Zacharias not Zeppelin: Germany to scrap Nazi-era phonetic table

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. **Assigning a word to each letter makes it easier to spell things out. Assign a word of your choice to each letter below. For example, *A is for apple.***

A is for _____.

B is for _____.

C is for _____.

D is for _____.

b. **Now compare your sentences.**

2 Key words

a. **Match the words in the box to the definitions below. Then find the words in the article to check your answers and read the words in context.**

> abolish   advocate   antisemitism   Aryan   eradication   habitually
>
> ombudsman   regime   relic   scrap   seep into   tackle

1. decide not to continue with something; get rid of something _____

2. a government that controls a country, especially in a strict or unfair way _____

3. officially get rid of _____

4. someone whose job is to deal with complaints that people make about an organization or particular type of business _____

5. hatred or prejudice towards Jewish people _____

6. make an organized and determined attempt to deal with a problem, often a social problem _____

7. slowly enter society and daily life _____

8. used for describing people from northern Europe, especially tall people with blonde hair and blue eyes. This word is associated with Nazi theories of race. _____

9. the fact or process of getting rid of something completely, especially something bad _____

10. publicly support a particular policy or way of doing things _____

11. something such as a system or rule that remains from an earlier time or situation _____

12. usually or often _____

The communication aid was altered in 1934 because the original version was deemed 'too Jewish'

Kate Connolly

3 December, 2020

1   Germany is to scrap its phonetic spelling table introduced by the Nazis in 1934 and temporarily replace it with the version the regime abolished because it was "too Jewish".

2   The table, in which code words are assigned to each letter of the alphabet to aid communication and avoid confusion, particularly in radio transmissions and telephone calls, originated in the late 19th century. In 1934, it was adapted by the Nazis who cleansed it of all its Jewish names.

3   "Samuel" was replaced by "Siegfried" to represent the letter S, "Zacharias" became "Zeppelin" for Z, and "David" was switched to "Dora". The preference was for Nordic names to replace Jewish ones, and where no suitable ones could be found, such as N (originally "Nathan"), an object or place name, such as "Nordpol" (North Pole), was chosen instead.

4   The international equivalent is the NATO phonetic alphabet. While that uses the words Alfa, Bravo, Charlie etc to help make spelling out words easier, the German equivalent uses Anton, Berta, Cäsar. The list is officially registered with the German Institute for Standardization (DIN), which regulates everything from the size of chairs to paperclips, under the DIN or norm number 5009.

5   Michael Blume, the ombudsman for antisemitism in the state of Baden-Württemberg – a post recently introduced in 13 states across the country to tackle growing attacks against Jews in Germany – has been leading a quiet campaign to get rid of the Nazi version of the system.

6   "Just in that one name change, Nathan to Nordpol, which we still use today, you can see how deeply this Nazi idea has seeped into our language and our thinking," he told the broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. In the Nazi's pseudoscientific ideology, the North Pole was seen as the original home of the Aryans.

7   While some words were officially changed back in the late 1940s – Siegfried was switched back to Samuel, for example – the Nazi era version has remained the one that most people have continued to use.

8   Historians have said the Nazi move to edit the spelling table, initially a seemingly minimal bureaucratic change in German life, holds an important lesson. The eradication of Jewish names was a warning to anyone paying attention of the intent to eradicate millions of Jewish lives just a few years on.

9   Blume has advocated switching back to the pre-1934 version, the so-called Weimar table. It will probably only be in use until autumn 2022, by which time an updated version is expected to be registered with DIN that will probably rely on city names. But Blume insisted the switch in itself was "an important symbolic gesture".

10 "My intention is that we don't just simply continue to automatically use the version introduced by the Nazis, which erased the Jewish names," he said.

11 The president of the Central Council of Jews, Josef Schuster, said he welcomed Blume's initiative and it was "high time we freed ourselves from the language of the Nazis and its relics."

12 Clemens Schwender, a professor of media who has studied decades of spelling tables that were listed in telephone books from 1881 onwards, told *Die Welt* that the fact that people still habitually use words such as Siegfried "shows that the 12 years of the Nazi era still have their impact."

13 As news of the imminent change spread on social media, many commentators said they had not been aware of the Nazi authorship of the code words, which are known and commonly used unquestioningly in daily life by people in Germany as a practical method for spelling out names over the telephone. Their use in military and aviation communication is limited, as those fields tend to use the international phonetic table.

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b. **Use some of the key words from task a. to complete these sentences.**

1. Unfortunately the government has failed to _____ the question of homelessness.

2. Andy is _____ late for class.

3. The ban on fundraising activities is a _____ from the previous management.

4. Thoughts of revenge started to _____ her mind.

5. The protest was the first of many events that led to the overthrow of the _____.

6. The announcement caused many people to contact the university's _____.

c. **Complete the table with the correct forms of the words.**

verb	noun
scrap	
abolish	
	eradication

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Germany has decided to scrap its phonetic alphabet and replace it with the official NATO phonetic alphabet.

2. The so-called Weimar table was developed by the Nazi regime.

3. Many German speakers have been using the phonetic alphabet without having any idea about its Nazi connections.

4. Michael Blume has recently taken up the position of Minister for Antisemitism in the German state of Baden-Württemberg.

5. This is the first time there have been any changes made to the German phonetic alphabet since the end of the Second World War.

6. Germany hopes to have an official updated phonetic alphabet in place by late 2022. Until that time, the pre-1934 version will be used.

4 Using key language

a. **Match the words to make word pairs from the article. Then find them in the article to check your answers.**

1.	avoid	a.	time
2.	pay	b.	out
3.	switch	c.	gesture
4.	symbolic	d.	confusion
5.	high	e.	attention
6.	spell	f.	back

b. **Use the word pairs to write a short summary of the article.**

5 Discussion

- **The article talks about 'a seemingly minimal change' holding 'an important lesson'. What do you think the author means by this?**

- **What other words and phrases could be controversial?* Should people still use them, do you think?**

- **Can you think of words or phrases that were used by most people years ago but are now offensive?***

*Please be sensitive to the feelings of people in your class as you mention these controversial or offensive words and phrases. Different people will have different reactions.

6 In your own words

a. **What words are used in the NATO phonetic alphabet? Alfa, Bravo, …**

b. **To check your answers and to find out more about the NATO phonetic alphabet, codes and signals, search online for *NATO phonetic alphabet, codes and signals.* What additional help does the NATO chart provide along with the words?**

c. **Create a new phonetic alphabet using the names of towns, cities, lakes, rivers and places of interest in your country or area. Be prepared not only to read out your new alphabet but to explain why you have chosen each word and offer guidance on pronunciation.**