



**PROPOSED TWENTY-SEVENTH LETTER OF ENGLISH ALPHABET \mathfrak{S} TO
REPLACE THE DIGRAPH 'SH.'**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper has interrogated the existence of the twenty-six letters in the English alphabet as currently being employed and has concluded that the twenty-six letters have been around for far too long without acceptable addition. The need for expansion has therefore arisen in the light of achieving space conservation when writing and printing hard copies of documents. The paper disagrees with the presentation of the ampersand '&' as the twenty-seventh letter of the English alphabet instead it has proposed \mathfrak{S} being the hybrid resulting from letters 's' and 'h' as the twenty-seventh letter. It concluded by recommending the evolution of appropriate letters for other consonant digraphs and trigraphs. This may help in phonological deepening.*

KEYWORDS: English Alphabet, Ampersand, Digraphs, Trigraphs, Graphemes, Phonological



INTRODUCTION

The first alphabet was believed to have been developed by the Semites in Egypt (1800-1900BC), after this came the Phoenicians who widened the use of those symbols. Sometime during the 8th century, the Greeks were known to have utilized the alphabet of the Phoenicians to evolve their own. The modification brought about by the Greeks led to the addition of vowels in accord with fluentfocus.com. This creation of a shorter alphabet than hieroglyphics by the Greeks was found to have covered all parts of their language. It was this invention which later got transferred to Latin.

The English alphabet was said to have come into being with the invasion of Anglo-Saxon England by the Romans. Since the Anglo-Saxons were known to have had a runic alphabet similar to the Latin alphabet, it became less difficult to combine for them. From that time onward more letters were added to give the present 26 letters of the English alphabet. A review of these 26 letters will show that they have been standing for too long yet there is no known law that says the number cannot be added to. Moreover, an addition of the 27th letter came in the form of ampersand '&.' But this ampersand presents more like a symbol for the only word 'and' rather than being a letter. Dissatisfaction with this addition led Oluwagbemi (2018: 54-55) to propose the 27th letter of the English alphabet as \mathcal{S} to replace 'sh' to form the stem of she or he. The drawback in that proposition is the fact that Oluwagbemi (2018) recommendation limited the usage of this hybrid to she or he. A further review of this proposed letter will reveal that it does not satisfy the criterion of varied letter utility. That is the use of a given letter to form two or more words. This paper is an attempt to widen the utilitarian value of this proposed letter by extending the concept of the letter \mathcal{S} to replace the digraph 'sh.' This way the letter \mathcal{S} will now replace 'sh' in every English word having the digraph.

Making a Case for the Letter \mathcal{S}

The account of the evolution of the 26 letters of the English alphabet (A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z) as given by Racoma (2018: 1-11) illustrated how each letter was formed, which is presented below:

1. Letter A - This was said to have been introduced in the 1800s but originally the shape was upside down and in ancient Semitic, it stood for 'ox.' It was later reshaped to assume its present shape.
2. Letter B - Being borrowed from the Egyptian hieroglyphics the letter was resting on its belly originally. The symbol then represented 'shelter' before it was made to assume its present-day look.
3. Letter C - This letter originated from the Phoenicians and it was made to look like a hunter's stick which the Greeks called 'gamma' but written facing left. The Italians turned it to face right which is the crescent shape of its present look.
4. Letter D - This also originated by the Phoenicians who gave it the name 'Dalet' which was made to look like a rough triangle that faced left. It was meant to represent the 'door.' However, the Greeks adopted it and named it 'delta' and the Romans perfected it to give it, its current look.



5. Letter E - Early in the Semitic tongue, this letter was pronounced as 'H' but around 700BC the Greeks re-shaped it to what it looks like today giving it the pronunciation of the 'ee' sound.
6. Letter F -The Phoenicians first supplied a symbol looking like 'Y' whose pronunciation sounded like 'waw.' The Greeks were known to have named it 'digamma' and made it to look like the present F but the Romans further worked on it and gave it the 'fff' sound of today.
7. Letter G – The present-day letter G evolved from 'zeta' by the Greeks which looked like 'I' whose pronunciation sounded 'zzz.' The Romans re-shaped it and gave it the 'g' sound on which further treatment resulted in its present look.
8. Letter H – The letter H actually began as a symbol for a fence in Semitic writing. Further treatment led to it assuming the present shape.
9. Letter I – This was known as 'yod' around 1000 BC which represented hand and arm. The Greeks referred to it as 'oita' and made it vertical and in the course of its evolution, it was turned straight to assume its current shape.
10. Letter J – The letter 'I' was also employed to stand for the 'j' sound in ancient times – which assumed its shape in the 15th Century as a result of the impact of the Spanish language.
11. Letter K – This came from Egyptian hieroglyphics. In Semitic tongue, it was called 'kaph' meaning "palm of the hand." But faced the left then. By 800 BC, the Greeks adopted it as 'kappa' by turning it into its present form.
12. Letter L – During ancient Semitic language, the letter 'L' was upside down – making it look like a hook – and was known as 'El' referring to God. The Phoenicians reversed the shape but it faced the left and called it 'lamed' – meaning cattle production. The Greeks renamed it 'lambda' after turning it to face right while the Romans perfected its final look.
13. Letter M – This started with the Egyptians as wavy vertical lines having five tips to represent water and in the Semitic language, the five peaks were reduced to three. The Phoenicians were credited with removing one more wave. Around 800 BC, the peaks were turned into zig-zags and flipped to form the letter M.
14. Letter N – This letter was made to look like a small ripple standing on a larger one to represent a snake. The Semites gave it 'n' sound to symbolize 'fish' which the Greeks later named as 'nu.'
15. Letter O – This letter started with the Egyptians making it to symbolize the 'eye' while the Semites called it 'ayin'. The further treatment given the hieroglyphics left it only with the pupil's outline that it presents today.
16. Letter P – This used to assume the look of an inverted 'v' and pronounced 'pe' meaning 'mouth' in Semitic tongue. The Phoenicians changed the tip into a diagonal hook which the Romans flipped to the right and close the loop to look like the present-day P.



17. Letter Q – The letter Q was originally given the sound ‘qoph’ to mean a ball of wool. It was presented as a circle but traversed by a vertical line. The Romans reduced the line around 520 BC to give it the current look.
18. Letter R – This was made to look like the human face looking left originally by the Semites and was pronounced ‘resh’ meaning head. The Romans however later turned it to the right with subtending foot to take the present shape.
19. Letter S – The letter S appeared originally like a horizontal wavy W that represented the bow of an archer. The angularity of the shape came from the Phoenicians who named it ‘shin’ which translated to ‘tooth’. The Greeks altered it and named it ‘sigma’ while the Romans flipped it to the current position.
20. Letter T – The Semites were using the lower case of the letter ‘T’ as we know it today. The Phoenicians called it ‘taw’ (mark) which sounded like ‘tee’ when pronounced. The Greeks called it ‘tau’ by adding a cross at the top to differentiate it from the letter ‘X’.
21. Letter U – The letter ‘U’ originally looked like ‘y’ and was called ‘waw’ to mean ‘peg’. The Greeks manipulated it and called it ‘upsilon’.
22. Letter V – The Romans were known to use V and U interchangeably and the separation started sometime around the 1400s.
23. Letter W – This letter began with the Scribes and Charlemagne during the middle ages who used to write double ‘u’ side by side but separated by a space. It was in 1700 that the letter started appearing in print with its unique form of ‘W’.
24. Letter X – The letter ‘ksi’ by the Greeks sounded more like x the lower case of this was found in the medieval manuscript. In the late 15th Century, Italian printers were known to be using the lower case of ‘x’.
25. Letter Y – The letter that started as ‘upsilon’ with Romans adding it around 100 AD.
26. Letter Z – The Phoenicians have a letter that they called ‘zayin’ to mean an ‘axe’. This looked ‘I’ but having serifs at both ends. Around 800 BC, the Greeks adopted it as ‘zeta’ giving it the sound ‘dz’ but its use was rested for a long time. Not until the arrival of the Norman-French whose words required the sound of the letter Z was it restored in the present form.

Is the Ampersand ‘&’ the 27th Letter of the English Alphabet?

The ampersand ‘&’ that does occur at the end of the Latin alphabet is sometimes referred to as the 27th letter of the English alphabet. However, this ampersand is known to stand for the word ‘and’. It is hardly used in the formation of any other English word. It was this limitation that made Oluwagbemi (2018: 54-55) disagree with the notion that the ampersand could qualify as the 27th letter of the English alphabet – which led him to form the hybrid letter ‘ \mathcal{S} ’ derived from letters ‘s’ and ‘h’. Further analysis of this proposition has revealed that like the ampersand, the letter ‘ \mathcal{S} ’ as projected is limited in use to ‘she or he.’ This paper is a further extension of the utilitarian value of ‘ \mathcal{S} ’ making it more versatile in word-formation.



The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) which was inaugurated in Paris in 1886 consists of about 107 sound symbols among others. Instead of symbols as proposed by IPA to represent graphemes, this paper advocates that letters could be developed appropriately to replace diagraphs and even trigraphs. If this idea is shared by all, less space will be required in writing.

For instance, an attempt has been made here in replacing ‘sh’ with ‘𐄂’ in the following English words and presented as below:

Shack, shade, shadow, shady, shake, shall, sham, shame, shampoo, shamrock, shape, shark, sharklet, sharp, sharpel, sharpener, sharples, sharply, shave, shell, shelter, shepherd, she, sheep, shelf, shine, shiny, ship, shipper, shippo, shirt, shock, shocker, shoddy, shoot, shooter, shop, shopify, shore, short, shot, should, shoulder, shout, shovel, show, shower, shuck, shudder, shunt, shunter, shut, shutter, shutterstock etc.

Replacing ‘sh’ with ‘𐄂’ in the above words among other words that can be formed will appear as below:

𐄂ack, 𐄂ade, 𐄂adow, 𐄂ady, 𐄂ake, 𐄂all, 𐄂am, 𐄂ame, 𐄂ampoo, 𐄂amrock, 𐄂ape, 𐄂are, 𐄂ark, 𐄂arklet, 𐄂arp, 𐄂arpel, 𐄂arpener, 𐄂arples, 𐄂arply, 𐄂ave, 𐄂ell, 𐄂elter, 𐄂epherd, 𐄂e, 𐄂eep, 𐄂elf, 𐄂ine, 𐄂iny, 𐄂ip, 𐄂ipper, 𐄂ippo, 𐄂irt, 𐄂ock, 𐄂ocker, 𐄂oddy, 𐄂oot, 𐄂ooter, 𐄂op, 𐄂opify, 𐄂ore, 𐄂ort, 𐄂ot, 𐄂ould, 𐄂oulder, 𐄂out, 𐄂ovel, 𐄂ow, 𐄂ower, 𐄂uck, 𐄂udder, 𐄂unt, 𐄂unter, 𐄂ut, 𐄂utter, 𐄂utterstock. In the above 54 words, 54-letter spaces have been saved from the earlier version. If the appropriate letters are formed for other consonant blend diagraphs such as bl, br, ch, ck, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gh, gl, gr, ng, ph, pl, pr, qu, sc, sk, sl, sm, sn, st, sw, th, tr, tw, wh, wr, and trigraphs such as nth, sch, scr, spl, spr, squ, str, thr, etc. appreciable savings in space for writing and printing could be made. The concern of this article is paper conservation in producing hard copies of documents. Though the evolution of these proposed additional letters will lead to more letters in the English alphabet, this will result in less space while writing and printing documents using words formed using the new letters that may be proposed and adopted. Perhaps, this can lead to phonological deepening. Whichever way this proposition is seen, the time has come to take a critical look at the present twenty-six letter English alphabet to increase the number since there is no law forbidding this. It is further suggested that single letters could be crafted to replace the same letters occurring as double in English words so that ‘committee’ would not be more than six letters in its spelling in such a way that letters mm, tt and ee would each be replaced by single letters.

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