

And so to zed

by Dr Ken George

Although it does not occur in Welsh (except dialectally, and in recent loan-words), the voiced sibilant [z] does occur in Breton (often written <z>) and in traditional Cornish (as shown by the use of <z> in texts from 1542 onwards). Yet most orthographies of revived Cornish do not use <z>, because (1) <z> was not used in Middle Cornish; (2) it has not been clear which groups of words may have contained [z]. Examination of six groups of words with Middle Cornish <s> indicates which were pronounced with [s] and which with [z]; minimal pairs show that the difference was phonemic. Modern orthographies would be improved by recognizing this difference; the simplest way to do it would be to use <s> for [s] and <z> for [z], though this would constitute a substantial change.