

Definition Determines Correct Spelling

By Linda Berrey, state contest director

There is a misunderstanding regarding the correct use of the *American Heritage Dictionary* with respect to the UIL Spelling and Vocabulary Contest. Some believe that if an alternate spelling of a word can be found in that word's etymology, then that alternative form should be considered acceptable. This issue needs to be addressed.

For example, one of this year's list words is "hanuman," defined in the third edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "a small monkey of southern Asia, having bristly hairs on the crown and the sides of the face". According to all three editions of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the lower-case "hanuman" is the only correct spelling. However, in this word's etymology (found in brackets after the definitions in the third edition), the capitalized "Hanuman" is given as the name of a monkey-god in Hindu mythology. As a result, some assert this word's alternate spelling, along with any word's etymological information, should be an acceptable source for correct spelling.

While words' origins remain eligible for testing vocabulary knowledge, a word's etymology is not a factor in determining correct spelling. For this reason, the information given in a word's definition is the sole determining factor for correct spelling.