

## Re: World's worst software. What's decent?

**Source:** <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.electronics.cad/2004-10/0192.html>

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**Date:** 10/22/04

Date: 22 Oct 2004 15:12:53 -0700

Chuck Harris <[cf-NO-SPAM-harris@erols.com](mailto:cf-NO-SPAM-harris@erols.com)> wrote in message  
news:<[esidnTvqu-fXi-TcRVn-1A@rcn.net](mailto:esidnTvqu-fXi-TcRVn-1A@rcn.net)>...

> *Bill Sloman wrote:*

>

>> *Teenagers are are special case – they use aberrant language with the fixed >> intention of not being understood by the*

>> *previous generation. See also "thieve's cant".*

>

> *Yes, their intention is to obscure, but look at how the teens quickly*

> *change the language that THEY understand. That is evolution at work.*

It isn't evolution, because teenagers go back to using standard language when they grow up.

>> *The fact that the U.S. is geographically bigger than England doesn't*

>> *signify in this context – England has more*

>> *different dialects than the US, and a greater variation between the*

>> *dialects, while Australia, which is about the*

>> *same size as the continental U.S.A. has hardly any perceptible regional*

>> *dialect variation.*

>

> *It sounds like you are agreeing with me:*

>

> *USA large -> few dialects*

> *Australia large -> few dialects*

> *England small -> many dialects*

No, I'm not. Australian English has essentially no geographical dialects, and presents a very different picture from the U.S.

As Paul Burke points out, the difference has to do with history. In the UK the regional dialects reflect the languages that used to be spoken in the various regions before English was imposed, and have persisted for about a thousand years, because the population doesn't move around much.

The U.S. dialects haven't evolved apart from an intially uniform version of English, but rather reflect the dialects of the different

groups who migrated into the different regions of the U.S.

Australia's lack of geographical variation in dialect reflects a very mobile population – something like 30% of the population moves interstate at least once in their lives.

> *Regions with a large number of dialects are a breeding pot for language change.*

As Paul Burke points out, dialects are pretty stable and the "isogloss" contour lines are equally stable.

> *Regions with few dialects are an indication of a stable language.*

Can you produce a few examples to test this claim? It doesn't seem to apply to Dutch or German, any more than it does to English.

> >

> >> *That being so, it can be argued that what you speak in England is the aberration.*

> >

> >

> > *Not really. English is spoken in a lot of places beside England and the*

> > *U.S.A. and no single dialect has any*

> > *particular claim to pre-eminence.*

>

> *England certainly has pre-eminence to the English language, they are where*

> *the language developed. Do they \*control\* the language? No, in spite of*

> *their former role in the spread of the language.*

>

> *The only country that I am aware of that claims eminence over a language*

> *is France. But then, they are the center of the known universe ;–)*

They certainly act as if this is the case.

> > *The aberrant spelling to which the OP was objecting, is a slightly*

> > *different case. Noah Webster "reformed" American*

> > *spelling in 1828*

> >

> > <http://www.ctstateu.edu/noahweb/biography.html>

> >

> > *while the rest of us have stumbled on using Dr.Johnson's spellings. Since > > English spelling embodies some six*

> > *different schemes for coding the phonetics of English into the Latin*

> > *alphabet, there is probably room for a lot more*

> > *reform than Noah Webster's idiosyncratic variations.*

>

> *Noah Webster, and Benjamin Franklin wanted to make English spelling*

> *phonetic. Their results failed and never gained popularity. I have*

> *seen copies of their "reformed" dictionary, and I cannot recall even*

> *one of their phonetic spellings that made it into the modern dictionary.*

> *Well, that isn't exactly true, if you look at the pronunciation guides, they*

> *are really close to what Webster and Franklin proposed.*

Color, and sulfur have made it into modern U.S. dictionaries – I spell them colour and sulphur.

> *In today's US English, 60% of the words in the dictionary  
> are pronounced differently from their phonetic pronunciation.*

This assumes a single, specific grapheme to phoneme rule. There are in fact six different sets of rules that show up in modern English spelling.

> *Ample evidence that Webster and Franklin's idea failed.*

> *Where Webster and Franklin did succeed, was in making spelling more  
> uniform. They took a language where spelling varied greatly depending  
> on where you were educated, and provide a reference of American  
> spellings. These spellings were not the simple phonetic spellings that  
> they wanted to have adopted, but rather, the spellings that were commonly  
> used by Webster, Franklin, Jefferson and others. It is interesting to  
> notice that the spellings used by Jefferson in his writings exactly match  
> those in the current American English dictionaries.*

Have a look at Elizabethan spelling sometime – the modern habit of spelling the same word the same way every time you write it is a comparatively recent innovation. I'd be very surprised if Jefferson spelled everything exactly the same way as current American dictionaries do – can you post a URL for a web-site that supports this claim?

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Bill Sloman, Nijmegen