which is adapted to the German language”.

An “adapted endonymic pronunciation” tries to translate the sound values of a foreign language (the “source language”) systematically into sound values of another language (the “target language”). It aims at retaining as many original sound values as possible; in any case the stress of the word from the source language should be retained. If there are no corresponding sound values in the target language the original sounds have to be replaced by sounds of the target language which resemble them to the most possible extent with respect to their auditive or articulatory quality (see item 3 above).

ARD’s pronunciation database has developed parameters for systematic, standardized pronunciation adaptations for various foreign languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Russian, discussed these parameters on an ARD-wide basis and adopted them unanimously; other languages will follow. In this process work groups in which representatives of different ARD houses act as consultants, are a creative and successful solution. Within ARD’s extensive network there is a considerable potential of specialists from a large variety of the world’s countries and language regions.
