

International English Spelling Congress

The scheme summarized below was one of 35 that passed the sifting process and was forwarded to the Expert Commission following the first session of the Congress.

IESC 1

The Zefur Spelling System

The self-expression medium for Society members.

The views expressed here are the author's and not shared by the Society, or a majority of its members

The English Spelling Society

The object of the Society is to raise awareness of the problems caused by the irregularity of English spelling; and to promote remedies to improve literacy, including spelling reform.

The Author

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The Zefur Spelling System.

Zefur has borrowed from several spelling systems to come up with a blend that hopefully will appeal to the reading public. Zefur is mainly supported by the alphabetic principle.

Zefur only uses the conventional letters but some have been assigned new pronunciations.

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1 - Introduction.

Zefur is an alternate spelling system for English. It is a lot different from traditional spelling (TS). Zefur removes most doubt about spelling and pronunciation, even though the spelling accent is not always in the reader's speaking accent.

SAMPA pronunciation guide symbols are used here.

English – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAMPA_chart_for_English

2 - The Zefur Phonemic Alphabet.

a aa ae ar arr au b ch d e ee f g h i ie j k/c* l m n ng* o or oe oi oo ou p r s sh t th u ur
ue v V vr w W wh y Y z zh

*k/c follows rules; <can, cat, cot, cvb, bank, cast, act, cumper,kik, keep>.

*/N/ and /Ng/ are spelled <ng>; <hangur/angur>, as in traditional spelling.

2.1 - R-colored phonemes.

Ar, arr, or, vr, ur, wr

3 - **Vowels.** (TS is above Zefur)

a e i o v u w ae ee y ie oe ue
bat pet pig spot mud alone book lake seed penny pie toe fuel
bat pet pig spot mvd uloen bwk laek seed peny pie toe fuel

oo au
moon caught
moon caut

oi ou ar arr or vr ur
boy plow bark marry fork burn letter
boi plou bark marry fork bvrn letur

Vowels at word end.

/{/ will be spelled <ah> at word end; <bah, nah>.

/E/ will be spelled <eh> at word end; <meh>.

/A:/ will be spelled <aa> *at word end*; <baa, spaa, maa, paa>.

/V/ will be spelled <uh> at word end except for <the>, which is a sight word; <uh, huh, uh-huh>. <The> is /Di:/ or /DV/.

<V, w and y>, are spelled for both vowel and consonant in Zefur. A shortcut for the rules for these symbols is that it is an either/or situation. A word will only make sense if it is pronounced just one way. Just like the <th> symbol; <this, thin, mvthur>.

<V> is almost always a vowel when followed by a consonant; except at word end—when an inflection is added—or when <v> ends the first element of a compound word. "Mud" <mvd>, "of" <uv>, "solved" <solvd>, "shelves" <shelvz>, "lively" <lievly>, "livestock" <lievstok>. "Convolvulus" /kun 'VOI VYu lus/ <convaulvyulus> – note /V/ between two consonants not at word end. "chef-d'oeuvre" - <shae-dvrvr>. This is a rare occurrence.

<V> is a consonant when preceded or followed by a vowel, or at base word end. <Vast, saev, solvd>. The only exception is <the> /DV, Di:/, a "sight word".

<V> is never part of a vowel combination. In the case of "coerce" /ko '3:ˈs/ and "triumphant" /tral 'Vm f@nt/, the /3:/ and /V/ will be spelled <u>, with a following doubled consonant; <courrs, triummfunt>.

A doubled consonant marks a <u> as a stressed /V/; "above, vulture, version" <ubuvv, vullchur, vurrzhun>. In single syllable words, <u> doesn't need a doubled consonant; "of, love, glove" <uv, luv, gluv>.

<W> is a vowel when a consonant follows. "Book" <bwk>.

<W> is a consonant when a vowel follows. <Wet>.

<Ww> is always pronounced as the "woo" in "wood"; /wUd/ <wwd>.

<W> is never part of a vowel combination in a Zefur spelling accent. "Aneurism" /'n j@ ,rl z@m/ US, /'n jU@ ,rl z@m/ UK; <anyurizum>. This rule makes it easier to know what <w> represents.

Sometimes vowel-y carries secondary stress. "Bumblebee, tepee/teepee" <bvmbulby, teepy> /'bVm b@l ,bi/, /'ti: ,pi/. This will feel wrong because <y> is normally totally unstressed. [I see no 'solution' that doesn't feel a bit wrong.]

<Y> is a consonant when followed by a vowel; unless <y> is a word end vowel. <Yes; fumilyur, milyun; carryur, carryng, beryul>.

<Y> is a vowel when followed by a consonant; "resell" <rysel, fumilyur>.

<Ue> = <yoo>. The <yoo> spelling will be in the few words where TS spells with "y". "You, youth, you're, you'd, you'll" <yoo, yooth, yoo'r, yoo'd, yoo'l>.

/ol/ - "old, goal, bowl, roll, role, solar, soldier" - <oeld, goel, boel, roel, roel, soelur, soeljur>.

4 – Schwa.

The most common unstressed vowel sound. Always spelled <u> in Zefur. <U> is also spelled for unstressed \V\; humdrum \hVm ,drum\ <hvm drum.>

<U> is also spelled for \V\ if \V\ precedes or follows \v\; above <ubuvv>, vulture <vullchur>. U will not be followed by a doubled consonant in single syllable words; love <luv>.

Sometimes unstressed /I/ is pronounced in a word, but /u/ could also be pronounced in the word. In this case, Zefur will regularly spell u, in order to highlight primary stress; <cabun>. An exception to this is in words like; "believe, demand, prevent" where /I/, /i/, or /@/, might be pronounced. In these words, <i> is spelled, mostly to avoid the unsightly <y> in these positions. <Bileev, dimand, privent, rimooov>. Compare to; <buleev, dumand, pruvent, rumooov>; or <byleev, dymand, pryvent, rymoov>. /I/ is generally given in dictionaries in these words. When; "de-, pre- and re-", are normally pronounced with /i/, as in inflections; spell; <dy-, pry-, and ry->. "Deregulate, predetermine, resell" <dyregyulaet, prydityrmun, rysel>. Also; /I/@/ is regularly spelled <i>, before <k>; <practicul, articul, publicaeshun>. Except at word end of multi-syllable words; <arsunic, mucanic>.

5 - Vowel Combinations.

<Ae, ee, ie, oe and ue>, will drop the e marker when the vowel is the first vowel in a vowel combination. Exception: word end vowels; <hieust, gaeuty>. But; <go/going and be/being>, have sight words; see 7 - Spelling Accent. See also, 5.3 - Syllabic Consonants.

The above will sometimes cause ambiguity because there is conflict with some other vowels. "Poet/pout" <pout>. Decoding (figuring out the word) is relatively easy however, and since normal reading is by recognizing the whole word, this is a temporary problem. If desired, a (.) can be used to clarify a spelling; reentur/re.entur, coopuraet/co.opuraet.

Both /i:/ and /i/ will be spelled <e>, as the first element of a vowel combination. "Realize" /'ri: @ lalz/ <reuliez>, "react" /ri '{kt/ <react>. Since /i/ is unstressed /i:/, this is no more ambiguous than spelling other vowels with the same symbol in both stressed and unstressed positions. "Diagram" <diugram>, "diagonal" <diagunul>.

When a word end vowel begins a vowel combination, the word end vowel will not be changed. <Being, seeing, hieust, carryur>. <Be> is a sight word. See 5.3 - Syllabic Consonants.

<V> is never part of a vowel combination. In the case of "coerce" /ko 3: `s/ and "triumphant" /tral 'Vm f@nt/, the /3:/ and /V/ will be spelled <u>, with a following doubled consonant. <courrs, triummfunt>.

6 - Syllabic Consonants.

Sometimes, <l m n and r>, are syllabic consonants. A syllabic consonant is a consonant with a vowel quality, and it can represent a complete syllable. Feel \fi: l\, <feel>.

Zefur will spell syllabic consonants compressed when following a vowel. That is; fire <fier>.

Zefur will spell syllabic consonants uncompressed when following consonants. That is; bubble <bvbul>. Meddle, medal, mettle, metal - <medul, medul, metul, metul>.

Exception: Syllabic <l and r> following <y> at word end; <beryul, carryur>.

In some words, the addition of an inflection will change the pronunciation of the base word. The spelling accent will usually reflect this change. An exception is with words like; "bubble and travel"; <bvbul/bvbuling, travul/travuling>, but not in such as "probable" <probubul/probubly>—not <probubuly>. While the speaking accent will normally be /'bVb lIng/ and /'tr{v lIng/, the spelling accent will be /'bV b@l Ing/ and /'tr{ v@l Ing/. This is so a general spelling rule can be used for all similar words.

7 – Stress.

In multi-syllable words, a doubled consonant will mark <u> as stressed /V/; <ubuvv, vullchur, vurrzhun>.

In Zefur, stress in single syllable words will be spelled as if they were stressed, with some exceptions explained elsewhere.

When <vv> would occur, either <uv> or <vu> will be spelled; <shove, of, vurs> <shuv, uv, vurs>. The consonant will not be doubled in single syllable words.

<Ee> will be spelled for both /i:/ and /i/ in single syllable words—except for the sight words and homophones; <be/being, he, he'l, he'd, me, she, she'd, she'l, she'z, the, we>.

<Ee> is stressed; unless it is a vowel combination; <reentur> \ri 'En t@r\.

When a compound word like "chickweed" is spelled in Zefur, the <ee> will be respelled to <y> because its stress has changed. <Chikwyd> looks pretty odd but it preserves the identification of primary stress. <Y> may carry secondary stress in this position; "cornmeal, bumblebee, turnkey, teepee", <bvmbulby, tvrnky, teepey>.

Vowel-v is always stressed. <Svmur, incvr>.

Vowel-y /i/ is generally unstressed /i:/, but may carry secondary stress, as noted above. "Penny" <peny>. "Athlete" <athlyt>, "teepee, bumblebee" <teeepy, bvmbulby>.

<U> is generally schwa (unstressed), but it might carry secondary stress, and when followed by doubled consonants, it will be stressed /V/; <uloen, hvmdrum, prununseaeshun, ubuvv, vurrzhun>.

While the stress of <u> is not pinned down (because of secondary stress), it still aids in locating primary stress in the word. Most of the time, <u> is schwa. Schwa is always spelled <u>.

The -ing suffix is always unstressed. <Singing>.

These stress features permit a considerable amount of primary stress identification.

A preliminary check of text in a short story, indicates about 90% of primary stress is identified, without extra stress marking.

9 - Spelling Accent.

Probably the most troublesome feature of Zefur is the spelling accent.

The spelling accent is not the pronunciation accent. The spelling accent enables word recognition. You will pronounce the words in your own accent. No matter what spelling system you use. In order to spell well, you will have to learn the difference between the spelling accent and your own speech.

When practical, TS will influence the spelling accent as if TS was a speaking accent; though visual - . There will be exceptions. Some will be arbitrary and we will have to count on the future to sort them out.

Since a spelling standard is not yet set for Zefur; present readers can just refer to a regular American or British pronouncing dictionary and use these guidelines for the best spelling. The spelling of some words will not be easily determined by the rules. For these, we will have to accept variable spellings until a spelling standard is set.

Zefur is a rhotic spelling system. <R's> are not dropped.

Zefur words will spell to the US vowel distribution of /{/ . "Cast, ask" <cast, ask>.

Zefur words will spell to the UK vowel distribution of /O:/ . Merriam-Webster, and the Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary, do not agree on this. Use the CEPD UK pronunciation, to guide the spelling of words with /O:/.

All dictionaries do not agree on the placement of schwa. "Severe" /sl 'vlr/-/s@ 'vlr/. Favoring the <u> spelling aids in the identification of primary stress. This rule is sometimes in conflict with favoring a TS appearance. An arbitrary decision will have to be made. "Cabin" <cabun>, "mistake" <mustaek>. The chosen spellings still represent pronunciations found in some dictionaries.

<U> is spelled instead of <i> (except before /k/) when /@/ is an optional pronunciation; unless /i/ is also an option; in which case <i> will be spelled. <Adud, mustaek, cabun, rabut, suvir; bileev, dimand, privent, rimooov, comprihend>. Since all dictionaries don't always show when /i/ is a possible pronunciation, this rule is somewhat fuzzy, but the writer should be able to predict when /i/ is an option. Attempt to avoid <y> midword by spelling <i> if it is not too much of a stretch. There are many words where <y> will be necessary, and the appearance will suffer a bit more; <rysel>. Keep <y> when it is a word end vowel; <hapy/hapynus, handy/handycap>.

When "t" is midword, as in "butter", it is commonly pronounced as /d/ in the US accent. This makes "medal and metal" have the same pronunciation. The Zefur spelling accent will keep the UK spelling accent for this, so the spellings will be; <medul and metul>.

Choose US pronunciations over UK when that is the only problem unsolved. This is like driving on the right side of the road. It's not that one is more right than the other, it is just to keep people from killing each other.

You can make your best guess until a spelling standard is available. You can easily read a standard accent even though it is not the same as your own.

10 - Consonants.

<V, w and y>, are spelled as both vowel and consonant.

b d f g h j k/c l m n p r s t v
 bat dog fish gas hat jet kid/cat list man net pet rat sun tan vet
bat dog fish gas hat jet kit/cat list man net pet rat svn tan vet

w y z
 wet yes zoo
wet yes zoo

ch th sh th wh zh ng ngg nk /Nk/
 chin this ship thin when measure singer finger think
 chin this ship thin when mezhur singur fingur think

/k/ - <C> is spelled before; <a, ae, au, o, oe, oi, oo, ou, v, u, ue>. *cat, caek, cot, coet, cvt, curect, cue, cool, caut, coin, count.*

/k/ - <C> is spelled before consonants; *act, cloud, crab, acshun; eecwul, aucwurd*.

/k/ - <K> is spelled before; <e ee y i ie>; *keg, keep, mvnky, kit, kiet*.

When an inflection is added to a word ending in <k>, the <k> will be kept; <lok/lokur, taek/taekun, bak/bakwurd>.

/k/ - <K> is spelled at word end in single syllable words; *bak, bank, bak/bakwurd*.

Exception, in homophones; *sic/sik*.

Spell <-ik> or <-ic> whenever /-ik/ is an optional pronunciation.

Spell <-ic> at word end in multisyllable words; "stomach, arsenic, sick" *stvmic, arsunic, sik*.

Spell <-ik> in single syllable words; *trik, bak, bank*.

/N/ and /Ng/ - Spelled <ng>. "Finger" is pronounced /'fɪN g@r/ *finger, singur* /'sɪN @r/.

/Nk/, will be spelled <nk or nc>. <Think,tinkle> *think, tincul, vncul, ancult*.

/n(t)s/ will be spelled <ns> in words like; "once, dance, sense"; but when the <s> is an inflection of a TS word ending in <t>, "cents", the <t> will be spelled; <sents>. "Once, mince, sense; wants, mints, cents." *Wvns, mins, sens; wvnts, mints, sents*. When TS spells the <t>, Zefur will spell the <t>; *antsy, chintz*.

/(t)sh/ - can be pronounced /tS/ or /S/. /(t)S/ is spelled <sh> in Zefur, except when TS spells with a <t or ch>. In these cases, ch will be spelled. "Essential, nuptial, ancient, conscience, ascension, mansion"; <isenchul, noopchul, aenshunt, conshuns, usenshun, manshun>. "Wrench, ranch, winch, cinch, lunch" <rench, winch, sinch, lvnch>.

Consonant-v is generally followed by a vowel if not at word end. Some exceptions are; "convolvulus" /k@n 'vOlv j@ l@s/ <convaulvyulus>, "chef-d'oeuvre" - *shae-dvrvr*. This is a rare occurrence. The reader's vocabulary will indicate the correct pronunciation.

<V> is a consonant when followed or preceded by a vowel. <Vet>, "save" <saev>.

When stressed /V/ is after a vowel it will be spelled <u> and a following consonant will be doubled; "triumphant" <triummfunt>.

<V> is a consonant at base word end, though an added inflection will confuse a little. "Solved" <saulvd>, "shelves" <shelvz>.

<W> is a consonant when followed by a vowel. <Wet> /wEt/, <uwae> /@ 'wei/.

<W> will not be part of a vowel combination in the Zefur accent. "Bureau" /'bjU ro/ <bywroe>. Exception; "tangata whenua" : <tangatu fenwu> – Maori – an example where /U/ precedes a vowel. The pronunciation is almost identical if /w/ is pronounced.

<Ww> is always pronounced as the "woo" in "wood" /wUd/ <wwd>.

<Y> is a consonant when followed by a vowel; unless <y> is a word end vowel. Otherwise <y> is a vowel. Yes, <familyur, milyun>; <carryur, beryul, taestyust>. See 5 - Vowel Combinations.

<Yy> is only found in a few words; mostly names. "Mascagni" /m{s 'kAn ji/ <Masconyy>. <yy> is almost always /ji/. Exception; "polyurethane" <polyywruthaen>. When <y> is next to a vowel, it is a consonant.

<Zh> is found in very few TS words; "Andizhan, Brezhnev, Zhivago, Zhou". Vision, measure <vizhun, mezhur>.

Many /Z/ words are also pronounced with /dZ/. Zefur's spelling accent will spell <j> where /dZ/ is an option.

11 - Sight Words.

A "sight word" is a word that is expected to be memorized. It doesn't follow the alphabetic principle. Other non-alphabetic words like homophones and words with ambiguous vowel combinations will be treated separately.

The indefinite article a, I, ass, off, hiss, he, me, ye, she, go, ok, the.

The indefinite article "a" will be spelled <a>; <hav a cvp uv <cofy>. The personal pronoun "I" will be spelled capital <I>. "I'll" <I'/>.

<Ass> to avoid confusion with "as".

<Off> to avoid confusion with "of".

<Hiss> to avoid confusion with "his".

<He, me, ye, she, go, ok, the> – to help look more like TS. High frequency and easy to learn.

<The> - spelled before both vowels and consonants; <the apul/the dog>.

The addition of inflections and compound words will keep the sight word spellings; be/being, go/going, nobody.

12 - Homophones.

Zefur enables a fair sized list of homophones by:

- Doubling a consonant at word end.
- Using a TS consonant phoneme such as; kn, to mark the difference in spelling.
- Using a TS vowel phoneme to mark the difference in spelling; <ther, their>.

13 - Selected Prefixes.

The "anti-" prefix will be spelled <anti->. <Anti-> will represent; /{ntI-/ , /{nti-/ , /{nt@-/ or /{ntal-/ . <Antifryz, antibiotic, anti-Umericun>; "antechamber" <antichaembur>.

The "semi-" prefix will be spelled <semi->, and will represent; /sEmI-/ , /sEmi-/ or /sEmal-/ ; <semiretierd>. The "semi" vehicle will be /sEmal/ <semie>.

The "trans-" prefix will be spelled <trans->; for /tran(t)s-/ or /tran(t)z-/ . <Transishun, transport>.

<Pre-> (*pre*-1400).

There may be a few more prefixes we should add to this list.

14 - Compound Words And Inflections.

A compound word is where two words are joined, as in; can-not, cannot. Zefur will spell these words as they are pronounced. Can-not /k{ 'nAt/ canot, "vineyard" vine-yard /vIn j@rd/, <vinyurd>.

In TS—according to linguists and dictionaries—the "-ed" inflection at word end is pronounced /t/ following unvoiced consonants; <f k p s x ch sh th>. "Laughed, cooked, clapped, passed, mixed, matched, mashed, toothed." Zefur will spell <d> to keep a connection to the TS inflection "-ed". <Lafd cwkd clapd pasd micds machd mashd toothd>.

15 - Contractions.

Zefur will use the apostrophe in contractions as in TS; arn't, can't, he'd, he'l, l'd, l'l . . . Possessive pronouns are spelled without the apostrophe as in TS; <its, hvrz, theirz>.

16 - Proper Names.

Consider your readers when deciding whether to respell proper names.

If using the Zefur spelling, but the correct pronunciation is not known, italicize the name with the original spelling; *Gaddhafi*.

17 - PV word list.

| TS | Zefur | TS | Zefur |
|--|---|--|---|
| pen, copy, happen lot, odd, wash back, bubble, job strut, bud, love | pen, copy, hapun lot, od, wosh bak, bvbul, job strvt, bvd, luv | zero, zone, roses north, war ship, sure, station cure, poor, jury | zeeroe, zoen, roezuz north, wor ship, shwr, staeshun cywr, por, jwry |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| tea, tight, button foot, good, put city, better fleece, day, streak day, ladder, odd price, high, try key, cock, school choice, boy get, giggle, ghost goose, two, blue church, match, nature goat, show, no, cold judge, age, soldier mouth, now fat, coffee, rough, move near, here, serious thing, author, path square, fair, various this, other, smooth start, father soon, cease, sister thought, law | tee, tiet, bvtun fwt, gwd, pwt sity, betur flees, dae, streek dae, ladur, od pries, hie, trie kee, cok, scool chois, boi get, gigul, goest goos, two, bloo chvrch, mach, naechur goet, shoe, no, coeld jvj, aej, soeljur mouth, nou fat, cofy, rvf moov nir, hir, sireus thing, authur, path scwer, fer, vereus this, vthur, smooth start, fothur soon, sees, sistur thaut, lau | pleasure, vision nurse, stir hot, whole, behind courage more, hammer, some happy, radiation, glorious nice, know, funny, sun about, comma, common ring, long, thanks, sung influence, situation, annual light, valley, feel intend, basic yet, use, beauty stimulus, educate wet, one, when, queen . kit, bid, hymn dress, bed trap, bad | plezhur, vizhun nvrs, stvr hot, hoel, bihiend cvrij mor, hamur, svm hapy, raedeaeshun, gloreus nies, knoe, fvny, svn ubout, comu, comun ring, long, thanks, svng infloouns, situaeshun, anuul liet, valy, feel intend, baesic yet, uez/ues, buety stimyulus, ejucaet wet, wvn, when, cween kit, bid, himm dres, bed trap, bad |
|---|---|--|---|

18 - Four standard texts spelled in Zefur.

The Star by H G Wells – in Zefur. Names may keep traditional spelling or not, according to the writers judgement of his readers.

It wvz on the fvrst dae uv the noo yir that the unounsmunt wvz maed, aulmoest siemultaeneusly frvm three ubzvrvtoryz, that the moeshun uv the planut Neptoon, the outurmoest uv aul the planuts that wheel ubout the svn, had bicvm very iratic. A ritardaeshun in its vulosuty had bin suspectud in Disembur. Then a faent, rimoeet spek uv liet wvz discuvvurd in the reejun uv the purtvrbd planut. At fvrst this did not cauz eny graet ecsietmunt. Siuntific peepul, houeuvr, found the intelujuns rimarkubul invf eevun bifoer it bicaem knoen that the noo body wvz rapudly groeing larjur and brietur, and that its moeshun wvz cwiet difurunt frvm the ordurly progres uv the planuts. (558 characters)

Britun when yvng by Frank Kermode

We mae nouudaez be chery about uezing the wvrd 'jeenyus', bvt we stil hav a gwd iedeu whot iz ment by it. For egzampul, ther ar graet nvmburz uv very giftud muezishunz hoo ar udmierd bvt not cauld jeenyusuz. Bvt ther ar vthurz, manufestly prudijus, purforming ofun at ecstrordunery aejuz, a vuriuty uv feets so complecs that the laemun cwd hardly imajun, eevun with the moest despurut laebur, ucomplishing eny uv them, whiel eevun muezishunz ar ustonishd: and we then reech for the gwd, handy, vaeg, Enlietunmunt wvrd and caul them jeenyusuz. The list incloodz Moetsart and

Mendulsun; and dispiet aul the limiting jvjmunts, it incloodz Benjumun Britun. (545 characters)

Oed to a nietungael by John Keats

Tiz not throo envy uv thie hapy lot,
Bvt being so hapy in thien hapynus.
That thou, liet-wingd Driad uv the treez.
In svm muloedeus plot,
Uv beechun green, and shadoez nvmburlus,
Singust uv svmur in fwl-throetud eez. (179 characters)

Fvzy-oepaek orthugraficul vizhunz by C Upward.

Ther wvz a por boi cwn't spel
Haf the wvrdz in our langwij too wel.
Hiz teechurz thaut: "Braen-sik!"
Mvm and Dad hoepd: "Dislecsic?"
Yet the chield rashly jird:
"Whot the hel!" (147 characters)

An expanded version of Zefur can presently (Feb. 2020) be found at:
<https://paulstought.wordpress.com/>