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In an earlier column I wrote about the game *Wordle* from the perspective of how replications and spin-offs have used parts of the game's name (*Quordle*, *Absurdle*, and so on). Well, I have done it myself. Let me introduce *PhoNZErDle*.

This variant has the same format as the original *Wordle*, with five character positions and up to six guesses. Its difference is that it is based not on spelling, but on pronunciation. My primary goal was to develop a phonetics teaching resource for linguistics courses, as it encourages students to think of words not in terms of their letters but their sounds. I have, however, been surprised at the amount of interest from my non-linguist friends.

I constructed *PhoNZErDle* (pronounced fonn-zer-dle) using a generous open-source resource for *Wordle* clones, *AnyLanguage-Wordle*. The idea behind *AnyLanguage-Wordle* is simple – you add your own dictionary and alphabet to a basic structure already programmed in computer code. The dictionary has a long list of possible words of the right length, from which the



# A phonetic Wordle

## Language Matters

target words are selected for players to solve.

*PhoNZErDle* uses a list of phonetically-transcribed words. Some were generously provided by my colleague Catherine Watson at the University of Auckland. Most resulted from my 'translation' of words in an open-source list from their original standard southern British English transcription, modifying them to the New Zealand English (NZE) accent and using a transcription system (*PhoNZE*) which we have developed in the linguistics programme at Victoria University.

*PhoNZErDle*'s alphabet is the IPA – not

the beer, but the International Phonetic Alphabet. Our students are expected to study and assimilate the IPA – again, not the beer. In particular, we get them started on transcribing using phonetic symbols the variety of English (NZE) they are likely to be familiar with or at least to hear around them.

Something we hope *PhoNZErDle* will be particularly helpful for is getting students to think in terms of sounds and not spellings: *panic* and *horseshoe* look very different in terms of their lengths, but they both have five phonemes (distinct speech sounds).

My own experiences in constructing *PhoNZErDle* and then testing it by playing the game have reminded me just how

difficult it is to leave spelling behind.

This is partly because we are accustomed to writing words in terms of spelling and not sound, but also because English has a complicated relationship between how a word sounds and how it is usually written down.

Because of its history, English has what is sometimes called a deep orthography – correspondences between spelling and pronunciation are frequently not readily predictable unless you already know the words. Consider the classic example of ; spellings in *ought*, *cough*, *rough*, *through*, *though*, *bough*, or the pronunciation differences in words related to one another like *sign* and *signal*, or the different pronunciations of *-ed* in *moved*, *jumped*, *wanted*.

Another issue for our students is lack of familiarity with the IPA (the alphabet, not beer). To help them, I have added a selectable "key tips" feature, which produces pop-up guides on the sounds represented by some of the more unusual phonetic symbols. My hope is that they will learn the symbols and eventually not need the "key tips".

A further deviation from the standard *Wordle* game is that *PhoNZErDle* is available in two modes. One is the usual one of a new word each day, so that players can compare how they did. The other is a practice mode, where a new word is introduced when the app or browser window is refreshed.

Interested? Go to [intro2psycholing.net/PhoNZErDle\\_daily](http://intro2psycholing.net/PhoNZErDle_daily). As well as the game, you will find some help and instructions.

## Contact us

Got a language query? Email [opinion@stuff.co.nz](mailto:opinion@stuff.co.nz). Not all queries will be answered.

## ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

# Strong words are also true words

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

Jumping as it was, President Joe Biden's description of the "extreme MAGA philosophy" as "like semi-fascism" was somewhat mild compared to the routinely heated rhetoric from the right. Republicans have nonetheless come unglued over the comment.

Senator Lindsey Graham suggested any attempt to hold former President Trump accountable for his mishandling of classified documents would result in "riots in the streets". Trump himself posted a screed demanding a do-over of the 2020 election.

Don't look now, but the elevation of one leader above the rule of law and the rejection of free and

## Viewpoint

fair elections in service to that leader are close to dictionary-definition characteristics of fascism.

It's not entirely unreasonable for Biden's critics to point out that he campaigned on a vow to bring Americans back together. But immediately after that 2020 campaign Trump refused, and still refuses, to acknowledge his loss. Now there's the news he spent 19 months refusing to turn over classified documents he unlawfully took from the White House.

What should concern Americans more than Biden's possibly impolitic wording is the distressing evidence that his description is essentially, historically, frighteningly correct.