SPELLING REFORM AND SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study examines the spelling reform in the context of society. The paper considers how the language users respond to the spelling reform. The principal reasons of the strong resistance of a society to any spelling changes are, first of all, the result of the habit and the lack of linguistic competence, lack of information about the differences in the life of language and spelling, about the laws of development of language and its writing. This paper provides evidence from different languages (German and Russian) to support this claim. English spelling which didn't have any reform is regarded as some kind of an impasse. The thought of the necessity of linguistic education for language users is introduced.

Key words: *spelling reform, society, strong resistance to spelling changes, lack of linguistic competence, lack of information about the laws of development of language and its writing*

> Language and the spelling belong to each other as the line and number.
>
> Hermann Paul
>
> The spelling should be "darned" from time to time, otherwise the written suit will be worn-out, won't suit the language.
>
> Lev Shcherba

INTRODUCTION

The writing systems have attracted relatively little attention from the scholars. Nevertheless in fact, the literature contains a substantial amount of research on writing systems, looking at them from different perspectives. The reasons can include scientific, aesthetic, political problems, easing the task of children, making the language more useful for international communication, making etymology clearer, etc.

Sebba (2009) presents socio-cultural aspects of spelling and calls for viewing orthography as a social practice. He illustrates different discourses as a part of the orthographic reform, such as modernization, cultural heritage, conformity and pedagogy. He also summarizes an impressive number of cases and examples of orthographic development and reforms. The author triggers our interest in "spelling matters" and introduces the standards of "traditional" twentieth-century linguistic approaches to orthography. The author claims that spelling is not merely a skill of using of a certain script. It can also be a signifier of social identity, a marker of language ideology, and even a symbol of political or religious power.

Coulmas (2013) explores the functions of writing and a written language, analyzing its consequences for a language, society, economy and politics. He examines the social causes of illiteracy and demonstrates that institutions of central importance to a modern society are built upon writing and written texts. He also explores the social dimensions of spelling and writing reforms.

The scholars noticed that spelling is an integral part of a language and the spelling reform as a formal change of spelling rules of any language is a natural process.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Writing systems have been improved in many languages in the past 150 years [OCSION 2017]. Some of the improvements were minor changes; the others were quite revolutionary. And in most cases embodiment of the new spelling encountered certain difficulties: strong resistance of the spelling users. According to Ball (2010) several unsuccessful attempts at spelling reform there have been in France since the 19th century.

It is natural because established orthographies are generally very difficult to change. Sebba (2007) shows that it is even more difficult than discuss the arguments for and against a spelling reform.

Although some papers include certain information about the spelling in society but one might argue that not many of the authors considered the spelling in detail and paid attention to its important characteristics, the attitude of the society to the spelling reform because they discuss linguistic, pedagogical and economic causes of changes.

Is the attitude of the public to the spelling reform significant in solution and understanding of the problem of "the spelling and society"?

Are only linguistic, cultural and pedagogical reasons relevant to solve the problem?

2. STRONG RESISTANCE OF THE SOCIETY

The aim of this study is to show the difficulties of the reform connected with the resistance of society, which is practically the same in different languages. This article is an attempt to present relevant evidence on the spelling reform and the reasons of the negative reaction to it by language users.

Let us consider this problem using the example of spelling reforms at the turn of millennium in the German and Russian languages.

2.1. Anti-reformers in the German-speaking countries

German had more than one spelling reform. The last of them – in 1996 – faced a very strong resistance. The authors of the reform were guided by the best motives to improve the German spelling and took into account the relevant problems. "Die neue deutsche Rechtschreibung" ("The new German orthography") and other special books with the basic provisions and its principles were published long before the beginning of this reform (Domashnev 1997, p.11-12).

As follows from many publications a great number of famous writers, philologists, teachers, staff of various libraries opposed against the reform (Eroms, Munske 1997). "Society for German Spelling and Language Cultivation – initiative against the spelling reform" was founded in opposition to the German spelling reform of 1996. Among the leading opponents were German writers G. Grass, S. Lenz, M. Walser, H. Enzensberger, W. Kempowski and others. The protest gained further nationwide significance through initiatives such as "*Wir Lehrer gegen die Rechtschreibreform"* ("We Teachers Against the Spelling Reform"). It was headed by the teacher and activist Manfred Riebe. After all this the constitutional court recognized legitimacy of the reform, but limited its obligation to official documents and school training. (Riebe, Schäbler, Loew 1997)

"German Spelling reform nearly a culture war" (McCarthy 2016). This material has presented a good deal of research of the spelling reform. The author noticed that "the controversy really heated up and nearly assumed proportions of a cultural war" and gave opinions of opponents of reform. For example, Friedrich Denk, a 73- year-old, most influential opponent of the spelling reform as a teacher at a grammar school in Weilheim in Upper Bavaria was definitely not willing to accept the new spelling and not willing to teach it, because "the spelling reform is as useful as a hole in the head". He and other opponents feared a degeneration of the German language. The author reported also that the polemics on the reform did not promote its success. The majority of Germans wanted to retain the old spelling. Many of newspapers and publishers who had taken the new spelling rules over time went back to the traditional rules. The reform has appeared on the brink of collapse.

In 1996 the Frankfurt statement with an appeal to stop reform has been adopted. It has been signed by germanists, teachers, writers, journalists, publishers, and university students. Then many appeals to courts and other public authorities have followed. On a referendum of 1998 in the State of Schleswig-Holstein most of participants have spoken against reform. Most of deputies of the Bundestag have spoken against reform too (Hachakh 2007).

Meanwhile professor of linguistics of Technical University Darmstadt, the member of the interstate commission on reform of the German spelling Rudolf Hoberg negatively estimated participation in a discussion everyone who doesn't know distinctions between language and the speech, a sound and a letter. To express such serious and complex problem as reform of spelling competently, it is not enough to be a graduate of a gymnasium or even university and to read much. It is a matter of philologists (Eroms, Munske 1997).

As modern polls had shown, 62 percent of residents of Germany still did not agree with the reform. After 15 years, spelling polemics weakened, but to speak about final acceptance of the reform and its success will be possible only after the change of generation (Seleznyova, Khakimova 2017).

2.2. Opponents of spelling reforms in Russia

The Russian spelling had 2 reforms. First of all Peter's reform of the Russian alphabet, when by the will of Peter and his associates some letters which were lost in sound manifestation of language were excluded. The reform of 1917 also exempted the Russian letters as graphic ballast and archaic writing of some grammatical forms. The Russian spelling more over had 2 serious attempts of improvement spelling. Let us consider it one after another (step by step)

2.2.1. Reform of 1917

Strong example of resistance to the reform and to any changes of spelling is shown by the history of the Russian orthography, during preparation and implementation of the reform of 1917, in particular. Preparing the reform is related to Peter the Great's reform of the Russian alphabet (Grigorieva 2004a, Grigorieva 2004b). It developed in a constant fight with its opponents. Spelling conservatives (individual scientists, writers, teachers and ordinary native speakers of Russia) put forward a set of arguments for stability of spelling traditions, against the intervention in the system of the Russian spelling.

Experience shows that as far as all people use a spelling the representatives of all professions consider themselves "experts" in the spelling problems and with a rare confidence express their views. In fact, real experts in spelling are rare even among linguists.

The Spelling events of different times have confirmed these words with surprising accuracy.

During the long preparation and implementation of the reform of 1917, its opponents wrote that the reform is an "assault" at the Russian language.

The Russian reform created three types of spelling conservatism and anti-reformers:

1) the anti-reformers considering reform a "devil product" of the Bolshevism;
2) the anti-reformers seeing esthetic violation of the Russian spelling in reform (the letter *yat* has "gothic" pointedness and is similar to the Russian small chapel with a cross on the skate);
3) the anti-reformers considering impossible editions of classics and, first of all – Pushkin, in new, not author's, spelling; seeing in new spelling deliberate distortion of both the spelling, and language of great writers (Kartsevsky 1923, pp. 2-7).

Obviously these opinions became a result 1) of ignorance that reform was not only the product of the Soviet power and 2) a result of identification of language and spelling. Ordinary native speakers had no knowledge that any writing was created on the base of language in one of the periods of its history and after some time comes to a state of contradiction with language. Such "spelling split" was some kind a reflection of social, educational and cultural stratification of the society (Kuzmina 1999, p. 216).

According to the statement of one of the initiators of the reform 1917 P. Sakhulin (he was called the first after the main initiators of reform 1917 academicians F. Fortunatov and A. Chakhmatov) changes in language are natural and the result of collective "work" of all people (the users of this language), or writers, its selected group. On the contrary, the spelling is always a result of "creativity of innovative minds". The "revision" of writing to eliminate the contradiction between language and its spelling is quite logical because language is more powerful than spelling (Protocol 1904, pp. 16-19; Sakhulin 1917).

Spelling anti-reformers do not have any elementary knowledge about the relationship between orthography and language or nature and history of the language. As Academician F. Fortunatov put it, even the greatest "author may be an incompetent judge while solving spelling problems" (Archiv of the Russian Academy of Sciences. St. Petersburg Branch. Fond 9. Inventory 1. № 842. Sheet 243). However, many Russian writers opposed the spelling reform of 1917: Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Bunin, Alexander Block and others.

Significant literature discussed the Russian spelling has been giving scholarly and pedagogical justification for the forthcoming simplification.

According to Professor Brand, "the general public and media would trust experts regarding spelling, as treatment is entrusted to doctors, construction to architects, the matter of spelling should be charged to philologists and teachers" (Brandt 1904).

According to famous Russian linguist, "nobody will begin to write about technical questions, about agriculture, without special knowledge in the fields but every journalist with a good style thinks that he can resolve every linguistic and philological problem" (Chernyshev 1905, p. 32).

It is necessary to notice that far from theoretical knowledge and the true story of the Russian spelling movement; far from knowledge of the laws of development of a language and spelling, anti-reformers of the Post-Soviet period had supported the return to pre-reform spelling tradition, representing reform of 1917 as unnecessary intervention in the historical horizons of language, as a fault of the Bolshevism (about the negative role of Soviet government in carrying out reform 1917 look Grigorieva 2004a, pp. 115-128; Grigorieva 2004b, pp. 165-167, 234-238; Grigorieva 2017, pp. 67-70).

2.2.2. The project of a spelling reform 1962

The same situation was in 1964 during the discussion of the project of an unrealized reform. The project has been developed by the Spelling commission under the leadership of the academician Vinogradov. Many participants of the discussion expressed fears that the reform will make changes in the language, "will spoil" the language.

Among active participants of the conference, there were writers, poets, literary critics and representatives of other professions, who were not connected professionally with the language. They stated that the reform would provoke "language damage", would create a serious danger for the best poetic works, would destruct many rhymes; new spellings would cause the feeling of alienation. Such kind of disapproval of the reform became a reason for actions protecting the reform. Their purpose was to repulse antireform attacks, to convince all anti-reformers that orthography had to change in accordance with the changing language, that the inner logics of the Russian orthography demanded those changes. Many linguists L.K. Maximov, N.A. Eskova, M.V. Panov and others desperately tried to convince the public that the language would not suffer from the changes in orthography. "The language will not suffer…" was the heading of the article written by the members of the committee and published in the journal "Family and School" (1964. № 12. P. 47). Members of the Orthographic committee persuaded that the reform would not change the grammar and pronunciation but some writers (M. Shaginyan, P. Antokolsky, I. Selvinsky and others) continued their arguments with specialists (Arutyunova 2013, pp. 159-172; Arutyunova 2015, pp. 19-86). Because of long-lasting orthographic activities, not irreproachable Project 1962 was rejected.

Answering to the anti-reformers of 1964 who saw a threat to the language, with many writers among them, Michael Panov (1964), a famous linguist of the 20th century, vice-chairman of the Spelling commission of 1962, wrote that identification of spelling and language was "a misconception, long-

standing, permanent and deleterious". He added that all the fears were an effect of the habit. "Changes in orthography were similar to dental treatment, they are painful but they should be treated because later on it would be easier".

2.2.3. Public polemic in connection with the project of new Set of the spelling rules

The same atmosphere was during the discussion of the draft of the new Set of rules of the Russian spelling and punctuation at the turn of the 20th–21th centuries. The project of the new Set which was created on the base of theoretical and practical data of the 1930s. It is the only Set of rules of the Russian spelling. Its initial imperfection was found in the process of its use as the standard. Moreover the lack of recommendations about spelling of new language material, which was a result of development of language was revealed.

The materials of numerous publications in media of 1996–2001 and scientific papers show a distorted knowledge both of language and spelling which is a peculiar instrument of preservation of any language in space and time. Nevertheless the expression "reform of the language" which in reality has no right for existence was widely spread. The ordinary view point unfortunately often contradicts scholarly opinions. Activity of this Spelling commission and its intention had been published in many and many linguistic publications. Among them:

1. *Eskova N. A.* About the new set of spelling rules. Science and life. 2000. № 7. P. 32.
2. *Kostomarov V. G.* Russian has left forward, and his suit is sewed on fashion of the fiftieth: [Conversation with the President of the International association of teachers of Russian language and literature V. G. Kostomarov / Zap. V. Molodtsova]. Russian gazeta. 2001. 13 Febvr. P. 3.
3. *Kuzmina S. M.* About new edition "Rules of the Russian spelling and a punctuation". Russian literature. M, 1995. № 2. PP. 81-85.
4. *Kuzmina, S. M., Lopatin, V. V.* To linguistic justification of the "Set of rules of the Russian spelling" (new edition). Russian philology today. Moscow. 1996. № 1. PP. 88-102.
5. *Kuzmina S. M.* Spelling commission and new edition of the Set of rules of the Russian spelling. Language: variability and constancy: Collection of the articles to L. L. Kasatkin's 70 anniversary. Moscow, 1998. PP. 185-192.
6. *Kuzmina S. M.* Society and spelling // Language. Culture. Humanitarian knowledge. Scientific heritage of G. O. Vinokur and humanitarian knowledge. M, 1999. PP. 211-217.
7. *Kuzmina S. M.* Russian is mighty, but time is stronger? [The conversation with one of a members of the "New Edition of the Set of Rules of Russian" project of S. Kuzmina] / The First of September (gazeta). 2000. 16 Dec. P. 2.
8. *Lopatin V. V.* That language kept up with time: About the new "Set of rules of the Russian spelling" [A conversation with the deputy Spelling commission with the academician of sciences V. Lopatin] / A. Shchuplov. Independent newspaper. 2000. 1 Apr.
9. *Lopatin V. V.* About the new set of rules of the Russian spelling. Russian language at school. 2001. № 2. PP. 55-60.

However reasonable, the arguments of the scholars have not been heard by spelling users, and it has created for 2 years opposition between a scholarly view (which was not uniform at all), on the one hand, and an ordinary view that was reflected on pages of periodicals – on the other.

Many linguists persuaded the society that the Set of rules under discussion was not the linguists' caprice but an objective necessity connected first of all with 1) the initial imperfections of the Set of 1956 and 2) those spontaneous changes which had taken place in the spelling itself as a result of language development, had not fitted into the recommendations of the Set and existed despite it. It is thanks to the scholars' articles that a sensible/sober view of an ordinary bearer makes its way through the sea of ignorance on the orthographic events of past years. (Materials of polemic on the beginning of the 21th century see Grigorieva 2002, p. 106-115; Arutyunova 2011, p. 138-148).

The opinion of opponents to any simplification of a spelling is based on the belief in infallible "correctness" of habitual spelling. It's widely spread among public non-educated linguistically. In this case convincing arguments for the reform will be only elementary promotion of the scientific knowledge obliging to take seriously the questions of the spelling and its simplification. The reason of the negative attitude to the reform can be considered conservatism and ignorance of the native speakers who are convinced of infallible correctness of the existing spelling. It is difficult to fight against such persistence, but nevertheless it is necessary. The example of the English spelling demonstrates that stability of spelling isn't a guarantee of stability of language. Therefore, considering the nature of language and its writing, there are some grounds to suppose, that the reform of writing cannot encroach on a living language what anti-reformers are very much afraid of.

One of participants of the orthographic discussion at the beginning of the 2Ith century states, 'Orthography is just a way of recording speech' but 'a language changes in time independent of our wish because we live in a changing world and the language should reflect these changes. … The sounding of words changes, the set of sounds changes… If we want spelling of a word at least in some measure to reflect its phonation, we simply have from time to time to correct orthography – up to revising the alphabet… Otherwise eventually a graphic presentation of a word turns into a hieroglyphic character'. (Published in the newspaper "Izvestiya" 11.08.2001). It could be appreciated as the fruits of the scientific enlightenment.

3. THE MAIN REASONS OF A SPELLING RESISTANCE

Reasons of a hostile attitude to reforms are generally social, political, psychological, cultural, historical and scholarly, but unfortunately scholarly reasons are known by the public least of all. To be exact: lack of linguistic competence is a main reason of resistance of the society.

The users of spelling should know that established long ago spelling and became habitual is replaced with great difficulties by new, though this old became evidently irrational and did not reflect a live condition of the language.

Reform rejection is connected with the fact that stability and aspiration to habitual is inherent to the person, because it means demolition for competent native speakers the mechanism of reading and writing.

The solution of questions of the spelling has to be the matter of the scholars, teachers, publishers and typographical workers, and not poets, novelists and even philosophers and critics at all. As treatment is competence of doctors, building of architects, engineers and foremen's, so matter of the reform of writing has to be given in a charge of people with knowledge of the linguistic theory. But, unfortunately, society trusts the writer more, than to the most authoritative scientist, without knowing that other writer at all his talent can't have even the most elementary data on a ratio of the concepts "language and spelling".

Spelling of any language during his first steps is always created on the base of the sound speech. Their further way is a natural way of development of language and relative stability of his written shape. The spelling remains rather stable during the long period while "live as life" language leaves forward. This conflict demands resolving, putting in compliance of the live speech and spelling, that is – reformation.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion it is necessary to emphasize that the main obstacles in reforming are a habit force and lack of linguistic education. Thus any society should be informed, that:

1. Reform of any spelling is a natural course of events in the history of any language.
2. Any reform despite of possible shortcomings represents an obvious progress in comparison with the former spelling.
3. The matter of improvement of a spelling is a professional duty of professional linguists in a spelling sphere.
4. Successful process of the spelling reform requires linguistic education of the society, formation of the linguistic competence.
5. Secondary education introduces the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, but unfortunately does not give any knowledge about the laws of the development of a language and its written shape. It is the duty of the linguists and teachers.

This educational program to overcome the ignorance in spelling theory and will become a tribute to the prominent Russian scholar who wrote at the very beginning of the 20th century, "I would only wish to help everyone who needs to acquire the correct view of the mutual relations of the language and spelling", because the attitude towards spelling can be unscholarly and disturb all plans of reforming the orthography (Ushakov1911, p. 6).

It will also become a memory tribute to the founder of French school of scientific linguistics and Romance philology Gaston Paris who suggested that spelling was not the matter of any taste; it was the matter of common sense and practice (sited in Alphyorov 1918, p. 15).

The evidence of numerous unsuccessful attempts of reforming of English spelling is provided in a book "Four hundred years of spelling reform" (Zachrisson 2008). It is probably a caution to those who takes away the spelling from a living language, approving of anti-reforming tradition and considering nowadays spelling the only suitable; who do not take into consideration the adaptation of the live speech and its written form to the requirements of the future.

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