NAME: ADNAN AKAKHIL

ID: 15924

ASSIGNMENT: 01

LECTURER: MISS RIZWANA IQBAL

DEPARTMENT: ARTS & DESIGN

COURSE TITLE: ENGLISH

DATE: 21 SEPTEMBER 2020

QNO1. What is history of spelling?

ANS1. The English writing system:

English has grown from the language brought to Britain in the 5th century by Anglo-Saxon invaders from North Germany. Its history is usually divided into three main phases:

Old English – from the arrival of the invaders in the 5th century to around 1130
Middle English – roughly 1130 to 1470
Modern English – about 1470 to the present

However, there were many changes within each phase – for example Early Modern English (roughly 1470 to 1700) is seen as distinct from truly Modern English. In reality, of course, change has been ongoing through all the phases.

The Roman alphabet and Latin were used in Britain when it was part of the Roman Empire (AD 43 to 410), and they stayed in use in the Celtic parts of the British Isles after most of the Romans left.

However, the invaders brought with them the runic alphabet, known as the *futhorc* from its first six letters. A few small examples of Old English written in runes have survived. There were at that time already several distinct English dialects based roughly on the separate kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England.

In 597 St Augustine came from Rome to Canterbury and converted the Saxons in Kent to Christianity. After this the Christian monks started using the Roman alphabet to write English. As the Roman alphabet did not have enough letters, they also used some runes, such as Þ (called *thorn*) for the *the* sounds in *this* and *thin*. At this stage, English spelling was mostly simple, as the letters matched the spoken words quite well.

Major surviving works in Old English include the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Bede's *History of the Christian Church in England* (translated into Old English from Bede's Latin), and the saga *Beowulf*.

English lost and found:

Shortly after the Norman Conquest in 1066, Norman French replaced English as the language of government and the nobles, but English always remained the language of the common people. However French words began to be used

in English and this has had a deep and lasting effect on the language, not least the spelling.

In the end Norman French went into decline after the loss of most of England's French lands. Then English (now Middle English) began to be adopted once more for official and literary use. This happened during the 14th century, but the process was not complete until about 1430.

Examples of works in Middle English include *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*, Langland's *Piers Ploughman* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

However, the new system was not consistent. It used both English and French ways of spelling, which accounts for many of the problems in modern English spelling. Although some words of French origin were respelled to suit English speech, eg *boeuf > beef, bataille > battle, compter > count*, others were not, eg *table, double, centre*.

Very early Early Modern English works include the morality play *Everyman* (late 15th century) and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (as printed by Caxton in 1485).

Printing adds to the muddle:

William Caxton first set up in business as a printer in Bruges (now in Belgium). There in 1473 he made the first printed book in English, the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. Caxton returned to England in 1476 and set up a press in Westminster. The first book known to have been printed there was Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Caxton's spelling was based on the Chancery Standard, to which he added his own variants. Sadly, though printing brought many advantages, it also added to the irregularity of the spelling system. The printers Caxton brought with him from the Low Countries were unused to the English language and made spelling errors, eg *any, busy, citie* for *eny, bisy, cittie*. They also sometimes used Dutch spellings, such as adding an *h* after *g*, turning words like *gost* into *ghost*. Although many of the changes they made were later weeded out, some of them, like *ghost* and *ghastly*, are still with us.

Another factor was the printing of the first English Bibles at the time of the Reformation. Many of these were printed abroad for fear of persecution, as producing a Bible in English was regarded as heresy. The recopying from texts that were already corrupt and the use of non-English-speaking printers in Europe added to the diversity of spellings. As there were no dictionaries, and few books of any kind, people tended to copy the spellings they found in any version of the Bible they could look at.

The sound of English alters:

One of the important factors in the difficulty of English spelling today comes from a change in the sound of spoken English which took place gradually between the 15th and the early 17th centuries. This affected mainly the seven long vowels of Middle English and is known as the Great Vowel Shift. It was first studied and named by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1860–1943).

The sound of some of these vowels has altered further between the 17th century and today. The changes did not all take place at the same time, and there were more stages than those shown in the table on the right. Some of the sounds involved are no longer used in standard English, and there is no distinct spelling for them.

The table uses today's normal spelling along with the sounds of modern UK standard southern English to show very roughly the main changes in the

sounds that were and are now spoken. Only the vowel sound in the word is relevant.

c.1400	c.1600	c.2000
bee	bay	by
bay	bee	bee
fair	fear	fee
lah	lair	lay
boot	boat	bout
boat	boot	boot
taut	tote	tote

* Where the original *oo* vowel was followed by certain consonants, eg *m* or *p*, it hasn't changed.

For the most part the spelling did not change to follow the sounds, thus increasing the difference between the written and spoken word. As late as the early 18th century Alexander Pope was rhyming *tea* with *obey* instead of with *bee* (the second line in the table above showing *bay/bee/bee* is the one that refers).

The early dictionary writers:

By the end of the 16th century, the uncertain and variable state of English spelling led to calls for its control. The first person to write a book of correct spelling in Early Modern English was Richard Mulcaster, first headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, and later High Master of St Paul's School, both in London, who published *the first Part of the Elementarie* in 1582.

He was to some extent a spelling reformer, although he was more interested in tidying up spelling than in making radical changes. His book contained only about 8000 words, far short of a modern dictionary. One of the changes he proposed was to use the letters *i.e.* instead of *y* at the end of a word, when they weren't stressed, as in *gentlie*. This allowed *y* to be used for the long-stressed vowel, as in *try*.

Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755 was the most comprehensive of its time and has had a great influence in the English-Speaking World. However, like Coote, Johnson was not at all interested in reform but rather chose what he regarded as the most common spellings.

He was also concerned that homographs — different words that are spelled the same, eg *bow* (the weapon, etc) and *bow* (to bend the upper body) — could lead to misunderstandings. He therefore chose alternative spellings to reflect differences in meaning, such as *stile* (steps over a barrier) and *style* (of art, writing, etc). Before compiling the Dictionary, he himself had written '…the rules of stile, like those of law, arise from precedents…' (*Plan of a Dictionary*, 1747). However, one effect of all this was to make learning to spell English words even more difficult.

English spelling since Johnson:

English spelling has seen only minor changes since Johnson, but there have been many of them. For instance, there is no longer a *k* on the end of many words like *musick* and *frantick*. These changes have happened gradually and without any planning.

The main exception was the making of an American standard by Noah Webster in the early 19th century. Webster based his dictionary on what he thought was then the current spelling in North America, but he was also a reformer.

Today some US spellings are slightly different from British ones, eg *check/cheque, labor/labour, defense/defence, specialize/specialise*. However, this has not necessarily made American spellings more regular than those in Britain. For example, *color* and *colour* are actually pronounced *culler* on both sides of the Atlantic. In contrast, the same word in Spanish is written *color*, matching the spoken word *col-or* perfectly.

There have been several attempts to reform English spelling in past centuries. Arguably the first was the *Ormulum* of the 12th century, produced by a cleric named Orm who wrote in the East Midlands dialect.

The first major attempt in modern times was led by USA President Theodore Roosevelt in the early 20th century. This was based on some of the proposed reforms for which Webster had failed to get general approval. It ran into early resistance and was ultimately blocked by Congress.

In the UK a private member's bill was passed by the British House of Commons in 1953, but in the end had to be withdrawn due to opposition by the Ministry of Education.

Many other proposals have been made over the years, but English spelling remains the most irregular of all spelling systems that are based on the alphabetic principle.