



HEALTH SCIENCES

The correct pronunciation of the generic name *Aedes*, to which *Aedes aegypti* belongs

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Abstract: *Aedes aegypti* is currently the mosquito with major impact on public health in Brazil and a proven vector of several emerging arboviruses. By consequence, its name is frequently being spoken by lay people of the media and general public, as well as by researchers in this country both in general media and academic events. However, the generic name *Aedes*, contrary to its etymological origin and worldwide correct pronunciation (“A-e-des”), has been frequently mispronounced as “Edes” on many occasions by media spokespersons and by researchers and lay people in Brazil. However, based on historical and linguistic evidence, it is confirmed here that the correct historical pronunciation (A-e-des) must be maintained and observed in Brazil as it is enunciated all over the World.

Key words: Chikungunya, Dengue, mosquito, Yellow Fever, Zika.

INTRODUCTION

Aedes aegypti is currently the mosquito with major impact on public health in Brazil, being the proven vector of Dengue fever, Zika and Chikungunya viruses, which seriously impact human health (Patterson et al. 2016, Carvalho & Moreira 2017, Donalisio et al. 2017). By consequence, the name of *Aedes aegypti* has been frequently spoken by media spokespersons and lay members of the general public, as well as by researchers in this country both in general media and academic events. However, *Aedes* is differently pronounced as “A-e-des” or “Edes”, and the initial diphthong of *aegypti* is pronounced as “a-e” or “e” (Rigolon 2015). On one hand, there is no doubt that in the latter case, because of the general rule of pronunciation of the Latin diphthong “ae”, it should be spoken as “e” (Rigolon 2015), thus “egypti”, with the final i being pronounced as a long vowel (as “need”). On the other hand, in the case of *Aedes*, as discussed below, the correct pronunciation does

not follow this general rule and the “e” must be pronounced separately from the preceding “A” (A-e-des), with the first and second e both being pronounced as a long vowel.

DISCUSSION

The genus *Aedes* was created and described by Meigen (1818). The original text was written in Gothic German with diagnosis or descriptions of the taxa in Latin. *Aedes* was stated at the top of page 13, while the sentence which clarifies the etymology of *Aedes* is the last on the same page, after a paragraph describing *Aedes cinereus*, which may possibly make it unnoticed for most of contemporary readers, who do not read Gothic German.

In the mentioned sentence, Meigen wrote that Graf (=Count) von Hoffmannsegg, which has[d] this species in his collection, create[d] the name *Aedes* from the Greek, meaning [in German] “beschwerlich”. The latter word is a

German adjective which has several meanings, such as arduous, tiring, tiresome, wearisome, troublesome. It is noteworthy that Johann Centurius Graf von Hoffmannsegg (1766-1849) was an influent German naturalist, who made contributions to botany, entomology and ornitology, besides gathering many biological collections (Papavero 1971).

Therefore, *Aedes* is taken from Greek (meaning distasteful, disagreeable, odious, unpleasant), and that is the reason why the first two letters (Ae) must be pronounced separately: A-e-des. In the past, many authors enhanced this fact by adding an umlaut over the first “e” of the name (“*Aëdes*”). A remarkable example is the superb comprehensive monograph about *Aedes aegypti* by Sir S. R. Christophers (1960) in which the name of this genus is always written as “*Aëdes*”. Nowadays, however, Article 27 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999) requires that no diacritical or other mark, such as an umlaut can be used, essentially removing the indicator for the correct pronunciation of *Aedes*. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that when one of us (JA) asked the culicid specialist Dr. Ralph Harbach at the Natural History Museum in London (NHM), UK, about the present subject, he informed us that in the case of *Aedes*, it is in fact pronounced as “*Á-é-dés*” and that “None of my French, German, African and Asian colleagues mispronounce the name (...)”.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Efforts should be made to inform and correct the current mispronunciation of *Aedes*, not only among scientists or researchers working in fields related to mosquitoes or diseases transmitted by them but also among lay people and media persons in Brazil, as a good scientific practice.

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Author contributions

HRG-S designed the study, performed most of the bibliographical search and prepared most of the text; EB translated the Gothic German of Meigen's work and provided insights about pronunciation; JA contacted Dr. Ralph Harbach for his opinion and information. All authors revised the manuscript and contributed for its content.

