

L'oignon no more

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Quelle abomination! No wonder the [#JeSuisCirconflexe](#) hashtag is already spreading *comme la foudre* . . .

And what on earth comes next? A friend suggests the following.
"2015: *oignon*. 2016: *ognon*. 2030: *le truk ki fe' pleure' ...*"

From *The Guardian*, 5 Feb. 2016

Not the oignon: fury as France changes 2,000 spellings and ditches circumflex

#JeSuisCirconflexe campaigners fight back against decision by the Académie Française to 'fix anomalies' and scrap the circumflex accent

French linguistic purists have voiced online anger at the loss of one of their favourite accents – the pointy little circumflex hat (^) that sits on top of certain vowels.

[Changes to around 2,400 French words](#) to simplify them for schoolchildren, such as allowing the word for onion to be

spelled *ognon* as well as the traditional *oignon*, have brought accusations the country's Socialist government is dumbing down the language.

Nothing provokes a Gallic row than changes to the language of Molière, but the storm took officials by surprise as the spelling revisions had been suggested by the [Académie Française](#), watchdogs of the French language, and unanimously accepted by its members as long ago as 1990.

The aim was to standardise and simplify certain quirks in the written language making it easier to learn (among them *chariot* to *charriot* to harmonise with *charrette*, both words for a type of cart and the regrouping of compound nouns like *porte-monnaie/portemonnaie* (purse), *extra-terrestres/extraterrestres* and *week-end/weekend*, to do away with the hyphen.

While the “revised spelling list” was not obligatory, dictionaries were advised to carry both old and new spellings, and schools were instructed to use the new versions but accept both as correct.

The reforms provoked a #JeSuisCirconflexe campaign (derived from the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag) on Twitter. As the row spread across the internet and social networks, some wondered why the reforms, decided 26 years ago, had suddenly become such an issue.

In 2008, advice from the education ministry suggested the new spelling rules were “the reference” to be used, but it appears few people took notice. Last November, the changes were mentioned again in another ministry document about “texts following the spelling changes ... approved by the Académie Française and published in the French Republic Official Journal on 6 December 1990”. Again, the news went unremarked.

It was only when a report by television channel TF1 appeared on Wednesday this week that the *ognon* went pear-shaped.

A furious student union group issued a statement lambasting education minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem for “believing she was authorised to overturn the spelling rules of the French language”.

The far-right Front National waded in with party vice president Florian Philippot declaring “the French language is our soul” and the centre right mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi calling the reforms “absurd”.

The growing fury forced the education ministry in [France](#) to reassure the public on Friday that the circumflex accent was not disappearing, and that even though school textbooks would be standardised to contain the new spellings, pupils using either would be given full marks.

“It’s just that the publishers of schoolbooks have got together and decided to apply the reforms as of the next school year,” the education ministry said.

[Le Parisien declared the reforms “impossible to apply”](#). Pierre Favre, school headmaster and president of the National Schools Union, said he hoped “wisdom would prevail”

“What makes this subject so controversial is that people are passionate about it. To change spelling touches on their childhood, reminds them of the pain, the effort, the successes needed to learn the rules and triumph. The circumflex accents are a kind of trophy,” Favre added.

Some pointed out that the i-less *ognon* sounds less like a vegetable and more like ‘oh non’, which pretty much summed up France’s reaction to the changes.

“This has been the official spelling in the Republic for 25 years. What is surprising is that we are surprised,” said Michel Lussault, president of the school curriculum board.

“There were strange spelling anomalies linked to historic

shifts so the Académie really made sure these changes were understandable,” he said.

It was not an upheaval, he added, more a “clean-up”.

When making the new spelling recommendations in 1990, the then “perpetual secretary” of the Académie Française Maurice Druon wrote that “language is a living thing,” adding: “Work should begin again in 30 years, if not earlier.”

10 spellings that will change

Oignon becomes *ognon* (onion)

Nénuphar becomes *néufar* (waterlily)

S’entraîner becomes *s’entraîner* (to train)

Maîtresse becomes *maitresse* (mistress or female teacher)

Coût becomes *cout* (cost)

Paraître becomes *paraitre* (to appear)

Week-end becomes *weekend* (weekend)

Mille-pattes becomes *millepattes* (centipede)

Porte-monnaie becomes *portemonnaie* (wallet)

Des après-midi becomes *des après-midis* (afternoons)

Source: [TF1](#)