Speling Is Irevelent:

Ghoti and Other Fine Spellings

John Brug

Copyright Page

VJ Holmes Publishing
3652 92nd Place
Sturtevant, WI 53177

Produced by Lulu
Distributed by Lulu and Amazon

ISBN of the e-edition

978-1-716-86546-6
Imprint: Lulu.com

Bar code

Contents

Foreword

This little commentary on the nightmare that is English spelling has its origin in an unlikely source, namely the work of Bible translation. As they were translating the *Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)* of the Bible, the editors realized that spelling issues in English, Hebrew, and Greek would be a significant problem that would generate many questions and complaints. When faced with a choice of two spellings of a word, they realized that often no matter which one they chose, some readers would claim their spelling was wrong. They were often caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They also realized that they would have to unlearn a lot of things they had been taught about grammar and spelling. They would regularly be confronted by dueling authorities who gave conflicting verdicts on given points of spelling and grammar. We used *Garner's Modern English Usage* as our default "rule book," even though we realized, as Garner does, that God has not appointed any individual or group as the authoritative czar of spelling and pronunciation. Conflicting authorities and the shifting sands of time will leave these issues unsettled and in flux until the end of time.

We did not carry out any extensive survey of centuries of English literature as some dictionary makers do (or claim to do), nor did we run our own extensive computer searches of the usage of various words. In addition to checking Garner and other authorities, we did read online studies about spelling, grammar, and the history of English. Then, based on our editing experience and our life-time reading experience, we made the call in each case. As a result of our work we also have posted a number of studies about spelling and grammar on our Wartburg

Project website which explain our approach to spelling and grammar. Our project also has a set of rubrics for grammar and spelling. At the end of this book we will include a number of appendices and a bibliography for further study of the subject.

This little book *Speling Is Irevelent* summarizes some of the more interesting things we discovered along the way.

Our goal in this little book is not to provide an academic treatise with a lot of footnotes but to share an experience. For a more academic, documented study, refer to the works cited at the end of the book. This book is not designed to reflect the approach of a historian, a grammarian, or an orthographist, but the approach of a storyteller sharing experiences. Relax and enjoy the story.

Today a huge amount of material on these subjects is available online. The basic material and the lists of examples that it contains migrate freely from site to site. In general, in addition to reporting our own experience during our translation work, we follow the time-honored tradition of orthographists, who customarily build on the work of those who have gone before them. The intended goal is to provide a Wikipedia level experience with fewer footnotes and hopefully with more fun.

In our EHV project we did make some modest spelling reforms, mostly of proper names. We are not advocating any specific program of spelling reform. Our main point is that the mess that is English spelling does create problems for writers, editors, and innocent school children, and no solution is in sight.

Because we circle the topic and view it from various angles, readers will find that some of the key points and examples are

repeated a number of times. This will be an advantage to readers in the end since *repetitio est mater studiorum.*[1]

Orthography is a very serious business, and frivolity, irony, and humor should be out of place in this important field. Nevertheless, we follow the tradition established by curmudgeon British orthographists who sprinkle some irony and humor and provocative statements into their works in order to brighten up their otherwise dreary existence and to retain at least a percentage of their readers throughout what would otherwise be a wearisome subject for many. But be forewarned: Orthographical humor is an acquired taste.

[1] Literally *repetition is the mother of studies* or more freely *repetition increases the retention of knowledge.*

Speling is irevelent

Our Titles

The title and subtitle of this book express two premises of our study: 1) English spelling is a mess and no solution is in sight. 2) Do not get too exercised and worked up about spelling and grammar variations. In the end, what matters is not which rule book is followed but whether communication is clear.

The Story of *Ghoti*

Ghoti is a creative re-spelling of the word *fish*. Its purpose is to illustrate the absurdity of English spelling and pronunciation rules. The word *ghoti* is meant to be pronounced in the same way as *fish* using these sounds:

- *gh*, pronounced /f/ as in *enough* /ɪˈnʌf/ or *tough* /tʌf/;
- *o*, pronounced /ɪ/ as in *women*/ˈwɪmɪn/;
- *ti*, pronounced /ʃ/ as in *nation* /ˈneɪʃən/ or *motion*/ˈmoʊʃən/.

Ghoti is often attributed to curmudgeon dramatist George Bernard Shaw, a supporter of spelling reform. Though the word *ghoti* does not appear in Shaw's writings, it has the character of something that he could have or would have or should have said. *Ghoti* is likely one of those free-floating sayings that are credited to many different people over the years. The first written claim for the creation of *ghoti* is from a letter of publisher Charles Ollier, dated December 11, 1855. Ollier claims that his son William came up wit*h ghoti* as a new method of spelling *fish*. Ollier then sets forth young Bill's rationale for the spelling. This is a very appealing story since it would seem at first glance to attribute the origins of *ghoti* to a child's frustration with learning English spelling. Doubt, however, is

cast on this understanding of the story by the fact that it appears that young Billy apparently was thirty years old in 1855. But why ruin a very nice origin myth? *Ghoti* should have been invented by a child frustrated with the burdensome task of learning English spelling, so that is how we will report it, even though *ghoti* may have been the invention of a middle-aged curmudgeon railing against the absurdity of British spelling.

There are a number of other appearances of the word *ghoti* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably in James Joyce's milestone work of fiction, *Finnegans Wake*, in 1939.

The *ghoti* story makes its point in an amusing and memorable way, but its scientific validity is doubtful. The *gh, o*, and *ti* combinations have the *f, i,* and *sh* sounds only under certain conditions and in certain positions in a word. A program designed to convert written text to audio might well read it as *goaty*/ˈgoʊti/, not *fish.* Our book's subtitle not withstanding, *ghoti* may be a not-so-fine spelling for *fish.* Nevertheless, like many other untrue myths, it does make a valid point and does serve a useful function.

If *ghoti* does not convince you of the absurdity of British spelling and to a lesser extent American spelling, many other examples in the body of this book will make the case.

Speling really is irevelent

Though people can get very worked up about supposedly wrong spellings, variant spellings and spelling typos very rarely cause a misunderstanding of the meaning of a word or a sentence. As an extreme example, read the following paragraph. An average reader of English will understand it all quite easily. Do not focus on the letters, but read it as you would read any

paragraph, running your eyes along the lines. The paragraph explains why spelling has a limited effect on understanding.

> I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclty uesdnatnrd waht I was rdgnieg The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mind!! Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttaer inwaht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are. the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a major porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh? yaeh and I awlyas thought slpeling was ipmorantt.

As a secondary proof that spelling is irrelevant, I offer this second demonstration which shows that spelling is irevelant. What matters is not the spelling of the words but recognizing the boundaries between words.

> Icouldntbelievethaticouldactuallyunderstandwhatiwasreadingthephenominalpowerofthehumanminditdoesnotmatterinwhatorderthelettersinawordaretheonlyimportantthingisthatthefirstandlastletterbeintherightplace

Even after reading the previous example with jumbled spelling, you probably had more difficulty reading this example with no word division. And the amazing thing is that alphabetic writing was written without word division for many centuries. Sometimes a letter even did double duty as the last letter of one word and the first letter of the next. It saved precious papyrus.

After all the time and effort we have spent in learning to spell, and after all the laborious proofreading we had to do during our lives, it comes as quite a shock to learn that spelling is relatively irrelevant to understanding. I admit that I was rather reluctant to let you in on the secret that spelling is irrelevant (knowledge which we hide from innocent school children) because I was afraid that such new insight would lead you to not buy or recommend this little book about spelling. My hope is that you did not discover this truth until you had already bought the book, and now you have to read it in an attempt to salvage your investment.

To alleviate my sense of guilt at selling you an unnecessary book and to lessen your sense of frustration that you bought it, I can offer you two comforting assurances. Spelling is not totally irrelevant. It is relatively irrelevant to understanding what you read or write, but it is very relevant to your self-esteem and social standing. To avoid predicable but erroneous criticism from spelling prescriptivist elitists, all of us must make a good show of conforming to a least one of the spelling codes common in our community If you do not, you run the risk of being labeled as a poorly educated rube, and most of us would not want that, would we? All of us have to maintain at least a veneer of spelling conformity and respectability for social reasons.

And there is this second comfort for you if you are a writer, editor, or student: The same rule of irrelevance that applies to spelling also applies to typos. Only relatively rarely will a typo have an effect on understandability. Most readers will read right by a lot of typos without noticing them. So will all-too-many proofreaders. Our minds are trained to see what the context and flow of the text tells us should be there, rather than to see what

actually is there. I recently discovered a typo in a Latin work that had remained uncorrected through several editions over 500 years of reprinting. Apparently no one was disturbed enough to fix it. This morning before I took up this task, I discovered a rather significant omission from a work that had been read by thousands of readers over a three-year period without anyone reporting the error. Even the most dreaded of all typos, the omission of a *not,* often does no real harm since readers autocorrect it. This presence or absence of *not* is surprisingly common in the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. The best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible have considerably more "typos"' than all modern print versions.

So do not be too frustrated by the spelling variants or typos that slip into your works in spite of your best efforts, and do not be too judgmental of those in the works of others.

Spelling innovations and typos rarely have much effect on the understanding of your message, but they have a lot of effect on aesthetics, self-esteem, and social approval. We don't want to have readers' perception of literary aesthetics cloud their acceptance of our message, so we have to be attentive to spelling for appearance sake. For that reason we must forge on with our in-depth study of spelling, so that we can appreciate both its necessity and its limitations.

Let's take the plunge into the wild world of English spelling.

English Spelling Nightmares

If writing is a tool designed to help readers recall the sounds of speech, the most sensible form of writing and spelling would be a form of alphabetic writing which has a close one-to-one match between the written letters and the sounds of the speech. As the pronunciation of words changes, the spelling should change to reflect the change of the sound. Unfortunately such phonetic spelling is rare, and English is not a good place to find it.

Living languages rarely have a perfect match between spelling and sound. Most alphabetic writing systems have some degree of correspondence between the signs and the sounds, but they differ as to how complete this correspondence is. English spelling is alphabetic, but it is quite weak as a guide to pronunciation.

Spelling was quite close to pronunciation during the Middle English stage when the modern spellings originated, but spoken English changed more rapidly than the spelling which was much more stable, resulting in the modern situation of weak correspondence of spelling to pronunciation. French and Swedish are other examples of languages in which spelling and pronunciation do not always match so well. Because of their relatively recent modernizations, several of the Balkan languages; some Romance languages such as Romanian, Italian, and Spanish; and Finnish and Turkish come much closer to consistency between spelling and pronunciation than English does.

There are a number of issues that contribute to making English spelling torture.

Bad Alphabet Match

In English spelling, the problem started when the primitive ancestor of English first became a written language around the 7th century AD. Instead of inventing an alphabet that matched the sounds of English, the missionaries who shaped the written language borrowed the Latin alphabet and tried to make it fit English, but the matchup of the Latin alphabet with the sounds of early English was not that great.[2] English had sounds which could not be represented by the letters of the Latin alphabet, most notoriously the kind of *th* in words like *the, this,* and *that,* or the hack in the back of the throat like the one in the German *ach*! For a while, the proto-spellers of English tried to solve the problem by inserting runes (þ, ð) into the English alphabet as additional letters of the alphabet to be used to represent these sounds, but eventually they settled for using the combination *th* to represent two different kinds of *th* sound (*thin* and *thick*, *this* and *that*). They also used various combinations of *g, c*, and *h* to represent other native English sounds. They eventually settled on *th* and *gh* as their workhorses. In the course of this painful process, some of the spellings that the word *thought* has endured include: *þoht*, *ðoght, thowgth, thouch, thotht, thoughte,* and *thowcht.* Typically, about the time that the

[2] Depending on the dialect, modern English has somewhere between 24 to 27 different consonant sounds and 13 to 20 vowels. However, there are only 26 letters in the modern English alphabet, so there cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. By another count, English has only 26 letters for 44 sounds, but it has 205 spellings for those 44 sounds, instead of just 44.

authorities figure out how to spell a sound, the sound becomes obsolete in the language and disappears.[3]

We can't even begin to talk about the fall-out that resulted from the Great Vowel Shift in which English brexited from the continental vowel system. Unfortunately the spelling of vowels did not shift to keep up with shifting pronunciation. Why do the words *weak, great, bread, wear,* and *heart* not sound alike? They all have the same *ea* vowel.

(The idea of the Great Vowel Shift is that the English vowels *a e i o u* once had similar values to those that these vowels have in most continental European languages today, in which the vowel *a* sounds like *ah, e* sounds like *ay, i* sounds like *ee*, *o* sounds like *o*, and *u* sounds like *oo* (the vowels are called *ah, ay, ee, o, oo* instead of *ay ee I owe you* as they are in today's English. If this is true, the long *i* in *bite* once sounded like the vowel in *beet.* The long *e* in *meet* once sounded like the vowel in *mate,* etc.)

English also has a sort-of-a-vowel grunt called the *schwa,* which is used in unaccented syllables. This grunt is actually the most common vowel in English. Since no one could decide what vowel to use to represent schwa, we decided that the only fair thing to do was to use them all (a, e, i, o, u): *a* as in *alone*, *e* in *system*, *i* in *easily*, *o* in *gallop*, and *u* in *circus*. Can we get a *y* in there? Oh wait a minute! That's not a vowel, is it? Oh yeah, it is in *sibyl,* and it is unwritten in *rhythum.*

[3] A nightmare in the opposite direction is that there are a six to ten different ways of pronouncing -*ough* as illustrated by *dough, rough, cough, bough, through,* and *thought,* which should be spelled more like *doe, ruf, cawf, ba'o, thru,* and *thawt.*

(The phonetic symbol ə is used to represent this grunt sound. Or less scientifically you can write it *uh*.)

Perhaps it is just as well that we did not have time to say anything useful about the Great Vowel Shift since some grammarians think it is a myth. But if you are a glutton for punishment, google the *Great Vowel Shift* and you can listen to recordings of these vowel shifts century by century.

One finds wildly different statements about this and other facets of the history of spelling and grammar, so one often does not know what to believe. Nevertheless, I am confident that this book will meet the accepted standard of reliability for grammar books—at least 60% of the statements about grammar and spelling that we espouse in this book are likely to be truth not myth.

This set of problems could be fixed by inventing a better alphabet.[4]

Changing Pronunciation

Another problem that bedevils spelling is that letters survive in words beyond their useful lifetime. Historic, obsolete spellings abound in English (a bad habit we learned from the French). The word *knight,* in which all the letters were once pronounced (compare the German *Knecht*), now should be spelled *nite. Night* should be spelled the same way.

[4] One letter that English spellers did invent was *w*. They took two *u*'s (which was written as *v* at that time) and put two *vv* together to invent a *double-u*.

The permission which English speakers have to skip useless consonants when they are reading also applies to useless vowels. Don't waste your breath on the second *a* in *caramel*, the first *e* in *different*, the *o* in *memory* the second *o* in *chocolate*. They are as useless as the deceased *m* in *pungkun pie.* No wonder *separate* has three syllables as a verb, but only two as an adjective.[5]

An argument for preserving these old, obsolete spellings is that this practice better shows the word's origin. (Otherwise how would a reader know that the English *knight* is the same word as the German *Knecht*?) But most readers are more interested in how to say a word than they are in the word's genealogy. Another reason for keeping obsolete spellings is that the practice enabled publishers to sell more spelling books to indoctrinate helpless school children. This value, of course, expired when the invention of the spellchecker made the study of spelling obsolete. This problem could have been fixed by updating spellings before the situation got out of hand.

(It must be granted that obsolete consonants on rare occasions serve a useful purpose as in the distinction of *write, right,* and *rite.)*

---

[5]It should be noted that many of the observations in this book apply only to SAE (Standard American English) which is spoken in the Heartland of America, in Michigan and other Midwestern states. The comments do not necessarily apply to the fringe forms of American spoken in Boston, New York City, and New Orleans. For example, most down-to-earth Americans call the sweet substance *carmel.* Some Eastern elitists call it *cairamel,* probably the same people who eat *tomahtoes.*

But the opposite vice also occurs. Self-appointed authorities added superfluous letters to established, perfectly fine English spellings in order to bring the spelling closer to the real or imaginary Latin origins of the words or worse yet to make the spelling look more French. For example, the fine English spelling *det* or *dette* was changed to *debt* to tie it to the Latin *debitum*; *dout* became *doubt* to link it to Latin *dubitare*. In the ultimate type of absurdity, *iland* became *island* to connect it to the Latin *insula*, even though *iland* had never been a Latin word.

People have been aware of the absurdity of this strange debacle in English spelling at least since the days of Shakespeare, who satirized it in his play *Love's Labour's Lost*[6] *(Act V, Scene 1)*, in which the character Holofernes insists that pronunciation of words should change to match spelling, rather than changing spelling to match pronunciation. Holofernes insists that everyone should pronounce the unhistorical *b* in words like *doubt* and *debt*. "I abhor…such rackers of orthography, as to speak *dout*, when he should say *doubt*; *det*, when he should pronounce *debt*,—d-e-b-t, not d-e-t. He clepeth a *calf, cauf; half*, *hauf*; *neighbour* vocatur *nebor*; *neigh* abbreviated *ne*. This is *abhominable*, which he would call *abominable*."

The Normans, who were Norwegians who had disguised themselves as French nobles in order to invade England, had already complicated things when they imposed themselves and their Frenchified influences on England and on the English

[6] Can anyone figure out the spelling here? I think it means "the labor of love is lost." The first apostrophe means *of.* The second apostrophe means *is.*

language in the 11th century. Because of them, the spelling of Romance words in English depends on whether the word came to English directly from Latin or from the degenerate form of Latin called French.[7]

Ossifying Bad Spelling

The advent of printing in the 1400s had the beneficial effect of stabilizing bad spelling. Now a printer could broadcast more examples of senseless spelling in a week than a scribe could do in a lifetime.

Through the last five centuries, there has been a steady stream of attempts at spelling reform, but they are doomed to failure because half the people hate them for changing spelling too much and the other half hate them for changing it too little.

Sensible spelling reform made some giant steps backwards in the 1700s with the work of Samuel Johnson, who was one of the more successful Latinizers and antiquarians who wanted to carry English back to purer classical roots. He perhaps deserves more credit than any other man for creating and codifying the mess that is English spelling.[8] He also established the now standard grammarian's practices of basing rules on personal

---

[7] The only useful contribution from French to American English is the term *French fries*, which is useful for distinguishing them from the less tasty American fries.

[8] Anyone who wants to understand how dictionaries are made should read the wordy but witty preface to Johnson's dictionary. It is appended to this book. But be warned that this is much like visiting a sausage factory before shopping for hot dogs. Any illusion about how authoritative dictionaries really are is soon dispelled by Johnson himself.

whim rather than on data and resorting to wit when one's grammatical claims are short of objective fact.

Sensible spelling reform took its most notable baby-step forward beginning in 1806 when Noah Webster published his *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language.* Many of the spellings he used, such as *color* (not *colour*) and *center* (not *centre*), would become hallmarks of American English.[9] In 1828 he published *An American Dictionary of the English Language.* It brought some unity and modest improvement to American spelling but at the cost of solidifying the split between American and British spelling. (Perhaps this was his intention all along since he was a fervent patriot.) However, Webster's attempt to bring about a thorough reform that would move American English toward true phonetic spelling was a colossal failure—serving as an object lesson to all would-be Websters. Perhaps this failure was just as well, since real reform would have hurt sales of Webster's dictionaries and blue spelling books. (More on this later in its own chapter.)

In opposition to the Websterian attempt to standardize and codify spelling, a leading defender of preserving liberty in spelling during this era was Andrew Jackson, "Old Hickory," the seventh President of the United States. Jackson was a rugged frontiersman who was a polar opposite from the Virginia/ Massachusetts elites who had dominated early American government. Jackson had gained national fame through his victory at the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812.

---

[9] I regularly use the term *American English* or even simply refer to this dialect as *English* even though I am aware the some authorities east of the Atlantic question whether American speech can properly be called English.

In 1824 Jackson ran for President but lost to John Quincy Adams; but four years later he ran again and successfully unseated Adams. During the campaign, Adams denounced Jackson as "a savage who can scarcely spell his own name." There was a grain of truth in this campaign slur. Jackson's spelling was indeed creative. Examples include "devilopment," the continent of "Urope," a "larg" audience, and a reference to a "femal" character. Jackson sometimes spelled the same word several different ways in a single letter. Jackson had the last laugh however with his retort, "It is a d*mn poor mind that can think of only one way to spell a word."

Today there is no Webster on the scene. Would-be spelling czars have no binding authority except in their self-defined mini-kingdoms. Calling your dictionary a *Webster's Dictionary* does not make you a Noah Webster. Today anybody can call their dictionary a *Webster's* since the term has been public domain since 1834. The Merriam company, of course, loves to remind people that they are the real heirs of Webster, but no one is listening.

No grammar or spelling book can ever be more than a snapshot of a part of a moving stream. Spelling, like language and life, is always in a state of flux with different forms co-existing side by side as old forms gradually fade and new ones grow.[10] Many of the spelling rules confidently proclaimed in authoritative tomes are in fact myths. Now with the appearance

[10] This is especially noticeable in compound words formed from two words. At first they are written as two words; then they are joined by a hyphen; finally they are spelled as one word. Why do we have a birthday but a wedding day?

of *ngrams* and other computer checks, the alleged rules can be checked and debunked and/or enforced more vigorously on the basis of real data.

An example of a spelling myth rebutted by computers is reflected in the EHV's practice of spelling *worshipped* with the double "p." Many dictionaries and authorities confidently state that *worshiped* is the American spelling and *worshipped* is the British spelling, but a computer survey shows that *pp* has been the standard American and British usage by a ratio of 3:1. (See the further treatment below.)

Just as Latinists created fake spellings by inserting extra letters into English words, popular electronic spell checkers can temporarily establish their mistakes as correct spelling rules, but the never-stopping current of living languages will fix the errors in due time. The correct term for the owner of an establishment that serves food is a *restaurateur,* but some electronic dictionaries are determined to make these individuals *restauranteurs.*

The ever-chaotic state of grammar and spelling can be frustrating, but it is just one small reminder of the important truth behind the Babel Principle of Language. The human race is always trying to produce its one empire, its one language, but no matter how hard people tug and pull together, the Babel Principle is always pulling them apart. Mankind cannot even produce a unified spelling system for one language, let alone one language for the world.

This book started as a study of the spelling inconsistencies in the English Bible, which trouble some people. It is actually a great comfort that the spelling and grammar in our Bibles is never settled, never finished, always restless. The only spelling

and grammar that are settled are the spelling and grammar of dead languages. (Or authorities might be able to control spelling in a narrowly defined mini-kingdom such as a publishing house or a newspaper, but they cannot control spelling outside the walls of their mini-kingdom.)

The spelling and grammar of the biblical languages was never settled during the 1000 years the Bible was being written. Biblical language is not settled today, and it never will be, as long as the Bible is alive in the life of the peoples. Language flows with the flow of history. And as the letters and sounds and spelling swirl and change, the meaning remains the same. The essence of the Word is the divinely intended meaning that stays the same in spite of the constant change of form. The outward form, in fact, must change to keep the meaning the same.

The same principle is true, of course, in every form and application of written language.

Grammar and spelling provide many examples of the ways in which editors find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. They know that no matter which option they choose, some readers will think it is wrong. But these dilemmas do not discourage them because they know that there is one solution to all these dilemmas: study, patience, and understanding.

An even greater comfort to Bible translators is expressed by a key theological principle: “The essence of Scripture is not the shape of the letters or the sound of the words but the divinely intended meaning.” If a translation conveys that meaning, it is delivering the Word of God, regardless of what the letters look like or how the words are pronounced, whether the language is a bit stuffy or archaic or a bit too casual for the tastes of some. The external forms change (indeed they must if they are to keep

communicating), but the meaning, the essence of the Word of God, must remain.

The following principle is equally true in every other genre: The external forms change (indeed they must if they are to keep communicating), but the meaning must remain the same.

This question from a reader troubled by spelling inconsistencies in the Bible illustrates the problem and the solution:

> The EHV is an American translation that has a policy of using American grammar and spelling. Why then do you use the British spelling *worshipped* instead of the American spelling *worshiped*?

Very early in the process of developing the EHV, we learned, to our surprise, that *worshipped* is the established American spelling for this word. The way that we learned this was through our study of Bryan Garner's *Modern English Usage.* We adopted this book as our favorite grammar reference book because it is based on extensive computer surveys of vast quantities of actual literature, and it is more entertaining than most grammars. One of Garner's emphases is debunking grammatical and spelling myths.

An example of a spelling myth that is rebutted by Garner's computer studies supports our practice of spelling *worshipped* with the double "p." Many dictionaries and authorities confidently state that *worshiped* is the American spelling and *worshipped* is the British spelling, but an extensive computer survey of actual usage showed that *pp* has been the standard American and British usage by a ratio of 3:1. Garner comments that some American dictionaries state a preference for *worshiped* with one "p," but this spelling has never attained a predominance in print. Double "pp" has steadily outranked

single “p” in America, and in Britain there has been no competition at all—it’s double “p” consistently. Maybe inaccurate Word spell checkers that flag *worshipped* as wrong will succeed in changing the American spelling to single “p,” but it is not yet the case.

There is an alleged English spelling rule that final consonants are not doubled in inflected forms if they are in unaccented syllables. In his study of this phenomenon in his article *Spelling, B*, Garner demonstrates that the doubling of the final consonant is indeed a British tendency, but there too there are exceptions.

So how did the British tendency *pp* become the established usage of America? My guess is that it is because American hymnody and liturgy have adopted very heavily from British sources, and when American Christians wrote about worship, hymnody, and liturgy, they were drawn to the spellings that were familiar from their worship life. In that way, their usage would agree with what their hymnal and lectionary used. But that theory does not explain why *kidnapping* is the dominant American spelling in violation of the alleged rule. It may be a simple analogy with *nap, napping,* or it may be due to the fact that *kidnap* was formerly accented on the second syllable. Grammar and usage are complicated. Seldom or never does a “rule” cover all the situations and exceptions.

At any rate, this case serves as an example of our practice that when there is an apparent conflict between a supposed rule and the actual usage as established by objective data, we tend to favor the computer data. The reason for this is explained a bit in the following.

We had learned early in the process of working on our project was that we had to unlearn a lot of things that we had spent years in learning. Nowhere was this more true that in the area of English spelling. It is surprising how much the nature of language study has been revolutionized by the ability to search vast amounts of literature in order to gather objective, "real life" statistics on any specific grammatical construction or on the spelling of a word. With a computer search, a dictionary writer can gather much more data about a spelling than could be gathered in a lifetime of reading. This type of research clearly shows that many of the supposed rules of English grammar and spelling are in fact myths. One of the first handbooks to make extensive use of this new tool is *Garner's Modern English Usage,* Oxford University Press, 2016.

In the past, grammatical and spelling rules published in handbooks were much like the tabulated results of a poll. The pollster took a sample and hoped that it accurately reflected reality. In the same way, the grammarian or dictionary writer read a lot of literature. He also read other people's spelling books, and from that sample he extrapolated (took a guess) at what the usage or spelling of a word would be across the total corpus of the language. He did this in order to formulate a rule for everyone to follow. Sometimes he also threw in his opinion of what the rule *should* be, even as he acknowledged that his "rule" was not in fact the rule but just his opinion. Searching Google Books still provides the grammarian or speller with only a sample, but it is a much bigger sample (*big data*), so statements about grammatical constructions and spelling can now be much more objective, based on real life data, with less guess work. Where there is objective data available, it is a good idea to follow it, except in those few cases where you are

following the time-honored practice of trying to create your own rule on the basis of your personal preference.

Spelling and grammar wars are such a common issue that we produced an EHV grammar book about the problem. It is called *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning,* and it is available for free from our Wartburg Project online library.

Someone might say, "You should just pick your favorite authority and go with it, him, her, or them." We have sort of done that with Garner, though we do not follow him 100%. The problem with this suggested approach is that God, the author of language, has not appointed anyone as the czar of spelling and grammar with the authority to make rules (laws) for everyone to follow. We learned early-on that if a reader warns us that one of our spellings is wrong and that we should correct it on the authority of Authority A and we do so, it will not be too long before someone else tells us on the authority of Authority B that our spelling is wrong and we should change it back to what we had in the first place. See our grammar book for examples of this phenomenon.

> See *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning* in the Wartburg Project Online Library, Part III, E. Spelling is discussed on pages 37-48, which is one source of this book.
>
> A review of Garner is posted in section IV of the Wartburg Project Library.

Foreign Spelling Nightmares Imported into English

The spelling and pronunciation of words and names that come into English from a foreign language are problematic. As an example of this principle we will take biblical words coming into English from Hebrew and Greek.

One of the biggest problems (by volume, not by seriousness) faced by Bible translators is the spelling of place names and personal names. Some of this is due to the difficulty of transferring words from Hebrew and Greek unto English.

Early on, a reader asked this question: "While reading the Bible and using books like Bible dictionaries, I have noticed that the spelling of people's names and place names is very inconsistent. Is the EHV going to fix this and have a consistent system of spelling?"

The short answer to this question is "No." Here is why.

Sometimes a situation is such a mess that no reasonable, consistent solution is anywhere in sight. An example of such a mess is the spelling of place names and personal names in the English Bible. A tug-of-war is going on between preserving the traditional spellings inherited from the King James Version, which are largely based on the Greek and Latin spellings rather than on the Hebrew text, and the desire to bring the English spelling closer to the original Hebrew or Greek names. All the systems in use, including ours, are riddled with inconsistencies. To compound the problem, there is a lot of inconsistency of spelling within the original biblical text itself. And God has not appointed any spelling emperor with the authority to decree the

correct, authoritative spellings and pronunciations. It is the days of the judges and every editor does what is right in his own eyes.

One example of the chaotic situation is the spelling of the name of Colosse, a city in Asia Minor which received a letter from the Apostle Paul. On the basis of the Greek text, the best spelling would be Kolossai (though it is also spelling Kolassai and Kolasai in Greek). In the old tradition followed by the King James Version, the Latinized spelling Colossae was standard. More recently, as Latinized *ae*s were being eliminated from English spelling, the spelling changed to Colosse (NIV 84). Today (NIV 2011) the spelling is being changed back to Colossae. Every editor does what is right in his own eyes.

The problem arises because some letters of the Hebrew alphabet (and to a lesser degree, the Greek alphabet) do not have a good correspondence with one specific letter of the English alphabet, so different people transliterate the names differently. A further complication is that many of the English names in the Bible have not come directly from Hebrew but via Greek or Latin. Yet another complication is that some names have continued to evolve further after they moved into English.

To cite one extreme example, the English name *James* has evolved from a Hebrew original *Ya'aqov,* via the Greek New Testament form *Iakobos*, via the late Latin form *Iacomus,* to English *James*. Quite a journey!

This inter-language transfer problem is not unique to the Hebrew of the Bible but applies also to many other writing systems, for example Arabic and Chinese. Compare *Koran/Quran* and *Beijing/Peking.*

This problem applies also to the pronunciation of foreign names. In France the estate of Versailles (Versai) is near Paris (Paree), but in the United States the city in Pennsylvania is pronounced Versailles, and the city in Ontario is Paris. The city Lima is pronounced Leema in Peru but Lima in Ohio, like the beans.

This applies to both the spelling and pronunciation of many foreign city names: Wien /Vienna, Moscow /Moskva, Cairo /al-Qahirah. And how do you pronounce the *x* in *Mexico*? *Meksuhko or Mehico?* Actually both are right in their own way. The rule in Mexican pronunciation is that *x* between vowels is *ks,* and that is how most Americans pronounce it. But the place name *Mexico* has its origin in a Native American language so it retains its historic pronunciation *Mehico* or with a Spanish *j Mejico.*

An attempt is underway to get the Hebrew-based place names and personal names to a more consistent transliteration from the Hebrew and to get the biblical names closer to the place names currently used in Israel, but no solution is in sight. Saudi Arabia and China have promulgated the correct transliterations for Arabic and Chinese words, but old and new spellings coexist side by side.

In regard to the spelling rules of biblical personal and geographic names, there is a regression to a pre-Webster era, in which there is no spelling king, and every speller does whatever is right in his own eyes.

English Language Spelling Reform

For centuries, there have been movements to reform the spelling of the English language. They seek to change English orthography so that it will be more consistent, match pronunciation better, and follow the alphabetic principle more closely. Common motives for such spelling reform include that it would make spelling easier to learn, cheaper to teach, and it would make English more useful as an international auxiliary or second language.

Reform proposals vary greatly in how drastic the changes are and in how they intend to persuade, force, or indoctrinate people to adopt them. Most spelling reform proposals are moderate. They use the traditional English alphabet, try to maintain the familiar shapes of words, and try to maintain common conventions (such as silent e). More radical proposals involve adding or removing letters or symbols or even creating new alphabets. Some reformers prefer a gradual change implemented in stages, while others favor an immediate and total reform for all.

Most attempts at comprehensive spelling reform have failed miserably. Some few spelling reform proposals have been adopted partially or temporarily. For example, many of the spellings preferred by Noah Webster have become standard in the United States, but have not been adopted elsewhere.

How Inglish Spelling Became Such a Mess

Modern English spelling developed from about 1350 onwards, when after three centuries of Norman French rule,

English gradually became the official language of England again, although it was very different than it had been before 1066 due to the importation of many words of French origin (battle, beef, button, etc.).

Early writers of this new English, such as Geoffrey Chaucer, gave it a fairly consistent spelling system, but this was soon diluted by chancery court clerks who re-spelled words based on French orthography.

English spelling consistency was dealt a further blow when William Caxton brought the printing press to London in 1476. One would think that the printing press would stabilize spelling, but Caxton had lived in mainland Europe for the preceding thirty years, and his grasp of the English spelling system had become shaky. The Belgian assistants whom he brought to help him set up his business had an even poorer command of English.

As printing developed, printers began to develop individual preferences or "house styles" further clouding the issue. Furthermore, typesetters were paid by the line and benefited from making words longer.

However, the biggest change in English spelling consistency occurred between 1525, when William Tyndale translated the New Testament, and 1539, when King Henry VIII legalized the printing of English Bibles in England. Many editions of these Bibles were printed outside England by people who spoke little or no English. They often changed spellings to match their Dutch orthography. Examples include the silent *h* in *ghost* (to match Dutch *gheest*, which later became *geest*), *aghast*, *ghastly*

and *gherkin*. The silent *h* in other words—such as *ghospel*, *ghossip* and *ghizzard*—was later removed.

16th and 17th Centuries

There have been two periods when spelling reform for the English language has attracted the most interest.

The first of these periods was from the middle of the 16th to the middle of the 17th centuries, when a number of publications that advocated proposals for reform were published. Some of these proposals were:

- *De recta et emendata linguæ angliæ scriptione* (*On the Rectified and Amended Written English Language*) in 1568 by Sir Thomas Smith, Secretary of State to Edward VI and Elizabeth I.
- *An Orthographie* in 1569 by John Hart, Chester Herald, advocated a radical but well-thought-out reform. Other writings for the cause were his unpublished manuscript from 1551 titled *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of Our Inglish Toung*; and a practical reading primer titled *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned*, published in 1570.
- *Booke at Large for the Amendment of English Orthographie* in 1580 by William Bullokar.
- *Logonomia Anglica* in 1621 by Dr. Alexander Gill, headmaster of St Paul's School in London.
- *English Grammar* in 1634 by Charles Butler, vicar of Wootton St Lawrence.

These proposals generally did not gain serious consideration because they were too radical or were based on an insufficient understanding of the phonology of English. Interestingly enough, several of these would-be reformers of English spelling

did not write their proposals in English. Even after the arrival of the King James Bible, the only respectable language for serious academic and scholarly work was Latin. An English Bible was for the use of the non-elite. Theologians still did their work in Latin.

However, more conservative proposals were more successful. James Howell in his *Grammar* of 1662 recommended minor changes to spelling, such as changing *logique* to *logic*, *warre* to *war*, *sinne* to *sin*, *toune* to *town* and *tru* to *true*. Many of these spellings are good and now are in general use. Why he felt the need to add an *e* to *tru* is a question.

From the 16th century onward, English writers who were scholars of Greek and Latin literature tried to link English words to their Graeco-Latin parents. They did this to maintain the tyranny of Latin over the English language and its strangle hold on academia. (The writer of this book is a recovering teacher of Latin.) They did this by adding silent letters to make the real or imagined links to Latin more obvious. Thus *det* became *debt* (to link it to Latin *debitum*), *dout* became *doubt* (to link it to Latin *dubitare*), *sissors* became *scissors* and *sithe* became *scythe* (as they were wrongly thought to come from Latin *scindere*), *iland* became *island* (as it was wrongly thought to come from Latin *insula*), *ake* became *ache* (as it was wrongly thought to come from Greek *akhos*), and so forth.

William Shakespeare satirized this disparity between English spelling and pronunciation. In his play *Love's Labour's Lost*, the character Holofernes is “a pedant” who insists that pronunciation should change to match spelling, rather than simply changing spelling to match pronunciation. For example,

Holofernes insists that everyone should pronounce the unhistorical *b* in words like *doubt* and *debt*.

The 18th Century

It is debatable whether Samuel Johnson's monumental work in the 1700s should be classified as spelling reform or spelling deform. Johnson had a profound and long-lasting effect on English spelling. Johnson, however, had a bias toward Latinizing and using older sources. His work is covered in more detail elsewhere in this book, including his full preface at the end of the book.

The 19th Century

The second period of reforming zeal started in the 19th century and coincided with the development of phonetics as a science.

In 1806, Noah Webster published his first dictionary, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*. It included an essay on the oddities of modern orthography and his proposals for reform. Many of the spellings he used, such as *color* and *center*, would become identifying traits of American English. In 1807, Webster began compiling an expanded dictionary. It was published in 1828 as *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. Although it drew some protest, many of the reformed spellings were gradually adopted throughout the United States.

In 1837, Isaac Pitman published his system of phonetic shorthand. In 1848 Alexander John Ellis published *A Plea for Phonetic Spelling*. These were proposals for a new phonetic alphabet. Although unsuccessful, they drew widespread interest.

By the 1870s, the philological societies of Great Britain and America took up the cause. After the International Convention for the Amendment of English Orthography that was held in Philadelphia in August 1876, societies such a*s* the English Spelling Reform Association and American Spelling Reform Association were founded. That year, the American Philological Society adopted a list of eleven reformed spellings for immediate use. These were: *are→ar; give→giv; have→hav; live→liv; though→tho; through→thru; guard→gard; catalogue→catalog; (in)definite→ (in)definit; and wished→wisht.* The elimination of silent e after short vowels makes some sense, but its retention as the marker of a long vowel would, for example, distinguish the adjective *live* from the verb *liv.*

One major American newspaper that promoted the use of reformed spellings was the *Chicago Tribune*, whose editor and owner, Joseph Medill, served on the Council of the Spelling Reform Association. In 1883, the American Philological Society and American Philological Association worked together to produce twenty-four spelling reform rules, which were published that year. In 1898, the American National Education Association adopted its own list of twelve words to be used in all writings: *tho, altho, thoro, thorofare, thru, thruout, catalog, decalog, demagog, pedagog, prolog, program*. *Thru* and the dropping of final *ue* in words like *catalog* enjoyed some success.

20th Century Onward

The Simplified Spelling Board was founded in the United States in 1906. The SSB's original thirty members consisted of authors, professors, and dictionary editors. Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate, was a founding member and supported the

SSB with yearly bequests of more than US $300,000. In April 1906, it published a list of 300 words, which included 157 spellings that were already in common use in American English. In August 1906, the SSB word list was adopted by President Theodore Roosevelt, who ordered the Government Printing Office to start using it immediately. However, in December 1906, the U.S. Congress passed a counter-resolution, and the old spellings were reintroduced. Roosevelt's mistake, ruling by executive decree and bypassing Congress, is still a contentious issue in the 21st century. Nevertheless, some of the proposed spellings survived and are commonly used in American English today, such as *anaemia/anæmia→anemia* and *mould→mold*. Others such as *mixed→mixt* and *scythe→sithe* did not survive.

In 1920, the SSB published its *Handbook of Simplified Spelling*, which set forth over twenty-five spelling reform rules. The handbook noted that every reformed spelling now in general use was originally the creative act of a lone writer, who was followed at first by a small minority. Thus, it encouraged people to "point the way" and "set the example" by using the reformed spellings whenever they could. However, when its main source of funds dried up, the SSB disbanded later that year.

In Britain, spelling reform was promoted beginning in 1908 by the Simplified Spelling Society and attracted a number of prominent supporters. One of these was George Bernard Shaw (author of *Pygmalion,* the inspiration for *My Fair Lady*). Much of his considerable fortune was left to the cause. Among members of the society, the conditions of Shaw's will gave rise to major disagreements, which hindered the development of a single new system.

Between 1934 and 1975, the *Chicago Tribune*, then Chicago's biggest newspaper, used and promoted a number of reformed spellings. Over a two-month spell in 1934, it introduced eighty respelled words, including *tho, thru, thoro, agast, burocrat, frate, harth, herse, iland, rime, staf* and *telegraf*. A March 1934 editorial claimed that two-thirds of readers preferred the reformed spellings. Another claimed that "prejudice and competition" was preventing dictionary makers from listing such spellings. Over the next forty years, however, the newspaper gradually phased out many of the respelled words.

Until the 1950s, Funk & Wagnalls dictionaries listed many reformed spellings, including the SSB's 300, alongside the conventional spellings.

In 1949, a Labor MP, Dr Mont Follick, introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons, which failed at its second reading. In 1953, he again had the opportunity, and this time his bill passed the second reading by 65 votes to 53. Because of anticipated opposition from the House of Lords, the bill was withdrawn after assurances from the Minister of Education that research would be undertaken into improving spelling education. In 1961, this led to James Pitman's *Initial Teaching Alphabet*, introduced into many British schools in an attempt to improve child literacy. Although it succeeded in introducing alphabet reform, it failed as a spelling reform measure, when children went back to the conventional spellings of their spelling books. After several decades, the experiment was discontinued.

In his 1969 book *Spelling Reform: A New Approach*, the Australian linguist Harry Lindgren proposed a step-by-step

reform. The first, *Spelling Reform, Step 1*(SR1), called for the short /ɛ/sound (as in *bet*) to always be spelled with <e> (for example *friend→frend, head→hed*). This reform had some popularity in Australia.

In 2013, University of Oxford Professor of English Simon Horobin proposed that variety in spelling should be acceptable. For example, he believes that it does not matter whether words such as "accommodate" and "tomorrow" are spelled with double letters. This philosophy is accepted and practiced by many spellers, though not necessarily on purpose.

Arguments for Reform

Arguments advanced in favor of spelling reform are that it would make English easier to learn, easier to decode (to read), easier to spell, and easier to pronounce, making English more useful for international communication. It would reduce educational budgets (fewer literacy teachers, fewer remediation costs, and fewer literacy programs). It would enable teachers and learners to spend more time on more useful subjects.

Calculate the great amount of resources that are wasted using the current spelling system! For example, shorter phonetic spelling can reduce text length by up to 15%. According to that figure, for every 100 letters being used on a daily basis there are 15 letters being used unnecessarily. That amounts to about 15 pages for every 100 pages of a book, or about 1 in 7 trees. This applies to all aspects of daily life, including business documents, newspapers and magazines, and internet traffic. This is a drain on time, energy, money, and other resources. If we can accept Daylight Savings time to save daylight and

electricity, why not Spelling Reform to save time and ink and pixels?

Advocates note that some spelling reforms have taken place already without any serious harm, but only slowly and not in an organized way. There are many words that were once spelled un-phonetically but have since been reformed. For example, *music* was spelled *musick* until the 1880s, and *fantasy* was spelled *phantasy* until the 1920s. For a time, almost all words with the *-or* ending (such as *error*) were spelled *-our* (*errour*), and almost all words with the *-er* ending (such as *member*) were once spelled *-re* (*membre*). In American spelling, most of these words now use *-or* and *-er*, but in British spelling, only some have been reformed.

In the last 250 years, since Samuel Johnson prescribed how words ought to be spelled, pronunciations of hundreds of thousands of words (as extrapolated from Masha Bell's research on 7000 common words) have gradually changed, and the application of the alphabetic principle in English has slowly been corrupted as spelling and pronunciation drifted apart. Advocates argue that if we wish to keep English spelling regular, then spelling needs to be amended to account for the pronunciation changes. Shorter phonetic spelling is currently practiced on informal internet platforms and is common in text messaging.

The way vowel letters are used in English spelling is extremely irregular. For example, *o*, expected to represent [o], may stand for [u], while *u*, expected to represent [u], may represent [ɐ]. Almost every vowel can be pronounced *uh.* This makes English spelling even less intuitive for foreign learners than it is for native speakers, which is of importance for an

international language. In fact, if you listen to the accents of foreign speakers of English, you will notice that one of the main things that gives them a "foreign accent" is that they actually pronounce *a,e, i, o, u* as distinct vowels rather than mushing them together as *uh.*

The Mush of Inglish Spelling

Unlike many other languages, English spelling has never been systematically updated and thus today it only partly holds to the alphabetic principle. As a result, English spelling has a system of weak, contradictory rules with many exceptions and ambiguities.

Most phonemes (sounds) in English can be spelled in more than one way. For example, the words *fear* and *peer* contain the same sound with different spellings. Likewise, many graphemes (written signs) in English have multiple decodings[11] and pronunciations, such as *-ough* in words like *through*, *though*, *thought*, *thorough*, *tough*, *trough*, and *plough,* do not follow spelling. There are thirteen ways of spelling the schwa (the most common of all phonemes in English), but they all are pronounced *uh.* There are twelve ways to spell /ei/ and eleven ways to spell /ɛ/. These kinds of inconsistences can be found throughout the English stock of words, and they vary between dialects. Masha Bel, an educator trying to help children, has analyzed 7000 common words and found that about ½ of all words cause spelling and pronunciation difficulties and about 1/3 cause decoding difficulties. Such ambiguity is particularly

[11] *Decoding* is the ability to apply one's knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, in order to correctly pronounce written words.

problematic in the case of heteronyms (homographs with different pronunciations that vary with meaning), such as *bow*, *desert*, *live*, *read*, *tear*, *wind*, and *wound*.[12] In reading such words one must consider the context in which they are used, and this increases the difficulty of learning to read and pronounce written English.

Establishing a closer relationship between phonemes and spellings would eliminate many exceptions and ambiguities, making the language easier and faster to master.

However, even the best spelling reform would be applicable only for a limited time in a limited region. For most Americans their father's sister is their *ant,* but in some regions of the East she is their *awnt.* Most Americans think daffodils are *yello,* but in Western Pennsylvania they are *yella.* In Michigan my name John is *Jaan,* but in PA it is *Jawn.* Do you eat *puhtaytos* or *pahtahtos*? I like *puhtaytoh chips,* but *puhtayta chips* are also ok.

Undoing Misguided Reforms of the Past

Some of the proposed simplified spellings already exist as standard or variant spellings in older literature. Reformation often is not something new, but a going back to the past. As noted earlier, in the 16th century, some scholars of Greek and Latin literature tried to make English words look more like their Greco-Latin counterparts, at times erroneously. They did this by

[12] *Homographs* are words that are spelled the same but have different meanings. *Heteronyms* are a type of homograph that are spelled the same and have different meanings, and also sound different.

adding silent letters, so *det* became *debt*, *dout* became *doubt*, *sithe* became *scythe*, *iland* became *island*, *ake* became *ache*, and so on. Some spelling reformers propose undoing these changes and going back to the old. Other examples of older spellings that are more phonetic include *frend* for *friend* (as on Shakespeare's grave), *agenst* for *against*, *yeeld* for *yield*, *bild* for *build*, *cort* for *court*, *sted* for *stead*, *delite* for *delight*, *entise* for *entice*, *gost* for *ghost*, *harth* for *hearth*, *rime* for *rhyme*, *sum* for *some*, *tung* for *tongue*, and many others. It was also once common to use *-t* for the ending *-ed* where it is pronounced as such (for example *dropt* for *dropped*). Some of the English language's most celebrated writers and poets have used these spellings and others proposed by today's spelling reformers. Edmund Spenser, for example, used spellings such as *rize, wize* and *advize* in his famous poem *The Faerie Queene*, published in the 1590s.

Redundant letters

The English alphabet has several letters whose characteristic sounds are already represented by other letters of the alphabet. These include *x*, which can be realised as *ks, gz,* or *z;* soft *g* (/d͡ʒ/), which can be realized as *j*; hard *c* (/k/), which can be realised as *k*; soft *c* (/s/), which can be realized as *s*; and *q* (qu,/kw/or /k/), which can be realized as *kw* (or simply *k* in some cases).[13] Do we really need two ways of writing the *k* sound?

C is the letter that most deserves to be kicked out of the alphabet, because it was not originally a letter of the alphabet in

[13] A chart of the phonetic symbols is appended to the end of this book.

the first place. The English alphabet is descended from the Canaanite alphabet via the Greek and Latin. In both the Hebrew and Greek alphabets the letter in third place in the abc's has a *g* sound (gimel, gamma.). The form of the letter *c* in Etruscan and Latin derives from a backward Hebrew *kaph,* a *k* sound. *Kaph* also developed a *k* shape. English uses them both.[14]

No other letter misbehaves as much as c. In addition of its k sound (captain) it can also masquerade as an s (cider, cease), as some kind of sh (special, ocean) a kind of hk (echo, ehko). Sometimes it disappears (scissors, Connecticut). It even misbehaves in the same word, such as *schedule* in which it is pronounced *shedule* in English but *skedule* in American.

These proposals also seek to eliminate the extensive use of digraphs (two-letter combinations to express one sound, such as *ch, gh, kn-, -ng, ph, qu, sh*, voiced and voiceless *th*, and *wh*) by introducing new letters and/or adding diacritical marks. Every letter would then represent a single sound. In a digraph, the two letters represent not their individual sounds but instead an entirely different and discrete sound, which can lengthen words and lead to mishaps in pronunciation.

Arguments Against Reform

Spelling reformers encounter many objections against the development and implementation of a reformed orthography for English. Public acceptance of spelling reform has been consistently low, at least since the early 19th century, after

[14] Noah Webster's explanation of the checkered origin of *c* and *k* is found in his preface, which is appended below on pages 118-120.

spelling had been semi-codified by the influential English dictionaries of Samuel Johnson (1755) and Noah Webster (1806). The irregular spelling of very common words, such as *are, have, done, of,* and *would,* makes it difficult to fix them without introducing considerable confusion. If Americans cannot be persuaded to adopt the metric system, which is used by nearly the whole world, how can it be persuaded to accept spelling reform?

English is the only one of the top-ten major languages with no associated worldwide regulatory body with the power to promulgate or promote spelling changes. To be meaningful, English spelling reform would have to be world-wide. Do Americans want to surrender their orthographic sovereignty to an international academy?

English is a West Germanic language that has borrowed many words from non-Germanic languages, and the spelling of a word often reflects its origin. This sometimes gives a clue as to the meaning of the word. Even if their pronunciation has strayed from the original pronunciation, the spelling is a record of the original phoneme.

The same is true for words of Germanic origin whose current spelling still resembles their cognates in other Germanic languages. Examples include *light*, German *Licht*; *knight*, German *Knecht*; *ocean*, French *océan*; *occasion*, French *occasion*. Critics argue that re-spelling such words could hide those links, although not all spelling reforms necessarily require significantly re-spelling them. Are readers more interested in word origin or correct pronunciation?

Another criticism is that a reform may favor one dialect or pronunciation over others, creating a standard language imposed

by the elite against common people. Uniform spelling reform might even be racist. Can spelling reform deal with British, American, Australian, and Indian English?

Some words are distinguished only by non-phonetic spelling (as in *knight* and *night*) so there is some value to keeping at least some of it.

Some words have more than one acceptable pronunciation, regardless of dialect (e.g. *economic* or *eeconomic*; *either, eether or aither*). How could spelling reform express both?

In the end, the only valid objection to spelling reform is that people do not want it because of the cost and difficulty of the change. Plus the advent of spell checkers has relieved them of responsibility for making spelling decisions.

I do not have any position on the necessity or possibility of spelling reform. A creeping reform toward more phonetic spelling, carried out with permission or even a nudge from the spelling police, seems to be a good way to go. Spelling activists may push the envelope, but for the general populace the rule is: "Be not the first by whom the new is tried; nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

Heroic Martyrs to the Cause of Spelling Reform

In the field of entertainment movie stars receive Oscars; Broadway performers receive Tonys; TV performers receive Emmys; and musicians receive Grammys. The equivalent honor for orthographists and spelling reformers is the Don Quixote.[15]

[15] The award is named in honor of Don Quixote, a knight in a 17th century Spanish novel, who is most famous for fighting

(The award could also be named the Jude, in honor of St. Jude, the patron saint of desperate and lost causes.) We will close this section by honoring a few of the martyrs to this lost cause. A fuller list can be found in online articles on spelling reform.

- Orm/Orrmin, 12th century Augustinian monk and eponymous author of the *Ormulum*, in which he stated that, since he dislikes the way people are mispronouncing English, he will spell words exactly as they are pronounced, and he describes a system in which vowel length and value are indicated unambiguously. He distinguished short vowels from long by doubling the following consonants after short vowels, or, where this is not feasible, by marking the short vowels with a superimposed breve accent. (Indicating short vowels by double consonants is used in some languages such as Swedish. Such double consonants can receive a double pronunciation—Han-nah not Hanah. Why write a consonant twice if you are not going to say it twice?)
- Thomas Smith, a Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth I, who published his proposal *De recta et emendata linguæ angliæ scriptione* in 1568.
- William Bullokar was a schoolmaster who published his book *English Grammar* in 1586, an early book on that topic. He published his proposal in *Booke at large for the Amendment of English Orthographie* in 1580.

---

windmills in the mistaken belief that they were giants. "Tilting at windmills" has come to refer to impractical battles with imaginary or over-inflated enemies.

- John Wilkins, founder member and first secretary of the Royal Society, early proponent of decimalization and a brother-in-law to dictator Oliver Cromwell.
- Charles Butler, British naturalist and author of the first natural history of bees: *Đe Feminin' Monarķi*, 1634. He proposed that "men should write altogeđer according to đe sound now generally received," and espoused a system in which the *h* in digraphs was replaced with bars.
- James Howell was a modestly successful spelling reformer who recommended minor spelling changes in his *Grammar* of 1662, such as *logique* to *logic*, *warre* to *war, sinne* to *sin*, *toune* to *town,* and *tru* to *true*, many of which are now in general use.
- Benjamin Franklin, American innovator and revolutionary, added letters to the Roman alphabet for his own personal solution to the problem of English spelling. Franklin modified the standard English alphabet by omitting the letters c, j, q, w, x, and y, and adding new letters to explicitly represent the open-mid back rounded and unrounded vowels, and the consonants [ʃ], [ŋ], [ð], and [θ]. He offered his new alphabet to Noah Webster who rejected it.
- Samuel Johnson (1755), poet, wit, essayist, biographer, critic, and eccentric, is broadly credited with the standardization of English spelling into its pre-current form in his *Dictionary of the English Language*.
  Noah Webster (1806), author of the first important American dictionary, believed that Americans should adopt simpler spellings.
  Both men are ineligible for the DQ because their reforms actually had some effect. They are eligible for the

Sancho Panza award for those who speak some sense when surrounded by nonsense.

- President Theodore Roosevelt commissioned a committee, the Columbia Spelling Board, to research and recommend simpler spellings, and he required the U.S. government to adopt them. However, his effort failed because he assumed public support rather than building it, and he bypassed Congress by issuing an executative decree.
- Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson, was a vice-president of the English Spelling Reform Association, precursor to the Simplified Spelling Society.
- Charles Darwin, originator of the *Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection*, was a vice-president of the English Spelling Reform Association, His involvement in the cause was continued by his physicist grandson.
- H.G. Wells, science fiction writer, was Vice President of the London-based Simplified Spelling Society.
- Andrew Carnegie, celebrated robber baron and philanthropist, donated to spelling reform in the US and Britain and funded the Simplified Spelling Board.
- George Bernard Shaw, playwright, willed part of his estate to fund the creation of a new alphabet now called the Shavian alphabet.
- Charles Galton Darwin, grandson of Charles Darwin and director of Britain's National Physical Laboratory (NPL) during World War II, was also a wartime vice-president of the Simplified Spelling Society. (It appears that dedication to spelling reform may be an inherited genetic flaw. See also the Pitmans below. Another indicator for spelling reform syndrome is being a

member of the nobility with too much time and money on your hands.)

- Mark Twain was a founding member of the Simplified Spelling Board.
- Robert Baden-Powell, 1st Baron Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, was an advocate of spelling reform.
- Melvil Dewey, inventor of the Dewey Decimal System, wrote published works using simplified spellings and even simplified his own name from *Melville* to *Melvil*.
- James Pitman, a publisher and Conservative Member of Parliament, grandson of Isaac Pitman, the inventor of shorthand, invented the *Initial Teaching Alphabet.*
- Robert R. McCormick (1880-1955), publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, employed reformed spelling in his newspaper. The *Tribune* used simplified versions of some words, such as *altho* for *although*.
- HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, one-time Patron of the Simplified Spelling Society, stated that spelling reform should start outside of the UK, and that the lack of progress for the cause of reform was discord among the would-be reformers. His abandonment of the cause was coincident with the acquisition of literacy being no longer an issue for his own children, and his lukewarm involvement in the cause may have been a result of the Society's rejection of his attempts to "pull strings" behind the scenes.
- Anatoly Liberman, professor in the Department of German, Scandinavian, and Dutch at the University of Minnesota advocates spelling reforms in his weekly column on word origins at the Oxford University Press blog. His article "Spelling reform: not a *lafing* matter" is

a good presentation of a contemporary argument for spelling reform.

The History and the Foibles Of the Dictionary

The main emphasis of this book is the mess that is English spelling. Defining words is the dictionary's main function, but until the advent of the spell checker, the dictionary was also the main arbiter of spelling, so we have included this note the history of the dictionary as background to our study.

What is a dictionary?

"What does that word mean?" "How do you pronounce this word?" Before the days of Google, these questions from school children often received the answer, "Go look it up in the dictionary." The dictionary was one of the first reference books to which young students were introduced. This powerful book contains (almost) all of the words you will use throughout your lifetime. Troubled spellers can find the correct letters and their correct order, and speakers can find clues to the pronunciation. However, most people don't keep a well-worn copy of a dictionary on their desk anymore, and word-lovers and learners are increasingly turning to the internet for an online dictionary.

A technical definition of *dictionary* is "a listing of lexemes (words and word bits) from the lexicon (vocabulary) of one or more specific languages, usually arranged alphabetically (or by the shape of the signs in ideographic languages like Akkadian and Chinese)." It may include definitions, information on usage, etymologies, pronunciations and spellings, etc. It may even include examples of the use of the word in good literature.

A distinction can be made between general and specialized dictionaries. *Specialized dictionaries* are limited to gathering

words in specialized fields rather than providing a complete survey of words for the whole language, for example, theological dictionaries, medical dictionaries, or legal dictionaries. Lexical items that describe concepts in specific fields are often called *terms* instead of *words*, although there is no consensus on where to draw the boundary.

General dictionaries are supposed to include all the words in the language which are in general use. How complete the list is depends on how long a word list you are willing to pay for and how heavy a book you are willing to handle.

There are other types of dictionaries that do not fit neatly into the above distinction, for instance bilingual (translation) dictionaries, dictionaries of synonyms (thesauri), and rhyming dictionaries. The word *dictionary* without an additional modifier is usually understood to refer to a general purpose one-language dictionary, with a burdensome load of foreign words thrown in for good measure.

There is also a contrast between *prescriptive* or *descriptive* dictionaries. *Prescriptivists* are attempting to legislate what they see as the correct use of the language while *descriptivists* merely record actual use without passing judgment about which uses are "correct." Stylistic classifications (such as "informal" or "vulgar") added to the definitions in some dictionaries are considered by some to be elitist and subjective or biased and less than objective.

How did the dictionary get in its present state?

The first recorded dictionaries, dating back to Sumerian times around 2300 BC, were bilingual dictionaries or translation glossaries. The oldest surviving monolingual dictionaries are

Chinese dictionaries from the 3rd century BC. The first purely English alphabetical dictionary was *A Table Alphabeticall*, written in 1604. Monolingual dictionaries in other languages also began appearing in Europe at around this time, beginning the era of dictionary proliferation.

Ancient Dictionaries

Over 4,000 years ago, Babylonian scribes impressed cuneiform signs[16] on clay tablets with wedge-shaped styluses to create a glossary of animals, stones, plants, and star names. Written in ancient Sumerian and Akkadian, the text was titled *Urra=hubullu*, which means "interest-bearing loan" in both languages (*urra* is Sumerian, *hubullu* is Akkadian). According to some scholars, it was the world's first dictionary, though this classification is debatable.

The twenty-four tablets (some of which can be seen at the Met in New York and at the Louvre in Paris) listed about 9,700 word pairs and were designed to help writers and students translate between the two ancient languages, which are not closely related. The compilers of *Urra=hubullu*, were concerned with making life easier for scribes. They had no big plans for describing their universe or codifying or shaping their language.

Some critics therefore argue that the hype over the *Urra=hubullu* is overrated. After all, these translation tablets do

[16] Cuneiform is not a language but a system of writing used for many languages. The sign for *king* for example would look the same in each language but would be pronounced completely differently in the different languages.

not resemble modern dictionaries—the monolingual (one language) dictionaries we would recognize today. *Urra=hubullu* is a bilingual glossary or translation aid. The same is true of one of the next-oldest glossaries, the *Shizhoupian*, a roughly 2,800-year-old collection of bamboo strips designed to teach up-and-coming scribes how to write Chinese characters.

Since our main concern in this book is spelling, we need an aside here on the "spelling" of ideographic languages like Akkadian.[17] An ideograph is a sign or picture that represents an idea, not a sound or a word. Many of the cuneiform signs, which were originally abstract pictures of an object (a human head, an ox head, a head of grain), give no hint of the pronunciation of the word. This must be learned from hearing one's teacher pronounce the word, the same way an English student would learn the meaning and pronunciation of $ or #. The language also had a large collection of signs that represented syllables such as *sa, se, su* or *la, le, lu.* Combinations of these syllabic signs could be used to spell out words (shi-pi = ship, shee-pi) = sheep). As the centuries went by, the use of syllabic signs began to crowd out the use of the pictographic signs except for common words. Since there were many signs representing the same sound, words could be spelled many ways. Signs also represented many different sounds across time and regions. For example one of the most common cuneiform signs (𒀭) could be read *ud, ut, his, per,* or *tam*. It could refer to such concepts as *day* and *light.* The cuneiform sign AN could represent the Akkadian word *ilum* (god), the name of the god Anu, or it could spell the syllable -an-. It could also be used as a determinative (category marker) with the names of other gods. In such cases it

[17] Babylonian and Assyrian are dialects of Akkadian.

was not pronounced. In Sumerian the sign (𒀭) would be pronounced *dinger* but it has multiple uses.

Over the millennia the signs evolved very drastically from the early pictographs to the very abstract signs of the Assyrian period. Beginning students of Akkadian usually read all ancient cuneiform texts in the Assyrian version of the script. The following line gives an example of the evolution of one sign.

We will close our discussion of cuneiform with the spelling of the title of the first dictionary:

Urra=hubullu  ur$_5$-ra — ḫu-bul-lu$_4$

The spelling consists of five signs: *ur* sign number five and the *ra* sign; the *hu* sign, the *bul* sign, and *lu* sign number four.

The practical value of this detour through Akkadian "spelling" is to wipe away any self-pity that English spellers have as a result of the nightmare of English spelling. English spelling is a walk in the park compared to cuneiform spelling and pronunciation.

To some degree, English spelling fails to provide readers with the pronunciation of the words, but this is not unique to English. It is even more true of alphabetic biblical Hebrew. Though it is called the first alphabet, the Canaanite/ Phoenician /Hebrew alphabet was not a true alphabet because it had no letters to represent the vowels. That improvement, which created a true alphabet, was made by the Greeks, who turned some the Canaanite consonants that they did not need onto

vowels. In the early Hebrew manuscripts the students had to learn the right pronunciation from a teacher since vowels were not present. Later Hebrew manuscripts hint at the vowels with some added vowel letters, and today they indicate all of the vowels with marks above and below the line.

(One of the consonants the Greeks did not need was the *aleph,* which was a glottal stop. (The glottal stop is not a consonant in English either, but you can hear it in *Oh oh*. It is the little catch between the two o's. You don't say a continuous ooo, but have a little hitch in the middle o'oo.) The Greeks made the *aleph* into the vowel A. In the same way they converted the consonant *he* into the vowel E; the consonant *vav* into the vowel U; the consonant '*ayin* into the vowel O; and the consonant *yod* into the vowel I.)

(Though it is not nearly as bad as in English, there is a bit of alphabetic mismatch in Hebrew. The Hebrew alphabet did not have enough letters to represent all its sounds (evidence that it probably borrowed the alphabet rather than inventing it). At the time when the Pentateuch was translated into Greek ע represented two sounds, '*ayin* and *ghayin*, as it does in Arabic. The translators of the Pentateuch sometimes transliterate ע with γ as in Gaza and Gomorrah. At other times ע is not represented by a Greek consonant but only by a vowel.

The problem of the inadequacy of the alphabet to represent all the sounds and dialectical variations are both reflected in the shibboleth/ sibboleth incident in Judges 12. The Hebrew alphabet had two letters (שׂ שׁ) to represent at least three sibilant sounds. In pointed Hebrew these letters are increased to three (שׂ שׁ שׂ) by the addition of a dot, but שׁ and שׂ are pronounced the same. What explains this? The alphabet was apparently invented

by people who had only two of these sounds. Hebrew had three sounds, but instead of inventing a new letter they used one letter to represent two closely related sounds (as they had done with ע). They seem to have chosen ש to represent two sounds. These sounds originally may have been similar to *sh* and *th*, yielding pronunciations approximating *shibboleth* and *thibboleth*. The unfortunate Ephramites could not say *thibboleth* because their dialect did not have the *th* sound. Later the sounds of שׂ and ס merged. The Masoretic Hebrew texts represents the Ephramites' dilemma as שִׁבֹּלֶת vs סִבֹּלֶת, but it may have originally been *th* vs *sh* rather than *sh* vs *s*. All suggested reconstructions and solutions of exactly what the original sound dilemma was must remain conjectural.)

Real Dictionaries

The first recognizable dictionaries in our sense of the term did not appear until around the third century BC, when Chinese scholars assembled the *Erya* or *Erh-ya (*"Approaching What Is Proper"). This book sorted Chinese words into nineteen categories and explained the meaning behind the names of plants, trees, and other categories. Supplemental additions to the *Erya* expanded the definitions of concrete topics such as "birds" and even abstract concepts like "righteousness." The creators of this work remain anonymous.

One of the earliest known dictionary writers, what professionals call a "lexicographer," was Philitas of Cos, a Greek poet who compiled a dictionary 2,300 years ago that was named "Disorderly Words." (Notice that dictionary names used to be much more interesting.) Philitas's book defined rare

literary words, including many that were found in the epic poems of Homer.

Over the centuries, dictionaries spread around the world. Sometime around the middle of the first millennium AD, an Indian grammar-lover named Amarasimha wrote the "Immortal Dictionary" (*Amara kosha)* or the *Namalinganushasanam* (instruction concerning nouns and gender). Both a dictionary and thesaurus, the Sanskrit text was written in verse to aid memorization.

The Rise of Modern English Dictionaries

As intellectual life flourished elsewhere, Europeans trudged through the dictionaryless dark ages.[18] But things began to change around the ninth century AD, when an Irish king-bishop named Cormac mac Cuilennáin released the *Sanas Carmaic*, a dictionary containing more than 1,000 words in the Irish language. Unfortunately, as a history text, the book was pretty unreliable: Cuilennáin defined words associated with Ireland's divine and mythological beings — and treated many of these legends as real.

Quality reference books would evade European word-lovers for centuries. Around 1604, a school teacher named Robert Cawdrey published the first English alphabetic

[18] The Dark Ages, the time between the fall of Rome in the 5th century and the Renaissance of the 14th century, were not quite as dark as they were made out to be. Some historians cast doubt on the validity the term. Certainly in the monasteries of Western Europe manuscripts and knowledge were still being transmitted.

dictionary, called *Table Alphabeticall*. Cawdrey's definitions were short and sweet, and, frankly, often unhelpful. The word *crocodile* was defined simply as "beast." (Could this be intended to point readers to the Behemoth at the end of Job?) An *akekorne* was defined as a "fruit" while an *abricot* was defined as a "a kind of fruite." Most useless was Cawdrey's definition of *Baptist* as a *baptiser*. (Or did Cawdry realize that the Greek New Testament uses both terms?) Years later, British statesman and diplomat Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, would lament the sorry state of English dictionaries like Cawdrey's as "a sort of disgrace to our nation."

Indeed, foreign language dictionaries did have a stronger track record. In 1286, a preacher named Johannes Balbus had produced *The Catholicon*, a combination Latin dictionary and encyclopedia that would become one of the first books published on Gutenberg's printing press. In 1502, the Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino wrote a Latin-Italian dictionary (with other languages added later) that was so influential that the word *calepin* was once an English synonym for the word "dictionary."

By the 17th century, English dictionaries began turning a corner, partially thanks to an epidemic of plagiarism by printing companies. (A lot of dictionary makers and publishers were more than ready to steal from one another.) In 1616, John Bullokar would release *An English Expositor,* a catalogue of "strange words" designed to introduce terms to "the capacitie of the ignorant." And in 1656, Thomas Blount would publish *Glossographia,* the first monolingual English dictionary to explore a word's etymology. *Glossographia* was also the first to include words like *coffee, chocolate, and omelette.*

A crucial milestone in the history of the English dictionary was the work of Samuel Johnson.

Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*

Samuel Johnson, an accomplished writer in various genres, spent nine years working on his dictionary, *A Dictionary of the English Language*. The dictionary was both comprehensive and concise. It contained textual references for words that were arranged alphabetically. Johnson completed his dictionary almost single-handedly, using only an occasional clerk for illustrations and a small staff of secretaries. He took many liberties with his definitions, often inserting his own wit and satire.

In 1747, Johnson outlined his plans to write the English language's ultimate dictionary: "One great end of this undertaking is to fix the English language." (When we hear the word *fix* we usually think *repair,* but it also means *stabilize* or *give a permanent form.)*

For the next eight years, Johnson poured his life into creating a work with 42,773 entries. This was an impressive feat, considering that the average person only uses about 20,000 words. Johnson was the first English lexicographer to use quotations to illustrate a word's meaning, a practice that still continues today. He was one of the first to respectfully acknowledge regionalisms, dialects, and other colloquialisms.

Johnson's dictionary contained flashes of humor and self-deprecation. Johnson defined his own profession of lexicographer as "a harmless drudge." Occasionally, he included his opinions, such as in his definition of *luggage*: "anything of more weight than value." In some instances, he was plainly

prejudiced. No fan of the French, Johnson omitted words such as *champagne* and *unique* and defined *finesse* as "an unnecessary word that is creeping into the language."

While *A Dictionary of the English Language* wasn't perfect and had its eccentricities, it served as the standard for more than 150 years.

Because of Johnson's importance in the development of dictionaries, the full preface of Johnson's dictionary is appended to the end of this book. It includes comments on his methodology, his defense of his work, and his rants.

Noah Webster and Beyond

Whether Johnson accomplished his goal to "fix" the English language is debatable, but across the pond, an American lexicographer named Noah Webster would take up the same challenge. At the start of the 19th century, Webster began work on a decades-long project aimed at distancing American English from the conventions that Johnson had diligently recorded, and he introduced readers to new, uniquely American, simplified spellings: *color* for *colour*, *center* for *centre, jail* for *gaol*, and *wagon* for *waggon,* and so on.

Webster also introduced approximately 12,000 words that had never appeared in a dictionary. Some, like *skunk*, "a fetid animal of the weasel kind," were American in origin. Others, like *hickory*, had roots in Native American languages. But not all of Webster's attempts to improve and stabilize the language succeeded. American readers rejected Webster's spellings of *soup* (*soop)*, *women wimmen)*, *close* (*cloze)*, *daughter* (*dawter)*, and *tongue (tung)*.

Noah Webster published his first dictionary, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, in 1806. After 20 years spent studying twenty-six languages, Webster released his full comprehensive American English dictionary of more than 70,000 words, *An American Dictionary of the English Language.*

Part of Webster's Preface is also appended to this book.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary

After Webster's death in 1843, George and Charles Merriam secured the rights to Webster's dictionary. Through a tedious process of expanding and editing, George Merriam published his revision as *Webster's International* in 1890.

The dictionary I used from my college years throughout the rest of my life was the Merriam-Webster 7th New Collegiate Dictionary (1965).

The *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* is now in its 11th edition, with a fully accessible dictionary and thesaurus available for free online.

Merriam claims that it is the true heir of Webster, but today any wanna-be lexicographer can call himself and his dictionary a Webster, so we have a superfluity of dictionaries.

The Oxford English Dictionary

Back across the pond the Oxford English Dictionary established itself as the gold standard for English dictionaries. Taking decades to complete and containing more than 400,000 words, the OED attempted to record every word to ever have graced or disgraced the English language. A linguistic triumph

when completed in 1928, the OED required the work of hundreds of helpers. To this day, it is the English language's authoritative reference book.

The idea for the O*xford English Dictionary* arose in 1844 from the grumblings of members of the Philological Society of London, who felt a great need for a comprehensive English dictionary. However, it was not until 1879 that they successfully convinced Oxford University Press (OUP) to invest in the project. To compile and define words, the Society appealed to newspaper readers to send in quotation slips or examples of words used in a variety of settings. Quotation slips came pouring in at an average of 1,000 reports a day.

The first volume was released in 1884, but James A.H. Murray and the Philological Society were very aware that they had only scratched the surface of their endeavor to catalog the English language. Murray was joined by a larger team of editors, and together, they continued to produce fascicles (the term for sections of the dictionary) for the next few decades.

Published letter by letter, the dictionary wasn't finished until 1928. *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* contained 400,000 words and phrases in ten volumes.

But the corpus (body) of a dictionary is never complete. The editors continued to work on it, and a single-volume supplement was published in 1933. That same year, the entire catalog was republished in twelve volumes and given its current title, *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

Realizing that the dictionary couldn't maintain itself by producing the multitude of supplemental printed volumes that would be needed to adapt to an ever-changing language, OUP

took the leap to begin digitizing the dictionary in 1983 and combining the supplemental volumes with the main volumes. Once the OED went online in 2000, the editors began a process to complete a revised third edition of the dictionary, estimating that it will be completed in 2037.

See also “Dictionary” and OED on Wikipedia and many other sites.

*

Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning?

The topic covered by his book is spelling not grammar, but the two topics are intertwined, and many of the same lessons and principles apply to both fields, so we are making a digression into the history of English grammar. The issue of grammar is discussed in much more detail in the grammar handbook *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning,* which you can download for free from the Wartburg Project website. Here we just give a sample to whet your appetite for that parallel study

Just as we had to unlearn a lot of what we had learned about spelling as a result of the process of producing the EHV, we had to unlearn many things we had been taught about grammar. It is surprising how much the nature of grammatical study has been revolutionized by the ability to search vast amounts of literature in order to gather objective, "real life" statistics on any specific grammatical construction or on the spelling of any word. With a quick computer search, a grammarian can gather much more data about a grammatical construction than could be gathered in a lifetime of reading. This type of research clearly shows that many of the supposed rules we learned in grammar school are in fact myths.

The most important lesson to be learned by writers and editors is that the primary function of good grammatical practice is not to conform to a rule book but to communicate clearly. For the best communication, writers and editors must focus more on expressing meaning than on fulfilling mechanical rules found in grammar books. Or to paraphrase the greatest communicator: "Grammar is made for man; man is not made for grammar."

As is the case with spelling, the communicator is often caught between a rock and a hard place when choosing between two grammatical constructions. If he or she chooses option A (the more formal, traditional construction), the message will sound stuffy or stilted to part of the audience, and the communicator will be labeled a "traditionalist snoot." If the communicator chooses option B (a more informal, colloquial construction which accurately reproduces contemporary speech), cries of "Bad Grammar!" will arise from grammatical purists. How does a communicator produce a balanced style that results in normal speech, but also anticipates and deflects erroneous but predicable criticism by grammatical traditionalists?

Grammar is very serious business and should never be treated flippantly. Grammar is no *lafing* matter. Grammarians themselves find a discussion about fine points of grammar to be perfectly fascinating. For themselves, they see no need to season the discussion of such a serious topic with levity, but they recognize that sprinkling a little humor and provocative language into their treatises might induce otherwise normal people to join in a discussion of this topic, which they might otherwise shun.

Grammar Wars: Mechanics or Meaning?

Grammar wars are fought on two fronts: One front is the battle between prescriptive and descriptive grammar. The other battle is the battle between formal and informal grammar.

Adherents of *prescriptive grammar* believe that when making tough grammatical decisions, you should follow a rulebook handed to you by some authority—whether that authority is your editor, your fifth-grade teacher, or strongly

worded letters from your readers. Preferably that authority should also recognize that Latin is the source of good English grammar. One advantage of this prescriptive system is that it relieves writers and editors of any responsibility for making decisions. Anytime you are criticized, you can simply say, "Mr. Nigel Huntington-Jones III in his definitive *The King's English,* p 567, paragraph 34.4b says, '*blah,blah*, *blah*'" and further discussion is render moot.

Adherents of *descriptive grammar* believe that nobody except God, the inventor of language, has the authority to make grammatical rules that are binding on everyone, and that appointing such a lord of grammar does not seem to be one of God's priorities. He has appointed no pope or czar of grammar and spelling. As a result, the best road for writers to travel if they wish to be understood and admired by their target audience is to speak the language of their audience. When confronted with a grammatical sticky wicket, the writer should ask, "What wording would sound normal to most people in this situation?" Then the writer should make an attempt to sound like a normal person. This used to be a difficult task because it formerly required that you listen to a lot of average, normal people talk or that you read a lot of books by and about ordinary people in order to be competent to make this judgment. Now the task of descriptive grammar is easier. All you have to do is run a phrase or construction through a computer search and you can instantly obtain several centuries of data on a given usage. It is very easy to determine how most people say a certain thing—at least the people in a specified time and place and social stratum.

There is, of course, a middle ground between prescriptive and descriptive grammar. A writer cannot simply ignore the grammatical decrees of the grammatical establishment, even if

many of them are not true. One cannot simply cast the conventional mechanical rules prescribed by grammarians to the wind.[19] On the other hand, there is only one grammatical rule that has universal validity: "I should say or write this in the way which will most clearly convey my intended meaning (including the intended mood) to my target audience." If a grammatical rule helps me do that, the rule is a useful tool. If the rule hinders that goal or annoys my readers, then I have to set aside the rule and do whatever best conveys the meaning and mood I am trying to convey. Writers and editors need to offset rules and authorities with their own experience, common sense, and a feeling for their audience. Of course, the wider their target audience is, the more difficult it is to do this.

You can begin with this task by determining whether you are by nature and training more of a grammatical snoot or slacker.

Are You a Snoot or a Slacker?[20]

What is your basic philosophy about grammar and usage? When you are between a rock and a hard place, do you tend to

---

[19] There is no inherent reason why red must mean "stop," green must mean "go," and yellow must mean "caution," but if that is the convention followed in most towns, it is hazardous to follow some other fashion.

[20] Provocative terms like "snoot" and "slacker" are a rhetorical device that grammarians use to enliven what some people regard as a dull subject. The term "snoot" as a synonym for "hard-core grammatical prescriptivist" was popularized by *Garner's Modern English Usage.* "Slacker" is a prescriptivist name for practitioners of the "anything goes" school of grammar.

look the situation up in your chosen rulebook and rigidly follow its advice? If so, you are a *prescriptivist*.

Or is your approach to grammar more *descriptive?* You think, "This is a conversation, not a royal proclamation. Most people I know do not say, 'For whom are you looking?' The normal way of talking is to say 'Who are you looking for?'"

You may lean in a descriptivist direction, but you cannot escape the rules of your teacher, your boss, or your in-house rule book. Nevertheless, you should not allow yourself to be too burdened by grammatical myths.

Myths Many People Believe About English Grammar[21]

Garner's *Modern English Usage* includes a catalog of twelve "myths" about English grammar that are believed by

[21] The terms "myths" and "superstitions" are another example of a rhetorical device that grammarians use to promote discussion and to raise awareness of an otherwise boring topic. The question here is whether or not many commonly believed grammatical "rules" are in fact "myths" which are not based on objective evidence.

Most major handbooks about debated grammatical issues are written by curmudgeons, especially if they are written by British grammarians. Grammarians are accustomed to pronouncing their opinions in strong, sometimes satiric terms. Grammatical humor tends to be dry humor that is an acquired taste. American grammarians are hard pressed to match their British counterparts in either curmugdeonness or grammatical humor, but they occasionally try to follow in the path set by the practitioners of real King's English or is it Queen's English, no, it is King's again.

many otherwise sensible people. Most of the otherwise sensible people who believe these myths are staunch prescriptivists.

Here we can only touch on two of these twelve myths.

Myth 1: You should never end a sentence with a preposition.
This is a valid rule in Latin, in which pre-positions must be pre-positioned to their object, but Latin is not English. In English and other Germanic languages, ending a sentence with a preposition or a verbal particle detached from the verb is completely idiomatic. As Winston Churchill supposedly remarked, "This 'no preposition last' dogma is a rule up with which it is not necessary to put."

Myth 2: You should not split an infinitive.
You are permitted to politely ignore this rule. Many good writers do.

Check out the full list in *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning?* Of the many other topics discussed in that book, we will sample just two,

Who and Whom

The word *whom* is engaged in a life-or-death struggle for survival. This is one of the hottest battles in the grammar wars, so let's tackle it here, since it establishes the pattern for a lot of other skirmishes. This topic generates the greatest number of grammatical complaints to editors.

Evidence for this is presented by the second FAQ we ever received at the EHV, and we receive some form of it at least a couple of times a year.

> Why does your translation use bad grammar? In the passion history in the EHV Jesus twice says, "Who are you looking for?" It should be "For whom are you looking?"

The following are the principles that govern the use of *who* and *whom*:

> Do keep distinctions between *who* and *whom*, etc., but in reporting conversation try to avoid uses that sound stilted or pedantic in contemporary English. "Who are you looking for?" sounds like normal conversation. "For whom are you looking?" does not sound normal in conversation. Try out a few English sentences and see what sounds normal.
>
> Do the same for the rule "no prepositions last." In Germanic languages "prepositions" (which often are actually not prepositions at all but are detachable particles that are part of the verb) sound very natural at the end of a sentence.

These principles were originally based on our feelings about the English language, not on any specific research. We knew this was a no-win situation. We were between a rock and a hard place. Purists would say that "who are you looking for?" is bad grammar. Most people would say "for whom are you looking?" sounds stuffy. Other terms used by hard-core descriptivists to describe the usage "for whom are you looking?" are "formal," "super-formal," "pretentious," "moribund," "socially divisive," and "a school-teacher superstition."

Since we frequently receive statements that "who are you looking for?" is bad grammar, it makes sense to post some of comments by reputable grammarians and editors. The editor of

a major American newspaper, who describes himself as a "moderate prescriptivisit," summarizes the current situation thus:

> In conversation, *who* appears to have supplanted *whom*, almost universally. There is no going back.
>
> In formal writing, such as an academic paper or book, *whom* remains on its precarious perch.
>
> In middle-level discourse, such as journalism, which aims at a conversational tone while adhering to the conventions of standard written English, *whom* is slowly slipping away, and probably should. …
>
> It may be time to discuss letting go of the distinction in journalism. No doubt my fellow prescriptivists will see this as a counsel of despair, even though I am holding the ground on *imply* and *infer*, *comprise* and *compose*, even though I continue to use *whom* in my own writing when the pronoun as object is called for. I am two-thirds of the way toward being a dead white male, and I think that *whom* will see me out.
>
> But language is tricky, and it defies predictions. School teacher superstitions, such as the supposed prohibition against the split infinitive or the preposition at the end of a sentence, persist despite having been repeatedly exploded.
>
> For now, *whom,* though it may have seen its best days, is going, going, but not quite gone.
>
> John McIntyre, Baltimore Sun

H. W. Fowler,[22] who could be as authoritarian as anyone, already foreshadowed this trend in his 1908 edition:

> The interrogative *who* is often used for *whom*, as in, "Who did you see?" A distinction should here be made between conversation, written or spoken, and formal writing. Many educated people feel that in saying. "It is I" or "Whom do you mean?" instead of "It's me" or "Who do you mean?" they will be talking like a book, and they justifiably prefer geniality to grammar. But in print, unless it is dialogue, the correct forms are advisable.

Fowler's 1908 rule is a good rule to follow: "In print the 'correct' forms are advisable unless it is dialogue." Actually, this ruling was "old news" already in 1908 since substitution of *who* for *whom* occurred already in Shakespeare four centuries ago.

Fast forwarding to the 21st century, how does Garner assess the situation?

> It's true that in certain contexts, *whom* is stilted. That has long been so: Every sensible English speaker on

[22] Henry Watson Fowler (1858-1933) is one of those authorities like Noah Webster, whose name continues to be attached to updates of his work long after his demise. He was a classicist, detached from the mainstream of contemporary linguistic scholarship. Working in near isolation in a country cottage, he produced a work, which his up-dater R. W. Burchfield characterized as "schoolmasterly, quixotic, idiosyncratic, and vulnerable." Yet he was regarded as one of the main authorities for English usage in the 20th century.

> both sides of the Atlantic says "Who were you talking to?" and the sooner we begin to write it the better.
> According to the Language Change Index on page 965 of Garner: "*Who* as an object not following a preposition is Stage 4." That means that it is virtually universal but is opposed on cogent grounds by a few linguistic stalwarts (die-hard snoots).
> So, "Who are you looking for?" is not bad grammar. It is viewed as acceptable, but not all die-hard snoots[23] will approve (yet).

Garner is careful to note that *whom* is not dead in American English. And, *who=whom* is not always acceptable. For example, *who* as an object following a preposition is only Stage 2 on the Language Change Index. That means that it is unacceptable in standard usage even if a significant fraction of the language community might use it. In other words, it is not acceptable to say: "That sits well with the local leaders, *one of who* drew upon his own analogy to describe the party."

One of the real benefits of using big data and ngrams is that it is now much more possible to base grammatical judgments on

[23] In Garner's book, "snoot" is not necessarily a bad pejorative word. He seems to be a borderline snoot himself. A snoot is someone who believes that listening to an average speaker of English is too often like watching someone use a Stradivarius to pound nails. But to have a clear grasp of the meaning, read his description of the word "snoot" on page 840. It's both serious and worth a chuckle.

very comprehensive objective data rather than largely on feelings and biases.[24]

There are a number of problems with rigid attempts to enforce the Law of *Who* and *Whom* and other similar laws:

---

[24] In its march from being "bad grammar" to "good grammar" a given expression passes through five stages:

Stage 1: Rejected. A new form emerges as an innovation among a small minority of the language community, perhaps replacing a traditional usage. Refined people normally consider innovations at this stage to be outright mistakes.

Stage 2: Widely shunned. The form spreads to a significant portion of the language community, but it remains unacceptable in standard usage. Terms in stage 2 often get recorded in dictionaries as variant or vulgar forms.

Stage 3: Widespread but… The form becomes commonplace even among many well-educated people, but it is still avoided in careful usage.

Stage 4: Ubiquitous but… The form becomes virtually universal but is opposed on cogent grounds by a few linguistic stalwarts.

Stage 5: Fully accepted. The form is universally adopted except by a few eccentrics.

The virtue of the sliding scale is that it shows that language is not like math. There's no way to justify absolute judgments of objective rightness and wrongness. Instead, the best we can do is to try to assess acceptability – which is a matter of degree (and a matter of opinion).

1. It is a futile attempt at an Amish-style freeze in time, which is impossible in a living language. The correct historical form of Jesus' words to Peter (who do you say I am?) is not "whom do you say I am?" but "whom say ye I am?" If we want to preserve the purity of the English language, we would need to preserve not only the cases of *who/whom* but also the cases of the 2nd person pronouns: *thou*=singular subject, *thee*=singular object, *ye*=plural subject, *you*=plural object. If the English language can survive the loss of *thou, thee,* and *ye*, it can survive the loss of *whom.* Actually the loss of *thou, thee,* and *ye* is more serious than the loss of *whom* since the loss of *thou, thee,* and *ye* is not the loss only of the subject/object distinction but also the loss of the useful singular/plural distinction.[25]
2. Old English (Olde Anglish) like other early Germanic languages had five grammatical cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and instrumental). Case distinctions held on longer for the pronouns than for nouns. But the effort to preserve *whom* will likely be no more successful than Canute's efforts to hold back the tide. Erasing *he, his, him* and *she, hers, her* will probably happen sooner than the disappearance of *whom* because

[25] Equal futile is the attempt to keep foreign words out of a living language in order to preserve its purity. The Hebrew language academy could not prevent the infiltration of alien words like *telephon, pizza,* and *chips* into Hebrew any more than English could keep out *pizza* and *hamburger.* Even the French, linguistic jingoists that they are, could not keep out *le selfie, le sandwich, le bulldozer, l'email,* and *Cool.*

they will be erased not by the tides of time but by civil penalties based on gender-based political correctness. The weakness of hard-core proponents of the Law of *Whom* is that the only weapon they have in their arsenal is shaming, which is not an effective weapon in a culture that is hard to shame.

3. The attempt to preserve cases is an ill-advised attempt to impose the grammar of a dead Romance language on a living Germanic language. A partisan of the lost causes of "who/whom" and "no preposition last" explained it this way: "When in doubt about correct English grammar, I always relied on the rules of Latin." Even in the case of Latin, nothing could prevent Latin from becoming Italian and Spanish and worst of all, French. The Roman man and woman on the street did not follow the rules of Cicero and Virgil, the two men who did more than any other two guys to insure that Latin would become a dead language.
4. When people try to apply dead rules to living language, they over-correct and make awkward mistakes like *"a woman whom I think is a genius." Whom* is not the object of *I think,* as rearranging the words demonstrates: "a woman who is a genius, I think." People who attempt to pray in King James English seldom do it correctly, and they think that the *y* in *ye olde pub* is pronounced as a *y* rather than the correct pronunciation as a *th*.

Writers should to use language that is both correct and alive and to observe the distinction between written communication and conversation (even conversation recorded in writing is still conversation). If Jesus says, "Who are you looking for?" some readers will say "Our Lord Jesus Christ would not use bad grammar." If Jesus says, "For whom are you looking?" or better

yet, "Whom seekest thou?" another set of readers will say, "Nobody talks like that. Jesus would not be stuffy. Jesus should sound like a living, lively person, not like an old-fashioned book." When editors are between a grammatical rock and a hard place, if their treatment of disputed issues results in 15% of their readers thinking they use bad grammar, 15% thinking they are stuffed shirts, and 70% don't care, they can count that as a win.[26]

We have dealt with the *who/whom* issue at some length because it gives a good model for dealing with other grammatical issues. We will look at one more sample from *Biblical Grammar* before we get back to our main topic, spelling.

Commas

The function of commas is to indicate a small pause in the reading or to signal the connection of words into groups. Your judgment about how you want a sentence to be read is the most important factor in deciding whether or not you want to place a comma in a specific spot. Here are the general rules.

1. Do use a comma before *and* in a series, as this usage seems to be gaining ground again after being out of favor for a while— "apples, oranges, and bananas."
2. Do not use a comma between two verbs with a single subject. Not: "He sent two men, and said to them". Either

[26] People who send in strong criticisms of the grammar and spelling of published works are not necessarily trying to be contentious. They may be trying to spare the authors and editor of the work from being embarrassed by their grammatical faux pas.

do not add a comma or add a second subject: “he sent two men, and *he* said to them.”

3. Poetic punctuation is intended to be a guide to poetic reading and singing, so it does not always follow grammatical necessity but indicates where the poetic pauses are.
4. When a sentence begins with *Oh,* whether or not *Oh* is followed by a comma depends on whether or not you want *Oh* to be followed by a short pause.
5. Adverbial phrases at the beginning of a sentence may be set off with a comma, but short phrases do not necessarily need a comma. Again, your purpose is to guide the reader as to how you want the sentence read.
6. The same is true of the word *therefore* at the beginning of a sentence. In the sentence “Therefore the place was named Beersheba” the reader should not read “Therefore (significant pause) the place was named Beersheba,” but “Therefore the place was named Beersheba.” No pause—no comma. One way around this issue is to rephrase: That is why the place was named Beersheba. In general do not put a comma after an initial *therefore* unless it indicates a conclusion drawn directly from the preceding sentence.
7. **If you are unsure about whether a comma is needed, read the sentence out loud a couple of times. Do you need a pause?—put in a comma. No pause—no comma. Examples: “Are you going?” “No, I’m not.” “You *are* going!” “No I’m not!” The two sentences say something quite different, and in writing it is the comma that marks the difference.
8. Closely related to this is the comma added to prevent an initial misreading of a sentence regardless of whether or not a pause is involved. This comma prevents joining the

wrong words together. “Down in the valley below, the city was glowing in the night.” Comma prevents the potential misreading, “in the valley below the city.”

9. **Remember, the purpose of punctuation is not to fulfill a rule but to help the reader, who cannot hear the natural pauses and the inflection present in speech. The commas help the readers put the pauses and inflection in the right place in the sentence. Ask yourself what punctuation will help the reader reproduce the speech correctly. Does clarity call for a pause?—put in a comma. Do you want continuity?—no comma. Is a comma needed to guide the reader in producing the correct intonation? Put one in. Whether the reader is reading silently or aloud, the function of punctuation is to help the reader and the hearer get the right flow to the sentence the first time through.
10. Use a comma whenever necessary to avoid ambiguity. Your goal is always to help the person who is reading aloud, perhaps without practice. (Important enough to say twice: The purpose of punctuation is to serve the reader, not to serve a rulebook. Grammar is made for man, not man for grammar.)
11. Sometimes wording that is clear when readers can see the words on paper may cause momentary confusion for listeners. Listen to the passages being read aloud to try to avoid such situations. Reword the sentence to prevent misunderstanding. Although it is clear in writing that *fir* is a tree or a kind of wood, in listening *fir* might be misunderstood as *fur.* The text must be worded in a way that will minimize that possibility.
12. Words that are appositional are set off by commas. Words that are part of the main term are not.

13. You can understand the principle if you practice reading the difference between these phrases: “the large, black bird” and “the large blackbird” and “the three wise men” or “the three Wisemen.” “Did you see the sun set?” “No, but I saw the sunset.”

Conclusion

A communicator’s degree of freedom in grammatical and spelling matters depends in part on whether one is acting as an author or an editor, as a free agent or an employee. Authors can shape their message and style to their audience’s preferences and biases as long as they do not compromise their message. However, they have no duty to do so if their chosen usages are intended to make a point.

For a more in-depth discussion of how to deal with grammatical battle grounds, in addition to *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning?,* download the online seminar for journalism students, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place.* It too is available from the Wartburg Project website for free.

Appendix 1

Samuel Johnson,
"Preface to the Dictionary"
From Samuel Johnson,
A Dictionary of the English Language

(London, 1755)

Edited by Jack Lynch and John Brug

Preface to the Preface

The text as arranged by JL comes from the text of the first edition of the Dictionary (1755). Paragraph numbers have been added.

The words in red are words that Johnson has misspelled in the opinion of the Microsoft Word spellchecker. This shows how many of Johnson's spellings are now wrong according to Noah Webster and Bill Gates. In print editions the colors will be shades of gray.

In this edition, because the reading of this treatise can get tedious because the language and punctuation are archaic, I have highlighted noteworthy statements or principles in purple. Paragraph numbers of some of the most important paragraphs are in **bold.** This provides a CliffsNotes version of the preface.

Reading the preface has four main benefits:

It displays the incredible talent of this great scholar and writer.
It displays the incredible self-confidence of the man whose rulings took on god-like authority.
It is entertaining to linguaphiles.
It is the best primary source for understanding how English spelling got to be such a mess.

Caveat lector—let the reader beware. There are technical and archaic parts of this article that only a spelling aficionado can love. Readers who have more common sense than the creators of our English spelling system may skip those parts until a day when they have been very bad and deserve to be punished. Then they can force themselves to read the whole preface.

I have added headings to assist readers who are scanning over the article, and I have made a few small changes for readability.
College students reading this for a class should demand extra credit for this work of supererogation.

The Preface

The Hard Life of a Dictionary Writer

[1] It is the fate of those who toil at the lower employments of life to be driven more by the fear of evil, than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure, without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect; where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward.

[2] Among these unhappy mortals is the writer of dictionaries; whom mankind have considered, not as the pupil, but as the slave of science, the pionier of literature, doomed only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths of Learning and Genius, who press forward to conquest and glory, without bestowing a smile on the humble drudge that facilitates their progress. Every other authour may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompence has been yet granted to very few.

[3] **I** have, notwithstanding this discouragement, attempted a dictionary of the English language, which, while it was

employed in the cultivation of every species of literature, has itself been hitherto neglected, suffered to spread under the direction of chance into wild exuberance, resigned to the tyranny of time and fashion, and exposed to the corruptions of ignorance, and caprices of innovation.

Recognizing the Sad State of English

[4] When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech to be copious without order and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority.

His Procedures

[5] Having therefore no assistance but from general grammar, I applied myself to the perusal of our writers; and noting whatever might be of use to ascertain or illustrate any word or phrase, accumulated in time the materials of a dictionary, which, by degrees, I reduced to method, establishing to myself in the progress of the work, such rules as experience and analogy suggested to me; experience, which practice and observation were continually increasing; and analogy, which, though in some words obscure, was evident in others.

[6] In adjusting the Orthography, which has been to this time unsettled and fortuitous, I found it necessary to distinguish those irregularities that are inherent in our tongue, and perhaps coeval with it, from others which the ignorance or negligence of later

writers has produced. Every language has its anomalies, which, though inconvenient, and in themselves once unnecessary, must be tolerated among the imperfections of human things, and which require only to be registred; that they may not be increased, and ascertained, that they may not be confounded: but every language has likewise its improprieties and absurdities, which it is the duty of the lexicographer to correct or proscribe.

How Spelling Became a Mess

[7] As language was at its beginning merely oral, all words of necessary or common use were spoken before they were written; and while they were unfixed by any visible signs, they must have been spoken with great diversity, as we now observe that those who cannot read catch sounds imperfectly and utter them negligently. When this wild and barbarous jargon was first reduced to an alphabet, every penman endeavoured to express, as he could, the sounds which he was accustomed to pronounce or to receive, and he vitiated in writing such words as were already vitiated in speech. The powers of the letters, when they were applied to a new language, must have been vague and unsettled, and therefore different hands would exhibit the same sound by different combinations.

[8] From this uncertain pronunciation, arise in a great part the various dialects of the same country, which will always be observed to grow fewer and less different, as books are multiplied; and from this arbitrary representation of sounds by letters, proceeds that diversity of spelling observable in the Saxon remains, and I suppose in the first books of every nation, which perplexes or destroys analogy, and produces anomalous

formations, which, being once incorporated, can never be afterward dismissed or reformed.

[9] Of this kind are the derivatives *length* from *long*, *strength* from *strong*, *darling* from *dear*, *breadth* from *broad*, from *dry*, *drought*, and from *high*, *height*, which Milton, in zeal for analogy, writes *highth*; *Quid te exempta juvat spinis de pluribus una*;[27] to change all would be too much, and to change one is nothing.

[10] This uncertainty is most frequent in the vowels, which are so capriciously pronounced, and so differently modified, by accident or affectation, not only in every province, but in every mouth, that to them, as is well known to etymologists, little regard is to be shewn in the deduction of one language from another.

[11] Such defects are not errours in orthography, but spots of barbarity impressed so deep in the English language, that criticism can never wash them away; these, therefore, must be permitted to remain untouched; but many words have likewise been altered by accident, or depraved by ignorance, as the pronunciation of the vulgar has been weakly followed; and some still continue to be variously written, as authours differ in their care or skill. Of these it was proper to enquire the true orthography, which I have always considered as depending on their derivation, and have therefore referred them to their original languages: thus I write *enchant, enchantment, enchanter*, after the French, and *incantation* after the Latin; thus

[27] How does it help you to remove only one thorn from the many? (Horace)

entire is chosen rather than *intire*, because it passed to us not from the Latin *integer*, but from the French *entier*.

[12] Of many words it is difficult to say whether they were immediately received from the Latin or the French, since at the time when we had dominions in France, we had Latin service in our churches. It is, however, my opinion, that the French generally supplied us; for we have few Latin words, among the terms of domestick use, which are not French; but many French, which are very remote from Latin.

[13] Even in words of which the derivation is apparent, I have been often obliged to sacrifice uniformity to custom; thus I write, in compliance with a numberless majority, *convey* and *inveigh, deceit* and *receipt, fancy* and *phantom*; sometimes the derivative varies from the primitive, as *explain* and *explanation, repeat* and *repetition.*

[14] Some combinations of letters having the same power are used indifferently without any discoverable reason of choice, as in *choak, choke; soap, sope; fewel, fuel*, and many others; which I have sometimes inserted twice, that those who search for them under either form, may not search in vain.

[15] In examining the orthography of any doubtful word, the mode of spelling by which it is inserted in the series of the dictionary, is to be considered as that to which I give, perhaps not often rashly, the preference. I have left, in the examples, to every authour his own practice unmolested, that the reader may balance suffrages, and judge between us; but this question is not always to be determined by reputed or by real learning; some men, intent upon greater things, have thought little on sounds

and derivations; some, knowing the ancient tongues, have neglected those in which our words are commonly to be sought. Thus Hammond writes *fecibleness* for *feasibleness*, because I suppose he imagined it derived immediately from the Latin; and some words, such as *dependant, dependent; dependance, dependence*, vary their final syllable, as one or other language is present to the writer.

[16] In this part of the work, where caprice has long wantoned without controul, and vanity has sought praise by petty reformation, I have endeavoured to proceed with a scholar's reverence for antiquity, and a grammarian's regard to the genius of our tongue. I have attempted few alterations, and among those few, perhaps the greater part is from the modern to the ancient practice; and I hope I may be allowed to recommend to those, whose thoughts have been, perhaps, employed too anxiously on verbal singularities, not to disturb, upon narrow views, or for minute propriety, the orthography of their fathers. It has been asserted, that for the law to be known is of more importance than for it to be right. Change, says Hooker, is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better. There is in constancy and stability a general and lasting advantage, which will always overbalance the slow improvements of gradual correction. Much less ought our written language to comply with the corruptions of oral utterance, or to copy that which every variation of time or place makes different from itself, and imitate those changes, which will again be changed, while imitation is employed in observing them.

[17] This recommendation of steadiness and uniformity does not proceed from an opinion that particular combinations of letters have much influence on human happiness; or that truth

may not be successfully taught by modes of spelling fanciful and erroneous: I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven. Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote.

[18] In settling the orthography, I have not wholly neglected the pronunciation, which I have directed by printing an accent upon the acute or elevated syllable. It will sometimes be found that the accent is placed by the authour quoted, on a different syllable from that marked in the alphabetical series; it is then to be understood, that custom has varied, or that the authour has, in my opinion, pronounced it wrong. Short directions are sometimes given where the sound of letters is irregular; and if they are sometimes omitted, defects in such minute observations will be more easily excused, than superfluity.

[19] In the investigation both of the orthography and signification of words, their Etymology was necessarily to be considered, and they were therefore to be divided into primitives and derivatives. A primitive word is that which can be traced no further to any English root; thus *circumspect, circumvent, circumstance, delude, concave, and complicate,* though compounds in the Latin, are to us primitives. Derivatives, are all those that can be referred to any word in English of greater simplicity.

[20] The derivatives I have referred to their primitives, with an accuracy sometimes needless; for who does not see that *remoteness* comes from *remote*, *lovely* from *love*, *concavity*

from *concave*, and *demonstrative* from *demonstrate*? But this grammatical exuberance the scheme of my work did not allow me to repress. It is of great importance in examining the general fabrick of a language, to trace one word from another, by noting the usual modes of derivation and inflection; and uniformity must be preserved in systematical works, though sometimes at the expence of particular propriety.

[21] Among other derivatives I have been careful to insert and elucidate the anomalous plurals of nouns and preterites of verbs, which in the Teutonick dialects are very frequent, and, though they are familiar to those who have always used them, they interrupt and embarrass the learners of our language.

[22] The two languages from which our primitives have been derived are the Roman and Teutonick: under the Roman I comprehend the French and provincial tongues; and under the Teutonick range the Saxon, German, and all their kindred dialects. Most of our polysyllables are Roman, and our words of one syllable are very often Teutonick.

[23] In assigning the Roman original, it has perhaps sometimes happened that I have mentioned only the Latin, when the word was borrowed from the French. And considering myself as employed only in the illustration of my own language, I have not been very careful to observe whether the Latin word be pure or barbarous, or the French elegant or obsolete.

Varying Quality of His Authorities

[24] For the Teutonick etymologies I am commonly indebted to Junius and Skinner, the only names which I have forborn to quote when I copied their books; not that I might appropriate

their labours or usurp their honours, but that I might spare a perpetual repetition by one general acknowledgment. Of these, whom I ought not to mention but with the reverence due to instructors and benefactors, Junius appears to have excelled in extent of learning, and Skinner in rectitude of understanding. Junius was accurately skilled in all the northern languages, Skinner probably examined the ancient and remoter dialects only by occasional inspection into dictionaries; but the learning of Junius is often of no other use than to show him a track by which he may deviate from his purpose, to which Skinner always presses forward by the shortest way. Skinner is often ignorant, but never ridiculous: Junius is always full of knowledge; but his variety distracts his judgment, and his learning is very frequently disgraced by his absurdities.

[25] The votaries of the northern muses will not perhaps easily restrain their indignation, when they find the name of Junius thus degraded by a disadvantageous comparison; but whatever reverence is due to his diligence, or to his attainments, it can be no criminal degree of censoriousness to charge that etymologist with lack of judgment, who can seriously derive dream from drama, because life is a drama, and a drama is a dream; and who declares with a tone of defiance, that no man can fail to derive moan from μονος, *monos*, who considers that grief naturally loves to be alone.

[26] Our knowledge of the northern literature is so scanty, that of words undoubtedly Teutonick the original is not always to be found in any ancient language; and I have therefore inserted Dutch or German substitutes, which I consider not as radical but parallel, not as the parents, but sisters of the English.

[27] The words which are represented as thus related by descent or cognation, do not always agree in sense; for it is incident to words, as to their authours, to degenerate from their ancestors, and to change their manners when they change their country. It is sufficient, in etymological enquiries, if the senses of kindred words be found such as may easily pass into each other, or such as may both be referred to one general idea.

[28] The etymology, so far as it is yet known, was easily found in the volumes where it is particularly and professedly delivered; and, by proper attention to the rules of derivation, the orthography was soon adjusted. But to collect the Words of our language was a task of greater difficulty. The deficiency of dictionaries was immediately apparent; and when they were exhausted, what was yet wanting must be sought by fortuitous and unguided excursions into books, and gleaned as industry should find, or chance should offer it, in the boundless chaos of a living speech. My search, however, has been either skilful or lucky; for I have much augmented the vocabulary.

Types and Classes of Words

[29] As my design was a dictionary, common or appellative, I have omitted all words which have relation to **proper names;** such as Arian, Socinian, Calvinist, Benedictine, Mahometan; but have retained those of a more general nature, as Heathen, Pagan.

[30] Of the terms of art I have received such as could be found either in books of science or technical dictionaries; and have often inserted, from **philosophical writers,** words which are supported perhaps only by a single authority, and which being not admitted into general use, stand yet as candidates or

probationers, and must depend for their adoption on the suffrage of futurity.

[31] The words which our authours have introduced by their knowledge of **foreign languages,** or ignorance of their own, by vanity or wantonness, by compliance with fashion, or lust of innovation, I have registred as they occurred, though commonly only to censure them, and warn others against the folly of naturalizing useless foreigners to the injury of the natives.

[32] I have not rejected any by design, merely because they were unnecessary or exuberant; but have received those which by different writers have been differently formed, as *viscid*, and *viscidity, viscous,* and *viscosity*.

[33] **Compounded or double words I** have seldom noted, except when they obtain a signification different from that which the components have in their simple state. Thus *highwayman, woodman, and horsecourser* require an explication; but of *thieflike* or *coachdriver* no notice was needed, because the primitives contain the meaning of the compounds.

[34] **Words arbitrarily formed** by a constant and settled analogy, like diminutive adjectives in *ish*, as *greenish, bluish;* adverbs in *ly*, as *dully, openly*; substantives in *ness*, as *vileness, faultiness*, were less diligently sought, and many sometimes have been omitted, when I had no authority that invited me to insert them; not that they are not genuine and regular offsprings of English roots, but because their relation to the primitive being always the same, their signification cannot be mistaken.

[35] **The verbal nouns in *ing*,** such as the keeping of the castle, the leading of the army, are always neglected, or placed only to illustrate the sense of the verb, except when they signify things as well as actions, and have therefore a plural number, as dwelling, living; or have an absolute and abstract signification, as colouring, painting, learning.

[36] **The participles** are likewise omitted, unless, by signifying rather qualities than action, they take the nature of adjectives; as a thinking man, a man of prudence; a pacing horse, a horse that can pace: these I have ventured to call participial adjectives. But neither are these always inserted, because they are commonly to be understood, without any danger of mistake, by consulting the verb.

[37] **Obsolete words** are admitted, when they are found in authours not obsolete, or when they have any force or beauty that may deserve revival.

[38] As composition is one of the chief characteristicks of a language, I have endeavoured to make some reparation for the universal negligence of my predecessors, by inserting great numbers of compounded words, as may be found under *after, fore, new, night, fair*, and many more. These, numerous as they are, might be multiplied, but that use and curiosity are here satisfied, and the frame of our language and modes of our combination amply discovered.

[39] Of some forms of composition, such as that by which *re-* is prefixed to note repetition, and *un-* to signify contrariety or privation, all the examples cannot be accumulated, because the use of these particles, if not wholly arbitrary, is so little limited, that they are hourly affixed to new words as occasion requires, or is imagined to require them.

[40] There is another kind of composition more frequent in our language than perhaps in any other, from which arises to foreigners the greatest difficulty. We **modify the signification of many verbs by a particle subjoined**; as *to come off*, to escape by a fetch; *to fall on*, to attack; *to fall off*, to apostatize; *to break off,* to stop abruptly; *to bear out*, to justify; *to fall in*, to comply; *to give over*, to cease; *to set off*, to embellish; *to set in,* to begin a continual tenour; *to set out*, to begin a course or journey; *to take off*, to copy; with innumerable expressions of the same kind, of which some appear wildly irregular, being so far distant from the sense of the simple words, that no sagacity will be able to trace the steps by which they arrived at the present use. These I have noted with great care; and though I cannot flatter myself that the collection is complete, I believe I have so far assisted the students of our language, that this kind of phraseology will be no longer insuperable; and the combinations of verbs and particles, by chance omitted, will be easily explained by comparison with those that may be found.

[41] Many words yet stand supported only by the name of Bailey, Ainsworth, Philips, or the contracted *Dict.* for Dictionaries subjoined. Of these I am not always certain that they are read in any book but the works of lexicographers. Of such I have omitted many, because I had never read them; and many I have inserted, because they may perhaps exist, though they have escaped my notice. They are, however, to be yet considered as resting only upon the credit of former dictionaries. Others, which I considered as useful, or know to be proper, though I could not at present support them by authorities, I have suffered to stand upon my own attestation,

claiming the same privilege with my predecessors of being sometimes credited without proof.

[42] The words, thus selected and disposed, are grammatically considered: they are referred to the different parts of speech; traced, when they are irregularly inflected, through their various terminations; and illustrated by observations, not indeed of great or striking importance, separately considered, but necessary to the elucidation of our language, and hitherto neglected or forgotten by English grammarians.

Anticipated Criticism

[43] That part of my work on which I expect malignity most frequently to fasten, is the Explanation; in which I cannot hope to satisfy those, who are perhaps not inclined to be pleased, since I have not always been able to satisfy myself. To interpret a language by itself is very difficult; many words cannot be explained by synonimes, because the idea signified by them has not more than one appellation; nor by paraphrase, because simple ideas cannot be described. When the nature of things is unknown, or the notion unsettled and indefinite, and various in various minds, the words by which such notions are conveyed, or such things denoted, will be ambiguous and perplexed. And such is the fate of hapless lexicography, that not only darkness, but light, impedes and distresses it; things may be not only too little, but too much known, to be happily illustrated. To explain, requires the use of terms less abstruse than that which is to be explained, and such terms cannot always be found; for as nothing can be proved but by supposing something intuitively known, and evident without proof, so nothing can be defined but by the use of words too plain to admit a definition.

[44] Other words there are, of which the sense is too subtle and evanescent to be fixed in a paraphrase; such are all those which are by the grammarians termed **expletives,** and, in dead languages, are suffered to pass for empty sounds, of no other use than to fill a verse, or to modulate a period, but which are easily perceived in living tongues to have power and emphasis, though it be sometimes such as no other form of expression can convey.

[45] My labour has likewise been much increased by **a class of verbs too frequent in the English language, of which the signification is so loose and general,** the use so vague and indeterminate, and the senses detorted so widely from the first idea, that it is hard to trace them through the maze of variation, to catch them on the brink of utter inanity, to circumscribe them by any limitations, or interpret them by any words of distinct and settled meaning: such are *bear, break, come, cast, fall, get, give, do, put, set, go, run, make, take, turn, throw*. If of these the whole power is not accurately delivered, it must be remembered, that while our language is yet living, and variable by the caprice of every one that speaks it, these words are hourly shifting their relations, and can no more be ascertained in a dictionary, than a grove, in the agitation of a storm, can be accurately delineated from its picture in the water.

[46] The **particles** are among all nations applied with so great latitude, that they are not easily reducible under any regular scheme of explication: this difficulty is not less, nor perhaps greater, in English, than in other languages. I have laboured them with diligence, I hope with success; such at least as can be

expected in a task, which no man, however learned or sagacious, has yet been able to perform.

[47] Some **words there are which I cannot explain,** because I do not understand them; these might have been omitted very often with little inconvenience, but I would not so far indulge my vanity as to decline this confession: for when Tully owns himself ignorant whether *lessus*, in the twelve tables, means a funeral song, or mourning garment; and Aristotle doubts whether ουρευς, in the Iliad, signifies a mule, or muleteer, I may freely, without shame, leave some obscurities to happier industry, or future information.

[48] The rigour of interpretative lexicography requires that the explanation, and the word explained, should be always reciprocal; this I have always endeavoured, but could not always attain. Words are seldom exactly synonimous; a new term was not introduced, but because the former was thought inadequate: names, therefore, have often many ideas, but few ideas have many names. It was then necessary to use the proximate word, for the deficiency of single terms can very seldom be supplied by circumlocution; nor is the inconvenience great of such mutilated interpretations, because the sense may easily be collected entire from the examples.

[49] In every word of extensive use, it was requisite to mark the progress of its meaning, and show by what gradations of intermediate sense it has passed from its primitive to its remote and accidental signification; so that every foregoing explanation should tend to that which follows, and the series be regularly concatenated from the first notion to the last.

[50] This is specious, but not always practicable; kindred senses may be so interwoven, that the perplexity cannot be disentangled, nor any reason be assigned why one should be ranged before the other. When the radical idea branches out into parallel ramifications, how can a consecutive series be formed of senses in their nature collateral? The shades of meaning sometimes pass imperceptibly into each other; so that though on one side they apparently differ, yet it is impossible to mark the point of contact. Ideas of the same race, though not exactly alike, are sometimes so little different, that no words can express the dissimilitude, though the mind easily perceives it, when they are exhibited together; and sometimes there is such a confusion of acceptations, that discernment is wearied, and distinction puzzled, and perseverance herself hurries to an end, by crouding together what she cannot separate.

Anticipated Criticism

[51] These complaints of difficulty will, by those that have never considered words beyond their popular use, be thought only the jargon of a man willing to magnify his labours, and procure veneration to his studies by involution and obscurity. But every art is obscure to those that have not learned it: this uncertainty of terms, and commixture of ideas, is well known to those who have joined philosophy with grammar; and if I have not expressed them very clearly, it must be remembered that I am speaking of that which words are insufficient to explain.

[52] The original sense of words is often driven out of use by their metaphorical acceptations, yet must be inserted for the sake of a regular origination. Thus I know not whether *ardour* is used for material heat, or whether *flagrant*, in English, ever signifies the same with burning; yet such are the primitive ideas

of these words, which are therefore set first, though without examples, that the figurative senses may be commodiously deduced.

[53] Such is the exuberance of signification which many words have obtained, that it was scarcely possible to collect all their senses; sometimes the meaning of derivatives must be sought in the mother term, and sometimes deficient explanations of the primitive may be supplied in the train of derivation. In any case of doubt or difficulty, it will be always proper to examine all the words of the same race; for some words are slightly passed over to avoid repetition, some admitted easier and clearer explanation than others, and all will be better understood, as they are considered in greater variety of structures and relations.

[**54]** All [my] interpretations of words are not written with the same skill, or the same happiness: things equally easy in themselves, are not all equally easy to any single mind. Every writer of a long work commits errours, where there appears neither ambiguity to mislead, nor obscurity to confound him; and in a search like this, many felicities of expression will be casually overlooked, many convenient parallels will be forgotten, and many particulars will admit improvement from a mind utterly unequal to the whole performance.

[55] But many seeming faults are to be imputed rather to the nature of the undertaking, than the negligence of the performer. Thus some explanations are unavoidably reciprocal or circular, as *hind*, the female of the stag; *stag*, the male of the hind: sometimes easier words are changed into harder, as *burial* into *sepulture* or *interment*, *drier* into *desiccative*, *dryness* into *siccity* or *aridity*, *fit* into *paroxysm*; for the easiest word,

whatever it be, can never be translated into one more easy. But easiness and difficulty are merely relative, and if the present prevalence of our language should invite foreigners to this dictionary, many will be assisted by those words which now seem only to increase or produce obscurity. For this reason I have endeavoured frequently to join a Teutonick and Roman interpretation, as to *cheer* to *gladden*, or *exhilarate*, that every learner of English may be assisted by his own tongue.

[56] The solution of all difficulties, and the supply of all defects, must be sought in the examples, subjoined to the various senses of each word, and ranged according to the time of their authours.

His Sources

[57] When first I collected these authorities, I was desirous that every quotation should be useful to some other end than the illustration of a word; I therefore extracted from philosophers principles of science; from historians remarkable facts; from chymists complete processes; from divines striking exhortations; and from poets beautiful descriptions. Such is design, while it is yet at a distance from execution. When the time called upon me to range this accumulation of elegance and wisdom into an alphabetical series, I soon discovered that the bulk of my volumes would fright away the student, and was forced to depart from my scheme of including all that was pleasing or useful in English literature, and reduce my transcripts very often to clusters of words, in which scarcely any meaning is retained; thus to the weariness of copying, I was condemned to add the vexation of expunging. Some passages I have yet spared, which may relieve the labour of verbal

searches, and intersperse with verdure and flowers the dusty desarts of barren philology.

[58] The examples, thus mutilated, are no longer to be considered as conveying the sentiments or doctrine of their authours; the word for the sake of which they are inserted, with all its appendant clauses, has been carefully preserved; but it may sometimes happen, by hasty detruncation, that the general tendency of the sentence may be changed: the divine may desert his tenets, or the philosopher his system.

[59] Some of the examples have been taken from writers who were never mentioned as masters of elegance or models of stile; but words must be sought where they are used; and in what pages, eminent for purity, can terms of manufacture or agriculture be found? Many quotations serve no other purpose, than that of proving the bare existence of words, and are therefore selected with less scrupulousness than those which are to teach their structures and relations.

[60] My purpose was to admit no testimony of living authours, that I might not be misled by partiality, and that none of my cotemporaries might have reason to complain; nor have I departed from this resolution, but when some performance of uncommon excellence excited my veneration, when my memory supplied me, from late books, with an example that was wanting, or when my heart, in the tenderness of friendship, solicited admission for a favourite name.

[61] So far have I been from any care to grace my pages with modern decorations, that I have studiously endeavoured to collect examples and authorities from the writers before the

restoration, whose works I regard as the wells of English undefiled, as the pure sources of genuine diction. Our language, for almost a century, has, by the concurrence of many causes, been gradually departing from its original Teutonick character, and deviating towards a Gallick structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recal it, by making our ancient volumes the ground-work of stile, admitting among the additions of later times, only such as may supply real deficiencies, such as are readily adopted by the genius of our tongue, and incorporate easily with our native idioms.

[62] But as every language has a time of rudeness antecedent to perfection, as well as of false refinement and declension, I have been cautious lest my zeal for antiquity might drive me into times too remote, and croud my book with words now no longer understood. I have fixed Sidney's work for the boundary, beyond which I make few excursions. From the authours which rose in the time of Elizabeth, a speech might be formed adequate to all the purposes of use and elegance. If the language of theology were extracted from Hooker and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from Bacon; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from Raleigh; the dialect of poetry and fiction from Spenser and Sidney; and the diction of common life from Shakespeare, few ideas would be lost to mankind, for want of English words, in which they might be expressed.

[63] It is not sufficient that a word is found, unless it be so combined as that its meaning is apparently determined by the tract and tenour of the sentence; such passages I have therefore chosen, and when it happened that any authour gave a definition of a term, or such an explanation as is equivalent to a definition,

I have placed his authority as a supplement to my own, without regard to the chronological order, that is otherwise observed.

[64] Some words, indeed, stand unsupported by any authority, but they are commonly derivative nouns or adverbs, formed from their primitives by regular and constant analogy, or names of things seldom occurring in books, or words of which I have reason to doubt the existence.

[65] There is more danger of censure from the multiplicity than paucity of examples; authorities will sometimes seem to have been accumulated without necessity or use, and perhaps some will be found, which might, without loss, have been omitted. But a work of this kind is not hastily to be charged with superfluities: those quotations which to careless or unskilful perusers appear only to repeat the same sense, will often exhibit, to a more accurate examiner, diversities of signification, or, at least, afford different shades of the same meaning: one will shew the word applied to persons, another to things; one will express an ill, another a good, and a third a neutral sense; one will prove the expression genuine from an ancient authour; another will shew it elegant from a modern: a doubtful authority is corroborated by another of more credit; an ambiguous sentence is ascertained by a passage clear and determinate; the word, how often soever repeated, appears with new associates and in different combinations, and every quotation contributes something to the stability or enlargement of the language.

[66] When words are used equivocally, I receive them in either sense; when they are metaphorical, I adopt them in their primitive acceptation.

[67] I have sometimes, though rarely, yielded to the temptation of exhibiting a genealogy of sentiments, by shewing how one authour copied the thoughts and diction of another: such quotations are indeed little more than repetitions, which might justly be censured, did they not gratify the mind, by affording a kind of intellectual history.

[68] The various syntactical structures occurring in the examples have been carefully noted; the licence or negligence with which many words have been hitherto used, has made our stile capricious and indeterminate; when the different combinations of the same word are exhibited together, the preference is readily given to propriety, and I have often endeavoured to direct the choice.

[69] Thus have I laboured to settle the orthography, display the analogy, regulate the structures, and ascertain the signification of English words, to perform all the parts of a faithful lexicographer: but I have not always executed my own scheme, or satisfied my own expectations. The work, whatever proofs of diligence and attention it may exhibit, is yet capable of many improvements: the orthography which I recommend is still controvertible, the etymology which I adopt is uncertain, and perhaps frequently erroneous; the explanations are sometimes too much contracted, and sometimes too much diffused, the significations are distinguished rather with subtilty than skill, and the attention is harrassed with unnecessary minuteness.

[70] The examples are too often injudiciously truncated, and perhaps sometimes, I hope very rarely, alleged in a mistaken sense; for in making this collection I trusted more to memory, than, in a state of disquiet and embarrassment, memory can

contain, and purposed to supply at the review what was left incomplete in the first transcription.

[71] Many terms appropriated to particular occupations, though necessary and significant, are undoubtedly omitted; and of the words most studiously considered and exemplified, many senses have escaped observation.

[72] Yet these failures, however frequent, may admit extenuation and apology. To have attempted much is always laudable, even when the enterprize is above the strength that undertakes it: To rest below his own aim is incident to every one whose fancy is active, and whose views are comprehensive; nor is any man satisfied with himself because he has done much, but because he can conceive little. When first I engaged in this work, I resolved to leave neither words nor things unexamined, and pleased myself with a prospect of the hours which I should revel away in feasts of literature, the obscure recesses of northern learning, which I should enter and ransack, the treasures with which I expected every search into those neglected mines to reward my labour, and the triumph with which I should display my acquisitions to mankind. When I had thus enquired into the original of words, I resolved to show likewise my attention to things; to pierce deep into every science, to enquire the nature of every substance of which I inserted the name, to limit every idea by a definition strictly logical, and exhibit every production of art or nature in an accurate description, that my book might be in place of all other dictionaries whether appellative or technical. But these were the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer. I soon found that it is too late to look for instruments, when the work calls for execution, and that whatever abilities I had brought to

my task, with those I must finally perform it. To deliberate whenever I doubted, to enquire whenever I was ignorant, would have protracted the undertaking without end, and, perhaps, without much improvement; for I did not find by my first experiments, that what I had not of my own was easily to be obtained: I saw that one enquiry only gave occasion to another, that book referred to book, that to search was not always to find, and to find was not always to be informed; and that thus to persue perfection, was, like the first inhabitants of Arcadia, to chace the sun, which, when they had reached the hill where he seemed to rest, was still beheld at the same distance from them.

[73] I then contracted my design, determining to confide in myself, and no longer to solicit auxiliaries, which produced more incumbrance than assistance: by this I obtained at least one advantage, that I set limits to my work, which would in time be finished, though not completed.

[74] Despondency has never so far prevailed as to depress me to negligence; some faults will at last appear to be the effects of anxious diligence and persevering activity. The nice and subtle ramifications of meaning were not easily avoided by a mind intent upon accuracy, and convinced of the necessity of disentangling combinations, and separating similitudes. Many of the distinctions which to common readers appear useless and idle, will be found real and important by men versed in the school philosophy, without which no dictionary ever shall be accurately compiled, or skilfully examined.

[75] Some senses however there are, which, though not the same, are yet so nearly allied, that they are often confounded. Most men think indistinctly, and therefore cannot speak with

exactness; and consequently some examples might be indifferently put to either signification: this uncertainty is not to be imputed to me, who do not form, but register the language; who do not teach men how they should think, but relate how they have hitherto expressed their thoughts.

[76] The imperfect sense of some examples I lamented, but could not remedy, and hope they will be compensated by innumerable passages selected with propriety, and preserved with exactness; some shining with sparks of imagination, and some replete with treasures of wisdom.

[77] The orthography and etymology, though imperfect, are not imperfect for want of care, but because care will not always be successful, and recollection or information come too late for use.

[78] That many terms of art and manufacture are omitted must be frankly acknowledged; but for this defect I may boldly allege that it was unavoidable: I could not visit caverns to learn the miner's language, nor take a voyage to perfect my skill in the dialect of navigation, nor visit the warehouses of merchants, and shops of artificers, to gain the names of wares, tools and operations, of which no mention is found in books; what favourable accident, or easy enquiry brought within my reach, has not been neglected; but it had been a hopeless labour to glean up words, by courting living information, and contesting with the sullenness of one, and the roughness of another.

[79] To furnish the academicians della Crusca with words of this kind, a series of comedies called la Fiera, or the Fair, was professedly written by Buonaroti; but I had no such assistant,

and therefore was content to want what they must have wanted likewise, had they not luckily been so supplied.

[80] Nor are all words which are not found in the vocabulary, to be lamented as omissions. Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in a great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation.

[81] Care will sometimes betray to the appearance of negligence. He that is catching opportunities which seldom occur, will suffer those to pass by unreguarded, which he expects hourly to return; he that is searching for rare and remote things, will neglect those that are obvious and familiar: thus many of the most common and cursory words have been inserted with little illustration, because in gathering the authorities, I forbore to copy those which I thought likely to occur whenever they were wanted. It is remarkable that, in reviewing my collection, I found the word Sea unexemplified.

[82] Thus it happens, that in things difficult there is danger from ignorance, and in things easy from confidence; the mind, afraid of greatness, and disdainful of littleness, hastily withdraws herself from painful searches, and passes with scornful rapidity over tasks not adequate to her powers, sometimes too secure for caution, and again too anxious for vigorous effort; sometimes

idle in a plain path, and sometimes distracted in labyrinths, and dissipated by different intentions.
[83] A large work is difficult because it is large, even though all its parts might singly be performed with facility; where there are many things to be done, each must be allowed its share of time and labour, in the proportion only which it bears to the whole; nor can it be expected, that the stones which form the dome of a temple, should be squared and polished like the diamond of a ring.

[84] Of the event of this work, for which, having laboured it with so much application, I cannot but have some degree of parental fondness, it is natural to form conjectures. Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design, require that it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition. With this consequence I will confess that I flattered myself for a while; but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify. When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation.

[85] With this hope, however, academies have been instituted, to guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders; but their vigilance and activity have hitherto

been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength. The French language has visibly changed under the inspection of the academy; the stile of Amelot's translation of father Paul is observed by Le Courayer to be un peu passè; and no Italian will maintain, that the diction of any modern writer is not perceptibly different from that of Boccace, Machiavel, or Caro.

The Causes of Change in Languages

[86] Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare: but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superiour to human resistance, as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence of the tide. Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavour to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers on the Mediterranean and Indian coasts. This will not always be confined to the exchange, the warehouse, or the port, but will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of the people, and be at last incorporated with the current speech.

[87] There are likewise internal causes equally forcible. The language most likely to continue long without alteration, would be that of a nation raised a little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the conveniencies of life; either without books, or, like some of the Mahometan countries, with very few: men thus

busied and unlearned, having only such words as common use requires, would perhaps long continue to express the same notions by the same signs. But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination, where one part of the community is sustained and accommodated by the labour of the other. Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas, and every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combinations of words. When the mind is unchained from necessity, it will range after convenience; when it is left at large in the fields of speculation, it will shift opinions; as any custom is disused, the words that expressed it must perish with it; as any opinion grows popular, it will innovate speech in the same proportion as it alters practice.

[88] As by the cultivation of various sciences, a language is amplified, it will be more furnished with words deflected from their original sense; the geometrician will talk of a courtier's zenith, or the excentrick virtue of a wild hero, and the physician of sanguine expectations and phlegmatick delays. Copiousness of speech will give opportunities to capricious choice, by which some words will be preferred, and others degraded; vicissitudes of fashion will enforce the use of new, or extend the signification of known terms. The tropes of poetry will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense: pronunciation will be varied by levity or ignorance, and the pen must at length comply with the tongue; illiterate writers will at one time or other, by publick infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety. As politeness increases, some

expressions will be considered as too gross and vulgar for the delicate, others as too formal and ceremonious for the gay and airy; new phrases are therefore adopted, which must, for the same reasons, be in time dismissed. Swift, in his petty treatise on the English language, allows that new words must sometimes be introduced, but proposes that none should be suffered to become obsolete. But what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? and how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea, or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliarity unpleasing.

[89] There is another cause of alteration more prevalent than any other, which yet in the present state of the world cannot be obviated. A mixture of two languages will produce a third distinct from both, and they will always be mixed, where the chief part of education, and the most conspicuous accomplishment, is skill in ancient or in foreign tongues. He that has long cultivated another language, will find its words and combinations croud upon his memory; and haste or negligence, refinement or affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotick expressions.

[90] The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom; this is the most mischievous and comprehensive innovation; single words may enter by thousands, and the fabrick of the tongue continue the same, but new phraseology changes much at once; it alters not the single stones of the building, but the order of the columns. If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile, which I, who can never wish to see dependance multiplied, hope

the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavour, with all their influence, to stop the licence of translatours, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of France.

[91] If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? it remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language.

His Goal

[92] In hope of giving longevity to that which its own nature forbids to be immortal, I have devoted this book, the labour of years, to the honour of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authours: whether I shall add any thing by my own writings to the reputation of English literature, must be left to time: much of my life has been lost under the pressures of disease; much has been trifled away; and much has always been spent in provision for the day that was passing over me; but I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labours afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton, and to Boyle.

[93] When I am animated by this wish, I look with pleasure on my book, however defective, and deliver it to the world with the spirit of a man that has endeavoured well. That it will immediately become popular I have not promised to myself: a few wild blunders, and risible absurdities, from which no work of such multiplicity was ever free, may for a time furnish folly with laughter, and harden ignorance in contempt; but useful diligence will at last prevail, and there never can be wanting some who distinguish desert; who will consider that no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away; that a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology, and that even a whole life would not be sufficient; that he, whose design includes whatever language can express, must often speak of what he does not understand; that a writer will sometimes be hurried by eagerness to the end, and sometimes faint with weariness under a task, which Scaliger compares to the labours of the anvil and the mine; that what is obvious is not always known, and what is known is not always present; that sudden fits of inadvertency will surprize vigilance, slight avocations will seduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning; and that the writer shall often in vain trace his memory at the moment of need, for that which yesterday he knew with intuitive readiness, and which will come uncalled into his thoughts to-morrow.

[94] In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the authour, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the English Dictionary was

written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow: and it may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe, that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. If the lexicons of ancient tongues, now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes, be yet, after the toil of successive ages, inadequate and delusive; if the aggregated knowledge, and co-operating diligence of the Italian academicians, did not secure them from the censure of Beni; if the embodied criticks of France, when fifty years had been spent upon their work, were obliged to change its oeconomy, and give their second edition another form, I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.

Appendix 2

From Noah Webster's Preface

Noah Webster on orthography and pronunciation from his preface to *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*

All spelling was left as it was in the Wikisource version of the Preface. The form is considerably more modern than Johnson's preface.

Highlights are in purple. The reading of the essay is difficult, but readers will be rewarded with many examples of spelling changes and the reason for them. A list of Webster's main points is appended to this chapter.

ORTHOGRAPHY

English Spelling is a Mess
With No Solution in Sight

The orthography of our language is extremely irregular; and many fruitless attempts have been made to reform it. The utility and expedience of such reform have been controverted, and both side of the question have been maintained with no inconsiderable zeal.

On this subject, as on most others which divide the opinions of men, parties seem to have erred by running into extremes. The friends of a reform maintain that our

alphabet should be rendered perfectly regular, by rejecting superfluous characters, and introducing new ones to supply defects; so that every sound may be represented by a distinct letter, and no letter have more sounds than one. This scheme is impracticable, and not at all necessary.[1]

The opposers of a reform, on the other hand, contend that no alterations should be made in orthography, as they would not only occasion inconvenience, but tend to render old books useless, and obscure etymology. It is fortunate for the language and for those who use it, that this doctrin did not prevail in the reign of Henry the fourth [about 1400]; for it was as just then as it is now; and had all changes in spelling ceased at that period, what a spectacle of deformity would our language now exhibit! The doctrin is as mischievous in its consequences, as the reasons on which it is founded are false. Every man of common reading knows that a living language must necessarily suffer gradual changes in its current words, in the significations of many words, and in pronunciation. The unavoidable consequence then of fixing the orthography of a living language, is to destroy the use of the alphabet. This effect has, in a degree, already taken place in our language; and letters, the most useful invention that ever blessed mankind, have lost and continue to lose a part of their value, by no longer being the representatives of the sounds originally annexed to them. Strange as it may seem the fact is undeniable, that the present doctrin that no change must be made in writing words, is destroying the benefits of an alphabet, and reducing our language to the barbarism of Chinese characters insted of letters. What is still stranger, this

doctrin is pertinaciously maintained by the men who make pretenses to exquisit taste and refinement in polite literature. And if any thing can add to the contradictions which such a principle involves, it is that the same men, who object to the minutest alterations of orthography, are the most active in effecting changes of pronunciation; thus aiding to destroy the use of letters, by creating new differences between the written and spoken language.

Moderate Reform Is Possible

The correct principle respecting changes in orthography seems to lie between these extremes of opinion. No great changes should ever be made at once, nor should any change be made which violates established principles, creates great inconvenience, or obliterates the radicals of the language. But gradual changes to accommodate the written to the spoken language, when they occasion none of these evils, and especially when they purify words from corruptions, improve the regular analogies of a language and illustrate etymology, are not only proper, but indispensable.

Defending the Alphabet Is a Chief Goal

On this general principle have all learned and civilized nations proceeded in refining their languages and preserving the use of alphabetical writing. Hence we observe as great a difference between the orthography in the laws of Romulus, Servius Tullius and the Decemvirs, and that of Cicero and Livy, as between the orthography of Chaucer and that of Addison. This principle also prevailed universally in the English nation, from the revival of letters to the last century, when certain eminent authors adopted an idea, as absurd as incompatible with

improvement, that a living language can be fixed beyond the possibility of change; and to the prevalence of this error, we may ascribe many of the irregularities of our present orthography.

Reform Is a Return to Original English Spelling

From this error, or perhaps from a total inattention to the history of our language, has originated another mistake which now governs public opinion on this subject; this is, that the present state of our orthography exhibits the true etymology of words, and that every alteration would tend to obscure it. There are some classes of words of which this true; but let it be noted that no small part of the anomalies in the spelling of words are egregious corruptions of the primitive orthography. Thus the present orthography of *leather, feather, weather, stead, wealth, mould, son, ton, wonder, worship, thirst*, &c. is corrupt; having been vitiated during the dark ages of English literature, under the Norman princes. The true orthography from the first Saxon writings to the 12th century, was *lether, fether, wether, sted or stede, welga, mold, suna, tunna, wundor, wurthscipe, thurst*.

Broad, was written *brade, brede,* and *braed.* We have preserved the first in the adjective *broad,* but the pronunciation of the noun *bredth* we take from the second, and the orthography most absurdly from the last.(2)

Tongue, was in Saxon written *tung, tonge* or *tunga,* which we pronounce correctly *tung*, omitting the last letter as in other Saxon words, and yet we write the word most barbarously *tongue. Launch* from *lance* is a corruption introduced at a very early period, with *daunce* for *dance, auncient* for *ancient, maister* for *master, plaister* for

plaster, and numerous similar corruptions which mark the barbarism which suceeded the Norman conquest.

Heinous from the French *haine,* which is correctly pronounced *hainous* as it was formerly written, is such a palpable error that no lexicographer can be justified in giving it his sanction.

Though is also a vitious orthography, *tho* being much nearer to the original word.

Drought and *height* are corruptions of *drugothe, heatho;* which the Saxons formed from *dryg* and *heh* or *heah, dr* and *high,* by adding the termination *th* as in *length* from *leng; strength* from *streng,* and as we form *truth* from *true, width* from *wide, warmth* from *warm.*The Saxon termination *th* is universally preserved in the popular pronunciation of this country; and so far is it from being an error or corruption, that it is the very essence of the nouns, *drouth* and *highth*. Men therefore who use this pronunciation, tho chargeable with "a zeal for analogy," as Johnson observes of Milton, and tho they may not imitate Garrick as Walker does, will still have the honor to be correct, and to preserve the purity of the original orthography. They will further have the honor of conforming to what is in fact the national pronunciation, and has been, from the earliest records of our language. *Height* is an innovation comparatively modern; and *drought* is the Belgic dialect of the Teutonic; but neither of these words existed in the Saxon, the parent of our language.

The use of *k* at the end of words after *c,* deserves notice, as it affords a remarkable proof of the corruption of

language by means of heedless writers. Johnson remarks that *c,* having no determinate sound, according to English orthography never ends a word. Had this eminent critic examined ancient authorities with more care, he would have found the reverse of his affirmation to be the truth. The practice, in his time, of closing all words with *k* after *c*, on which he founded his observation, was a Norman innovation.

The history of these letters is shortly this. The Romans used *c* as an equivalent for the Greek *k,* as appears by the translation of Greek into Latin, and of Latin into Greek, made while both were living languages. The Roman *c* is the Hebrew *caph* inverted and rounded at the angles, and the Greek *kappa* was probably formed from the same character. The Greek alphabet did not recognize *c,* nor the Roman alphabet *k.* When therefore the Romans borrowed and naturalized Greek words contining a *k,* they used for it their own equivalent letter *c.*

Hence the Greek *keler*, swift, was written in Latin *celer; kentauros,* a centaur, *centaurus; keros,* wax, *cera; kio,* to move, *cieo; kinnabaris, cinnabar; kinnamon, cinnamum; mousikos, musicus;* leaving not a particle of doubt that *c* and *k* were letters of precisely the same power.

The Saxons had probably no knowledge of letters, till they settled in England; and in that country, no letters were known, but those of the Roman alphabet, a knowledge of which had been left there by the Romans. The Saxons therefore adopted the Roman characters, with a few variations, which were required by particular sounds in their language. Hence, till after the conquest, *c* was used to express the power of *k*, as in the Latin language; and

insted of not terminating any English word, as Johnson alleges, it terminated *every* word where the power of *k* occurred; as in *boc, book; folc, folk; wic, wick; ric, rick.* In a volume of Saxon history, written in the twelfth century, the letter *k* is not found in ten words.

The Norman conquest however effected a change in the power of *c,* and established it as the equivalent of *s* before *e, I* and *y.* This, like most innovations, introduced confusion, and rendered it convenient or necessary to use *k* in all words in which the power of *k* was wanted before those vowels. Thus the Saxon *cepan,* to keep; *liccian,* to lick; *licean,* to like; *locian,* to look, were converted into the present English words; and in many words, *k* usurped the place of *c* without a like necessity, as book from *boc.* Hence we find that in most of our Saxon words, *k* is written at the end, after *c* or in lieu of it; and we cannot, without it, form the past time and participle of verbs; for *liced, loced* would lead to a false pronunciation.

Such is the history of the introduction of *k* into our language. But *c* at the end of words retains its place and power, particularly in all words formed from Greek and Latin adjectives in *kos* and *cus,* and consequently in all words not from the same originals, but formed according to that analogy; as *music, public, republic, nitric, camphoric, majestic.* To add *k* after *c* in such words is beyond measure absurd, for both have the same power, having been formed from the same original character. If any thing can add to the impropriety, it is that *k* is always omitted in the derivatives, *musical, publication, republican.* Uniformity is a prime excellence in the rules of language, and surely no person will contend for the propriety of

musickal, publickation and republickan. Fortunately, most modern writers have rejected the *k* from words in which it is useless; and it is desirable that dictionaries should add their authority to the practice.

We have a few words of another class which remain as outlaws in orthography. These are such as end in *re,* as *sceptre, theatre, metre, mitre, nitre, lustre, sepulchre, spectre,* and a few others. Most of these have found their way into our language from the Greek and Roman, through the channel of the French. This termination is common in the Saxon as well as the French, and probably the final *e* was pronounced after the consonant. However this may have been, English writers have unanimously formed a different analogy by transposing the letters, so that the *re* in *sceptre* can not be considered as an English termination. And it is among the inconsistences which meet our observation in every part of orthography, that the French *nombre, chambre, disastre, disordre, diametre, tigre, chartre, arbitre, tendre, fievre, entre, monstre,* and the Saxon *hongre,* and hundreds of other words should be converted into *number, chamber, disaster, disorder,* &c. conformable to the pronunciation, and that *lustre, sceptre, metre,* and a few others would be permitted to wear their foreign livery. This is the more surprising, as the most distinguished writers of the last and preceding centuries, Newton, Shaftibury, Dryden, Prideaux, Hook, Whiston, Bolingbroke, Middleton, &c. wrote these words in the regular English manner, *er.*

> "Having the imperial scepter."—Newton chron. 308.
>
> "The scepter of Babylon was broken."—Prideaux con. 1, 2.

See Boling, let. 8. Hook. Rom. hist. 1. 79. Whiston, Josephus, 2. 14. Hist. of California, 1. 71, &c. And this orthography gives *sceptered,* as written by Milton, Pope and other poets, which cannot be regularly formed from the French *sceptre.*

"The power of earth, and scepter'd sons of jove."—Pope Iliad, B. 1.

The present practice is not only contrary to the general uniformity observable in words of this class, but is inconsistent with itself; for *Peter,* a proper name, is always written in the English manner. *Metre* also retains its French spelling, while the same word in composition, as in *diameter, barometer,* and *thermometer,* is conformed to the English orthography. Such palpable inconsistencies and preposterous anomalies do no honor to English literature, but very much perplex the student, and offend the man of taste.

A like inconsistency is observable in another class of words which we receive from the French language. *Musquet, masque, risque, paquet, picquet, chequer, relique, &c.* have received a regular English orthography—*musket, mask, risk, packet, picket, checker, relic,* &c. while *burlesque, grotesque, picturesque, pique* and *oblique* retain their French livery. *Opaque* is now written *opake,* by most authors; and it is presumed that the few outlaws which remain, will soon be subjected to the laws of English orthography.

A similar inconsistency prevails in the pronunciation of the words of Greek original, beginning with *arch,* in which *ch,* receive their English sound before a consonant, as in

archbishop, and the sound of *k* before a vowel, as in a *architect.* But *arch,* being established in its English pronunciation, becomes the root from which every word of this class is considered as derived, and will naturally control the pronunciation of the whole. Nor ought this principle of uniformity to be violated; for uniformity in the classes of words is the most convenient principle in the structure of language, and whatever arbitrary rules the learned may frame, the greatest part of men will be governed by habits of uniformity. To these habits we are indebted for all the regularity which is found in our own language or in any other.

For this reason, rather than from a rigid adherence to the originals, we ought to write *defense, pretense, offense, recompense,* &c. with *s* insted of *c*; for we always use that letter in the derivatives, *defensive, offensive, pretension, recompensing.*

For a like reason, as well as to purify our orthography from corruptions and restore to words their genuine spelling, we ought to reject *u* from *honor, favor, candor, error,* and others of this class. Under the Norman princes, when every effort of royal authority was exerted to crush the Saxons and obliterate their language, the Norman French was the only language of the English courts and legal proceedings, and the Latin words which, at that period, were introduced into use in England, came clothed with the French livery. At the same time, to preserve a trace of their originals, the *o* of the Latin *honor,* as well as the *u* of the French *honeur* was retained in the terminating syllable. Hence for some centuries, our language was disfigured with a class of mongrels, *splendour, inferiour,*

superiour, authour, and the like, which are neither Latin nor French, nor calculated to exhibit the English pronunciation. Johnson, in reverence to usage, retained this vitious orthography, without regarding the palpable absurdity of inserting *u* in primitive words, when it must be omitted in the derivatives, *superiority, inferiority* and the like; for no person ever wrote *superiourity, inferiourity.* A sense of propriety however, has nearly triumphed over these errors; and our best writers have almost unanimously rejected the *u* from this whole class of words, except perhaps ten or twelve. From these also Ash has very consistently rejected *u,* restoring the purity of the original orthography.

Johnson often committed errors, but seldom gave his sanction to innovations, unauthorized by any good principle. Yet in a few instances he has departed from his usual caution. An instance occurs in his change of *sceptic* to *skeptic*. This innovation had some countenance in the pronunciation which had been corrupted by the Universities; for Greek scholars had discovered that the original was *skeptikos,* from *skeptomai.* The mischiefs which proceed from such partial views of subjects are incalculable. It is a thing of no consequence whether we pronounce vowels and consonants as the Greeks and Romans pronounced them—but it is of immense practical importance, that when we have analogies established in our own language, we should, on no account, violate them by introducing unnecessary exceptions.

By immemorial usage, the English nation had established the Latin orthography of words of this class, as *scene,* from *skene; scepter,* from *skeptron; sciamachy*, from

skiamachia; in which, contrary to the original sounds of the *k* and the *c, sc* had been pronounced as *s.* To change *one* word of this class, without the others, was to innovate without reason, or the prospect of utility; to deform our orthography with anomaly and embarrass the student with needless difficulties. The same reason would authorize *skience* for *science; skiolist* from *sciolus,*and *skintillation* from *scintillatio*; nay, *civil* must be written and pronounced *kivil; celebrate, kelebrate,*and *circle, kircle*; for in all words, *c* in Latin had the sound of *k.* Such are the mischiefs of innovation! Fortunately, the corrupt pronunciation of *sceptic,* has made little progress in this country; and in this, as in many other words, if we can be permitted to think and reason for ourselves, we may still preserve the purity of our language.

We have some classes of words received from the Latin through the French, to which a final *e* was anciently affixed, either for the purpose of forming a syllable or to soften a preceding vowel, in conformity with the established pronunciation of the French. Such are d*etermine, examine, doctrine, discipline, medicine,* and others with a different terminating syllable. This practice of ending words with *e* was doubtless warranted by the pronunciation, during the ages which followed the Norman conquest in England. In many cases of Saxon words ending in *a,* which formed a distinct syllable. I find the Normans changed the a into *e*, and the slight evanescent sound of this vowel being finally omitted in pronunciation, the vowel was at last retrenched. In other words, the French influence introduced a final *e,* in words of Saxon original, to which the Saxons affixed no vowel. But whatever reasons might once exist for the use of final *e* in

poete, lande, behinde, businesse, and a multitude of other words, none surely can be assigned for annexing it to the words before mentioned. The letter does not belong to the originals, *determino, examino, doctrina,* &c. it has no use in modifying the preceding vowel; and it is never used in the derivative words, *determination, examination, doctrinal, disciplinarian, medicinal;* while in some classes of words, it leads to a false pronunciation. It is a relic of barbarism which ought not to be tolerated in the language. It ought to be retrenched, as it has been from *origin* and *deposit.*

In some words we observe most singular corruptions. *Doubt,* is the French doute, with a inserted out of complasance to its Latin original *dubito. Debt* and *indebted* stand nearly on the same footing.

Redoubt, is the French *redoute,* corrupted perhaps by a supposed alliance of the word with *doubt,* with which it has not the least connection.

Pincers holds a place in books, tho rarely heard in pronunciation. This word is a remarkable proof of the inveteracy of custom, even when obviously wrong; for tho the verb *pinch* is formed immediately from the French *pincer,* yet the noun used in conversation is *pinchers,* the correct and regular derivative of the English verb, *pinch.*

The introduction of *e* into *vineyard* is a modern corruption; the word not being compounded of *vine* and *yard,* but of the primitive [win] *vin* and *yard*, the correct pronunciation of which we retain. It is precisely analogous to *wisdom,* which is compounded of the ancient *wis* [not the modern *wise*] and *dom.* We might just as well write *wisedom* as

vineyard. In this as in almost every other instance of anomaly, the pronunciation has been preserved correct by custom, while the orthography has been corrupted by authors.

It is singularly unfortunate, that English translators of foreign languages, have not uniformly translated *letters* as well as *words.* The practice of receiving foreign words into our language, in a foreign orthography, is one of the most serious and growing evils which the friends of an elegant and regular language have to combat. The powers of many of the letters are very different in different languages. When therefore a French or a German word is introduced into English, the letters should be translated—and the true sounds of the foreign words expressed in English characters of correspondent powers. Thus *soup* in French, when the letters are translated, becomes *soop* in English—*tour* becomes *toor*—*schistus* in German, is *shistus* in English—*pacha, bedouin,* in French are *pasha*, or *bashaw* and *bedoween* in English—*Wolga* in German is *Volga* in English; *Michigan and Chenango* in French are *Mishigan, Shenango* in English. The great body of a nation cannot possibly know the powers of letters in a foreign language; and the practice of introducing foreign words in a foreign orthography, generates numerous diversities of pronunciation, and perplexes the mass of a nation. And the practice is, I believe, peculiar to the English. The Romans gave to all foreign words, their own letters, terminations and inflections; and a similar practice obtains among the modern nations on the Continent of Europe.

There are other corruptions of English orthography, which may be mentioned; but these examples are sufficient to show, first, the extreme negligence of authors, whose business it is to purify and refine orthography, no less than to enrich the language with new terms and improve its general structure. Secondly, the utter mistake entertained by superficial observers, in supposing our present orthography to be correctly deduced from the originals.

A few of these errors may still be corrected, as the emendations will require trifling changes, which can occasion no perceptible inconvenience; while they will purify the orthography, illustrate etymology and relieve the learner from embarrassment.

But it would be useless to attempt any change, even if practicable, in those anomalies which form whole classes of words, and in which, change would rather perplex than ease the learner. That *h* is pronounced before *w* in *when,* tho written after it; and that *tion* are pronounced *shon* or *shun,* are things of no great inconvenience; for these irregularities, occurring uniformly in many words, which constitute classes, form the anomalies into general rules, which are as easily learnt as any other general principles.

---

(1) In the year 1786, Dr. Franklin proposed to me to prosecute his scheme of a Reformed Alphabet, and offered me his types for the purpose. I declined accepting his offer, on a full conviction of the utter impracticability, as well as inutility of the scheme. The orthography of our language might be rendered sufficiently regular, without a single new character, by means of a few trifling alterations of the present

characters, and retrenching a few superfluous letters, the most of which are corruptions of the original words.

[(2)] Chaucer wrote *brede*; and *bredth*. The true orthography is preserved in the first Charter of Massachusetts, Haz, Col. Vol. 1, p, 240, 241, 213, as it is in many old authors.

PRONUNCIATION

Achieving Uniform Pronunciation Is Impossible

The pronunciation of words is a subject which presents even greater difficulties than the orthography; and difficulties which multiply in proportion to the efforts made to surmount them. The friends of refinement have entertained sanguine expectations that men of letters might agree upon some standard by which pronunciation might be regulated, and reduced to a good degree of uniformity. My own hopes of such an event are very much abated by the ill success of the ingenious compilers of standards in Great Britain; and the more I reflect upon the subject, the more I am convinced that a living language admits of no fixed state, nor of any certain standard of pronunciation by which even the learned in general will consent to be governed. Elphinstone adopted the visionary idea of a perfect alphabet and fell into disrepute. Kenrick did not reach the point of refinement demanded by the Court and Stage, and was neglected. Sheridan carried his refinement and his fashionable peculiarities so far, that the nation almost unanimously rejected a great

part of his scheme. Walker succeeded, condemned one half of Sheridan's court pronunciation, and for a short period, enjoyed a tide of popularity. Nares, whose work I have not seen but whose reputation stands high even with Walker and his other competitors, condemns Walker in some particulars; and Jones, the latest compiler of distinction and popularity, sweeps a large part of Walker's peculiarities of pronunciation into the lumber-room of corruptions. Who is to succeed and condemn them all is yet uncertain; but it is not to be doubted that the next period of twenty years will produce as many authors of standards as the last, no two of which will agree in their scheme of pronunciation.

That a complete standard, to which all the polite and learned of a nation will conform, is, in its own nature, impracticable, may be satisfactorily proved from the structure of the human mind; from the various modes in which different men view the same subject; the different effect of the same degrees of evidence on different minds; the different impressions made by education, which become the ground-work of uncontrollable prejudices; and the extreme reluctance which men feel in relinquishing their peculiar notions, and yielding to the opinions of others. The same consequence may be deduced from the variableness of pronunciation among the leading characters of a nation. So far is the present pronunciation of the court and stage in England from being fixed, that no two writers are yet agreed what it is; and if the case were otherwise, there is no probability that it would remain the same for any considerable time. Any man who will read Sheridan, Walker and Jones, will be satisfied not only that there is no uniformity in what is called the *best*

pronunciation, but that such attempts as have hitherto been made to ascertain and establish a standard, render it impossible there ever should be one; and that every succeeding compiler only multiplies the obstacles to the accomplishment of his own wishes. Every compiler has some peculiarities in his scheme; some local practices to which he is accustomed, and which he mistakes for the *best* pronunciat[i]on. Both Sheridan and Walker abound with such local usages. The more books are made, the more local usages will be exalted into a standard of correctness, each of which will have adherents, and the more the honest inquirer will be perplexed and confounded with various usages and discordant principles.

To satisfy my readers that I do not exagerate the difficulties of this subject and the contradictions between the most respectable standard authors, I will here exhibit a few examples, in which the pronunciation of each author is given, not in his own letters and figures, for these might not be understood by persons unacquainted with his works; but in letters of known powers, and which the most ordinary reader cannot mistake.

SHERIDAN.	WALKER.	JONES.
Ab'bey, abby	Ab'bee	Ab'by
Abbrévyate	Abbréveeate	Abbrévyate.
Abbrévyature	Abbréveeachure	Abbrévyature
Ab'dicate	Ab'deecate	Ab'dicate
Abdic'ativ	Ab'dicativ	Ab'dicativ
Abdom'inak	Abdom'eenal	Abdom'inal
Aberun'cate	Abeeruncate	Aberun'cate

Abee'ance	Abáyance	Abáyance
Ab'jectly	Ab'jectlee	Ab'jectly
Abil'ity	Abil'eetee	Abil'ity
Ab'lepsy	Ab'lepsee	Ab'lepsy
Ab'negate	Ab'neegate	Abnegate
Abominátion	Abomeenátion	Abomination
Abor'tively.	Abor'tivelee	Abortively
Abrupt'ly	Abrupt'lee	Abruptly
Abscis'sion	Abcizhon	Abscizhon
Absin'thyated	Absintheeated	Absinthyated
Abstémyus	Abstémeeus	Abstéemyus
Abstémyusly	Abstémeeusly	Absteémyusly
Abstémyusness	Abstémeeusness	Absteémyusness
Ab'stinence	Ab'steenence.	Ab'stinence
Ab'stinent	Ab'steenent	Ab'stinent
Abstract'edly.	Abstract'edlee	Abstract'edly

It will be observed that the principal difference in the foregoing table, is in the sound of *i* and *y* in unaccented syllables; Walker directing the sound to be uttered as the long *e* in *me, see.* Thus according to his scheme, *ability, vanity* are to be pronounced *abileetee, vaneetee*; which, as Jones has justly observed, is no "trivial error." Indeed this error is so material, as to render his book a very improper guide to pronunciation. It is utterly repugnant to the genius of our language—and if followed, would totally destroy the harmony of our metrical composition. Let these lines be read with Walker's pronunciation.

"The proper studee of mankind is man"—

"A being darklee wise and rudelee great"—

We see at once the pernicious effects of this scheme of pronunciation, in the confusion of poetic feet and loss of melody.[1]

This mistake of Walker's, extends to a greater number of words, than any other—It extends literally to thousands. Sheridan and Jones have avoided it, and given to the *i* and *y* unaccented, the short sound of *e,* which corresponds with the practice in the United States.

Let the differences of pronunciation be noted also in the following words.

	SHERIDAN.	WALKER.	JONES.
Bench, &c.	Bentsh	Bensh	Bentsh
	Beltsh	Belsh	Beltsh
	Filtsh	Filsh	Filtsh
	Brantsh	Bransh	Brantsh
	Intsh	Insh	Intsh
	Pintsh	Pinsh	Pintsh
	Buntsh	Bunsh	Buntsh

In this class of words, Sheridan and Jones are unquestionably right; and with them corresponds the practice of this country. Where Walker learnt to give the French sound of *ch,* to such words, I cannot conceive.

SHERIDAN.	WALKER.	JONES.
Accentuation.	Accenchuation	Accentuation.
Gratulation	Grachulation	Gratulation
Habitual	Habichual	Habitual
Furnichur	Furneeture	Furniture
Multichood	Multeetude	Multitude

Protrood	Protrude	Protrude
Prochooberant	Protuberant	Protuberant
Shooperb	Superb	Superb
Chooter	Tutor	Tutor
Choomult	Tumult	Tumult

These examples are selected from whole classes of words, consisting of many hundreds, in which each author has prescribed to himself some rule which he deems so clearly correct, as to admit of no doubt or controversy. And how is the honest inquirer to know which is right, or whether either of them is entitled to be a standard authority? Do not such pointed differences, among authors of distinction, prove that there is no uniformity of pronunciation among the higher ranks of society in Great Britain; and consequently, that no standard can be found in their practice? This unquestionably is a fair inference from the facts.

---

[1] Palpable as this error is, we find Murray has introduced it, with other mistakes of Walker, into his Spelling Book; giving a whole table of such words as *daily, safely, holy, nobly*, &c. with directions to pronounce "both the syllables long."

A FEW OF WEBSTER'S PRINCIPLES

1) English spelling is a mess, and no solution is in sight.
2) Avoid the two extremes of radical reform and no reform.
3) The alphabet is the greatest invention in history. Reform should focus on defending alphabetic spelling.
4) Meaningful reform is possible.
5) Meaningful reform is not innovation but restoration of original Saxon spelling corrupted by the Normans and S. Johnson.
6) It is impossible to establish uniform pronunciation in a living language.

Appendix 3

The King James Bible of 1611

The 1611 King James Bible was the most influential publication in the English language. It was written more than four hundred years ago when the English language was quite different than it is today. The original 1611 text, written in Early Modern English, shows the Latin influence on English. Much of its theological language comes from Latin, the language of the Western Church. Spelling was in Jacobean style which was not entirely standardized, but could be read phonetically. The original typeface was in Gothic style. Both the type style and the older language of the 1611 version may be difficult to read by some 21st century English readers. The spelling *and* type style of the King James were updated over the years, so that the KJV still in use today is not the 1611 version. What follows is a sample of some familiar passages in the original spelling and style.

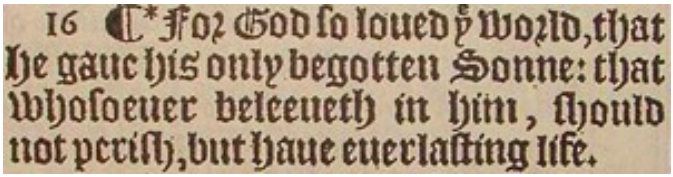
Genesis 1

1 In the beginning God created the Heauen, and the Earth.
2 And the earth was without forme, and voyd, and darkenesse was vpon the face of the deepe: and the Spirit of God mooued vpon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Pslam 23

1 *A Psalme of Dauid.*
The Lord is my shepheard, I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie downe in greene pastures: he leadeth mee beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soule: he leadeth me in the pathes of righteousnes, for his names sake.
4 Yea though I walke through the valley of the shadowe of death, I will feare no euill: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staffe, they comfort me.
5 Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oyle, my cuppe runneth ouer.
6 Surely goodnes and mercie shall followe me all the daies of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for euer


16 ¶* For God so loued ỹ world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleeueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.

Spelling rules in 1611

The spelling rules of the King James Bible are called Jacobean spelling. *Jacobus* is the Latin form of the name of King James. *Jacobean* is the name given to this era.

- *U* and *v* were graphic variants of a single letter. The form *v* was used at the beginning of a word and *u* in all other positions, regardless of whether the sound was a vowel or a consonant.
- Similarly, *j* was only an extended form of *i*. The form *i* was generally used for both the vowel and for the consonant sound (as in *jam*) in most positions in a word. Its capital form, which resembles *J*, was beginning to be used in initial position for the consonant sound.

- The final silent *–e* was much more commonly found, not only as a marker of a long vowel in the preceding syllable (as in *take*), but also with no phonetic function, sometimes after an unnecessarily doubled final consonant.
- Double *e* (*ee* or *e..e*) was used for two different long front vowels: the close vowel of *meet* and the formerly mid vowel of *meat*, *mete*. The significance of this is now obscured since in most words the two sounds have become identical. The spelling *e..e* was gradually restricted to the latter while additionally *ea* was beginning to be introduced as an alternative spelling.
- Similarly *o* (*oo* or *o..e*) were often used for two different long back vowels: the close vowel of *moot* and the mid vowel of *moat*, *mote*. The form *o..e* was gradually restricted to the latter and, during the 16th century, *oa* was introduced on the analogy of *ea*.
- Instead of *t* in the ending now usually spelt *–tion* the letter *c* was frequently used.
- Numerous abbreviations used in manuscript form were carried over into print. A short line above a vowel was often used to replace *m* or *n*. The forms *yt* and *ye* were used to abbreviate *that* and *the*.

Appendix 4

Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
Phonetic Spelling

A phoneme is the smallest sound in a language. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a system of letters and symbols that are used to represent the individual sounds of a language. The table below lists the IPA symbols used for American English.

The first column is the phonetic symbol.
The second column is a word with that sound.
The third column is the phonetic spelling of the word.
Many of the symbols are English letters but some are strange symbols. For convenience in learning, a collection of these follows the main collection.

Symbol	Example	Phonetic spelling
/i/	beat	/b/ /i/ /t/
/ɪ/	bit	/b/ /ɪ/ /t/
/e/	bait	/b/ /e/ /t/
/ɛ/	bet	/b/ /ɛ/ /t/
/æ/	bat	/b/ /æ/ / t
/ʌ/	but	/b/ /ʌ/ /t/
/ə/	about	/ə/ /b/ /o/ /t/ This is called schwa or shwa
/ɚ/	bird	/b/ /ɚ/ /d/
/u/	boot	/b/ /u/ /t/
/ʊ/	book	/b/ /ʊ/ /k/
/o/	boat	/b/ /o/ /t/
/ɔ/	bought	/b/ /ɔ/ /t/
/ɑ/	bob	/b/ /ɑ/ /b/
/ɑɪ/	bite	/b/ /ɑɪ/ /t/
/ɑʊ/	brown	/b/ /r/ /ɑʊ/ /n/

/ɔɪ/	boy	/b/ /ɔɪ/
/p/	pot	/p/ /ɑ/ /t/
/b/	bet	/b/ /ɛ/ /t/
/d/	dog	/d/ /ɔ/ /g/
/t/	top	/t/ /ɑ/ /p/
/k/	kit	/k/ /ɪ/ /t/
/g/	got	/g/ /ɑ/ /t/
/f/	fog	/f/ /ɔ/ /g/
/v/	vat	/v/ /æ/ /t/
/ɵ/	thick	/ɵ/ /ɪ/ /k/
/ð/	that	/ð/ /æ/ /t/
/s/	sat	/s/ /æ/ /t/
/z/	zoo	/z/ /u/
/ʃ/	shut	/ʃ/ /ʌ/ /t/
/ʒ/	measure	/m/ /ɛ/ /ʒ/ /ɚ/
/h/	help	/h/ /ɛ/ /l/ /p/
/ʧ/	church	/ʧ/ /ɚ/ /ʧ/
/ʤ/	jump	/ʤ/ /ʌ/ /m/ /p/
/m/	mom	/m/ /ɑ/ /m/
/n/	nod	/n/ /ɑ/ /d/
/ŋ/	thing	/ɵ/ /ɪ/ /ŋ/
/l/	lot	/l/ /ɑ/ /t/
/r/	rat	/r/ /æ/ /t/
/w/	won	/w/ /ʌ/ /n/
/j/	you	/j/ /u/

The odd symbols

/ɪ/	bit	/b/ /ɪ/ /t/
/ɛ/	bet	/b/ /ɛ/ /t/
/æ/	bat	/b/ /æ/ /
/ʌ/	but	/b/ /ʌ/ /t/
/ə/	about	/ə/ /b/ /o/ /t/
/ɚ/	bird	/b/ /ɚ/ /d/

/ʊ/	book	/b/ /ʊ/ /k/
/ɔ/	bought	/b/ /ɔ/ /t/
/ɑ/	bob	/b/ /ɑ/ /b/
/ɑɪ/	bite	/b/ /ɑɪ/ /t/
/ɑʊ/	brown	/b/ /r/ /ɑʊ/ /n/
/ɔɪ/	boy	/b/ /ɔɪ/
/ɵ/	thick	/ɵ/ /ɪ/ /k/
/ð/	that	/ð/ /æ/ /t/
/ʃ/	shut	/ʃ/ /ʌ/ /t/
/ʒ/	measure	/m/ /ɛ/ /ʒ/ /ɚ/
/ʧ/	church	/ʧ/ /ɚ/ /ʧ/
/ʤ/	jump	/ʤ/ /ʌ/ /m/ /p/
/ŋ/	thing	/ɵ/ /ɪ/ /ŋ/
/j/	you	/j/ /u/

Resources

Some of the topics to search for online to find a lot of additional information and more documented academic resources are:

> English Spelling, English Spelling Reform, English Pronunciation, Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster, H. W. Fowler, Masha Bell's list, idiographic spelling, the alphabet, phonetic alphabets, history of the dictionary, history of English grammar, etc.

Other Resources

Bryan Garner, *Garner's Modern English Usage,* 4th Edition. Oxford University Press, 2016. The authority we use. Start with the entries on Spelling and Pronunciation and the articles in the front material on grammar wars.

Anatoly Liberman, "Spelling reform: not a *lafing* matter," Oxford University Press blog. A good presentation of a contemporary argument for spelling reform.
https://blog.oup.com/2020/04/spelling-reform-not-a-lafing-matter/

Look for these articles in the Wartburg Project online library:

> "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," an online seminar for journalism students.
>
> *Biblical Grammar: Mechanics or Meaning?*