

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

AS STRANGE TO THE EYES AS EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS, THESE 43 SYMBOLS COMPRISE THE KEYBOARD OF THE SHAVIAN TYPEWRITER

ALPHABET SOUP

Tired of the absurdities of present spelling, reformers are pushing a streamlined, but still tricky, letter code

13 5232, 171 1312312, 131
 2 1312 82 115 13, 52318
 110 82 115 5118 J 5232-
 110121, 1 70122, 52321
 8 123121-52318 13231--171
 21 8 1231 2 52318 2 123124
 13 123124 110 12312 23
 123 123124 23 123124 8 2
 123124 A, B, C.

This passage in the new Shavian alphabet, designed to remedy the inadequacies of present Roman script, is an exact transcription of the paragraph which immediately follows.

If a small, but dedicated band of people has its way, spelling will lose its sting for school-children, and others, throughout the English-speaking world—but at the price of learning a completely new alphabet which looks more like shorthand or Arabic than the present A,B,C.

The crusaders for the new alphabet, including a few Australians, have assumed the mantle of the celebrated Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, who died still nursing an ambition to see the English alphabet reformed. Shaw's attitude was that the existing alphabet, whose letters are borrowed from Roman script 2,000 years old, was inefficient, wasteful and confusing.

No one is going to dispute the validity of his objections. No alphabet of only 26 letters can cope efficiently with a language, such as English, which has more than 40 separate, single sounds.

At present, many single sounds have to be represented by combinations of letters, such as the ai in claim and the ee in street. This wastes both time and space.

Appalling inconsistencies in spelling with the present alphabet waste mental energy as well. The same vowel sound is represented in to and through, but while a single letter suffices in one case, four are needed in the other.

Because of the lack of concise vowel symbols, one letter has to serve many different vowel sounds, as in the sentence, "Mary's father kept a small boat at Swallow Lake," where "a" appears eight times, seven with a different value. Here is the same sentence in the new alphabet with each "a" underlined:

13 5232, 171 1312312, 131
 2 1312 82 115 13, 52318
 110 82 115 5118 J 5232-

In contrast, the ridiculous dictates of present spelling force us to use a veritable gamut of different letters to represent the same vowel sound in different words, as in "Busy women give money to encourage foreign missionaries." Here the single vowel sound "i," as in "bit," is written nine different ways.

A lot of present spellings reflect pronunciation, not today, but in the centuries immediately after the Norman conquest of England.

Efforts have been made to introduce phonetic spelling with the present alphabet, but few people would feel comfortable writing, "I belev in God dhe Fadher Aulmeiti,"

or "Deer Sur." Shaw insisted that, to be efficient, a new alphabet must have a completely new set of symbols.

Inadequate as the present alphabet is, however, only some of its critics are likely to agree that the trouble can be fixed by introducing a completely different alphabet, no matter how efficient and time-saving that new alphabet may be.

Yet some nations have reformed and even completely changed their alphabets—usually under the pressure of social upheaval—and Shaw saw no reason why the English-speaking peoples should not make a similar effort.

In his will, he directed that the bulk of his estate be used to seek and publicise an improved alphabet. Although the provision was disputed at law, a compromise settlement allowed at least a partial realisation of his purpose.

A new Shavian alphabet, which the playwright saw and admired in prototype before his death, is in being, though, admittedly, only a handful of people are using it.

A special edition of Shaw's play "Androcles and the Lion," printed in both orthodox Roman type and in

English language and is, therefore, nearly twice as long as the one in wider use.

It has 24 vowels, compared with five available now, which largely accounts for its greater length. These extra vowels mean that one letter can be used for many sounds now requiring two, such as the oo in wool, or the ou in out.

Two of the Shavian vowels are special symbols representing constantly recurring, neutral vowel-sounds now spelled in a variety of ways. One called "ado" represents the unaccented vowel sound which occurs four times in "the common-hippopotamus," being spelled a different way each time—with e, o, a and u. Here it is in Shavian to show the use of the "ado" symbol:

8 5232 123124

The other special Shavian vowel "array," represents the unstressed "ado" followed by a liquid "r" sound, as in brother, martyr, kaffir and interview. Here is the "array" vowel in the word martyr: 13123

Further simplifying writing and printing, the four most commonly used words in English the, of, and, to — are represented by single letters in Shavian. The new script has only a printed form with no cursive, or running equivalent, and it has no capitals. Sentences start without a capital, though proper names may be distinguished by a preceding dot, known as a Namer-dot.

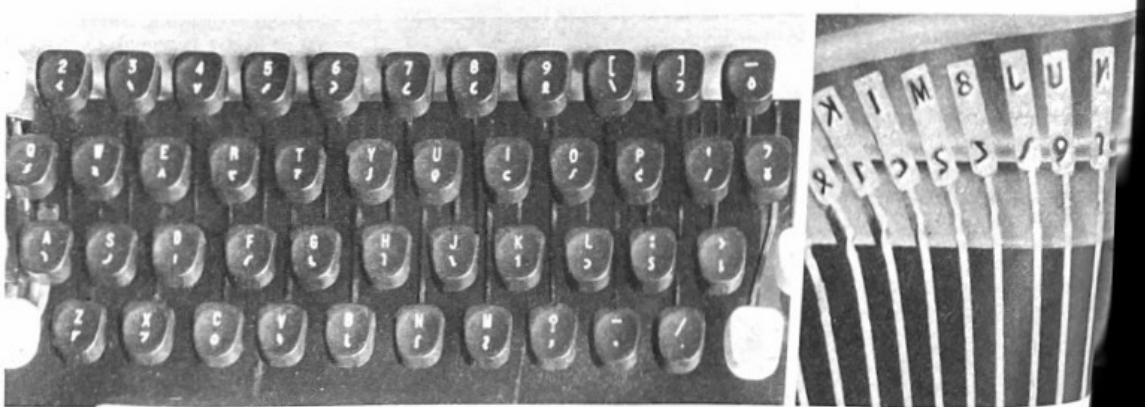
Shavian's shorter spellings, its champions claim, could reduce by a third the amount of newsprint and paper used by the Press and printers throughout the world. Because they are much more phonetic than present spellings, children will learn to read much more quickly if Shavian is

By **SHAUN McILRAITH**

the new Shavian alphabet, has been published by Penguin Books, fulfilling another term of his will.

A portable typewriter with a Shavian keyboard has been produced by Imperial Typewriters and a quarterly journal, "Shaw Script," typed in Shavian on the machine, circulates from England to many parts of the world, including Australia.

The new Shavian alphabet has 40 letters and eight compound letters representing the essential sounds of the

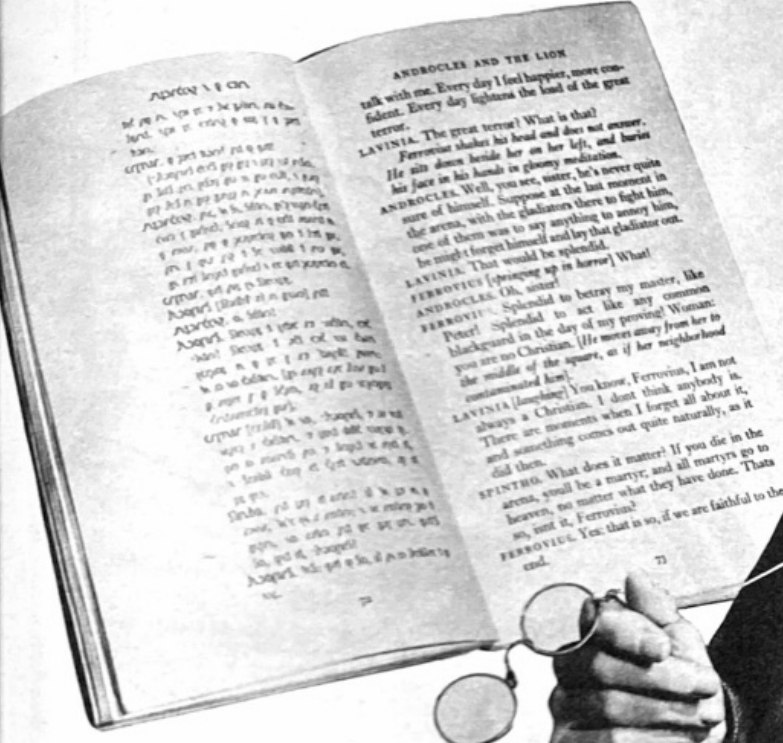


One of the dedicated band promoting Shavian, Mrs Pearl Smith, of Sydney (left), has just received a Shavian typewriter imported from England. The keyboard (above) provides ordinary Roman capitals as well as Shavian lower-case. The two alphabets are encompassed on the type face (right) by using Roman on the top and Shavian below.

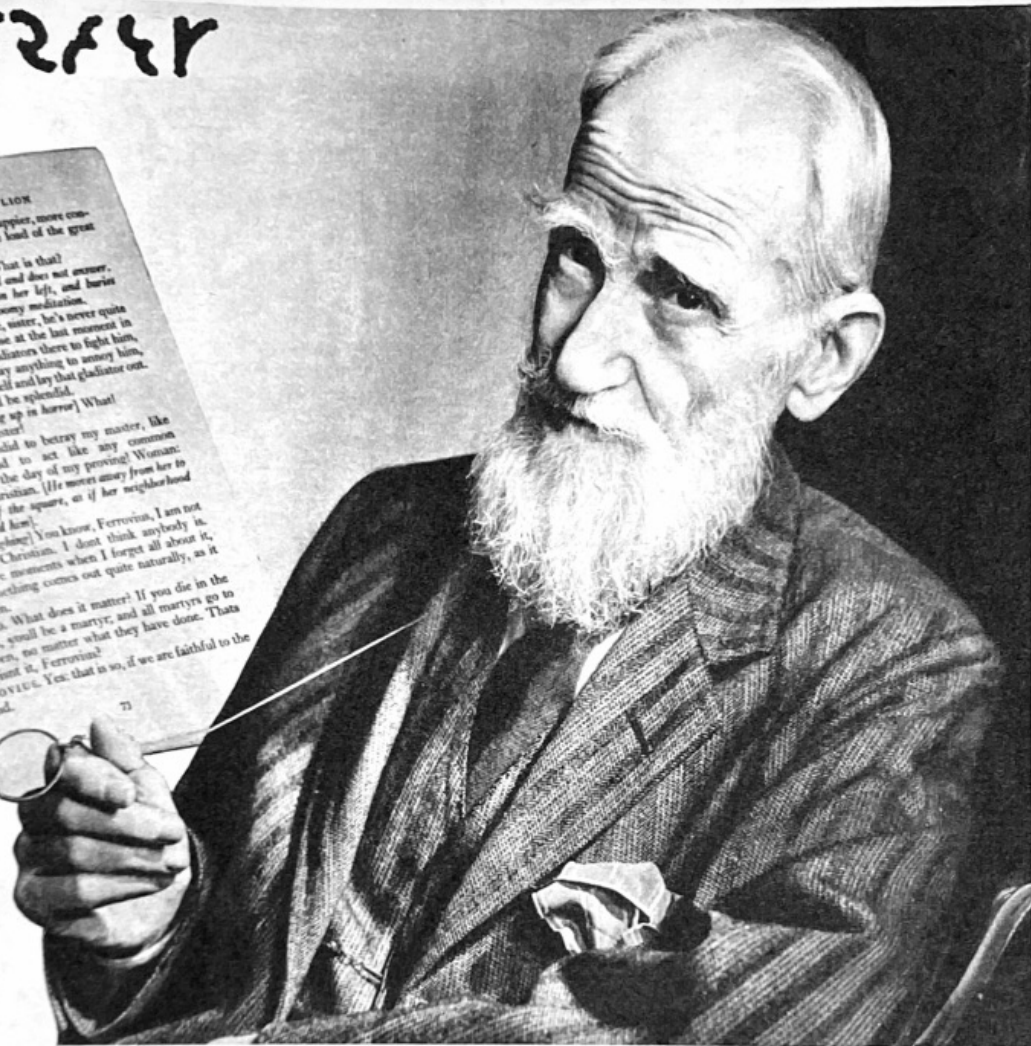


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RECENTLY IMPORTED INTO AUSTRALIA.



The man who inspired the new alphabet, playwright George Bernard Shaw, failed in his aim of devoting the bulk of his estate to reforming present script, but did succeed in another provision of his will—that his play "Androcles and the Lion" be published in both Shavian and orthodox type within the same covers.



adopted, say the same protagonists.

They predict that people will be able to read with less fatigue 25 per cent to 50 per cent faster in Shavian than in Roman script, and will be able to write more legibly 50 per cent to 80 per cent faster. Writing speeds of 60 words a minute — and even 100 with some contractions — are forecast for Shavian.

All told, say the Shavian enthusiasts, the long-term saving in time, effort and money would much more than make up for the short-term inconvenience of learning a new alphabet.

Certainly, spelling will be much easier for anyone who masters Shavian, since the strength of a truly phonetic alphabet is that all words can be spelled just as they sound. Yet this very attribute presents its own problems, the main one being that different people have different ways of pronouncing the same words.

At present, everyone spells dance the same way, whether they pronounce it with a short or a long a. Shavian writers may hesitate over which a to use, for they have letters for both vowel sounds. Americans may wonder whether they should use the same Shavian vowel in bomb as in calm, and in dog as in ought.

For Americans, Yorkshiremen, Irishmen, Welsh, Scots and Australians to go merrily ahead spelling words in Shavian as their particular speech-groups pronounce them, would result, of course, in as much, or more, confusion than the present alphabet creates. Some standardisation of Shavian spelling is essential, if only because reading is much easier if the same word always looks the same wherever it occurs.

A tip on the spelling standard to adopt in Shavian was given by Shaw

in his will. Discussing the proposed transliteration of "Androcles and the Lion" into Shavian, he suggested the pronunciation assumed "should resemble that recorded by His Majesty, our late King George V, and sometimes described as northern English."

This leaves unsolved the problem of words which sound alike, such as there and their, but have very different meanings. Many, but not all, such words are clearly differentiated in the present Roman script. The question is whether they should be spelled differently in Shavian, even if it means trampling on phonetics.

These and other ticklish points are being threshed out now by the brains behind Shavian, such as Peter MacCarthy, Professor of Phonetics at Leeds University, England, and Kingsley Read, the 76-year-old retired English lettering designer whose design was accepted for the new alphabet.

Defeats purpose

At this early stage, MacCarthy is already leaning toward the conclusion that only a compromise can solve the Shavian dilemma. Alternative spellings will have to be allowed for some words, he believes.

To impose standardised spellings rigidly on people who pronounce words differently, he argues, defeats a key purpose of Shavian, which is to rid people of the burden of memorising spellings that do not fit the words they represent.

In this contradictory position, the best course, MacCarthy suggests, may be to permit writers to use the spellings that come naturally to them, rather than demand that they try to please the mixed demands of their

readers. But users of Shavian, he cautions, must not take too much on themselves and start altering or adding to the new alphabet. This can end only in chaos, he says.

Another objection to a new and completely phonetic alphabet is that it obscures the Latin and Greek derivations of so many English words. To anyone with a smattering of the classics, these Latin and Greek origins are a great help in understanding difficult words.

Shavian, however, is not meant to replace the existing alphabet, but to be used concurrently with it, just as the later Arabic numerals, 1, 2, 3, are used with the older Roman I, II, III. But because it is more exact than Roman lettering, the hope is that Shavian eventually will usurp Roman as the popular script.

Shaw himself indicated he had no intention of scrapping an alphabet which has served hundreds of years of culture. In a letter to the London "Times" in 1945, he wrote, "I do not propose to meddle with our classical texts, misspelt, or rather unspelt, as they are: what I desiderate as a professional writer is an alternative alphabet which will save the millions of hours of manual labour now wasted in a sort of devil-worship of Dr Johnson."

Dr Samuel Johnson, who produced a definitive eighteenth century English dictionary, laid down many spellings which are still in force. Shaw referred disparagingly to the present alphabet as the "Johnson alphabet."

Because he found Roman script laborious, Shaw wrote the first drafts of all his plays in Pitman shorthand, whose outlines were all phonetic. Sir James Pitman, M.P., a grandson of Isaac Pitman, the shorthand inventor,

was one of the committee appointed after Shaw's death to seek a new Shavian alphabet.

The design finally selected might be mistaken for a sort of shorthand, mainly because it is unfamiliar. Actually, it relies almost entirely on single letters, having no outlines for syllables except for its few compounds.

Plan was attacked

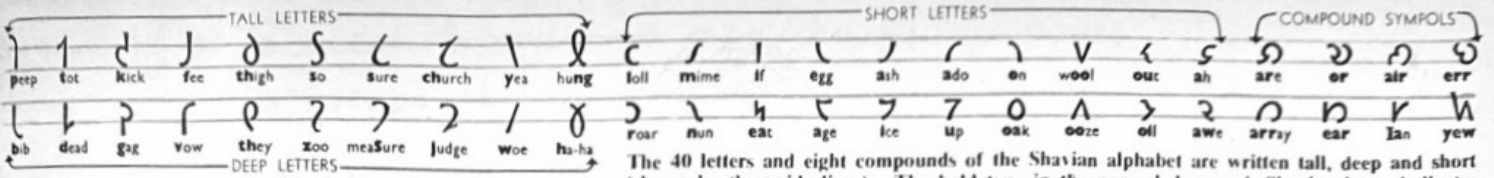
In his will, Shaw provided that the income of his estate be held in trust and used to finance inquiries into a new alphabet of at least 40 letters to enable language to be written "without indicating single sounds by groups of letters or by diacritical marks." Diacritical marks are used to distinguish different values of the same letter.

When he died in 1950, Shaw's estate was worth £367,233, but posthumous income, mainly royalties from "My Fair Lady," the musical adaptation of Shaw's play "Pygmalion," boosted the figure to more than £1,350,000 during the next few years.

His scheme for a new alphabet drew fire from an unknown defender of the English language who petitioned the Court to suspend probate of the will on the grounds that it gravely affected "the majesty of the English language and would have serious repercussions on English literature."

In 1957, because of difficulty in interpreting the will, the Public Trustee, who was Shaw's executor and trustee, asked the High Court of England for guidance on the provisions relating to a new alphabet.

Justice Harman decided the trust provisions were invalid and the money



The 40 letters and eight compounds of the Shavian alphabet are written tall, deep and short (shown by the guide lines). The bold type in the name below each Shavian letter indicates its sound. Letters may be joined in writing where one ends at the beginning of the next. For example: **rlsrl** may be written **rlsrl**. There are no capitals. Names are distinguished by a preceding Namer-dot, as in Rome: J0S. Five common words are expressed by single letters: **o** = the; **f** = of; **u** = and; **l** = to; **j** = for. Letters on the chart should be learned in pairs: **l** and **l**, and so on. Using this guide, readers can try to decode the two Shavian examples, below:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Australia's few Shavian writers are staunch and plucky pioneers

went instead to the British Museum, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the National Galley of Ireland. Shaw had named these three bodies as beneficiaries should his alphabet plan fail "by judicial decision."

Giving the Court's decision, Justice Harman said Shaw's plan would involve a change in the law. The trust envisaged was analogous to trusts for political purposes, which had never been considered charitable.

Shaw himself, the Judge said, seemed to suspect the plan would miscarry. "Hence his gibe about failure by judicial decision," he went on. "I answer that it is not the fault of the law, but of the testator, who failed almost for the first time in his life, either to grasp the legal problem, or to make up his mind what he wanted."

When the Public Trustee appealed against the ruling, the three institutions which had benefited from it agreed to provide £8,300 toward the new alphabet venture.

A prize of £500 sterling was offered for an alphabet design complying most nearly with the provisions of Shaw's will, and about 450 entries from all

over the world flooded in. Because no single design entirely satisfied the judges, the prize money was divided among four competitors, including Kingsley Read.

Read's design was finally accepted and Peter MacCarthy transliterated "Androcles and the Lion" into the new script. Penguin Books issued its edition of the play in standard and Shavian alphabets in November, 1962.

Under the terms of the will, 16,000 hard-cover copies were distributed free to public libraries throughout the British Commonwealth and North and South America, and to national libraries in other countries.

The space-saving advantage of Shavian is apparent in the book, which offers the same passage in Roman and Shavian on opposing pages. The orthodox text is set across 3 1/2 in. Shavian, printed to the same depth, needs only 2 1/3 in width to reproduce the same number of words. This is a one-third saving in printing space.

If Shavian had been set to the same measure as Roman, it would have reproduced the play in 40 pages instead of the 60 required with orthodox type.

In an introduction to the book, Sir James Pitman offered to help people with their Shavian by resurrecting a chain letter scheme used by his grandfather to popularise shorthand. Isaac Pitman called it the ever-circulator.

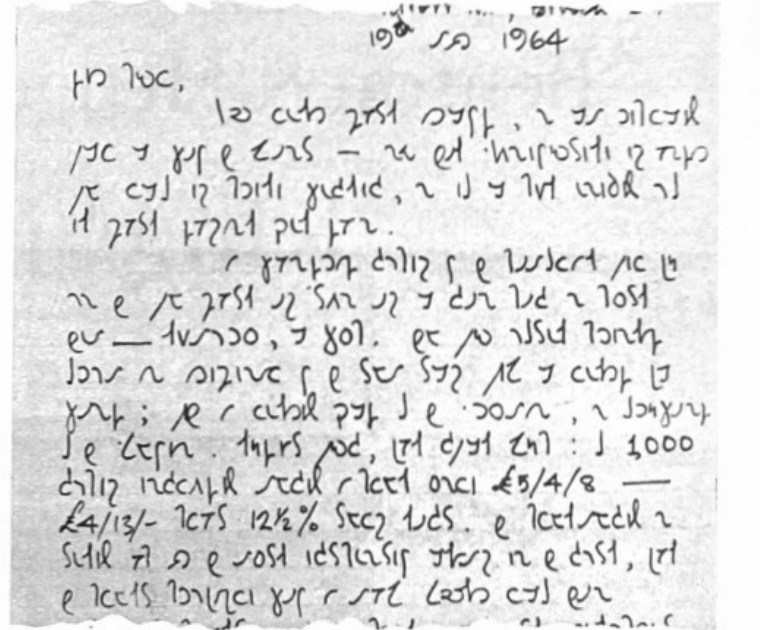
Taught herself

People wanting to brush up their Shavian by the new ever-circulator, write to Sir James Pitman mentioning their interests and circumstances, and he puts them in touch with a circle of others interested in the Shavian alphabet. Members of the circle keep a chain-letter in Shavian passing between them.

This is how Mrs Pearl Smith, of Pott's Point, Sydney, improved her Shavian. A 73-year-old widow of a city solicitor, Mrs Smith taught herself to read and write Shavian from the Penguin edition of "Androcles and the Lion," which contains a key to the new script.

Not a particular admirer of Shaw as a playwright, she had become interested in phonetics through working as a shorthand instructor. Since learning Shavian she has discovered a deeper affinity with Shaw through reading more of his work.

The other members of Mrs Smith's ever-circulator are Bob Dick, of Milton, in Brisbane, and Peter Oliver, of Southern Rhodesia. When the chain letter reaches Mrs Smith, it contains her letter to Bob Dick, his to Peter Oliver and Oliver's to her. She extracts her letter, substitutes a new one to Dick and posts three again. So



One way of mastering Shavian is through a chain-letter system, called the ever-circulator. This link in an ever-circulator is from Bob Dick, in Brisbane, to Mrs Pearl Smith, in Sydney. The Shavian, below, is a transcription of Shaw's letter to the London "Times" in 1941, calling for a completely new alphabet.

So,

... and I (in the name of the ever-circulator) ...

... the chain goes on, each member extracting an earlier letter and writing a new one when his turn comes.

A fluent writer of Shavian, Mrs Smith still has trouble reading the new script. "I haven't the same span in Shavian as in ordinary type," she says. "It's a bit irritating having to pause over single words when you've been used to scanning several at once. But I will improve as I get more used to the outlines."

Another minor nuisance is a fight between spellings, which mars her translations from Shavian to Roman. "I tend to spell everything phonetically," she says, "particularly when I'm

working from the new alphabet back to the old."

When she was teaching herself Shavian, Mrs Smith transliterated into the new script a World War I diary of her brother, Cecil Griffin, a light-horseman at Gallipoli and a gunner in France. The Mitchell Library in Sydney has accepted her Shavian version of the diary for its archives. Such transliterations, she believes, will be more than a passing curiosity. But even the most vigorous proponents of the new alphabet admit there is a long way to go before Shavian can live on its own without their support. #

æ	b	c	d	ee	
lce	bed	cat	dog	bee	
f	g	h	ie	j	k
fat	ig	hat	tie	jet	kit
l	m	n	œ	p	r
later	man	net	over	pen	rat
r	s	t	ue	v	w
red	spin	tree	use	vice	wind
y	z	s	wh	ch	
yes	zoo	day	when	chair	
th	th	sh	z	g	
the	th	ship	leisure	rig	
a	au	a	e	i	o
father	out	at	eat	ink	boat
u	ω	ω	ou	oi	
up	blue	look	out	oil	

Another new alphabet used in many English and American schools to help children learn to read is the Initial Teaching Alphabet developed by Sir James Pitman. Children who advance from I.T.A. to standard script are said to become better readers. I.T.A. has 44 symbols representing separate sounds in English, and includes 14 digraphs, joined pairs of letters covering gaps in the present alphabet. In contrast to Shavian, which breaks completely with writing tradition, it is derived from present Roman lettering, which stems from ancient Egyptian as the diagram (right) shows.

EGYPTIAN	SINAI	SEMETIC, FROM 1250 B.C. ON, INCLUDING ARAMAIC, HEBREW, ARABIC				ETHIOPIIC NAME	GREEK	VALUE	NAME	LATIN	
		NAME	MEANING								
𐀀	Ⲁ	א	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Aleph	Ox	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	a	Alpha	A
𐀁	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Mim	Water	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	m	Mu	M
𐀂	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	Ayin	Eye	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	o	Ou	O