

# Today's topic:

- **Spelling reform**

---

*Background:*

- RE #4, "Should English spelling be reformed?"

# 0. Key points today

- RE #4: Some pros and cons of spelling reform
- Examples of proposals for spelling reform in English
- Spelling reform in the context of language varieties (dialects)
- Spelling reform, implemented: What happened in Germany in 1996?

# 1. Some pros and cons of spelling reform

- What kind of spelling reform does Napoli lay out?  
What are its characteristics?



# 1. Some pros and cons of spelling reform

- What kind of spelling reform does Napoli lay out?  
What are its characteristics?
  - one sound ↔ one letter
  - sensitive to different pronunciations by speakers of different varieties (dialects)
- How does this relate to topics from our course?
  - orthographic depth
  - levels of language: Is Napoli's system designed to represent phonology or phonetics?

# 1. Some pros and cons of spelling reform

## **Group discussion / Participation exercise**

- Form a group of about size 5 (some may be 4)
- On a blank piece of paper, write your names

# 1. Some pros and cons of spelling reform

## Group discussion / Participation exercise

- Write up a short answer to **one** of these two questions (and prepare to share with the class):

What is the strongest argument you can give, **based on the Napoli chapter**,

- (a) in favor of reforming English spelling?
- (b) against reforming English spelling?

# 1. Some pros and cons of spelling reform

## Group discussion / Participation exercise

- Same group, same paper (prepare to share):

*Suppose your group was assigned to create a spelling reform program for English.*

Using your knowledge from this course, and other ideas or experiences:

- Explain at least one way you could make a spelling reform program that is **better** than the one that Napoli discusses



## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- We will look at some actual proposals for English
- For each example, consider:
  - How would you describe the **type** or **extent** of the changes being proposed?
  - How well do you think this system addresses the **problems** caused by English spelling?
  - How easy do you think it would be for current users of English to **adapt** to the new system?
  - How many of Napoli's arguments against spelling reform **apply** to this system?

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- James Howell, *A New English Grammar Prescribing Certain Rules as the Language will Bear for Foreigners to Learn English* (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*” ([Wikipedia](#))

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- Daniel Webster, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806) [emphasis added]
  - “...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.”

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- *Handbook of Simplified Spelling* (US, 1920)
  - Developed by a US organization known as the Simplified Spelling Board (founded 1906)
  - T. Roosevelt ordered federal agencies to use it in publications! But this didn't last long
  - Examples on [Wikipedia](#)

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- *The Pioneer of Simplified Spelling* (journal)
  - Developed by the Simplified Spelling Society (London, 1912)
  - Example:

“The aim of the Society now is to place before the public clear statements of the case against the current spelling, to show how serious are the consequences of yuezing it, and how much would be gained, if some such scheme as that of the Society were adopted. ”

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- Benjamin Franklin's alphabet (published 1779)

*Kensigtyn, 26 Septembyr, 1768.*

*Diir Syr,*

*yi hav transkryib'd iur alfabet, &c., huitfi yi hink myit bi av syrvis tu hoz, hu wif to akuyir an akiuret pronynsiefiyn, if hat kuld bi fiks'd; byt yi si meni inkanviiniensis, az uel az difikyltis, hat uuld atend hi brigiq iur letyrs and arhagrafi intu kamyn ius. aal avr etimalodfiiz uuld be last, kansikuentli ui kuld nat asyrteen hi miinig av meni uyrds; hi distinkfiyn, tu, bituiin uyrds av difyrent miinig and similar saund uuld bi iusles, ynles ui liviq ryiters pyblifi nu iidiifiyns. In fiart yi biliiv ui myst let piipil spel an in heer old ue, and (az ui fyind it iisiiest) du hi seem ourselves. With ease and with sincerity I can, in the old way, subscribe myself,*

*Dear Sir,*

*Your faithful and affectionate servant,*

*M. S.*

- This image is from [Wikipedia](#)
- See alphabet chart, same example at [Omniglot](#)

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- The “Shavian” alphabet (named after George Bernard Shaw)

- Developed by Kingsley Read (1958)
- Funded by G.B. Shaw in his will!
- See alphabet at [Omniglot](#)
- Example text (from [Omniglot](#))

ר הוורקונו חו צר/דא ר הכל רפל פ קלוול ררמלע צר  
ד'ג לל ר לרלרד ר ררקהכ סו/ לעל פ דס. ל'דכ  
לעלרדקל ר וכוול ר חסדר רדו קלפ'ר.

## 2. Examples of spelling-reform proposals

- Degrees of spelling reform:
  - New spellings for **particular irregular words**, based on **existing regular spelling patterns**
  - New spellings for **most/all irregular words**, using the **existing alphabet**
  - Adding **new letters** to the existing alphabet to make a more **shallow orthography**
  - Creating an **entirely new alphabet** to represent the phonemes of the language, and using it to create an extremely shallow orthography



### 3. Spelling reform and language varieties

- What are some points raised in Napoli's discussion of reforming the spelling of the word *car*?

### 3. Spelling reform and language varieties

- What are some points raised in Napoli's discussion of reforming the spelling of the word *car*?
  - Sounds can be **present** in some varieties but not in others: [k<sup>h</sup>aɪ] vs. [k<sup>h</sup>a] (but see **allophones**!)
  - Different varieties may have different **phonetics** for the (historically same) sound: [k<sup>h</sup>ɑ] vs. [k<sup>h</sup>a]
  - One variety may have multiple **allophones** for a phoneme that another doesn't have:  
[k<sup>h</sup>ɑɪ] / [skɑɪ] vs. [kɑɪ] / [skɑɪ]
- How many of these *have to be* problems for a reformed spelling? (Check examples above)

### 3. Spelling reform and language varieties

- Consider using **one symbol per phoneme**
  - Does this address all the points from the previous slide?
- What do we do about language varieties with **different numbers** of phonemes?
  - Should we base the set of phonemes on a “standard” language? If so, whose? Effects?
- What do we do about language varieties that differ in **which words** contain which phonemes?
  - *egg*: [ɛgg] vs. [ɪg] → *eg, ig*, variability, ???

## 4. Spelling reform, implemented

- Germany, 1996
  - Here is the [list of reforms](#) (StackExchange)
    - Where does this fall along our scale of degrees of reform?
  - Here is [what happened](#) (Goethe Institut)
    - How did the public react to the reforms?

## 5. Upcoming

- Project proposals due tonight at 11:55pm!
- Next time: We'll take a look at some of the people and ideas in the "reading wars", about how to teach young children to read, and why