

Secondary Uses of Letters in Language

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In the context of this article the secondary uses of letters are those that involve not the mere recording of pre-existent speech forms, but full participation, as independent ingredients, in a given language. Five such autonomous uses have been set off: (1) the conventional arrangement of letters in standard alphabetic order and the special functions of chosen segments of that sequence; (2) all manner of abbreviations (truncation, literation, acronyms); (3) diverse implications of the shapes of the letters; (4) references—difficult to detect—to the acoustic shapes of the letters; (5) hints of the conventional labels given to letters in spelling-out aloud. Special attention has been given to the occasional interplay of these uses, whose frequency seems to advance by leaps and bounds in such societies and cultures as place a premium on “modernity.”

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Abbreviations

Though the use of abbreviations is very old, their current vogue is unprecedented. Also, while the motivation was once consistently utilitarian (scarcity of costly writing material, lack of precious time, etc.), it has in this century become smart and stylish to use them in certain contexts. The modern world's two leading countries are most commonly referred to in this manner: *US(A)* and *USSR* (=Russ. *SSSR*), as are also the major international organization (*UN*), influential political, military, economic, and cultural alliances (*NATO*, *SEATO*) and agencies (*UNESCO*), and countless entities of the body politic. The old, thoroughly outmoded acrostic has now been replaced

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by the acronym and its vars.;²² in fact, the officious book market already offers dictionaries of the constantly mushrooming acronyms.²³

Truncation. The psycho-social matrix of the craving for abbreviations (on the one hand, a connubium of science and advertising; on the other, an urge for privacy, seclusion, humor, imagination) is not at issue here;²⁴ what matters is less the root of the fad than the specific

²² This is not the place to review the history of the acrostic, which left such important traces in Guillaume de Machaut, Froissart, Gervais du But, Villon ("Ballade de bon conseil," "Ballade des contre-vertés"), also in medieval Latin and even in medieval Hebrew poetry. The device reached its climactic point in the 14th and 15th centuries.

²³ One such venture is H. Baudry's *Nouveau dictionnaire d'abréviations*, «D.A.» françaises et étrangères, techniques et usuels, anciennes et nouvelles, rev. ed. (La Chapelle Montligron [Orne], 1956), cf. M. Cohen's ironic assessment in *BSLP*, LII: 2:17f. The American counterpart appeared later: M. Goldstein, *Dictionary of Modern Acronyms & Abbreviations* (Indianapolis, 1963). The standard treatise on abbreviations in modern French is H. Kjellman, *Mots abégés et tendances d'abréviation en français*, UUA, Year 1920, No. 2; cf. L. Spitzer's favorable and stimulating appraisal in *LGRPh*, XLIII (1922), cols. 27f., with a heavy stress on the intrinsic intimacy of many shortened forms and on the reckless exploitation of this mood by hard-boiled advertisers. Kjellman himself isolates and examines several abbreviatory schemata of little concern to us here, e.g. those involving (a) reduplications: *bobosse* = *bossu* 'hunchback,' (b) apocope: *sous-off(icier)*, esp. *auto*, *métro*, *photo*, *stylo*, *vélo*, which call to mind coll. Engl. *homo*(sexual), *memo*(randum), *mono*(nucleosis), *polio*(myelitis), *psycho*(path), and (c) apheresis: (*mar*)*chand*. Interesting is his discovery that the French "letter-words" (which bear squarely on our problem) reflect, in the last analysis, an English fashion. On the current state of affairs in Spanish see R. Lapesa, "La lengua desde hace cuarenta años," *Rev. de Occid.* (Nov.-Dec. 1963), pp. 193-208, esp. 201ff., and D. Alonso, *Del Siglo de Oro a este siglo de las siglas* (Madrid, 1962), pp. 7f.

²⁴ The connotations are very numerous and sometimes elusive; they involve secrecy, mock-secrecy, encoding, as in (*V*)*IP* ← (*Very*)*Important Person*, with overtones of top-level diplomacy; evocation of an intimate circle of workers, of a coterie, etc. (*SLOM* ← *Selective List of Materials*, readily understood only at the MLA Headquarters); folk-etymological, sometimes pious reinterpretations, as is conceivably true of *SOS* ← *Save Our Souls*; malicious—reading into *SPQR*, as did Rabelais, *si peu que rien*, or into the Spanish epistolary formula *s(u)* *s(eguro)* *s(ervidor)*, as have done college students, some nonsensical remark (*siempre serás salvaje*), or else decoding, as with Berkeley's *FSM* (1964-65) ← *Free* (later: *Filthy*) *Speech Movement*; veiling, if not total avoidance, of taboo words, of downright profanity, etc., or squeamish reference to "intimate" body functions (*S.O.B.*, *T.B.* ← *tuberculosis* [once a scare word], *V.D.* ← *venereal disease*, *B.O.* ← (*offensive*) *body odor*, *W.C.* ← *water closet* ('toilet'); rescue of inordinately long and foreign-sounding words for familiar objects from the sphere of pedantically academic discourse (*T.V.* beside *telly* ← *television*). The

linguistic conditions under which it materializes and thrives. Even within the frame of this general limitation one further retrenchment is necessary: such abbreviations as involve chunks or torsos of words—the classic example is *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, si*—as against plain letters (typically, initial letters), do not qualify for inclusion. Thus, such instances of plain “truncation” as G. *Sozis* ‘Socialists’ and, later, *Nazis* ‘National Socialists,’ *Gestapo* ← *Geheime Staatspolizei* or E. *commies* ‘Communists,’ Am.-E.—typically, in the jargon of college students—*Caltech* ‘California Institute of Technology,’ also *Comp(arative) Lit(erature)*, *Home Ec(onomics)*, *dorm(itory)*, *prof(essor)*, or—in the plural—coll. *fed(eral)s*, *seg(regationist)s*, or again Russ. *Smers* ‘counterespionage agency’ (← *smert’ spionam!* ‘death to the spies!’), *Čeka* ‘state police’, lit. ‘emergency commission’ (← *Čerezvycajnaja Komissija*) do not answer the description of the problems directly relevant in this context; ²⁵ conversely, *AEG* ← *Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft*, *GMBH* ← *Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung*, *SA* ← *Sturmabteilung* and *SS* (written with two stylized S’s: angular and elongated) ← *Schutzstaffel*, or *GPU* (a later name for *Čeka*) decidedly do. Compounds involving an abbreviation and a full word, in this order (type ‘*U-boat*’), are of peripheral relevance and invite, after incidental mention, a brief separate discussion.

Deceptive abbreviations. Certain very special situations must, at the outset, be deducted from the reservoir of an increasingly abundant

original formula may be almost universally forgotten, as in Am.-E. *G.I.* ‘enlisted soldier’ (← *Government Issue*, stamped on certain supplies).

²⁵ This type of abbreviation—involving juxtaposed slivers of key-words—reached its peak during and after the Russian Revolution, though the genesis of the model precedes the political events. Early examples include *ispolkom* ← *ispolnitel’nyj komitet* ‘Executive Committee’ and *linkor* ← *linejnyj korabl’* ‘battleship’; cf. *agit (acionnaja)-prop(aganda)*, *pol-* and *torg-pred* ← *političeskij* and *torgovyj predstavitel’*, respectively, *kol-* and *sov-xoz, glavkom* ← *glavnokomandujuščij*, *kombrig* ← *komandir brigady*, *univermag* ← *universalnyj magazin* ‘department store,’ *polit-otdel*, and *raj-kom*, even *medsestra* ‘medical nurse’ and *medsanbat* ‘medico-sanitary batallion.’ Similarly, *Gestapo*, under another totalitarian régime, was preceded by *Sipo* ← *Sicherheitspolizei* and later followed by *Vopo* ← *Volkspolizei*, while *Politische Polizei* was, for obvious reasons, left alone. Progressive pre-revolutionary Russia favored literation (*èser* ← *social revoljucioner*), occasionally with additional consonantal support from other segments—medial or final—of the words concerned, e.g. *kadet* ← *konstitucionnyj demokrat*, *èsdek* ← *social-demokrat*. (In these abbreviations *-ek* and *-er* are actually to be pronounced with an /è/.)

material. There exist deceptive cases, as when an *L-train*, known to Chicagoans and formerly to New Yorkers, stands for *El* (*evated*), in sharp contrast to Berlin's *U-Bahn* (*Untergrundbahn* 'subway') and *S-Bahn* (*Schnellbahn* 'rapid transit'), or when *X* before a telephone number functions as a substitute for *Ex* (*tension*). The abbreviation proper, though clearly isolable, is here subordinated to a kind of rebus-like puzzle (see below). *K.O.* 'knock-out punch in boxing' is a genuine abbreviation (favored by sensational headlines) which, with the world-wide prestige of this American sport, has spread even to countries where its compositional design is not fully understood, cf. *G. K.O.* /kao/, and *T.K.O.* ← *technical knock-out* is following suit; but *O.K.* may well be a pseudo-abbreviation for the following pair of visibly related words (of controversial ancestry²⁶): a verb enjoying considerable acceptance on the scale of formality ('to confirm, endorse') and a far commoner but distinctly familiar adverb or interjection (some educated speakers willingly use *to okay*, but are reluctant to substitute *O.K.* for 'all right'). Trenchant *It. W* for *Evviva!* is unique in its use of a single foreign letter, or a graphic approximation thereto, as a near-equivalent in shape of two identical native letters; placed upside down, the sign conveys the opposite message: 'abbasso!'. Arbitrarily disguised as an abbreviation of two words is *I.D. Card* ← *IDentification card*. Where written abbreviations involve foreign-language formulas, their reading-aloud, I repeat, may involve the substitution of vernacular equivalents: *e.g.* ← *exempli gratia* (commonly pronounced "for instance"); *i.e.* ← *id est* ("that is"). A Greek letter, endowed with its original value, has infiltrated Latin script in *Xmas* ← *Christmas*, popular in the English-speaking countries; cf. also *X Science* ← *Christian Science* and recall the above-cited passage from Lope's *Peribáñez*.²⁷

²⁶ The older literature on the subject is unfathomable. Even the critical digest of earlier conjectures has swollen to inordinate proportions; see, in *AS*, W. A. Heflin, "O.K. and its Incorrect Etymology," XXXVII (1962), 243–248, and A. W. Read's successive elaborations: "The First Stage in the History of O.K.," XXXVIII (1963), 5–27; "The Second Stage in the History of O.K.," XXXIX (1964), 5–25; "Later Stages in the History of O.K.," XXXIX, 83–101; "Successive Revisions in the Explanation of O.K.," XXXIX, 243–267.

²⁷ In his memorandum W. E. Geiger observes the disturbing polysemy of the symbol *X*, which stand for 'Christ, Christian' through dual reference to the Greek letter *X* (in *Christ*) and to the cross as associated with the crucifixion. In addition *X* acts as a traffic symbol: *X-walk* 'cross-walk,' *X-road* 'cross-road,'

Literation versus acronym. The two basic varieties of the acronym are conditioned by the readers' desire either to pronounce each letter with its full label, a procedure known as "literation," Fr. "épellation" (Am.-E. *GOP* ← *Grand Old Party*, R. *RSFSR* /èrèsèfèsèr/ 'Great Russian Soviet Republic,' G. *KDP*/kapede/ ← *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, Braz.-Ptg. *UDN* /udene/ ← *União Democrática Nacional*, similarly *PTB* ← *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* and *PSD* ← *Partido Social Democrático*, or to credit each letter strictly with its phonetic value, as in *WAC* ← *W(Omen's) A(rmy) C(orps)*, *radar* ← *ra(dio) d(etecting) a(nd) r(anging)*, R. *TASS* ← *T(elegrafonje) A(gentstvo) S(ovetskogo) S(ojuza)*, and coll. Fr. *URSS* ürs/. The latter device (the acronym *stricto sensu*) is the more remarkable of the two, both linguistically (because it tends to create entirely new words, not just strings of familiar labels for letters which, in the last analysis, represent mere compounds) and stylistically (inasmuch as the boldness of certain uncommon sound sequences may have some kind of shock effect, sounding a clarion call to action, provoking laughter, etc.). Preferences as between the two procedures vary widely from language to language and from abbreviation to abbreviation, depending, broadly, on national attitudes toward humor, improvisation, originality and, narrowly, on degrees of sheer pronounceability; for G. *KZ Konzentrationslager* 'concentration camp' (pronounced /kacet/) speakers seemed to have little choice a generation ago, though in present-day America the comparable difficulty of pronouncing *SNCC* monosyllabically has been successfully circumvented by the introduction of an auxiliary vowel: /snik/ (obviously preferred to *snack*, inopportunistically reminiscent of a light meal, and to *snuck*, offensively suggestive of 'sneaking'²⁸). Emphatically informal /snik/, appropriate to the

RXR (or *RR-X*) 'railroad crossing,' accompanying *cross* in its semantic expansion through—to use B. Migliorini's apposite term—"synonymic radiation." Within the modern context of congested highway traffic, but with a hint of the older religious use, the cross, as a deterrent, may mark the spot of a fatal automobile accident. As if this measure of ambiguity were insufficient, the *X* is used as an elementary mathematical symbol ('multiplied by'), functions informally as a rebus for *EX* (*tension*) in telephone numbers, and plays a rôle impervious to the uninitiated in the all-important *X-ray* (as against G. *Röntgenstrahl*).

²⁸ In colloquial American English, *snuck* rivals *sneaked* as the simple past. The vocalization of *sncc* reminds many observers of Lewis Carroll's "jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871–72),

an eagerly awaited operation; *H-hour*, the decisive hour, etc. One finds traces of this use in ultra-modern French: *L'heure H*, and elsewhere.³² The starting-point is patently the well-known preference of logicians and mathematicians for "Point *P*," "Sentence *S*," etc. (*Zero hour*—which involves a numeral, not a letter—has its root in a different military tradition, but not—counter to a widespread belief—in the kind of count-down practiced at missile sites).

The abbreviation reaches its maximum of effectiveness where a blunt gesture conjures up the convolution of a letter readily associated, in turn, with a slogan or catchword. Churchill's famous rallying formula "V for Victory" and the accompanying aggressive movement of two adjoining fingers immediately come to mind.³³ (These were often accompanied by the first four notes of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, which symbolize the International Morse Code for the letter 'V'—dot, dot, dot, dash.)

Interplays of analogy. The world of abbreviations, a separate microcosm though hardly one hermetically sealed off from other avenues of communication, has its own rules for interplays of analogy. The extreme rarity of word-final *-rs* in modern French makes one wonder whether the formal and semantic proximity of *URSS* /ürs/ and *ours* /urs/ 'bear' (the name of the animal traditionally emblematic of that country) could be plausibly attributed to coincidence; here the thread of a common noun of long standing and that of an ultramodern abbreviation for the name of a country appear inextricably interwoven. Conversely, a perceptive observer not so long ago reported from Alabama that the highly erratic, if amusing, abbreviation SLIC for *S.C.L.C.* ← *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* was launched by some experimentally minded speakers involved in an event all

³² I know of one facetious variation on *D-Day*. On July 15, 1964, at the height of the Republican Party's San Francisco Convention, one local newspaper came out with this flashy headline: "*B-Day* for Barry Goldwater." One is tempted to place in this area of connotation the title of the motion picture, *Dial "M" for Murder*.

³³ The element of humor is very potent in all categories of abbreviations; coll. G. (Berlin) *j.w.d.* /jotvede/ ← *ganz weit draußen* derives its impact from the jocular symbolization of the initial consonant in *ganz* by *j*, in tribute to the local substandard pronunciation. Intimacy, restriction to a closed social circle (*G. Uni* ← *Universität* among students), even to the sphere of a single family or a couple, and prudishness have been additional factors in truncation, literation, and acronyms alike; cf. fn. 24, above.

participants of which freely used SNIC for S.N.C.C. Here, strictly within the realm of nascent acronyms, one minor irregularity is seen gradually spawning another, of far greater magnitude.³⁴

Proper names. The use of abbreviations in proper names is a multi-dimensional problem transcending the narrow frame of this essay. Let me simply enumerate its most conspicuous dimensions: the affectionate truncation of first names in hypocoristic variant forms (cf. E. *Abe*, *Dan*, *Dave*, *Sam*, *Sol* for men; *Pam*, *Pat* for women, though in the ranks of the latter the addition of *-ie*, *-y* is widely practiced, regardless of age: *Jackie* from *Jacqueline*, *Abby* from *Abigail*³⁵); the acceptance in certain social contexts of literation in familiar address and in deliberately informal signatures—a fad that has frequently led to the coinage of nicknames;³⁶ the use of initials alone (or of an initial plus a favored segment of the family name) in the identification of authorship and, at a later stage, the creation of an acronymic *nom de plume*.³⁷

³⁴ See Renata Adler, "Letter from Selma," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 1965, pp. 121ff., esp. 121c and 122b.

³⁵ Other languages achieve roughly the same effect through reduplication of the core syllable: *Pepe* from OSp. *Jose-pe*, or through suffixation (often in conjunction with truncation), cf. It. *Giacom-ino*, *G. Hein-i* (from *Heinrich*), *Rud-i* (from *Rudolf*), and *Ton-i* (from *Anton*), R. (a) *Alë-ša* (from *Aleksej*), *Anto-ša* (from *Anton*), *Ja-ša* (from *Jakov*), *Ma-ša* (from *Marja*, (m., f.) *Saša* (from *Aleksan-dr* or *-dra*), or (b) *Kolja* (from *Nikolaj*), *Kostja* (from *Konstantin*), *Nastja* (from *Anastasja*), *Polja* (from *Paulina*), *Sonja* (from *Sofja*), *Tolja* (from *Anatolij*), *Vanja* (from *Ivan*). Truncation in this context involves aphesis as often as it does apocope; and a teasing effect can be produced by the addition of a masculine suffix to a feminine name, as in French (*Marie* ~ *Marion*), under conditions investigated by Gilliéron and, later, by Spitzer and Hasselrot. On the Spanish material see P. M. Boyd-Bowman, "Cómo obra la fonética infantil en la formación de los hipocorísticos," *NRFH*, IX (1955), 337–366.

³⁶ In current American English practice, addressing a person (often an older partner or one particularly respected) by his initials—say, *X. M.* for *Xavier Miller*—marks the selection of a level of social contact approximately intermediate between those characterized by "first name" and "formal" address. In academic circles nicknames have frequently sprouted from such literations; thus, the late medievalist Ernest H. Kantorowicz (cf. *RPh.* XVIII, 1–15) was known to his intimates as *EKa* (pronounced in German fashion), because he signed his memos "E. Ka." Extra-economical newspaper headlines, on the other hand, have propagated the use of initials for the names of this country's presidents (*FDR*, *JFK*).

³⁷ Such *noms de plume* have, to be sure, a slightly journalistic ring. Thus, the contemporary Argentine writer Héctor F. Miri signs his pieces *Hefeme*, an odd composite in which one discerns *efe* for the middle initial and *eme* for *M-*, but

Sequences of identical letter-sounds. One cluster of minor problems concerns the succession of identical letter-sounds, entirely by themselves or as parts of longer formulas, as the -AA- in *NAACP* ← *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, the -LL- in *FILLM* ← *Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes*, the -RR- in *UNRRA*, the -SS- in *OSS* ← *Office of Strategic Services* and, at the opposite end of the political spectrum, in *TASS*. Here the acronym, as a written formula, is unimpeachably explicit; but in oral delivery it falls short of yielding an accurate clue to the full name, especially where consonants are at issue and the language involved is, like French, unprepared for gemination; as a result, one nugget of the information to be conveyed tends to go astray. Where no segment precedes, or follows upon, the bare repetition of a consonant, speakers must have recourse to literation. A certain shrillness of the message—perhaps in unavoidable recoil from the threat of monotony—is, typically, the consequence. This overtone may be welcome as a purveyor of emphasis or even as a tool of intimidation; not for nothing does Himmler's *SS* almost match, in its graphemic pattern, the American South's older *KKK* ← *Ku-Klux-Klan* (initially organized: 1867–77; revived in 1915), a name which has, rather characteristically, outlasted such early regional competitors as “Knights of the White Camellia,” “White League,” and “Invisible Circle.” By the same token, any gentler message will be clad in a less strident phonic garb; witness

no *hache* for *H*-. At the beginning of this century, one of two Russian writers bearing the same name *Vasilevskij* added to that name *bukva* ‘letter,’ and the other *ne-bukva* ‘non-letter.’ One protagonist in Vladimir Tendrjakov’s novel *Svidanje s Nefertiti* (Moscow, 1964) is nicknamed by his classmates “*Mys* without a soft sign,’ to distinguish rather coarsely, or even derisively, the spelling of his name from that of the common noun *mys*’ ‘mouse.’ Teams of writers and artists may devise semi-jocose names to mark their joint authorship; such artificial names, as a rule, are composite, containing torsos or fragments of each member’s original name. Frequently, the initial syllables are conjoined; thus, the exiled Russian poets *Mixail Gorlin* and *Raisa Blox*, romantically linked and later married, signed some of their poems *Mirajev*, while three Russian painters working on their homeland, *M. Kuprinov*, *P. Krylov*, and *Nik. Sokolov*, exhibit under the joint name *Kukryniksy* (1965). If the first syllable from one man’s name and the last from his partner’s name were to be amalgamated, the result—in terms of linguistic architecture—would be the same as in *E. liger* ‘cross-breed of lion and tiger,’ Am.-E. *brunch* (*breakfast* × *lunch*), *smog*, and *hottle* ‘hot bottle’ (for tea or coffee). Cf. also *Tanzania*, the name of a new African country (*Tanganyika* × *Zanzibar*); and Fr. *français* ‘Anglicized French.’

the semi-formal *Three-D Policy* (“Determination, Deliberation, Discussion”) quite recently proclaimed by the President of this country, a slogan which, on the linguistic side if not in substantive value, calls to mind the *Tridelts* (members of the *Tridelta* = $\Delta\Delta\Delta$ Sorority). Old-timers to this day remember *3-D movies* ‘three-dimensional motion pictures.’

Transmission from language to language. Where latter-day contacts between languages of roughly comparable structure are involved, abbreviations are apt to spread in different fashions. One possibility is, first, to translate the full name of the agency, bureau, organization, etc., then to produce, from the resources of the target language, a new abbreviation, entirely independent of the old. *U.S.A.* thus becomes *EE.UU.* in Spanish and *США* in Russian (while Fr. *États Unis* and G. *Vereinigste Staaten* seem compatible with unassimilated, capsulized, *U.S.A.*); *U.N.* emerges as *ONU* in Italian, *ОН* in Russian, etc. The alternative is to carry over, into the target language, the phonic content of the literation from the source language, as when Russian newspapers in New York transcribe *NATO* by *НАЙТО* and *SEATO* by *СИТО*, blurring in the process the identity of some vital constituents of the original formulas. A rival transliteration, not quite so reckless, renders *A.F.L.* by *ЭйФЭл* and *C.I.O.* by *СиАйО*, using the interplay of capitals and lower-case letters as a means of helpful audio-visual guidance and hierarchization.³⁸

The Shape of the Letters

If the conventional sequence of the letters in the alphabet is something inherently abstract, the individual configuration of each link in that

³⁸ I cannot here expatiate on all manner of abbreviations currently employed in technology, but shall quote from W. E. Geiger’s helpful memorandum on the use of Radio and TV international call-letters, “an easily datable category which may reveal trends and fancies in letter usage, e.g. (a) esoteric: *WBBM* and *WGN*, both Chicago; (b) partially transparent: *WCOP*, Boston (*W-C-O-P* or *W-COP*), and *KBEE*, Modesto (*K-B-E-E* or *K-BEE*); (c) network affiliation: *WCBC*, New York, and *KCBC*, San Francisco (Columbia Broadcasting System); (d) place or origin: *KPHO*, Phoenix, Ariz., and *KCMO*, Kansas City, Mo.; (e) metaphorical or humorous (designating some local trait or its desired opposite): *KOOL*, Phoenix, and *KOLD*, Tucson (a pleasant relief from Arizona’s desert climate?), or *KABL*, Oakland-San Francisco (evoking S. F.’s historic *Cable-Cars*).” A preference for metaphor over literation seems to characterize the names of those stations established after 1945. Add Radio *KAL*—a student-operated and -managed radio station in Berkeley.

chain involves an immediate appeal to the readers' and writers' visual impressionability. Especially if the printed capital letters are slightly stylized, in the directions of straightening, rounding, or tightening, their basic geometric design may stand out very sharply, as when the O in Latin script, reduced to its bare essentials, signals a complete circle; the T suggests three quarters of a cross and the C, three quarters of a circle; the A marks a triangle on two feet (in contrast to Greek delta = Δ , a plain equilateral triangle) and the B, two semi-circles springing from a perpendicular line, etc. Some of the distinctive Cyrillic characters (the III and the Ж, say) display a beautiful symmetric contour. Within the realm of anatomy, two salient malformations of human legs are crisply described by the German tags *X-Beine* 'knock-knees' vs. *O-Beine* 'bandy legs, bow legs' (a pattern imitated by Estonian, cf. mod. Gr. λαβδός [adj.] 'knock-kneed,' from the characteristic outline of λαβδα). In modern American industry and merchandising, in the symbolization of traffic rules (made of late international on European highways), and in many other domains of contemporary living, the angle or curve of the capital letter conveys a brief message, instantaneously assimilable and extremely graphic. What could be more plain than a Y for: 'Watch out for the bifurcation of the causeway!' or, viewed in the opposite direction, for 'Merging traffic'? Grammatically the pattern, at least in English, involves a compound, in which the first ingredient (the name of the letter) serves as the prime qualifier of the second; cf. the dressmaker's *A-skirt* and *V-neck-(sweat) shirt* (or *-blouse*, or *-sweater*); the architect's *A-frame*; the butcher's *T-bone steak*; the driver's and traffic-policeman's *U-turn* (as against clumsier *hairpin-curve*), etc. Adoptions of this striking pattern in the Romance languages have necessitated certain adjustments to different syntactic conditions, cf. Fr. *décolleté en V*.

One visualizes two different classificatory approaches to this copious stock. The analyst may take as his point of departure the "designatum" and ask himself what material features of mid-twentieth-century civilization best lend themselves to this class of labeling. Up-to-date reference works like the *Merriam-Webster New Intern. Dict.*, supplemented by first-hand experience and reports of witnesses, show *T-* as an accepted qualifier of *abutment, bandage, bar, beam, bob, bolt, bulb, cart, cloth, connection, crack, cross, hinge, iron, pipe, plate, rail, rest, slot, square*; *T-straps* in women's shoes were a fad ca. 1960. On

balance, not all these bits of evidence fall under our rubric: since *T-cloth* is described as ‘cotton-cloth stamped with a T, made in Great Britain and sold in Asia,’ the convolution of the object is not at issue and the item must be discarded from our list (just as *U-boat* and *U-turn* belong to radically different categories). The remaining cases, however, seem homogeneous (a *T-cart*, e.g., has a “body shaped like a T”) and prove that handicraft and industry have been the main contributors and that deft mechanics, inventive construction engineers, and imaginative manufacturers, jobbers, and retailers of tools must all have had a heavy share in this nomenclatural vogue.

Far more exciting for the graphemicist is the classification by letter, i.e., by the “designans.” Capital letters in modern Latin script are not all endowed with an equally impressive shape; *E*, *H*, *X*, and *Z* boast a symmetry sorely lacking in *F*; *I* has a neatness of design absent from *J*; *G*, *P*, and *R* suffer from a certain complexity of configuration, as does *Q*,³⁹ and as do Cyrillic *Ы*, *Ю*, and *Я*; *Y*, I repeat, has an exciting quality of convergence or divergence. Other members of the alphabetic set, notable for their pleasingly ornamental or alarmingly dramatic silhouettes, play a role commensurate with these advantages of delineation. The *T*, we recall, figures prominently here (and measurement with the *T-square* has given rise to such phrases as *It suits—or fits—me to a T* ‘precisely, exactly’). The *L* is also noted for its angularity, which has been highlighted by the title of a widely acclaimed British motion-picture: *The L-Shaped Room*. The *S*, characterized by litheness and sinuosity, is familiar not only from road signs (*S-curve*), but also from a compound like Pol. *esyfloresy* (pl.) ‘arabesque design based on the letter S.’ The sharp changes in direction marking the outline of the *Z*—noted for its acute angles—have added to the cross-linguistic appeal of G. *Zickzack*, Fr. *zigzag* (older spelling: *zigue-zague*,) etc.;⁴⁰ on the moral level (‘shiftiness, fickleness’), they

³⁹ Amusingly, some cultured and refined speakers of English associate *queue* (in reality, an obsolescent word for ‘tail,’ of transparent French ancestry) with the queerly shaped letter *Q*.

⁴⁰ E. *zigzag*, Sp. *zigzag*, Ptg. *ziguezague*, Pol. *zygzag*, Russ. *zigzag*, etc., in some instances with further derivational offshoots (e.g., Fr. *zigzagueur* and Sp. *zigzaguear* ‘to zigzag’—from which I would not hesitate to extract the action noun *zigzagueo*); but It. *zigzag* seems unicuspidal (*una strada a zigzag*; *andare, cominciare a zigzag*). The starting point is apparently G. *Zickzack*, characterized by its neat vowel alternation *i-a* within a rigid consonantal frame. Such lexical items are, as a rule, facetious in tone and onomatopoeic either in actual origin or, more frequently, in secondarily acquired overtones; cf. W. Busch’s

account for coll. Fr. *être fait comme un z* ‘to be a fraud.’

On the whole, it is the basic contour of the letter that tickles the imagination of speakers. Under special circumstances, however, a minor stroke or so little as a diacritic mark may capture the focus of attention. This is true, in English, of the twin phrases *dotting the i*'s and *crossing the t*'s ‘leaving no detail or nuance unexplained’; in either instance reference is, for once, to the lower-case character (cf. Fr. *mettre les points sur les i*, It. *mettere i puntini sugli “i”*). Representatives of North Albanian and South Albanian intelligentsia—who experimented, until recently, with rival dialects, differently spelled, as literary media—used to taunt each other with such reproaches as “blinding the e’s” (in reference to *ë*) and “slashing vowels.” The Yiddish stereotyped phrase *mət ə dugəš* ‘with emphasis, with heavy insistence’ involves a dot-like diacritic mark (placed inside, seldom alongside, the character) which denotes the gemination (lengthening) or the obstruent pronunciation of certain consonants in Hebrew. A freewheeling writer, taking his cue from phraseology so slanted, is at liberty to go much farther in his similes and metaphors, as did in fact a French romantic poet in musing: “Sur le clocher jauni, / La lune, / *Comme un point sur un i*,” or as did Christian Morgenstern in his “Fisches Nachtgesang,” suggesting by the marks ordinarily reserved among classicists for vowel length vs. brevity (–*◌*) the open or closed mouths of a school of fish, while an exiled Albanian may grimly recognize in *K* (evocative of *Komunizëm*) the dim silhouette of a man dangling from a gallows. (For an empty gallows capital Cyrillic “g,” namely Г, would provide a matchless sketch.) In his *Greguerías* R. Gómez de la Serna muses repeatedly on the profile of letters, both capital (*S, X, T, H, F, W, D*, in this order) and lower-case (*ñ, ü*); usually the object will suggest the

slightly discrepant “*Ricke-racke, ricke-racke*/geht die Mühle mit Geknacke” in the most celebrated episode of *Max und Moritz*; also Sp. *tictac* beside E. *tick-tock*, *ping-pong*, and many other increasingly current words, some of them truly international, others definitely confined to a single language—particularly the verbs: to *flip-flap*, *tittle-tattle* (to a few such items a suffix is firmly welded: *wishy-washy, shilly-shally*). The *z*, then, was initially—on the articulatory or the acoustic-auditory level—an incidental element of *zigzag* and by no means a prime determinant of its meaning. But with the gradual rise of literacy, the secondary, visual association of the shape of *z* with the word’s semantic content turned out to be so opportune and spellbinding as partially to overlay (or to reduce to subordinate rank) the original set of relationships. A separate etymological cameo on this pan-European word is a pressing desideratum.

letter: “El cisne es le S capitular del poema del estanque” (p. 49); sometimes the shape and the specific place of the letter within the alphabet jointly stir the writer’s imagination: “La H es la escalera del alfabeto” (p. 78); or one letter will evoke another (p. 92); or else a letter will suggest an action devoid of relationship to other letters (p. 99). But these artistic rêveries and idiosyncratic reactions transcend the precinct of language proper, viewed as the backbone of speech-communities.⁴¹

⁴¹ I cannot elaborate here on the artistic potentialities of the letters. The exquisite ornamental uses of letters in Oriental, esp. Arabic, script are well known; so is the fact that the intricacy of Chinese characters tends to blur the frontier between painting and exquisite writing. Modern Western taste rejects the pretentious ornamentation that encumbered certain styles of nineteenth-century lettering through flourishes, distentions, elongations, crosshatching; in particular it frowns on the capitals of “la belle époque,” clumsily loaded with nudes, etc. On the other hand, the twentieth century has discovered a new affinity between calligraphy and the visual arts, a kinship for which ultramodern “precisionism” provides the clinching argument. Isolated letters and word fragments have figured in avant-garde paintings since shortly before the First World War. Georges Braque’s “Soda” (1911) and “Oval Still Life” = “Le violon,” Gino Seveini’s “Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bar Tabarin” (1912), Pablo Picasso’s “Card Players” (1913–14) and “Green Still Life” beside “Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Rum” (1914), and Juan Gris’s “Breakfast” (1914) beside “Grapes and Wine”—all eight displayed in New York’s Museum of Modern Art—are cases in point, illustrating (to quote a recent comment on Leningrad’s Hermitage Collection) the “interplay of geometric planes and commercial lettering”; and in “Private of the First Division” (1914) by Kazimir Malevic separate Cyrillic letters and words in Cyrillic script are allowed to act as ingredients. As early as 1916–18 Paul Klee composed picture-poems, the almost illegible text of which merged with the colored squares; toward 1930 he was inspired by Arabic script. In his “W-geweihtes Kind” (1935) the W-shaped frown on the child’s contorted face invites a dual or triple interpretation: (a) letter *W* /ve/, (b) *Weh* /ve/ ‘grief,’ perhaps (c) *W-eihe* ‘consecration.’ Characteristically, in Joan Miro’s piece “Women With Undone Hair Greeting the Crescent Moon” (1939) the Chinese character for ‘woman’ flanks her symbolic delineation. Into Saul Steinberg’s “Design” both stylized (embellished) and nonstylized letters enter on a par, as important ingredients. In Mark Tobey’s “Calligraphic Structure” (1958) one sees stylized, dimly recognizable letters and light-colored “litteroid” signs projected against a background of red. See R. Étiemble, *The Written Word* (London, 1962), pp. 88 (Fernand Léger, “Still Life” [1925]), 90 (Henri Michaux, “Signs” [1951]), 91 (Marinetti, “Words” [1919], 94f.).

I am, on the whole, not concerned here with such uses as involve modified shapes of the letters. But let me quote, for the sake of its typographic piquancy, this excerpt from G. A. Shipley’s memorandum: “In the Southwest and West of the United States, the alphabet is put to distinctive use in branding horses

The Acoustic Image of the Underlying Sound

Given the widespread equation of sound and letter in certain cultures, it is theoretically conceivable that in a few set phrases (e.g., in acoustically slanted similes) names of letters evocative of sounds might occur as welcome frames of reference. One can imagine, savored in isolation or arranged in sets, stereotyped comparisons of the type: 'shriller than an *I*', or 'dull as an *O*', or 'hissing like a [s]', or again 'no less flat than a [...]', etc.

In the introductory section of his recent monograph (see fn. 12, above) I. Fónagy has arrayed numerous cross-cultural testimonies on the use, from times immemorial, of impressionistic qualifiers in the classification of sounds: thin or sharp vs. thick, light or brittle, fragile vs. heavy, weak or empty vs. strong, clear vs. dark (or murky), straight vs. skewed, high vs. low, narrow vs. broad or flat, acute vs. obtuse, white vs. black, cold vs. hot or steaming, delicate vs. rough, quick or nimble vs. slow, and even male vs. female. Understandably, his authorities have, for the most part, been grammarians and teachers of diction (in some corroborative tests his own children have acted as "subjects");⁴² Dante appears briefly as a witness (p. 23) for the existence of soft, woolly, gliding, smooth, and hairy sounds—but it is Dante the theorist rather than the practicing poet that has been appealed to. If the inquiry were to spill over into the adjoining domains of *belles-lettres*, folklore, and untutored laymen's reactions (where pertinent material, precariously dispersed, can be assembled only through chance discoveries), there is a high probability that the slot here posited through logical extrapolation might effectively be filled.

and cattle (also, less generally, sheep). The simplest brands are ordinary letters, usually paired off (*CB, RL*). Quite frequently the shapes of the letters are altered. The most common deformations are achieved by combining two letters into one character (*B ← JB, N ← NL*) [these ligatures are reminiscent of Arabic script]; a common var. involves the reversal of one member of a set (*B ← BL, X ← KB*). Occasionally one letter will absorb another: *Ø ← DK*; but *⊙* would be interpreted 'Circle P' (see below). Many brands are formed by letters accompanied by qualifying or distinguishing signs, e.g. *Δ*, *⬠*; these qualifiers have conventional names, and such brands are «read»: *Δ* 'Rocking A', *⬠* 'Diamond A'. Further variation is achieved by «resting» a letter on its side (*∞*), whereupon it ranks as 'Lazy'. Some combinations are quite intricate".

⁴² Few went as far in embroidering as F. Cascales who, in his *Tablas poéticas* (1617), called *p* "soberbia e hinchada" and *u* "sutil y lánguida."

Puns on the Label of a Letter

In some instances, we recall, the conventional name of a letter (as used in spelling-out a word, say; also in reciting the alphabet), or at least its “peak,” approximately coincides with the acoustic value of the phoneme so designated; cf. the tags of the vowel phonemes in such languages as German, Russian (except for **Ы**), Spanish, and Italian. In other situations the label attached to the letter is discernibly different from any correlated sound effect; note especially the discrepant designations of the *H* in the major European languages (It. *acca*, Fr. *ache*, Sp. *hache*, Ptg. *agá*, etc.). In characteristic Semitic alphabets, particularly in the Hebrew, the name for each consonant pillar and each diacritic sign or vowel symbol is a full-bodied word which, more often than not, is endowed with some primary meaning, hierarchically far weightier than its derivative orthographic meaning; e.g. *H*. ‘*ajin*’ ‘eye’ (and sign for a pharyngeal consonant), *jad* ‘hand’ (and sign for a prepalatal semiconsonant). The situation obtaining in the Greek and the Old Cyrillic alphabet (as used for Church Slavic) is partially reminiscent of Semitic (Phoenician) so far as the length of the labels—as distinct from their partially voided semantic (in particular imagerial) content—is concerned. Both kinds of label, the natural or sound-imitative and the conventionally autonomous, enter occasionally into word-plays, in rebus fashion. In cultures exploiting humorous situations—to produce the impression of informality, light touch, extemporaneousness, originality, gaiety, banter, irrepressible naughtiness, persiflage aimed at all that seems stale and stuffy—this flashy device is effectively harnessed in ticketing fancy food items, unconventional (“exotic”) types of entertainment, all such services as appeal to the customer’s unashamed hankering after modernity and escape from normalcy: *Bar-B-Q* ← *barbecue*, *The hungry i* (name of a San Francisco night club famous for its daring floor show, with *i* standing—one guesses—for [ogling] “eye” or—so legend has it—for “intellectual,” with a possible side-glance at “I” ‘ego,’ while the lower-case letters are impudently thrown in for additional shock), *U-drive* and *U-haul* (two recent manifestations of the “do-it-yourself” fad) beside less sharply silhouetted *U-save* (supermarket), etc. Particularly amusing, on account of the built-in chain reaction of surprises, is *U-Smile* (name of a motel outside Kansas City, Mo.) which, on further thought,

resolves itself into *U.S. Mile*.⁴³ Semihumorous in background, perhaps, and reminiscent of *X* for ‘extension’ is the salesman’s abbreviation *XL* ← *extra-large*, in reference to men’s shirts; this particular symbolization of size by letter clashes with the following use of (a) one series of a given letter: *AA*, *A* (for eggs), *AA* through *EE* (for shoes) and (b) one series of letters: *A,B,C,D* (for men’s pajamas).

Whatever one may think of the latter-day commercialization of these jocular elements, their primary use in comic rhymes, riddles, parlor games, anecdotes, etc. is unassailable. Of the many examples that come to mind let me adduce just two. In the ’forties the following comic rhyme swept this country: *ABCD goldfish?* (‘Abie, see de [= the] goldfish?’)—*LMNO goldfish!* (‘[H]ell, [th]em ain’ [n]o goldfish!’)—*OSAR goldfish* (‘Oh, [y]es, [th]ey are goldfish’).⁴⁴ The other illustration immerses us in a multilingual milieu. Yiddish, in its basic layer an alloy of German dialects but one imposing on its users—all of them literate—familiarity with the Hebrew alphabet, represents a patch of unsurpassably fertile ground for all kinds of cross-cultural puns. To appreciate the joke one must remember that *G. Heu* ‘hay’ corresponds to Yid. /he/, which the letter *H* happens also to be known as /he/, in Semitic tradition, as against standard G. /ha/. The story itself is short enough: An avaricious Jew is reported to have fed his donkey a gradually diminishing daily ration of hay until, at the bitter end, he offered him, instead of any food, a complimentary glimpse of *H* in a Hebrew primer.

⁴³ In this twilight zone one may also place the spelling “eye” for the letter “i,” which, as a result of its intrinsic palsy, suffers from poor visibility. In many cities with “alphabet streets” (e.g. Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, Calif.), the *I Street* appears as *Eye Street* on maps and some street signs. Through further, less justified extension of this principle, a bifurcation in a California road or highway may be referred to as a *wye*; thus, the Y-shaped junction of a well-traveled East-West “cut-off” with the north-south highway a few miles to the south of Napa is known to motorists as the *Napa Wye*.

⁴⁴ The supply of rebus-like jokes and riddles is, of course, inexhaustible. The former category may be further illustrated with *YYUR/YYUB/ICUR/YY4me* (“Too wise you are,/too wise you be,/I see you are/too wise for me”); the later is aptly exemplified with the question: “Which five letters may form a sentence of forgiveness?”, prompting the answer: *IXQSU* (“I excuse you”). Half a century ago, Latin American adolescents drew much inspiration of this kind from H. Pipiritaña, *Media tonelada de chistes*; the German-speaking countries have their own supply of *Witzkisten*, and a veritable subliterate has sprouted the world over.

Interactions of the Separate Functions

After categorizing as neatly as possible the secondary uses of alphabetic letters in actual language, one is led to revert to the question: Is it possible to identify combinations of these functions or overlaps between them? The answer is in the affirmative. (Because there have been all along incidental hints to this effect, a measure of repetition is unavoidable; but a concluding restatement has its justification.)

Several rather different situations come to mind. Hypersensitive persons (such as poets), who have been cultivating experiences in synesthesia, are apt, I suppose, to establish connections between the graphic thinness of an *I* and a certain phonetic thinness (or shrillness) of the corresponding sound [i], or, for that matter, between the roundness of an *O* as a letter and the rounding of the mouth in the pronunciation of [o], if not of [ɔ]. Such sensory cross-connections involving the interplay of the third and the fourth use retain their validity in art and have exerted a modicum of tolerable influence on learned nomenclature, but are unlikely to affect the humbler forms of speech.

A speaker's leaning toward acronymic abbreviation, on the other hand, may very well be paired off with his preference for granting autonomy to short segments of the alphabetic array. Characteristic of ultramodern trends, particularly in the English-speaking world (ironically, also in the Soviet sphere and in Israel), is in fact the selection of such abbreviatory slogans, titles, and names, especially for aggressively marketed brands and for dynamically fostered movements, as lend themselves either to conspicuously easy memorization or to strikingly effective enunciation (best of all, to both). Whereas previously an infectious sequence of catchwords was first launched on its own merits and only then was the wisdom of some kind of space-saving abbreviation separately tested, the stage reached at the mid-century point demands that in preliminary deliberations about catchwords, at the very moment of their "incubation," the optimal advantage to be derived from the impact of their prospective compression be allowed to intervene as a prime determinant of the final choice. The three best mnemonic devices available in the Western World are (a) either to arrange the acronym in such manner that it may convey, in capsulized form, an appropriate message of its own; cf. the appeal of such richly suggestive neologisms as *R. MIG* (name of a

military jetplane) ‘eye’s wink, moment,’ *CARE* and *CORE* ← *Congress of Racial Equality*,⁴⁵ as against the colorless, linguistically indifferent *AFL*, *CIO*, *HUAC*, etc. of earlier vintage (to say nothing of *RENFE*, the uninspiring name of Spain’s national railway company, and of downright cacophonous *SSSR*); (b) or, by way of alternative, to array the letters in sequential order, as in California’s (and other states’) *ABC* Agent, vividly calling to mind the “Alcoholic Beverage Control Act”; (c) or else to achieve a striking monochromatic effect through repetition: *BBB* ← *Better Business Bureau*. Where meaningful authentic words fail to crystallize, there remains the residual possibility of the emergence of such acronyms—bordering on works of art—as suggest names hauntingly beautiful and at the same time not implausible, e.g. *EUDEBA* ← *E(ditorial) U(niversitaria) de B(uenos) A(ires)*.⁴⁶ Of these various techniques it is clearly *ABC* alone that illustrates an overlap between the first and the second function.

Of the exceedingly rare interlocking of the first and the third use no other example is on hand but *Mind your p’s and q’s!* If the anecdote tracing the formula in *Mind your pints and quarts!* is based on ascertainable historical fact,⁴⁷ the dual motivation, pictorial and

⁴⁵ Additional examples: Am. E. *CATS* ← *Children’s Amateur Theater Service*; *FLIC* ← *Film Lovers’ Independent Cinema (Society)*, with a hint of coll. flick ‘motion picture,’ both organizations with headquarters in San Francisco (1965); G. *ODESSA* ← *Organisation der ehemaligen SS Angehörigen*, with the name of a Russian seaport beckoning—as a haven of safety, a dream-like avenue of escape, or a nightmare of remorse? From Italy I can report *FIAT* (with Biblical reverberations) ← *Fabbr. Ital. Aut. Tor.* and *UNICA* ← *Unione Nazionale Italiana Caramelle (e) Affini*. A rebellious student movement might gather more than ephemeral strength if the surging defiance were first expressed by the organization’s threatening full name, then epitomized and driven home, in punch-line style, by a hard-hitting acronym (say, *FIST* ← *Free, Independent Students for Turmoil*).

⁴⁶ Ever new such deceptively euphonious, “romantically” sounding names seem to be crystallizing. The latest that has come to my attention is *ARAPA* ← *American Research And Professional Association* (Berkeley, Spring 1965). Linguistically relevant is the fact that, to increase the percentage of vowels and thus to enhance the audio-oral attractiveness of their brainchildren, the engineers of formulas currently pepper them with *o*’s (from *of*) and *a*’s (from *and*), cf. *CORE*. Contrast this practice with the older strict confinement to the nuclear words, as in *AFL* ← *American Federation (of) Labor and CIO* ← *Congress (of) Industrial Organizations*, where *of* is left unrepresented.

⁴⁷ Derived from the manner of serving beer in English pubs (16th-17th centuries). One had to “mind” the *p*’s and the *q*’s, because they were marked on a board, and the customer paid later by the number of marks.

sequential, of the contrast $p : q$ would explain the immense appeal and rapid speed of an initial tavern joke.

The following combination of uses may be unprecedented. Dartmouth College sponsors a summer educational program for underprivileged children called *ABC* ← *A Better Chance*. The abbreviation conjoins two varieties of the first use: the vivifying sequential effect and the topical suggestion of the program's actual goal: imparting the "ABC" (and its implications) to children.

In the past, some linguistic scientists have gone out of their way to stress the derivative character of script as against speech.⁴⁸ It was probably wholesome or even necessary to drive home relentlessly the distinction in rank; but once the point has been made, it is equally wholesome to remind ourselves that, tape, phonograph record, radio, and television screen notwithstanding, one can observe a present-day global trend toward increased "old-fashioned" literacy. To this rational curve has been superadded, as a discrete feature of style, the fascination for the abstract and distilled. The chances are that, riding the combined crest of these two vogues, the names, sounds, shapes, and successions of letters (the last-mentioned in small segments of the alphabet and in either crude or sophisticated abbreviatory successions) will play a progressively influential part in the phraseological contour and in the lexical deposit of all languages whose speakers resort to alphabets.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ No expert has taken a more uncompromisingly vigorous, indeed, rigid stance on this matter than the late L. Bloomfield; see my review, in *RPh*, XVI (1962–63), 83–91, of his posthumous book *Let's Read; a Linguistic Approach* (1961), ed. C. L. Barnhart, with special reference to the Introduction. My own stand on this score coincides, by and large, with D. L. Bolinger's ("Visual Morphemes," *Lang.*, XXII [1946], 333–340), who spoke up courageously at a moment when it was almost hazardous to do so; see especially his remarks on "Visual paronomasia": visual puns, intentional misspellings, and other non-phonemic signs, such as dashes, quotes, spacing-out (pp. 337–339).

⁴⁹ I owe certain data and ideas to my late wife, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, and to a number of friends: R. D. Abrahams, A. L. Askins, Rina Benmayor, D. Catalán, O. Elizabeth Closs, Louise G. Clubb, P. B. Fay, W. E. Geiger, V. Golla, J. L. Grigsby, Henry R. and Renée T. Kahane, Raimundo and Denah Lida, Marilyn May, Josephine Miles, Arshi Pipa, M. J. Ruggerio, G. A. Shipley, R. Stefanini, A. Taylor, E. Vihman, Alina and Elizabeth H. Wierzbarska, B. M. Woodbridge, Jr. See also fn. 30, above, for a special acknowledgment to Mr. Michael J. Toconita.

There are several side-issues into which limitations on space have prevented

me from going. One rewarding direction might have been the study of commercial brand-names; Leo Spitzer's Smith College lecture of February 19, 1948 ("American Advertising Explained as Popular Art"), included one year later in his book *A Method of Interpreting Literature* (pp. 102–149), is quite unenlightening on this major facet of the chosen "Gebrauchskunst."—The jocular expansion of abbreviations, briefly hinted at in fn. 24, actually represents an autonomous "secondary use," because it interposes between two full-blown word groups a mediating literation of implicitly equal rank; cf., in the parlance of American military advisers stationed in Vietnam, *Viet Cong* → *V.C.* → *Victor Charlie*. The motivation is not necessarily jocular; superstition, pooh-poohing, and still grimmer attitudes may be behind this "verblümter Ausdruck."—Regarding the use of Latin *N*, in Cyrillic environment, for 'X' by Russian classics, note that Gogol, in veiling the locale of his narratives, wavered between *NN* (*Dead Souls*, opening line) and raised triple star, thus: *po ulicam sela****, to which he even dared attach an adjectival suffix: **** skoj cerkvi* (*Evenings . . .*).