

## Traditional Spelling Revised (TSR)

### Author's Further Thoughts in The Light of Consultation

Two main criticisms were made of TSR during the consultation process.

The first was that it was insufficiently radical, the second that it was too radical. The following comments are essentially an elaboration of my response to these points as made on the Society's blog page and at the two meetings of the second session.

#### Insufficiently Radical

As for the first criticism, I accept that TSR is more conservative than any of the other schemes shortlisted. However, I believe that reformers must have some regard to the preferences of those already familiar with Traditional Spelling (TS), if reform is to have any prospect of success. Given that TS respells so few words compared with other schemes, this is a definite advantage. Notwithstanding its cautious approach, TSR would be far more rule-based than TS and would reduce the task of memorising irregularities significantly. I would, however, be prepared to consider some modifications to the scheme as previously presented. The following are my thoughts.

If TSR were to be introduced in roughly its present form and this became generally accepted, I would envisage a further stage at which one could contemplate removing some of the remaining retained irregularities. These would include the approximately 60 sign words and some of the semi-regular subgroups. Individuals and those responsible for local place names might be encouraged to respell proper nouns in accordance with the rules of TSR. There may also be a case is due course for further rationalisation of options for representing vowel graphemes. At the moment, TSR retains from TS most of the various letter combinations that can represent a particular vowel sound, making changes only where there is currently some ambiguity (eg the combination <ie> or <ough>). However, the choice of graphemes for phonemes could be further reduced.

#### Too Radical

As for the second main criticism, I have made it clear that I think introducing any reform in a whole series of stages runs the risk that while the initial steps may be grudgingly accepted, such acceptance may fade. Resistance soon builds up when it is realised that the initial list is only the start of change and that a whole series of other innovations will be introduced in the years to come. I think that Noah Webster ran into that problem, which was also a feature of resistance to metrication in the United Kingdom. So, although I am prepared to see one or more further stages for TSR, this would be after its main changes had been accepted; I am not convinced that a system which failed to contain the main elements of TSR as it now stands would do much to improve access to literacy. We need to make English spelling as predictable as French, if not as Spanish or Italian, if we are to make substantial progress.

## Need for a Revised English Spelling Commission

Whatever scheme is eventually adopted by the Congress, I think that a Revised English Spelling Commission (by whatever name) would be an essential instrument of reform. I see this as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) comprising people drawn from the spelling reform movement and including experts in relevant disciplines. It would be the function of the Commission to facilitate adoption of the adopted scheme, and to consider what modifications to it might be desirable in the light of the reactions in the English Speaking World.

## Some Possible Tweaking of TSR

As opposed to the two main comments above, I have received little comment on the detail of TSR. However, on consideration, I have the following as candidates for some possible tweaking.

### *The letter <s>*

As with TS, I have allowed the letter <s> to represent the sounds /s/ (snake) and /z/ (wise) respectively. TSR retains from TS the reasonably reliable rule as to when these respective sounds are implied: <s> stands for /s/ at the beginning of a word and when in association with the sounds /k/, /f/, /p/ and /t/ (e.g. clicks, cliffs, clips, sits, etc). Elsewhere <s> usual represents /z/, except when it is doubled (hiss). But there are one or two exceptions to this normally reliable rule, e.g. the combinations <dis> and <mis>, and following certain prefixes: <de->, <re->). Consideration may need to be given to whether the relevant words need to be respelled, or whether some refinement of the TS rule would be sufficient.

### *The <ar>, <er>, <or> and <ur> combinations and the doubling rule*

Generally, TSR (like TS) requires a doubling of the letter <r> to shorten the vowel when used in combination with <a>, <e>, <o>, or <u>. But this only applies when the syllable is stressed. Where the syllable is unstressed, the rule does not apply. Words such as around, erupt, original etc. follow this convention. Words such as erratic, erroneous, and irradiate do not. In the interests of avoiding unnecessary respelling, it may be desirable to retain from TS, if only temporarily, the spelling of the latter group. This exception would only apply to vowel + <r> combinations and not to other cases where TS currently misapplies the doubling rule, e.g. accommodate (TS) > acommodate, (TSR), committee (TS) > comittee (TSR).

I have not produced a revised 12-page PV summary, as the above changes are very minor and, in any case, only tentative: a decision as to whether to implement them would probably be a matter for the proposed Commission, following a further consultation process.

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