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SUBJECT: FUCTIONAL ENGLISH

HISTORY OF SPELLING:

For centuries, there has been a movement to reform the spelling of English language. It seeks to change English orthography so that it is more consistent, matches pronunciation better, and follows the alphabetic principle. 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 very different from before 1066e

16th and 17th centuries:

The first of these periods was from the middle of the 16th to the middle of the 17th centuries AD, when a number of publications outlining proposals for reform were published. Those proposals generally did not attract serious consideration because they were too radical or were based on an insufficient understanding of the phonology of English. However, more conservative proposals were more successful. James Howell in his Grammar of 1662 recommended minor changes to spelling.

19th century:

The second period started in the 19th century and appears to coincide 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 hallmarks 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, the reformed spellings were gradually adopted throughout the United States

St. Augustine Started Writing in English

According to linguists Anne Curzan and Michael Adams, St. Augustine and his followers began writing with the Latin alphabet in England around the year 597. The alphabet had 23 letters for around 35 English sounds, so some letters were used for multiple sounds. Later, when the Norman French invaded England in

1066, some French spellings were introduced, which is why, for example, city is spelled with a C, like cité in French. When scribes at the time needed to create a vowel sound there was no letter for, they sometimes doubled consonants after the vowel, or added an adjacent, second vowel, such as "ee" or " ea," to reflect the multiple sounds represented by one vowel, but they did so inconsistently. Remember, back then every document in the world was written by hand, and duplicated by hand, too!Anne Curzan generously responded to our request for examples. She wrote, "Here are a couple of examples from Scragg's A History of English Spelling showing the influence of Anglo-Norman scribes.

At Times, Spelling and Pronunciation Did Match

At this time, words like knight really were pronounced the way they are spelled, with the K sound at the beginning and the throaty sound you hear in Hebrew for the GH. The I sound was more like the sound in "bit." So, back then, knight the warrior and night the opposite of day were not homophones, like they are today, but they still rhymed.

Later on, over a few hundred years and ending during the seventeenth centuries, people started pronouncing almost all the English vowels differently. This change is noticeable to scholars—partly because it occurred just after spellings had started to become standardized—so there's actually a name for it: the Great Vowel Shift. By the end of the shift, words like mouse and house that had been pronounced like "moose" and "hoos," started sounding like the we say them today: mouse and house. But since spelling had become more standardized, the spellings stuck even after the pronunciations changed.

Gutenberg Began to Standardize Spelling

One of the key elements that allowed spelling to eventually become fixed was the printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century. Around that time and later, a spelling reform of sorts took place because printed works and their various haphazard spellings were becoming much more widely distributed. But, those efforts brought new spelling problems, because they were based on the whims of a small number of men in positions of authority who

revered Greek and Latin. Renaissance scholars took it upon themselves to change spellings not to be more like pronunciations, but instead to be more like the classical languages, creating the silent letters in words like debt, and even adding silent letters that we eventually started to pronounce! For example, the Middle English word for falcon was "F-A-U-C-O-N," but scholars stuck an L in there to look more like the Latin word, and speakers now pronounce the L. That's also why receipt has a P, and indict has a C (it used to be "I-N-D-I-T-E"!)

Webster Made Some Spelling Changes

Later, in 1828, Noah Webster successfully made some changes to U.S. spellings, hoping to strengthen the cultural divide between the British and the Americans. For example, he took the U out of honour, and took the British spelling of realise (R-E-A-L-I-SE-) and changed the S to a Z. But, many of his proposed changes were rejected because certain spellings were already too well-known and widespread. For example, he wanted to drop the E at the end of determine, which didn't work out too well, as we know. From today's standpoint, it doesn't really seem appropriate to actively make spelling changes to divide speech communities. Additionally, we can all agree that it might be easier for the English-speaking world now if people had rejected Webster's changes, especially for school children who move from the U.S. to the U.K. and vice versa, and are still in the middle of learning to read and spell. In the U.S., most of us learned to spell glamour with that British U, and we are all doing just fine with the U there.

The Germans Tried Spelling Reform

You may have heard of the attempt at spelling reform in Germany in the nineties. The government did pass a spelling reform law, but there were numerous court cases and legal challenges against it. Even a decade after the reform, many newspapers wound up following some of the new rules, but not others, leading to more gray areas in spelling conventions, instead of fewer.

One take-away from all of this is that meddling and reforming writing systems that are already established typically adds confusion. confusion that only sorts itself out after time has passed, and doesn't do much good in the short-term,

unless there truly is no standard to begin with, in which case, of course, people would need a standard to be established. Even though some of the reforms from hundreds of years ago were chosen arbitrarily, that is still not a reason to further meddle now, especially when we are able to disseminate the written word in mere seconds.