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Not All is Wrong with French Spelling

by Albert Valdman

ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS of FL teaching “in the New Key” is that the spoken language is primary and writing only its derivative.¹ Accordingly, the student’s first task is discrimination among target language sound features, if not with near-native accuracy, at least in such a way that they are kept distinct from each other; for instance, in French /*ẽ*/ must be distinguished and differentiated from /*ã*/ so that sentences like *C’est cinq francs* and *C’est cent francs* may be kept apart. At this stage it is also generally agreed that the conventional orthography should be withheld from the student since it does not provide a consistent representation of the vowels and consonants of the language: thus, in the conventional orthography /k/ is represented by *c* (*cave*), *qu* (*qui*), *que* (*chaque*), *q* (*cinq*), *k* (*kilo*), *ch* (*chrétien*), *cq* (*acquis*) and *cc* (*accord*) while the digraph *en* stands for both /*ã*/ (*vent*, *gens*, *entend*) and /*ẽ*/ (*moyen*, *examen*, *européen*). Instead, a *phonemic* transcription, traditionally the IPA (International Phonetics Association) alphabet which does exhibit the desired consistency, is used to facilitate accurate perception and pronunciation. Subsequently, the student is taught to spell in the conventional orthography by “rewriting” the symbols of the transcription as letters of the conventional orthography. Such a strategy is implied in the following types of statements excerpted from noteworthy New Key texts: /r/ is written *r* (*rat*), *rr* (*errer*), *rh* (*rhume*), R. Politzer, *Teaching French: An Introduction to Applied Linguistics*, p. 92, or /j/ is written *ie* (*hier*), *io* (*distribution*), *ill* (*fille*), *il* (*soleil*), *ia* (*siamois*), *y* (*voyons*), *Foreign Service Institute Basic French*, p. 305; a more useful approach is tried in E. Burroughs’ *Programmed Course in French Phonetics*, p. 61: “the graphemes *on* represent [õ] and before the graphemes *b* and *p* [õ] is represented by the graphemes *om*.” This strategy falls far short for at least two reasons: 1) it assumes that the conventional French orthography is, like the IPA alphabet

¹ A French version of this paper constituted part of a lecture presented in August, 1962, to the training institute held by the *Bureau d’Etudes et de Liaison pour la diffusion du français dans le monde* at the Faculté des Lettres, Université de Besançon.

or the transcription systems employed by structural linguists of the Neobloomfieldian persuasion, a phonemic notation which must always represent every significant sound class of the language (*phoneme*) by one and the same symbol, and in which every symbol, in turn, must always be convertible into one and the same phoneme without recourse to word boundaries, grammatical function and the like; 2) the sound-to-letter correspondances it operates with constitute an extremely unsophisticated and ineffectual pedagogical procedure. A demonstration of the inadequacy of the IPA alphabet or phonemic transcriptions of the type described above to account for the very complex French sound system elegantly, economically and realistically is clearly beyond the scope of this article which, however, proposes to show: 1) that the most adequate and economical way to represent French **sentences** is the heretofore much maligned French conventional spelling and that 2), any procedure for the systematic teaching of the conventional spelling presupposes the prior acquisition on the part of the learner of both sound features and grammatical patterns and must necessarily consist of rules couched in both phonological and grammatical terms.²

Morphophonemic Transcription

The conventional orthography is a far subtler and more powerful instrument than phonetic or phonemic transcriptions since it attempts to provide the decoder information about both the *substance* (phonological shape) and the *content* (grammatical function and lexical range) of words. French is characterized by extensive variation in the shape of grammatical forms conditioned by phonological and syntactic factors, namely, whether the following form begins with a consonant or a vowel and whether it is in close-link construction with the form under consideration; this behavior is traditionally labelled *liaison* and *elision* but also includes such alternations as *bel/beau* and *vieil/vieux*. In French, forms are often realized by two different sound shapes and can be represented most economically by a notation that subsumes several phonemic renditions (morphophonemic transcription). To indicate whether a grammatical form occurs in one or two—sometimes three as in *six* and *dix*—phonological shapes, the orthography opposes two sets of consonants: “stable” and “latent.” Thus, *treize*

² Detailed discussions of the inadequacies of IPA and transcriptions based on a rigorous application of Neobloomfieldian phonemic canons will be found in the various works by A. Martinet cited in the *References* appended to this article. Martinet proposes another type of phonemic transcription that depends on the notion of *neutralization* and the concept of the *archiphoneme*; I have adopted a modified version of this transcription in my *Applied Linguistics: French* and discussed its pedagogical implication in “Teaching the French Vowels”, *MLJ* XLV (1961), 257–262.

can be converted to /trɛz/ only, while *très* yields both /trɛ/ as in *C'est très drôle* and /trɛz/ as in *C'est très amusant*; *verte* represents /vɛ:r/ only but *vert* represents both /vɛ:r/ (*Il est vert*) and /vɛrt/ (*vert et pimpant*). Generally, the latent consonant indicated by the orthography is very rarely realized: the *r* of *-er* infinitives (*Voulez-vous déjeuner avec moi*), the *-s* and *-x* of plural nouns (*Les soldats anglais*), but it is this feature which differentiates utterances homophonous in isolation, e.g., *sans* /sā/ or /sāz/, *sang* /sā/ or /sāk/, *il sent* /sā/ or /sāt/, *tu sens* /sā/ or /sāz/, and which would-be reformers of the orthography submit as evidence for the latter's inconsistencies and vagaries.

Generally, stable consonants are represented by consonant letters followed by *e* while latent consonants are written with consonant letters only; this is best illustrated by the following adjective paradigm:

	MASCULINE		FEMININE
	↗ pE tit		
SINGULAR	petit ↘	petite →	pE tit
	↗ pE ti		↗
PLURAL	petits ↘	petites →	pE titz
	pE tiz		

Except for /E/ the symbols in bold type stand for phonemic units; note that /E/ represents the latent vowel mute-*e* which is realized as either zero (no sound) or neutralized /œ/; this type of formulation eliminates the very burdensome [ə] from the vowel inventory. Clearly, only a transcription which incorporates this feature of the orthography is effective for French. To represent the forms cited above one would write masculine singular forms and both sets of plural forms as one, viz. *petit pEtiT*, *petits pEtiTZ*, *petite pEtit*, *petites pEtitZ*; thus *les petites filles leZpEtitZfiZ* must be read /leptitfi/ since all latent consonants occur before consonants; in *les petits hôtels leZpEtiTZotèlZ* the second Z is realized as /z/ since it occurs before /o/ but the T that precedes it is not realized—it would appear in *un petit hôtel œpEtiTotèl* /œpitotèl/. This notation is converted into sound by the simple rule that latent consonants (written as capitals) are “realized” obligatorily only if followed by a vowel and if the following word is in close syntactic link. It is fashionable today to state that spoken and written French show considerable structural difference. This is accurate only if by written French we mean literary French in which, for instance, the narrative past tense is the past definite rather than the past indefinite, but is patently misleading if it infers that a French sentence written in orthography has a different structure from an equivalent sentence transcribed in phonemic notation. This misconception rests on the failure to interpret the

orthography as a code which yields the correct spoken forms to those who possess its key, the literate native speakers of the language.

A thorough analysis of French must ultimately account for latent consonants. True, if they are discarded a more transparent and simple analysis results; for instance, regular *-er* verbs can be said to have only three forms in the present and three in the imperfect: /lav/, /lavø/, /lave/ and /lave/, /lavjə/, /lavje/. It is said that all languages have ragged edges; while it may be wise for the teacher to cut these off sometimes, it is a liberty which the analyst cannot take. In fact, regular *-er* verbs have at least five present and four imperfect forms: /lav/ *lave*, /lavZ/ *laves*, /lavT/ *lavent*, /lavøZ/ *lavons*, /laveZ/ *lavez*; /laveZ/ *lavais*, /laveT/ *lavait* and *lavaient*, /lavjəZ/ *lavions*, /lavjeZ/ *laviez*.³ Not only can latent consonants contained by words be realized in phrases and sentences but they also appear in derivation; compare: *sans* /sā/ but *sans issue* /sūzisy/; *sang* /sā/ but *sang impur* /sākēpy:r/ and *sanguinaire* /sāginer/; *cent* /sā/ but *cent ans* /sātā/ and *centenaire* /sātner/.

Teaching the Orthography

Since it is a morphophonemic-type notation, the conventional spelling can only be taught by a program whose input provides information relative to the phonological composition and grammatical structure of utterances. Instead of the unstructured lists of sound-letter or letter-sound correspondences found in traditional pronouncing dictionaries and handbooks of phonetics (Fouché, Varney-Pleasants) as well as recent New Key texts and manuals (Politzer, FSI, Burroughs, Mueller and Mayer) such a program must stress the acquisition by the student of the productive orthographic patterns which native speakers themselves use in noting down unfamiliar or newly-coined utterances. The rules of this program must be ordered in a pedagogically efficient series: progression from the simple to the complex, from the frequent to the rare, and from the productive pattern to the marginal and residual.

Discussions of the French conventional orthography fail to take into account a fundamental aspect of the structure of French, namely, the absence of clear phonological signals of word boundaries. In French the final stress-accent marks off units which are generally longer than words (phonological phrases—breath groups), and junctural phenomena of the

³ For typographical simplicity, the morphophonemic transcription appears between slant lines rather than between braces as is the standard usage. The latent consonants that appear in the items in transcription would be realized *obligatorily* in the following items respectively: *laves-en*, *lavent-ils*, *lavons-en*, *lavez-en*, *lavait-il* and *lavaient-ils*; they are realized optionally and quite infrequently in *tu lavais une chemise*, *nous lavions une chemise*, *vous laviez une chemise*.

type that differentiate English *nitrate* and *night-rate* or *an aim* and *a name* do not seem to occur consistently so that word identification ultimately depends on extra phonological cues; to paraphrase Delattre, *le mot n'est pas une entité phonologique en français*; witness the following pairs: /œsipalmā/ *un signe allemand* or *un signalement*, /illaprā/ *il l'apprend* or *il la prend*, /leromē/ *l'air aux mains* or *les Romains*. Since, hopefully, the student is expected to spell sentence-length utterances rather than words lifted out of context, the first step in the use of the orthography is the segmentation of sentences into their constituent words by grammatical analysis and lexical and contextual inference. The first part of the spelling program must perforce be a word isolation routine. After the reduction to word-length units has been effectuated phonological and grammatical rules are applied. The spelling program will also contain a list of items which break general rules or which are not amenable to rules, notably, embellishments and etymological reconstructions like *doigt*, *poids*, *scie*, *type*, *cathédrale*, *alphabet*. Of course, in an actual spelling program, the various types of rules would not be presented sequentially but simultaneously and would parallel the phonological, grammatical, and lexical content of the course syllabus. The description that follows must not be construed as a self-contained pedagogical program but merely as an illustration of the type of rules that can be formulated in the teaching of the French orthography to students acquainted with the Roman alphabet.

Phonological Rules

Phonological rules must permit the student to *predict* with a high degree of success the exact representation of phonemes in specific phonological environments. Some of these rules take the form of mere correspondence lists, for example:

1. Phonemes represented by single letters: /a/ → a, /i/ → i, /y/ → u, /p/ → p, /b/ → b, /d/ → d, /f/ → f, /v/ → v, /m/ → m, /n/ → n, /l/ → l, /r/ → r;
2. Phonemes represented by letter combinations: /ʃ/ → ch, /œ/ → un, /ɲ/ → gn, /u/ → ou;
3. Fixed combinations of phonemes represented by letter combinations: /wa/ → oi, /wē/ → oin, /ʉi/ → ui.

In the formulation of the rules rare spellings such as *y* and *î* for /i/ and *ph* and *ff* for /f/ have not been considered and are relegated to lists; certainly such misspellings as **sifler* or **stile* would not shock educated Frenchmen as those like **duze* for *douze* or **cashe* for *cache* which might result in the confusion of contrasting forms or which show the lack of assimilation of more general and fundamental spelling patterns.

Where the one-to-one correspondence between phonemes or phoneme sequences and graphs is broken, spelling rules must be stated in terms of the immediate phonological environment—rather than in terms of immediately preceding or following *letters*.

The simplest case is: a phoneme /X/ is represented by graph *a* in environment *p* and graph *b* in environment *q*. For instance, /ɔ̃/ is written *on* everywhere except before the consonants /p/ and /b/ where it appears as *om*: *ton*, *sonde*, *conte* but *tombe*, *somptueux*, *combat*. The graphs are always convertible to sound unambiguously: both *on* and *om* before consonants are always read as /ɔ̃/; note recalcitrant items like *compter* and *bombon* which must be listed.

A graph or series of graphs *a*, *b*, etc. may represent two phonemes /X/ and /Y/. Both *eu* and *œu* can be read /ø/ as in *jeu* and *vœu* and /œ/ as in *jeune* and *œuf*. This seldom presents any difficulty since the two phonemes are, for all intents and purposes, positional variants of a single unit and never really contrast in connected discourse so that, simplifying somewhat, both graphs are to be read /ø/ in final position and before *-se* /z/ (*peu*, *vœu*, *nerveuse*) and /œ/ everywhere else (*jeune*, *Europe*, *bœuf*).

The spelling of /k/ and, to some extent, that of /g/ and /ʒ/ illustrates a much more complex case where some ambiguity arises in going from phoneme to letter and vice versa: a phoneme /X/ is represented by graph *a* in environment, *p*, by graph *b* in environment *q*, etc.; but in addition, the graph *b* stands for /X/ and also /Y/ in environment *q*; to complicate matters further, /X/ is also written *c* in environment *p*. The exact representation of /k/ can be predicted with 75 to 90 per cent accuracy with the aid of only four rules. /k/ is spelled:

- Rule 1. *c* before the vowels /a u y ɔ̃ o ɔ œ/ and the sequences /wě/ and /qi/, e.g., *cave*, *couve*, *cuve*, *conte*, *alcove*, *causer*, *chacun*, *coiffeur*, *cuir*.
- Rule 2. *c* in consonant clusters, e.g., *clan*, *crawate*, *acte*, *racle*, *sucré*.
- Rule 3. *que* in final position, e.g., *chaque*, *pique*, *choque*, *nuque*.
- Rule 4. *qu* before /i e ε œ ø ě/, e.g., *qui*, *quémander*, *quelle*, *quenouille*, *queue*, *quinze*.

These rules are reversible since the correct sound can be retrieved from all graphs in the stated environments: *coincer* is unambiguously /kwěse/, *cascade* is /kaskad/, *quelque* is /kelk/, etc. The rules may lead to some wrong spellings of /ka/ which is represented by *qua* in about 60 words but the graph *ca* is much more frequent (more than 2000 words); here there is no other recourse than to list the items in which the main rule does not apply; similarly final /k/ is represented by *c* in some masculine nouns, e.g., *sac*, *bloc*, *bouc*, *bec*, *donc*. All items with /kã/ must be listed individually since

about half of them are spelled with *c* (*camp, cantine, cancer*) and the other half with *qu* (*quand, cinquante, quantité*). The conversion of the graph *qua* is problematic since it may be /ka/ in *quartier* or /kw/ in *quatuor*; going in the other direction, /kwa/ is spelled *coi* (*coiffe, coi*) *quoi* in *quoi* and *quoique*, and *qua* in numerous items (*quadrangle*). The small number of basic rules and the same limitations and qualifications obtain mutatis mutandis for /g/ which is written:

1. *g* before /a u y o õ o ə wē ŋi/ e.g., *gargarisme, goutte, gustatif, gonfler, gosse, gauze, goinfre, guisarme*;
2. *g* in consonant clusters, e.g., *glace, Grégoire, gloire, jungle*;
3. *gue* in final position, e.g., *algue, vogue, figue*;
4. *gu* before /i e ε ē œ ø/, e.g., *guitare, guérir, guerre, sanguin, gueule, queux*.

The spelling of /ʒ/ is predicted by a smaller number of similar rules which appear in a different order. That consonant is written:

1. *g* before /i e ε ē ã/, e.g., *gitan, agir, gérant, gel, engin, gentil*;
2. *ge* in final position, e.g., *cage, visage, tige*;
3. *j* elsewhere, i.e., before /a u y õ o ə wē ŋi wa œ ø/, e.g., *jalouse, bijou, jupe, jaune, joli, juin, juillet, joie, jeune, jeu*.

The total predictability of these rules is reduced by two sets of problems: /ʒ/ before /ã/ is written *j* if the vowel is represented by *an* or *am* (*janséniste, jambe*) but in the great majority of cases where /ã/ is written *en* or *em* (*gendre, gingembre*) Rule 1 applies; *j* is also used before /e ε/ sporadically, e.g., *jésuite, jersey, jette*. More troublesome and extensive is the breaking of Rule 3 in derivatives of words where Rule 2 applies: *mange/mangeons, cage/cageot, village/villageois*.

Instances of a phoneme /X/ represented by several graphs in a single environment or by several graphs in overlapping environments cannot be effectively handled by phonological rules and appeal must be made to lists. Thus, in final position /ɛ̃/ may be written *in, ein, ain, aim, en (fin, peint, pain, faim, and Agen)* and /ã/ is written *en* and *an* in most positions (*sang, cent*). The most complicated instance of this type of phoneme-graph relation is illustrated by /s/ which is represented by *s, ss, ç, t* as follows:

	<i>Initial</i>	<i>In clusters</i>	<i>Before /j/</i>	<i>Intervocalic</i>	<i>Final</i>
<i>s</i>	sire, sa	slave, geste			
<i>ss</i>			passions	classer, polissons	fasse
<i>c</i>	cire		différencier	glacer	face
<i>ç</i>	ça			poliçons	
<i>t</i>			station		

There is also the rare graph *sc* which occurs in *scie*, *conscience*, etc. Note, however, that the conversion of these six graphs to /s/ is unambiguous in every instance because, while *s*, *c*, and *t* also represent /z k t/ respectively, there is complementarity of distribution, for example *s* stands for /z/ in intervocalic and final position (*lisons*, *mise*) and for /s/ in initial position and in clusters as illustrated in Table 1. This last consideration demonstrates again that a phonemic notation need not aim at perfect and bi-directional correspondence between phoneme and symbol provided that the conventions used result in a non-contradictory representation of sound features as well as an unambiguous conversion of symbols back into sound features.

Grammatical Rules

The spelling of some vowels and consonants can be specified with greater accuracy if some grammatical information is provided within the phonological rules sequence. Consider the spelling of /j/ which is represented by *i*, *il*, *ile*, *ille*, *ï*, and *y*. To enhance the student's chance of writing that phoneme with better than the $\frac{1}{6}$ accuracy that this kind of statement permits, the following program can be formulated. The phoneme /j/ is spelled:

- Rule 1. *i* in initial position (discarding marginal items like *yaourt*, *yole*) e.g., *iode*, *iambe*;
- Rule 2. *i* between consonant or consonant cluster and vowel *pieu*, *fluvial*, *passion*, *question* (but excluding rare items like *Lyon*, *naïade*);
- Rule 3. Final position:
 - a. In masculine nouns and adjectives, *il*, e.g., *seuil*, *travail*, *vieil*;
 - b. In feminine nouns, adjectives and verbs, *lle* if /i/ precedes and *ille* otherwise, e.g., *fille*, *pille* but *taille*, *feuille*, *travaille*, *souille*;
- Rule 4. *ill* between vowels, e.g., *bouillon*, *travillons*, *failli*;
- Rule 5. *y* between vowels in words which are variants (morphological and derivational) of form in /wa/ *oi* or /ɥi/ *ui*, e.g., *vois/voyons*, *fuis/fuyons*, *roi/royal*, *loi/loyal*.

Since neither native speakers nor students can be expected to be intimately acquainted with the derivational patterns of the language, with the exception of verbs, items covered by Rule 5 are best furnished by lists. This program is bi-directional except that the graph *ille* stands for both /j/ and /l/, e.g., *ville* /vil/ but *bille* /bij/, and the pronunciation of each item so written must be memorized individually. Items containing written and pronounced consonant + *r* or *l* (*ouvrier*, *prier*, *oublier*) are also not handled by the above rules; here *i* represents both /i/ and /j/ but spelling and

conversion to sound is unambiguous and predictable from the preceding consonant clusters.

The structure of French clearly requires that spelling be taught concurrently with grammar. Many of the so-called silent letters of the orthography are grammatical markers consisting of latent consonants seldom realized overtly which must be inferred by comparison with morphologically related forms or from the grammatical structure of the sentence. Consider the spelling of adjective forms. Feminine forms that end in a consonant can generally be written with the aid of phonological rules alone, e.g., /frwad/ → *froide*, /sēpl/ → *simple*, /uvert/ → *ouverte* and for those that end with a vowel only the simple rule that provides for the addition of *-e* need be added, e.g., /sale/ → *salée*. But accurate representation of masculine form that ends orally with a vowel may belong to the type *salée/salé* where both are identical with regard to pronunciation or to the type *mauvaise/mauvais* where the masculine and feminine forms differ in some environments (*elle est mauvaise* /møvez/ versus *il est mauvais* /møve/) but are similar in others (*une mauvaise habitude* /møvez/ but *un mauvais hôtel* /møvez/). In other words, in the latter type the masculine forms show a change: stable consonant → latent consonant, but whether the latent consonant is *T D S Z N*, etc. cannot be determined from the masculine form itself as can be seen from the following correspondences:

1. <i>z</i>	-se	<i>Z</i>	-s	grise	gris
2. <i>s</i>	-sse	<i>S</i>	-s	grosse	gros
3. <i>t</i>	-te	<i>T</i>	-t	petite	petit
4. <i>d</i>	-de	<i>D</i>	-d	grande	grand
5. <i>n</i>	-ne	<i>N</i>	-n	brune	brun
	-nne			bonne	bon

French syntax is characterized by an extensive system of agreement and concord which serves to mark grammatical relationships and dependencies. In spoken French agreement and concord are usually marked by the appropriate selection of bound forms that occur preceding verbs and nouns; the orthography, however, consistently provides for a redundant marking of agreement and concord relationships: compare for instance /lafil/, /lœfil/, /lefil/ but *la file*, *le fil*, *les files* or *les fils*; /laptit/, /leptit/ but *la petite*, *les petites*; /lœzɔlizardē/, /laɔzɔlivila/, /lezɔlizardē/, /lezɔlivila/ but *le joli jardin*, *la jolie villa*, *les jolis jardins*, *les jolies villas*. The orthographic signals for feminine and plural in the noun system and the various person-tense endings in the verb system obviously cannot be predicted by sound-letter correspondence rules but by the identification of grammatical signals expressed overtly in the spoken utterance or by contextual clues. Subse-

quently correct orthographic markers are added to the written representation of the spoken utterance by grammatical rules that operate in a discontinuous fashion as illustrated below:

<i>legarsō</i>	<i>le</i> = plural	les garçons
<i>ynvrɛfe</i>	<i>yn</i> = feminine	une vraie fée
<i>døptitpupe</i>	<i>ptit</i> (versus <i>pti</i>) = feminine	petite poupée
	<i>dø</i> = plural	deux petites poupées
<i>ʒfini</i>	<i>ʒ</i> = first singular	je finis
<i>pølfini</i>	<i>pøl</i> = third singular	(il) finit
<i>ilzūplwa</i>	<i>ilz</i> = third plural	ils emploient
<i>tyūplwa</i>	<i>ty</i> = second singular	tu emploies

This correspondence between oral and orthographic marking of syntactic relations argues against the establishment of separate audio-oral and reading-writing phases in introductory French courses and a long time-lag between audio-oral presentation of features and their representation in the orthography.

Syntactic distribution also helps to resolve other spelling problems where concord is not involved. Five of the verb forms of *-er* verbs, which constitute the productive class of French verbs, end with the vowel /e/: *donné, donnez, donner, donnai, donnerai*. Obviously phonological rules, no matter how sophisticated or detailed, would be of no avail but the four verb endings *-é, -ez, -er, ai* can be predicted and written correctly with complete success by inspection of the constructions in which they occur:

il a passé	but	il va passer
vous passez	but	vous allez passer or vous avez passé
je passai	but	j'ai passé or je vais passer
je passai	but	je passerai

The exceptions to the phonological and grammatical rules illustrated in this article are due to the differentiation of homophones at least for the "eye": as Frei states (*La Grammaire des fautes*, p. 75): "C'est dans le besoin de clarté qu'il faut chercher la véritable raison d'être d'une bonne partie des chinoiseries de l'orthographe." As a result of various historical developments French words have lost a considerable part of their substance and many forms which were differentiated in earlier stages of the language have merged. But since the word is the linguistic unit most available to the native speaker—in fact, the only linguistic unit insofar as he is concerned, witness the layman's exclusive concern with words in all his dealings with matters linguistic—he has insisted that different words, i.e., words with different meanings or grammatical function, be kept distinct in the

orthography. Although latent consonants are in the process of disappearing in conversational style, spelling doublets and triplets such as *toi/toit*, *conter/compter*, *mur/mûr*, *foi, foie, fois*: *pin, pain, peint* will resist all efforts at spelling reform.

In summary, written and spoken French do not manifest separate structures; the former is merely a coded representation of the latter and such discrepancies as occur between the two are best interpreted as the orthography's redundant signalling of grammatical features and relationships that also occur or obtain in the spoken utterance. When we say that speech is structured we refer to the fact that imbedded within the concatenation of sounds we hear are grammatical units organized in a tight hierarchy; evidently, as the representation of speech, writing involves more than converting sounds into letters, and efficient spelling and reading (in the narrow sense) programs in French must go beyond the simplistic lists that both traditional orthoepists and applied linguists have given us heretofore and must take into account both the structure of the language and the conventions of the orthography. For a language blessed for better or for worse with an extensive system of form alternation of the elision/liaison type (*sandhi variation*), no more elegant and efficient writing system could be devised than the French conventional orthography, *sans chinoiseries*, however.

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