

## *The Periodic Table of the Alphabet*

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If that bearded nineteenth-century Russian, Dmitri Mendeleev, had turned his attention to the Science of Linguistics, instead of to the pseudo-scientific cult of Alchemy, then rather than merely discovering the Periodic Table of the Elements, he might have been led to invent the following "Periodic Table of the Alphabet."

Rows \ Cols:	V <sub>b</sub>	IV <sub>b</sub>	I	II	III	IV <sub>a</sub>	V <sub>a</sub>
1			<sup>1</sup> A	<sup>2</sup> B	<sup>3</sup> C		
2		<sup>4</sup> D	<sup>5</sup> E	<sup>6</sup> F	<sup>7</sup> G	<sup>8</sup> H	
3		<sup>9</sup>	<sup>10</sup> I	<sup>11</sup> J	<sup>12</sup> K	<sup>13</sup> L	
4	<sup>14</sup> M	<sup>15</sup> N	<sup>16</sup> O	<sup>17</sup> P	<sup>18</sup> Q	<sup>19</sup> R	<sup>20</sup> S
5		<sup>21</sup> T	<sup>22</sup> U	<sup>23-24</sup> V*	<sup>25</sup> X	<sup>26</sup> Y	<sup>27</sup> Z

\* The rare-labial series <sup>23</sup>V <sup>24</sup>W

FIGURE 1.—The Periodic Table of the Alphabet, Preliminary Form.

Note that Column I consists of the 5 vowels: A, E, I, O, U. No less striking is the group of 5 velar consonants (the K-family) in Column III: C, G, K, Q, X. Column IV<sub>a</sub> contains the semi-vowels (H, L, R, Y) and Column IV<sub>b</sub> the dental consonants (D, N, T). Note that Column V<sub>a</sub> consists of the sibilants, S and Z. Finally, Column II features the labials or lip consonants (B, F, P) and the "rare-labial series" of V and W (called "double vee" in most languages). The fact that J is in Column II, whereas M is *not*, is clearly a case of experimental error, which is readily rectified by the simple expedient of interchanging the positions of J and M!

We are now ready for the acid test (to borrow a chemical term) of our new theory. We shall attempt to plug the gap, to "fill hole in the dental column" as it were (no pun intended), in Position 9. There are other dental-consonant sounds in English, such as the one rendered by "th," but they lack a special symbol of their own. However, if we look back to the Greek alphabet, we find that between H and I (called "eta" and "iota" in Greek, and actually written H and I) there occurs the letter  $\theta$ , "theta," the missing "th"! Our new theory is a success. (The old Semitic alphabet, from which both the Greek and the Roman were adapted, had as its first ten letters the ancestors of positions 1 to 10 in our revised chart, including as #9 the dental letter "teth," between #8 "heth" and "10 "yod"). Our revised table appears as Figure 2.

Rows \ Cols:	VI	I	II	III	IV	V
1		<sup>1</sup> A	<sup>2</sup> B	<sup>3</sup> C		
2	<sup>4</sup> D	<sup>5</sup> E	<sup>6</sup> F	<sup>7</sup> G	<sup>8</sup> H	
3	<sup>9</sup>	<sup>10</sup> I	<sup>11</sup> M	<sup>12</sup> K	<sup>13</sup> L	<sup>14</sup> J
4	<sup>15</sup> N	<sup>16</sup> O	<sup>17</sup> P	<sup>18</sup> Q	<sup>19</sup> R	<sup>20</sup> S
5	<sup>21</sup> T	<sup>22</sup> U	<sup>23</sup> V	<sup>24</sup> W	<sup>25</sup> X	<sup>26</sup> Y
						<sup>27</sup> Z

I = vowels  
 II = labials  
 III = velars  
 IV = semi-vowels  
 V = sibilants  
 VI = dentals

FIGURE 2.—The Periodic Table of the Alphabet, Revised Form.

Even the format of Figure 2 is tentative. Perhaps there is another sibilant to be placed above "J." Perhaps W is not truly a separate letter, but merely an isotope of V. In French, for example, they sound exactly alike. (One wag has suggested that the entry in row 5, column II indicates that we have not yet gotten all the *bugs* out of our system. Bah!) But these are relatively minor details, which will surely be resolved during the course of our next Federal Research Grant. However, there is a bold new direction for our future research, which cannot help but excite the imagination—the next triumph for our new theory will be that we shall use it to predict the properties of the letters in Row 6! Once they have been predicted, we are confident that these new, heavier, and probably unstable letters will be discovered individually, by diligent experimental search.