

# Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

## §2. Arguments for and against Spelling Reform

These are general arguments that do not fit in any of the other specialised categories listed later in this book. For a comprehensive listing of references up to 1929, see Kennedy, Arthur.: *A Bibliography of Writings in English*, 1929.

### Contents

1. Julian, Jas. [English has More Rime than Reason](#).
2. Hotson, Clarence, [The Urgency of Spelling Reform](#).
3. Barnard, Harvie, [A Summary of Reasons For & Against Spelling Reform](#).
4. Yule, Valerie, [Spelling & Spelling Reform: Arguments Pro & Con](#).
5. Oakensen, Elsie, [Is Spelling Reform Feasible?](#)
6. Rondthaler, Edward, [Simplification & Photo-typesetting](#).
7. Downing, John, [Research on Spelling Reform](#).
8. Evans, Kyril, [A Discussion of Spelling Reform](#).
9. Canadian Linguistic Assoc. [The Case For & Against Spelling Reform](#).
10. Tune, Newell, [Comments & Rebuttal of Previous Arguments](#).
11. Sinclair, Upton, [A Letter to the President](#).
12. Turner, Geo, [Some Technical & Social Problems of Spelling Reform](#).
13. O'Halloran, [Proceedings of SSS 1975 conference](#).

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §2.1 p4 in the printed version*]

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1967 p12 in the printed version*]

### 1. English Has More Rime Than Reason, by James L. Julian, Ph. D.\*

\* reprinted from *the Catalyst*, vol 1, no. 2, June, 1959.

\* Chairman, Dept. of Journalism, San Diego State College.

The verbal spit-balls being tossed at those allegedly guilty for our horrible spelling skills are largely misdirected.

Frequently pelted are such innocents as grade schools, parents, high schools, television, colleges, comic books, educationists, and even opticians. The real culprit, and a monstrous one it is, is the language itself.

Let's face it. English is an illogical, irrational hodgepodge in which most letters stand for different sounds in different words. Note some absurdities: *know* rimes (also spelled r-h-y-m-e-s) with *no*, but not with *now*. *Vain*, *vein* and *vane* all rime, but: *comb*, *bomb*, and *tomb* do not. *Climb* doesn't rime with *limb*, which does with *him* and *hymn*.

You'll find nothing to rime in *blood*, *mood*, and *hood*, but you do in *isle*, *I'll*, *eye'll* and *aisle*. *Sow* (to plant) doesn't rime with *sow* (female swine), but it does with *sew*, *hoe*, *go*, and *dough*. And what's logical about *lead* (the metal) riming with *said*, *led*, and *dread*, but not with *lead* (the verb)?

Our language is illogical because years ago orthographers, the people who established "correct" spellings in the dictionaries, goofed on how to select the right spellings. They had the illogical idea that spelling should be based upon common usage. But the printers, who established these spellings, were mostly imported foreigners. Frenchmen spelled French words as they did at home;

Germans, Dutch also - which did not correspond with the Anglo-Saxon ideas of how to represent speech sounds. There are only 45 phonemes, or basic speech sounds in English, yet there are varied ways of spelling each of these sounds. Examples are *holy*, *wholly*, and *holey*. All together there are over 500 ways of spelling these 45 basic speech sounds - a veritable chaos.

English is difficult to spell because it is not phonetic. That is, any given letter or group of letters can represent different sounds in different words. Note the sounds represented by o-u-g-h in *tough*, *through*, *cough*, *thorough*, *ought*, *drought*, *bough*, *hough*, and *dough*.

Imagine the confusion if our arithmetic were as imprecise as our spelling. In math it's necessary for a number to have a constant value. Thus, 7 always is exactly one unit larger than 6 and one unit smaller than 8. Not so in spelling. The letter *a* represents 9 different sounds in English; the letter *e*, 7; *o*, 8; and *u*, 8. Equally illogical and confusing are silent letters found in such words as *gnat*, *knee*, *know*, *answer*, *two*, and *would*.

English orthography is as confusing as a poker game in which all cards are wild, yet may have different values or even no value under certain conditions. Once a wag named Turner spelled his name Phtholognyrrh. He justified the bizarre orthography this way: *phth* is pronounced *t* as in *phthisic*; *olo* is pronounced *ur*, as in *colonel*; *gn* is pronounced *n*, as in *gnat*; and *yrrh* is pronounced *er* as in *myrrh*.

Better spelling skills are not achieved automatically by youngsters who master phonetics in school. English is such an odd language that the spelling of each word has to be memorised. This isn't easy considering such oddities as the *er* sound, which is spelled differently in *germ*, *firm*, *worm*, *turn*, and *journey*. Conversely, the same letters made different words, as o-u-r in *sour*, *source*, and *courage*. Isn't it expecting too much for our children to master these vagaries of English spelling?

The words *psychology* can be spelled in at least 6,480 ways without changing its pronunciation. You have to use some odd letter combinations, but in English the pronunciation of *psy* is the same for *si*, *ci*, *sih*, *seye*, *sie*, and at least six other combinations.

Spellings are tied to custom and historical roots of words rather than the function of the letters used in individual words. The villains in this plot have been lexicographers the compilers of dictionaries, who have stubbornly resisted much-needed changes. Centuries ago, they could easily have made such changes when our spelling was in a state of uncertainty. Indeed, Noah Webster tried to shorten the spelling of a few dozen words. Today, the American spellings: *color*, *program*, *tire*, and similarly spelled words contrast strangely with the British: *colour*, *programme*, *tyre*. But many of his other innovations have been dropped.

Lexicographers have lacked the courage to allocate only one sound to a letter, eliminating such variances as the *y* in *sky*, *you*, *key*, *duty*, *nymph* and *myrrh*. They've authorised such homonyms as *one* and *won*, *would* and *wood*, and *metal*, *mettle*, and *medal*, *meddle*. They've befuddled us with the homographs *wind*, *live*, *lead*, *bow*, and *read* - words with two meanings, two pronunciations, but one spelling. What a senseless handicap to learning!

What will be done to make English spelling more logical? Probably nothing. Habit is the most tyrannical of masters, and custom is a despot. Orthographers who advocate sensible, simplified spelling always get clobbered by traditionalists who oppose any change in the *status quo*. They are afraid the books they have written will suddenly become obsolete.

Litul relef iz in site for us pore spelors.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.2 pp5,6 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1966 pp12,13 in the printed version]

## 2. The Urgency of Spelling Reform, by Clarence Hotson, Ph.D.

Recently an education authority declared that by 1970 there will be only one poorly paid job available for every five boys who have failed to graduate from high school. The demand for unskilled labor has been constantly shrinking in the face of increased automation, and functional illiterates find it impossible to get and hold jobs. A special weakness of our schools is the evident failure to teach reading and writing to a large proportion of schoolchildren. This is a crucial failure, as reading ability is the key to education.

Meanwhile we must face the evident fact that the children of Soviet Russia are far ahead of our own in mastery of reading vocabulary and academic subjects at the same ages. While our pupils are struggling with babyish primers, the Russians are handling materials of the kind that ours do not reach and years later. [1] A three-year study by Ruth Strickland, professor of education, Indiana University, shows that our children speak maturely, but their school textbooks are giving them baby-talk. The oral language of children, she concludes, is far more advanced than that of our elementary school books. [2]

It seems clear that our schools have some special problem in the teaching of reading that does not trouble the Russians. Why does it take our children so long to learn reading? What causes this difference? Why are Russian children far ahead of our own in academic subjects at the same ages? The obvious reason has been ignored. It is just that the Russians learn to read and write with ease, because Russian is spelled phonetically and consistently, whereas our spelling is so far from either phonetic or consistent as to be something between a joke and a crime. We have some 500 symbols to express the 40 sounds of English. [3] Since these symbols are the 26 letters of our Roman alphabet, and combinations of these, the resulting confusion is terrible. Reason and logic are handicaps rather than helps in learning our spelling. We must rely mainly on sheer "brute memory."

Altho many efforts have been made in the past to reform English spelling, they have never sufficed to overcome the massive inertia that resists all change. Now, however, the evident fact that the young of Russia are being much more efficiently educated than our own should be just what we need to force this reform. The whip of dire necessity may compel what rational argument alone could never achieve. For if we want to catch up with the Russian performance in "space technology" and the education of engineers, the first thing we must do is reform our uniquely eccentric spelling. It is not pleasant to think what will happen if we don't.

George Bernard Shaw performed a great service in calling public attention to the need for spelling reform. He pointed out the great advantage that Russia has over English in having a rational orthography. Unfortunately, as I think, he insisted on an entirely new alphabet for English, and accordingly his play, *Androcles and the Lion* has now been published in double form, Shavian on one side and conventionally spelled English on the other.

A most significant educational experiment has more recently been carried on in England with primers printed in an augmented Roman alphabet of 42 letters. Hundreds of elementary schoolchildren have learned to read with ease and eagerness by the use of such primers instead of the conventional kind, and their zest for reading is such as to alarm their teachers. Their performance far surpasses that of children who start with ordinary textbooks, and they have an advantage of at least a year over such children when both sets of children must later use conventional textbooks.

The importance of this experiment, the Pitman Initial Teaching Alphabet, cannot be exaggerated. It proves that children learning English, if given the advantage of starting with a system of rational spelling, are quite capable of doing as well in school work as Russian or any other children. For such good results, the child must at the outset find English words spelled in a consistent way that does not violate logic. The problem of illiteracy can be solved at the source; indeed, with a rational spelling there will be no problem. The waste of years of time in education can be avoided. The frustration, despair and juvenile delinquency resulting from the extreme difficulty of learning to read and write by traditional methods will be much reduced. A new age of progress and prosperity will begin.

The Simpler Spelling Association, at Lake Placid Club, New York, urges all would-be spelling reformers to make the best of our present Roman alphabet. It would take too long a time to supplant our old-time alphabet by either an entirely new alphabet like Shaw's, or an augmented Roman alphabet like that of the Pitman Initial Teaching Alphabet. The common-sense solution of our root problem, I submit, is to find the best way we now have of representing any particular sound in English speech, and to make that the rule, excluding so far as practical all other representation. At present we use 500 symbols for 40 sounds, so that English is 8% phonetic. A well-devised system of simplified spelling should be almost 100% phonetic.

There are indications now of increased interest in spelling reform but much more is needed. Within the past decade the British Parliament came within three votes of setting up a royal commission to reform English spelling. The argument most effective in defeating the bill even by this narrow margin was that no reform is possible without the co-operation of the United States of America. Nothing will be done, we may be sure, until our government sets up a Spelling Reform Commission, for no reform of any language's spelling was ever achieved except by government action; and this has always been effective.

About 80 years ago, the leading scholars and teachers of English strongly favored spelling reform, and tried vainly to get Congress to act. Recently, Congressman Harlan Hagen, of California, introduced in Congress "A Bill to establish the National Spelling Commission to reform the spelling of English words, to publish the United States Official Dictionary, and for other purposes." This he did January 12, 1959. It has been re-introduced in every session since. The bill, now H.R. 6930, is to be considered by the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as part of the office-wide program, Project English. Public hearings are promised on the bill when the public shows enough interest to demand some action.

It is highly significant that Hon. Harlan Hagen is from California, for this state is well ahead of the rest of the country in realizing the need for spelling reform. Homer W. Wood, a lawyer and former newspaper publisher of Porterville, California, has been most active in the cause. On May 6, 1961, he secured an important resolution from the California Newspaper Publishers Association, with a membership of more than 400 newspapers. On May 23, 1961 under the leadership of Senator J. Howard Williams, the California State Senator passed a resolution for a National Spelling Commission and a United States Official Dictionary.

The Hagen Bill affords a great opportunity finally to rid the English-speaking world of an enormous handicap. It is to be hoped, of course, that full opportunity to consult with Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand will be given, and that perhaps four possible solutions of the problem of spelling reform for English may eventually be submitted by the Commission for the final choice of Congress and the representatives of the other English-speaking lands. The Hagen Bill is at least a motion before the House with which to get started. The necessary government action must be prepared for and accompanied by the peculiarly American way of handling a political problem,

namely, by the initiative of the people themselves. As many as possible of us should become vitally concerned with the problem of spelling reform. Let each one, or as many as can do so, develop his own system, and then compare notes. Let the best ideas be found by such experimentation and comparison of notes.

The merits of all suggestions for reform must, of course, be carefully reviewed and evaluated by the eminent scholars to be appointed to the spelling reform commission when Congress passes the Hagen bill or some similar measure and one is accordingly established. In reply to an open letter to President Kennedy by Upton Sinclair, the noted author, in behalf of spelling reform, the President's office recently suggested the formation of the committee of scholars and specialists to canvass the entire question and make concrete recommendations.

The urgency of spelling reform also appears from the fact that despite its atrocious orthography, English, by reason of the special merits: its vast vocabulary, relatively simple grammar and syntax, freedom from inflections, essential brevity, and the immense empire of literature and learning which it offers the adept, is already the most important medium of international communication, and is increasingly studied by educated persons the world over. It is noteworthy that a phonetic system of spelling called World English has been employed since 1930 to help students in secondary schools of Scandinavian countries to correlate sounds of English words with their conventional spelling. This phonetic system enables the pupil to pronounce the word correctly in spite of its present-day spelling.

Of course, foreign students learning English cannot expect for some time to come to escape the need to read English as it is now spelled. Any phonetic system they use is a means of glossing the conventionally spelled text to enable them to pronounce what they read with reference to a phonetically consistent key. But in the measure that English becomes the world medium of communication, the pressure for a phonetic or rational spelling is bound to increase. The more the world's people make English their own language, the less they will be willing to tolerate such nonsense as the spelling we have passively inherited. If we fail to reform the spelling of standard English, however, what will surely conquer the world will be a wretched "Pidgin English," a deliberate insult to the standard tongue. So far as it is ever recorded, it will be phonetically spelled. But it will outrage the very souls of all who cherish our noble speech.

It is time for a great effort to reform our spelling and to free teacher and pupil alike from the slavery imposed by an anomalously eccentric orthography, thus leaving far more time for teaching and acquiring real knowledge. Instead of repressing and suppressing the child's nascent rationality by a spelling that insults and penalizes reason and overemphasizes brute memory, we can cultivate his mental powers by a sensible system such as I propose. The damage to the minds of children from our present spelling is incalculable.

For those who need to be shown just how extremely bad our conventional spelling is, I highly recommend *English Heterography, or How We Spell* by Dr Godfrey Dewey, an 80-page booklet published and distributed by the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, Lake Placid Club, New York. The Foundation welcomes financial contributions in support of its good work.

This contribution of mine to spelling reform is an attempt to expiate the sins of a fairly long life. For after getting a Ph.D. at Harvard in English Philology, I inculcated our unique orthography as a college teacher of English for a number of years, and then for another period of years enforced it as the proof-reader for a great publishing house. With that background, and my recent study of spelling reform, I feel reasonably sure that I know what I'm talking about.

In view of the efficiency of Russian education as the result of nothing except phonetic spelling, a drastic rationalizing of English spelling is imperative for the welfare of the free world and perhaps even for its survival. If there was ever a time when we of the English-speaking world could afford to handicap ourselves by our present ghastly spelling, that time is now surely past. The great merits of English have made it the leading medium of world communication despite this handicap, but now that our entire free way of life is in danger, this disadvantage of being hampered by the world's worst spelling must also be overcome. Our freedom itself may well depend on our success in achieving a rational spelling. This must be done within ten years at most, if our luck or the mercy of Providence allows even that much time. Where do you stand, reader? Will you pitch in and help the cause?

*Footnotes:*

1. *What Ivan Knows that Johnny Doesn't*, by Arther S. Trace, Jr., Random House, N.Y. \$3.95.
2. *National Observer*, July 30, 1962. This study was financed by the United States Office of Education.
3. *English Heterography, or How We Spell*, by Godfrey Dewey, Ed. D. Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, Lake Placid Club, N.Y.

Clarence Hotson Ph.D., Romulus, N.Y.

**Editor's comments:** I think one thing was reported all out of proportion to its actual importance. I doubt if the argument most effective in defeating the bill in Parliament was that reform was not possible without the co-operation of the U.S.A. and other English-speaking countries. This was only a red herring that could easily have been disposed of if they had wanted to do so. It is very simple to amend the bill to read "the Commission is empowered to seek agreement with other English-speaking countries as to the form of spelling simplification to be adopted." The real reason was that Mont Follick, MP who introduced the bill, showed as an example of the reform his blasted alphabet which was probably one of the worst. As I have long contended these skeletons should be kept in the spelling reformer's closets where they can frighten no legislators, or we will continually further the day when legislators will seriously consider any spelling reform bill. The important step is to get Congress to establish a commission with authority to select a system of simplification by agreement with other English-speaking countries. There will be plenty of opportunities to show the Spelling Reform Commission the hundreds of schemes devised by reformers since before the time of Columbus. Reform has not been delayed by a lack of examples, but rather *because of some of them*.

Reform *has* been delayed because of the lack of interest by parents and teachers in the ease with which their children learn to read - and the many other advantages of simplification. Getting quantities of convincing arguments to our legislators is the problem we must solve first. Let's put the horse before the cart - not the reverse order!

[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.3 pp7,8 in the printed version.]  
 [Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1977 pp14,15 in the printed version]

### 3. A Condensed Summary of Reasons For and Against Orthography Simplification,

by Harvie Barnard, Tacoma, WA.

as a means toward better communication and understanding among English speaking peoples, both at home and on an international basis

#### Part 1: With respect to young children, preschool, kindergarten and primary.

<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
<p>Simplification is good because it makes learning easier and faster for young children, especially for beginning readers: kindergarten and primary pupils.</p> <p>Simplification of orthography would involve changes in spelling which would ensure a more consistent relationship between sounds (pronunciations) and spelling, thus making a dependable symbol-phoneme the relationship.</p> <p>Any changes which would make spelling more consistent and logical would make reading instruction a simpler matter for everyone: pupil, teacher and the schools.</p> <p>A logical and consistent relationship between sounds and spelling will enhance word recognition, hence simplify and improve the reading process without causing confusion due to inconsistencies. At present there are many symbol combinations representing a single sound, and also various pronunciations for a single symbol - as for the vowel letters and the letter "c" and other important consonant letters.</p> <p>Which is more important to the child - learning to read or the study of etymology and philology? Certainly learning to read must come first. Etymology is incomprehensible to a child and just as useless. Preserving etymology as a defense for the status quo has not been allowed in Italy and other European countries where simplification has been made.</p> <p>The basic principles of reading and the processes of teaching reading are well understood. The major problem is not that of teaching, but the difficulties of having to teach</p>	<p>Making learning easier is bad for children because anything which comes easily without work is not appreciated or really learned. The old adage, "The easier to learn the easier to forget - and the harder to learn, the more it is retained" still permeates the thinking of many teachers.</p> <p>Changes in spelling would only tend to compound the present state of confusion, because we are having too many difficulties are things are now. Changes could make matters worse.</p> <p>The learning of spelling and reading has always depended more on memorization and of multi-symbol combinations (whole words), rather than upon definite phonemes for specific speech symbols (letters).</p> <p>Because our language is based on many tongues, both ancient and modern, it would be impossible to alter spelling or pronunciations without losing sight of word origins. Too many changes would result in a loss of traditional inflections as well as the phonemic sources associated with the history of our language. Carol Chomsky says the English language has the optimal spelling for representing words because it shows the relationship between the root words and their derivatives, which makes easier the spelling of the latter.</p> <p>We have always had illiterates and a certain proportion of "slow" readers in spite of new reading programs and all kinds of teaching aids. The basic causes of non-readers and illiterates cannot be eliminated because we do not know what they are.</p>

<p>inconsistent material. If numbers and symbols had more than one numerical value, no teacher could teach arithmetic. Is it reasonable to expect a child to learn from 2 to 5 sound values for more than half of the symbols of our alphabet?</p> <p>The teaching of inconsistencies, irregularities and unpredictable values places an excessive and needless burden upon the teacher as well as the pupil. Several successful simplifications have been developed and proved effective. The major obstacle to the use of any one simplification system is not the program itself, but the decision as to how and when it should be adopted and put into use. As far as the pupils are concerned, there really are no objections to spelling reform.</p> <p>Making words easier to spell would probably eliminate one of the great traditions of the public school system - the great American Spelling Bee, with its considerable waste of time, which could then be used to advantage to develop the child's knowledge of content reading.</p>	<p>Inconsistencies are so deeply ingrained in our spelling habits that it would be easier to continue to teach inconsistencies than to eliminate them.</p> <p>Aren't we overly concerned with the 5% or 10% who are retarded readers?</p> <p>If there was a best system of reformed spelling, reformers would be in agreement on it. But there isn't. Everyone who devises a solution to the problem of reforming our spelling has different ideas and a different system. If spelling reformers can't come to any agreement as to which is the best system, how can they expect anyone else to decide which is best?</p> <p>It is not practicable to consider a simplification because of the many difficulties of implementing any kind of a new system. Even if one particular system were to be adopted, how could we be sure that it would be accepted and used by all schools and teachers?</p>
--	---

**Part 2: With respect to adults, literate and illiterate.**

<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
<p>While adults who are already literate might find a new spelling a little strange at first, the fact that it would be easily sounded out would make it easy for adults to readjust their reading habits. Besides they would not have to learn all of it at one time. It would be presented to them gradually as they saw it in the newspapers.</p> <p>Illiterate adults would need to go to school in any case, but they would find the learning to read so much easier than when they tried to learn T.O. that they would be happy with a system that was logical, sensible and easy to learn.</p> <p>Adults who were dropouts would then have an incentive to return to school - because then learning to read would be made so much easier.</p> <p>Foreigners would be more willing to learn English if it were phonemically based instead of having little system or regularity.</p>	<p>Adults would object to having to go back to school to relearn to read in a reformed spelling. A considerable readjustment would have to be made to the reading habits of literate persons, with considerable slow-down during the relearning period, costing money to employers.</p> <p>School dropouts would not be willing to return to school and again face failure. Most are probably earning money even if the job is not paying good but they could not afford to give up this pay in order to again try to learn to read.</p> <p>Most foreigners do not need to learn English and those that do will learn anyway because a strong need makes a compelling desire to learn. When there is a will, it will find a way. The present spelling has not prevented millions from learning English. And English is already the most widely used foreign language.</p>



### Part 3: The relation of simplification to reading.

<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
<p>When word recognition is made more dependable, it is simplified for the reader, hence reading becomes faster and the flow of that uninterrupted, hence more understandable.</p>	<p>Since word recognition is largely a matter of visual memory, there is little to be gained by establishing logical or reliable relationships between spelling, pronunciation, and reading.</p>
<p>Altho memorization is fundamental to all learning, a consistent relation between symbol groupings (spelling) and phonemes (sounds of the symbols) makes learning something more than mere rote or "non-sense" memorization.</p>	<p>Some children are destined to be non-readers and seem to be in a state of confusion from the first grade on. This condition has been termed "Dyslexia," and it is generally considered to be incurable. Therefore we will always have a percentage of non-readers, functional non-readers, and complete illiterates.</p>
<p>When one symbol or symbol combination is assigned to several sounds, or when one sound is assigned to several symbols, word recognition becomes completely illogical and hence confusing. Because there are so many situations in English spelling, simplification is a necessity if confusion is to be avoided.</p>	<p>It has been demonstrated many times that competent teachers are able to teach the majority of children to read without a large proportion of failures. Many of these children are likely to fail regardless of what we do for them or how much we simplify the orthography of the English language.</p>
<p>Any simplification which reduces confusion will aid in the teaching of reading, and will thereby reduce frustration and the attendant reading failures.</p>	<p>The success in teaching children to read depends upon the method used. Some methods work better on girls and others work better on boys.</p>
<p>It has been demonstrated that when the element of confusion is eliminated from the mind of the student he is enabled to make a fresh start. Then, by avoiding further confusion with its attendant frustrations, the "failure" can succeed in learning to read. Encouraged by initial success resulting primarily from simplification, the poor reader now gains self-confidence and takes on a new attitude of reassurance and faith in the system.</p>	<p>Ability to read is mainly a function of the I.Q. of the individual. Either he "has it" or he does not. If he was born with a sufficiently high I.Q. he will read without difficulty. If his I.Q. is below a certain level he will probably never learn to read.</p>
<p>It has been shown that I.Q. values depend to a large degree upon the early, preschool, environment, and that by rescuing very young children from a greatly deprived environment at a sufficiently early age, the I.Q. can be substantially improved. Also it has been demonstrated that tests intended to evaluate "intelligence" had an academic or an environmental bias, and that by providing a period of training in a favorable environment, I.Q. ratings could be substantially increased.</p>	<p>The same can be said for memory. A person either has it or he doesn't. If the memory is good, the person will learn to read. If not, the person will have reading difficulties or may never be able to read effectively.</p>
<p>It is common knowledge that inconsistent,</p>	<p>A spelling reform with all its attendant difficulties is not needed. What is needed is the removal of slum environments and correction of the lack of reading matter in poor peoples homes.</p>
	<p>Since many things in life are inconsistent, illogical, and hence confusing, children should be taught as early as possible to accept inconsistencies and adapt to them.</p>

<p>irregular, or confused information is not remembered as readily as that which is consistent and illogical. This being true, why should we handicap the learning processes of young children by forcing upon them material which is inconsistent and illogical?</p> <p>The public pays an exorbitant price for academic failure. Inability to learn is related directly to failure to read or "functional illiteracy." Failing leads to dropping out, which relates directly to juvenile delinquency. Therefore any form of simplification in our educational process which reduces failure at any or all levels of learning would be a blessing for the pupil, the schools, and the public.</p> <p>Simplification may begin with the alphabet or with consistency in the relation between sounds and symbols, between pronunciation and the way words are spelled. In a truly simplified fonetic system, "if you can pronounce a word, you can spell it. If you can spell it, you can write it, and if you can write it, you can also read it."</p>	<p>If we were to eliminate confusion by simplification, or by any other means, there would be a tendency for all students to gravitate towards a common norm. The poorer ones would improve and the better or superior ones would be less outstanding. This would tend to eliminate the screening effect produced by the elimination of those of lesser intelligence and our schools of higher learning would become overcrowded. Hence, illogical subject matter serves a useful purpose - that of preserving the status quo of our present academic system.</p> <p>It is useless to fight tradition or the established order. Teachers and students alike should be taught to accept things as they are, which is always easier than overturning established procedures. We should accept "reality" and use the methods, materials and equipment which we already have had provided for us by our academic leadership. As long as the policy makers and authorities are satisfied, why should educators risk their jobs for the sake of change?</p>
--	---

**Part 4: The relationship between simplification and dropouts and delinquency.**

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>For</i></p> <p>As long as we successfully oppose ease of learning or simplification of any or all of our academic processes, there will be confusion, frustration and failure of some pupils to learn. Failure means dropouts, and dropping out is the first step towards delinquency. Since delinquency almost invariably leads to deviant behavior in one form or another, it could be said that school failure is the beginning of a life doomed to criminality. Thus, when our schools produce failures, we are "educating" to make criminals. If our schools can get pupil started properly and successfully, failures may largely be avoided. Simplification of the learning process will help greatly to do this.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Against</i></p> <p>Although delinquency is known to be closely related to dropping out of school, it is also believed that much delinquency begins before the pupil is placed in the public school system. An undesirable family or home environment can initiate delinquent tendencies at an early age. Frustration and erosion of the child's psyche and self-confidence may have begun long before the child is exposed to the learning processes and teaching in the schools system. It is almost always the children from deprived or debased home situations who have serious learning difficulties. Children from good family situations are usually happy children who have the least learning problems and usually the least likely to fail or to drop out. By the time the child reaches 2nd grade his character is largely determined and his success or failure assured or denied.</p>
--	--

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.4 pp9-18 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1976 pp11-20 in the printed version]*

## 4. Spelling and Spelling Reform: Arguments Pro and Con, by Valerie Yule\*

(SR-1 used)

\*Prepared by Valerie Yule, Victoria, Australia.

Published by Access Skills Project Team, Curriculum Standing Committee (Technical Schools), Curriculum and Research Branch, Education Department, Victoria, Australia, May, 1975.

### Index

1. [Introduction: Spelling Reform is Red, but not a Herring.](#)
2. [The claims of spelling reformers.](#)
3. [Arguments against spelling reform, and critique of these arguments.](#)
4. [Some opinions of reputable authorities and educational experts](#) (representative of a much larger group.)
5. [English spelling and 'specific learning difficulties' in reading and writing.](#)
6. [Why not spell any way you like?](#)
7. [The teaching of reading if there were a consistent English spelling.](#)
8. [The dangers of SR-1.](#) The risks of letting Australians spell with short e-sound with the letter e.
9. [SR-1 in the schools.](#)
10. [Comparative testing of spelling reform proposals.](#)
11. [The next step?](#)
12. [Recommendations for action on spelling reform.](#)
13. [For further information:](#) Draft contents of a monograph in preparation on spelling and spelling reform.
14. [Spelling Survey 'Beta.'](#)
15. [Bibliography, references:](#) (still incomplete)

### 1. Introduction: Spelling Reform is Red - but not a Herring.

Modifying English spelling to remove its worst excesses and irrationalities is part of our fight against social injustice.

1. It was imposed in the first place in the 18th century in order to eliminate the visible signs of education to the elite. (Read Lord Chesterfield if you doubt this). The more difficult the spelling you espoused, the higher your snob rating. English spelling remains a visible sign of social oppression and social distinctions. It is indeed a dead hand of the past.
2. An important part of the fight for social justice is arousing peoples' consciousness of how they are oppressed. We do not have merely economic oppression but psychological oppression too, which we do not realise. We take for granted difficulties and suffering which are preventable, and put up with things that are completely irrational, not realising that they could be changed. In schools today many children are becoming quite vocal about how the adult world oppresses them - and English spelling is for them one of the most unjustifiable impositions of inconsistent, dishonest adults, who say, for example, our spelling is sensible - when the children can see that it is not.
3. English spelling does not handicap the privileged people in society, who have fewer problems with it because of their literate homes or verbal facility or good visual memories. Like athletes, they can jump the hurdles. But the cripples who cannot jump and have to clamber, if at all, are the multiply-handicapped and the disadvantaged and the foreigners. Where we spend months learning to read and write, they spend years on spelling. Many have not the capacity to cope

with it as children without special coaching, or are only able to learn as adults - again with special coaching - but they never become as proficient as others, and they have missed out on their years in school.

In the past a higher proportion learnt to read despite our spelling than do now because in the past:

- a. At least an hour a day and often more was spent just on spelling for 6 years. Today teachers want to 'educate' children, not teach spelling; the curriculum is full of other things. (Some schools still spend 1 hr. a day).
  - b. Children were punished for *not* learning, and so scared into learning. Do we want this still? What *positive* motive can we offer kids?
4. The more people can read, the more able they will be to know and fight for their rights and to act constructively to preserve and improve society. Therefore anything that helps people to learn to read and write better is a weapon in the fight for social justice, and should not be scorned.
  5. Spelling reform has been a major plank in social reform in most countries which have changed their social systems in this century. (Whatever you may think of the social changes they made, the leaders of the successful changes regarded spelling reform as *part* of their fight, not a red herring).

cf. Russia, 1918, Turkey, 1929, Indonesia in their fight against the Dutch, Korea in its fight against Japan. Red China has been bringing in spelling reform even before they won the country; the pictograph system has been progressively simplified and reduced in number - and literacy rates have gone up, but it is still too difficult to achieve universal literacy, and so they are bringing in our alphabet with fonetic spelling - altho you would think their difficulties so much worse than ours:

- a. A completely different way of writing - not just minor modifications such as we seek. And their literary heritage, in that picture-writing, goes back thousands of years.
- b. Chinese has far more homophones than English, distinguished only by tone.
- c. Chinese has hundreds of languages, all linked by the picture-writing; now millions of Chinese must learn Mandarin to read it.

Yet they see universal literacy as so much a part of social justice, they go ahead. Already the fonetic writing appears frequently in dual combinations with the pictographs on walls, posters and periodicals (cf. how the Koreans switched to a new alphabet by the same dual transition period). A friend just come from Peking tells me that they confidently expect the transition to be made in five years. And we boggle at the few changes we need to make our own creaky system work - as if we were too mean to pay for a few spare parts when our car had broken down. We prefer to insist nothing is wrong - and keep on pushing it.

6. A red herring is what distracts attention from the main issue. Since the simple changes suggested require no money, time or effort except a willingness to try it out, it can hardly be said to be a distraction on these counts. (Unless everything a human being does that is not directly fighting for social justice in the economic sphere is a red herring. Do you go to the motion pictures? Do you spend time with your family?)
7. The degree to which it need not be a distraction is seen in the fact that people who imagine SR-1 would be disturbing can look at how little disturbance has been caused by other spelling and orthographic changes already generally accepted in the interests of efficient communication, e.g.:
  - a. American spellings permitted as dual spellings in schools.
  - b. Omission of apostrophes in Scottish education and even in some Australian publications.
  - c. Changes such as Ms. and the computer numbers on cheques, etc.
  - d. A good deal of simplification of technical terms in cybernetics, etc.

*Exercise for you:* In the streets and when travelling, pass the time by reading notices, etc., and note:

- how many silent letters are quite superfluous. (*When in doubt, cut it out.*)
- how many simple changes would still leave words completely recognisable and yet so much easier to learn and spell.

If we only dealt with these, at least the burden would be lightened a little - and then we could decide whether we wanted to do anything about 'trickier' ones. Half a loaf is always better than no bread - and it might be enough - or it might encourage us further. Why not have the courage to find out? It is not as hazardous as smoking.

(Note re. our heritage:

1. Most books in the world today were printed or reprinted in the past 20 years. In fact only a small minority have read anything in the past ten years that was not printed within their lifetime.
2. A sensible spelling reform would not be so alien, so anyone who wanted to could read old spelling, as you read 1st Folio Shakespeare and English students read Chaucer.

"There is in fact no evidence at all for the main claims of spelling reformers." (quoted by Barry Hill, *The Melbourne Age*, Jan. 1975.

## **2. The Main Claims of Spelling Reformers.**

1. The major claim is that English spelling needs reform.
2. Other countries have successfully modernized their spellings, and set precedents for us.
3. The difficulty of present English spelling is greatest for those who are already most handicapped in society - the disadvantaged, migrants, and children who are handicapped intellectually, emotionally, physically or culturally.
4. Present readers would have less difficulty reading a consistent English spelling than those now functionally illiterate have trying to read present spelling.
5. The major barrier against spelling reform is our own prejudice against change in what has been drilled into us as 'right' without us ever having a chance to contest it. The effects of this type of prejudice appear throughout history against every reform that has tried to benefit the human race.
6. That people can adjust to changes in spelling - as they have adjusted to radical changes in fashions, decimal currency, metric measurement, forms of transport, heating, communication, etc., etc. The bases of our society itself are questioned. Why keep spelling as the last paper tiger?
7. English spelling has always been changing - although too slowly. It is already being quietly modified without disaster by dual spellings in dictionaries, and c.f. the recent modifications in the Victorian Spelling Book, the Scottish Spelling Book, etc. - none of which have attracted any public furore at all.
8. Modifications to English spelling such as the open 'short-e' the spelling of SR-1, can easily be tried out; if they are unsatisfactory, they will fail and no harm would be done - as the attempted American reform 70 years ago failed because people feared being thought 'uneducated' if they spelt more sensibly. On the other hand, if 'the time is ripe,' the changes will stick.
9. There are so many barriers to universal literacy that we cannot leave this one alone as if it were the only problem learners face.

These claims can be investigated - much evidence exists already.

### 3. Particular Arguments Against Spelling Reform.

#### a) *Popular:*

1. Our spelling enshrines the history of our language.
2. Our English language is very rich; if you change the spelling, the richness of the language is lost.
3. Changing spelling would mean the loss of our literary heritage.
4. Present spelling is beautiful and changes offend the eye.
5. If we have a spelling reform, we should have a perfectly phonetic one, and since that is impossible, reform is impossible.
6. Everyone should be allowed to spell as they like.
7. Hard spelling is good discipline for children.
8. Reading is on the way out, so it is a waste of time bothering with spelling reform anyway.
9. English spelling has never changed, and so must never change.

#### b.) *Scholarly:*

1. English spelling is really quite regular even though it does not look like it.
2. The connections of related words, and the connection of the spelling with the underlying deep structure of our language would be lost. This would affect
  - a) Children's extension of vocabulary.
  - b) Ease of adult reading, undistracted by phonetic representation of words.
3. Homophones (words which sound the same) would be spelt the same and this would cause more confusion than it does when we talk.
4. Ninety percent of our words would need changing. This argument is often advanced by those who also support statement b) 1.
5. Spoken English varies so much that common ground for reasonable spelling is impossible.
6. Better sound-symbol correspondence makes reading speeds slower. (Conversely, does worse correspondence make reading speeds faster?)
7. Anything that tends to make writing easier will make reading more difficult and vice-versa.
8. The present spelling is the best imaginable for children learning to read.

Spelling reformers claim that all these arguments are untenable, that the research claimed to support them can be shown to fail to do so, and that evidence can demonstrate the opposite case.

#### *Critique of arguments against spelling reform*

Summary. (For detail, see Monograph Report).

#### a) *Popular arguments*

1. English spelling is not reliable as a shrine for the history of our language, which is better seen in reference books. Who wants to use it as a shrine anyway? We don't expect cars to look like horseless carriages.
2. Our English language is rich and marvellous; do not confuse it with the spelling. The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.
  - a) In many ways a sensible spelling would make it easier to read Shakespeare in the original than it is now. He spelt 'cough' as 'cof.'
  - b) Once you are an expert reader, you can soon read anything, even another language - and more people would be expert readers. Expert readers today can read Old English spelling.
  - c) In any case, most of what anyone has read has been printed or reprinted in the last 20 years.
4. Beauty in spelling, fashion, art, women, depends on what you are used to seeing.

5. A *practical* spelling reform is needed for *practical* reasons.
6. Freedom to communicate more effectively is more important than free spelling at the cost of communication.
7. Good discipline for children is learning to work hard on tasks seen as sensible.
8. If literacy is lost, we do indeed lose our English heritage, as well as a major dimension of human experiencing and communication across time.
9. English spelling has always been changing, altho the tempo varies.

b) *Scholarly arguments*

1. An analysis of the Stanford computer studies shows that the 'regularity' of English is quite useless for learning to read and spell; even a computer given 203 rules for spelling can predict only 26% of the words Form II students are expected to spell correctly.
2. An analysis of the spelling list for Grades III-VI shows that only 10% of the non-phonetic spellings there have any connection with 'underlying structure' which Chomsky claims that English orthography represents. A further analysis shows how inconsistent English spelling is in even the nature of the connections that do appear.
3. English spelling is already full of words with different meanings which sound and are spelt the same. (112 on this MS page.' A phonetic spelling would only add 24, i.e. over 77% of the homographs exist already.) We use context both when we talk and when we read, and so are not confused. (e.g. show, can, sound, will). But in partial compensation, many homographs would then be spelt differently, e.g. read, does, present, tears, on this page.
4. Most of the change necessary for sensible spelling is in cutting out surplus letters, (which would save 5-10% of paper, ink, effort and time) and very few words would look unrecognizably different (e.g. cof and cough).
5. Dictionaries now use 'standard English' as guides for pronunciation; however much our speech does vary, we *think* we are talking the same, and what we *think* is what would make consistent spelling internationally feasible.
6. Only readers expert in present irregular spelling would be slowed down by better sound-symbol correspondence. If you learnt to read a phonetic spelling, it would not affect you as you developed your automatic habits of meaning-abstraction.
7. It can be disproven that *anything* that makes writing easier will make reading more difficult and vice-versa - for example, the more unnecessary letters are omitted, the quicker the writing and easier the reading. The only exception is of course, that the more careless the writing, the more illegible and full of mistakes.
8. The claim that our present spelling is the best possible for children learning to read is not only obviously untrue by common sense and common observation, but has been disproved again and again, notably by the i.t.a. experiment. (See Warburton and Southgate's *i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation* which reviewed *all* the evidence, rather than look only at one study that happens to support your own preconceived ideas.) i.t.a. was shown to have so many advantages in helping children to learn to read and write quickly and successfully, that it is a pity that it has the dual disadvantages of being unattractive to adult teachers (only 10% of English infant teachers have ever even tried it) and requiring transition to present spelling.
9. A gradual transition, with dual spellings (the present and 'tha better' alternative) both permissible in the dictionaries until one or the other was superseded in public usage, would inconvenience nobody - neither present spellers nor learner-readers. This has been the way the language and spelling has changed before, and as it can continue to change, - but please God, a little quicker and in more sensible directions.

**4. Some Opinions of Reputable Authorities and Educational Experts.**

1. H. W. Fowler (lexicographer of the Concise Oxford Dictionary), in Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, 1950, pp. 553-5.

"The notorious difficulty of English spelling and the growing impatience caused by it make it almost imperative to declare one's general attitude towards reform . . . that the substitution for our present chaos of a phonetically consistent method that should not sacrifice the many merits of the old spelling would be of incalculable value . . ." Fowler mentions some of the problems and opts for gradual reform . . . that "its spelling not be revolutionised but amended in detail, here a little and there a little as absurdities became intolerable, until a result is obtained that shall neither overburden schoolboys nor stultify intelligence nor outrage the scholar. In this book some modest attempts are made at cleaning up the more obtrusive untidinesses; certain inconsistencies have been regarded as in the present diffusion of literacy no longer required of us . . ." and so Fowler himself has made some contributions to spelling reform without outraging anybody, "desirable minor reforms" as he calls them.

He then goes on to discuss examples of spelling "philologically inexplicable." "Hence a larger proportion of the tears shed over spelling. Little relief can be given; the words in which there is no guide as to whether there is one consonant or two are not a score or so of which a list could be made and learnt, but thousands; nothing short of a complete spelling book will serve the turn of a really weak speller. . . ."

2. The Report of the Bullock Committee on the Teaching of Reading. (*A Language for Life*. H.M.S.O. 1975, pub. by the British Gov't) pp. ?

The Committee considered spelling reform to be outside its terms of reference, and so did not feel itself competent to declare itself on the subject, altho members were divided on whether they thought a wholesale reform was desirable. However, the report was univocal in criticising present spelling:

"If one were intent on constructing a writing system from scratch the obvious course would be to aim at a one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes." (pp.85-6). The report goes on to demonstrate how much written English falls short of this ideal, citing evidence of research and horrible examples (e.g. (1) *one, home, comes, women, of, or, to, go*. (2) *aisle, height, eye, 1, phial, ice, high, island, buy, guide, sty, rhyme*.)

"The complexity of English spelling patterns does appear to retard progress" in learning to read. (p.87). "We have already noted the bewildering complexities of the English spelling system and it is self-evident that a simplification of the relationship between sound and spellings must make it easier for a child to make progress in the early stages. If there are fewer items to be learned, this must reduce the time required, and if there are fewer ambiguities, there will be less confusion. All this is amply confirmed by research. Following a careful review of the evidence, the authors of the Schools Council Report on i.t.a. came to this conclusion:

"There is no evidence whatsoever that the best way to learn to read traditional orthography is to learn to read *in* traditional orthography . . ." (p. 110)

The Committee cited evidence demonstrating the especial difficulties of learning to read in English, compared with that in other countries, e.g. the research of Berdianski, Cronnel and Koehler (1969) who

"examined the 6,092 two-syllable words in the comprehension vocabularies of a group of six to nine-year old children. They recorded 211 different spellings for the phonemes of these words, and these required 166 rules to govern their use. Over 10% of the words still had to be left aside as 'exceptions.' Sixty of these rules applied to consonants, which are usually thought to be 'regular' (p.86).



"We must emphasise that this level of decoding is of particular importance in the early stages of learning to read." (p. 87)

3. Dr. John Downing, author of *Comparative Reading*, (1973), who was the director of the i.t.a. project in Britain said: "it is important to understand that the i.t.a. experiment took place as a test of the effects of spelling reform. . . . The conclusions are quite clear that a reform in English spelling would cut failure in learning to read by about 50%."

*On the question of SR-1*, Downing states categorically, the difference between i.t.a. and what Harry Lindgren is proposing very much favors the latter." (personal communication, Feb. 1975).

4. Carol Chomsky, "Reading, Writing and Phonology," *Harvard Educational Review*, May, 1970. pp.287-308.  
"It is highly likely that the child, however, in the beginning stages of reading, does assume that the orthography is in some sense 'regular' with respect to pronunciation. In order to progress to more complex stages of reading, the child must abandon this early hypothesis. . ." (p. 299). Chomsky goes on to demonstrate what considerations of 'learned words and complex derivational patterns' are involved and that 'it is by no means obvious that a child of six has mastered this phonological system in full' (p.301) and that is why 'literacy acquisition from this point of view may well extend over a much longer period of time than ordinarily assumed' (p.302). Chomsky concludes by looking at the 'other side of the coin' and 'to restore a sense of balance' admits the 'less consistent aspects' of English spelling, and quotes one of the hundreds of humorous verses that exist on *Hints on Pronunciation for Foreigners*.
5. The marketers of dictionaries might well be considered reputable authorities on the public's capacity to read and write present spelling, and there is perhaps no more trenchant comment on English spelling that could be made than the fact that Anglo-Saxon countries alone have a steady, permanent market for *Handbooks for Terrible Spellers*. This type of book is produced at about the rate of four a year in English.
6. There is also some point perhaps in citing that master of myth and fantasy, Jakob Grimm, who saw our 'whimsical, antiquated orthography' as the only barrier to the universality of the marvellous English language.

## **5. Spelling and 'Specific Learning Disabilities' in Reading and Writing English Spelling - a problem we set the children.**

Successful adults usually had no problem learning to read and spell, and cannot understand why other people find it hard. We are like athletes who cannot understand why cripples cannot jump a barbed wire fence. English spelling is very much like barbed wire.

A. *Why English spelling is harder for children at risk to Specific Learning Difficulties than you remember it being for you.*

1. In the first place, they already have language difficulties, and while academics like Gillooly claim that English spelling is 'a near optimal system of representing the English language' for those who are already expert in the English language and 'instinctively' understand its 'underlying structure' *the children we are concerned with are not expert.*
2. *Sequencing problems* are compounded when spelling is sometimes sequential, sometimes not.
3. *Visual memory difficulties*, when most of our spelling requires rote memory.
4. *Auditory discrimination problems*, when so much of our spelling does not match the sounds properly in any case, making for more confusion.

5. *Sound blending problems.* When so much of our spelling cannot be sounded out for blending, children with shaken confidence give up trying.
6. *Weak figure-ground discrimination,* analysis, synthesis, etc. An inconsistent spelling adds booby-traps for those who are still shaky.
7. *Variability and difficulties in control of emotions, senses, movements.* Such children lack inner security and are more easily 'thrown' when they cannot find reliable structure in what they must learn, and more easily develop learning blocks when they cannot predict which spelling is regular and which not.
8. *Tedium.* They have to spend so much more time learning spelling, with less success, than other children; it takes up more of their school-time at the expense of 'intelligent' learning, and school takes on the colour of distaste.
9. *Continual mistakes* which they cannot avoid by using intelligence. They feel failures and this often generalises to other areas of learning also.
10. *Decoding reading* is so hard for them that they get entangled in the mechanics of reading, and so are handicapped in learning to read for meaning.
11. *Poor generalising ability,* as a result of insufficient opportunities to generalise, so they don't make the 'intuitive generalisations' about reading and spelling that textbooks often blithely say that children make without being taught.
12. *Less flexible sets,* so it is hard to accept exceptions to general rules.
13. *'Difficult' children* are more likely to stick their heels in and say, 'I refuse to learn this. It is silly. I'm not silly.'

#### B. Comment:

When a child cannot read or spell, adults try to diagnose what is wrong *with him*. The children themselves, when they haven't submitted to the adult's diagnosis, say 'It's the spelling.'

*The i.t.a. experiments have demonstrated that with a consistent spelling, the failure rate in learning to read can be reduced by something like 50%.* This is not to be dismissed as peanuts.\*

\*(trivial)

Most other languages except Chinese have spellings sufficiently consistent for children to learn to read in 18 months - not 3 years as with us - and for adults learning the language, to pick it up in one or two lessons. Our own children and migrants must learn two conflicting languages, *the spoken and the written*.

### 6. Why not spell eny way You Like?

A. The reason for uniform spelling is to make communication easy.

- 1) The reader can redily identify the words you are using.
- 2) It is possible to read very fast with automatic word-recognition, but that is slowed down by unfamiliar spellings. With spelling reforms, the reader adjusts quickly with practice to such uniform changes as we have to American spellings, but if everyone spelt as they liked, this adjustment would be impossible.
- 3) The reader can look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary, and so can understand what he is reading and also extend his vocabulary. This is particularly important for migrants and children.
- 4) One suggestion is that everyone can spell as they like except printers, typists, etc. This would place an intolerable burden on *them* and on publishers, given the task of rewriting all MSS. They would be additionally handicapped since presumably they would not have learnt a uniform spelling at school eny more than anyone else.
- 5) Some bad spellers are good readers, but on the whole, those who cannot spell have difficulty in word recognition - in reading too. Bad spellers left to spell how they liked would be even worse.

- 6) Those already handicapped by finding literacy more difficult to achieve would find reading even harder, with so many more variant spellings to decipher.
- 7) Even with our present spelling, children learn more uniform pronunciation of words, to improve communication. This is particularly important for migrants.
- 8) A uniform spelling that was consistent and economical would extend the possibilities of automatic word-recognition by scanning machines reading aloud to the blind.

B. The arguments for 'spelling any way you like' would have little or no force if we had a simple, consistent spelling.

- 1) D. M. Bennett and others have shown that learning spelling lists in school does not help much (while M. Peters and others have shown that most people still have to apply their minds to learn spelling somehow). If English spelling were consistent, children would be able to reason out how words were spelt and not have to rely on rote-learning. Reaching the basic principles of spelling would be short, merciful and once-and-for-all.
- 2) 'Doing your own thing' Since spelling is only a tool to communicate, with consistent spelling children would be much freer much younger and earlier to 'do their own thing' in expressing themselves and communicating effectively, as well as reading what they wanted to. 'Spelling your own thing' has as little point compared with those self-actualising possibilities as insisting on your own idiosyncratic techniques in the technical aspects of grammar, ballet dancing, mountain-climbing, architecture, sports, auto-driving, or any human activity requiring skill or social co-operation.

## **7. The Teaching of Reading if there were Consistent English Spelling.**

(Assuming a reform of present spelling, not a new or revised alphabet, nor major alterations that would make past and present spelling difficult to read.)

1. Digraphs can be linked in primer reading (e.g. th as th) so that there is always one-sound, one-symbol correspondence at the beginning of learning to read.  
When teaching with linked script, *letters and sounds can* easily be taught in consistent and sensible relationships. *a* always sez short-*a* except in digraphs, and as these can be taught initially as linked letters, there need be no early inconsistency to confuse the child.
2. The child *can write and read what he wants* to as soon as he is able to connect sound and symbol and is perceptually adept for the particular size of the print.
3. This means that his *vocabulary and his writing style* can advance at an early age because he can read material at his mental age level, not just at a reading-age level dependent on spelling skills.
4. *Teaching in other subjects* and areas can advance much faster because children can read facilely in it, and can work independently very early. It is much easier then for children to work at their own pace, and race ahead to hold their interest in a subject, instead of being held back by poor reading, and made to dislike subjects because they are associated with unpleasant struggling to read and decode.
5. *Library books* can be appropriate for the mental and emotional age of the child. He need read no tripe that he doesn't want to.
6. *Methods of teaching reading* can be improved in many other ways now impossible, not just by the reduction of unnecessary difficulties and less wasted time, but by better analogy, phonic dissection and synthesis (e.g. develop early skill in fast reading, and in using context to aid fast reading and comprehension. For fluent reading, rhythm could, I think, be improved by giving children vowel patterns to read, which when read aloud, can be recognised as a familiar verse or nursery story - so that even at the stage of learning letter sounds, children are getting the idea of flow in reading, and developing good eye-movements for fast reading.)

The initial teaching alfabet experiments have demonstrated incontrovertibly the value of a consistent spelling for the unhindered development of children's spoken, written and reading language. We now need a permanent consistent English spelling that does not have the transition and unfamiliarity drawbacks of i.t.a., and which would make unnecessary any transition (with its time-consuming delay and impediment).

## 8. The Dangers of SR-1.

*What are the risks of letting Australians spell the short-e sound with e?*

1. The ACES Review editorial of Dec. 1974 suggests that the risks are as great as that of metrication which will only reach the terminal point of its operation 'when we are all speaking French and reading in the history books of the crushing defeat inflicted by Napoleon on Wellington at Waterloo.'

This type of 'thin-end-of-the-wedge' argument is used about any attempt to reform anything, and the ACES example shows to what ridiculous lengths the imagination can go.

The great advantage of SR-1 as a first step in spelling reform is that it is *not an irreversible step*. If it does not work, it will not be the thin edge of any wedge; it will simply fade out, as so many previous ill-timed attempts have faded out.

2. *Any change for better or worse involves some risk.* Let us then look clearly at what risks could result from allowing Australian adults and school children to write the short-e sound always with the spelling 'e'.

- a) At present 210 words in the basic spelling list for Grades III-IV are already spelt with 'e' for the short-e sound. Now 28 more words in which the sound 'e' is spelt variously 'ea', 'a', 'ie', 'ue', 'ai', and 'eig', could also be spelt as they sound, e.g.:

alredy	bred	brekfast	breth	ded	deth	fethers
hed	helthy	heven	hevy	insted	led	lether
ment	mesure	plesant	plesure	redy	welthy	wether
eny	meny	frend	gess	sed	bery	foren

- b) In any page of print using SR-1, the reader could expect to see 2-5 respelt words on the average - i.e. often not more than the usual number of writer's misspellings or printer's errors, which people no longer take as reasons for cancelling subscriptions or apoplexy.
- c) Would present readers be able to read anything written using SR-1? No worries - you have been doing it! Much has been made of the possible confusion between the different meanings of *bred*, *red*, and *led*, but as it is there are different meanings of *read* and *lead*. Context makes clear even such hypothetical examples as 'This is a little red book,' just as it clarifies the hypothetical example in present spelling of 'The truck had a tender behind.'
- d) Could children using SR-1 be able to read material using old spellings? Yes, no worries, because they would only need *recognition* memory which is easier than *recall* (it is easier *to read* than *to spell*). Teachers would only have to tell them there were dual spellings - as there are with *jail* and *gaol*, *judgment* and *judgement*, *connection* and *connexion*, *surprise* and *surprize*, etc. Context is a further guide. There is also the major point that it is always easier to build *from the simple to the more complex* in learning than *to start* with the complex, so SR-1 children could even have the advantage in learning to read present spellings.
- e) Could easier spelling sap children's moral fibre, making them intellectually flabby and work-shy?

The reverse is more likely, since nothing sabotages one's attitude to work more than realising it is futile and stupid. At present stupid spelling only encourages children to think that other adult demands may be stupid also.

Sensible spelling would mean that one used one's reason to spell, instead of rote memory, thus encouraging children to use and trust their reason.

I believe and practice the Puritan Work Ethic, and believe that children should learn that Hard Work is stimulating and worth-while and necessary for self-actualisation and social welfare - but I want them to learn this through doing worth-while Hard Work, not mentally stagnating memorising other generations' mistakes. Simpler spelling would give more opportunity for the former in the school program.

- f) "To teach a few children that they can if they wish spell 'said' as 'sed' for example, is to implicitly authorise the development of a unique and individual lexicon for each person, which means ultimately of course the end of all communication and civilisation." ACES Review, op. cit. (Another superb hyperbolic exaggeration).

By analogy, Samuel Johnson was also presaging the end of civilisation when he permitted two spellings of many words in his dictionary - a practice which lexicographers continue - and when the Education Department permitted American as well as English spellings in Australia, To paint a zebra crossing on a road is not to authorise jaywalking.

- g) Would Australians be internationally ostracised? Would anyone lose a job for using SR-1, or fail to get one? In the 'good old days' of pedantry perhaps, but hardly likely today, when even academics in English departments cannot always spell impeccably. (I checked the word myself.)

It is my belief that the climate has changed so much, and British and American assumptions of their own innate superiority have been undermined so much, that an Australian example would be seen as an initiative, not cheek or presumption, and would soon be followed, since the need for change is becoming increasingly recognized, but no one dares to 'bell the cat.'

### 3. *Who will be the Guinea-pigs?*

Who can be the 'guinea-pigs' in any research or experiment in spelling reform, and what risks will they run?

#### A. For SR-1 'first-step' reform, spelling short-e sound with 'e'.

- a) *Literate adults* can use this spelling whenever possible. It would be worthwhile to have a register of volunteers willing to try the reform for one year, and survey them at the end as to:
  - i. Any adverse effects on them professionally.
  - ii. The public reaction they experienced;
  - iii. Their own feelings about:
    - (a) continuing to use SR-1, and
    - (b) any further changes, and what these should be.
- b) *Volunteer periodicals* to include a column using this spelling in each issue, without making any public comment about it, noting any recognition by readers that this is anything except the usual misprints, and possibly after a time surveying readers about their reaction.
- c) *Schools*. In many schools there is a policy that students are not penalised for making spelling mistakes. It would seem reasonable that where staff-majority agrees, and parents

and students are agreeable, that the students could be told explicitly that they will not be penalised for using either present or SR-1 spelling for the shorts sound in words, for an experimental period of one year. The results could be evaluated in terms of the effect on student's interest and attention to spelling (not only a Hawthorne effect), and whether this in turn affected motivation for literacy, and staff, parent and student attitudes after a year.

d) *Individual students* should be contacted for opinions as to the usefulness of SR-1.

B. *For Other Research.* Most of the research involved with the psychology of spelling is no different from the usual sort of educational research and can be conducted in the same way. However, when research involves the coding process or attitude change, adults may be concerned about confusing or otherwise affecting students. My own preliminary studies indicate that such research helps children to understand present spelling, rather than confusing them, but teachers and researchers may wish to monitor pilot studies very carefully. They may even wish to use only absolutely hopeless students, as a way of giving them a 'last chance' to learn how to read.

### **9. The Introduction of SR-1 in Schools.**

A. To permit SR-1 to be used in schools as alternative spellings for words with the short-e sound would not be a major step at all, unlike other spelling reform proposals.

1. As opponents of the reform themselves ingenuously point out, (see e.g. *The Teachers' Journal*, 25.2.1975) the short vowel sound as in *bet* is already represented by the letter 'e' in 91% of words, - so this is only the logical extension to the other 9%.
2. Dual spellings for many words have been allowed by dictionaries right from the start, (including Samuel Johnson's)
3. The Victoria Education Department's most recent spelling books officially permits dual spellings for words spelt differently in America and Britain - and I think the trend is for students to follow the simpler of the two when there is a choice.
4. The reform also follows students' 'natural,' 'logical' spelling. Learners always spell the short-e sound with 'e' until they are taught all the horrible exceptions. In my own research, *Spell it how you would like to spell it*, the short-e sounds are almost 100% spelt by subjects with the letter 'e' only, (as in *treasure, sed, insted, certenly*) however varied some of the solutions of other sound-symbol relationships might be. The exceptions to this generalisation tend to be people who cannot imagine any change from what has been instilled into them.

B. *Testing what value SR-1 might have in schools.* This is not as difficult as you might imagine, and there are several avenues of approach, once one has the information on which schools or teachers are using or permitting the use of SR-1, and some information on the ways in which they do this.

1. General reading tests, using both SR-1 and traditional spellings, would be open to the criticism that the SR-1 teachers might all be the better teachers, haloed with Hawthorne effects, etc. - but that in itself might be significant. Children's own writing is another area.
2. Children and secondary students' own opinions are not unimportant.
3. Research at the infant level, observing whether children taught in SR-1 can use context to make the transition to traditional spelling in their reading, if they know that it is possible to encounter variant spellings.

### **10. Comparative Testing of Spelling Reform Proposals.**

This is somewhat tricky in practice, altho the hundreds of proposals since the 15th century all tend to fall into one of 3 groups: alfabet reform, additions to the present alfabet, and minimum-change reforms to tidy up the present system.

I have been carrying out some pilot experiments on acceptability and ease of learning of a variety

of Spelling reform proposals, using as material a standard piece of prose (a fairy story containing as much really awful English spelling as possible) which has been translated into a variety of different reformed spellings by the authors of the proposals or recognised agents.

These spelling systems included: i.t.a., Wijk's Regularized English, Paulsen's Torskript, Kingsley Read's Sound-spell, Arnold Rupert's Ryt, Eustace's System II New Spelling, Wilkinson's World English (FWI), Reg. Dean's Britic.

The subjects have ranged from Grade 4 school children to adults, migrant and Australian.

Extraneous factors tend to be involved, e.g. Britic, which substitutes surplus letters of the alphabet for the instances where others have two tasks, or for major digraphs, is intellectually rather fascinating to play round with. Torskript is also an intriguing decoding exercise for those who can read already, and Soundspel is graphically pleasing to see.

However, altho the tests prove that given a key to a consistent spelling of eny sort, almost anyone who realises that the letters represent sounds can decode and read almost anything, there are considerable variations in which are the easiest to remember and apply oneself.

So far the incontestable finding is that most subjects

- a) would like spelling reform,
- b) would prefer a minimal change one, that benefitted *them* personally, by leaving them with what they had learnt already, but gave them security agenst making mistakes by tidying up the irregular spellings that are difficult to remember.

Further analysis is to be made.

## 11. The Next Step?

A great advantage of trying SR-1 as the first step in improving our spelling is that it gives ideal opportunity to:

1. develop attitudes to spelling reform that are not based on prejudice, but on some practical experience. The public as well as the experts will have had a chance to realise what it is all about - and they have a right to this chance since it affects them so directly.
2. find out what happens as a result of the first step - not only in peoples' attitudes and expectations about literacy, but what ramifications and implications, foreseen and unforeseen, may appear.
3. be able to consider the next step, if eny, on the basis of more information and experience, including the findings of the research that we hope will be carried out in the next year or two.

The range of possibilities include:

- a) dropping even SR-1,
- b) another single-sound spelling change, such as SR-2,
- c) an interlinked pattern of moderate spelling modification (on the Dutch lines - for example, a consistent representation of consonants or all short vowels.
- d) a major reform removing all irregularities in spelling in favour of a consistent system either phonemically or combination phonemic-linguistically based, or
- e) major reform going further into a modified, augmented or revised alphabet.

Possibility e) I consider to be out of the question at present in view of the necessity for an internationally recognised alfabet for as meny languages as possible - altho a few augmentations such as we have already in meny languages would still be possible (c.f. Spanish, German, French,

Swedish, etc.). Such changes would require common agreement among the major European and Anglo-Saxon countries and government authorisation. Even d) would require agreement among English-speaking countries.

If SR-1 becomes a fast-spreading success, there could well be demand from all sections of society for international agreement on a 'pattern' reform for SR-2, to be agreed on by those involved with the practical aspects of spelling (in the news media, education, publishing, technology, etc.) as well as by experts from research in psychology, linguistics, education, etc. and given government authorisation.

Possibility a) must also be recognised by those who support SR-1 and by those who oppose it.

Possibility b) could well follow the success of SR-1 in becoming acceptable for general use without any legislation being required - the change entering the spelling on the same trial-and-error basis as all spelling changes and all language changes have originally - with lexicographers merely recording and establishing the changes that occur.

Possibilities b) and c) now require thought, investigation, and pilot study. I think my own recommendation for SR-2 would be that all f-sounds be spelt with 'f' instead of 'ph', 'gh', 'ft', or 'lf' or 'v', and that this spelling be permissible one year after SR-1. (it would affect 16 words in the Grades III-VI Basic Spelling List).

## **12. Recommendations for Action on Spelling Reform.**

1. The active encouragement of public and student interest, so that everyone becomes well-informed on the wider aspects as well as the personal or specialist ones. It must be realised that Spelling is only a *coding* game, and a tool for learning as well as for communication, and therefore should be as efficient as possible.
2. The nomination of a reputable body, or concerned members within it, co-opting as necessary, to form the Victorian centre for collection and publication of information regarding spelling reform research and literature, with funding to be provided for this purpose.
3. The encouragement of responsible papers and discussion of all aspects of reform in professional journals and at conferences.
4. The nomination of a committee sponsored by relevant bodies to organise a conference on spelling and spelling reform in 1977.
5. The encouragement of responsible research on all aspects of spelling reform and the psychology of spelling, within the Education Department, by the Australian Council for Educational Research, and by research students in tertiary and post-graduate studies.

Such research to include:

- a) Reviews of previous and current research.
- b) Experimental investigation of claims of opponents of spelling reform, e.g.
  - Does phonetic spelling slow down reading once practice effects are established?
  - Do homographs in present spelling slow down readers in general practice?
  - How much of our worst spelling has any relation in fact to Carol Chomsky's notion of representation of underlying structure?
  - How 'regular' is English spelling for the learner at different stages of the learning-to-read process?
  - Group differences in practice effects in adapting to SR-1. The effect of exposure to SR-1 over a 2-year period.



Do children, while learning to read, effectively abstract meaning from words without phonic clues to the words? How does automatic speed-reading really develop in the fastest readers?

- c) Experiments in the teaching of reading with 'double-decker' spelling, giving 'consistent' spelling cribs for reading at a child's mental age level, including evaluation of effects on his 'oracy' and vocabulary development.
  - d) Investigation of the sort of spelling easiest for learning to read.
  - e) Investigation of the sort of spelling that would be most efficient once the children could read in it. Comparative tests of different proposals.
  - f) Experimental investigation of how much a consistent spelling would really be affected by international differences in spoken English.
  - g) Attitude change: measuring changes after exposure to information or experience in using SR-1.
  - h) Marketing; Gimmicks, gams and gadgets to make spelling reform a fascinating subject.
6. That no penalties be imposed on anyone, adult or student, using the spelling 'e' for the short-e sound for a trial period of two years.

### **13. For Further Information, Contents of a Monograph in Preparation.**

Readers are referred to a draft Monograph on Spelling and Spelling Reform being prepared by V. Yule (draft copy held by Access Skills Project Team of the Curriculum Standing Committee - Technical Schools - of the Curriculum and Research Branch of the Education Department; by the Victorian Action Committee Against Illiteracy; and by the author), for further information and evidence. This report will cover the following areas:

1. *Does English Spelling Need Reform?* - a demonstration of how awful it really is and a discussion of the arguments put up by opponents who suggest that:
  - a) It is 'really quite regular,'
  - b) More regular spelling would make reading slower;
  - c) Present spelling represents the underlying structure of the language;
  - d) Making spelling easier would make reading harder and vice versa;
  - e) Present spelling is the easiest possible for children to learn;
  - f) Eny spelling reform would mean the loss of our heritage.

This includes discussion and critique of the works of Carol Chomsky, Paul Hanna and the Stanford computer studies, Lee, Jacobson, Wijk, Gillooly, Frank Smith, Sir James Pitman, John Downing and the i.t.a. experiments, the Simplified Spelling Society, Laubach, Skeat, Biack, Ripman and Archer, Mrs. Smelt, Goodman, Hodges, Hildreth, N. Chomsky and M. Halle, etc.

2. *Other Countries have Reformed their Spellings:* accounts of spelling reform in the Netherlands, Finland, Turkey, China, Korea, Portugal, Russia, etc; the reading process in countries with more consistent spellings such as Norway, and Persi-writing, Middle Eastern lands; Japan, where children's first learning to read is syllabic; Pitjitjin-jara, which tribal aborigines in Central Australia learn to read in months; what happens in bilingual countries where children learn English and, say, Welsh, Erse, Bengali, etc.; our rival reactionary, France; cross-cultural studies on reading difficulties.

3. *Research Aspects of Spelling and Spelling Reform.*

- a) *Linguistics:* Structural linguistics, transformational grammar, psycholinguistics.
- b) *Etymology:* The effects of pseudo-learning for retro-grade spelling. How SR-1 revives the spellings of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton.

- c) *Phonology, Dialects, 'Standard English'* and related questions; Homophones. 'Why a perfectly phonetic spelling is an unnecessary (and impossible) ideal.
  - d) *History and Sociology of Spelling*: How spelling has been a mark of social class for a mandarin elite, a sacred symbol, an initiation rite into the educated classes, a security shibboleth instead of being what it should be: a tool for the most effective communication and use of our real heritage, the English language.  
The relation of attitudes to spelling to social change in general. The need for an effective spelling in the modern world. Future shock at change.
  - e) *The Psychology of Learning Spelling and Reading*: Research needed on untested assumptions about the nature and development of automatic reading habits; optimal media for learning language skills; the available evidence on the effects of learning a consistent spelling on later T.O. spelling; the effects of dual spellings for words.  
The study of irregularity of spelling in terms of the learner, rather than of the adult expert reader.  
Brief notes on some nine small scale studies in spelling and reading by V. Yule, 1972-75.
  - f) *The Psychology of the Literate Reader and Spelling Reform*. The evidence on whether the 'public' would stand for spelling reform. The development of more phonetic spelling in technology and commerce. Attitude sampling; social characteristics of supporters and opposers of spelling improvement. Attitude change and its relevance to spelling reform. Adaptation of the literate readers to changes such as SR-1. Investigations of practice effects and familiarity.
  - g) *History of Spelling Reform since 1500*. Why English spelling became worse in the 18th century; why reforms have failed to gain acceptance in the past; why does anyone still oppose reform; accounts of spelling reform proposals and their vicissitudes; what the initial-teaching-alphabet experience has shown; the opinions of 'reputable theorists and educational researchers' pro- and con reform, and the fact that experts on reading and spelling who *do not admit* that English spelling is pretty awful are rather rare and therefore conspicuous. Most say our T.O. is awful but take for granted nothing can be done about it. (e.g. the Bullock Committee).
  - h) *Practical Questions on Reform*: Problems in reforming English spelling; possible solutions, and how to decide among the possible solutions. The introduction and implementation of reform, (research, authorisation, marketing, evaluation, time-tables). Practical proposals for action research at every level.
  - i) *Who are the Experts?* What can they decide? How should they decide it?
- 1) *The first decision to be made is: Is spelling reform necessary and advantageous?* In this the public has as much democratic right as it has to change anything else it is fed up with. Those who suffer from present spelling - the learners, the teachers, those in any way handicapped - have more right to demand change than the few who have a vested interest in text-books, the history of words, or present readers have to resist modifications.
  - 2) *What sort of Change?*
    - a) *A new alphabet?* This would hinder international communication through the Roman alphabet so much that it should be shelved - unless at some stage computer technology requires a revision for all languages.
    - b) *Changes in present spellings*: Some reduction of absurdities are so obvious that general consensus should easily be reached. Some are a little trickier, and this is where experts on philology, cybernetics, psycholinguistics, social psychology, phonology, etc. can come together to decide. Going from simple to difficult, the questions of how best to represent the English language through spelling could perhaps be ranked like this:

For a phonetic representation of the language that did not require too fine auditory discriminations by the ordinary person:

- i. Easy-consistent representation of most consonants- f for *ph, gh, lf, ft, v*, etc.  
omission of most silent, unnecessary letters,  
single letters for short vowel sounds. as in *bat, bed, bit, bob, but*.
  - ii. *More difficult*, requiring general agreement on choice of spelling pattern:
    - (a) 'What spellings to use for the long-vowel sounds: A E I O U as in *bay, bee, by, doe, due* ar (aa), er, air, or (aw) ow, oy, and particularly tricky, oo as in book or boot.
    - (b) How to represent the slurred sounds in unstressed syllables, which are only pronounced clearly in very formalised speech or in derived words (e.g. metal, metallic)
    - (c) What to do with, *k, q, x*.
    - (d) and a few tricky consonants, as in *tion, cion, sion, sure*, etc.
  - iii. *The relation of spelling to the structure of the language*. It may be found desirable to have some spellings that *consistently* represent the structure of the language more than the sound, in order to have the easiest to learn and use, e.g. s for plurals rather than s, z or s plus spelling changes (as we now have with *lady/ladies*); d for past participles rather than d, t, or ed: some slurred vowels may be best represented by the sound in related words (e.g. *metal/metallic, demon/demonic*). But such linguistic rules could be understood by reason, and be reliable and consistent - as they are now.
  - (a) *Homophones*. English spelling is already full of homographs (and words with multiple meanings) which are not used in a confusable manner, e.g. *can/can, will/will, bit/bit, rest/rest*, etc; while a consistent spelling may possibly require exceptions for *two/too/to*, or *for/four/fore* and a few others, this can be investigated and decided accordingly.  
*Comment*: No problems are insoluble, including workable decisions on the 5% of words where dialect differences appear. (e.g. *sceptical, tomato, castle, clerk, pass*).
- 3) *The Deciders*: Everyone can make the simple, easy changes, but we should ask experts to decide on the harder ones, and all with international government support.
- i) The government should pass legislation establishing a commission with authority to investigate proposed reform schemes, to cooperate with other English-speaking countries on selecting a system of reformed spelling, and a means of introducing and utilizing it.

j) *Conclusions*:

#### **Appendices:**

- I. Bibliographies.
- II. Opinions of reputable theorists and educational researchers, plus opinions of practical users of the written word.
- III. Analysis of spelling patterns in the Victorian Spelling Lists.
- IV. Detailed analysis of Chomsky's 'underlying form' argument - applied to the spelling primary children learn.
- V. English vowel spelling patterns - a manual for children.
- VI. Details of other research on spelling and spelling reform.

#### 14. Spelling Survey 'Beta' Questions

Please tick appropriate space		yes	not sure	no
1.	Is accurate spelling important?	___	___	___
2.	Is your spelling accurate?	___	___	___
3.	Is learning correct spellings difficult?	___	___	___
4.	If words are understood, does it matter whether they are spelled correctly?	___	___	___
5.	Can wrong spellings make words hard to read?	___	___	___
6.	Are you disturbed by writing that contains many spelling mistakes?	___	___	___
7.	Should there be a campaign to make spelling easier?	___	___	___
8.	Would you help a campaign to make spelling easier?	___	___	___
9.	Would you prefer our present spelling to remain unchanged?	___	___	___
10.	Would it bother you if small and gradual changes were made in our spelling?	___	___	___
11.	What pronunciation should be represented by the new spelling? Please tick appropriate space/s	___	___	___
	Standard English	___	___	___
	Standard American	___	___	___
	Educated Australian	___	___	___
	Different spellings according to the dialect spoken	___	___	___
	Other: (please write)	___	___	___
12.	Do you see any benefit in simplified spelling?	___	___	___
13.	What advantages might be conferred by a simpler spelling?	___	___	___
	a) Easier to write	___	___	___
	b) Improved reading ability	___	___	___
	c) Pronunciation more uniform	___	___	___
	d) Easier to learn English as a foreign language	___	___	___
	e) Save time in teaching of reading and writing	___	___	___
	f) No need to teach spelling	___	___	___
	g) Encourage use of English internationally	___	___	___
	h) When you read new words it will be easier to say them	___	___	___
	i) When you hear new words it will be easier to write them	___	___	___
14.	Should anyone decide how words should be pronounced?	___	___	___
15.	Who should decide how words should be pronounced?			
	Teachers ___ Politicians ___ Radio & TV announcers ___			
	University professors ___ Public speakers ___ No one ___			
	Dictionaries ___ Others: _____			

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Please return to:  
Barrie Smith, c/o Spelling Action Soc., Glenhuntly, Australia.

## References.

Four books available in the C.A.E. library are:

372.4 Pit. Pitman, James. *Alphabets and Reading: the initial teaching alphabet*, by Sir James Pitman & John St. John, London, Pitman, 1969.

372.42 Ben. Bennett, David M. *New methods and Materials in spelling: a critical analysis*. Hawthorn, Vic. ACER, 1967.

372.6 Sme. Smelt, Elsie D. *How to speak, spell and read: a new way to learn English*. So. Melbourne, YMCA, 1972.

421.42 Lin. Lindgren, Harry. *Spelling Reform: a new approach*, Sydney, Alpha Books, 1969.

## Other References.

*Teaching and Learning Spelling*. Australian Curriculum Officer's Conference on English, 1968. (Roneoed report, Queensland Education Department).

*Curriculum Guide: Spelling*. (Education Department of Victoria, 1970).

*Research on Handwriting and Spelling*. (National Conference on Research in English, U.K., 1966).

Hanna, Paul R, Hodges, R.E. and Hanna, J.S. *Spelling Structure and Strategies*. (Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1971).

Bullock Committee Report: *A Language for Life*. HMSO, London, 1975.

Arvidson, G.L. 1963, *Learning to Spell*. Wheaton.

Aukerman, R.C. 1971, *Approaches to Beginning Reading*. John Wiley

Dewey, Godfrey 1971, *English Spelling: Roadblock to Reading*. Teachers College Press, Columbia U. New York.

Downing, John et al. 1972, *Comparative Reading*, Macmillan.

Cane, B. and Smithers, J. 1971, *The Roots of Reading*, N.F.E.R.

Follick, Mont. M.P. 1965, *The Case for Spelling Reform*, Pitman.

Haas, Wm. (ed) 1971, *Alphabets for English*, Manchester U. Press.

Kucera and Francis 1967, *Computational Analysis of Present Day American English*. Providence, Brown U. Press. This book ranks 50,406 words in order of frequency of use, and is used as a guide to controlling vocabulary in children's readers, to keep it to the minimum.

Mathews, M. 1966, *Teaching to Read Historically Considered*. U. of Chicago Press.

Peters, M.L. 1967, *Spelling: Caught or Taught?* Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Ripman, W. and Archer, W. 1948, *New Spelling, being proposals for simplifying the spelling of English without the introduction of new letters*. Revised by D. Jones and H. Orton. Simplified Spelling Society. Pitman.

Schultzen, L, Allen, J.H.D., Miron, M.S. *Tables of Transitional Frequencies of English Phonemes*. 1964. U. of Illinois Press.

Simplified Spelling Soc. Pamphlets by Skeat, Jones, Macan, Harrison, Ripman and others. Pub. Pitman.

Stoddart, J. and Stoddart, F. *The Teaching of English to Immigrant Children*. 1968. U. of London Press.

Tauber, A. (ed) *Bernard Shaw's Spelling*.

Vallins, G.H. 1972, *Spelling*. Revised by D. G. Scragg. Andre Deutsch.

Vernon, M.D. 1971. *Reading and its Difficulties*. Cambridge U. Press.

Wijk, Axel 1959. *Regularized English*. Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm.

Warburton, F.W. and Southgate, V. 1969. *i.t.a., an Independent Evaluation*. (The Schools Council's report) Murray and Chambers.

## It would also be interesting to read:

Hart, John 1569, *An Orthographie* conteyning the due order and reason how to write or paint thimage of mannes voice, most lyk to the life of nature.

Berdiansky, B., Cronnell, B. and Koehler, Jr. "Spelling-sound relations and primary form-class descriptions of speech comprehension vocabularies of 6-9 year-olds." Southwest Regional Lab. Inglewood, Ca., 1969. \$3.75.

A related paper by Cronnell given at Amer. Educ. Research Assoc. N.Y. Feb. 1971, and quoted by Wm. Gillooly in *Reading Research Q.*, Winter, 1973.

Samuela, S.J. "The relationship between sound-letter correspondence in language and reading achievement," in J.A. Figuerel (Ed) *Reading and Realism*, I.R.A. 1969, pp. 846-853.

Tauber, Abraham, 1958. *Spelling Reform in the United States*, Columbia U. L.C. crd Mic 58-2717 University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich, 48106. pp.311. \$15.35, xerox. (The most comprehensive doctorate thesis on spelling ref.)

Downing, John *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet*, Cassell, 1967.

## **Journals**

*American Journal of Psychology*, v. 77, p.320-21. 1964.

*Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour*, v.3, p.215-21, 1964.

*Psychology Review*. v.6, p.345-75. 1899.

*British Journal of Statistical Psychology*, 8. 29-58, 1955.

Chou En-Lai, Wu Yu-Chang and Li Chin-Hai, *Reform of the Chinese Written Language*, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1958.

*Journal of Educational Psychology*, 44.497-503. 1953.

*Educational Research*, 6. 16-28, 1963. & 9.137-144, 1966.

*The First International Reading Symposium*, Oxford, 1964, Cassell. Downing on Reading Readiness Re-examined, 1966.

NFER. *i.t.a. research evaluated*, report of a conference at Univ. of London, 1967.

Cutts, Warren G. (Ed), *Teaching young children to read*, *Office of Education Bulletin*, Washington, D.C. U.S. Dept. of Health, Education & Welfare. Ch. by Durrell.

Simon, B. and J. (Eds) *Educational Psychology in the USSR* Routledge & Kegan Paul, ch by Elkonin, D.B. 'The Psychology of mastering the elements of reading' 1963.

*English Language Teaching*, 16.39-43, 1961. 'On the teaching of reading in non-European languages.'

Fries, E. 1962. *Linguistics and Reading*. New York, Holt, Rinehard & Winston.

Gaspar, R. 1964. MA Thesis, Univ. of London. *The prediction of errors in the reading of English on the basis of misleading analogies in English spelling*.

*American Journal of Psychology*, 75.554-570, 1962.

*A basic research program on Reading*: Final report on co-operative research project no. 639 to Office of Education, Dept. of Health, Educ, and Welfare, Washington, D.C. 1963. "An analysis of critical features of letters, tested by a confusion matrix."

## **The Spelling Action Society**

So far as the Society's ultimate aim, the simplification of English spelling, is concerned with education, it is motivated on the one hand by the high illiteracy rates in all English-speaking countries, and on the other hand by the complexity of English spelling. The Society attributes the first of these, mainly, to the second, and considers that the back of the illiteracy problem would be broken if our spelling were simplified. This opinion is based on the principle that the simple is easier than the complex, with its corollary that simplifying a task makes it easier. This principle and corollary are apparently rejected by many educationalists who deny that simplifying spelling would make the acquirement of literacy easier, and some even maintain that it would make it harder.

There are several reasons why the Society's ultimate aim could not be achieved overnight, even if everyone were willing. On the contrary it can only be achieved by a large number of small changes, spread over many years; the first one, used herein and called SR.1, is that the clear short vowel-sound as in *bet* be written *e*. The Society's present aim is the introduction of SR.1 and no other spelling change, a proposal that has been well thought out. This fact is however ignored by the educationalists already referred to, part of whose methodology is apparently to pass judgement on the proposal without bothering to find out about it. Those who prefer to do this first can consult: Harry Lindgren, *Spelling Reform: A New Approach*.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §2.5 pp19-23*]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1980 pp2-6*]

## **5. Is Spelling Reform Feasible?** **by Elsie M. Oakensen,\***

\*Northampton, England.

Presented at the 2nd International Conf. of S.S.S. at Nene College, July 29, 1979.

### **The Origin of Spelling**

Spelling was originally the true matching of spoken sounds each with a different symbol. It began when symbols were first used to represent sounds instead of pictures. 4,000 years ago languages were simply spoken. The Greeks had 24 letters in their alphabet, Latin used 22, the Phoenicians 26. All symbols could be matched to sounds and the spoken languages had become visible.

When the Romans arrived in Britain bringing with them their alphabet, it was no doubt adequate for the purposes of written communication then (which was usually in Latin but since that time many influences have played their part and Weekley (1949) described the spelling of English as "so far as its relation to the spoken word is concerned, quite crazy."

John Downing says, "There is a logic in English spelling but it is very complex. It consists of several logical systems that were introduced at different times. Now they overlap and give the appearance of illogicality. This appearance confuses children because it is difficult for them to understand the complex logic involved." Our language is said to be made up of about 42 sounds and we have only 26 letters with which to spell words. Consequently letters must do double duty. Each of the vowel letters represents several or many sounds. All of the different sounds may each have several letters or letter combinations to represent them. Every letter of the alphabet is used silently in some word. Appendix 1 gives some examples of the different sounds for the same letter and the different letters or groups of letters for the same sound, and also words with silent letters.

### **Should a Reformed Spelling be Implemented?**

Consideration should be given as to whether or not spelling reform should be implemented and I shall now examine the arguments for and against transferring to a fully phonetic alphabet.

English, although richly endowed with many advantages, has, in comparison with other languages, one serious defect - its unphonetic spelling. Many people from the 13th Century onwards have considered it worthwhile to spend many years of their lives designing alphabets which they feel would make it more phonetic or would help to simplify and regularize English spelling (Appendix 3, *The Way to Spelling Reform*). These devotees of spelling reform would consider the following of being the advantages for such a move.

1. *It is commonsense to enable English-speaking children to spell correctly without having to memorise every word*, and unreasonable to confront them with such a host of apparently irrational difficulties at the very outset of their careers. The perceived confusions and inconsistencies of the existing spelling impose an obvious burden on pupils and teachers throughout the English-speaking world.

One of the chief objects of education is to develop children's reasoning processes. This they cannot do with our spelling because it is so difficult to perceive its logical basis. Thus the discipline of "learning to spell" may be harmful and worthless.

2. *In foreign countries English is less effective than it might be as a second language because of its extremely complex spelling.* With a system which is free of unnecessary complexities or apparent irrationalities, and which offers a better guide to pronunciation, its acceptance as a world language could be made surer. Nothing stands so much in the way of English becoming the most important medium of communication as its spelling. This alone would justify our attempts to reform it. In 1975 H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh agreed to support the aims of the Simplified Spelling Society by becoming its first Royal Patron.

3. *The number of adult illiterates in this country is staggering.* Considerable sections of the adult population find difficulty in achieving literacy and communication. An alphabet relating written symbol to spoken sound would rapidly lessen the vast numbers of people who have failed to learn to read in traditional spelling.

In *A Plea for Spelling Reform*, W. R. Evans (1878), referring to the work of the Elementary Education Act writes, ". . . that teaching our anomalous system of spelling to the children of the poor is in most cases impracticable, and that when the task is in exceptional cases accomplished, it entails the *loss of much other instruction that might be imparted during school attendance.* . . ."

Charles Dickens may have been expressing a similar view when, in *The Pickwick Papers*, he had old Mr. Weller say to Sam,

"When you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it's worthwhile goin' through so much to learn so little, as the charity-boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter of taste."

The Simplified Spelling Society estimates that at least a year of educational time would be saved by all English speaking children if their "New Spelling" system were used. Jamieson (1973), who designed 'sensubul speling', calculates an average of one-and-a-half misuses of symbols per word in traditional spelling. The time and energy saved when teaching a simplified and regularised orthography could be better used in meeting the increased educational demands of a changing civilisation.

4. *Paulsen (1971) and Rondthaler agree that the practical consideration of turning out printed material which is nonconventional is no longer a forbidding one.* During the last 25 years there has been a continuous state of revolutionary change in printing techniques. Today we can place a transliterating computer between the typesetter's keyboard and the photo-printout unit and at the turn of a switch, the traditionally spelt input comes out as the new spelling typesetting. These two writers both feel that the saving in printing bulk would pay for the computers again and again. "We have at last the technology to make the dream come true. Do we have the courage to use it?" Rondthaler, (1973) asks.

The opposers of Spelling Reform see as an insuperable obstacle. 1, that pronunciation is not uniform in all areas where the language is spoken, nor is it even static. It is forever changing. In Vallins (1973),

"Swift and Johnson saw what Spelling Reformers have never been able to see, that phonetic spelling means swiftly changing spelling, with variations according to local types of pronunciation. The one thing that can be legitimately fixed in a language is the form of its words, and that must depend not so much on changeable and variable sound as on recorded history: in brief, spelling should be precisely what it is in English, etymological rather than phonetic."



The derivation of a word would be obscured by a new type of spelling. 'Words of Teutonic origin for instance would be extensively changed.

English is a living language, outside influences add foreign words to our vocabulary, and the pronunciation of words is continually changing. The use of dialect is no longer frowned upon. At present all these changes are being gradually absorbed into our language, because with the large variety of combinations of letters required to spell a sound, a new group is accepted without comment. If we used a phonetic alphabet for our present 40-plus sounds, would new symbols need to be added in the future when new foreign words were admitted to our vocabulary, or would we accept the foreign spellings for these words, and by so doing, could this new simplified and regularised spelling become, in a thousand years time, even more confused than it is at present. We could, of course, copy the languages of other countries who adapt the spelling of foreign words to their own spelling rules, eg. picnic = pique nique (French).

2. *The learning of spelling it is argued, is a good mental discipline.* Children who never have to exercise their minds on anything difficult will not be good for much in later life. In Boyd (1924),

"English spelling though teeming with irregularities is fundamentally rational, and in spite of confusion and uncertainty caused by irregularities, we learn to spell the majority of words on the basis of analogy."

Prof. Axel Wijk (1972) suggests that if we examine the entire vocabulary of the English language, we shall find that the vast majority of English words (about 90-95%) actually follow certain general rules and patterns and that only 5-10% display definite irregular spellings. (see Appendix II, Comparison of alphabets)

3. *With a new alphabet, words would have absurd representations and look unfamiliar.* Some would be shorter in length but with "New Spelling" and "Consistent Spelling", very many would be extended, so it would be doubtful if there would be an overall economy of letters or space.

4. *Homophones, words which sound alike, are spell differently at present, but when represented phonetically would have the same configuration and would cause confusion to the reader.*

Dr. Gassner has shown great concern about this problem in his "Consistent Spelling," and uses double consonants in words to show difference in meaning.

5. *If Spelling Reform were implemented, the millions of volumes in public and private libraries would become 'closed books' (without special study) to the children of tomorrow.*

My own observations on these points would agree that "A language requires an adequate collection of various signs for its spoken sounds. English spelling reformers say we need 40 or more phonetic symbols instead of the 26 we have." (Fairbanks 1970)

1. *The chief merit of a phonetic system would presumably be its consistency.* It may be argued that our not having such a system is indeed the root of our troubles. Goaman (1966) supports this. He stated: "It would make English a much easier language to read if we always used the same letters to represent the same sounds."

2. *After a short study of phonetic print, the reader will find he is able to read and write with perfect fluency.* The only difficulty will be to analyse the different sounds needed in formulating the written words, but this neglected part of our education can become surprisingly interesting.

3. *It is said that reformed spelling would obscure the etymology of words.* But in an approximately equal number of words wrong etymology would be clarified. A phonetic spelling would no doubt give many words a form farther removed from their Latin or other source than the old spelling, but the mass of those who learn the new spelling will also know the old, which will always be available for reference to those who are interested in etymology. The study of the derivation of words is a specialist subject for the scholar. As long as words convey meaning to the ordinary person, that is all he requires from them.

In the 8th Century Alcuin taught the scribes a development of script used by Irish monks. He introduced the small letters of the alphabet. Most of them have a different representation from their corresponding capital letters. [6] These were new characters and Alcuin could be accused of reforming the spelling of his day. He introduced new configurations to each word and we can assume that this was welcomed by the scribes who would find it much quicker and easier to write.

At first the unusual American spellings we see in many present-day books may be offensive to the eye. This would be so with any new spelling. We shrink instinctively from any change from the familiar, but in time the initial strangeness becomes accepted, and in turn, also becomes familiar.

4. *Pitman (1969) observed, with reference to Shaw's alphabet, that it was both more legible and one-third more economical in space than traditional printing,* and suggested that this could lead to a great increase in reading speed.

5. *The homonym-homophone argument is baseless.* It is maintained that confusion would arise if *right, wright, rite, write* (which are homophones) were all written with the same configuration, but confusion does not arise when these words are spoken, and it is impossible to make up a sentence containing one of these words so that any of, the other three could take its place and make sense. (Ben Franklin, 1783)

It is appropriate at this point to mention the confusion caused to children beginning to read, by homographs, [7] words such as *'read, tear, wind, row'* etc. which have different pronunciations, but the same configurations. This at present is a far more confusing situation than future similarly-spelt homophones would be.

With a phonetic alphabet, homographs would have a spelling in which their accurate sound would be read and the confusion we now have when reading them would be eradicated. In both cases the efficient use of context will establish the meaning of the words. And care in writing context would eliminate the need for differently-written homophones.

6. *All books in the old spelling would be useless it is said.* Those who use the new spelling would also be able to read the old without too much difficulty. Everyone would find it is relatively easy to read phonetic print. One verbalises as one reads. The future generations could apply this ability to reading the old print - they would not have to learn it and spell it - just read it.

Before a decision can be made about a reform which would affect us all to some degree, there are six questions to be answered.

1. *Is it fair that a year's education time should be wasted on teaching children to read?*

i.t.a. has been proved to be a success in the initial stages of learning to read. The transfer from i.t.a. to conventional spelling is not as formidable as had been anticipated. Even the most sceptical observers have had to concede that it helps dull children from poor homes and does not retard bright ones from good homes.

How much more reading could have been achieved by these children if they had not had the problems of changing to the traditional orthography and learning so many spelling rules! How much less would be the pronunciation problems of foreigners learning our language, if it were phonetically spelt!

In Fernwald (1974), "Learning to read the English language is one of the worst mind-stunting processes that has ever formed a part of the education of any people."

## *2. Can we legitimately criticise the idea of Spelling Reform without first having a detailed knowledge of the imperfections of our present-day spelling system?*

Teachers and members of the public not familiar with i.t.a. are doubtful of the advantages of the use of a phonetic alphabet because they have the impression that this would mean learning over 40 completely new symbols - and even people in the teaching world cannot, or will not, realise that this is a complete fallacy. Of the 45 symbols in the expanded i.t.a. alphabet, 24 are exactly the same as our Roman letters, 13 are easily recognisable digraphs of our common letters joined together, 5 are ordinary letters with slight distinguishable embellishments, and only 3 are completely new to be learned.

Prof. Walter W. Skeat (1942) felt strongly about this also. He said, "No one can possibly be in a position to judge as to the extent to which our spelling ought to be conformed (if at all) to that of Greek or Latin - for this is what supporters of the (so called) etymological spelling really mean - until he has first made himself acquainted with the history of our spelling and of our language. The plain question is simply this: how came we to spell as we do, and how is it that the written symbol so frequently gives a totally false impression of the true sound of the spoken word. Until this question has been more or less considered, it is impossible to concede that a student can know what he is talking about, or can have any right to be heard. It is surely a national disgrace to us, to find that the wildest arguments concerning English spelling and etymology are constantly being used by well educated persons, whose ignorance of early English pronunciation and of modern English phonetics is so complete that they have no suspicion whatever of the amazing worthlessness of their ludicrous utterances."

## *3. Is Spelling Reform coming to us gradually without us realising it?*

Since the 1950's changes towards clarity and simplicity in the mechanics of spelling have been made where fullstops, apostrophes, inverted commas (quotes), hyphens, and capitals are concerned.

Spacing now performs the function of punctuation in addresses and qualifications after a person's name. Fullstops and commas are omitted. (Robert Brown, BA, MP)

Abbreviated words omit the fullstops after the final letter if that is the same as the letter in the full form. (Gk for Greek)

The apostrophe is less used and has disappeared from 'bus and 'cello (bus and cello), and in plurals where there is no clear notion of possession (Girls School). Teachers' Training College became Teacher Training College in the late 1940's and in 1964, College of Education. We now have Earls Court., St. Davids, Selfridges.

We say 'quotes' instead of 'quotation marks' or 'inverted commas'. They were not used by Shakespeare or in the King James Bible. Are they really necessary?

Hyphens are essential in such phrases as 'will-o-the-wisp' or 'happy-go-lucky' but previously

hyphenated place names have dispensed with them (Kingston upon Thames, Stratford upon Avon).

Current custom prefers lowercase letters if there is uncertainty as to which to use, thus there is simplicity of print.

New words are continually being added to our vocabulary.

These reforms have come about almost unnoticed. In Australia (1975) Harry Lindgren's spelling reform (SR 1) using no new characters was introduced. Here in the first stage of Spelling Reform the short *e* sound was simplified. In all words containing this sound the group of letters used was replaced by a single *e*, e.g. bread becomes bred; friend - frend; leopard - lepard; said - sed, etc. By simplifying one sound at a time the change is so gradual that very few inconveniences will be felt.

4. *If traditional spelling is continued, is help needed for a simpler introduction to this complex system?* In 1913, Bradley in his paper "On the Relations between Spoken and Written Language, with special reference to English," stated,

"It is not the sole function of writing to represent sounds. Writing can directly express meaning, in that for most experienced readers words have an ideographic rather than a phonetic value. We do not, in fact, read by sound. . . Traditional spelling is essential for the preservation of association of words, and for speedy communication of ideas. However, there is no doubt that those unphonetic features of our spelling which have their practical value for the educated adult, do add enormously to the difficulty of learning to read and write. The waste of time in education caused by the want of consistent relation between written and spoken word is a serious evil which urgently calls for a remedy."

It was to be 50 years before Sir James Pitman introduced a remedy, namely i.t.a., into British schools. This is the best thing that has happened so far to simplifying the task of teaching children to read.

5. *If it were decided to introduce spelling reform, which type of alphabet would be best for this country?* This is a decision which would be made, by a responsible body of knowledgeable people, taking into consideration all the advantages, disadvantages, and observations I have listed, and selecting the type of alphabet best suited to the needs of the world at the time in question.

The alphabets I have studied appear to fall into four categories. (see Appendix II, Comparison of alphabets)

1. A medium for teaching beginners to read and write, and designed specifically to facilitate the transfer to traditional orthography. (i.t.a.)
2. A new system of regularised spelling using the present 26 letter alphabet without the addition of new characters. (New Spelling, Wurd English, and Consistent Spelling).
3. A new system of regularised spelling using some of the 26 letters of our present alphabet singly or as digraphs, with a few additional characters. (simpl speling).
4. A new system with sufficient augmentation of the Roman letters to achieve highly consistent matching of sounds and letters with one symbol to each given sound, and no double or treble letter combinations used as at present. (Readspell, Torskript).. Or in addition,
5. A compromise between traditional orthography and total reform. (Lindgren's SR 1, and Wijk's Regularized English).

6. *What then is to be the future of our unsystematic spelling? Must we suffer indefinitely?*

"When once the public mind is prepared to accept reform in principle, and the government is stirred up to action, it is clear there will have to be some official enquiry into the best method of reform."

Echoing these words of William Archer in an interview in the *Daily Chronicle* (November 1911), it was felt at the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society that although representation had been made to Parliament by the Society in the past, and to the Bullock Committee, nothing positive would be done in this country without definite proof of a successful alphabet - one which could be brought into use with the minimum effect on the public.

Perhaps it will be considered after the future trials that such an alphabet is among those I have mentioned, and a gradual and unobtrusive transfer to its use will be employed in this country, learning too from any problems which may arise during the Australian Spelling Reform. But in making a decision about Spelling Reform the main consideration must be the welfare of future generations of readers and writers, not our own, as we can finish our lives using the traditional print.

Until then phonologists and linguists will continue to search for one standard pattern of written English with Kingsley Read's (1975) words echoing in their minds:

"The time for endless and often petty-fogging research is over. The need is for CONTROLLED TESTING, FORWARD THINKING, and ACTION!"

## Appendix I

### (1) *Different sounds for the same letter:*

a cat baby call calf want many errand imaging about  
e be bed pretty seargeant Derby over  
o woman women for other no olive do labour down  
u up use put but rule busy rule busy bury quite

### (2) *Different groups of letters for the same sound:*

sh ocean ship herbaceous chef stanchion cachou  
fuchsia special vicious pshaw exemption sugar  
fascist seneschal cushion schottische conscience  
conscious pension sjambok issue mission satiate,  
tortoiseshell nation cautious luxury flexion anxious  
ə about the mother captain pageant nuisance luncheon  
special region errand cupboard

### (3) *Silent letters:*

a, dead, b, doubt, c, back, d, adjust, e, have, f, staff,  
g, reign, h, honor, i, receive, j, hajji, k, know, l, talk,  
m, mnemonic, n, condemn, o, journal, p, psychology,  
q, lacquer, r, carry, s, island, t, watch, u, build, v, navy,  
w, who, x, billet-doux, y, played. z, puzzle.

**Appendix II**  
*Comparison of Alphabet Symbols*

World English	i.t.a.	TORSKRIFT	Consistent Spelling	Readspel	simpl speling
A a	a	A	A a/ac	a	a
B b	b	B b	B b	b	b
--	c	--	--	--	--
D d	d	D	D d	d	d
E e	e	E e	E e/+dbl	e	e
F f	f	F f	F f	f	f
G g	g	G g	G g	g	g
H h	h	H h	H h	h	h
I i	i	I	I i/y	i	i
J j	j	J j	J j	j	j
K k	k	K k	K k	k	k
L l	l	L l	L l	l	l
M m	m	M m	M m	m	m
N n	n	N n	N n	n	n
O o	o	O o	O o/+dbl	o	o
P p	p	P p	P p	p	p
--	--	--	--	--	--
R r	r	R r	R r	r	r
S s	s	S s	S s	s	s
T t	t	T t	T t	t	t
U u	u	U u	U u/+dbl	u	u
V v	v	V v	V v	v	v
W w	w	W w	W w	w	w
--	--	--	--	--	--
Y y	y	Y y	Y y	y	y
Z z	z	Z z	Z z	z	z
--	--	--	--	--	--
ch	ch	ç ç	-ch	ch	c
sh	sh	Σ s	-sh	sh	sc
th	th	D ð	C c	th	ð
th	th	fi p	th	th	θ
wh	wh	hw	hw	wh	hw

*Comments*

World English, New Spelling, Torskript, and Consistent Spelling all keep the capital letters.

i.t a. retains c to keep the similarity with traditional orthography and uses *or* and *au* as these are sounded differently in some countries.

Consistent.Spelling uses X for the ks sound and q for the neutral vowel sound.

In simpl speling, one symbol represents more than one sound, e.g. (h*it*, year) and a (a, hat, pass)

In Consistent Spelling and simpl speling, both oo (book) and w (wet), are represented by w.

New Spelling differs from World English in that W.I. adds diacritical marks to th (them) and th (thin) in place of N.S. *dh* and *th*. Also N.S. uses *oo* and *uu* as in *good fuud* whereas W.I. uses them as *guud food*.

Torskript and simpl speling use ð for the *th* sound in (them) and Consistent Spelling uses c for that sound.

The authors of these systems are:

New Spelling: Walter Ripman and William Archer

World English: Herbert S. Wilkinson

i.t.a.: Sir James Pitman

Torsikript.: Victor P. Paulsen

Consistent Spelling: Dr. Walter Gassner

Readspel: Kingsley Read

simpl speling: Edward Smith

### **Appendix III**

*The way to spelling reform - a brief history of spelling reform over seven centuries.*

[#1 should be a square, #2 should be a circle with a dot in the middle.]

13th century An Augustine Canon named ORM distinguished short vowels from long by doubling the succeeding consonants, or when not feasible, by marking the short vowels with a superimposed breve.

1476 WILLIAM CAXTON deliberately adopted certain spellings in the interests of consistency and uniformity.

1568 Sir THOMAS SMITH proposed an extended set of symbols (Alphabetum Angelicum), with 34 characters.

1569 JOHN HART used diacritical marks to distinguish vowel sounds and devised new symbols for consonants.

- WILLIAM BULLOKAR used numerous marks both above and below letters to assist readers. He suggested that vowels should have marks to indicate length and quality; vowels should be doubled for long sounds e.g. oo, and that some silent letters (e, b, i, o) should disappear.

1530-1611 RICHARD MULCASTER recommended no change in the existing 24 letters (*j* and *v* were still included under *i* and *u*). Mulcaster's influence was considerable and he listed the first rules of spelling.

1621 ALEXANDER GILL thought spelling should be phonetic but made allowance for derivation, difference of meaning, accepted usage and dialect.

1634 CHARLES BUTLER was particularly keen on single characters or the ligature for the existing double or doubled symbols, but he was completely unphonetic.

1640 SIMON DAINE was interested in letter names and referred to the changing pronunciation of the time with its relationship to spelling.

1644 RICHARD HODGES highlighted homophones. He disliked unnecessary double consonants and was concerned about the different sounds of vowels in different words. He used diacritic marks and separated syllables by a hyphen.

1668 JOHN WILKINS was concerned with word confusion. He had 450 characters in his system.

1768 Dr BENJAMIN FRANKLIN dispensed with c, j, q, w, x, y and added 6 new characters, but he relied on digraphs and for a long vowel he doubled the short vowels.

- Dr. WILLIAM THORNTON aimed at one symbol for each spoken sound and included *j* for sh, #1 for aw, and #2 for wh.

1840 Sir ISAAC PITMAN. In his *Phonography in Writing by Sound, being a New and Natural System of Shorthand*, the signs and symbols were consistently phonetically and emphasised the anomalies of English spelling. In Pitman's Shorthand we have a phonetic spelling that for consistency and accuracy, has stood the test of time.

1866 Dr. EDWIN LEIGH invented Fonotypy and carried out experiments in it and with an alphabet that indicated all sounds and silent letters without respelling.

1908 PITMAN's enthusiasm and inventiveness encouraged the formation of the *Simplified Spelling Society*.

1912 ROBERT BRIDGES (Poet Laureate) belonged to the *Society for Pure English*. He removed mute letters, e.g. *hav, liv, coud*, etc.

1914 Miss McCALLUM successfully taught a reading system based on the 'International Phonetic Alphabet', at a school in Cowdenbeath.

1856-1950 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW was interested "in the introduction of a new English alphabet containing between 40 and 50 new letters to be used and taught concurrently with the old alphabet until one or the other proves the fitter to survive,"

In his own writings he dropped the *u* in *our* endings and apostrophes in noun possessives, and abbreviated words and phrases. After his death part of his estate was used for the alphabet scheme in which in 1962 *Androcles and the Lion* was published.

The 'Shaw Contest Alphabet' was of 40 letters and 8 digraphs. Shaw provided money in his will for the inauguration of a "British alphabet of at least 40 letters" to be devised by a qualified phonetician.

1949 Dr. MONT FOLLICK, Labour M.P. for Loughborough introduced a private members' *Spelling Reform Bill* into the House of Commons, seconded by Sir JAMES PITMAN. The Bill was defeated in a small house by a vote of 84 to 87.

Since the formation of the Simplified Spelling Society there have been 16 attempts to simplify the teaching of English by a variety of methods, notably:

WORDS IN COLOUR (Gattegno, 1940)

COLOR STORY READING (Jones, 1965)

DIACRITICAL MARKING SYSTEM (Fry, 1966)

*Thirteen new alphabets* have been formulated including:

NEW SPELLING (Simplified Spelling Society, 1948)

REGULARIZED INGLISH (Wijk, 1958)

i.t.a. (Pitman, 1961)

The SHAW CONTEST ALPHABET (composit of 4 winners, 1962.)

MALONE SINGLE-SOUND ALPHABET (1962)

TORSKRIFT (Paulsen, 1963)

SENSUBLE SPELLING (Jamieson, 1973)

WURLD INGLISH (Wilkinson, 1970)

These have all received a certain amount of publicity.

At the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society (London, 1975), it was decided that trials should be organised at some future date when Phonetic Alphabets should be compared for usefulness in teaching English, and the evidence set before the Government with a suggestion of Spelling Reform.

The alphabets offered for the trials were nos. 2 through 7 listed above in Appendix II.



[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.6 pp23,24 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin, Fall 1978 pp18,19 in the printed version]

## 6. Simplification and Photo-Typesetting, by Edward Rondthaler\*

\*International Typeface Corp, New York.

... the new road to a quick changeover.

The history of spelling simplification shows us that the writers and the typesetters were the ones who always scuttled simplification. It never reached the readers - they never had a chance to pass judgement.

Sometime around 1910 several magazines and 20 important newspapers agreed to try simplification on a piecemeal basis: 12 words this year, 30 next, 300 the year after, and 1500 or more eventually. It may have been a great idea, but it was very bad psychology. Nobody wants to change his writing habits – least of all journalists and typesetters frantically trying to meet daily deadlines.

As for readers, we can't say how much resistance they would generate because we do not know. We might be agreeably surprised. If the spelling were close enough to present-day English so that almost anybody could quickly "catch on", the resistance might fade away rapidly - as it has in England with the recent change to decimal coinage. The truth is that we'll never know how much reader resistance we'll get until we try it on a large scale, and up to now we've had no good way to try it.

If, at the outset, we limit our use of simplification to new printing and new public signs, we can completely eliminate the writers' and typesetters' resistance. They need make no change. Why not? Because we can program computers to convert their typewritten *oldspel* into typeset *nuespel* - at fantastic speeds.

Take a look at what is happening today in the typesetting revolution; and bear in mind that more and more type is being set this way:

1. The author types his manuscript as usual.
2. The typesetter keyboards the manuscript into punched tape or an Optical Character Reader scans the manuscript, reading the letters about the same way that scanners read numbers on bank checks, but doing it visually at the rate of about 40 words per second. As the optical tube reads the manuscript, it converts the letters into codes on punched or magnetic tape.
3. The codes on the tape are then converted back into letters and projected, a paragraph or two at a time, onto a proofreading screen resembling a TV screen with a typewriter keyboard attached to it.
4. As the proofreader reads the copy on the screen, he can type in corrections, additions, etc. As he types, the errors magically vanish from the screen and the corrections take their place.

5. When the proofreader is satisfied that the paragraph is correct, he presses a button and - presto - the letters on the screen are converted into codes on a new tape.
6. The new tape is fed into an even more fantastic printout unit with dials that may be set at will for type style, size, line width and leading.
7. The printout unit is turned on and begins to photo-compose lines at the rate of 10 to 10,000 letters per second! A computer attached to the unit figures out the correct hyphenation for words breaking at the ends of lines, and justifies each line as it is set.
8. Out comes a film positive or negative that may be developed conventionally and used in offset, gravure or letter-press printing!

None of this is a dream any more. It is in daily successful operation. While the sophisticated equipment is still pretty expensive, we must remember that photo-typesetting machines, in general, are getting cheaper every day. Fifteen years ago, the least expensive photo-typesetter was \$75,000. Today you can buy a simple one for \$5,000.

It takes very little imagination to see that the computer behind the typesetter's keyboard or the OCR tube could be programmed to read *words* rather than *letters*, and that it could transliterate *oldspell* input into *nuespel* on the tape. This means that authors and journalists could continue to write in oldspell, but when their words appeared in print they would be in nuespel. And the author could write either "through" or "thru", and both would go onto the tape as "throo." The same applies to homophones. Homographs and author's typing errors become a little more difficult. These would show up on the screen IN CAPS in their oldspell form and the proofreader would then type in the correct nuespeling.

And all of this will be practical *long before simplification is accepted*.

The important thing to remember is that the resistance shown to previous attempts at simplification has been *writer-resistance* - not reader-resistance.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.7 pp24,25 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1980 pp8,9 in the printed version]*

## **7. Research on Spelling Reform by John Downing, Ph.D.\***

\*Victoria University, Victoria, B.C. Canada.

\*A talk presented at the 2nd International Conference on Reading and Spelling by the Simplified Spelling Society at Nene College, July 1979.

Psychological research can help spelling reformers in three ways. Firstly, there is a substantial body of scientific research evidence that supports the view that a simplified spelling of English would bring very great benefits to children's education in the English-speaking world. Secondly, research shows that simplification would improve the effectiveness of students learning English as their second language. Thirdly, the psychological study of human motives for changing spelling conventions or preserving them provides for spelling reformers' strategies.

### **1. *English-speaking children's education***

Debates in the British Parliament led the Minister of Education to give her support to a scientific experiment to test the effects of simplifying English spelling. The experiment was conducted by England's two foremost educational research organizations: the National Foundation for Educational Research and the University of London Institute of Education. The experiment was conducted in a large number of state schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The experimental classes used a simplified spelling of English and their progress was compared with control classes using the traditional orthography of English. Both groups of schools used the same reading books and teaching methods. The two groups of children were matched in intelligence, social class, and several other variables. The only difference between the two sets of classes was the way in which their reading materials were printed - the experimental group's in simplified spelling, the control group's in conventional spelling. This research was probably the largest and best controlled scientific experiment ever conducted in British education. It was also one of the longest. The same children were studied for five years. The detailed description of the experiment was published in one of my books (Downing, 1967).

The results of the experiment were quite unequivocal. The children using the simplified spelling made much more rapid progress in learning to read, write and spell. The incidence of failure in reading, writing and spelling in the experimental group was less than half of that of the control group.

The conclusion from this large scale scientific research is inescapable. The traditional spelling of English is a very serious cause of failure in the development of literacy skills. More than one half of the children who are failing in their school work today would be saved from this disaster if English spelling were simplified. (For detailed statistics see Downing, 1967, 1969, 1977; and Downing and Latham, 1969.)

### **2. *English as a second language***

Several scientific studies have been made on the effects of simplifying English spelling on students learning English as a second language. For example, Abiri's (1969) subjects were 1000 Yoruba-speaking children in Nigeria. The half of these students who learned English in simplified spelling were significantly superior to the half that learned with conventional spelling. Several studies in Britain and America with non-English speaking minorities have confirmed the conclusion that the

traditional spelling of English is a serious handicap in the teaching of English as a second language. (For a detailed review, see Downing 1979.)

### 3. *Strategies for spelling reform*

A psychological analysis of the spelling behaviour of English speakers over the past ten centuries reveals the causes of changes and stabilities in English orthography.

There is a strong desire for stability among producers of books. The desire is based on the belief that readers prefer to find a word always spelled the same way. The first period of stability was in the West Saxon standard for old English in the reign of King Edgar (959-975). It was a period of economic prosperity and peace. Books were in demand and the masters of the scribes maintained strict conformity to the phonemic spelling of English of that time. This stability fell into ruin when English ceased to be the language of power, following the Norman invasion. Then, about 1430, English revived through its use in the Chancery. This revival was accompanied by revisions to make English more phonemic. But it was far from stable. It was Mulcaster in 1582 who argued for the level of stability of English spelling that we know today. He proposed that words which already had a stable spelling should continue to be spelled that way. But words that were spelled in a variety of ways should be given a fixed spelling. The most phonemic spelling among the alternatives should be chosen. However, Mulcaster accepted non-phonemic spellings that were reasonable analogies with other stable spellings, and he also considered that homophones should not be homographs. Cooke's spelling primer of 1596 brought about the stability of English spelling that Mulcaster sought. By 1700 stabilization was complete, and it only remained for Dr. Johnson's dictionary to record what the printers and publishers had already accomplished.

The important psychological point here is that there is a strong motive for stability of spelling in periods of peace and prosperity when books are in demand. But note that the basic motive is economic. Publishers and printers want stability of spelling because they want to sell their books to readers who prefer such stable spellings. As we shall see below, if other economic factors become stronger than the desire for stability of spelling, then stability will be sacrificed.

Therefore, let us consider what has caused changes to occur in the history of English spelling. Seven motives can be traced :

- (1) *Immediate financial gain*. In the middle ages, lawyers' clerks were paid for their writing by the inch. As a result, words were given longer spellings and the clerks got paid more.
- (2) *Aesthetics (a) tidiness*. Alternative spellings were used for the same word in order to achieve a neat right-hand margin on the page (for example, *pity*, *pittie*, etc., according to the amount of space to be filled).
- (3) *Aesthetics (b) fashion*. For example, the letter *z* has always been unpopular. Hence, the sound /*z*/ is often spelled with *s*, for instance.
- (4) *Etymology*. Spelling words to show their linguistic origin has long been a motive for modifying English spelling. But it was especially prevalent during the Renaissance. Unfortunately, it led to so many etymological errors that modern English spelling is an unreliable guide to the origins of English words. Nevertheless, etymology remains an important argument against spelling reform, despite its invalidity.
- (5) *Visual morphemes*. A number of English spellings are deliberately non-phonemic. For example, *ed* for past tense and *s* for plural have been consciously introduced as being more useful than phonemic spellings in these grammatical contexts. The avoidance of homographs for homophones also was a deliberate decision by Mulcaster, for example, *rite*, *right*, *write*, *wright*. Also some other interesting visual morphemes seem to have developed through unconscious motivation. For example, when Caxton had the monopoly of printing in England, he changed many *g* spellings into *gh*. "Gir", "goose", "goat", "ghost", and "ghastly" were all spelled with *g* before Caxton. Caxton spelled them all with *gh*. As more competing printing presses were introduced, the *gh*'s reverted to *g*'s - but a few words kept Caxton's *gh*, for

example, *aghost*, *ghost*, *ghastly*. They all seem to have some connection with the emotion of fear.

- (6) *Domination through language*. The year 1066 marked the beginning of the ruination of the stable English spelling of the Saxons. The scribes' customers became less and less interested in written English and more and more interested in written French. English spelling consequently was neglected and many errors crept in that have been preserved to the present day. From the truly conservative point of view, today's spellings of *monk* and *cinder* are errors. The original spellings were *munk* and *sinder*. The domination of French over English during the Norman period produced another curious anomaly in English spelling. As the Norman rule became settled, many educated people in England became not only bilingual but also biliterate. Therefore, there was no reason to change French spellings into English spellings when a French word became adopted into English. The biliterate could read the French words in an English text. Thus, unlike most other languages, it became traditional in English to preserve the foreign spellings of words adopted into English.
- (7) *Simplification*. Throughout the past one thousand years of English spelling, there have been recurring demands for its simplification. The most frequent change that has been demanded is a return to a more phonemic representation. Also changes that have actually occurred have often been phonemic.

These are the chief motives that have inspired changes and preservations in English spelling during the long history of its development. Despite the rather lengthy period of stability that English orthography has experienced till lately, we should never overlook these dynamics. English spelling has changed frequently in the past and the same forces for change are all around us still today. Two currents of change are clearly discernable.

Firstly, Harry Lindgren's *S.R.1* proposals are becoming increasingly popular and have found favour among teachers of English in Australia. Here, we see the age old demand for a return to the simple phonemic spelling of the Saxon English of a thousand years ago.

The second wind of change that is blowing up may become gale force. That most powerful motive of all is stirring again - the economic one. Graham Greene has proposed a page in the *Times* of London for the *Guinness Book of Records* for its huge number of spelling errors. Why so many errors? Why is stability of spelling collapsing? Because the stability of conventional English spelling is becoming economically unfeasible. Money is being save by computerized typesetting and reduction in proof-reading. Thus the desire for stability of spelling is being set aside to save money.

Spelling reformers can use this knowledge of human motives for change and stability in spelling to plan strategies for bringing about that simplification of English spelling that scientific research has shown to be necessary for improving English language teaching.

## References

- Abiri, J. O. O. (1969), "Using i.t.a. and standard orthography in teaching English and reading in Nigeria." *Reading Teacher*, 30, 137-140.
- Downing, J. (1967), *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet*. London: Cassell.
- Downing, J. (1969), "New experimental evidence of the effectiveness of i.t.a. in preventing disabilities of reading and spelling." *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 5, 547-555.
- Downing, J. (1977), "The probability of reading failure in i.t.a. and t.o." *Reading*, 11 (3), 3-12.
- Downing, J. (1979), "Results of teaching reading in i.t.a. to children with cognitive deficits." *Reading World*, 18, 290-299.
- Downing, J., and Latham, W. (1969), "A follow-up of children in the first i.t.a. experiment." *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 39, 303-305.

Preserving traditional orthography is only essential to prevent poor people from getting a good education and taking away good jobs from us well-educated people who think we are so superior to the masses of people. N.W.T.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.8 pp26-30 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1978 pp5-9 in the printed version]*

## **8. A Discussion of Spelling Reform, by Kyril Evans\***

\* Deceased.

I wish to discuss a subject in which we all should have been interested long ago. This subject has been kept in the philological ivory towers of learning and out of sight for us, the laymen. For this reason, we were not and could not have been interested in it in the past. We were not aware of its need, nor why we should be interested in it, nor of its effects upon our lives.

This subject is spelling reform.

The slave economy of Greece and Rome and the feudal economic system of the middle ages did not require universal literacy. In these economic systems, only those who were charged with the direction of the affairs of the state, and the very few who were motivated by learning for its own sake and had plenty of time, money, leisure and a strong desire for learning, became educated and literate.

The industrial revolution, however, changed all that mode of life. Ordinary people were needed to construct and operate machines. These people had to be able to receive and to give written instructions in regard to the construction and operation of machines. Verbal instructions were inadequate and impractical because of the difficulty in remembering the numerous, complex details.

However, the industrial revolution did not change our system of writing in order to make it more suitable for the machine age. From the time of the industrial revolution till today, the ordinary everyday users of the English language have to waste years of time in order to acquire the bare minimum of education, just the three r's, and to adapt themselves to the industrial way of life.

During the past, some of the high priests in the temples of religion, politics and learning, resisted any changes in the system of writing, maintaining that writing is sacred and immutable. In spite of all this resistance, changes in pronunciation and in spelling always take place, but take place in a haphazard manner, causing more confusion than simplification in our spelling.

We, the English speaking people, are practical in every respect, except in the matter of spelling and tradition. But the time has come for us, if we are not to remain the slaves of an outworn system of spelling, to take an interest and search for a solution to the problem of spelling reform, a solution which will be practicable and could be mastered in the shortest time possible.

Could anyone imagine that today a place exists in our society for illiterate people? No, there is no place for illiterates in our industrial way of life.

The more complex our way of life becomes, the higher the standard of education which will be required for every member of the community. We shall have no time to waste.

Our mal-phonetic system of spelling wastes from 2 to 3 years of every school child's life and much of the time of each adult in the English speaking world.

Did you ever stop to think of the difficulties of the adult wrestling with the spelling or the pronunciation of new and unfamiliar words with which he comes in contact every day? The ever-present question is: "How do you spell this word?" or "How do you pronounce that word?" The questioned person may be just as puzzled as the questioner.

If reference is made to the dictionary, the information is not always there, or is not easily available, for if the searcher has no idea of the spelling of the word and is not familiar with the explanatory words in the dictionary in connection with the word, he cannot find it. The compilers of the dictionaries are compelled to resort to various means in order to make you catch onto the pronunciation of the words. These means are: respelling, the International Phonetic Alphabet, the Greek, the Latin, or any of the other languages of the origin of the words. One is required to know thoroly all these means and a few other languages before one can understand and master English pronunciation and spelling.

### **How did this confusion in our spelling come about?**

It is because our language is a polyglot language - it contains words from almost every other language in the world.

Its direct ancestors are the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman French Languages. The Webster International Dictionary of the English language states that neither the Anglo-Saxon orthography nor the Old French was distinguished for its regularity. But when the two were thrown together, the result was a mass of confusion and anomaly hardly to be paralleled, except, perhaps, in the spelling of the native Irish.

Our language is very young. It was born approximately six and a half centuries ago. The birth of the Chinese language is in the dim past of history - it is said to be more than fifty centuries old. The English language today is travelling the same road which the Chinese language has been travelling. The two languages have certain similarities. The English language, like the Chinese language, is fast becoming a functional language - the meaning of the words is determined by their function in the sentence. This represents a simplification in grammar. Its spelling, however, is becoming a word-picture spelling - one letter or a series of letters, unrelated to the sounds of speech, make up the lettered picture of each word. This represents a very serious complication in the writing of the language.

History tells us that during the fifth century, Celt-inhabited Britain was invaded by the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. A century or so later the Danes and the Vikings came to the British Isles. All these invaders spoke closely related languages of Teutonic origin. They had no difficulty in understanding each other. In time, they merged and formed the Anglo-Saxon nation, with its particular language and customs. The Anglo-Saxons continued to exist as a free nation until the year 1066.

That year, William the Conqueror crossed the English Channel with large armies and subjugated the Anglo-Saxon nation. The conquerors brought with them the French language and made it the official language of the islands. The Anglo-Saxon language came to be regarded with contempt by the conquerors and was relegated to the countryside as the language of the peasants and the foreigners. This relation between the conquerors and the conquered continued until the 12th century when Normandy, the homeland of the conquerors, was invaded by her neighbors. The Normans in England needed allies. They began to fraternize with the Anglo-Saxons and to accept them as fellow-countrymen. By the beginning of the 14th century, the two people had merged as one people, with one language, the English language.

### **The reasons for the confusion in our spelling are numerous:**

First, in the merging of the Anglo-Saxon and the French languages, Anglo-Saxon words and French words were used together, without change in spelling, to form the beginning of the English language. Anglo-Saxon sounds of speech and French sounds of speech were retained for each of the letters of our alphabet. This resulted in multiple sounds of speech for the same letter and

multiple spellings for the same sound of speech.

Latin words in the English language were inherited from both the Anglo-Saxon and the French languages, since both of them used Latin as the language of legal documents and as the church language. Through the Latin language, many Greek words were introduced into the English language. The language scholars kept the spelling of the new words as close to the spelling in the original language as possible, but took the liberty to change the pronunciation of the words. This is what is called 'anglicizing' the pronunciation of foreign words in the English language. Thus, English spelling was made even more complicated.

During the period of the Reformation, language scholars maintained that English spelling should indicate the origin of the words rather than their pronunciation. This is the so-called historical or etymological spelling. By this method of spelling the etymologists sought to make easier their own task of cracking down the origin, history and development of words. In this they were not always successful, but the historical method of spelling made English spelling infinitely more difficult for the everyday users of the English language. For example, Greek, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and French, among others, have all been assimilated into English. Their divergent spellings have brought about 10 different spellings for the sound of speech of 'k.' This would imply that one has to know all these languages before one can hope to master English spelling. This may be possible for one who is prepared to spend a lifetime, like the Chinese scholars of old, in the study of these languages, before one can hope to master the use of the English language.

Another reason for the confusion in English spelling is that, before printing came into general use, each writer spelled the words he wrote the way he thought they should be spelled, irrespective of how other writers spelled the same words.

The process of coining new words and borrowing words from other languages still continues today unabated. As long as English spelling remains non-phonetic, we shall be forced to continually add new sounds of speech to each of the letters of our alphabet, and to add new spellings to the existing sounds of speech. In time, we may come to the same impasse to which the Chinese have come today.

Today, the Chinese realize that they cannot hope to industrialize their country without the use of a phonetic alphabet. For this reason, a committee in the Ministry of Education at Peking, is working feverishly to devise such an alphabet for their language.

Shall we wait for fifty years before we stop wallowing in such a confusion? What has been done in the past to free us from this anarchy and tyranny in our spelling?

**Yes, a few haphazard attempts have been made in the past in order to regularize English spelling.**

The author of a literary work in the 14th century used the device of doubling a consonant letter in order to indicate that the immediately preceding vowel sound is a short vowel sound. At present this rule is honored more in the breach of it than in its observance.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1, in England, several grammarians undertook the task of improving the quality of writing by reducing the multiple non-phonetic spellings of certain words which had more than one non-phonetic spellings each.

About the year 1837, Sir Isaac Pitman in England, advocated the adoption of phonetic spelling. He based his invention, shorthand writing, entirely on the sounds of speech and not on the non-phonetic spelling of the words. Every stenographer knows this.



During the last few years of his life, Benjamin Franklin became an ardent advocate of spelling reform. He devised a phonetic alphabet, but because of his advanced age, did not press for its adoption.

Noah Webster, a contemporary of Benjamin Franklin, advocated simplified spelling. He included some of these reforms in his dictionary. His reformed spelling today distinguishes American English spelling from the British English spelling.

During the second half of the last century, the Philological Association made the first organized attempt at spelling reform. However, the philologists found it difficult to agree among themselves as to what is to be done and how it is to be done. They held several conferences and finally a committee was appointed to devise a phonetic alphabet. After some hard work, this committee brought forth such an alphabet, but found no soil in which to plant it. First, because the philologists disagreed among themselves both on the alphabet and how to put it into use. Second, because many of the so-called educated people, having a vested interest in non-phonetic spelling, opposed any changes. Third, because the printers were death on any changes in spelling, or having anything to do with new and unfamiliar letters. Fourth, because illiteracy was very prevalent.

At the beginning of this century, The Simplified Spelling Society of Great Britain devised a system of simplified spelling which reduced considerably the multiple spellings of most sounds of speech and the multiple sounds of speech for the same spelling. But it did not go so far as to make English spelling completely phonetic. It adopted 31 rules for simplified spelling and then four years later adopted an additional 30 rules. These were so complicated that they were impractical. Then in 1934 the S.S.S. embraced the phonetic system of Prof. R. E. Zachrisson called *Anglic* but renamed it 'New Spelling.' In 1953 they brought a bill before Parliament for the adoption of their system of spelling for teaching reading and it lost by only three votes. A compromise was reached in which the Minister of Education gave the government's blessing, but no financial support, to a series of classroom tests comparing the difference between teaching reading in out archaic spelling and teaching reading in a phonetic spelling.

During the twenties of this century, The Simplified Spelling Board in the U.S.A. undertook the solution of the problem of spelling reform. In its publications, the Board stated that its ultimate aim is to make English spelling completely phonetic. As a start, they made up lists of words which had more than one non-phonetic spelling. These lists were issued, one at a time, to the various educational institutions and to the various industrial and commercial establishments, with the request that the simpler of the more than one non-phonetic spellings be adopted officially.

In the past two or three decades, a number of individuals made attempts to devise a phonetic alphabet for the English language. However, these individuals were limited in their views. Because of this limitation, they committed certain errors in their alphabets. For example, one of them made the statement that the words *pin* and *pen* were pronounced the same and, therefore, they should be spelled the same way. His statement may be true for his local dialect, but it is not correct for the English language in general. In a phonetic spelling these words do not change their spelling. Another of these individuals, because of a strong influence from the Russian language, introduced in his phonetic alpha- bet the soft sign of the Russian alphabet. This soft sign is absolutely unnecessary for the English language.

All these organizations and individuals spent a great deal of time, effort and money to design a simplified spelling or a phonetic alphabet. For various reasons, they committed certain errors of judgement in designing their alphabets and in their approach to the subject. However, the pressure for higher standards of education and for a higher level of education for the general public, was not sufficient to arouse the public to the opportunities. Now, the machine age, the electronic age, the atomic age, and the age of automation demand a higher education for every member of the community. A spelling reform, therefore, is imperative. The only questions which remain to be

answered are: what shall be the extent of the reform and, how shall we go about implementing the reform? We really need to save the necessary time to apply to raising the standard and level of education.

Students in high schools and colleges are failing in greater and greater numbers every successive year. Reading, spelling and writing are basic to all other subjects of study in the schools. Failure in spelling foretells failure in reading, which in turn foretells failure in many other subjects of study. How can a student make progress in the other academic studies when they require a certain proficiency in reading? Our non-phonetic spelling, from year to year, becomes more and more complex, difficult and time-consuming, because of the tremendous growth of the vocabulary of the English language. This is at a time when science, industry and education are crying for trained men and women.

An immense number of new words are continuously cropping up in our language. Half a century ago, a person in command of 6000 words was considered to be an educated person and a fluent speaker. Now, he has to be in command of 20,000 words and to understand 100,000 words, in order to be considered an educated person and a fluent speaker, and to be able to handle all the subjects of study required of him. We have added immensely to our stock of words, but we cannot add to the time at our disposal, in which to master the use of these added words. We continue to flounder and muddle through with our non-phonetic spelling, not knowing that the time is fast approaching when we will no longer be able to afford to flounder. We shall have to be through with our muddling waste of time and energies. The greatness of the English speaking people in the fields of science, invention and literature has put us ahead of the rest of the world, and afforded us time in which to tarry on way and muddle through at leisure. However, the rest of the world is catching up to us, and, if we do not seize the opportunity to cease wasting our time with our non-phonetic spelling, we shall be passed by and left behind on the road to progress by the rest of the world.

*(Editor's note - watch Japan and Germany.)*

Science, industry and education are crying for qualified men and women to lead us on the road to progress. It has been admitted that we are lagging far behind in the training of such leaders. It has also been admitted that the financial barrier prevents many of our talented young people from developing their abilities to the fullest as leaders in these fields. But how many of us realize that we have young people in our communities gifted with every ability for learning, except the dubious gift of a rote memory? These boys and girls have an inherent sense of logic and love to exercise their intelligence by the use of common sense reasoning in the process of learning. But when we confront them with our illogical, confusing, historical, non-phonetic spelling, which requires a rote memory in learning some of it, but not all of it, we destroy that common sense - that sense of logic that science demands in its learning. These young people then feel frustrated and give up in despair early in their schooling. Their potential and valuable contributions to progress in science, industry and education are lost forever.

The traditionalists tell us that our non-phonemic spelling is based on a deep-seated tradition which makes it immutable, and therefore it cannot be changed. In order to prove that this traditional immutability of English spelling is incorrect, all one has to do is to compare Shakespeare's works in their original spelling with their spelling in today's issues. It is the vested interests in printing and in learning with non-phonetic spelling which hide behind the non-existent tradition. They attack viciously anyone who dares to suggest changes in our spelling for the purpose of simplification. Spelling is simply a tool with which we serve ourselves. It serves us efficiently or inefficiently according to the manner in which we fashion it consciously. The words spelled regularly are easy to remember. Those irregular words - those which indicate wrongly a pronunciation at variance with speech - cause trouble in learning and when we want to use them in speech. The floundering in our spelling forces us to flounder in our speech as well. If one pays careful attention to people speaking, one cannot fail to note that many of the words are not carefully spoken, they are

mumbled, because the speaker is not quite sure of their correct pronunciation. This mumbling, if not corrected early in the formative years, becomes a habit which is extremely difficult to correct. This is where our school teachers come in with their correct and clear speech. Anyone listening to President Eisenhower or Secretary of State John Foster Dulles speaking, cannot fail to notice the manner in which these statesmen pronounce the words 'international' and 'secretary.' They pronounce these words as 'inernational' and 'seketary.' Most probably, they commit this error unconsciously, by force of habit. An Irish medical doctor, speaking on the radio from Newfoundland on the occasion of St. Patrick's Day, pronounced the word 'voice' as 'vice.' Someone called at my door soliciting a donation for a charitable cause. When I asked what was her organization, she said that it was "The Multiple Serosis Society of Canada." She pronounced the word 'serosis' almost under her breath, whereas this word correctly pronounced is 'sklerosis,' a Greek word meaning hardening.

Oh, there is so much to learn and there is so little time in which to learn it! There is time - but we are wasting it in trying to learn our archaic, burdensome spelling. We are spending so much time asking each other: "How do you spell this word?" or, "How do you pronounce that word?" Or, run to the dictionary and, quite often, not be able to find it even there. It is impossible to find it in the dictionary, if you do not know the spelling accepted by the dictionary as correct, or the dictionary will not help you with the pronunciation if you are not thoroughly familiar with the explanatory words. Then, in despair, you say to yourself, "Oh well, I shall not use that word," or "I shall look for another word." Thus we are wasting our time and our vocabulary suffers.

We - the public - should have been interested in the subject of spelling reform long ago, if we were not so self-centered and selfish, so that, today, our mal-phonetic spelling would not act as a barrier to our talented young people from developing to the fullest their abilities for their own benefit and for the benefit of the community.

In order to interest and inform the public about spelling reform, I have published a small book entitled, "A Phonetic Alphabet for the English Language." It is available in many of the bookshops and in most of the university libraries and public libraries throughout Canada.

The phonetic alphabet presented in this book is not entirely new. I have studied most of the spelling reform alphabets offered in the past and have endeavored to correct the errors in them. In other words, I have built on the foundation laid down by others in the past.

A phonetic alphabet cannot wander too far from the present non-phonetic alphabet. If it introduces too many radical changes, it will place too heavy a burden on the transition generation, and on those individuals of the future generations who wish to delve into the literature of the past written in our old spelling. For this reason, in the formulation of my phonetic spelling system, I have taken the letters of the present non-phonetic alphabet and have fixed to each letter the sound of speech which that letter represents most often in non-phonetic spelling as at present. Thus, the student of phonetic spelling is already familiar with the relation of each letter and the sound of speech it represents. There are very few exceptions to this rule. These few exceptions are related to easily understood and remembered analogies. For example, a single vowel letter represents a short vowel sound of speech. The same letter doubled represents the corresponding long vowel sound of speech.

In regard to the consonant sounds of speech, the only changes are as follows: the voiced *th* in the word *then* is changed to *dh*. The *ch* in the Scottish word *loch* is changed to *kh*. The *s* in *pleasure* or the *z* in *azure* are changed to *zh*. The French nasal *n*, which is used in very few words in English, borrowed from the French, is represented by a small *N* of capital form as in the words *ensemble*, *encore*, *entree*, etc.

Thus the spelling of approximately 20% of our words is unchanged in this phonetic spelling system.

These words do not change their spelling because they are spelled phonetically in our conventional spelling. (a pity there are not more) Examples of such words are: *at, get, hit, hurt, with,* etc. 60% of our words change their spelling only in such a way that the reader cannot fail to read them. Examples of such words are: *butn, faar, gaard, betur, butur, komfort, kuning, kwik, kwontiti, militeri, strateji, woz,* etc. Foreigners from Europe will recognize them as old friends from their mother tongues. Only the remaining 20% of the words change their spelling a little more radically - and these are the ones in conventional spelling that cause the most trouble in learning to read.

The main objection to change to phonetic spelling is the fear that we will be required to start learning the language all over again. This fear is really unfounded. The present generation already knows the language, as far as it will know it by means of the non-phonetic spelling. All phonetic spelling means is that we are asked to spell the words correctly as we pronounce them correctly. It has been pointed out above, the student of phonetic spelling will already be familiar with the phonetic sounds of the letters of the alphabet.

Another objection, which opponents of spelling reform over-stress, is that we will lose contact with the literature of the past written in non-phonetic spelling. This disadvantage is more fancied than real. Shakespeare did not write his works in today's spelling - his was more nearly based on pronunciation, but it was also inconsistent. The student who becomes master of phonetic spelling will have some difficulty in reading non-phonetic spelling, but context and the regular words will help. As time recedes, only the few research scholars in literature will pore over books in non-phonetic spelling and will be likely to wonder at our obstinacy in continuing for such a long time with our illogical non-phonetic spelling. In time, all important literary and technical literature will be published in phonetic spelling.

The third disadvantage, which is also not formidable, is that the transition generation will have to be able to read both the non-phonetic and the phonetic spellings, but will need to use only one of them. The transition generation will already know the non-phonetic spelling, as much as it will ever know it. To learn to read the phonetic spelling will be a very simple matter, as this is the very purpose of phonetic spelling - to enable the student to learn reading and spelling without wasting any time.

A fourth disadvantage is the fear that, with phonetic spelling, the English language will disintegrate into a group of languages because of regional dialects. Such disintegration can happen only if the various English speaking peoples were completely isolated from each other. But today, science has developed the means of communication to such an extent that such isolation is impossible. Radio, television, talkies, exchange of school teachers, speakers, trade, travel, and many other factors favor the unity of speech of the English speaking people. Phonetic spelling will actually tend to prevent the spread of regional dialects by offering a standard of pronunciation which is desired to be emulated.

### **The advantages of phonetic spelling over non-phonetic spelling transcend by far the disadvantages.**

The school children in the primary schools will be able to learn in six years what they now require eight years to learn. They will save approximately two years of schooling time. We will not take the children out of school at the end of the six years. But we shall transfer some of the high school subjects to the primary schools, some of the college subjects to the high schools, and we shall add to the university curriculum subjects of new developments. Thus, we shall give to the youths of the future generations two years more education than they are now getting without an increase in the cost of education - without raising school taxes on this account. And by making it easier to learn to read, we will reduce the number of school dropouts.

The second advantage will be that the frequent search for spelling and pronunciation information becomes unnecessary with phonetic spelling.

The third advantage will be that the English language will become one of the easiest languages to learn. It is the most useful language now. This will enhance the possibility of the English language becoming the international language of the world.

A fourth advantage will be that many more millions of non-English-speaking people will learn to speak, read and write the English language. Thus the influence of English culture and literature will spread ever wider in the world.

A fifth advantage will be that speakers of the English language will be sure of the proper pronunciation of their words. This will enable them to speak more deliberately and clearly without mumbling.

A sixth and a great advantage of phonetic spelling will be that writers will be able to put down on the printed page any of the existing sounds of speech of standard English or any of its numerous dialects. This is impossible with non-phonetic spelling. Various systems to indicate dialects have been shown over the years - chiefly by humorous writers, many of whom were weak on the phonetics of English speech. But their endeavors have spurred spelling reformers to devise better phonetic systems.

The lack of the sixth advantage was felt very keenly by the late George Bernard Shaw. For this reason, he said that he was making the most serious proposition in his life when he asked that a phonetic alphabet be devised for the English language. He tried to leave a good portion of his fortune in quest of such an alphabet, but a faulty will resulted in a compromise which only allowed a small portion of his estate for the project. He thought that the staggering savings in time, effort, material and money, which will be affected by the adoption of a completely phonetic alphabet - one letter for each existing sound of English speech - should be sufficient to shock and to convince all the sceptics in the English speaking world of the necessity for a phonetic alphabet for the English language. He is correct in his estimate. With a completely phonetic alphabet, these savings will amount to as much as 18% in the cost of labor and material in writing, typing and printing. This saving would be in addition to the saving for the schools and the universities.

The problem which Shaw sought to solve is a two-fold problem. The first part of the problem is to devise a completely phonetic alphabet for the English languages single character for each sound of speech. There are many alphabets which fulfill the solution to this part of the problem.

The second part of the problem is financial. The courts need not argue that Shaw's will requires a change in the law of the land. The right to change the law belongs to the people of every democratic country. However, in order to inform the people of the great advantages to themselves from the adoption and understanding of phonetic spelling, money is needed to use the channels of communication and information. When the people realize the great benefits to be derived for themselves and future generations from the adoption of phonetic spelling, they will demand that the governments act to change the law to implement spelling reform.

The implementation of spelling reform requires the co-operation of the general public, of the educators, and of the educational authorities in all English speaking countries. Otherwise, spelling reform will remain like a gold mine in which the gold is undeveloped and unused. A thorough public discussion of phonetic spelling as compared with non-phonetic spelling, is necessary in order that English speaking communities may realize the great financial and cultural benefits to be derived from the adoption of phonetic spelling.

School teachers are limited to the teaching of the system of spelling laid down by the educational

authorities. Teachers as individuals can further the reform by discussion, but they cannot implement the reform, unless they are so authorized by the Minister of Education. The Minister of Education in each English speaking country authorizes the system of spelling used and taught in the schools of his particular country.

Spelling reform need not create an insurmountable gap between the past - non-phonetic spelling, and the future - phonetic spelling. It should enable the present generation to read the reformed spelling with ease. It should enable future generations to read the non-phonetic spelling with little difficulty, provided it is taught properly. It is very essential that there be no complete break between the two systems of spelling. A gradual introduction of the reform will make it easier to be accepted and assimilated.

In all English speaking countries the form of society and government is democratic. If the general public, the voter, is convinced that a given reform would benefit it, it tells the government, by means of the ballot, to implement such a reform by legislation.

**The following methods of gradual implementation of the spelling reform are suggested:**

1. The general public to be given an interest in the subject of spelling reform by holding contests for the best ideas on spelling reform and how to put it into use. Thus the public will become self-informed about the need and advantages of reformed spelling, and may come up with some good ideas on the process of utilizing the reformed spelling.
2. High school and college teams to debate the subject. Spelling reform is a lively subject for controversy.
3. School teachers to be permitted to carry out voluntary experiments in order to test the advantages to be gained by the adoption of the phonetic system of spelling and to report the results of such experiments.
4. Individuals to acquaint themselves with the subject of phonetic spelling and to challenge friends to correspond in phonetic spelling with them. Such correspondence will provide them with entertainment and education in phonetics.
5. The appropriate grades of the public schools to be introduced to phonetic spelling, as a special subject, as soon as possible, so that the present generation of school children be prepared for the change when the reform is implemented by law. This may even assist in the learning of non-phonetic spelling by showing the contrast.
6. Phonetic spelling clubs to be formed for the purpose of leading public discussions on the subject through public meetings, writing letters to the press, discussions on the radio, television, etc. The formation of the clubs to be based on the electoral ridings for members of parliament which has the jurisdiction over educational matters.
7. Finally, when a large section of the public becomes convinced of the great financial and cultural benefits to be gained for itself from the adoption of the reform, it can require that the members of parliament introduce bills to call upon other governments for legislation to establish phonetic spelling as the official spelling system for each English speaking country.

[Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W Tune; §2.9 pp30-34 in the printed version]

[Not included in Spelling Progress Bulletin.]

[Altho there are numbers for references or notes, there were none. The numbers in the Editor's comments seem to refer to the numbered paragraphs in 'The Case against'.]

## 9. The Case For and Against Spelling Reform

From *Some Arguments For and Against Spelling Reform* by the Canadian Linguistic Assoc. & the Canadian Univ. Teachers.

### The Case For Spelling Reform

1. Although specific reasons can be brought forward to justify the reforming of English spelling, beneath them all is perhaps the sub-conscious resentment that most people have against its illogical nature. Man is a rational creature and the greater part of his search for knowledge consists of perceiving order in apparent disorder. The very arbitrariness of English spelling immediately calls forth the opposition of man's logical faculties. Knowing that *read* rhymes with *bead* and that both words rhyme with *seed*, reason rebels when it then must accept the rhyming of *head* and *bread* with *bed*, Equally reason cannot easily accept the fact that the letter *a* has one value in *bat*, another in *bake*, yet another in *father*, yet another in *any*, and seemingly no independent value at all in *caught*.
2. People make their first serious contact with English spelling when they learn to read in school. For this reason we might take first those arguments that concern the child at school. Learning to read and write is the major activity of the child's early schooldays. Anything that will speed success in this task and perhaps also make it more interesting is to be welcomed.
3. In this context the first argument for spelling reform is that it will save school time. For example, Henry Bradley says: "The waste to time caused by the want of a consistent relation between the written and the spoken word is a serious evil, which urgently calls for a remedy." In a debate in the English House of Commons on March 11, 1949, Mr. Follick, who was speaking in favour of reforming English spelling, said that in his opinion the saving of time would be as much as two years of a child's life at school. [2] The saving of time was not put so high by another advocate of reform, William Archer, but he claimed that a year's school time would be saved by this step. [3] It must be admitted, however, that for the most part statements of this sort made by advocates of spelling reform reflect personal opinions and nothing more. None of them is based upon properly conducted tests in which control classes were used, but see in this connection the experiments described as Pitman's Augment Alphabet Tests.
4. The next point taken up by advocates of spelling reform is the drudgery in learning to spell, the ceaseless trial and error until finally the correct arbitrary pattern is remembered. Thus Mr. Follick argues: "In the first place, in school, nobody ever learns spelling. They waste time at it. It is a horrible drudgery. But they never learn it." [4] But it is worth noticing here that this is a subjective argument and that what one person finds drudgery, another will even enjoy. In the same debate there were speakers who disagreed with Mr. Follick. For example, Mr. Tomlinson said: "I do not believe that children go through untold hours of drudgery in trying to learn how to spell. It is true that some of them fail to learn how to spell, but they would fail under any system. [5] Sir Alan Herbert even justified a mild degree of drudgery: "I want to say a word

about this so-called drudgery. I think it is grossly exaggerated. I do not know of anything worth learning that can be learned without some drudgery, which means 'distasteful toil'. Think of the agonies of learning the piano." [6]

5. In a pamphlet entitled *Spelling Reform and Our Schools*, [7] W. J. Reed makes these points that bear on a child's early schooldays. He discusses first the relationship between word recognition and comprehension. He claims that a consistent spelling would reduce the time spent on recognition and increase that on comprehension. [8] From this he goes on to say that "spelling reform would thus give us not only better word recognition but also better comprehension." [9]
6. He then argues that a child's powers of written expression are hindered by the current spelling. He uses only words that he can spell whether they are the best words or not. With a more rational system of spelling, a child could write any word that he could say. [10]
7. Lastly [11] Mr. Reed claims that rational spelling would exercise a child's reasoning power.[12] His argument as it stands can hardly be justified. The purpose of teaching any spelling system is not to train a child's reasoning power but to enable it to read. Rather Mr. Reed ought to claim that a child can bring its reasoning ability to its aid in learning a rational system but not when learning the present irrational system and that for this reason a rational system should replace the present one. On the other hand it is arguable how far this would materially improve the learning of spelling. The failure rate in science and mathematics, both rational in nature, is high enough to prevent anyone thinking that the greater utilization of reasoning in teaching spelling would necessarily produce generations of better spellers.
8. Spelling reform has been advocated by others, not for what it will do for children in school in their early years, but for what it will prevent after school in later years. In the House of Commons debate referred to above, Commander Maitland suggested that our present spelling system was producing bad readers, that bad readers preferred books with many pictures, that this was often the sexy sadistic literature of the bookstalls and that the influence of this literature was a cause of criminal activities among the young. [13] Mr. Reed expressed the same idea. He says that the child, having seen the illogical nature of spelling "may only register a little disappointment with his elders for not playing quite fair; or he may, after many more such failures, form the opinion that his elders, either stupid or unkind to allow such illogical spelling to obstruct his educational process. This opinion has, of course, to be suppressed and so it becomes more dangerous to himself and everybody else. Apart from the intellectual loss then, there is the possibility of emotional and even delinquency troubles, which indeed have a high correlation with education failure." [14]
9. The next arguments urged in favour of spelling reform do not advocate it for its own sake but because it would lead indirectly to an overall betterment of the English language. Henry Bradley believes that many words in English, which have been derived from Latin and Greek are recognized by the classically educated more from the written form than from anything else. A phonetic spelling for English would break this recognition and would first drive many of these words out of the language. The result of this would be "to free our language from its unnatural bondage to the alien, to compel the developments of its native resources, and to revive its decayed power of composition and derivation." [15]



10. It has been suggested that rational spelling would be a guide to correct pronunciations of the language. Thus, for example, Mr. Follick, in the House of Commons debate claimed that he had heard the word *tribunal* pronounced "half dozen ways" [16] and that a reformed spelling would guide speakers as to which form to use. [17]
  
11. The last arguments put forward in favour of a reformed spelling concern the possibility of English becoming the world's "second" language. That to some extent English is this already will not be denied. Mr. Follick claimed that the language had reached this position because of certain intrinsic merits which it possesses, viz. short words, simple grammar and easy pronunciations. About pronunciation he said: "there is not a difficult sound in the English language:" [18] However, he believes that the irrational spelling of English prevents the language from being easily spoken and hence becoming the world's single "second" language. [19]
  
12. *Summary of arguments in favour of spelling reform*
  - (a) Reaction against the irrationality of English spelling
  - (b) Saving of teaching time in school
  - (c) Elimination of drudgery from learning to read
  - (d) Increase in a child's power of comprehending written English
  - (e) Increased fluency in a child's written work
  - (f) Reasoning powers can be used by a child in learning to read and write
  - (g) Reduction of delinquency and crime
  - (h) Elimination of many classically-derived words and the revival of native resources in word formation
  - (i) Provision for clearer guides to the pronunciation of the language
  - (j) Furtherance of English as the "second" language of the world.

## **The Case Against Spelling Reform**

1. All major attempts at implementing reform of English spelling have so far failed. This is not because the arguments against reform are crushingly strong - though they do have some validity - but because the public at large is apathetic about the proposal. Sir William Craigie suspects that the reading public would not "[having] learned the current spelling. . . willingly acquire a new one." Mr. John Parker in the English House of Commons was quite certain of his attitude. He said: "I have learned the existing system of spelling and therefore find myself reluctant to go to a great deal of trouble in learning another system." There can be no doubt that most people do not care one way or the other about spelling reform and of the few that have thought about it, the great majority are too lazy to act.
  
2. Allied with this apathy there is also prejudice against the idea of spelling reform. Sir William Craigie realized that a big objection to re-spelt forms would be that they would have a fair chance of suggesting "only ignorance and illiteracy." According to Sir Tomlinson, even George Bernard Shaw, a noted opponent of the current spelling of English, felt this prejudice against the reformed spellings. Sir Tomlinson quotes Shaw as follows: "I should strenuously object to have to read, much less write, my own works in a strange script, though I know I should get accustomed to it in a few weeks if I took the trouble." Rightly or wrongly, correct spelling is taken as indicating an educated person and equally an inability to spell is thought of as showing ignorance. This idea is a serious obstacle to any change in our spelling system.

3. Another objection, hardly an argument but more than a prejudice, is to be found behind the comment of Sir William Darling: "I am of the opinion that it [spelling reform] is an attempt to step down our education standard, because reading English is a little difficult in as much as it requires concentration and thought, and well-intentioned persons *should not make it easier*." Though hardly a valid argument in itself against spelling reform, Sir William's statement deserves attention as perhaps pointing to one facet of twentieth century educational practice and perhaps providing a suitable background against which to consider spelling reform.
4. When we turn to specific objections to spelling reform, we find that many of them derive from practical considerations. The first of these is that even supposing the majority of people were in favour of reform, what machinery and what authority exists to bring it about? A change of spelling would not just happen. An order saying that from a certain date such and such a spelling would be acceptable would be required and who would give this order and would their authority in the matter be accepted? Secondly, spelling reform has been a debated topic on both sides of the Atlantic all this century. A vast amount of money, of time and of labour has gone into the subject, and yet seemingly the vast mass of the people has not been affected by it at all. The task of persuading enough people to accept the reform in order to bring it about seems therefore so large that one may sceptically wonder if it could ever be done.
5. Spelling reform would probably not be welcomed by printers. Any change whatsoever would slow down their work and cause confusion until such time as typesetters had become entirely familiar with the new system. One may even wonder whether a skilled man who had worked in that trade for a number of years would ever make a complete adjustment and consequently have his efficiency impaired forever. Even more problems would arise if the new system that was adopted had new letters in it as so many of the projected reformed alphabets do. This would mean adaptations to existing printing machinery. It could even mean their complete replacement. What this would mean to the printers in time and expense can hardly be estimated but it would obviously be considerable. Even worse, however, all typewriters would equally become obsolete.
6. The changeover to a new orthography inevitably raises the question of what will happen to all the books that already exist. Some reprinting will be inevitable, if only of works that are arranged alphabetically. Whatever system of reformed spelling were adopted, it would be reasonable to assume that words such as *know*, *knight*, *knot* would no longer begin with *k* and that similarly *photograph*, *physics* and *phonetics* would not begin with *ph* but with *f*. The labour of resetting all thirteen volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary* or all twenty-four volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, to take but two examples, would be immense but would have to be done. As for other books, it has been argued that they could be left unchanged since a few hours' practice will enable any mature person to read them as we read Shakespeare's First Folios today. On the other hand there may be more faith than conviction behind this statement. Throughout the world's libraries there are millions of books printed in the current spelling system. They represent a huge capital expenditure. The positive advantages of reforming English spelling would have to be very strong before a path could be taken that might make these libraries more difficult all access, or even close them to the public altogether.(!?)
7. One of the arguments for a reformed spelling is that by having a regular relationship between the written and the spoken language, a foreigner would learn to speak the language more easily in that having learnt the sound value attached to each letter he would then read a text aloud with some confidence of getting the correct pronunciation of each word. Against this,

however, the present irregular spelling has in one respect a bigger advantage. Many English words derive ultimately from foreign languages. They were borrowed and assimilated into English, often retaining the spelling that they had in their parent language. Thus, for example, though a Frenchman may not understand the English words *centre*, *certain*, *censure*, *calm* when he hears them, he will at least have no difficulty in recognizing them when they are written down. But this aid in understanding goes when the above words appear in a rational phonetic form, perhaps in some such spelling as *senter*, *surten*, *senser*, and *kaam*. Loss and gain here have to be weighed against each other.

8. The rules of English grammar are few by comparison with most foreign languages and are easily learnt. This is a real advantage for a foreigner who is learning English. Thus the regular rule for making the plural of a noun is to add an *s*, thus: *cap-caps*, *hat-hats*, *boy-boys*, *cab-cabs*, *nose-noses*, *bridge-bridges*. But with a spelling system based upon the pronunciation of the language, cognisance would have to be taken of the differences in pronunciation in the above words. There would in fact be three plural endings, not one, viz: *s* as in *kaps*, *bats*, *z* as in *boiz*, *kabz* and *iz* as in *nouziz* and *bridjiz*. The same multiplication would occur in the endings of the third person singular of the verb in the present tense (*he walks*, *he runs*, *he rushes*), in the past tense (*he walked*, *he yawned*, *he waded*) and in the past participle (*walked*, *yawned*, *waded*).
9. Phonetic spelling would also do a disservice to scientists. Henry Bradley makes two points. New terms are coined largely from Latin and Greek elements. They are written forms and properly they have no pronunciation. An attempt at a phonetic spelling would be an artificial thing. It would obscure the meaning of the word by destroying the accustomed appearance of the constituent elements and would bring no compensatory advantage. Secondly, a "universal" spelling based on Latin and Greek usage is common in all technical words in all languages so that a foreign scientist is considerably helped in reading a work in English. It would hinder him to have to translate a phonetic spelling into the more traditional spelling first.
10. The points so far brought against spelling reform have dealt with public sentiment, practical obstacles, and the foreigner. All these deserve consideration, but so far no linguistic reasons have been urged against a reformed spelling. There are two arguments that have to be considered.
11. It is axiomatic that a language is not a static thing. Though the terms *living language* and *dead language* are not exact, they point to an essential truth, namely that as long as a language has speakers, it is changing just as a living organism is changing and that it never achieves a fixed form, such as Latin has, until it is no longer the daily speech of a nation. The language of King Alfred in the ninth century is different from that of Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth which in turn is not the language of William Shakespeare at the end of the sixteenth whilst English in the twentieth is different from all three. If reformed spelling were a once-and-for-all thing, it might be easy to accept, but in fact it would be a never ending process. Some authoritative body would have to be set up with instructions to revise spelling at intervals. Vallins quotes Dr. Johnson, a man usually criticized on this subject but who on this point at least saw more clearly than most. Dr. Johnson says: "Of these reformers some have endeavoured to accomodate orthography better to the pronunciation, without considering that this is a measure by a shadow, to take that for a model or standard which is changing while they apply it."

12. The major problem for advocates of spelling reform, who have as their goal a more phonetically based spelling, is the fact that English is not uniformly pronounced throughout the world. Mr. Hollis made this point in the House of Commons. He said: "I see a certain amount of common sense in the maxim that we should try to spell as we pronounce, but the difficulty is that people pronounce English entirely different from one another, and the reason why they understand it is only because they spell it the same." Actually no advocate of reform demands a rigorously phonetic system. For example, Daniel Jones suggests that no distinction be made between stressed and unstressed syllables in the word *was* in the following sentences: *He thought he was wrong* [wəz] and *He thought he was* [woz]. In the same way he would leave out stress marks, even though stress positioning is meaningful in words such as *increase* (noun) and *increáse* (verb), *torment* (noun) and *torment* (verb).
13. When he considers the question of different dialects, however, Jones says: "It would be inconvenient and lead to difficulties both in reading and in writing, if any large number of common words were to be spelled in more than one way." No one would disagree with this statement but then comes the question which form of English is to be the model upon which the orthography is to be based. In England there is presumably no problem. There is a recognized standard speech and this would no doubt be the pattern for the orthography. Consequently the story of The Little Red Hen, told in southern Received Standard English, begins as follows in a reader prepared for the Simplified Spelling Society. "Wun dae dhe Littl Red Hen found a graen ov wheet." But how far will this orthography help the young North Yorkshire boy who speaks the local dialect? His pronunciation of *one* can best be written *yan* [jan]. For him *red* has the same vowel sound as *wheat* and both words might best be written *reed* and *wheet* [riəd, wiət]. He would not use the standard form *found* but a pronunciation that would be indicated by the spelling *fund* [fvnd]. Is he really any better off with this new system of spelling when it comes to equating sound with letter? And the situation will be repeated whenever the local speech differs to any real extent from Received Standard English, viz. Devon, Cornwall, the west country generally, Lancashire, the northwest, Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland, Scotland, and so on.
14. The problem becomes more complex when English is viewed on a world scale for then there is no recognized standard speech. This question is too big to be entered into here but one or two examples of the sort of problem that will arise can be given by comparing certain typical British and Canadian pronunciations. In Canada the words *hat*, *cap*, *bath* and *pass* have the same vowel sound and so might well appear in reformed spelling as *hat*, *kap*, *bath* and *pas*. On the other hand *father* and *calm* would perhaps be written *faather* and *kaam*. But in England the spellings to follow the pronunciations there, would have to be *hat*, *kap*, *bath*, *paas*, *faather* and *kaam*. In Canada the words *cot* and *caught* are pronounced alike and could be spelt in a reformed orthography *kot*. In England the two words are distinct and would be written *kot* and *koot* respectively, where *oo* indicates the long vowel sound in *good*.
15. There remain three objections to reformed spelling that are often brought forward. None seems to have any real validity and so can be dealt with briefly. First there is the aesthetic argument that reformed spelling is ugly and displeasing. William Archer points out quite correctly that there is no positive beauty in the current spelling. Indeed there can be no such thing and certainly no foreigner (who would not be distracted by the word's meaning and who should therefore presumably appreciate the beauty of the word forms more disinterestedly than an English speaker) ever feels that the appearance of English in print is beautiful. It is true that the sensation of ugliness for some people on seeing reformed spelling is real, but it is

a sensation that comes from a "defect of expectation", not from an actual perceived ugliness. This feeling comes entirely from habit - a new habit would mitigate it and of course a new generation brought up on reformed spelling would never experience it.

16. The second of these arguments is the etymological argument, which is that a reformed spelling would obscure the etymology of most English words. Briefly the answer to this is that English spelling is at best today only haphazardly etymological - that the spelling of many words is actually misleading etymologically (for example *doubt*, which is properly *dout*, coming from French *douter*, not directly from Latin *dubitare*, and *scissors* which should be *sisors* or the like from French *cisoires* and not as if it came from Latin *scissor-(es)* "carver" from *scindere* "to cleave") and that the number of people who are interested in the etymology of words is so small relative to the mass of English-speaking people that they cannot be allowed to stand selfishly in the way of reform.
17. The last argument is the homophone argument. At the present there are some words that are pronounced alike but which are spelt differently. If a phonetic basis of writing were to be introduced these words would then be spelt alike and it is claimed that ambiguity could be caused.

Henry Bradley created some examples:

Trafalgar Square is the finest sight (site) in London  
the rights (rites) of the Church  
Mr. So-and-so is a flower (flour) merchant.

In normal usage, however, these words would be rarely confused, the context almost certainly indicating which word was meant. Further, though a reformed spelling would bring together many homophones under one spelling, it would release many present homographs into different spellings, words such as *bow* (noun) and *bow* (verb). Perhaps the loss in one area would be balanced by the gain in the other.

18. *Summary of arguments against spelling reform.*

- (a) Public apathy and prejudice
- (b) Lowering of educational standards
- (e) No machinery for bringing about reform
- (d) Immense labour needed to persuade people to accept reform
- (e) Objections from printers
- (f) Reprinting of many books would be necessary and the use of others possibly made awkward
- (g) Loss of easy recognition of many words by foreigners
- (h) Complication of English grammatical rules
- (i) Objections by scientists
- (j) Continual need for revision of spelling.
- (k) Differing forms of spoken English.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.10 p34 in the printed version]  
[Not included in Spelling Progress Bulletin.]

## The Case For and Against Spelling Reform

### 10. Editor's comments (on previous article):

This is the kind of biased report you can expect from a die-hard status quo advocate when he tries to write a paper giving both sides of a controversy. You will note that he could not refrain from presenting the arguments in favor of spelling reform without inserting negative comments at frequent intervals. And most of his comments against reform would not be applicable to a modest reform like SR-1 to SR-5. In his preconceived, determined opposition to reform, he overlooked this angle of the *kind* of reform and *how* it could be presented so as to not upset the literate adults who are satisfied with the status quo. Also he overlooked the fact that many words have two spellings - both of which are considered acceptable by our dictionaries. And that in the field of commerce new words coined are invariably spelled in a phonetic manner.

His paper is presented here mainly to show to what lengths the opponents of spelling reform will go to vindicate their prejudices. And he is ashamed of his many illogical arguments that he hides behind a cloak of anonymity of an "Association."

The fallacy of many of his statement against reform is not always obvious.

In #1, all attempts at changing anything appear to have failed - until our government actually authorizes the change. But it is true that most people are complacent - just as they were about the adoption of the Metric system, which is now becoming a reality.

In #2, this idea might have had some validity 3/4 of a century ago, but not now.

The falsity of statement #3 should be obvious. Spelling reform is a serious attempt at *bettering* our educational standards.

In another section of this book, it will be shown how to implement a reformed spelling. Suffice to say that there is for sure a legal and authoritative way - by government action and decree with government usage as a precedent.

His #5 has no validity. Printers and typesetters do not care if the text they have to work with is simple or difficult. They are paid by the hour. If it takes longer to set up an article on medicine, engineering or law, or any other technical jargon, the author or the publication pays for the difference - not the printer, most of whom don't even read what they print. What he says about adding new letters to the alfabet, however, is true.

In #6, no doubt some reprinting will be advisable, but the present literate population would not need to have books reprinted, nor would they forget how to read in the old spelling. Only such books as dictionaries or encyclopedias, wherein words starting with the eliminated silent letters, are relocated, would be affected. But these new editions would stimulate our economy with new sales.

In #7, the illogicality of this assertion should be easily seen. While the French word (or spelling) might help a Frenchman understand that particular word, it would not help a Greek, a German, a Swede, a Russian, or dozens - yea, hundreds of others. And the large amount of our words were not borrowed from foreign languages but *derived* from Latin and Greek, both of which are mutually

incompatible.

For #8, we must weigh the advantages and disadvantages. Certainly it is more important to have a reliable system than our present unreliable system of making plurals and possessives.

#9 is false because the Greek alphabet is entirely different from ours. The Greek spelling does not have the digraph 'ph' in it. The Greek letter 'phi' (our T.O. name for it) does not indicate that it should be 'ph' but rather that should be 'f'. And all languages do not use the 'ph' digraph, viz, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, Danish, and probably others use 'f' instead. And in Lord Gleichen's *Alphabets of Foreign Nations*, p. xiii, it says, "ph must not be used for this sound (f) in respelling foreign names."

No such artificial digraphs are used in Latin derived words, showing that such a digraph is unnecessary to indicate ancestry.

#11 may have been true 2 or more centuries ago, but the language has not changed even slightly in the last century and fixing the spelling along phonetic lines will tend to *prevent* changes in pronunciation. The reason why pronunciation *did* change centuries ago was because 99% of the population was illiterate and the spelling had already become an unreliable guide to pronunciation.

#12. The reason why there are differing dialects is because there is no standard phonetic spelling to be used as a guide to pronunciation. If there were, we would gradually follow the standard and eventually emerge with a standard speech. And he exaggerates the amount of differences between dialects. For instance, the dialectal differences between British and American speech amounts to only a few dozen words out of the 75,000 in the dictionary.

In #13, the specter of words being spelt in more than one way is held up as a deterrent, yet he seems to be unaware that there are a lot of words which in our dictionaries have 2 acceptable spellings.- past & passed, color & colour, honor & honour, program & programme, catalog & catalogue, dialog & dialogue, prolog & prologue, thru & through, tho & though, altho & although, donut & doughnut, canceled & cancelled, embarrass & embarrass, to name only a few. And there are 30 listed by Papailiou and Jason in their thesis (SPB, Spring, 1981).

In #14, Pitman's experience with his initial teaching alphabet indicates that this dialectal difficulty is only a minor issue and affects so few words as to be immaterial. What is more important? - that a few words do not indicate exactly the real pronunciation, or that most words (in T.O.) do not indicate pronunciation at all. Shall we reject something that is almost perfect in favor of something that is very unreliable?

#15 is disposed of by the author so no further comment is necessary.

As for the etymological argument, it was also challenged in our Section 5 by Yule and Downing.

The homophone argument is another "red herring" intended to obscure the real issue and has little merit, as shown by Ben Franklin and others. Some reformers even provide two means of portraying the same sound so as to provide means of differentiating the homophones. But he is right in saying that the gain in differentiating homographs will balance the loss of differentiation among homophones.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.11 p35 in the printed version]*

*[Spelling Progress Bulletin October 1962 p25 in the printed version]*

## **11. Upton Sinclair Cites Need For Spelling Reform In Letter To President Kennedy**

Upton Sinclair, famous magazine writer, author of books and publisher, strongly favors reformed spelling. He has asked President Kennedy to help this cause in a very fine and strongly worded letter.

It was written by Mr. Sinclair without his knowing that a bill was in congress for the creation of a National Spelling Commission. He expresses the same idea however, and has written Homer W. Wood that he is in favor of the present procedure as expressed in the bill.

The letter follows:

A Letter to the President  
President John F. Kennedy  
The White House  
Washington 25, D.C.

My Dear Mr. President:

I know that I am addressing the busiest man in the land; but a year or so ago you were kind enough to write me a gracious letter, saying that you had read some of my books; so I am venturing to hope that this letter may come under your eyes. It deals with a subject of vast importance, one which may affect our human condition for centuries to come. I will make my statement brief.

During my sixty-eight years as a professional writer - beginning at age fifteen - I have had to do with the spelling of the English language. I have learned it reasonably well, so my trouble is not a personal one; but as a man of humane feelings I think of the millions of children who come into our primary schools every year, as well as the tens of millions of foreigners who wish to adopt our language and make it into a world language. It is, of course, of the greatest interest to us that they should do it; but the chaos of our spelling makes the task one of unimaginable difficulty. No one can figure how large a portion of time and study of both children and foreigners is wasted on this futility; but half the study time would be a reasonable guess. This means that simplified and systematized spelling would make the learning of our language twice as easy as it is, and so twice as useful to the world. .

You and I have possessed the English-American language almost from infancy, and we take its spelling as a matter of course. It requires a definite effort for us to look back upon our early blunders and gropings in this jungle of inconsistencies. We were told that they were our fault; but more often than not they were the fault of our "mother tongue." The multiplicity and absurdity of these faults would take a volume to list . . .



I have in my mind one sentence - I cannot recall whether I read it somewhere or made it up myself. It contains five words which are spelled with the same endings, but the endings are pronounced differently: "A rough cough and a hiccough plough me through." So there are five different ways you can read the sentence, and you can throw any company into "stitches" by reciting: "A ruff cuff and a hiccuff pluff me thruff," or "A roo coo and a hiccoo ploo me throo," and so on. But to a foreigner these problems are not funny; he finds it hopeless to disentangle them, and may give up in disgust and go home to his native tongue. But your grandchildren and my great grandchildren cannot do that; they have to learn thousands of exceptions to spelling rules, and all their lives have to know that if they slip up with a written or spoken word, they will be taken for illiterate. Their task is harder than the foreigner's; we make allowances for him.

What I invite you to do will require very little of your time, and will immortalize your name as much as if you had written the Declaration of Independence. Select a group of scholars who have studied the problems of spelling reform and have advocated it, give them a staff and the necessary funds, and commission them to lay out a program for a minimum reform of orthography within a reasonable time. There will follow, of course, world-wide discussion and controversy, which is all to the good, for it is the process of preparing the public mind for a world- wide change. When the commission submits its program, put it into effect in public printing, and in your own and other official statements, the newspapers cannot refuse to print them; and a bit later they will have to follow the new ways. It will not be long before the public gets over the shock, and realizes the night- mare from which it has been wakened.

There is nobody in the land who can do this job but you, Mr. President; and there is little chance that you could do anything else that will give such benefit to the human race. It is clear that English may become the future international language; and nothing can stand in the way but the fantastic absurdities, the chaos and disorder, which have come down to us from the ignorance of the past centuries in which our language was formed.

That is all; except to offer my sincere congratulation upon the courage and hope which you have so far given to the people of our land.

Sincerely,  
Upton Sinclair

[*Spelling Reform Anthology* §2.12 pp36-39 in the printed version]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1976* pp2-5 in the printed version]

## 12. Some Technical and Social Problems of Spelling Reform, by George Turner\*

\*Reprinted from *English in Australia*, No. 31, May, 1975, pp. 3-12.

\*Dept. of Lang. & Lit., Univ. of Adelaide, South Australia.

G. W. Turner was born in New Zealand in 1921 and received an M.A. from the Univ. of New Zealand in 1948. He trained as a librarian, then worked for six years in academic and public libraries. From 1955 to 1964 he held a post in the English Department of the Univ. of Canterbury, New Zealand, and since 1965 has been Reader in the Dept. of English, Univ. of Adelaide. He holds a diploma in English Linguistic Studies from Univ. College, London, and has contributed a number of articles on Old Icelandic phonology, Australian and New Zealand English, and grammatical topics to learned journals. His publications include *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand* (Longman, 1966, second edition, 1972), *Good Australian English* (Reed Educational, 1972), and *Stylistics*, (Pelican Books, 1973).

The idea of spelling reform is as old as regular English spelling. No sooner had the printers regularized practice in spelling than reformers were ready to point out anomalies and suggest improvements. The anomalies increased with inevitable change in the spoken language, and criticism, though fluctuating, was never entirely absent. The success of 19th-century shorthand brought a new wave of interest in reform, supported by many prominent philologists, and this interest has not yet entirely dissipated. The success of metrication, which weakens the old argument of likely public inertia, has revived the hopes of reformers, though it is doubtful whether any serious linguists now lend them support.

Metrication presents a misleading analogy with spelling reform. Systems of currency or of weights and measures are arbitrary 'languages' for measuring and discussing phenomena outside themselves, but spelling and pronunciation are both linguistic phenomena. It is at least possible to regard a spoken and written version of a word as two forms of the same word; you can't do that with litres and beer. It is to be expected, then, that a reform of spelling will throw up problems which are different from those encountered in metrication, and we must not be surprised if the problems of spelling reform are likely to be much more complex.

### Background Theory

The theory of spelling is part of the wider theory of the relation between spoken and written language. Spelling is not a necessary part of this relationship since it could be said that a purely ideographic language like Chinese hardly has spelling in the usual sense, but if a writing system is generally based on the spoken form of a language, we can talk of spelling. The aim of spelling reformers is to make the two systems as alike as possible, by making each element in one system correspond as far as possible to an element in the other.

There are three possible approaches to the relationship of speech and writing. The first is to think writing is the 'real language' and speech is a way of actualizing it on particular occasions; the second is to think of speech as the 'real language' and of writing as a way of reflecting it, with some loss, in a convenient recording form; the third is to regard the 'real language' as something more abstract which may be actualized indifferently in speech or writing. Our theoretical standpoint on

this question will affect our views on spelling and its reform.

The first view, that writing is the 'real language', seems to have been the view of Swift who thought that adapting writing to speech was like fitting one's body to one's clothes. The view underlies a practice among some elocutionists and (at one time) teachers who encouraged their pupils to pronounce the unstressed syllable of *mountain* to rhyme with *stain* or *train*. Though such teachers inevitably earned ridicule, it would not be absurd to suggest that, rather than reform spelling, one should encourage as far as possible spelling pronunciations, that instead of respelling *said* as *sed*, we 'repronounce' it as 'sayed' (to rhyme with *maid*). Such changes in pronunciation have been not uncommon in the history of the language; *apothecary*, *window* and *waistcoat* were once pronounced 'potecary', 'winder' and 'westkit', and *forehead*, though still 'forrid' generally, is already pronounced as 'forehead' for some of a younger generation, so that these words are less irregular than they once were, though the spelling hasn't changed. Place names provide many similar examples, and the success of recent New Zealand efforts to promote a 'correct' pronunciation of Maori names shows that pronunciation reform is at least as possible as spelling reform.

The second view, that speech is prior, in a real as well as historical sense, has perhaps been commoner than the view that writing is prior. As a reviewer of William Holder's *Elements of Speech* in an early volume (V, no. 45, 1669, p. 958) of the *Transactions of the Royal Society* put it "Written Language is a description of . . . Audible Signs, by Signs Visible," Such a view became dogma among American linguists in the 'Bloomfieldian' era (say 1940-57). Written language was hardly accepted as language at all. Perhaps it was because it was so thoroughly despised in theory that there seem to have been no memorable calls for its reform at that time, though the implication was there, since, if writing was merely a means of recording speech, it would be reasonable to make it as exact a record as possible. It should reflect surface phonetic phenomena mechanically, without intrusion of etymology, deeper knowledge of the connections of words and other interference by the reasoning mind with raw phonetic facts.

But before spelling reformers caught up with this theoretical justification and learned to change their complaint that English spelling is 'irrational' to one that rational processes (such as, say, the unpronounced 'd' in *handkerchief*, just because reason connects the word with *hand*) interfere with phonetic truth, a new wave of linguistic theory subverted the Bloomfieldian linguists and promoted a view resembling our third theoretical possibility. Already in Denmark Louis Hjelmslev and the followers of glossematic theory were indifferent to priorities between speech and writing. They saw language as abstract form realised indifferently in spoken or written 'substance.' Much the same view is inherent in Chomsky's transformational grammar, and though glossematic theory did not much disturb the world outside Denmark, Chomsky did. It was no longer necessary to insist that speech alone was real and writing a parasitic growth on it. Linguists began to dare to write about writing. It did not seem to matter very much whether it closely paralleled speech, so long as rules for converting abstract linguistic competence either into speech or into writing could be clearly stated. Of course, an intelligent relationship between the two was to be preferred, but as we shall see, the most intelligent relationships appeared increasingly, in the light of transformational grammar, to be a spelling not markedly unlike the one we have.

### **Technical Problems**

The technical problems of spelling reform will differ according to which theory of language (the priority of writing, of speech, or of neither) is held.

If writing is held to be central and speech adapted to it, there is little occasion for reform of the writing, unless possibly to eliminate some unpronounceable sequences to encourage a consistent

habit of spelling pronunciation.

It is the view that speech is primary and writing reflects it that best justifies a desire to reform spelling. The Bloomfieldian linguists are likely to be most helpful in providing a (somewhat dated) linguistic theory for reform. At least Bloomfieldian linguistics does nothing to rule out reform, though it does demonstrate that the problems are a little more intricate than some amateur reformers suppose. First it might warn the reformers to dismiss loose talk of 'phonetic spelling'. Spelling would never be truly phonetic but would approximate to phonemic spelling. A phonetic transcript of speech ideally records every discernibly different detail of pronunciation. It would distinguish the 't' of ton (with aspiration, a little puff of expelled air detectable if you place a wet hand near the lips as you pronounce the word) from the different, unaspirated 't' of *stun*. It would distinguish the difference (heard by any speaker of Polish) between the bright 'l' at the beginning and the dark 'l' at the end of a normal Australian pronunciation of *little*. Such differences are too fine to need recording in spelling since they are not used in English to distinguish one word from another and consequently are not usually consciously heard by speakers of English who are untrained in phonetics. Only a sound which does contrast with other sounds in a given language to differentiate words is called a phoneme. (Slant lines, e.g. /p/ are conventionally used to record phonemic transcriptions.)

Besides the separate 'sounds' in sequence, called the 'segmental phonemes' of a language, Bloomfieldian linguistics recognized 'suprasegmentals'; pause, stress (the phonetic 'emphasis' on particular syllables) and intonation (the 'tune' of language). These are not easily recorded in writing, though punctuation goes some way towards it. Their omission is, of course, a serious shortcoming in any practical representation of speech in writing, since much of the nuance and even the meaning of speech depends on them. Consequently punctuation, defective though it is as a total representation of the rhythm of speech, is more important than spelling in avoiding ambiguities in writing. If you write 'John, thought the teacher, was ridiculous.' omitting the commas, you change the meaning; if you spell ridiculous as 'rediculous', you cause a minor catch in the reader's fluency and show a dullness to the interconnectedness of words (*ridicule/ridiculous*) but at least your meaning can be salvaged with certainty.

Even without the suprasegmentals, there are many difficulties in arriving at an agreed set of phonemes for English (or a chosen variety of it), and even more problems if we have to record these phonemes using only the familiar 26 letters and their combinations, but a list might certainly be agreed on for practical spelling purposes.

This does not necessarily complete the task of providing the best spelling for English. It might be argued, with the support of Bloomfieldian linguistics, that the best spelling would not be merely phonemic but morphophonemic. We spell the plurals *ships*, *shoes* and *cabbages* by adding an -s in each case, and this seems sensible enough, but phonetically we pronounce 's' in one case, 'z' in another and 'ez' (or, in England 'iz') in the third; and a purely phonemic spelling would have to record these usually unnoticed variants. In technical language, /s/, /z/ and /iz/ are 'allomorphs' of the 'plural morpheme' in English. If we allow a uniform spelling for the phonemically variant allomorphs, we have morphophonemic rather than strictly phonemic spelling. Presumably all pleas for 'phonetic spelling' would, if precisely stated, turn out to be pleas for morphophonemic spelling.

Morphophonemic spelling is a departure from a purely mechanical rendering of significant speech sounds by written symbols. It represents a rational interference with the automatic conversion of each sound to an appropriate symbol. It recognizes a deeper organizing principle below the surface sequence of sounds.

Transformational grammarians have given great emphasis to deep organizing principles below the surface of language, usually with a suggestion, still sometimes disputed, that these deeper principles reflect the mental processes of users of language. The best known work of transformationalists is in grammar but the principles have been applied to the sound and spelling of language as well. It is an extension of the morphophonemic principle and has led to a justification for a written notation much closer to traditional English spelling than a phonemic transcript is. This work is new and details are still debated, but it is clearly work which responsible spelling reformers will need to watch closely.

One simplified example of the kind of thinking which is becoming current must suffice here. Consider the words *critical* and *criticism*. It is clear that suffixes *-al* and *-ism* have been added to a stem *critic-*, or, more generally, to another suffix *-ic*. How should we represent this suffix in writing? Phonemically it varies between /ik/ and /is/, but we feel that these forms are variants of a single linguistic element. It would be useful to be able to spell it with an /i/ followed by another symbol representing something which sometimes appears as /k/ and sometimes as /s/. Since this is exactly the function of the English letter 'c', the letter 'c' might well be used for this. And so a traditional butt of spelling reformers, the letter 'c' which 'uselessly' duplicates two more precise symbols 'k' and 's', proves to be justified by our deeper awareness of our language.

Perhaps not all English spelling practice can be justified in this way. Reforms would still be possible, but they might well be less extreme than early reformers expected. Linguists seeing speech and writing as separate manifestations of an underlying form are not induced to feel strongly that the two should be congruent in detail, but, provided deep relationships are preserved, linguists need raise no objection to change if for special and educational reasons it is desirable.

### **Sociolinguistic Problems**

The chief motives for spelling reform are therefore social and educational; that is, they are sociolinguistic rather than linguistic in the narrow sense. Linguists can assess spelling systems, pointing out that one is a better reflection of deep interconnection than another, or that one is a more accurate representation of surface phenomena, and psycholinguists can investigate whether deep or surface spelling systems are easier to acquire or more productive of educationally valuable skills in the long run, but, since it is obvious that spelling systems are not determined by inexorable linguistic laws from the present state of a spoken language, conscious design of a spelling system remains theoretically possible. Linguists can point out linguistic implications but social forces promote the desire for change and possible social repercussions ought to be foreseen before changes are made.

If we decide on our first (and least likely) theoretically possible project, to fit pronunciation to spelling, we will inevitably favour the literate and the educated, or, more generally, those who spend most time with the printed word. This may seem to some to create the most desirable form of favoured elite, but elites of any kind are out of fashion. In the past the strong influence of Latin spelling on English gave just such an advantage to the educated, but Latin has so much ceased to be a mark of education that this argument no longer carries much weight. On the contrary, Latin spellings now retain a merit that ought to be conceded by reformers, since they make English easier for foreigners to learn. Strangely, however, it is precisely those who would change our Latin spellings who in their statements are usually very solicitous of the interests of foreign learners. Surely, however, a Frenchman encountering our written words *illustration* or even *psychology* would feel we spell very reasonably; it is when he hears us say the words that his shoulders rise in a hopeless shrug. The advantage is especially with European foreigners, but scientific terminology

is rapidly carrying international words beyond Europe now.

Our second theoretical possibility, and the one actually urged by all reformers, is a radical change in spelling. Such a change would immediately create a new and quite different elite, and perhaps a worse one. Scholars would still have to learn the old spelling, since our cultural traditions cannot simply be discarded and melted down like old coins, but those who have only the new spelling would be cut off from all older literature except for a corpus of classics, chosen indirectly if not directly by scholars, for reprinting. It is not enough to say that a *reading* knowledge of old spelling might still be retained; any teacher of Middle English knows that variant spelling is in itself a deterrent to readers. If Australia alone were to introduce new spelling, the loss would be much greater as English and American and other English language writing would become difficult of access. An immense provincialism both in time and place would ensue. We must not lightly assume that scholars wanting older texts are merely a handful of literary recluses, either. To take one instance, much useful work in local history is done by people who are not professional scholars. It is hardly likely that back files of newspapers will be reprinted in reformed spelling, so that spelling reform would deter, if not disable, the amateur historian.

Of course older people, for a time, would have the older spelling. The generation gap would be immensely widened. If newspapers adopted the new spelling, some of the elderly would very likely give them up, preferring older books, perhaps with some cultural gain, but with a considerable sense of withdraw from society, even remembering that we now have television and radio news as well.

Reprinting programmes of books for the new generation would be a new call on paper supplies and publisher's time. This is not a trivial point at a time when publisher's lists are beginning to be reduced and 'marginal' books, which in the past have often later become centrally important books, do not easily find publishers.

Legal implications of a change would need to be foreseen. Perhaps surnames would remain unchanged to puzzle the young, but laws and statutes would need redrafting (or lawyers would again, as in the days of Latin documents, be securely removed from the layman), since a change in spelling can create ambiguities. There *may* be no cases of this in legal documents, but a skilled lawyer would need to check, since such examples as 'For her alone, his knightly favours' or 'The lore and rites (law and rights) of the Aborigines' show that ambiguities in speech are sometimes eliminated by traditional spelling.

If all these risks are taken, or prove to be less than they seem, there remains a problem of standardizing the new spelling. Reformed spelling is not spell-as-you-please, nor even an exact presentation of speech phonemes by written symbols, since many words, like *have*, for example, differ according to stress in 'They *have* come', 'They might've come', 'They might 'a' come', and we would presumably, unless catching the nuances of speech as we do now, need an agreed single spelling for a word like *have*. Nor is it, for any individual, a simple conversion of his own speech into writing, for a more 'phonetic' spelling would soon reveal to us the surprisingly large unnoticed variation in the detail of pronunciation between one person and another.

A reform would have little chance of success unless agreed to by all English-speaking countries, but, to simplify, we will suppose that Australia alone adopts a change.

This would ensure a fairly close parallel between speech and writing, but those learning to read would still need to isolate separate words and analyse their careful pronunciation, and in a few

cases, perhaps made more unacceptable by their rarity, an individual would need to conform to a norm not his own. There would be some variation according to social class; either some would learn to spell 'anything' or others would learn 'anythink.'

It would not do to allow free variation among individuals. One argument used for reform is the example of metrication, but the main argument for a costly metrication scheme is that it is a move for standardization. It helps the export trade. For other reasons standardization is just as essential nowadays in writing. A great deal of reading - reports, newspapers and road signs as well as books - has to be taken in by a modern citizen and he must take it in quickly. At 100 k.p.h. you cannot puzzle out a road sign as you work out Chaucer. Any new spelling must be standardized spelling and it must be taught. The educational argument would, of course, be that a reformed spelling could be taught more quickly.

### **Educational Implications**

It is widely thought (but perhaps needs detailed research to confirm it) that German, Spanish or Russian children learn to write their language more quickly than English children. In the case of Russian, this is at the expense of a larger alphabet, and the internationalization of the Russian rather than the Latin alphabet could perhaps be considered by the more ardent and hopeful reformers. Certainly no perfectly phonemic system can be devised for English using our present 26 letters alone.

It would be interesting to know whether there are any compensatory gains in the longer time English children spend in learning to read. Do they get a better understanding of our language from the intricacies of our spelling, some of which reflect deeper patterns in our language? It would be difficult to prove one way or another, but it would be an interesting task for psycholinguistic research to attempt an answer. A step of the magnitude of spelling reform would, after all, justify considerable expense in preliminary research, and, indeed, demands it.

A more purely educational question is, if a year or two were saved by a simpler spelling system, would the saved time be reinvested in language work or would reform lead to a further diminution of emphasis on language in education? It might be possible to investigate what is done with the time saved in Germany or Russia. Possibly the Germans and Russians more often learn other languages, but this very desirable aim can hardly be urged by spelling reformers, since it is well known that English pronunciation differs very widely from the European pronunciation of shared vocabulary, and a spelling which reflected our deviant pronunciation would isolate us in the written language, as we are already isolated in the spoken, from the European mainstream.

A more fundamental need in educational research is to continue to investigate the role of pronunciation in reading. This is an age-old problem dividing the 'phonic' people from the 'look and say.' It is true that a pure 'look and say' approach with some children has led to an uncertainty in word attack still discernible in advanced university students encountering new names or foreign words. On the other hand it is doubtful whether reading skill is entirely phonic in essence, at least once it is developed, since it seems we read '1975' more easily than 'nineteen seventy-five' though it is undeniably less 'phonetic.' Once we are used to it, we are capable of taking in words, whatever their spelling, as we take in '2cwt' or '\$100', as pictures recognized without the scaffolding of phonic conversion. What persists in rapid reading seems to be a rhythm, rather than a detailed awareness of sounds, so that punctuation is more important than the detail of spelling in guiding the understanding.

If a developed reading ability is, in fact, mainly visual, the chief advantage of spelling reform would

be in the early stages of teaching and such a reform would seem to have little advantage over i.t.a. unless the conversion from i.t.a. to normal spelling has proved more difficult than its advocates suggest. Since experiments with i.t.a. are already established, it would be interesting to make a close and detailed study of the change to traditional spelling from the child's point of view. Is there any sense of enlightenment when *said* turns out to be a fairly regular past tense of *say*, or when *critical* and *criticism* prove to have a common element? Such insights could easily be overlooked. The psychologist Bruce Derwing reports that his daughter noticed at the age of four that the terms *orange* and *orange-juice* were connected, and was delighted with the discovery. It is a charming anecdote and the child's delight is the essential point. Who is to measure the value of such sudden insights into the connectedness of language and its role in training a critical intellect?

Language is a most intricate system in which all the details relate to each other in ways we are only beginning to understand. Students of linguistics enter exam rooms expecting to discuss Meillet's statement that language is 'un système où tout se tient' - a system in which everything hangs together. If a detail is altered, the system is altered. If a language loses the dual number, the meaning of plurals is slightly changed. Meillet's insight, or rather his statement of a traditional insight, is relevant not only to the theory but also to the tactics of spelling reform. Should reforms be introduced piecemeal or should a total change be made once, as with decimal currency? The implications of change by stages are difficult to foresee, but it is clear that we would not simplify by adding and subtracting details, but would set up with successive reforms a series of systems of written language, each of which should be studied as a total system in relation to the spoken language, if the magnitude of the task did not preclude such a procedure. In any case, on psychological grounds, it seems that a single change, adequately prepared by research and linguistic education of the public, might generate public enthusiasm where a succession of minor changes would merely engender irritation.

## **Conclusion**

This study is not a polemic but it will be clear that I am doubtful about the desirability of spelling reform and anxious lest it be approached without reference to current linguistic knowledge and without understanding of the social results, particularly the hardening of a division between an elite of scholars with access to tradition and a rabble who read what scholars transliterate for them. A training in linguistics and the social history of language has made me very aware of these dangers.

It is not that I do not welcome an interest in language from politicians and the public. It is not that I do not sympathize with the amateur who can afford to be daring in another man's subject. I have myself a magnificent plan to solve the energy and fresh water problems of Australia by training a large magnifying glass on part of the sea producing steam to drive electric turbines and condensed water to irrigate farms. I hope physicists and engineers would agree that it is a good idea but fear they would point out technical difficulties, as they have a right to. The technical difficulties I see in spelling reform are so great and the advantages over the existing system so doubtful that I would rather direct a welcome public interest in language towards projects of more undeniable value, such as, to name an obvious one, a full historical dictionary of Australian English.



[Spelling Reform Anthology §2.13 p39 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1976 p5 in the printed version]

### **13. Proceedings of the 1975 Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society.**

The papers presented at the 1975 Conference in London will be published this summer under the title, 'Reading and Spelling,' *Proceedings of the 1975 Conference*. This limited edition will contain nearly 200 pages and will cost f4.00 (\$10.00 USA) postpaid. Send in your payment now to be assured of getting a copy. The advance sales will determine how many will be printed.

**The contents will be as follows:**

*Hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt*, by David Seton  
*Writing in Japanese*, by Prof. F. J. Daniels  
*Ancient & Modern African Syllabaries*, by Geo. O'Halloran  
*Sounds & Symbols in Spanish*, by A. R. G. Burrows  
*Problems of Spelling in German* by Rolf Landolt  
*The History of English Spelling*, by Dr. D. Scragg  
*Speed-Writing Shorthand*, by Bryan Edwards  
*Possibilities of a Useful Pasigraphy*, by Prof. T. Hofmann  
*Visual Methods in Teaching Reading*, by George O'Halloran  
*Phonic Methods in Teaching Reading*, by Beatrix Tudor-Hart  
*Chomsky, the English Orthography & Reading*, by Prof. John Downing  
*Spelling, Psychology & Colour Story Reading*, by Ken Jones  
*Regularised English & the Teaching of Reading*, by Prof. Axel Wijk  
*Direct Methods in Teaching Eng. as a For. Lang.*, by Dr. J. Osanyinbi  
*A Cross Cultural Study of Eng. Lang. Competence*, by Dr. J. Osanyinbi  
*Illiteracy: Is Eng. Spelling a Factor?*, by Marjorie Chaplin  
*Sensubul English Spelling*, by Hugh Jamieson of the Simplified Spelling Society  
*Essential Requirements for Reformed Spelling*, by Dr. W. Gassner  
*The Spel*, by Patrick Burke  
*Torskript*, by Vic. Paulsen  
*A Future Orthography Balancing Sound & Sense*, by D. Masson  
*Towards a Spelling Reform*, by Prof. A. Mazurkiewicz  
*Spelling & Parliament*, by W. Reed  
*Light at the End of the Tunnel*, by Ed. Rondthaler  
*Assistance to Spelling via Pronunciation*, by R. Cropper

There will be much of interest to all those interested in the English language, particularly to those who teach it either to native speakers or to foreign learners. Teachers of reading will find much to broaden their views. There are sections showing the origins of writing and how it is done in other languages nowadays so that we may learn by comparison. Modern methods of teaching reading occupy a large part of the volume, which should be useful to both lecturers and students in Teachers Colleges, as well as to teachers and parents. Some space is also devoted to spelling reform. There is also the final report on the largest experiment ever done anywhere in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

This book has something for almost everybody. It will broaden the horizons of all connected with the teaching of reading - especially those who wish to understand more about the difficulties their learners face.

I appeal to you for any help you may be able to give by ordering the book in advance or by helping us to get more sales for it. We are anxious that our first major publication should go into teachers colleges and public libraries where it will be accessible to all.

Geo. O'Halloran, London, England.