Diagraphia in Advertising: The Public as Guinea Pig

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Orthographic conventions adopted by advertisers for many consumer products depart significantly from ordinary standards of correctness, e.g., ARRID, BISKIT MIX, DETANE, KLEEN, WHEY-FERS. This paper analyzes more than 1,500 expressions of this practice and suggests that advertising spelling (1) constitutes the graphic analog of what linguists call diglossia, (2) has influenced the criteria by which English readers judge correctness in spelling, and (3) is made possible by special properties of the graphic-phonological system with which English is written.

"Da-da-doo! When a California firm named Dy-dee-Wash sued Tidee-Didee Diaper Service for advertising itself as Didee-Tidee, a superior-court judge ruled against Dy-dee, saying that Tidee-Didee's advertising as Didee-Tidee did not confuse customers of either firm." *Playboy*, October 1974.

0. It is impossible to stroll through a supermarket, pharmacy, sporting goods, or department store without observing a few expressions of the kind of data with which this study is concerned. Closer examination would reveal more—probably upwards of a hundred on any given day. Moreover, these data occur in high frequency in popular magazines and on television. I refer to the practice of advertisers of modifying conventional or dictionary spellings of names and descriptions of products. This practice is so pervasive that we are no longer consciously aware that there is a "clean" in KLEENEX, a "school" in PLAYSKOOL, a "gleam" in GLEEM, a "rye" and a "crisp" in RY-KRISP, or a "kissed" in SUNKIST. These examples barely hint at the dimensions of this phenomenon: spelling innovations promulgated by advertisers, presumably to attract customer attention through orthographic novelty.

Visible Language, X 4 (Autumn 1976), pp. 295-308.

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The present study represents an attempt: (1) to gather a reasonably large sample of these data, (2) to analyze their structural relations with corresponding dictionary forms, and (3) to make tentative general statements about their nature and functions in contemporary North American society. Analysis focuses on the data themselves. Subsequent publications will consider such spelling modifications from the perspective of advertisers who create them.

1. The sample consists of 1,512 modified advertising spellings (AF's, advertising forms) which contrast in certain environments with corresponding DF's (dictionary forms[1]). The sample is comprehensive in the sense that I recorded all the AF's that I could find in seven months of intensive searching in stores of all kinds, in popular publications, and in television advertising. Probably 75% of the sample came from supermarkets and "discount" stores. About 90% of the sample has as referents products which are sold in stores. The rest are the names of businesses, particularly restaurants of the fast food type. About 7% of the sample came from Nova Scotia, about 3% from the west coast of the United States, the rest from a large urban area of the American Midwest.[2]

Since the resources which can be exploited to effect DF-AF transformations are numerous, I shall discuss at some length the kinds of forms which constitute the present sample. In so doing I shall consider explicitly both the attributes which define AF's as a category and those which do not, but which, nonetheless, are employed in other kinds of word transformations designed by advertisers.

In general, an advertising transformation will be regarded as an AF if three conditions coexist: (1) the spelling change does not simultaneously condition a pronunciation change. This criterion will exclude a form like MIRRO-MATIC,[3] for example, since the spelling change (mirror/MIRRO) obliges a change in pronunciation (/mírər-míròw/);[4] (2) the AF or an isolable segment thereof must have a clear referent in a dictionary form (e.g., KLEEN/clean). This criterion will exclude a form like FOSTEX; (3) the advertising form must be orthographically non-dictionary, a condition not fulfilled by such forms as BAND-AID or EASY-ON. In addition, forms were

excluded from the sample if their transformations were generated solely by one or more of the following: (1) space was modified, e.g., BETTERWEAR, STAYFREE; (2) punctuation was modified, e.g., AĆCENT, SUPRE-MACY; (3) a nonstandard alternate of a dictionary morpheme has been introduced with a customary spelling, e.g., GEE-TAR /gíytàr/ for DF guitar /gìtár/, 'N / ən) 'and', 'O / ə/ 'of'; (4) two sequential forms have been made to overlap, e.g., EVERAIN, ENDUST. In sum, to be an AF, the transformation must be pronounced identically with its corresponding DF; it must be spelled differently, the difference involving letter changes, not merely space or punctuation change; it must consist of more than mere overlap; and the presence of more or less standardized spellings of nondictionary allomorphs (e.g., 'ER / ər/ 'her') cannot by themselves be sufficient to include a given transformation in the AF sample.

2. *Classification of Advertising Forms by Length.*
By prior definition one or more spelling changes must be involved in any DF-AF transformation. From one point of view—length—there can be but three kinds of AF's: those that are longer than their DF starters, those that are the same length, and those which are shorter. Much of the discussion that follows is oriented to these three classes of AF's. Length as a criterion was not selected randomly or capriciously; from at least two perspectives other than length these three categories constitute a realistic classification. One is that frequency of expression varies conspicuously: longer-than-dictionary AF's=7.3% of the sample; DF-length same as AF's=31%; shorter-than-dictionary AF's=73%[5] This suggests that distinct cognitive models have been exploited by AF designers (for the most part professional advertisers) to generate the data. Moreover, while there is overlap, the kinds of transformations involved in the production of the three classes of AF's differ appreciably.

Examples of each AF length class and their transformational analyses follow. Each entry includes a DF or segment thereof and its AF transformation.

2.1 *Longer-than-Dictionary Advertising Forms.* Some examples of this class are: air/AIRE busy/BIZEE canine/KAY-NYNE complex/COMM-PLEX epoxy/E-POX-E handy/HANDEE pocket/POK-ETTE shop/SCHOPPE wink/WHINK.

The total array comprises 81 DF's and DF-partials (12% of those available in the sample), 93 corresponding AF's and AF-partials (11.7% of the sample), and 110 serial-number representations (7.3% of the sample). 187 transformations constitute this array, as follows:

Reduction transformations (6, 3.2%).[6] E.g., [-ah-]=/ /→[-U-], [-ck-]=/k/ → [-K-], [-hnn-]=/n/ → [-HN-], [-ll-]=/l/ → [-L-].

Same-length transformations (35, 18.6%). E.g., [c-]=/k/ → [K-], [-i-]=/ay/ → [-Y-], [-ie-]=/iy/ → [-EE].

Expansion transformations (102, 54.8%). E.g., [-y]=/iy/ → [-EE], [-r]=/r/ → [-RE], [-y]=/iy/ → [-IE], [-p]=/p/ → [-PPE].

In addition, apostrophe, hyphen, and space have been utilized in the lengthening of AF's, as follows: apostrophe (3, 1.6%), hyphen (40, 21.3%), space (1, 0.5%).

2.2 *Same-Length AF's.* This group comprises 258 DF's and DF-partials (38.6% of the sample), 279 corresponding AF's and AF-partials (35% of the sample), and 475 serial number representations (31% of the sample). A total of 631 transformations constitute this group, as follows: reduction transformations (86, 13.6%), same-length transformations (439, 69.9%), expansion transformations (66, 10.5%).

In addition, hyphen and apostrophe have been used as transformation components, as follows: apostrophe (8, 1.3%), hyphen (32, 5%).

2.3 *Shorter-than-Dictionary AF's.* This group comprises 350 DF's and DF-partials (52% of the sample), 405 AF's and AF-partials (51% of the sample), and 1,109 serial number representations (73% of the sample). A total of 1,560 transformations constitute this group, as follows: reduction transformations (1,186, 76%), same-length transformations (162, 10.4%), expansion transformations (178, 11.4%).

In addition, hyphen has been used in this group 34 times (2.2%).

3. *Conscious Change Devices.*
The transformation formula illustrated above has been applied uniformly to all DF-AF relationships and has yielded a total of 2,378 transformations for the sample of 1,512 AF's. These transformations have not been put forth here as directly reflective of cognitive exercises of their designers. Rather, they represent the sum total of a series of devices or models employed by AF designers. The data themselves encourage certain inferences regarding processes consciously exploited by advertisers to generate AF's.[7]

3.1 *Digraph Reduction.*[8] Overwhelmingly, conscious change devices are used to reduce a DF to a shorter AF. A total of 297 DF's (44% of all DF's in the sample and 85% of all *shortened* forms) have been reduced with this technique. Some example of this process are: ac*c*urate/AKURET blo*ck*/BLOK d*oo*r/DOR fl*ow*/FLO v*iew*/VU.

3.2 */ə/-Graph Deletion.* This group is made up of 43 AF's (4.1% of the shorter-than DF group), all but one of which are characterized by the following: (1) two syllables, of which (2) the first is stressed and (3) the nucleus of the second is unstressed /ə/. The feature which sets this group apart is that the DF graph(s) which spells /ə/ has been deleted and *not* replaced in the AF. Examples are: BLISTER /blistər/, CHIK-N /cikən/, FLAV-R /fleyvər/, TYTN /taytən/.

3.3 *Past Participle Reduction.* A small group (9) of past-participle DF's has been changed in such a way as to allow for the inference of a consciously operating reduction device: e.g., dipped/DIPT equipped/EQUIPT hopped/HOP'D tipped/TIPT.

3.4 *Reduction by Homonym Substitution.* In excess of 30 DF's have been reduced by the substitution of all or part of the form by graphic material in representation of a homonym with the DF.[9] Spelling difference and reduced length are prior conditions for substitutability. There are a few cases (e.g., heart/HART locks/LOX new/NU) in which it is not possible from the data alone to determine whether homonym substitutions or another process was operative at the time of the transformation. Some example are: old/OL are/R barbecue/BAR B Q butter/BUT-R extend/XTEND.

3.5 [g] *Reduction.* One of what some regard as the bane of English spelling is the frequency with which some vowels are part-graphed with [gh], e.g., /dow/=[dough], /hay/=[high], /eyt/=[eight]. Advertisers have de- [gh] ed 28 DF's a total of 300 times (20% of inventory serial numbers); e.g., bright/BRITE delight/DELITE dough/DO height/HITE.

3.6 *Conscious Change Devices in Same-Length Advertising Forms.* AF's that are the same length as their DF starters (2.2 above) also appear to have been transformed by conscious devices. These are fewer in number than shorter-than-dictionary AF's (2.3 above). Moreover, reduction per se is operative in but 13.6% of the sample, while same-length transformations constitute just under 70% of the same subsample. And of these, 41.5% are products of a single transformation: [c-]=/k/ → [K -]. That is, in 41.5% of cases in which a [c]-initial DF was transformed to an AF of the same length, the change was to [K]-initial AF's. That 12% of the entire AF sample should be expressed by a single transformation can hardly be regarded as random response by designers.[10] Thus, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that change in graphic appearance per se is a device consciously exploited by advertisers, alone or in conjunction with other conscious devices.

3.7 *Conscious Change Devices in Longer-than-Dictionary Advertising Forms.* These are very few—110, or 7.3% of the entire AF inventory. Several devices operate here, including homonym substitution, e.g., (daisies → DAYS-EASE), (forgone → FOURGONE), (time → THYME). One that seems to be isomorphic with this class is a product of the presumption that "older" or "earlier" spellings convey an image of enduring quality, of the simpler (hence preferable in these complex and troubled times) virtues of yore. Public understanding of "older" spellings involves another kind of presumption—that they should be longer than contemporary spellings, manifesting extra, nonfunctioning letters. Exploitation by advertisers of these mass perceptions has resulted in such forms as OLDE THYME SHOPPE, TOWNE HOUSE, PUBLICK HOUSE, GLAYZE.

4. *Cultural Domains Represented by Advertising Forms.*
One way to view the AF sample is as representing 1,512 distinct product/service names. Even a cursory examination of the inventory, however, illustrates that some classification is possible. There is a plurality of AF's for restaurants, for example, but they tend not to be restaurants we would term "elegant," "posh," "gourmet," or "high class." "Fast food franchise" focuses on the criteria which overwhelmingly are characteristic of AF products/services: (1) high volume, (2) low price, (3) quick turnover, (4) quick expendability.

Among the 270 AF's which seem classifiable as foods/beverages, there are crackers, salad dressings, breakfast cereals, candy bars, "diet" foods, fruit juices. And under household maintenance items there are laundry detergents, floor waxes, toilet bowl cleaners, light bulbs, household deodorizers, paints, pesticides, and garbage bags. By contrast, few AF's exist for products which appear to be the opposites of those just mentioned: automobiles, expensive furniture and clothing, funeral homes, big electrical appliances, medical and scientific equipment, office equipment and machines (but office "supplies" are well represented by AF's). That is, when the projected image is of permanence, low volume, high price, and relative endurance, AF's tend not to occur. This is not to suggest that the criteria specified are binary predictors of AF/non-AF.

I have attempted to group the 1,512 numbers in the AF inventory into categories. In descending order of occurrence, these seem to be:

1.	Household maintenance items	338 (22.4%)
2.	Foods and beverages	270 (17.9%)
3.	Hobby/recreation	181 (12.0%)
4.	Household furnishings	139 (9.2%)
5.	Automotive supplies, services	129 (8.5%)
6.	Toiletries/beauty aids/health aids	119 (7.9%)
7.	Clothing	77 (5.1%)
8.	Pets	66 (4.4%)
9.	Children's toys	49 (3.1%)
10.	Tools	47 (3.1%)

11. Other-than-automobile transportation/communication	41	(2.7%)
12. Miscellaneous businesses	31	(2.1%)
13. Baby items	25	(1.7%)

Examples of the five most frequently occurring domain or referent categories (those numbered 1-5 above):

Household maintenance: ALUM-A-LUB (aluminum window lubricant), ANT-PRUFE (insecticide), BLOXROT-R (wood preservative), CANT MISS (mousetrap), COVERZIT (priming paint), DAZ-L (spray paint).

Foods and beverages: AYDS (low-calorie candy), BAKE-N-SERV (frozen food), BEANEE WEENEE (canned beans), BEEKIST (honey), CHEES POPS (crackers), CHEEZ-IT (crackers), DAN-DEE LUNCH (restaurant).

Hobby/recreation: AIREQUIPT (slide magazine), AQUA-KEM (portable toilet deodorizer), DEDLY DUDLY (fishing lure), DURA PAK (fishing tackle), EASI-LITE (camp light), GLA-MUR (bowling lanes).

Household furnishings: BILTRITE (garden hose), DIGI-GLO (clock), FLEX-O-WIP (egg beater), FRIGIDAIRE (refrigerator), GLYDES (table-leg caster), KWIK PIK (storage box).

Automotive supplies: BRITE-VUE (auto reflector), EZE PAK (battery fluid), FYR FYTER (fire extinguisher), HEET (gas line antifreeze), JET-CIT-THRU (car wash), KAR-KARE (auto oil filter).

5. *Advertising Forms as a Kind of Graphic "Diglossia."*

"Diglossia" is a sociolinguistic phenomenon associated with the scholarship of Charles Ferguson. He observed that there are many speech communities in which two or more varieties of the same language are used by some speakers in different social circumstances; e.g., an educated speaker of German who uses the national standard language for professional reasons and a local dialect at home and with neighbors. An example familiar to Americans is the use of "Ghetto" English by Blacks with peers and family, but standard American English in circumstances (school, job) where it is perceived as necessary or useful. Ferguson points out that national standard/local dialect is not the only dimension along which diglossia can be expressed; Christian Arabs in Baghdad

speak a "Christian Arabic" dialect when talking among themselves but speak the general Baghdad dialect ("Muslim Arabic") when talking in a mixed group (Ferguson 1959). Diglossia, then, is the use of different forms of a language in a speech community, each under known and patterned social circumstances, such that the different forms of the language are in complementary distribution with one another.

There appears to exist a more or less exact analogy between diglossia in Ferguson's sense and the relationships between DF and AF. That is, there are many circumstances in which DF is considered the only acceptable spelling of a word. We are taught DF's in school; DF norms are reinforced daily in most of what we read and in all of what most of us write. Nonetheless, there exists one arena in which orthographic conventions (spelling rules) are different. They are not random, for they exploit genuine English phonographemic relationships. AF's are generated by a set of conditions in which experimentation, variety, and option maximization are known to pay off. The result is that at the same time it is orthographically distinct from DF and in complementary distribution with it. Thus, advertising spelling constitutes the graphic analog of diglossia. I suggest that "digraphia" would appropriately specify situations in which different versions of a written language exist simultaneously and in complementary distribution in a speech community.

6. *Relations between Widespread Use of Advertising Forms and Inherent Properties of the English Alphabet.*

Some basic understanding of how English is written is necessary in order to appreciate why its properties are so abundantly exploitable for AF's. An alphabet is a system of writing in which, ideally, a one-to-one isomorphism exists between grapheme and phoneme. Put another way, a reader knows that any given letter is pronounced with the appropriate allophone of a known phoneme and that this relationship is consistent and predictable. Conversely, when the stimulus is an allophone of the phonemic system being written, the writer can predict with complete accuracy into which of a set of graphemes (letters) he should translate that allophone.

The precision of fit between components of phonemic and graphemic systems suggested by the above does not exist in the practical world of writing natural languages. Numerous historical and structural factors interrelate in ways which reduce the predictability of phoneme-grapheme correspondence. An example from Mexican Spanish (a relatively very efficient alphabet) is that while [s z] are always predictable as /s/, the reverse is not true. Moreover, in some environments, [c sc x] are also predictable as /s/, but not the reverse. Depending on one's perspective (say, English teacher by contrast with AF designer) English writing is either enormously worse or better than Spanish from this point of view.[11]

Even a cursory inspection of English sound-letter correspondences tells us that we do not, for example, write the English consonant /t/ with but one letter, say [t], but that we also write it in a number of other ways: [te tte th ed d ct cht bt tt pt]. It tells us that we do not—as an ideal or high-efficiency alphabet would constrain us—write the English vowel /uw/ with only one letter, but with the following: [ey ioux oue ougha oup ough ou oo oe o ieu ew out u ue ui w we wo au]. And so on, through the inventory of phonemes.

What we write with are not individual letters of the alphabet, but with phoneme-grapheme relationships or functional equations, symbolizable, for example, as follows: /š/=[sh ch t], /i/=[i o ee], /t/=[t ed pt]. Elsewhere (Jaquith 1969) these relationships have been called phonographemes, the term indicating that on the one hand they derive their components from distinct kinds of cultural inventories and, on the other, that they function as units. That is, our alphabet is better described as consisting of 363 or so phonographemes than of 26 letters. In terms of the cognitive operations involved in making graphic-phonological and phonological-graphic translations (i.e., reading and writing), our 26 letters are but the raw materials from which the functioning units are fashioned.

It would appear—perhaps ironically—that advertisers are keenly aware of this. Moreover, if one can judge from the pervasiveness and intensity of the AF phenomenon, advertisers have discovered ways to use them effectively. Canons of spelling cor-

rectness do not apply. It is not that they are ignored; it is, rather, that they are manipulated. The several hundred phonographemes utilized for English spelling have been collected into a kind of thesaurus, the retrieval procedures for which free its users from many of the constraints of correctness. Utilization of these resources assure advertisers continuing access to a vastly augmented supply of graphic materials, one which DF defenders cannot exploit. Why—competition being what it is—would a supermarket display a thematically related group of products AF-tagged as *SANI-BLUE, *DAINTY BOWL, *FLUSH BRIGHT, and *TIDY BOWL when they can feature SAN-E-BLU, DAINTY BOL, FLUSH BRITE, and TY-D-BOL?

7. *Influence of Advertising Forms on Spelling Conventions.* By the time he/she reaches middle age, a consumer in the English-speaking world will have been the target of AF stimuli numbering in the millions. In spite of the tune-out response we all develop to protect against the exhausting necessity of consciously processing inordinately large numbers of stimuli, I suspect that AF's must leave their mark. Aside from other possible consequences of smoking KOOL, of shampooing with LUSTRE-CREME, and of pre-filling with PRE-FIL, one is forced or strongly encouraged to play the alternative spelling game an enormous number of times. We are thus conditioned to an appreciation that we need not remain bound to one-way correct spelling. We see *quick* spelled KWIK, QUIK, and QWIK. We see *safety* spelled SAFE-T, SAF-T, SAF-TE, SAFTEE, and SAFTI. And, I suspect, we come to a kind of understanding that some of the AF experiments are shorter or clearer or more rational than the right (DF) way to spell the word.[12] Consider these examples of letter reduction: kissed/KIST minute/MINIT light/LITE stick/STIK heart/HART spread/SPRED slow/SLO snacks/SNAX.

What effects might lifelong exposure to AF's have on the criteria by which we judge acceptability of a spelling? Put another way, can AF's be shown to feed back into and influence DF's? When I was a child in California, d-o-u-g-h-n-u-t was the way to spell that word, while the very occasional AF D-O-N-U-T was regarded by many as daring. By contrast, one can find "DONUTS

(see doughnuts)" in a 1974 telephone business index. Under "doughnuts" in that directory are listed 58 businesses, all of which use DONUT in the name of the business or the product description. Moreover, both the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* list DONUT independently as "variant of doughnut" and "a doughnut," respectively.

Long-term consequences are difficult to predict. One is already manifest: that our culture and its bearers are sufficiently flexible to tolerate, even encourage, something like two writing systems for one language. One is DF: tried, true, predictable, and dependable —something which is an intimate and permanent part of our lives and which we choose to pass on to our children. The other is AF: ever-shifting, elusive, now amusing, now infuriating, existing in a kind of fairyland where nothing is permanent. Each carries on in its own place, neither seriously challenged by the other.

Such comprehension as English readers ultimately come to possess of the structure of their writing system owes a certain debt to AF. Years of frequent AF translation serve as a kind of consciousness-raising experience. We are forced into awareness that our way of writing offers not just one, not just a few, but many spelling alternatives. We approach an appreciation of the arbitrariness of relations between grapheme and phoneme, that letters and letter combinations can be shuffled about endlessly in seeking new ways to spell the same old word. To put it another way, AF reading appears to have a pedagogical function—to teach us that we write and read with hundreds of phonographemes of which our 26-letter alphabet is only the external manifestation. Why has education ignored this tool? Why have such basic and exciting things about our way of writing been available only as spin-off from a different kind of enterprise? Anyway, thanks, ad guys; THANX, that is.

1. I selected *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as the DF standardizer, primarily because it was handy.
2. Areas where the data were recorded are probably not significant statistically, since almost all AF's have as referents nationally-distributed products.
3. While AF's are in practice written in upper- and lower-case letters, in all colors and sizes and in many type styles, to avoid confusion they and segments thereof are represented exclusively in SMALL CAPITAL letters. DF's and segments thereof are represented in lower-case letters.
4. Phonemic representation is as postulated by Hockett (1959:60) with two modifications: (1) /o/ is not represented at all, since it does not occur in the speech (my own) which was used to transcribe DF's; (2) following more common practice, I use /y/ for Hockett's /j/ and /iy ey ay oy/ for his /ij ej aj oj/.
5. These total 111.3%. This is because some inventory serial numbers (e.g., 75, 1296) reflect more than one transformation and, thus, appear more than once.
6. "Reduction" transformations are those wherein AF is shorter than its DF starter, e.g., [-ck]=/k/ → [-K]. "Same-length" transformations are those wherein AF is neither longer nor shorter than DF, e.g., [ai-]=/e/ → [-AY]. "Expansion" transformations result in an AF longer than its starter, e.g., [-t]=/t/ → [-TE].
7. What is tagged "transformation formula" represents a strictly etic analytical device, previously available and imported by the analyst *ad hoc* into the cultural domain under consideration. By contrast, what I have called "conscious change devices" are emic in the senses that they are suggested by the data themselves, were unavailable before examining the data, and appear to coincide with cultural behavior of the natives under consideration herein: commercial advertisers.
8. "Digraph" is defined as a sequence of two letter graphs which has as its referent one phoneme, e.g., [ea]=/e/, [ck]=/k/, [wr]=/r/. A few trigraphs and one sequence of four letters ([cque]=/k/) are included in this array.
9. Homonym is herein defined as a morpheme (conspicuously including conventional letter names) with the same phonemic shape as another English morpheme. For example, [R]=/ar/ "name of a letter" is a member of a homonymous set which includes [are]=/ar/ "plural present of *to be*."
10. Another factor contributes to the high percentage of [c-]=/k/ → [K-] noted: DF's in general begin more often (17%) with [c]=/k/ than with any other phonographeme.
11. Considerable searching has yielded only one French AF (KÉBEC — Québec) and three Spanish AF's (KAWAMA ← Cagüama; FOTO-KOLOR ← Foto-Color; KORECTOR ← corrector). These languages have relatively quite efficient alphabets in the sense discussed in the text. They are correspondingly poor in AF-building resources.
12. This statement should not be interpreted as imputing altruism or any other motive to advertisers. Another reason for so much reduction might be that it is cheaper to produce shorter AF's. Still another possibility is that orthographically simplified AF's are thought to reach a larger audience of potential buyers. That is, some will be attracted through novelty. Others—the barely- or partly-literate —might be reached through simplified spelling per se.

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