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 -ise 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.