Portuguese Spelling

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PORTUGUESE SPELLING.

The spelling of Portuguese has long been in much the same condition as that of French: the sound of a word could generally be guessed from its written appearance, but the latter could not be deduced from the former. Among the more wide-spread irregularities were those due to the use of Latin-Greek *ch = k*, *ph = f*, *th = t*, *y = i*; these are now abolished by the action of the Portuguese government, which has recently appointed a spelling-reform commission and approved of its labours. Another sweeping change is the simplifying of double consonants, aside from the cases where they are required by the pronunciation. Thus the general basis of Portuguese spelling becomes nearly the same as that of Spanish; in some points it is even simpler. Medial *h* is dropped: *desonesto*, *niilismo*, *veículo*. It may be suspected that this is a first step towards getting rid of initial *h*, in accordance with the general Italian practice. Likewise the spelling *quilómetro* is more reasonable, from the Hispanic standpoint, than Spanish *kilómetro*. Of course the use of *u* after *q* is a waste of energy; but so long as *qu* is an established symbol for the sound *k*, *kilómetro* is doubly irregular. Perhaps some day it will be discovered that the *u* after *q* is needless and the example of Antoine Thomas will be followed, *qoi q'il an arive*.

A welcome feature of the new spelling is the systematic use of accents. If a word is printed properly, its stress can now be known with as much certainty in Portuguese as in Spanish. The system is of course more complicated than that of Spanish, since there are two distinctive varieties of *a*, *e*, *o*, besides the nasal vowels. It also has a slightly different basis; *i* and *u* in hiatus are treated as syllabic vowels, so that *seriam sérios* corresponds to Spanish *serían serios*. Considered historically, this treatment seems reasonable: stressed *-ia* is an ending of every verb in the language, while stressless *-io* is mainly bookish, popular words of the *tíbio*-type being even rarer than in Spanish (Port. *limpo* = Span. *limpio* < *limpidu*). But the marking of final stressed vowels appears less rational; *a*, *e* and *o* take an accent, likewise *i* and *u* after a vowel but not after a consonant: *sai* < *salit*, *sai* < *salite*, *uni* < *unite*. In Spanish and Italian, for words of more than one syllable, it has long been settled that a final stressed vowel must have a written accent, and the same rule was adopted some years ago by the Rumanian Academy¹. Would it not be better to do this in Portuguese?

¹ Tiktin, *Rumänisches Elementarbuch*, Heidelberg 1905, p. 17.

It must not be supposed the new spelling is phonetic; there are still plenty of difficulties for the native of Lisbon. By reason of the southern leveling of *em* and *ãe*, *ou* and *ó*, *ch* and *x*, *ç* and *ss*, *z* and *s* (after a vowel), countless historic forms are as arbitrary as our *right* and *write*. But any fixed spelling will be a relief, after the anarchy that has long prevailed: some persons call their nationality *português*, while others have preferred the spelling *portuguez*, avoiding the use of an accent by adopting an unhistoric *z*, which is also unphonetic in certain regions¹.

Those who are interested in the matter will find the new forms in A. R. Gonçalves Vianna's *Vocabulário ortográfico e remissivo da língua portuguesa* (Lisboa 1912). This work contains, besides the word-list, an excellent account of Portuguese spelling, and an explanation of verb-forms, regular and irregular.

EDWIN H. TUTTLE.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

ITALIAN 'X.'

In theory *x* is practically an unknown letter in modern Italian. It is however considered normal by Malagòli in the international prefix *ex*-²; and it is used, as in other languages, to evade the statement of a name. In this latter case, and as a mathematic symbol, it is read *is* (or *ics*), according to Petrocchi³. As a member of the alphabet, it is named *iccasce* or *iccase*.

I do not know whether Goldoni's dialect plays are fashionable literature nowadays; but readers of modern authors cannot help noticing the Venetian characters in Fogazzaro's writings. One of Fogazzaro's plays is almost entirely in the Venetian dialect⁴. A very common word is *xe* (< *hic est*), meaning 'is.' How is the *x* sounded? I am not aware that any "practical" grammar answers this question, which is nevertheless a practical matter. It has the sound of English *z* or French *z*, which cannot be expressed initially, before a vowel, in Tuscan spelling. This Venetian *x* seems to be the source of Albanian *x* with the same value, according to one of the systems used in the schools⁵.

In the Genoese dialect, *x* is used for a sound like French *j*, and

¹ Vianna, *Exposição da pronuncia normal portuguesa*, Lisboa 1892, p. 47.

² *Ortoepia e ortografia italiana*, Milano 1905, p. 24.

³ *Novo dizionario universale della lingua italiana*, II, Milano 1902, p. 1247.

⁴ 'El garofolo rosso' in *Scene*, Milano 1903.

⁵ Pekmezli, *Grammatik der albanesischen Sprache*, Wien 1908, p. 11.