

## 2. The 'z/s' controversy

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Although Fowler recommends that on the strength of usage by such august bodies as *The Times*, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, and of course Fowler himself, *-ize* should be preferred to *-ise* in the spelling of verbs of reputed Greek origin, such as 'realise', there are various factors militating against this usage in South Africa:

- a) These days you have to be a scholar of ancient Greek to realise that a verb such as 'advertise' is of Latin and not of Greek derivation.
- b) Many so-called Greek verbs ending in *-ize* were introduced into English from Latin or French, and it therefore becomes rather difficult to determine whether in fact they should be spelt with a 'z' or an 's'.
- c) General usage, at least in South Africa, tends to favour the 's'.
- d) Spelling with an 's' will always be correct, as all 'z' words can be spelt with an 's', while the reverse does not apply.
- e) Although they have opted for a 'z', virtually throughout their writing Americans have indicated that the ideal situation would be for all these words to be spelt with one letter, be it a 'z' or an 's'.
- f) If a 'z' is used in 'advertize', as the Americans tend to do, 'advertisement' seems to give that

choice the immediate lie.

- g) Even if 'organise' is pronounced with a 'z' and not an 's' sound, there are enough examples such as 'is' to refute the 'spell according to sound system', which will lead to chaos in any case.
- h) The Greek verbs in question differ considerably from their English derivations as to spelling and do not for example end on a silent 'e' as in *-ize*, with the result that an 's' for a Greek zeta, which is not quite the same as a Roman 'z' after all, would not represent the sole break with spelling tradition in these matters.