

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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PRONUNCIATION OF "FAHRENHEIT"

In English-speaking countries the Fahrenheit temperature scale is more widely used than the centigrade, especially for gauging weather, but the latter is familiar enough to make it necessary, in many cases, when we refer to thermometer readings, to specify which scale we mean. How should the names of these scales be pronounced?

"Centigrade" is a good Latin derivative. There is no valid reason for pronouncing it, as some Americans do, as if its first syllable were French and the rest of the word English.

"Fahrenheit" is German. If we conform to the rules of that language, we must pronounce the first syllable with the "a" broad, as in "arm," but the name has been anglicized -- and in more ways than one! Most dictionaries of English insist on the German pronunciation, but in the eastern United States, so far as my personal observation goes, the "a" in this name is usually pronounced short, as in "hat," and the same usage prevails among cultivated people in southern England, as shown by that priceless record of gentlemen's English, Daniel Jones' "English Pronouncing Dictionary."

A third pronunciation is general in the middle western United States, according to M. M. Schoonouer, who states in the current number of "American Speech" that most middle westerners pronounce the first syllable as if it were spelled "fare." In a foot-note he also accuses Bostonians of preferring this pronunciation-- but he does not say what kind of Bostonians. Canada and the Far West remain to be heard from.

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