

Spelling Forms in Competition

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The Case of *-ise* vs. *-ize*¹

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1. Introduction

One of the problems of English spelling is the dual representation of the so-called ‘eyes’-words, rendered in discourse as *-ise* and *-ize*, both with high-frequency verbs such as *modernise/modernize* and rare coinages, as in *burglarise/burglarize*, etc. *Eyes*-words have historically evolved from two different language systems as two different forms with the same meaning, which have eventually come to coincide in their use in English with competing orthographic forms.² The present paper first assesses the origin and development of the competition of these forms in the history of English from their introduction into English to their current configuration in British and American English; and then analyses their distribution in 13 varieties of English worldwide from the perspective of diatopic and text type variation. The study concludes, on the one hand, that the adoption of *-ize* in American English was an early 19th-century phenomenon while *-ise* spread in British English in the late 20th century; and, on the other, that the dissemination of *-ize* is constantly on the rise in many varieties, and the growing Americanisation of English, among others, is taken to be the most decisive element factor.

2. Background

While the *-ize* form is a Greek verbal ending transmitted through Latin and Old French and initially associated with Greek verbs (i.e. *baptize*), the *-ise* form is etymologically connected with French verbs ending in *-iser* (i.e. *realise*).³ As a result of the increase of Latinate and Greek vocabulary in English in the Renaissance and of the familiarity

of literate men with Latin, ‘English spelling became as affected by the etymologising process as French had earlier been’ (Scragg, 1974: 53–54). Many grammars and usage guides have since then adopted a purist approach proposing to spell words with a Greek etymon with *-ize* and Latin ones with *-ise*.⁴ This etymological rationale is, in many cases, opaque to the modern reader and there has been some pressure, at least in British English, to standardise the <s> spelling on the basis of the French form (Carney, 1994: 433), while other sources, such as the *OED*, *The Times* or *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* opted to standardise the <z> spelling on the grounds of its pronunciation /z/ (Pink, 1932: 88).⁵

The origin of this orthographic variation dates back to the latter part of Middle English. Even though the competition was initially solved in



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favour of the Greek form *-ize*, this practice was not systematic because of i) the increasing variation of *s/z* in Old French and Middle English; ii) the uniform spelling of some verbs (*comprise*, *surprise*, etc.); and iii) the French decision to deplore the *z*-spelling in favour of the standardisation of the *-ise* form in these contexts (Upward & Davidson, 2011: 171).

It was in the 16th century when these forms began to proliferate regardless of their origin, whether Greek or Latin/French. Early Modern English writers could spuriously use either form without considering the origin of the word itself, as in *metamorphize/metamorphise* or *exercise/exercize*. Interestingly enough, this orthographic fluctuation also spread, albeit sporadically, to other native words which had never been written with the *-ize* spelling, as in *arise/arize*.

The dilemma, however, was not resolved with the arrival of prescriptivism, which in many cases proposed to leave it to the user's choice. Even though 18th-century prescriptive grammarians almost systematically ignored the phenomenon, the general tendency was to avoid any reference to the existence of the *<z>* spelling. In his *Elements of the Grammar*, Coote deliberately ignored any reference to Greek-etymon verbs in the following terms:

the orthography of a great number of words is so unsettled, that they are written indifferently in two ways. [. . .] This difference is the effect of their passing to us from the Latin through the medium of the French; in consequence of which double derivation, they are differently written, according to the temporary prevalence of one or the other language in the writer's mind' (1788: 35; also Elphinston, 1765: 381).⁶

It was in the 19th century when grammarians expressed their concern for the unresolved representation of 'eyes'. In Alford's *The Queen's English* (1864), for instance, he stated that 'it does not seem easy to come to a decision' in view of the 'present state of our English usage', recognizing that the question was still open (Alford, 1864: 36). 20th-century usage guides brought some sort of fresh air to the topic in the attempt to disregard the etymological distinction assuming the speakers were not necessarily aware of the origin of particular words. Pink proposed that 'in the absence of general agreement on the matter, the reader may please himself' (1932: 88), noting that the ordinary users with limited knowledge on etymology are cutting 'the Gordian knot by spelling all such words with *-ise*, and English printers very commonly adopt the same practice' (1932: 88; Vallins, 1951: 196–197; 1955: 120).⁷

Today, the choice between *-ise* and *-ize* is generally considered to depend on geographical preferences, the latter ascribed to American English (henceforth AmE) while British English (henceforth BrE) allows either spelling (Carney, 1997: 65; Peck & Coyle, 1999: 48; Upward & Davidson, 2011: 171). This is a simplistic description of the issue in view of the number of verbs which can adopt either spelling. There is, however, a growing tendency today for the use of *-ize*, in academic prose in particular, both with high frequency and with rare coinages (Biber et al., 1999: 402; Todd & Hancock, 1986: 293).⁸

Variation increases when it comes to the different varieties of English worldwide. Among the inner circle varieties, 'both American and Canadian publishers restrict themselves to *-ize* while Australian and New Zealand publishers tend to use *-ise* more consistently than their British counterparts, with *<z>* spellings usually being a sign of learned or scientific writing in those varieties' (Bauer, 2002: 62; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 1715). Notwithstanding this, the variation is not merely a matter of American versus non-American usage; informal written International English, for instance, is characterised by a mixture of British (Commonwealth) and American spellings, 'with the latter presumably dominating' (Bauer, 1994: 134; Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 187).

Existing accounts are mostly descriptions of the general tendencies across varieties based on assumptions derived from the dominant publishing policy in a particular area, which cannot be taken as the general practice of a community of speakers. The present paper therefore delves into the origin, development and distribution of these competing forms in English. The first part approaches the phenomenon historically, describing the quantitative dimension of the forms from the year 1500, when their actual competition arose. The second provides a distribution of the varying forms in some present-day varieties of English worldwide, both inner and outer circle varieties. The study follows the line initiated by other recent works examining the spelling of relevant English words, such as Achiri-Taboh's account of the dual representation of 'shun'-words and the choice to spell them as *-tion* or *-sion* (2018: 36–42) along with the subsequent discussion on their provenance and historical development in English (Achiri-Taboh, 2020; Bulley, 2020).

The study relies on different corpora in view of the diachronic and synchronic dimension of the analysis. The historical analysis covers a time-span of approximately 500 years (the period 1500–1993) and, for convenience, is based on the

evidence found in the *Early English Books Online Corpus (EEBOC)*, the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET)*, the *Corpus of Historical American English (COHAE)* and the *British National Corpus (BNC)*, which contain sizeable textual evidence from Early Modern to present-day English.⁹ The synchronic analysis of the varieties of English, on the other hand, is based on the *Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)*.¹⁰

A holistic treatment of the phenomenon is not feasible in view of the different etymological provenance of the words. For convenience, an etymological perspective has been adopted considering the evidence provided by the most frequent words of French/Latin and Greek origin with dual forms. Mark Davies' tagged versions of *EEBOC*, *COHAE*, *BNC* and *GloWbE* have been designed using the CLAWS7 POS-tagger, therefore facilitating introspection not only by lemma but also by part-of-speech.¹¹ The instances were automatically retrieved by searching for the verbal uses of *-ise* and *-ize* with the notation **ise*_v** and **ize*_v**, so that both the present and the past tense forms could be automatically generated, third person inflection included, irrespective of any orthographic variation in the rendering of the word (such as *advertise*, *aduertise*, *advertised*, *advertises*). Additional searches were needed, however, for the *-ing* forms (*-ising** and **-izing**, respectively). CLMET is unfortunately offered as a plain text version, a fact which complicated the automatic generation of the instances. Irrespective of the corpus, the results required manual disambiguation to eliminate the instances beyond the scope of the present research.

3. Variation in the spelling of *-eyes* in the history of English

The diachronic study is based on the occurrences provided by the topmost frequent French/Latin

and Greek words allowing for the forms *-ise* and *-ize*. The words of French/Latin provenance include *advertise*, *authorize*, *baptize*, *circumcise*, *criticise*, *exercise* and *recognize* and the Greek ones include *anathematize*, *anatomize*, *epitomize*, *metamorphize*, *phlebotomize*, *philosophize*, *synchronize*.¹² As shown, *-ise* outnumbers *-ize* in Early Modern English, with 64.6 and 0.5 occurrences, respectively (normalised to 100,000 words). In themselves, these figures cannot be taken as a typical case of spelling forms in competition, at least at that early stage of development, but two etymologically distinct forms with apparently different uses. The use of *-ise* and *-ize* in the period 1500–1700 depends on the etymology, *-ise* systematically preferred with Latinate and *-ize* more strongly associated with Greek words, as shown in Figure 1. The rise of *-ise* with Latinate words in the period 1500s–1540s is surely corpus-biased as these decades display a smaller number of words than the other decades, and this was precisely the period when some French borrowings were still incipient in English. After the 1540s, however, *-ise* is found to have a balanced distribution over the period, with a slight decrease towards the second half of the 17th century. The *-ize* form is negligible with less than one occurrence every 100,000 words throughout the whole period. With Greek words, on the other hand, *-ize* became the preferred form immediately after the borrowing of these terms into English in the second half of the 16th century, rising from 0.26 to 0.51 occurrences in the 1600s and 1690s.¹³ Interestingly enough, *-ise* becomes sporadic throughout the whole period.

The period 1700–1900 is characterised by the actual competition of these variant forms until the eventual adoption of *-ise* in BrE and *-ize* in AmE. Figure 2 presents their distribution with both types of words in CLMET in view of the three 70-year sub-periods of the corpus (1710–1780,

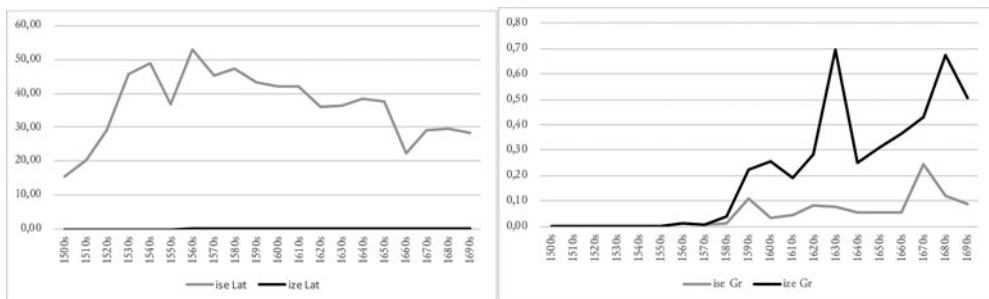


Figure 1. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Latinate and Greek words (n.f.)

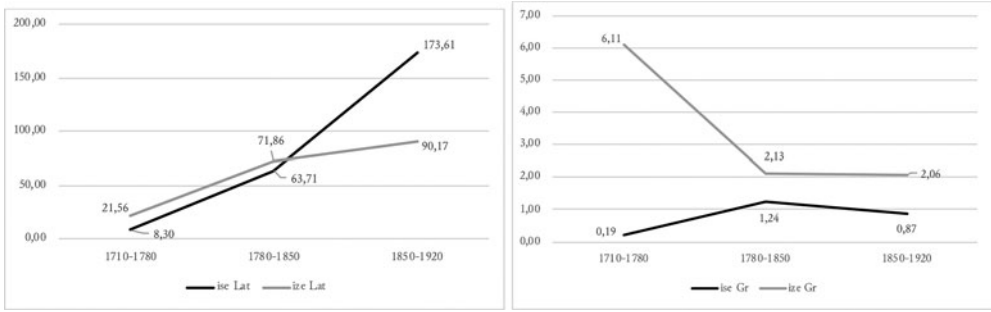


Figure 2. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Latinate and Greek words in CLMET (n.f.)

1780–1850 and 1850–1920). These forms were in an on-going process of competition until the second half of the 19th century when *-ise* definitely outnumbered *-ize* with Latinate verbs, to such an extent that the former almost doubled the occurrence of *-ize* in the period 1850–1920, after *-ize* had been found to be slightly more frequent than *-ise* in the first two periods.

In combination with Greek words, the period 1710–1780 is a follow-up of the Early Modern English practice with an outstanding use of *-ize* (with 6.11 and 0.19 occurrences, respectively). The period 1780–1850 shows a significant decline of *-ize* (with 2.13 and 1.24 occurrences, respectively). Even though *-ize* slightly outnumbers *-ise*, they present a parallel distribution in the period 1850–1920 and, unlike words of Latinate origin, there is no clear preference for either of them until the first quarter of the 20th century.

The period 1960–1993, in turn, confirms the definite adoption of *-ise* in BrE, irrespective of the provenance of the word. As shown in Figure 3, in the first sub-period (1960–1974) *-ize* triples the occurrence of *-ise* (357.8 and 116.3 occurrences, respectively). This is an unexpected occurrence considering the tendency observed in the last period of CLMET where *-ise* already outnumbered

-ize at the beginning of the 20th century. The drastic rise of *-ize* in the first half of the 20th century is surely associated with the impetus received at that time from reputed sources such as the *OED*, *The Times* or *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which opted to standardise the <z> spelling on the grounds of its pronunciation /z/. Notwithstanding this, *-ise* not only resisted in the period 1960–1974, but also managed to rise again in the period 1975–1984, when it outnumbered *-ize* with Latinate words (with 274.5 and 185.5 occurrences, respectively). This preference remained in the last sub-period of the corpus where both forms occur with a rate of 63.8% and 36.2% towards the end of the century. Greek ones, on the other hand, confirm the progressive standardisation of *-ise* in BrE. The *-ize* form is still preferred over *-ise* in the first sub-periods of the corpus and the latter proliferated in the last sub-period along with the concomitant decline of *-ize*.

Unlike BrE where the competition stretched until the last quarter of the 20th century, these orthographic variants never competed with each other in AmE. As shown in Figure 4, *-ize* is already the preferred form in AmE since the beginning of the 19th century and, more importantly, it is found to be on the rise throughout that same

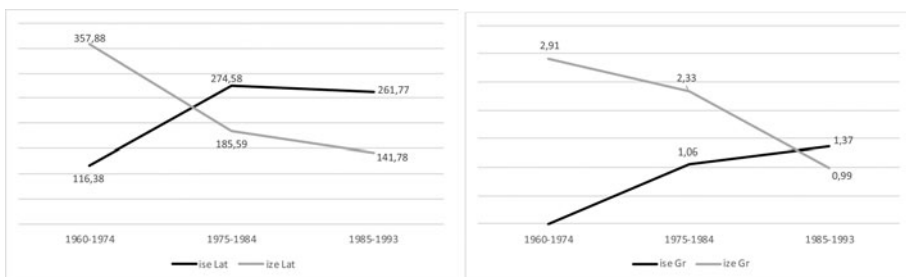


Figure 3. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Latinate and Greek words in BNC (n.f.)

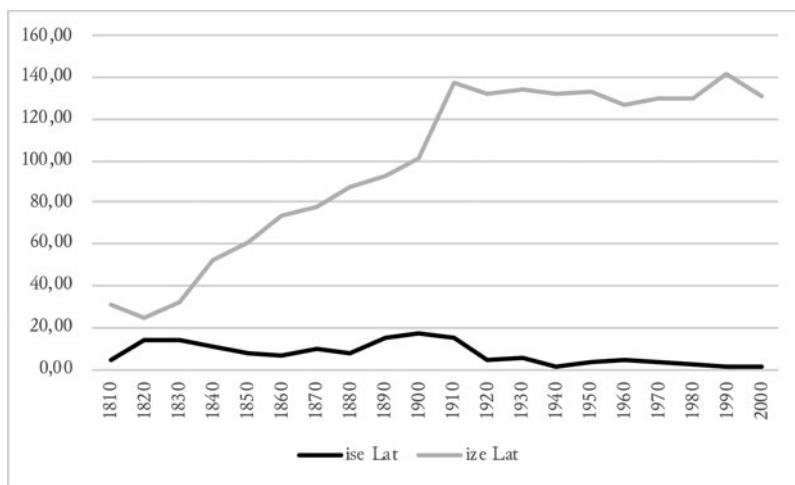


Figure 4. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Latinate words in COHAE (n.f.)

century until reaching its climax at the beginning of the following century, coinciding with the progressive demise of *-ise* which becomes sporadic since then. The standardisation of *-ize* in AmE took place regardless of the Latinate or Greek origin of the word.

4. Variation in the spelling of *-eyes* across varieties of English

This section analyses the distribution of these spelling forms in different varieties of English worldwide. The study first discusses the alternation in the inner circle varieties to proceed with the outer circle, both in Asian Englishes and African Englishes. Jamaican English (JmE) is

also offered as an example of a transatlantic variety of English.

The analysis of spelling variation from a diatopic perspective must necessarily begin with the study of the item in the inner circle to evaluate its diffusion in the other less influential varieties. Figure 5 collapses the distribution of *-ise* and *-ize* with words of Latinate provenance. In the inner circle, as expected, two major tendencies stand out. The *-ize* form, on the one hand, systematically predominates in AmE and CanE, while *-ise* is sporadic. The preference for *-ize* in CanE is logically the result of the direct contact with the American language and culture. CanE is described as a blend of British and American features where pronunciation is American and spelling of British influence

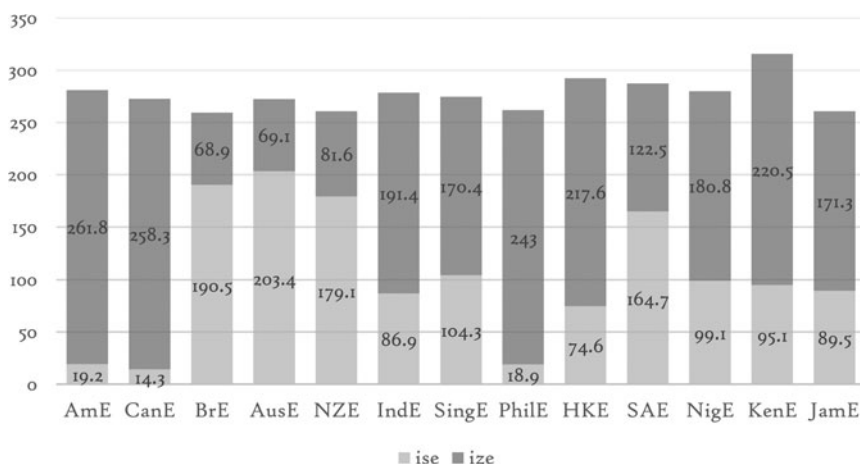


Figure 5. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Latinate words (n.f.)

(Schneider, 2006: 66), albeit the dilemma in this case is clearly resolved in favour of the American spelling.¹⁴ The *-ise* form, on the other hand, is preferred in BrE, AusE and NZE, although *-ize* finds considerable room in these varieties. The diffusion of *-ize* in BrE is explained as a result of the decision of some reputed sources to adopt this spelling (the *OED*, *The Times*, among others). AusE and NZE, the former in particular, have consolidated as distinctive varieties of English with their own norms, mostly relying on BrE as a result of a national hostility to the American usage (Burridge, 2010: 148), a fact which may have contributed to the diffusion of the BrE spelling. There is, however, a growing process of Americanisation driven by the younger speakers of the language (Peters, 2001; Taylor, 1989), which is now spreading the use of *-ize* in these varieties.

In view of these tendencies, the moot point is to discern whether the outer circle varieties have adopted the American- or the British-based model for the rendering of *eyes*-words. In the Asian varieties, the dilemma is clearly resolved for the adoption of the American rendering, although the phenomenon evolves at a different speed in each case. PhilE, as an American-based variety, is clearly pioneering the diffusion of *-ize*, followed by HKE in spite of the relatively recent presence of the British in Hong Kong, who returned to China in 1997. Finally, IndE and SingE present a higher distribution of *-ise*. IndE is elsewhere referred to as a conservative variety of English, often consistent to the BrE practice and impervious to many morpho-syntactic innovations (Calle-Martín & Romero-Barranco, 2014: 136; Seoane-Posse & Suárez-Gómez, 2013: 12). India was under the rule of the British Empire from 1765 until independence in 1947, a nearly 200-year period which resulted in its status as an associate official language in the country together with Hindi (Gargesh, 2006: 94). In contrast with the other Asian varieties, ‘the syntax of Indian English, as opposed to phonology and lexis, is said to conform most to standard British English’ (Sajjala, 2009: 39), a fact which may also explain the high distribution of *-ise*. SingE stands out as a variety with a certain proneness to morpho-syntactic innovations (Seoane-Posse, 2017: 118), although with some spelling ties to the BrE standard associated with the government attention to language issues, which have encouraged teachers ‘to promote standard English in the classroom and ensure that their pupils develop the ability to communicate reasonably proficiently in this more formal variety’ (Deterding, 2007: 90). The promotion

of the standard here has surely had greater impact on spelling than in the other levels of language.

In the African varieties, two tendencies are observed. SAE, on the one hand, is more prone to retain the BrE spelling (57.3%), although *-ize* closely follows (47.7%). The BrE imprint here is surely the outcome of the policy of Anglicisation by the British when they retook control of the territory from Dutch hands in 1806 lasting until 1910 when the Union of South Africa was formed giving English and Dutch the status of co-official languages (Kamwangamalu, 2006: 159–160). As in the case of IndE, this 100-year period of Anglicisation has undoubtedly left a stronger imprint of the British standard than in the other African varieties. NigE and KenE, on the other hand, are more prone to the adoption of *-ize*, KenE in particular. Unlike South Africa, the European languages arrived relatively late both in West and East Africa as a consequence of the colonialist expansion, and today the English language is used there almost exclusively in a socio-educational context. English in East Africa is mostly based on the characteristic features of New Englishes, not directly transmitted through native-speaker settlers and, consequently, ‘the theoretical BrE norm in grammar is still upheld in books but rarely used or experienced in use in present-day East Africa’ (Schmied, 2006: 191). This casts light on a freer attitude towards the British standard in these varieties, the incidence of *-ize* surely interpreted as the effect of the growing interest in American culture.

The arrival of English in Jamaica was the result of the British colonialist expansion throughout the West Caribbean in the 17th century. Consequently, this variety of English is ‘more British-oriented, at least in [its] phonology, though in the last century American and Canadian influence can be expected and documented’ (Aceto, 2006: 211). The relevance of *-ise* is negligible in JamE, representing approximately one third of the instances. The *-ize* form is favoured here in spite of the long-standing influence of BrE, surely as a result of the American-Canadian influence throughout the last century.

The incidence of *-ize* in these varieties is not exclusively explained in terms of their colonial history and current legislation. More decisive is the contribution of American imperialism and growth of pop-culture after World War II, raising ‘America to the height of political, economic, commercial, technological strength which saw the transformation of English from being a reserve of the British Isles and their queen, to a code of

international linguistic transaction' (Anchimbe, 2006: 3; Graddol, 1997: 9). In itself, this Americanisation of the English language 'presupposes a greater or less submergence of regional and national varieties and cultures into a far greater and more powerful American-determined variety' (Anchimbe, 2006: 9). This idea of submergence is what comes to light with the dissemination of *-ize* as a form on the rise even in the non-American-determined varieties.

Figure 6 presents the occurrence of *-ise* and *-ize* with words of Greek provenance in the 13 varieties analysed, where the figures have also been normalised for comparison. The etymological rationale is rejected in these varieties as they practically follow the tendencies found with Latinate words. In the inner circle, both AmE and CanE again show a natural predisposition to *-ize* while BrE, AusE and NZE are prone to the use of *-ise*. Still, *-ize* is not a residual form in the latter varieties insofar as it represents one fourth of the total of instances in BrE and AusE (5.1 and 4.9 occurrences, respectively) and one third in NZE (5.1 occurrences).

The Asian varieties present a similar state of affairs with a greater preference for *-ize*. As an American-based variety, PhilE again shows the highest distribution of this form (91.2%), followed by HKE (76.2%), IndE (65.5%) and SingE (62.3%). In the African varieties, SAE stands out as the only variety consistently following the British form with *-ise* while both NigE and KenE are more prone to the adoption of *-ize*. Finally, JamE also adopts the spelling *-ize* with words of Greek origin.

Figure 7 presents the frequency of *-ise* and *-ize* across the varieties and text types. With the necessary caveats, web pages are taken to represent more formal writing for general purposes, in most cases for commercial purposes, requiring a more elaborated and complex type of prose. Blogs, in turn, display a less formal instantaneous writing, often consisting of individual or group discussions on a particular topic, which therefore implies a less elaborated and simpler type of prose. The results show a slightly greater frequency of *-ize* in blogs than in web pages, at least in non-American-based varieties such as BrE, AusE and NZE. In the Asian varieties, this difference can be taken as an indication of the productivity and growing level of diffusion of this form. IndE, on the one hand, presents a higher incidence of *-ize* in the less formal type of writing, which confirms that it is well advanced in the process of adoption of the American form. SingE, on the other hand, exhibits a balanced distribution of *-ize* in both text types, showing a more constrained diffusion. In the light of this, the *-ize* form is now spreading more widely in IndE HKE than in SingE.

The African varieties show a similar state of affairs. While NigE and KenE present a more widespread use of *-ize* in blog material, SAE is again faithful to the BrE spelling in both types of texts. In itself, SAE stands out as the most conservative variety in the adoption of *-ize* and there are not clear symptoms that the American spelling will eventually displace the British form, at least in view of the positive attitude towards the latter.

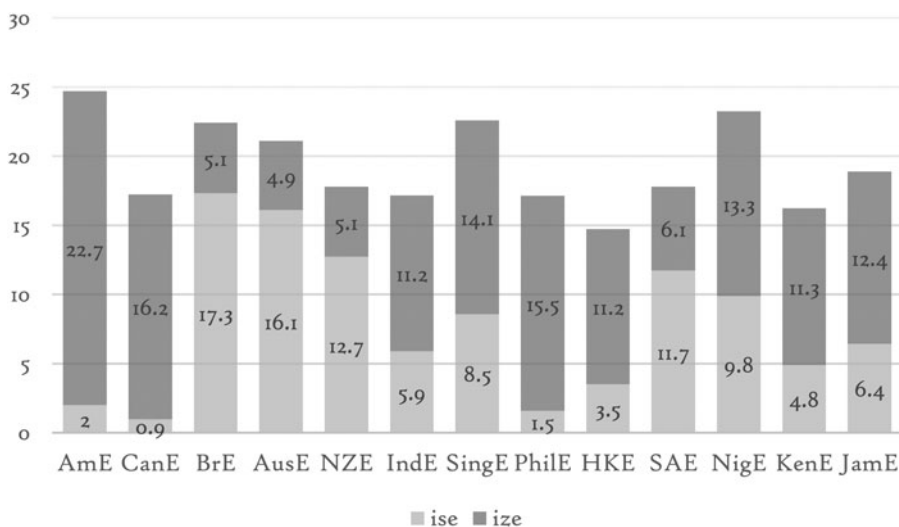


Figure 6. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* with Greek words (n.f.)

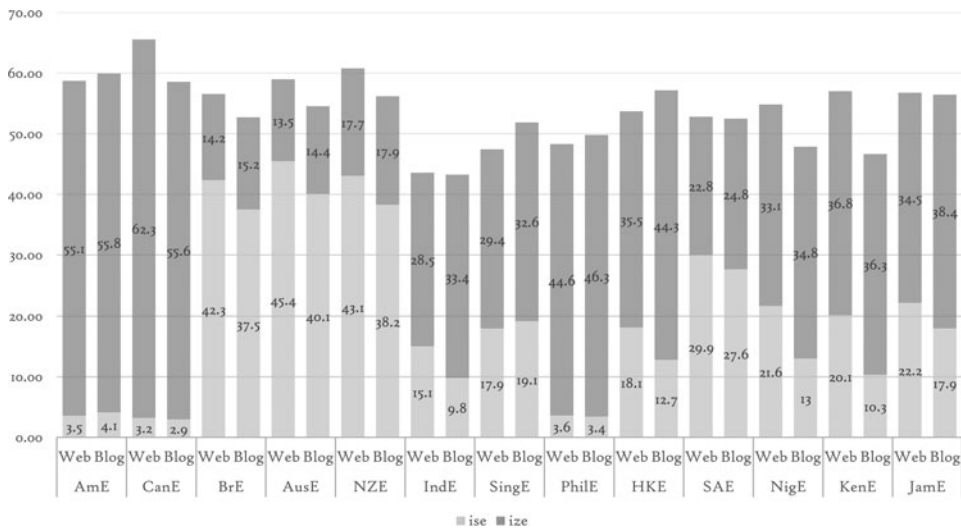


Figure 7. The forms *-ise* and *-ize* across text types (n.f.)

Finally, JamE follows the same trend with a higher frequency of *-ize* in blogs than in webpages.

As mentioned above, the diffusion of *-ize* is again confirmed as the result of an ongoing process of Americanisation in many of these varieties, which have progressively lost their original ties with Britain to develop a growing interest in American culture together with the adoption of the American linguistic variety. Different studies have investigated the level of Americanisation of some varieties of English worldwide, especially on the grounds of spelling and vocabulary (Awonusi, 1994; Collins, 2009; Fuchs, 2017; Modiano, 1996; etc.). In the particular case at hand, it goes without saying that the BrE spelling has lost substantial ground in favour of the American form, BrE varieties included. The outstanding use of this spelling in blogs may be taken as a reliable evidence of its success worldwide. This material has been highlighted ‘as a text-type where American forms are preferred’ (Gonçalves et al., 2018: 2) and its online status stands out as a convincing argument in favour of the Americanisation of *-ize* in English worldwide.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has examined, on the one hand, the origin and development of the dual representation of the so-called ‘eyes’-words in English, rendered in discourse as *-ise* and *-ize*, two forms which have been in competition for more than five centuries ‘in the long and convoluted history of English spelling’ (Achiri–Taboh, 2018: 6);

and, on the other, the outcome of this competition in different varieties of English. The study has evaluated the quantitative dimension of the phenomenon both in the inner and the outer circle varieties, the latter including representatives of the Asian, African and Caribbean varieties of English. In itself, the paper pursues the analysis of the phenomenon from the early 1500s relying on different corpora to provide material for the diachronic and diatopic study. The data have allowed me to reach the following conclusions.

First, the paper has studied the development of these forms in the history of English. With Latinate words, *-ise* outnumbered *-ize* in the second half of the 19th century, becoming the standard form in BrE since then. With Greek ones, both forms have shared a parallel distribution from the first half of the 19th century without any clear preference for either of them until the first quarter of the 20th century. Even though *-ize* is systematic in AmE from the early 19th century, it was not until the 20th century when *-ise* was definitely adopted in BrE, regardless of the origin of the word itself.

Second, the diatopic analysis has shed some light on the distribution of these forms in some varieties of English. While *-ize* predominates in AmE and CanE, *-ise* is the preferred form in BrE, AusE and NZE, albeit with a recurrent use of *-ize*. In the outer varieties, the dilemma is clearly resolved for the adoption of the American rendering even in the varieties traditionally considered to be more British-dependent. Curiously enough, SAE is the only outer variety where the BrE spelling still surpasses the American form. The study has also

shown a slightly greater frequency of *-ize* in blogs than in web pages, the former taken to be a less formal instantaneous writing implying a less elaborated and simpler type of prose. The higher incidence of *-ize* in blogs corroborates its current level of productivity as a clue to its eventual triumph over *-ise* in these varieties.

In itself, the topic is not merely a matter of British versus American confrontation, but the result of eclectic forces joining their efforts at different times in favour of the American spelling. The first step was taken by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *The Times* or *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, probably based on its voiced pronunciation or even a wrong association with the Greek suffix. Already in the 20th century, many printing houses, British ones included, adopted *-ize* in their publication stylesheets, spreading this form in high-esteemed publications on a range of subjects. Nowadays, one can hardly deny the effects of the process of Americanisation in many aspects of our lives, from culture and business to language itself. Even when these facts have proved to be decisive in the development of *-ize*, there are also other reasons, be they aesthetic or social (Bauer, 1994: 135), which ultimately make the individual to use one or the other in a particular linguistic context. As of now, concluding that *-ize* is on the rise worldwide is a safe claim.

Notes

1 The present research has been funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (grant number FFI2017-88060-P). This grant is hereby gratefully acknowledged. I am grateful to the anonymous referees of *English Today*, whose thoughtful comments have substantially improved the final version of this article. I would also like to thank Dr. Antonio Miranda (University of Málaga) for sharing with me his concerns about the competition of these spelling forms some years ago.

2 As in the case of ‘shun’ with non-derived words (Achiri–Taboh, 2018: 41), ‘eyes’ may appear in some words as part of the root morpheme, as in *advertise*, *circumcise* or *recognize*, among others. Following Achiri–Taboh’s study, the present analysis is concerned with the rendering of the words rather than with the suffix itself. It is not, on the whole, a study of morphology, but one purely of spelling and etymology focusing of the use and distribution of *-isel-ize* regardless of whether the Latin or Greek morpheme was productive at some point in the history of English.

3 The reader has to be careful with the accounts in the relevant literature as some of them either omit this etymological rationale (Warner, 1961) or confuse the etymology of the forms. Todd and Hancock’s

International English Usage mentions that ‘the *-ise/-ize* ending is Greek in origin but it is not restricted to words of Greek origin’ (1986: 257).

4 After their introduction into English, they were also the input for the variation in the rendering of *-isation* and *-ization*.

5 *The Times*, however, reconsidered the choice of *-ize* in 1992, when the British form *-ise* was again adopted. According to McArthur, among British publishers *-ize* ‘is preferred by Cassell, Collins, Longman and Oxford; <-ise> by the Readers Digest; Chambers has <-ise> for its native-speaker dictionaries and <-ize> for its EFL learners’ dictionary’ (1992: 43; Cook, 2004: 181–182).

6 In this same vein, Wright did not even recognise the possibility of such an orthographic variation in his account of the pronunciation of <s> affirming that ‘s founds z [. . .] in the terminations es, ise, ose, use and sm’ (1794: 31).

7 In their *New Spelling*, Ripman and Archer proposed to rewrite the suffix as *-iez* (cf. *authoriez*, *dogmatiez*) in the attempt ‘to give a visual English that is more in accord with the spoken language than the present orthography’ (1940: 6; also Ripman, 1941).

8 Notwithstanding the dominant use of *-ize* in English, the picture is somewhat contradictory to the extent that, on the one hand, an overuse and new use of *-ize* is often criticised on stylistic grounds (Quirk et al., 1985: 1557–1558) and, on the other, the ongoing need to name new processes is carried out through verbs formed with *-ize* (Biber et al., 1999: 402).

9 The complete list of Mark Davies’ English corpora is available in <http://www.english-corpora.org>. For a more detailed description of the corpus potential, see Mark Davies’ account in the corpus webpage (<http://corpus.byu.edu/eebo>). For convenience, the study exclusively relies on the written version of the BNC.

10 Technical writing, Bauer complains, is ‘more likely to be aimed at an international audience, an audience including Americans, and *-ize* may be chosen with this in mind’. These books are often prepared with American spelling checkers and ‘it seems likely that *-ize* spellings predominate in these checkers’ (1994: 135). *GloWbE*, however, incorporates fresh and reliable linguistic material which becomes the appropriate source for the study of cross-linguistic variation in present-day English.

11 CLAWS (*Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System*) was developed at the University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language (UCREL) at the University of Lancaster (Garside, 1987: 30–41; Garside and Rayson, 1997: 179–193; Garside and Smith, 1997: 102–121).

12 Whilst the Old French verbs have been chosen on account of the frequency of these items in the corpus, the Greek ones are, as expected, low-frequency items.

13 The majority of these Greek terms were Early Modern English borrowings, introduced in the second half of the 16th century. According to the *OED*, for instance, the earliest written evidence of the verb *anatomize* is recorded in 1541, *anathemize* in 1566,

metamorphize in 1591, *philosophize* in 1594, *phlebotomize* in 1596, *epitomize* in 1599 and *synchronize* in 1624. Interestingly enough, the verb *metamorphize* initially competed with the form *metamorphose* (introduced in 1576 from Middle French), the latter eventually disappearing in favour of the *-ize* form.

14 In fact, the actual influence of British English is today a matter of dispute as there are linguists arguing that 'British settlers arrived too late to have had any profound effect on the phonology and grammar of early Canadian English' (Levey, 2010: 115).

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