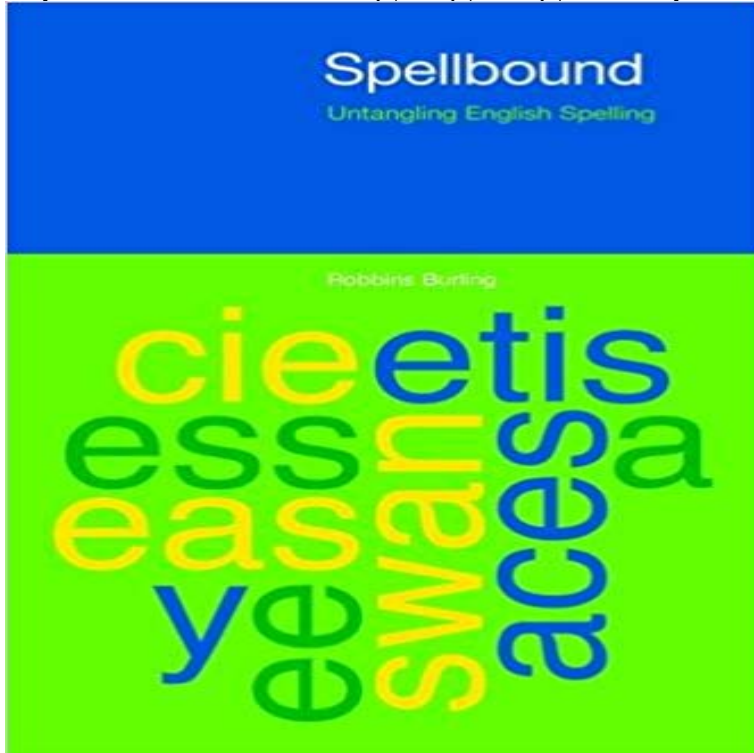


Spellbound: Untangling English Spelling



This is a book of two parts. The first six chapters are relatively general. They describe something of the history of English spelling and the factors that have brought so many irregularities to our language. The author argues that the irregular spelling of English is one factor in the disgracefully high rate of illiteracy in the English speaking world, and he describes attempts to reform the spelling of other languages. Korean reforms required centuries, but were ultimately successful. Some reforms have been carried out more quickly, but many have been complete failures. The reasons for the recurrent opposition to reform are considered. After a flurry of interest in English spelling reform during the first half of the 20th century, the topic was reduced to little more than the object of humor. The second part of the book is more technical than the first part. The criteria that should govern the choice of alternative reforms are described with care. The relatively easily reformed consonants and the much more difficult vowels are then considered in some detail. Attention is given to the problem of designing a spelling that is equally suitable for the many and diverse dialects of spoken English. A unified spelling could not perfectly represent any single dialect, but it could be very much better for all dialects than our present spelling. Possible ways by which reforms might be brought about are considered, but no single spelling is advocated.

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