

Why the Internet age will not accept simplified English spelling

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ABSTRACT

I argue that any attempt to alter English spelling internationally is doomed to failure for three reasons: 1) the multiplicity of native and non-native English pronunciations; 2) resistance from fear of censorship through transcription; 3) impossibility of enforcement, a factor now intensified by the inherently plural nature of the Internet.

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I - INTRODUCTION: FROM SHAW TO McLUHAN

The question before us is whether the rules of English spelling, which no-one could claim are particularly logical, should be simplified through reform. This notion has had a certain popularity, one of its most famous exponents being Bernard Shaw, who declared provocatively in his preface to *Pygmalion* (1914): 'The English have no respect for their language ... They cannot spell it because they have nothing to spell it with but an old foreign alphabet of which only the consonants - and not all of them - have any agreed speech value ... The reformer we need most today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast'¹. The idea gained currency, though not success, in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of the influential orthodoxy of that period claiming the inherent primacy of speech over writing. The high priest of this tendency was of course Marshall McLuhan, whose *Understanding Media*, published in 1964 - somewhat paradoxically devaluing the written word through the medium of print - denounced 'the typographic trance of the West' and affirmed the presumed spontaneity of 'the vocal, auditory and mimetic world that had been repressed by the printed word'². In such a pro-audiovisual, anti-writing climate, a reputed linguistic scholar such as David Crystal could write, in *Linguistics*, his manual of 1971: 'Speech is the primary medium of linguistic expression ... all natural languages were spoken before they were written ... To base our statements about language on writing rather than on speech is therefore a reversal of linguistic priorities'³. Crystal here comes quite close to reducing writing to a mere derivative of speech. To seek to approximate the written word to speech through spelling reform would thus, in such a period, seem both theoretically and pragmatically justified. Whether such a position, seemingly appropriate to the audiovisual age, is quite so suited to its successor the Internet age is, however, as I shall argue below, another matter altogether.

It is well enough known that the English language has two generally accepted sets of spelling conventions, British and American, and that the differences between the two are in fact not great. Today in the English native-speaker world, Ireland, Australia and the Indian subcontinent follow the UK, while Canadian spelling is somewhere between British and

¹ Shaw, 5.

² McLuhan, 15, 279.

³ Crystal (1971), 60.

American; non-native learners will typically follow the spelling of whoever their teacher was. The orthographic reforms successfully introduced into US English from 1828 by Noah Webster, the compiler of *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, who 'changed the spelling of many words in his dictionaries in an attempt to make them more phonetic'⁴ (replacing -our by -or, -lled by -led, etc), are of course significant and defining of written American English, but at the same time remain fairly limited in scope. Webster in fact had earlier proposed, in his manifesto of 1789 'An Essay on the Necessity, Advantages, and Practicality of Reforming the Mode of Spelling and of Rendering the Orthography of Words Correspondent to Pronunciation', a far more deep-reaching spelling reform for American English, the objective being to 'reform ... abuses, and introduce order and regularity into the American tongue'⁵. His original reform would have, inter alia, abolished silent letters, domesticated words of French origin and added extra accented characters to the alphabet, but this of course did not happen.

The idea of simplification may be superficially attractive, but it can be counter-argued that solid reasons exist for leaving English orthography as it is, and that the effect of the Internet is actually to strengthen those arguments. I shall divide my main observations into three parts. First, I shall look at the circumstances of spelling in two other European languages with a global reach, Portuguese and Spanish, and consider what lessons may be learned therefrom for English; second, I shall examine the long-standing obstacles to any reform of English spelling; and finally, I shall consider the extent to which the situation has been modified by the advent of the Internet.

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II - PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH

It is fair to say that the four European languages with a genuinely global reach today are English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Of the four, English and Portuguese operate a dual spelling system (UK/US; Portugal/Brazil), while the orthography of French and Spanish is unified worldwide. For reasons of space I shall here consider only Portuguese (today an official language in eight independent countries)⁶ and Spanish (an official language in twenty)⁷. To take the former first, it is interesting to note that the Portuguese language underwent a considerable spelling reform in 1911 (known as the Gonçalves Viana reform, after Aniceto dos Reis Gonçalves Viana, the phonetician who was its architect, and who set out its principles as early as 1885 in his essay, written jointly with the orientalist Guilherme de Vasconcelos Abreu and available today on-line - 'Bases da Ortografia Portuguesa' [Bases of Portuguese Spelling]). This reform had two notable characteristics: it was consciously introduced in the wake of a political revolution, namely the introduction of the Portuguese republic following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1910; and it had international success,

⁴ 'Noah Webster' (Internet reference).

⁵ Webster (Internet reference).

⁶ Portugal (including the Azores and Madeira in the Atlantic); Brazil; five African countries, i.e.: Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe; and East Timor in Asia. Portuguese is now only rarely used in the former colonial territories which are not independent countries, i.e. Macao in China and Goa, Daman and Diu in India. The status of Galician, in many ways similar to Portuguese but spoken within Spanish territory, remains problematic.

⁷ Spain (including the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands in the Atlantic and the two North African cities of Ceuta and Melilla); eighteen Latin American republics; and Equatorial Guinea in Africa. There is one non-independent Spanish-speaking territory, Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, belonging to the US (on whose mainland there are of course large numbers of English-Spanish bilinguals of Hispanic origin).

being later accepted, in an agreement of 1931, by the then only other independent state using the language, namely Brazil. Gonçalves Viana's conscious aim was to introduce an 'ortografia científica e uniforme' (a 'scientific and uniform spelling'⁸). The reform abolished the great majority of double consonants - thus, COMMÉRCIO (commerce) became COMÉRCIO, the main exception being the double s, which was and is pronounced differently (soft S) from the single S (hard S). In addition, it systematically removed the orthographic traces of ancient Greek: here its architect was ruthless, declaring: 'São banidos da escrita os símbolos gráficos sem valor de fonema próprio' ('Graphic symbols which have no value as a phoneme in themselves are banished from writing'⁹). The reform thus eliminated the letter Y in favour of I, while TH became T, PH became F and hard CH became QU. PHYSICA became FÍSICA, ELEPHANTE became ELEFANTE; THEOLOGIA became TEOLOGIA. Placenames too were not immune: for instance, the Portuguese fishing village NAZARETH became NAZARÉ, losing its unpronounced final TH.

However, these changes did not render Portuguese a completely phonetically spelled language: for instance, silent 'h' remains (as in 'homem' = man), while double s ('ss', as in 'massa' = pasta) and c with cedilla ('ç', as in 'maçã' = apple) are interchangeable. In Portugal, the old forms did not disappear altogether: they can still be seen on, say street name-plaques or university façades dating from before the reform, and, interestingly, some remain in people's surnames. The phonetician VIANA's own name is now thus spelt and not, as in 1885, VIANNA; but 'old' spellings remain to this day in some surnames, as in ATHAYDE or in the name of the TOTTA E AÇORES bank (where one would expect ATAÍDE and TOTA). The reasons for the unchanged surnames appear to be legal, relating to the principle of juridical continuity and such factors as inheritance and property ownership.

Today, Brazilian Portuguese exhibits a number of minor orthographic divergences from European Portuguese, reflecting differences in pronunciation, e.g. FATO (= fact) (Brazil) for FACTO (Portugal). 1990, however, saw the signing of an international spelling agreement or 'Acordo ortográfico' which was intended to standardise spelling in all Portuguese-speaking countries. This agreement, after numerous postponements, is theoretically being implemented as of 2004, but it continues to encounter resistance, notably in Portugal - one reason being its preference for Brazilian forms which do not necessarily reflect European Portuguese pronunciation. It is true that the 1911 reforms have long since been accepted throughout the Lusophone world and that no-one would want to go back to the old spelling. It is, however, also the case that that reform was never so radical as to make texts in the old spelling incomprehensible: they simply look quaint. Portuguese is today certainly a global language, now spoken, in the wake of decolonisation, in no longer two (as at the time of the reform) but eight independent countries. It has second- as well as first-language speakers in five African countries and in East Timor, but it does not have many non-native speakers, and any temptation to extrapolate from the Portuguese reform of 1911 to English and its situation today should take account of the very different circumstances now surrounding English as a global language.

Spanish has even more considerable claims than Portuguese to be a global language, and unlike Portuguese is also widely taught as a foreign language, thus having a fair number of non-native speakers. It is often said to be a near-totally phonetic language in which sound corresponds all but perfectly to sense. This assertion, however, requires qualification. If we take the norms of standard peninsular Spanish as a starting-point we will find that, for

⁸ Gonçalves Viana and Vasconcelos Abreu (Internet reference).

⁹ *ibid.*

instance: initial h, as in 'hombre' (man), is silent; 'b' and 'v' are not distinguished in pronunciation; and 'g' and 'j' in certain positions are pronounced identically ('jinete' = rider; 'girasol' = sunflower). These factors create a degree of confusion among the less educated, who may, for instance, write the expression 'a ver' ('let's see') as if it were the auxiliary verb 'haber'. Besides, the 'near-phonetic' label is truer of peninsular than it is of Hispanoamerican Spanish. Standard European Spanish observes the phonetic distinction between the seseo (soft s sound) and ceceo (soft th sound), while Hispanoamerican Spanish (as well as, to complicate matters, peninsular pronunciations in Andalusia and Extremadura, and that of the Canary Islands) does not recognise the ceceo and uses only the seseo. The result is that while in the received peninsular pronunciation the letters c and z are in certain positions pronounced th (ceceo) while s is always pronounced s (seseo), in Hispanoamerica all three are pronounced s (seseo). Hence Hispanoamericans may hesitate as to whether to write a given word with a c, z or s, and even the very educated may stumble occasionally, by, say, writing the verb 'acechar' (to ambush) as 'asechar', or the adjective 'asertivo' (assertive) as 'acertivo'. In addition, the Argentinian pronunciation of certain sounds is notably different from, say, the Colombian, let alone the peninsular Spanish. Meanwhile, one of the advantages of Spanish as a world language is, precisely, the interoperability of the written form, at least as far as graphic conventions are concerned - a crucial feature of international Spanish that allows a text published in, say, Mexico City, to be understood in, say, Buenos Aires, Lima or Madrid. Any attempt to approximate the pronunciation of Spanish further to speech would have the effect of part-balkanising the written language.

In the Internet context, it is worth mentioning an interesting new development in the writing of (essentially so far) peninsular Spanish, which arrestingly combines the discourses of cyberutopia and equal opportunities. It is now quite frequent in academic, feminist and even some mainstream circles (e.g. bookshop websites) to use a new, gender-neutral graphic convention for certain nouns, adjectives and even articles (wherever the endings -o/-a and -os/-as apply). Where a gender-neutral or gender-indeterminate referent is implied, the terminations -o (masculine) and -a (feminine) are both replaced by the graphic neologism @ (in other words, the 'at' sign familiar from email addresses), so that 'amigo y/o amiga' (male and/or female friend) becomes 'amig@'. Similarly, in the plural 'los/las amigos/amigas' ('the male friends and/or the female friends') becomes 'l@s amig@s', i.e. friends of either gender, both genders or non-specified gender. In at least some people's usage, then, a new letter has been added to the Spanish alphabet. In a further curious twist, this usage is not transferable to speech and remains confined to page and screen, thus serving in the cyber age to call in question the orthodox notion of the absolute primacy of speech over writing.

It may be concluded from the examination of Portuguese and Spanish that the orthographic experience of other languages is not as simple or as straightforward as it might appear (in the Spanish case) or does not necessarily transfer unproblematically to the different circumstances of English (in the Portuguese case). Every language, let us not forget, has its own dynamic.

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III - ENGLISH SPELLING REFORM: THE OBSTACLES

To return to English and the issue of spelling change, we may note in the first place a trenchant and carefully-argued rebuttal of the idea from a leading modern authority. The reputed grammarian R.W. Burchfield concludes in the 1996 edition of *Fowler's Modern English Usage* that spelling reform is a pipe-dream. Burchfield notes that 'modern English

spelling falls well short of being a reliable guide to the pronunciation of a sizeable number of English words', and that, indeed, 'the notorious inconsistencies of English spelling' are such that 'it is tempting to think that they could be legislated away'. However, he points out that any phonetics-based reform of English spelling would at once run up against the question of *whose* phonetics: as he puts it, 'Whose standard English would qualify as the model for the re-spelling of the whole language?'¹⁰. Terminologically, it would be more accurate to say 'Whose received pronunciation?', but Burchfield's point is more than valid. Would the new rules be based on English, Scottish, Irish, American, Canadian, Australian, South African, Caribbean, Indian or Singaporean pronunciation? Would final 'r' be written - reflecting Scottish and American usage - or not - reflecting received English usage? The result could even be, paradoxically, to fragment the written language, with different countries adopting different spelling rules in line with their own pronunciation - whereas at present English in its written form, allowing for minor national spelling variations, can be pronounced in a huge variety of accents while remaining effectively the same.

In addition, a major reform, supposing it to be enforceable, would have the long-term consequence of rendering any texts printed prior to it unreadable to all but a few specialists. Burchfield makes this point too: 'Reform, if radical, would automatically place millions of books, newspapers, etc., out of the reach of the general public until they were reprinted in the new spelling system'¹¹. Indeed, here Burchfield's 'until' seems over-optimistic: in view of the huge amounts of material involved, the operative word is surely 'unless'. In all likelihood the reform would thus usher in a new form of censorship. Works not chosen for 're-spelling' would disappear from view, and the new editions of other works might be not just *re-spelt*, but *re-written*. On this scenario, passages judged offensive, whether by the standards of today's political correctness or some other belief-system yet to be invented, would be not re-spelt but, rather, ideologically cleansed or deleted outright by zealously self-righteous transcribers. This is no empty threat: such transcription would be a form of interlingual translation, and in translation studies circles there does exist a school of thought which believes that translators are entitled to suppress elements of the original which they find ethically unsound. A recent writer on translation ethics, Gerard McAlester, refers to the view that 'a valid text should ... be ethically sound' and that where unacceptable material appears in the original 'it is the translator's job to correct or gloss the text' - indeed, that translators' 'ultimate responsibility for what they do is their own conscience'¹². However, not everyone's conscience tells them the same things, and given the existence of such positions and the analogy between translation and transcription, there is no guarantee that texts of whatever kind would emerge unmodified from transcription into the new spelling. In addition, there would be the question of who would check the work of the transcribers, be it on ideological grounds or merely for technical accuracy (transcription software could no doubt be devised, but it would no doubt be about as reliable as the existing automatic translation software). It is difficult to see how living writers could be forcibly persuaded to have all their existing works transcribed into the new spelling - would they acquire the competence to do it themselves, or would they trust the transcribers? Would J.K. Rowling accept the idea of a respelt Harry Potter?

Another major obstacle to spelling reform is that, in view of the huge number of countries in the world that now use English as a first, second or foreign language, there is no guarantee that all would adopt a new standard. Burchfield, again, refers to 'the absence of a single

¹⁰ Burchfield, 731.

¹¹ Burchfield, 731-732.

¹² McAlester, 225, 227.

competent linguistic authority empowered to make such fundamental changes¹³. The concept of a language Academy is perceived as alien to English-speaking cultures; nor is there any organisation of Anglophone countries with pan-national powers in the language field. Nor would there be any way of enforcing the 'new' rules internationally on private or individual use, especially (a not unimportant point today) on the Internet. I shall return in greater detail later to the enforcement issue.

For the moment, I will stress that Burchfield concludes that 'the English spelling system is best left alone, except in minor particulars'¹⁴. Another grammarian, the generally traditionalist John Honey, comes, in his 1997 book on Standard English *Language is Power*, to a similar conclusion, while leaving more room for change than Burchfield: 'The arguments for radical reform are ... much less convincing than the case for piecemeal change in instances which give rise to constant confusion'. He proposes, for instance, changing 'read' (past tense and past participle) to 'redd' while keeping the infinitive 'read'; and changing 'live' to 'lyve' for the adjective while retaining 'live' for the verb¹⁵. However, even small individual changes as this would come up against the same insuperable enforcement obstacles as would a root-and-branch reform, and indeed Honey does not say how he would enforce his handful of 'new' spellings.

This does not mean, of course, that English spelling will not change over time. Bernard Shaw's practical efforts at spelling change, as far as the published editions of his works are concerned, seem to have been limited to throwing out the troublesome apostrophe - albeit only partially, as examination of the text of *Pygmalion* in today's Penguin edition brings up 'Ive' and 'youre' without the apostrophe, but 'I'll' and 'she'll' with it. Today, it is undoubtedly the case that large numbers of people do not know how to use the apostrophe correctly (as witness the endless confusion over 'its' and 'it's', or the notorious 'greengrocer's plural' as in 'cabbage's'), and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it could eventually fall into disuse. Martin Cutts, author of the influential style manual *The Plain English Guide*, warns: 'The apostrophe is now so widely misused ... that its eventual death seems inevitable'. Should this happen, there would be an immediate loss of precision for the written language, for the distinction between possessive singular and possessive plural would be blurred: 'the boy's mother' (one boy's mother) is *not* the same as 'the boys' mother' (the mother of several boys), and it is therefore worth sounding a warning note on the matter. Indeed, as Cutts himself points out, 'the correct use of apostrophes conveys meaning and prevents ambiguity'¹⁶.

IV - GLOBAL ENGLISH SPELLING AND THE INTERNET

Of all the objections to recasting English spelling, however, the most telling one today is, I believe, that of unenforceability. This factor is now immensely compounded by the Internet, whose existence has effectively become the guarantee of the unreformability of International English spelling. One aspect of the Internet revolution which is perhaps not sufficiently remarked is the extent to which it undermines McLuhanite ideology and embodies a return in triumph of the written word. The prestige of written texts had in reality never fallen as low as the audiovisual pundits would have wished: for better or worse, the sacred books of the three great monotheisms have retained, and more than arguably increased, their power and influence over the last thirty years. The Internet, meanwhile, began with email and later

¹³ Burchfield, 731.

¹⁴ Burchfield, 732.

¹⁵ Honey, 166.

¹⁶ Cutts, 89.

developed the World Wide Web as its two killer applications, and both are text-based. Classic literary texts, both famous and obscure, are readily available on the Web, and one of the most successful e-retailers, Amazon, has books as its core business. Substantive and productive human relations are built around email, in other words around the exchange of written texts, by people who may never or rarely meet physically. In a striking reversal of the alleged primacy of spoken over written, the closest of email correspondents may never speak even on the telephone, or may try out that mode of communication only to conclude it is inappropriate, inconvenient and unnecessary. Email communication exhibits certain characteristics of the spoken word, such as informality and flexibility, but should nonetheless be defined as essentially a new and specific register of the written language. Indeed, David Crystal, in his important study *Language and the Internet* - published in 2001, three decades on from his *Linguistics* - betrays a rather more conciliatory stance on the value of writing than in that earlier book. Crystal states: 'What makes Netspeak so interesting, as a form of communication, is the way it relies on characteristics belonging to both sides of the speech/writing divide', but goes on to specify: 'Netspeak has far more properties linking it to writing than to speech ... [it] is better seen as written language which has pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language which has been written down'¹⁷.

Crystal declares that with the Internet 'we are on the brink of the biggest language revolution ever'¹⁸. This is indeed a major probability, but it does not follow that such a language revolution will include the revolutionisation of English orthography. The Internet is, certainly, a crucial forum for the spread and development of Global English. It is of course not true that, as some glibly pronounce, English is 'the language of the Internet' - any such assertion is belied by the ever-growing proliferation of sites in, say, Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Spanish - but it is true that English operates as the network's main lingua franca - and it is, indeed, significant here that Crystal should have entitled his book *Language and the Internet* when its almost entirely English-oriented content would have warranted *English and the Internet*. English is used for electronic communication between native speakers of different origins, between native and non-native speakers, and among non-native speakers of multiple provenances. Numerous websites run by non-native speakers express their content wholly or partly through the medium of English. The Internet is the most visible manifestation of the situation described by Tom McArthur, in his book of 2002, the *Oxford Guide to World English*, in which he sees English, in the version variously known as 'world English', 'international English' or 'global English', as 'the universalising language of the human race', or 'the world's default mode'¹⁹ - a language which he classifies as in a category of its own, 'a set with a membership of one', 'distributed more or less equally worldwide'²⁰. This situation is of course disapproved by some linguists, as notably by Robert Phillipson in his *English-Only Europe? Challenging Language Policy* (2003). Phillipson asks anxiously whether 'a single privileged language, along with the paradigms associated with it, represents a threat to other ways of thinking and their expression'²¹; yet his critique of English is itself written in English. Another commentator hostile to the perceived hegemony of English, Stuart Campbell, writing in 2005, nonetheless stresses 'the problem of dealing with the fact that English is now used by more second-language users than mother tongue speakers'²². For the foreseeable future, and

¹⁷ Crystal (2001), 28, 47.

¹⁸ Crystal (2001), 241.

¹⁹ McArthur, 2, 13, 434.

²⁰ McArthur, 415.

²¹ Phillipson, 80.

²² Campbell, 28.

whatever advances Chinese or Spanish may make, the global dominance of English as planetary lingua franca, used by both native and non-native speakers, is not going to go away.

In these circumstances, there are those who believe that the efficacy of English as a means of electronic communication would be furthered by a root-and-branch spelling reform that would operate at global level, thus universalising an approximation of written English to the characteristics of speech. However, whether or not such a reform might theoretically be desirable, there are good reasons for affirming that the existence of the Internet renders it totally unenforceable.

The Internet is not the law-free zone that some claim it is, but it is by its nature the perfect redoubt for refuseniks and dissidents of all hues. English, meanwhile, is spoken and written as a first or second language in a very large number of countries and territories, and as a foreign language virtually everywhere. If we suppose a future in which every country in the world where English is a first or second official language - let us say, the entire Commonwealth plus the US and Ireland - not only adopted a new simplified spelling but made the production of new texts in the old spelling illegal, such is the nature of the Internet that there would be nothing to stop refuseniks publishing on-line in the old spelling from sites hosted in other countries. Even if all print publications in the English-speaking world had to be in the new spelling, emails and blogs are by definition private and personal forms of communication and not subject a priori to legislative fiat. To coax every single user of English worldwide into adopting a new spelling would appear as impossible a task as to transcribe the entire mass of English-language texts now existing on the Web.

V - CONCLUSION - DIGRAPHIA OR DYSTOPIA?

What would happen in practice would be the permanent creation of a situation of what linguists call digraphia (that is, the existence of two different sets of writing conventions for a single language). The new spelling would be used, on a maximum-case scenario, by governments, younger people who had learned it at school, and older converts; the old spelling would continue to be employed by a variety of refuseniks, some of them creative writers or non-fiction authors quite legitimately fearing distortion or censorship of their work through transcription. Such a coexistence of old and new spelling would, indeed, have a partial fictional analogy in the coexistence of Oldspeak and Newspeak in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In Orwell's novel, as with spelling reform, the dynamic for language change is based on a notion of simplification, although in his imaginary totalitarian society the motivation is political and ideological: Oldspeak, or Standard English, is to be gradually replaced by Newspeak, a simplified form of English with a slimmed-down grammar and a deliberately reduced vocabulary. However, even in the satiric context of Orwell's fictional scenario, it is admitted that such a transition would take years and that for a long period diglossia would prevail. The official expectation is that 'with the passage of time the distinguishing characteristics of Newspeak would become more and more pronounced - its words growing fewer and fewer, their meanings more and more rigid'²³, while Oldspeak would gradually die out, and with it all comprehension of the past: 'It was impossible to translate any passage of Oldspeak into Newspeak unless it either referred to some technical process or some very simple everyday action ... In practice this meant that no book written before approximately 1960 could be translated as a whole. Pre-revolutionary literature could only be subjected to ideological translation'. In practice, the difficulty of an absolute

²³ Orwell, 324.

transformation of language was acknowledged insofar as 'it was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050'²⁴.

Orwell was imagining a totalitarian world, whereas the essence of the Internet is freedom. However, the problems of a total language transition that he envisaged may be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the spelling reform issue. The radical reform of English orthography would inevitably be an incomplete process, above all since it could not be forced on the individual users who are the creators of a large part of the ever-expanding library that is the Internet. All that reform would achieve would be a permanent situation of digraphia, with some material available in one spelling, some in the other, and the remaining material transcribed between the two to dubious standards of reliability. This digraphia would be in practice be a dystopia - no utopia at all, and no cyberutopia either. English spelling as we know it is certainly confusing, but I submit that spelling reform would lead only to confusion worse confounded, and that all those who write the English language, be they first-, second- or foreign-language speakers, will, for the foreseeable future, be better off expressing their ideas and their creativity within the graphic conventions of English as we now know them. In other words, Harry Potter has done more for global literacy than spelling reform ever could.

²⁴ Orwell, 326.

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- (unsigned) 'Noah Webster', <www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/noah-webster.html>, site last updated 2003.

Even though English spelling is so irregular, native speakers still share a common writing system with little regional difference. When you refer to the moving organ in your mouth, you may pronounce it differently, but all native speakers write T_O_N_G_U_E, in such obviously "wrong" spelling. Why? Why didn't different regions develop different writing systems, since they have different accents and word-choices? That's why The English Dialect Dictionary that has been completed by Joseph Wright, is now extremely valuable. But the diversity of accents within the nation is still being studied by linguists. 4. Some students find English spelling very challenging, g) but others think it's pronunciation that causes more problems. 5. On the one hand immersion courses are very good for breaking language barriers, f) On the other hand, they are usually quite expensive and too short and don't meet the expected standards. 6. If it is true, why then so humble number of people can really speak foreign languages? From my point of view the only method of studying foreign language is not connected with modern methods such as internet communication or immersion courses.