

# Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972

Dedicated to finding the causes of difficulties in learning reading and spelling.

"A closed mind gathers no knowledge; an open mind is the key to progress."

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*[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.4 p114 in the printed version]*

## **1. A Bill to establish a National Spelling Commission**

**The Hon. Harlan Hagen, Member of Congress from Tulare, Calif. introduced Bill HR 2165 in Congress in 1960 at the request of Homer W. Wood, Editor of the Porterville, Calif. Evening Recorder. It was referred to the sub-Committee on Education, but no action was taken.**

*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 pp1,13 in the printed version]*

### An Appeal

to all concerned parents, teachers and others who are disappointed in trying to teach effectively in our unreliable spelling. Please ask your congressman or representative in Parliament to introduce the following Bill to start the ball rolling for a simplification of English spelling:

### A BILL

To establish a National Spelling Commission to reform the spelling of English words, to publish the United States Official Dictionary, and for other related purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

### CREATION OF THE NATIONAL SPELLING COMMISSION

Section 1. There is hereby created a National Spelling Commission (herein this act referred to as the "Commission").

### MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 2. The Commission shall be composed of five members appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

### CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 3. The Chairman of the Commission shall be designated by the President at the time of appointment.

### QUORUM

Sect. 4. Three members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum. A vacancy in the Commission shall not affect its powers but shall be filled in the same manner that the original appointment was made.

### REMUNERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 5. each member of the Commission shall receive compensation of \$75. per diem and shall be reimbursed as provided in the Travel Expense Act of 1949, as amended, for travel, subsistence, and other necessary expenses incurred in the performance of duties vested in the Commission.

### STAFF OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 6. The Commission shall have the power to appoint and fix the compensation of an executive director and a staff in accordance with the provisions of the Classification Act of 1949.

## DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 7.

(a) The Commission shall undertake a study to establish rules for the simplified phonetic, or other reformed spelling of words in the English language.

(b) (1) The Commission shall, in conference with representatives of Great Britain and other English speaking countries, reach an agreement on two possible systems of reformed spelling of English words, each with varying degrees of change from our present spelling.

(b) (2) The Commission shall submit the two possible systems of reformed spelling to the Congress of the United States for its final selection of the best system of reformed spelling.

(c) The Commission shall devise a plan for putting the reformed spelling into official use, which plan shall take into consideration plans for the implementation of the official reformed spelling by Great Britain and other English speaking countries.

(d) (1) After selection by the Congress of the United States of the most feasible system of reformed spelling, the Commission shall prepare and edit a dictionary which shall be known as the United States Official Dictionary (hereafter in this Act referred to as the "dictionary.").

(d) (2) The dictionary shall have entries for words in the English language which are in common usage in the United States.

(d) (3) The words in the dictionary shall be spelled in accordance with the rules of spelling established by the Commission pursuant to subsection (b) (2) of this section, and for every word of entry there shall be indicated an approved pronunciation.

(d) (4) The Government Printing Office shall publish as many copies of the dictionary as the Commission deems appropriate.

## SPELLING OF WORDS IN PAPERS, DOCUMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES

Sect. 8. Any word printed, typewritten, or otherwise reproduced for the United States or by officers or employees of the United States in performance of their official duties after 30 days after the publication of the dictionary shall conform to the spelling of such word in the dictionary.

## DICTIONARY COPYRIGHT

Sect. 9. The Commission shall investigate the desirability of obtaining a copyright for the dictionary when it is completed and the establishment of charges for its reproduction by private enterprise.

## TERMINATION OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 10. The Commission shall cease to exist sixty days after the publication of the first edition of the dictionary by the Government Printing Office.

(enlarged copies of this Bill are available from the Editor)

**A Re-examination of W. R. Lee's  
2. "Spelling Irregularity and Reading Difficulty in English"  
by John Downing, Prof. in Education, Uni. of Victoria, Victoria, B.C., Canada.**

One of the most interesting contributions to the study of the relationship between the way a language is spelt and the process by which children learn to read is the monograph by Dr. W. R. Lee, *Spelling Irregularity and Reading Difficulty in English* (London: National Foundation for Educational Research, 1960). In it Lee made some valuable contributions to our knowledge of this problem. Unfortunately, these real contributions are not generally recognized. Instead, his study has been better known for one of the specific conclusions he reached -- a conclusion which we now know to have been false due to technical mistakes in a part of his research design. This erroneous conclusion was quite widely publicised and frequently quoted as if it were factual. The purpose of this article is to make clear how Lee's research error led to his false conclusion, and at the same time, by sifting the wheat from the chaff, to show the true importance of Lee's work.

**1. Lee's False Conclusion**

The view that irregular spelling is an important cause of reading difficulty suggests the hypothesis that irregularly spelt words should be more difficult to read than regularly spelt ones. To investigate this, Lee developed an objective method of scoring the degree of irregularity in the spelling of English words, a regularly spelt word being defined as one in which every sound is spelt as that sound is most commonly spelt in the language. Thus, the irregularity score of a word rises as the spellings of its sounds move away from their most – usual forms. In his two experiments, Lee classified the words which had to be read by the children into two categories: "more regular" and "less regular," a dividing line being drawn arbitrarily at a point on his scale of spelling irregularity. He went on to analyse the errors made by 275 children in reading aloud selected passages of prose and found that there was a slight tendency for the younger children (under 11 years) but not the older ones (over 11 years) to make more errors on the "less regular" words than on the "more regular" ones, but that the difference was too small to warrant a definite conclusion.

In a further experiment on 172 children ages 7–11, the same author compared the errors made with 12 "more regular" words and 12 "less regular" words. Commenting on his results, he points out that five of the six most often correctly read were from the list of "more regular" words, while five of the six words producing the highest frequency of error were "less regular" words, but Lee says, "As far as other words (in his list) are concerned, there is no correlation between the irregularity of their spelling and the extent to which they are successfully or unsuccessfully read," and later concludes from these results that irregular spellings are "by no means a major cause of reading difficulty among the children who took part in the enquiry." (Although Lee published no co-efficient himself, the correlation between reading errors and spelling irregularity can be calculated from his data and turns out to be +0.37 (Spearman's  $p$ ), which is short of significance at the 5% level of confidence.)

However, Lee's conclusion is false in any case because he failed to control an important variable in his experiments. The children in his experiments were between 6 and 12 years of age who *had already learnt to read*. Therefore, the effects of the irregularity of the spelling may have been obscured by the fact that his test words varied not only in spelling irregularity but also at the same

time in their frequency of occurrence in the children's past experiences of reading, writing and speech.

In Table 1, I have compared Lee's results on spelling irregularity and reading accuracy with Burrough's (1957) findings on the frequency of these words in young children's speech. (Where Burroughs has not kept a separate record for a particular word, figures from the report of the Scottish Council for Research in Education (1948) have been used.)

Table 1  
Spelling, Irregularity, Familiarity and Reading Accuracy

Lee's Category of Regularity	Lee's Order of Accuracy in Reading		Burroughs' Percentage Frequen. of Occurrence	
	# of words in top half	# of words in bottom half	words used by less than 6% of the children	words used by more than 6% of the children
A 'more regular' words	7	5	10	2
B 'less regular' words	5	7	4	8

It is clear from this table that Lee's "less regular" category was made up of words which are more frequently used by young children than the words he selected for his "more regular" category, and it seems clear that the correlation between reading errors and irregularity of spelling would have been greater had his test not been so weighted against the hypothesis that unsystematic spelling causes reading difficulty.

In discussing Lee's data it must also be noted that he did not test for individual differences or for differential effects due to the fact that different age groups were involved in the total sample tested. Allowance also needs to be made for the fact that the experimental design also included the presentation of the 24 test words always in the same order – instead of being randomized or balanced.

In a third experiment, Lee dictated ten nonsense words to 256 children between the ages of 6 and 12 years, to discover whether children had formed associations between phonemes and spelling. He found that there was not a great deal of correspondence "between the ways in which children had written the sounds in these nonsense words and the ways in which they are usually written in English," and concluded that "the children had formed no mental association between speech sounds. . . and the most frequent ways . . . of representing them." This is not a surprising result, but it is difficult to follow the author's subsequent reasoning that because this association has not been established there is no evidence for such a "tendency or demand in a young reader's mental make-up," for one could hardly expect children to develop such associations if the actual relationships between a word's spelling and its phonemes are so objectively obscure as to provide little opportunity for the necessary learning to occur.

Lee's failure to control the familiarity of the words for the children in his experiments on more versus less regular English words, and his general neglect of the influence of children's previous

linguistic experiences quite obviously renders false his conclusion that "the lack of a regular correspondence between sounds and letters has been shown to be a minor cause of reading difficulty, particularly where isolated words were concerned."

## **2. Lee's Important Contribution**

Despite serious research errors described above, Lee's work deserves commendation in many other respects. Firstly his originality and creativity command the respect of scholars in this area of investigation. Lee's studies represent a pioneer attempt to bring new scholarly methods to the study of this problem. Our libraries are choked with the repetitive platitudes of more timid investigators of the problems of reading in English. More of the creative type of inquiry found in Lee's work would be welcome.

Another of Lee's investigations published in the same monograph, though less often quoted, turned out to be more fruitful. Lee attempted to relate the relative phonetic regularity of the spelling of different languages with the methods of teaching reading used in the relevant countries. It seemed possible that "phonic" methods would be more popular in those countries where the spelling had a more regular relationship with the sound of the spoken language, and that the "look-say" approach would enjoy greater favour where the spelling was not so systematic.

More specifically, Lee investigated "whether the way in which a language was spelt had been taken account of in deciding upon methods of instruction or whether it had shaped these methods." His method of research was to ask open-ended questions in letters through the mail, followed by further mail correspondence. More than 30 countries were included in this inquiry by Lee.

The replies Lee received led him to conclude: "Among the most regularly spelt are Finnish and Turkish: Finland favours a synthetic method which Turkey has abandoned. Spanish and the Slavonic languages are also fairly regularly spelt, but while the Slavonic countries have adopted an analytic-synthetic (but mainly synthetic) approach to reading, no unity of method is apparent in the Spanish-speaking world. . . It is unnecessary to continue. All these languages are more regularly spelt than English, and it is clear that both analysis and synthesis play a part at some stage or other in the methods used to teach the reading of each. Yet a close association between methods and 'regularity' does not exist."

Thus Lee could find no connection between phonic or other synthetic methods and languages with more regular spelling. Nor did he find the opposite relation between look-say and other analytic or global methods and less regularly spelt languages.

Furthermore, Lee found that controversy over the best instructional methods was just as heated in countries with more regularly spelt languages as it was in those with less regularly spelt languages. For Example: "No one type of method is in favour in the English-speaking world as a whole, any more than in non-English countries, but whether there is greater controversy about reading instruction methods than in the world at large is doubtful: almost everywhere the merits and demerits of various approaches are keenly discussed."

Lee's data did not enable him to give any explanation for the lack of correspondence between instructional method and the degree of regularity of the spelling of the different languages.

However, I have recently completed a comprehensive survey of the teaching of reading in 14 countries (John Downing, *Comparative Reading*, New York, Macmillan, 1972) which shows clearly why no close connection between instructional methods and the ways language is spelt is ever likely to be found. There are at least three strong reasons why it is extremely unlikely that instructional methods and a language's spelling (or writing system) should be correlated:

1. The existence of *dialect differences* within one language area may nullify generalizations about 3 grapheme-phoneme relations in its writing system.
2. The alphabetic writing system may not be a code *only for phonemes*.
3. Differences in teaching methods may be based on *educational or psychological considerations* that outweigh concerns about the nature of the writing system.

Detailed evidence on all three reasons are given in my report, *Comparative Reading*, but here space permits only an illustration for each.

On the first reason, my evidence from Argentina is the most striking. A loose generalization which is often heard is that Spanish is "much more phonetic than English." Hence, according to Lee's hypothesis one would expect phonic methods to prevail in Spanish-speaking countries such as Argentina. However, the linguistic map of that country quickly pricks the bubble of the popular myth of the "phonetic spelling" of Spanish. The dialectal differences are exceedingly complex and it is immediately clear that any country-by-country comparison is far too crude to test Lee's hypothesis.

On the second reason, in several languages the conventional classification of their writing systems into alphabetical, syllabic, and ideographic types is likewise too crude for this purpose. Lee himself questioned the assumption "whether spelling need be looked upon as a guide to sounds alone." For example, in English the letter *s* is unreliable as a code for phonemic sounds, but it is very consistent in syntactical signalling. Likewise, Chinese characters are not only morphemics but often have phonetic significance also.

But it is the third reason which is the most convincing. My *Comparative Reading* studies show that the true basis for the selection of instructional methods has nothing to do with the way in which a language is spelt. In all the countries investigated I found a common typology of educators. On the basis of educational philosophy and psychology, teachers' beliefs can be placed in one of two groups:

- (1) Those giving priority to *atomistic decoding*. [\[1\]](#)
- (2) Those giving priority to *meaningful chunking*. [\[2\]](#)

Teachers of the atomistic decoding type emphasise the elements or mechanics of the language, whether they be the letters that make up words in English or the strokes of the characters in the Chinese ideographs.

Teachers of the meaningful chunking point of view place their emphasis on giving children samples of the written language which are meaningful and therefore functionally relevant for the child from the beginning. Again meaningful chunking is equally relevant in Turkish, English, Japanese or

Chinese.

Thus the size of the unit of written language or its type of writing system is not important. The teacher's choice depends on whether he or she believes in (1) planning his lessons on the abstract properties of the language, or (2) the child's interest in and understanding of the purposes of literacy.

### 3. Conclusion

Lee's valuable contribution has been his creative approach to the problem of the relationship between learning to read and the regularity of spelling in different languages. His conclusion that spelling irregularity does not cause difficulty in learning to read was false because of serious errors in his experiments. However, his other conclusion that there is no connection between instructional methods and the ways language is written or printed has been strongly supported by recent research.

This latter finding is very important for the policy of the spelling reform movement. Spelling reformers should steadfastly refuse to become embroiled in controversies over instructional methods. They are irrelevant because they are an entirely separate issue. A spelling reformer who has strong views about teaching methods should keep them to himself when talking about spelling reform. For example, if he couples spelling reform with phonic methods he is likely to estrange about one half of his audience in the English-speaking world.

Far better is it to point out the truth that spelling reform will help teachers of both points of view. Phonics will be aided by making the relations between letters and sounds more consistent. But the Look-Say and other meaningful chunking methods (especially the Language-Experience approach) will be greatly helped because simplified spelling enables the child much more quickly to understand the purpose and nature of communication thru the written language. Thru discovery learning about the relations between spoken and written language in meaningful chunking methods of instruction, simplified spelling will allow the child much more rapidly to enjoy literature and to experience the joys of creative authorship himself. Thus simplified spelling will be seen as valuable for all methods of instruction.

[1] This is my name for what Gray called methods "which approach the teaching of reading through initial emphasis on the elements of words and their sounds as aids to word recognition."

[2] This is my name for what Gray called methods "which approach it through the use of words or larger language units, and lay emphasis on the meaning of what is read."

(Wm. S. Gray, *The Teaching of Reading & Writing*, Paris, UNESCO, 1956).

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 p4 in the printed version]

### **3. "Reading," an Uncomplex and Useful Definition/Explanation, by Harvie Barnard\***

\*Shelter Bay, Laconner, Wash.

Most of the explanations and/or definitions of Reading are quite understandable to the academically oriented, the experts and those concerned with psycholinguistics. Yet in all the voluminous literature concerning the nature of reading there exists such a complexity of definitions that for the teacher of reading, especially in the primary grades, such definitions are rarely useful and often more confusing than helpful for instructional purposes.

The fundamentals of reading are taught in the primary grades. If the child successfully struggles thru the inconsistencies of our semi-phonetic English language, and if he is able to memorize the many essentially non-phonetically spelt words, he may eventually emerge as a literate person. But, (and this does happen more often than we realize), if the child becomes confused, frustrated, and is either unable or unwilling to accept and to use the highly inconsistent and illogical nature of our English spelling, he will "fail" and will be relegated to the ranks of the special ed., the "dum-dums," and non-readers, – at best, the functionally non-readers.

The International Reading Assoc., an organization basically for improvement in the teaching of reading, offers a fairly clear statement as to the "Nature of Reading." I.R.A. states: "Reading is a complex act that involves more than the mere pronouncing of words," (This assumes that the reader can pronounce them), and goes on to say, "It includes the ability to understand literal and implied meanings, and to react critically to the ideas that have been read. . . ." This statement is certainly true enough as far as it goes, but from the standpoint of the elementary classroom teacher such an explanation is of doubtful value in the practical sense. Like many academic definitions, they serve primarily to *introduce* the subject, and from there on the explanation of "the complex act" may stretch into a thesis, an elaborate monograph, or a course of study extending over a semester or more of related studies and/or research. And if the primary teacher finds the time and motivation to pursue the subject at great length, her conclusion is likely to be little more than an extension of the original fundamental statement, that "Reading is a complex act," – which she knew was true in the beginning.

In a single word, Reading is *Visualization!* And visualization is simply "getting the picture." It is utterly amazing how infrequently this word visualization appears in any of the traditional or classic definitions of reading. Visualization is a functional act, a set or combination of steps which occur in the mind of the reader. These steps are well known, beginning with recognition and followed in rapid sequence by "decoding," reference, and finally imaging or "seeing." For the beginner there is an intermediate step of great importance – Sounding, and whether this sounding is done orally or "saying to one's self," this sounding is a necessary step in the decoding process. For the experienced or competent reader the entire process is totally automatic and nearly instantaneous. Speed develops with experience and practice, but in the beginning and in the initial steps of teaching require some

form of verbalization, whether aloud or silently, and is employed both with classwork or individually. But however fast or slow the process, the eventual outcome, if it be true understanding or comprehensible reading, is getting a mental image, or *Visualization*.

### **A New Outlook on Education**

In its broadest sense, education commences at birth and continues thruout life. When it stops, whether for the individual or society, then regression sets in, the individual deteriorates (or remains static), and the society of which he is a part suffers in proportion.

To avoid a national decline or disintegration, our educational efforts as a nation should be implemented toward people of all ages rather than limited to the usual 12 or 14 years of public schooling. Starting with parents and young parents-to-be and continuing with very young children, initial training should develop "readiness" or the years of schooling which will follow.

In all public schools greater emphasis should be given to the communicative skills. Total literacy for the entire population should be a national goal, and the various avenues of self-expression should be encouraged as a means toward developing the full potential of every man.

Believing that proficiency in reading is fundamental to progress in all areas of learning, greater effort should be applied to the teaching of reading and to the simplification and improvement of initial reading materials. Innovation of teaching methods and mechanics should correct the most obvious "roadblocks" to the learning and use of our English language. Inconsistencies in spelling and pronunciation should be eliminated wherever possible so that academic failure with its accompaniment of confusion, frustration and ultimate delinquency may be eliminated.

Believing that crime and criminality begins with academic frustration and failure at some point in our present educational program, it behoves us as a society and a nation to correct the mistakes and shortcomings of our older methods and to welcome innovation wherever and whenever possible. The tremendous costs of crime and correctional institutions should convince the most sceptical as well as those desirous of reducing taxes that every dollar invested to improve educational processes so as to reduce delinquency would be the best used funds of all the tax monies paid out for social benefits. If public funds are not wisely allocated for a truly effective educational program, the rocketing expense of crime controls and "corrective" institutions will cost the tax-paying public much more than would be spent for preventive educational measures.

Basically the question becomes a matter of choice between crime prevention and crime problem-solving, between effective education for good citizenship and the mounting costs of more police, more courts, more jails, more institutions, and more social problems. The time is long overdue when our educational leadership should squarely face this problem and start an effective program in cooperation with our various state and federal educational agencies.

#### 4. Direct consequences of serious reading problems in the schools, by Harvie Barnard

A sequential and comparative outline relating to the child, school, and society.

the Child	the School	the Nation, and Society
1. inability to read at grade level.	1. special aid needed for this pupil; more teaching than normal; additional equipment and more teaching time required.	1. no apparent effects as yet, except higher local tax levies; higher costs not yet apparent to the voter.
2. loss of confidence, loss of status, fear of failure begin to be apparent.	2. more of same indicated as above; reading specialists and special classes needed.	2. more teaching personnel required; greater staff expenses and sometimes added class-rooms, more equipment mean higher school budgets.
3. frustration symptoms are definitely apparent; behavior problems and failure syndromes now obvious to teachers.	3. "slow" pupils held back; remedial teaching needed; psychologists required; separation difficulties frequently develop.	3. substantially greater costs for specialized personnel further increase the budgeted "costs of instruction."
4. non-readers and functional non-readers become aware of failure; stop making progress entirely. They stop learning and become "hard core" trouble makers.	4. unless effective aid is rendered at this point, the non-readers become total failures as far as further progress is concerned. It may now be too late to help the non-reader!	4. more of the same; higher costs and higher school budgets; still not apparent to the general public, but distressingly obvious to all school administrators.
5. pupil desire to quit and drop out apparent to all teachers; attendance laws require continued schooling regardless of failure to make progress.	5. counselors begin suggesting switch to vocational courses and/or intensified individualized instruction.	5. the need for different types of, or approaches to instruction is considered to be the only possible solution, but facilities may be beyond the funds available.
6. the pupil finally drops out or becomes unteachable; is in trouble with school authorities and may be suspended or expelled for "bad behavior."	6. the pupil leaves, and a poor to bad school record remains in the school files. If not completely delinquent, he may enter a vocational school or the Army.	6. the potentially delinquent is unable to find work, but usually finds trouble, (if unemployed); becomes a public offender and causes greater taxes than when a student.
7. the dropped pupil is glad to be free of the constant failure strife and is now "on his own." Consciously, or unconsciously, he is still a failure to himself and in the public viewpoint.	7. the school is now "out of the picture," and is as glad to be rid of him as he was to get away from an unhappy situation.	7. barring a miracle, the delinquent is now well on his way to becoming a permanent social burden, possibly a threat to the 'establishment'. Sooner or later he becomes 'institutionalized', if not for law breaking, then as a reliever or welfarer at continuous public expense.

The course of events as outlined above has been painfully obvious to most educators for many years. What can be done? ? ? Do what experienced educators and many wise men have said for years: "IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION by every possible means, and as early as possible!!!. This includes simplifying our unreliable spelling.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology* §20.3 pp267–274 in the printed version]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin* Fall 1972 pp6–13 in the printed version]

## 5. Factors which have hitherto led to Failure of Attempts to Reform English Spelling, by William J. Reed\*

\*The author has had 47 years of experience of teaching, including 25 years as Headmaster of a primary school. He is now engaged in remedial teaching for Kent Education Committee.

\* He is author of *Spelling Reform and Our Schools*, 1959 with 2nd edition in 1960.

In *Testimony of Scholarship* [\[1\]](#) I have examined the works of Skeat, Trench, Craigie, Bradley, H. W. Fowler, W. I. Lee, Mont Follick, H. L. Menken, and others. In those passages where any of them has criticized, or is reputed to have criticized spelling reform, his actual words have been quoted and then examined in detail. Trench's attacks on reform and those reformers whom he called 'the phoneticians' are assessed. Menken's remarks concerning reform and reformers are exposed for the worthless jibes that most of them were.

Trench was the first real scholar who attempted to argue against spelling reform. Writing early in 1854, in lectures which later were assembled into a book, "*English Past and Present*," he clearly indicated his dislike of phonetic spelling and of 'the phoneticians.' Such arguments as he was able to bring in support of his case were effectively answered many times and particularly by three very eminent philologists. These were Sir James Murray, Prof. Max Muller (successively, Professor of Modern European Languages at Oxford, Fellow of All Souls, First Professor of Comparative Philology and, in 1896, a Privy Councillor), and Prof. Walter Skeat. Trench seems never to have rejoined the battle and doubtless lived to regret his attacks on 'the phoneticians.'

Henry Bradley and Sir William Craigie saw quite clearly that our inconsistent spelling conventions are a formidable obstacles to those who are trying to learn our language – particularly children and people whose native language is not English. They did not however, work for reform as many other great scholars did, tho Bradley spent many years on the periphery of the reform movement. Craigie explained in great detail how the existing anomalies and inconsistencies happened: see especially his *English Spelling – its Rules and Reasons*, Harrop, 1928. He explains clearly how these faults arose. Nowhere in it does he say anything that could be regarded as an argument against spelling reform. But in S.P.E. Tract LXIII, *Problems of Spelling Reform*, Clarendon Press, 1944, pp. 29, he presented a long line of obstacles to spelling reform, some hypothetical, some real, some fancied and opinionated. The committee of the Society for Pure English at that time consisted of the following persons whose names are listed on the inside of the front cover: Mrs. (Lloyd) Bridges, Kenneth Clark, W.A. Craigie, Kenneth Sisam, L. Pearsall Smith.

In order to show how Craigie's mind was working, we present a number of quotations from this pamphlet and my comments. The public should know that his income and reputation depended on his work as chief editor of a dictionary (N.E.D.); one of his chief aims was to discredit (and so to prevent) any reform of spelling which would make his huge dictionary out of date and perhaps put him out of a job. Some of his silly remarks cannot be explained in any other way. Craigie was a good dictionary maker, but on spelling reform he was out of his knowledgeable field, as you will soon see.

Quotation: On the first page which is numbered page 47, we read that advocates of new spelling have "failed to produce any effect on the general body of writers and readers. These, for the most part, have remained completely ignorant of the proposals, or, if acquainted with them, have regarded them with indifference or decided dislike."

Comment: It is not an argument against spelling reform to say that those "who have remained completely ignorant of the proposals" were not in favour of them. How could they be in favour of something they did not know about? To say those "acquainted with them have regarded them (the reform proposals) with indifference or decided dislike" is doubtless true of some people but is certainly not true of many other people, including most of those who were well qualified to judge.

Q: Line 28 of the same page -"The failure of so many attempts" (to reform spelling), "which in itself is a clear indication that there is no general desire for change, is due to minimizing, or rather ignoring, the practical and other difficulties which have to be reckoned with and would have to be overcome before any important change could be effected. A clear statement of these will serve to show that the problems are neither few nor easy to solve."

C: There can, of course, be "no general desire for a change" until people will have received at school, university or elsewhere considerable education in the theory and practice of spelling and until they will have become acquainted with the arguments for and against reform. People cannot very well make a useful decision if their knowledge of spelling has never progressed beyond the infant school stage in which they were *conditioned to accept: once, who, said, two*, etc.

It is difficult to understand why Craigie should say that spelling reform failures have been "due to minimizing or ignoring the practical and other difficulties." Spelling reformers are acutely conscious of the difficulties, especially those which Craigie himself mentions including the fact that most people are "completely ignorant of the reform proposals or regard them with indifference or dislike" Of all people in the world, spelling reformers are the least likely either to minimize or ignore the practical or other difficulties. The greatest of all difficulties is the fact that people are conditioned from infancy to accept what is euphemistically known as 'traditional orthography' and to regard all departures from it as 'mistakes' and therefore objectionable. This prejudice can become almost invincible after about fifteen years at some schools and colleges.

Q: On page 48, Craigie asks by what steps reformed spelling could be introduced. He says that the changes "must be introduced at the some time and to the some extent in all the English speaking countries and wherever English is written or printed. Otherwise, the resulting confusion would be worse than the present irregularities. It is difficult to see by what machinery this universal consent could be secured, and by what authority the result could be imposed on the printer, the publisher, and the reading public in the event of these disapproving of the change."

C: Craigie here wisely warns us that confusion could be increased if some people were spelling in one way and other people were spelling in another way. Hundreds of millions of people use the English language and they all have to be considered. The dangers, however, are much less now than they would have been even 25 years ago, when this passage was written. Central governments are stronger, communications more rapid and, above all, publicity is more effective. Driving on the right, instead of as formerly on the left, was brought about in Denmark without any difficulty and without any subsequent confusion: now, there is general satisfaction with the reform. Radio, television, newspaper and other publicity are able to make people accept changes much more rapidly than formerly. In Britain, decimal money has been introduced and the old money has been superseded (15-2-1971) almost without any difficulty at all. [2] Craigie says that it is difficult to see by what machinery this universal consent (to change) could be secured and by what authority it could be imposed. It was likewise difficult to see by what machinery and by what authority all banks, shops, offices, schools, and the general public would stop using the coins (£. s. d.) that they have long been used to and would start using a new and different coinage. What can be done to driving habits in Denmark and to arithmetical habits in Britain can almost certainly be done to our spelling habits.

Q: On page 49, lines 11 seq. is found a very important passage: "Some 70 years ago" (that would be c. 1874) "a number of distinguished scholars and men of note expressed their unanimous opinion that a reform of spelling was both desirable and necessary. Their views were fully recorded and published, and form an imposing body of testimony; but everybody continued to spell as before."

C: How many people have ever seen this "imposing body of testimony"? Was it taught in schools or in colleges? How could people get to know about it? And if they did not know about it, how could they possibly be influenced by it? Was there any newspaper or other publicity campaign about it? Or were these facts hushed up? No wonder "everyone continued to spell as before." [\[3\]](#)

Q: Page 49, line 16 seq. "in 1908, the Simplified Spelling Society was founded and is still in existence." (i.e. in 1944) "Among its founders and members it has included not a few well-known scholars and men of letters."

C: Lists of the Society's officers and committee members, as printed on the inside covers of pamphlets, were, and still are, most impressive. The greatest scholars have been devoted spelling reformers: not one great scholar has even attempted to make a case against spelling reform, though Dean Trench did attack "the phonographers" rather bitterly during talks he gave to the students of Winchester Diocesan Training College. Trench was soon answered by the greatest philologists of the time, including Max Muller, Walter Skeat and Sir James Murray.

Q: Page 49 continued. After saying that the founders and members of the Society included "not a few well-known scholars and men of letters" the passage continues, "but if its influence has been felt outside its membership, it has not been sufficiently strong to produce any change in the habits of writers and printers in the matter of spelling. This lack of effect is significant: if so little has been accomplished in the course of a century, it is evident that a much more active, wide-spread and continuous agitation would be necessary to convince the English-speaking world of the necessity of reform and to reconcile it to the particular form to be given to this."

C: Craigie designates as "agitation" those attempts by great scholars and others to educate the general public in the matter of writing their native language. We must hope that no offense was intended. Let the word stay as it is. It should be recalled that an "active, wide-spread and continuous agitation" was necessary before slavery could be abolished, and before steps could be taken to prevent little boys from being burnt or suffocated in narrow chimneys and to prevent helpless little orphans from being transported to work long hours in unhealthy and dangerous factories. It may be that this sort of "agitation" is necessary before any important reform can be brought about. In that case, we must agree that "a much more active, wide-spread and continuous agitation" will be necessary, and should be undertaken, in order to bring about the reform of English spelling.

When Craigie says that English spelling should not be made phonetic "regardless of consequences," no scholar surely is likely to suggest changing anything "regardless of consequences."

Q. The passage continues ... "English does not stand alone in this respect; there would be equal difficulty in applying a phonetic spelling to French, or Gaelic, or Greek: in such a form, they certainly would not be easier to read than they are now."

C: It would have been more accurate if Craigie had said, "With phonetic spelling, they would not be easier to read (*by those who have been long familiar with the unphonetic spelling*) than they are now." They would, however, be easier for those, children or adults, who were *learning* these languages. When we are considering English spelling reform, this is a very important point.

Q: Page 51, line 12 seq. carries a well-known passage which is often quoted, "No ordinary person in

reading to himself is consciously translating the written or printed symbols into their equivalent sounds: the letters which he sees convey to his mind the word and its meaning without any such analysis."

C: It is certainly unwise to be so dogmatic concerning the psychology and physiology of perception. What Sir William says about the process of interpreting letters shows his ignorance of the perceptual reading process. Words in a sentence must be sounded (orally or silently) before the meaning is conveyed. However, an experienced driver can interpret road signs without any of the conscious thought and concentration which would be necessary in the case of a learner.

Q: Page 52, line 6, we read the following, "At the early age at which the teaching of reading normally begins, the child does not so readily associate letters and sounds as might be supposed." [\[4\]](#)

C: Slowness in associating letters and sounds may be due, in some part, to the early age at which reading instruction begins but it is due much more to the way most school books allow the same letter to indicate many different sounds in different words (the letter *a* can represent any one of nine sounds) and allow the same sound to be spelt in many different ways (*rush*, *special*, *station*, *mission*, etc.)

Q: The passage continues, "and beyond words of one syllable, (the child) is likely to have difficulty both in pronouncing the word (unless it is already very familiar with it) and in reproducing the spelling whether this is phonetic or not."

C: Pronouncing words and spelling words would both be made easier by a spelling which is phonetically consistent. With a reliable, consistent orthography, a child, or other learner, would be able very quickly to read any word he hears spoken. Most of the difficulties which children experience at school with reading and writing are quite unnecessary and could have been abolished long ago, if the Government had shown the same initiative in dealing with word symbols as it has recently shown in dealing with symbols of money, weights and measures.

Q: As Henry Bradley wrote in *Spoken and Written English*, page 8, line 34 seq., "The educated Englishman of the 16th century may have found that certain English words gained in expressive force by a spelling that brought them into visible association with their real or supposed originals in the learned languages with which they were so much at home. Although, however, we may admit that the pedantic spellings of the 16th century once served a useful purpose, it does not follow that we ought to perpetuate them now that the conditions which gave them their value no longer exist." On the next page, line 38, he says, "It is certainly absurd that we should go on writing 'victual' when we pronounce 'vitl'."

C: It is often said that there is an "etymological argument" against spelling reform. The evidence of all those who know most about etymology suggests that no such valid argument exists.

Q: On page 56, 4th paragraph, "The problem therefore is to find a form which would be recognized as an improvement without presenting too glaring a contrast to the standard which has remained practically unchanged for nearly three centuries, has many advantages to set against its defects, and has not been found really difficult to acquire and use correctly by those who have grown up with it."

C: This is fair enough, except, perhaps for the last clause. Most of us learned to read and write such a long time ago that we cannot recall how difficult these processes were to acquire. They almost certainly required much time and energy that could, perhaps, have been better spent on other things. Moreover, we must give some thought to all those millions who have not "grown up with it." They

might be spared the necessity, and the incidental frustration of "growing up with it."

Q: The book ends with what seems to be an apology for our present spelling, "When all is said against it that can be said, it is well to bear in mind that it has now stood the test of three centuries and in spite of all its alleged defects has not prevented English from attaining the world wide position it now holds."

C: To say that it has now stood the test of three centuries means presumably that our spelling has lasted 300 years without radical change. This is true. Our system of coinage has lasted even longer, but, because it has been found to have unsatisfactory features, it was reformed in 1971. Many other systems, which have lasted for hundreds of years, have been found unsuited to modern needs and have been changed, and so improved. Spelling similarly needs to be improved. When Craigie writes of "all its alleged defects," he makes no attempt to refute the allegations or to deny that they really are defects.

He does not anywhere attempt to argue against spelling reform. He says that it would alter the familiar appearance of words, which statement is obviously true, and that it would encounter much opposition (his opinion).

Q: In the 3rd paragraph, page 75, Craigie gives two necessities for spelling reform. It will be necessary "to devise a new spelling which will be so clearly preferable to the old as to overcome all opposition to it, and not least such opposition as is based upon habit, prejudice or mere unwillingness to change." It would be necessary also "to put this forward in such a way that its general acceptance throughout the English speaking world would be practically assured from the outset."

C: The first of these two necessities presents little difficulty. The other one would require action by the central government, such as has been forthcoming in all those countries which have adopted reformed spelling during the present century. Granted these two conditions, it seems that Craigie would have no objection to spelling reform. At least, he has put forward no case against such reform. He would certainly be in favour of "the principle of least disturbance" as so many spelling reformers now are. It is necessary, or at least advisable, to make concessions to current usage. He proceeds:

Q: "There would be better chance of some success if the aim were less ambitious. Gradual changes in certain words, or types of words, such as have been made in the past, might well be introduced by writers and printers, which in time would become so familiar that the older forms would take their place with those already discarded, such as horreur, terreur, musick, physick, deposite, as well as fossile, chymical and chymist. Such changes, however, could only be of a limited character, and would still leave the essentials of English spelling intact."

C: This last is the penultimate sentence of the pamphlet. The only other sentence is the one which says that all the alleged defects of its spelling have not prevented the English language from being adopted in many parts of the world. [\[5\]](#)

Regarding a "less ambitious aim," it is important to note that a very large number of reformers favour a partial reform as opposed to a thorough-going reform. If the reform is to be implemented by government action, as in the case of the Turkish alphabet reforms, popular objection is not likely to constitute a formidable obstacle, especially as in this case Ataturk was not a constitutional ruler and Turkey was not governed as a democracy. But in Western democracies, such as our own, popular resentment is something which has to be avoided as far as possible.

When Craigie speaks of "leaving the essentials of English spelling intact" he presumably means that many words would still look very much the same as before – that we should have what is often called a "minimal change reform." It would, however, be possible to assume that the essentials of English spelling, as indeed of all spelling, are that the same letters should always stand for the same sounds. One reason why this is not true today is that changes in spelling have not been able to keep pace with the much more rapid changes in pronunciation. Mechanical printing and, above all, the large stocks of infant school readers and other school textbooks have tended to prevent what may be called spelling changes from catching up with changes in pronunciation. Another reason is because words are imported from foreign languages unchanged in spelling although such spelling systems are often in conflict with the phonetics of English spelling.

Changes "might well be introduced by writers and printers" and these would, in time, become so familiar that the older forms would be discarded as Craigie suggests. The flood of printed matter in the older forms is making it increasingly difficult for them to be discarded in favour of consistent and more scholarly forms. Craigie might have joined the reformers in trying to popularise new and better forms but he chose not to do so.

This study of Sir William Craigie's 1944 pamphlet shows that the author did not advance any important arguments against spelling reform. Passages in which he may seem to have been arguing against reform have been quoted verbatim and appropriate commentaries added.

Craigie may not have looked forward with much satisfaction to the use of spellings which would be markedly different from those he had long been dealing with for the *New English Dictionary*, but he saw the disadvantages of the current spelling conventions and the educational obstacles presented by them. He noted how some former spellings had been reformed. He noted that many other spellings are now unsatisfactory and that they could be reformed with advantage to all who have to learn and use the English language.

The most eminent scholars in Britain and America have generally been in favour of spelling reform. There seems to be only one noteworthy exception: Richard Grant White in *Everyday English*, 1880, pp 512, (a sequel to *Words & Their Uses*, 1871). Here is his summary of 21 objections to spelling reform, in Chp. XVI, with my comments.

- (1) "Language is speech, of which writing is not the representation, but the suggestion."  
Suggestions would be much more useful if they were consistent. The all-important objection to our present spelling is that it is inconsistent.
- (2) "Spelling has nothing to do with speech." This is untrue. "Spoken words are not formed by a combination of distinct sounds." This is also untrue.
- (3) "A certain non-conformity of speech and writing is inevitable." Of course, unless we use a system of phonetic transcription.
- (4) "Difficulty of learning to spell has been much exaggerated." Untrue.
- (5) "The economical disadvantages of the received English spelling have also been monstrously exaggerated." Untrue, but spelling reform is much more concerned with education than with economics.
- (6) "The economical disadvantages of a phonetic change in English spelling would be . . . calamitous." Untrue, except during a short transition period when printers, typists, etc. were adjusting their habitual actions and thinking.
- (7) "Phonetic spelling involves changes in written language from time to time." Agreed; but with phonetically consistent spelling, changes in pronunciation would be less likely and less rapid.
- (8) "The introduction of phonetic spelling would make the written English of the post a dead letter . . . except in transliteration." Many people would prefer to read this in transliteration, as many

of them now read Chaucer, Caxton, and Shakespeare. Changes in spelling do not affect the significance of any work when it is considered as literature.

- (9) "Phonetic spelling involves an entire change in the structure of written English." There would be changes in spelling (improvements) but most people would not define these as involving a change in the *structure* of written English.
- (10) "The function of science as to language is not to improve it but to study it historically, comparatively, and analytically." Scientific study, in any field, is a waste of time unless it leads to improvement.
- (11) "Philologists are incompetent, and out of place as reformers of written language." Untrue. Philologists study language and spelling. They do not presume to know everything, but they are likely to know more about these matters than other people.
- (12) "The question as to spelling is chiefly one of practical convenience – today." Every spelling reformer would agree wholeheartedly with this statement.
- (13) "Printing did not introduce confusion to the written language." Agreed. "it was the means of an approximation to a systematic and uniform orthography." Agreed; but now we could make our orthography more *systematic* and more uniform.
- (14) "Modern English orthography is not the result of a blundering compromise between sound and written form." It certainly is a compromise. Most of us would prefer to call it an unsatisfactory compromise rather than a blundering one.
- (15) "Johnson's dictionary . . . merely recorded a spelling which had been established for fifty years. Approximately true.
- (16) "Etymology . . . is interesting, valuable and to a certain degree instructive." True.
- (17) "Phonetic spelling reform is no new movement." Agreed. "Notwithstanding the learning, the ingenuity, and the labour of its advocates, it has always failed." The really important question is, "Why has it failed?" Answers have been suggested in certain articles, including mine.
- (18) "The sounds to be expressed by phonetic writing are quite indeterminable." Untrue.
- (19) "Letters once silent have in numerous and various instances . . . been restored to sound. This might be done again, and should not be hindered." This would mean changing the pronunciation of many common, familiar words back to that of 500 years ago – an impossible feat.
- (20) "The ablest, most learned, and most experienced of spelling reformers confesses . . . that the more he endeavours after a phonetic spelling, the greater the difficulties he finds in the way." One man's failure helps another man's success. All these difficulties are surmountable, and have been overcome by researchers since the time of this most learned, and most experienced reformer.
- (21) "Any attempt to introduce phonetic spelling into literature *on an extended* scale would result only in anarchy, confusion, and disaster, which would be *temporary*, indeed, but grave and deplorable." Reference to "an extended scale" introduces the conception of "How much?" and by so doing, seems to concede the 'point that spelling should be somewhat more consistently phonetic than it now is. This is what spelling reformers have been saying.

In this summary, it is apparent that a prejudice against any change governs and beclouds all his thinking.

White does not give any valid arguments which might weaken the case for spelling reform, or explain the delay.

Since most eminent scholars have been in favour of a reform of our spelling, it is important to ask the question, "Why then has there been so little change since Noah Webster's time?"

Conditions seemed to be favourable to reform in America when President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 gave an order to the Government Printer that State documents should hereafter be printed with

the 300 reformed spellings recommended by the Simplified Spelling Board, and being used by many universities and newspapers. But Congress balked at the President's assumption of their prerogative and censured him, forcing him to withdraw the order.

Conditions seemed favourable in Britain between about 1924 and 1935 when university professors and many subordinate staffs were almost unanimous about the need for spelling reform. During this period, several notable petitions were drawn up and presented to successive governments, – those for instance of 1924 and 1935. The reform movement, however, was not supported by the general public and so did not achieve any success.

All young children are psychologically conditioned to accept the spelling conventions of Queen Anne's time and the effects of this conditioning last a long time; they frequently last throughout a person's lifetime. Children brought up in this way are not likely to demand anything better when they grow up.

For the general public to adopt a reasonable attitude to spelling reform, it is necessary that spelling should be taught reasonably to people when they are young. What happens in the infant school and in the nursery is the crux of the whole matter. Bad spelling habits formed in early childhood are difficult to change later on.

### **Indoctrination and Public Apathy**

Attempts to implement spelling reform have been made by a large number of individual scholars and also, since about the middle of the last century, by several societies.

No reform, however, can get started in the face of public apathy, and it is probably public apathy which has defeated all attempts at spelling reform. This apathy about spelling is due principally to the fact that children normally pass thru the successive stages of schooling without ever being told some of the basic facts about spelling. These basic facts are particularly the fact that printing and writing are symbolic representations of the language we speak, and the fact that letter symbols, like all other symbols, lose much of their effectiveness if they are not used consistently. In the spelling which children have to use at present, letters are used most inconsistently and therefore are used less effectively than they should be.

At a very impressionable age, children are conditioned to accept such irrational spellings as: *once, who, two, few, shoe, blue, said, where* – but *here, now* – but *know* (as if the addition of a silent letter could change the pronunciation of a set of letters to the sound of a different word) and forced to adopt an acceptance attitude of spelling generally. [6] As a result of this misguided teaching, many people are unable later on to think rationally about spelling or to consider the matter of reform without prejudice. It is not surprising that many people reject invitations to consider the arguments in favour of reform. The really surprising thing is that there are any at all who are able to see the faults in our present spelling and are not blind to the benefits that could be expected to result from reform.

It would be wrong to blame teachers for this state of affairs. So far as the essentials are concerned – and spelling is the most important essential of all – teachers have to teach what the authorities expect them to teach. For a hundred years or more, some of the most enlightened teachers have been advocating the use of a decimal currency and further metrification. Nothing however could be done to implement these reforms until recently when a government initiative is bringing them into effect. Similarly, some of the most enlightened teachers (in the universities and the schools) have long been in favour of more rational spelling, but no reforms could be implemented without some initiative by the central authority. *No improvement in our spelling will ever be brought about while the government pretends to be satisfied with what is clearly an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and*

refuses even to consider the overwhelming case in favour of reform.

We all grow up in an educational climate which tends to make us think that whatever is now generally accepted as customary must necessarily be right. Tradition and habit are such powerful influences that young children – and even older children – have little chance to raise any effective protest against the conventional spelling that most adults use and which they seem determined to make children use also. A child's protests can be effectively overruled. When one child wrote the letters: *s e d*, the teacher complained, "That does not spell 'said'," whereupon the child respectfully asked, "Well, sir, what does it spell?" But a lamb might just as well try to argue with a wolf.

Tradition is one of the means by which the human race preserves its equanimity- one might almost say, its sanity. It would be too much if every human problem had to be solved from first principles.

Traditional customs can, however, become oppressive and be the cause of much suffering, as was the case in some parts of India with suttee and thuggee. The force of custom is so strong that these oppressive and cruel practices could not be ended except on the initiative of a foreign power. In English speaking countries, the force of spelling custom is very strong indeed; it may be that our schools are unable, without some outside initiative, to escape from the adverse influences of the presently accepted old spelling, which dates from about 1690. In the previous sentence, 'outside initiative' does not mean something foreign, but something outside the normal school organization. Just as decimal currency and further metrification is being accepted in the schools on the initiative of industry and commerce, so spelling reform may be accepted for similar reasons. The latter, no less than the former, would have to follow action by the central government.

Meanwhile, the conditioning process continues and the effect of this is not short lived. On the contrary, the ill effects last for such a long time that when people do recover – those who are fortunate enough, or strong minded enough to do so – they are often fairly advanced in years. Most of the spelling reformers I have known have reached an age at which, normally, they would be living quietly in retirement. Several of them have said that they spent their childhood being taught Old Spelling, spent much of their adult life teaching it, and did not realise the disadvantages of it until they were approaching an age when time and energy were hardly enough to enable them to work effectively for reform.

It is interesting in this context to mention just two reformers of the fairly recent past. Sir George Hunter was an octogenarian when he made his greatest efforts for the Simplified Spelling Society. If he could have started earlier, he would almost certainly have achieved much more, even in the face of opposition such as he had to contend with. opposition from such influential persons as Charles Trevelyan, Eustace Percy and Lord Irwin, who were successively presidents of the Board of Education and who were obstinately opposed to any consideration of the facts about spelling reform. At his advanced age, he could hardly be expected to continue fighting indefinitely against such odds.

So the conditioning which most of us undergo in early childhood has an inhibiting influence during most of our lives – certainly during what should be the best years of our working lives.

Prof. Walter Skeat was 73 years of age when he founded the Simplified Spelling Society in Sept. 1908 though, nearly 30 years earlier, in 1879, he had been a vice-president of the Spelling Reform Association and had long been pointing out the unscholarly nature of many conventional spellings.

The Hon. Robert L. Owen, a former Senator from Oklahoma (1907-1925) was 85 years old when, as H. L. Mencken records, "he set up as a spelling reformer." [\[7\]](#) Owen was born in 1856 and died in 1947. If he had started his reform activities at 35 or 45 instead of at 85, he would have achieved

more. At any rate, that would be a reasonable assumption.

People usually start to work for spelling reform late in life and this is one of the reasons why their efforts have not been successful in achieving any significant measure of reform. Their lateness in starting to work for reform can easily be explained. In any human society there are strong forces which support and try to maintain the status quo. Teachers and lecturers, for example, find themselves almost inextricably involved with conventional spelling so that any work for reform is just about impossible until they retire. Throughout their working lives, they have to read the spelling of Queen Anne's time, write it, teach it, and diligently 'correct' all departures from it. The main stream of pedagogical practice is strongly running with this spelling of c. 1700 and it is not easy to struggle against the stream.

In examining human behaviour, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of habit. The spelling habits which we are compelled to form in childhood are difficult to change. The conditioning process, which has been noted above, underlies and explains almost everything that has prevented changes in the spelling we learnt as children. Those who resist reform are not necessarily wicked or specially stupid. They are victims of the system. It is not helpful to talk of their conspiracy, or their machinations against children. The truth is that they still believe what they were taught in early childhood and that they cannot change the spelling habits they formed then. When compulsory schooling was introduced, in Britain about 100 years ago, the authorities' first priority *should have been* to find and introduce a sensible (that is consistent) way of representing our native language in printed symbols. The education authorities did not have the foresight to do this. They should have spent some time and money on finding a satisfactory *medium* for writing, printing and reading the language. Instead, they have preferred to spend large sums on *methods* of trying to mitigate the harmful effects of using an unsatisfactory medium. The currently used medium is so unsatisfactory that it has, according to Dr. Godfrey Dewey's calculations, 561 different symbols by which our 41 speech sounds may be represented. This is a formidable obstacle to the fundamental educational processes. All the arguments about *methods* of teaching literacy (look and say, whole word sentence method, and similar other inane descriptions) are to a large extent useless and meaningless until something can be decided about improving the *medium*. The authorities however are very slow to give their minds to this most important of all educational problems. Meanwhile, the children and other learners suffer, and educational standards are lower than they should be, with little hope of improvement.

### **Lack of Publicity**

Although spelling is the basis of all reading and writing, and therefore of all literacy, the matter is almost completely ignored by the great instruments of national publicity. Daily and Sunday newspapers never mention spelling unless it has some special topical interest, such as when 'Androcles' was printed in "Bernard Shaw's new alphabet" and sent gratis to all libraries; or when Pitman's Augmented Teaching Alphabet began to make an impact on the teaching of conventional reading; or when certain well-informed members of the Simplified Spelling Society sent letters and articles to the educational press and were successful in getting them printed.

Generally speaking, however, the press is not interested. This is obviously because it thinks the public is not interested, but does not stop to enquire why the public is not interested in this very important matter.

Radio and Television do not mention spelling reform in the usual course of events. I have twice been invited to broadcast on sound radio and once, at peak viewing time, on television, but such trifles are not enough to cause more than a ripple on the vast sea of public indifference. The mass media can make people like or dislike things, believe or disbelieve opinions, but they have never done anything to encourage people to understand spelling, which is the basis of all writing and non-

vocal communication.

School textbooks could do much to make children think seriously about spelling, but they do not even try. In this respect, things are worse now than they were 30 or 40 years ago. The same fault can be found with most books used at training colleges and in education departments of universities. Teaching staffs are in some measure to blame for this state of affairs, but certain printers and publishers are still more to blame for the lack of initiative. Printers and publishers were the people who fixed our spelling conventions during the latter part of the 17th century and some of their descendants seem to be determined to prevent any change in even the most outdated and inconvenient of these conventions. Spelling reform would bring them important advantages but the immediate disadvantages of change prevent them from seeing this. Most printers and publishers are indifferent to spelling reform and know little about it. Scholars may write books about spelling reform but these will have no influence at all unless publishers decide to print them. All credit is due to the few publishers in Britain and U.S.A. who are sympathetic to the movement, but generally speaking, educational publishers and other publishers tend to obstruct the course of possible reform.

Public libraries usually have few or no books on spelling reform. Few people have the knowledge and the will to write such books and get them published. Even when such books are published, it is difficult to find reviewers who will review them and journalists who will discuss them. It often requires many thousands of pounds to launch a new book (or indeed, a new cigarette, a new pet food, a new drink, or a new washing powder) and spelling reformers do not usually have that sort of money. So it happens that even those who are willing and anxious to learn cannot find the books to satisfy their thirst for such knowledge. Ask librarians about spelling reform literature and they are unlikely to be able to help, however well disposed they may be to learning. Those who administer our libraries will not order books on spelling reform unless members of the public, in appreciable numbers, ask for these books. Members of the general public will not ask for such books until their interest is aroused by controversy over better methods of teaching spelling and reading at school. So the real villains of the piece are those who direct and decide what kinds of language teaching shall be given at schools and colleges, though it is possible to plead on their behalf that their policies are the outcome of deficiencies in their own education. Here is a sort of vicious circle.

Even encyclopaedia and other reference books afford little help. They are noticeably averse to mentioning reform. When an eminent scholar, who is or was a notable spelling reformer, is being dealt with, his efforts are glossed over or not mentioned at all. Of Prof. Walter Skeat, the Oxford Companion to English Literature (Clarendon, 1946) records this: "He did much to popularize philology and old authors and he also, in his later years, led the way in the systematic study of place names." There is no word about his prolonged work for spelling reform or of how he founded the Simplified Spelling Society.

Chambers' Biographical Dictionary (new edition, 1961) has 22 lines about Skeat but, again, there is not a word about spelling reform or the S.S.S. The Concise Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 1961) has ten lines about Skeat but, again, there is no mention of spelling reform or the Society. Encyclopedia Britannica (1962) has 16 lines on Skeat, but not a word about his work for sp. ref. In the 1969 edition, there is no entry for Skeat.

Everyman's Encyclopaedia (vol. XI, pp 681-2) has 19 lines on Skeat but nothing about his work for spelling reform. Everyman's Dictionary of Literary Biography (revised, 1962) has 15 lines but no mention either of sp. ref. The entry concludes: "He also made an authoritative Etymological Dictionary (1879-1882) and in 1873 he founded the English Dialect Society." All this is true, but there should have been some reference to his devoted work for sp. ref. The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature vol. 3, gives a half column to Skeat and concludes, "Skeat also published pamphlets on spelling reform, place names, etc." At least here is some reference to what we are

looking for: there is at least a mention of spelling reform. Generally speaking, as these extracts show, the matter is ignored.

At the back of an old copy of Pears Cyclopaedia, there were calendars for the years 1943 to 1946, so the issue must have been that of 1944 or 1945. Under Spelling Reform, in the section entitled, "Matters of General Interest," the following passage is printed: "Spelling Reform is a subject which has many distinguished supporters – philologists and men of letters – and the Simplified Spelling Society, whose aim is to bring about a system of spelling which shall represent the actual pronunciation of each word, numbers over two thousand members, including Sir James Murray, Viscount Bryce, Sir William Ramsay and Andrew Carnegie: it is actively engaged in spreading the new spelling propaganda." (page 633). To show how, since then, the matter has been hidden from the public, we have to note that the 1968 Pears, and possibly some earlier issues, omits the foregoing passage altogether and makes no mention of spelling reform. This is further evidence indicating that today's reading public is not given a chance to consider the matter fairly. This is another example of the policy which was noted elsewhere while dealing with the Introduction to Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary where the criticism of accepted spelling conventions and the plea for spelling reform are omitted altogether from recent editions.

There is a similar example in the case of Melvil Dewey's "Decimal Classification and Relative Index." Melvil Dewey was one of the greatest of all spelling reformers as well as being a number of other things: his decimal classification is still used in thousands of libraries throughout the world. He wrote the introduction to this great work in his own system of reformed spelling. More important still, he gave five imperative reasons why we should work for reform.

- "(1) We should end the 'disgrace of having the worst spelling in the world.'
- (2) We should avoid wasting the time we now spend interrupting our train of thought and consulting dictionaries; we could also save one seventh of the total number of letters now used in printing, with consequent financial savings.
- (3) We should avoid 'the criminal waste of school time – not only in spelling classes but also in all other studies throughout educational life.'
- (4) It is wrong to addle children's brains. 'One could hardly devise a more deadening process to the normal brain than the teaching of such words as *bone, done, gone, or love, move, rove.*' There are thousands of other cases of equally unintelligent spellings.
- (5) The present spelling is a formidable obstacle – probably the only real obstacle-to the acceptance of English as the world language or, at least, as the world's second language."

This powerful advocacy of spelling reform appeared on pp. 51 and 52. It was printed in the early editions and was still printed in the 13th edition dated 1932, but it was omitted from the 16th edition dated 1958 and from subsequent editions. The omission of Dewey's arguments for reform could only happen at the instigation of influential people who were opposed to reform. This again helps to explain why spelling reform has made so little real progress. The majority of people are not in favour of reform chiefly because they are not allowed to see the facts on which they could form a sound judgement.

People cannot learn these facts – except in the face of every possible discouragement – at school or at college; they cannot learn them from the press, from the radio or television nor even from the public libraries. If some reformer does succeed in getting the facts published in a book, it is likely that these facts and relevant opinions will be omitted from later editions.

Spelling reform makes little real progress because of many publishers, because of many administrators, because of many teachers. These all act as they do because of the way they were taught spelling or, perhaps we should say, because of the way they were not taught spelling. It

seems that this state of affairs can only be changed as the result of a government initiative, as Sir George Hunter and others realised in Britain, as Homer Wood and others have realised in America; and as has been realised by various reformers in other parts of the English speaking world.

### **Misrepresentation**

It is regrettable that the facts about spelling reform are not usually given to students or made easily available to them. It is even more regrettable that in some books there have been misrepresentation of the facts. In Prof. Simeon Potter's *Our Language* (Pelican Original), p. 188, we read the following unfounded and misleading assertion, "In *English Spelling, Its Rules and Reasons*, (New York, 1927, pp 115), Sir William Craigie has prepared an erudite defence of our unphonetic orthography without special pleading."

Potter must have known that Craigie's 1927 book was not an erudite defence – or any other sort of defence – of our unphonetic spelling, so the words quoted above were probably written by some editor or bibliographer; but they appear in Prof. Potter's book and he ought to have checked them. Craigie's book, as the Introduction makes clear, was written to show "How the several elements have combined to produce the great variety so noticeable in the spelling of English." Craigie did not try to defend this spelling. He merely set out to show how it happened. Potter's statement about "an erudite defence" is just not true. This is a serious case of misrepresentation by one who ought to have known better. Spelling reformers have to contend with fairly widespread ignorance. It is unfortunate that they should have to contend also with untrue statements from people who are supposed to know about spelling and whom the general public trusts to tell the truth.

Chambers' Encyclopaedia (1966) prints an article, entitled "Spelling and Orthography," on page 82 of volume 13. The last paragraph includes this sentence, "The main claim of spelling reformers is that learning of English by children and foreigners would be made easier." Any reformer would add that this is one claim, but not probably the main one: there are numerous others. The article goes on, "But a violent reform of spelling, however desirable in theory, has evoked no great enthusiasm in practice."

*Comment:* an emotive word such as 'violent' should not have been used in this context; the phrase, "however desirable in theory" suggests that there is, in theory, a strong case for reform. Theory is based on facts. If spelling reform is desirable in theory, the evidence on which that theory is based certainly deserves to be carefully examined and thoroughly discussed. This the writer does not do, nor does he even suggest it. It is interesting to note that the writer of this article was an anatomist. It is difficult to see why an anatomist should be chosen to write something about spelling. At least, we can understand how he came to misrepresent so badly the case for spelling reform. We may hope that a future edition of this book will try to put the case more fairly.

The writer proceeds, "Moreover, spelling reform would sever a link between English readers of today and English literature of the 17th century and earlier."

*Comment:* we do not normally read literature of the 17th century and earlier in the spelling of any period earlier than about 1700. We normally read it after it has been transliterated into the spelling which became conventional *after* 1700. Spelling reform could not sever any link because there is no link to sever.

These are just two examples of misrepresentation. There are many others.

### **Vested Interests**

The difficulty and wastefulness of Queen Anne's spelling – as still used in our schools today, should surely be factors favouring reform. With many people, unfortunately, they tend to make reform less desirable, and certainly less urgent. Those who have spent much time and energy learning to master

the intricacies of this out-of-date spelling have acquired thereby a qualification which is worth prestige and money so long as these intricacies and absurdities remain current practice and so long as they have official approval. This affects writers, printers, teachers, shorthand typists, and many young people still in school and college. All these have a vested interest in keeping our spelling unchanged.

Teaching techniques which mitigate, to some extent, the ill effects of Queen Anne's spelling, can only justify their existence so long as we retain this inconsistently spelling, with all the said ill effects. Just as purveyors of certain pills and prophylactics can prosper only so long as certain forms of illness and disability remain widespread, so authors and publishers of certain books intended for backward readers can only prosper so long as Queen Anne's spelling ensures that there are large numbers of backward readers who may possibly profit from using these books and methods. So the evil tends to feed on itself. It obstructs the need for reform and obstructs the work of reformers.

The evils of Queen Anne's spelling are self-perpetuating and are likely to remain so until new teaching methods, dependent on the use of reliable spellings, are authorized by the Department of Education and Science. Meanwhile, we must urge the Department to encourage further experiments involving the use of better, more consistent, spelling.

### **Attitude of Government**

Spelling reform has not been implemented, chiefly because we have not been able to persuade the government to show any real concern about the way irregular spelling affects the teaching of reading in the schools. During the 1960's, advocates of i.t.a. made notable progress, partly because they succeeded in enlisting the support of London University's Institute of Education, of the National Federation for Educational Research, of the Schools Council, and of other official and semi-official bodies. If spelling reformers will proceed on similar lines, the outlook for us should be no less bright.

At its Annual General Meeting of Dec. 1970, the Simplified Spelling Society unanimously passed a carefully worded resolution respectfully asking the Government to appoint a Departmental Committee to examine the accumulated evidence in favour of spelling reform. I personally delivered this resolution to the Curzon Street Offices of the Department of Education and Science. Correspondence followed and, as the Society's Honorary Secretary, I had an hour's interesting and encouraging talk with a high ranking official. So far, so good. Now that the Simplified Spelling Society of London and the Simpler Spelling Assoc. of New York are in full agreement concerning the details of New Spelling (thanks in no small measure to the long and untiring efforts of Godfrey Dewey and others in America, and Herbert Wilkinson particularly, in England) we should be able to look forward confidently to real progress in the near future.

[1] Title of a forthcoming book by this author.

[2] Ed. note: Also the Metric System of Weights and Measures is now in transition to use in Britain and has passed the U.S. Senate.

[3] Ed.: Everywhere in the world where spelling reform has been instituted, it has been done by government decree or legislation. Here, Congress did not act, so no one was obliged to change.

[4] Ed. note: Not true, as recent work in Britain by Downing has shown.

[5] Ed. note: How does he know that the irregular nature of English spelling has not been a deterrent of its use, and that long ago English would have become the Universal Language if it had not been for this handicap?

[6] Tennyson: Yours is not to question why, yours is to do or die.

[7] *American Language, Supplement Two*, page 289.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §4.8 pp73,74 in the printed version*]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 pp14,15 in the printed version*]

## 6. Language Reform in the Netherlands, by Helen Bonnema

The Rotterdam newspaper, *Handelsblad*, 18 April, 1972 issue, reported on a public opinion survey concerning spelling reform. 65% of the men and women responding favor further spelling reform, particularly of verb forms. It was found that more men than women desire simplifications. Men from ages 24 to middle age were more accepting of it than older ones. The group most opposed to change was the 15 to 24-year olds.

In Brussels, Belgium, where Flemish is used (a language differing from Dutch no more than American from British English), 83% of the people are against much change in spelling. Their objection is that their authors are not good in revised Dutch forms and will write in the English language instead. However the Belgians would accept anything adopted by Netherlands in order to retain uniformity with their northern neighbours.

The Dutch Society of Translators is opposed to any further changes, and states that the government has been too drastic on previous occasions in going far beyond their original goals, and has made revisions which detract from clear meaning.

Throughout the news article, the "previous changes" mentioned are those which have now been adopted by people in general, and were incorporated in *De Nieuwe* (new) *Spelling*, which has for over 20 years been the official orthography of Netherlands and Belgium. It had been used side by side with the older or previously official orthography for over a half-century before its adoption by the government on 14 February, 1947. Its changes consisted mainly of the omission of superfluous vowels and consonants and of flecnal endings which had long ceased to be pronounced. In 1954, the Dutch and Belgium governments issued a publication entitled *Woordenlijst van de Nederlandse* which introduced further changes, chiefly in the spelling of "foreign" or loan words and became the official dictionary after 1955.

Continued simplifications are being made. The above-mentioned newspaper survey concerns current proposals. Such considerations have been a perennial concern of the Dutch for the past century.

In 1875, De Vries and Te Winkel demonstrated the vexations of spelling, and they tried to make matters easier for writers of their language by stating a number of rules.

For example:

If the long /i/ sound is heard in a word which is derived from one spelled with a /i/ in French, it is spelled with /ij/, but if from one spelled with /ee/ in French, it is written /ei/.

French *carvi* becomes /karwij/ (caraway seed)

French *carvée* becomes /karwei/ (work, task)

Both Dutch words are pronounced identically.

De Vries and Te Winkel's rules also included those for pairs of words which are identical in pronunciation except for the initial consonant:

ruischen (spelled /sch/ vs. bruisen (spelled with /s/)

rauschen (spelled /sch/ vs. brausen (spelled with /s/)

A young child could not spell correctly by hearing the sound of these and similar words. He had to know how each was spelled in Old French, or in Old German from which it was taken!

De Vries and Te Winkel wrote 25 rules for just the /o/ vs. /oo/ and /e/ vs. /ee/ spellings.

They also showed the difficulty arising from the fact that a different definite article *de*, *des*, *den*, or *der* was used before nouns of different gender. Yet the gender could not be determined by commonsense:

- a woman's coat was masculine
- a man's jacket was feminine
- a woman's coat was masculine
- a man's pants was feminine

During the 70 years between 1865 and 1935, numerous proposals were made for improving the situation. The most influential person was Dr. R. A. Kollewyn who in 1899 founded the "Vereneging tot vereenvoudeging van onze spelling" – Society for Simplifying Spelling. His suggested improvements were not accepted by the government at that time. In 1934, by royal decree, a compromise between Kollewyn's proposals and De Vries-Te Winkel's models was authorized for use in connection with specified examinations. The instructions included this note: "There is no intention yet on the part of the Dutch authorities to apply the terms of the Decree to general use." It was accepted in July 1936 by the Minister of Education. Further improvements were made and adopted in 1946 in Belgium, and on Feb. 14, 1947 in Netherlands, as mentioned earlier herein. The understanding was that geographical names and other changes would be added later. Apparently the "other changes" are the subject of debate now in 1972.

### Similarities between Dutch and English

The Dutch language might be called a halfway house between German and English. It is less conservative than its neighbor on the east, and less radical than its neighbor across the North Sea. Its treatment of the ancient grammatical genders exemplifies that middle position. German has preserved the three genders intact, English has effaced the distinction altogether, and Dutch has retained only two.

One of the relationships with English is obvious in the consonants:

<i>Dutch</i>	<i>English</i>
bloed, doen	blood, do
gras, hand	grass, hand
jaar, kan	year, can
lip, man	lip, man
naam, plug	named, plug
recht, tong, winter	right, tongue, winter
The former /f/ and /s/ are now /v/ and /z/	
vinger	finger
zingen	sing
The former /th/ and /d/ have coalesced as /d/	
dief	thief
diep	deep
/al/, /ol/ before /d/, /t/ have changed to /ou/	
koud	cold
bout	bold
/ft/ has changed to /cht/	
zacht	soft

Dutch words given to English include: *easel, landscape, etch, boss, cookie, Santa Claus, snoop, waffle, and Yankee.*

### **Reform in other Dutch Speaking Nations**

In his book *The Dutch*, Adrian Barnouw now makes the following comments about spelling reform: "The problem is aggravated by the lack of uniformity in spoken Dutch. Within the borders of Queen Wilhelmina's kingdom there is a recognized standard language which, thanks to the schools, is more or less known and accepted by all her subjects. But the Dutch language covers a larger territory than Her Majesty's realm. The northern half of Belgium is also a Dutch-speaking area. Belgium Dutch, called Flemish, is a patchwork quilt of local idioms, many of which have preserved the inflected article and other archaic traits such as have not survived in Holland Dutch. The educated Flemings are doing their best to adopt standard Dutch as their model, but find it hard to reconcile themselves to the new orthography, as it bears less resemblance to their local speech than did the old. They are anxious to promote a cultural *rapprochement* of Flemish Belgium to Holland, and they regret the official adoption of an orthography that tends to emphasize the difference between Belgium and Holland Dutch.

The Dutch people in South Africa, on the other hand, have no cause for sharing the Fleming's objections. Their language is a radically simplified form of Dutch, and its speakers find it easier to read the Holland Dutch in the reformed than in the archaic spelling.

### **Contrasts Between the Achievement of Spelling Reform for Dutch and English**

To Americans and Britishers, even the faulty Dutch spelling of the century ago seems regular when compared with English. They marvel that Hollanders have succeeded in improving an already fairly logical orthography. Yet it may be that reform is easier where changes required are not as drastic as those needed in English.

Perhaps the compactness of the country should also be taken into consideration. Reformists need persuade a much smaller number of people living in a more compact land area. The area of Netherlands, 12,978 miles, is comparable to that of Maryland, which ranks 42nd in size among our 50 states. The population of continental Netherlands is 12,220,000, which is comparable to that of Pennsylvania, ranking 3rd among the other states.

If each of our states had its own distinctive language, it may be that its governor would have an easier task of achieving spelling reform than would the president of our whole country.

The enormity of our task certainly is greater, yet we can hope for the day in which we can match our record with that of the Dutch.

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## 7. Book Review by Gertrude Hildreth\*

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Carroll, John B., Peter Davis & Barry Richman, *The American Heritage Word Frequency Book*, Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston; American Heritage Pub. Co., New York, 1971. pp. liv & 856. Quarto. Price \$25.00.

Today's computerized technology applied to the analysis of the English lexicon makes possible more extensive and systematic studies of words in print than any previous investigations. The American Heritage Intermediate Word Count (AHI) was undertaken to determine the words and terms to be included in the new *American Heritage School Dictionary* (AHD) of approximately 35,000 entries for use in grades 4 through 8, selected from textbooks and other materials to which students are most often exposed.

The AHI is a computer-assembled selection of 5,088,721 words drawn from 500-word samples of 1045 publications, largely school textbooks used in grades 3-9, inclusive. In all, 33,623 pages of text were sampled. The AHI lists 86,741 different words and terms found in the text samplings. The authors regard the AHL corpus as a highly informative probe of the American School lexicon. Certainly, this is not only the most extensive word count of children's school reading matter ever compiled, but the most technically skilled in the selection, tabulation and analysis of data.

### Basis of the AHI Corpus

The raw material for the AHI corpus was selected by means of a questionnaire sent out to heads of public, independent and parochial schools throughout the U.S. in 1969. The questionnaire sought to determine the text-books, drill materials, and other printed matter most frequently used in elementary school classrooms, public and private, in all basic subject areas. Of the 155 public schools invited to participate in the project, 71 returned usable replies.

### The AHI Corpus

The AHI corpus is a body of *graphic words*, "a word" being defined for the computer as "strings of characters bounded left and right by spaces." This broad definition included words with internal punctuation, abbreviations, acronyms, mathematical symbols, numerals, and also word particles resulting from hyphenation. *Catch* is a 'word,' so is *cap'n*. Other examples of "words" are: *etc.*, *Sq.*, *ing*, *ious*, *ment*, *hmmm*, *zz*; also: A-flat, 3rd, 101st, 1/250, .007, 1776, \$2000, FMH, Zn S04. Related words were treated as separate words: *have*, *has*, *had*, *having*; *word*, *word's*, *wording*, *wordy*, *etc.*

The word types, 86,741 in all, are listed both alphabetically and in order of frequency. The alphabetical list begins with A-a and terminates with zzz-zzz-zzz! Words occurring no more than once in the entire corpus are arrayed in six columns at the bottom of each page. The information supplied for each word is as follows:

The word itself,

F- the number of times the word appeared in the total corpus,

D- Index of dispersion .000 to 1.000 by categories,

U- Estimated frequency per million running words derived from F,

SFI- Standard Frequency Index indicative of possibility of occurrence of each word.

Also given are tables of total frequency of words by grades and in ungraded materials; and simple

frequencies of words in the 17 school subject categories analyzed.

Special note should be taken of U, the index devised by Dr. John Carroll to facilitate comparison among words of different raw frequencies. U also makes possible comparison between the AHI frequencies and the *Thorndike-Lorge Teachers' Word Book*, edition of 1944. The word *pyramid*, for example, occurs 4½ times in a million words grades 6 and above, distributed almost equally between mathematics and social studies. The word *crowd* has a raw frequency of 396, a U of 66.213; whereas *cried* has a frequency of 1043, a U of 145.75.

The word *harvest* with a raw frequency of 112, U 16.4, is used most often in school readers, social studies and non-fiction. *Muscles* with a raw frequency of 360, used over 51 times in a million words, is distributed fairly evenly in grades 3 to 9, used more often in science, library reference reading, and school readers.

The rank-order list in the back of the book gives all 86,741 entries including those with a frequency of 1 from most to least common. With each word F, the raw frequency, D and SFI are entered as in the alphabetical list. The rank list begins with *the* (F, 373,123) and terminates with *trespasses* (F, 1).

The statistical analysis of the AHI includes details of word-frequency distribution data, analysis of the AHI corpus in comparison with other recent word counts; reliability and accuracy of the F, U and SFI statistics, analysis of word frequencies by grade and subject matter. Statistical analysis of the total vocabulary of AHI indicates that it conforms to a normal curve of distribution. The first 1000 words in the total distribution are common, familiar words that account for 74% of the total usage; the first 5000 account for 89.4%.

The 17 words with the highest frequency in AHI in descending order are:  
*the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, be, for, was, on, are, as, with.*

For convenience in using the rank order list, a line is printed in caps marking off words by intervals of 100.

Just a glance down any column of the alphabetical list reveals the predominance of rare-frequency words and terms used no more than once in the entire corpus, about 40% of the total list. In the vast vocabulary of English, most words appear in print less than 50 times in a million.

Inspection of the AHI corpus reveals increasing difficulty (rarity) and diversity of vocabulary with advancing grade. There is far less redundancy of word usage the higher the grade level. As the authors point out, textbook context makes use of more common words and uses them more frequently than other types of reading matter. A check of the subject area lists shows variation in diversity as well as in the number of different words employed.

The AHI corpus, compared to the *Lorge Magazine Count* and the *Brown University Analysis*, has more easy (high probability) words and a wider range.

Some word oddities show up in exploring the corpus. The term *boy* is used more than twice as often as *girl* (*boy* approximately 70%, *girl* 30%). Also, *he* is over three times as frequent as *she*.

How accurate and reliable are the frequency data? How do vocabularies for the respective grade levels and subject areas differ? These questions are answered in charts and tables prepared by Dr. Carroll. The subject areas sampled differed in range; the smallest ranges of different words were in the subjects of religion, home economics, shop, composition. Science also has a comparatively narrow range.

### Practical uses of AHI

Altho the authors' purpose in producing this computerized list was for the preparation of an intermediate school dictionary, teachers, writers for juveniles and others will find this compendium useful for a number of purposes. To list a few:

- Selecting words of known frequency for the construction of reading, spelling and vocabulary tests, as well as subject matter tests.
- Indications of vocabulary frequency for readability formulas, and of infrequency, e.g. words beyond the 1000 most frequently used words.
- Preparing subject matter for texts in various subjects with vocabulary control.
- Preparing reading exercises and check tests.
- Deriving lists of word cognates; lists of common prefixes and suffixes.
- Checking common compounds and contractions.
- Writing juvenile literature and factual material for children.
- Preparation of scaled spelling lists. Identification of common words for spelling practice. AHI includes all the words of the most widely used spelling series.
- Listing common words conforming to phonic principles for drill exercises.
- Identifying the commonest English words with irrational spellings.

Here are a few examples with raw frequencies indicated: *the*, 373,946, *to*, 121,347, *was*, 40,934, *are*, 35,454, *have*, 22,337, *were*, 17,031, *said*, 15,309, *of*, 14,600, *do*, 12,695, *many*, 12,158, *would*, 11,188, *write*, 9,846, *know*, 5,655, *through*, 5,442, *any*, 5,023, *come*, 4,676. AHI is a convenient guide for spelling reform researchers.

The AHI contains a far wider stock of words for all these purposes than the *Thorndike-Lorge Teachers Word Book*, Horn's *A Basic Writing Vocabulary*, or Rinsland's: *Basic Vocabulary of Elementary School Children*.

### Some Evaluative Comments on the American Heritage Word List

Is the AHI the best possible word count for dictionary making and other school uses listed above. The question is impossible to answer without studies based on other samplings of context and definitions of "a word." According to the authors, "the substrata (of text) the corpus represents is the elementary education system of the U.S." (Grades 3-9, ages about 8-14 or 15). This statement can be questioned because the AHI corpus is so largely a standard graded textbook vocabulary, although library and other materials were also sampled. Today the purchase, shelving, and the use of instructional media is rapidly changing. For a period of years the textbook tradition has been giving way to wider, more flexible use of instructional materials, while ungraded and multiple-use of school readers and other textbooks has gained momentum. Furthermore, today a wide range of printed materials other than texts is used for studies in all curriculum areas at all grade levels. Elementary pupils make extensive use of reference materials and library books for study projects. Formal graded texts represent only one segment of printed instructional material to which school children are exposed. Today's study materials include a wide array of leaflets, pamphlets, brochures, clippings and handouts, often locally prepared. A relatively limited selection of juvenile fiction, periodicals, and non-fiction is represented in the AHI corpus.

Exploration of the AHI suggests shortages in some areas and topics. The word *flyer* is surprisingly rare, 14 usages, *flyers*, 4; *airman*, 10. With the overuse of *he*, the lists appear to be short on sports, hobbies, recreation and modern technological terms of interest to youngsters. The word Kodak does not appear in the list.

My preference would have been for a separation of texts in the skill subjects: spelling, mathematics,

composition, grammar, reading drills, shop, from texts and library materials in the content areas of the curriculum, would have been preferable. What about spelling? In modern schools the assumption is that the meanings of the words to be spelled are already known because the use of spelling is for writing, e.g. *ambassador* or *blizzard*.

The textbooks sampled included more school reader series, both basal and supplementary, than other texts. Due to controlled increases of vocabulary, these books show restricted word-count frequencies. For this reason there should be separate tabulations of school reader vocabularies.

A shortened AHI consisting only of whole words that are meaningful, phonemic units of speech, omitting all the hyphenated word parts, digital numerals, acronyms, and other non-word symbols would be advantageous.

### **Hyphenated Words in the AHI**

Hyphenation of words on a page or in a column of print serves to equalize line length. Examination of typical school books shows that the number of hyphenated words on a page increases as line length decreases and longer words become more numerous. Hyphenation is rare in lower grade reading materials, but more frequent in upper grade textbooks with two columns to a page, and in periodicals and newspapers.

The breaks between words produce word particles that may or may not be identical with whole words, e.g. *so-cial*, *be-gin*, *care-less*, *both-ered*. Compound words: *sailboat*, *postman*, *oilwell*, each contain two separate words.

In AHI apparently all hyphenated words in the text samples were recorded as two separate word particles rather than as whole items. Although the proportion of such words in the text was undoubtedly minimal, recording word parts in the frequency counts could produce spurious over-frequency of some words. For example, *hood* can be a head covering or the terminal syllable of *childhood*; *less* may be a quantitative term or the final syllable of *priceless*.

Here are some of the word endings produced by hyphenation listed in AHI: *ing*, *ed*, *er*, *ly*, *est*, *tion*, *ions*, *ness*, *ent*, *ment*, *sion*, *ance*, *et*, *ity*, *ible*, *ner*, *ers*, *ious*, *ite*, *ory*, *ter*, *ting*, *tious*, *logy*, *ish*.

Hyphenated word fore-parts are harder to identify since few items in AHI have hyphen marks.

Items in this class are: *ab*, *aw*, *con*, *de*, *dis*, *ef*, *en*, *ex*, *im*, *inter*, *mis*, *mak*, *pre*, *pres*, *pro*, *re*, *si*, *sub*, *syn*, *trans*, *um*, *un*.

Without checking the text samples, it would be impossible to determine how the tallying of separate hyphenated parts affects the frequencies for some words.

### **Other Vocabulary Lists**

School people are certain to want print-outs of selected words from AHI, the commonest 1000, 4000, etc. Also, new computerized lists such as the vocabulary of a far wider grade range, semantic counts of varied word meanings, the specialized vocabularies of separate school subjects, regional materials and wide-ranging literary juvenilia. The possibilities are infinite with the combination of computer technology and human intelligence. The AHI authors have shown the way in this promising development.

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 pp17,18 in the printed version*]

## **8. For Beauty in Speech by Dianna Adler\***

\*As told to the reporter for *The South African Digest*.

The beauty of the spoken word – whilst the truth of this description is often brought home by orators and actors on the stage, it is a truth which seldom concerns the man in the street. He uses speech as the means of communication with his neighbour, and is content if his neighbour understands his message. His vocabulary is obtained from books and his environment, and there is too little opportunity to use words effectively. To do this, teaching must start at school, and teachers in South Africa are now learning how to make children apply these words properly and freely before teaching them to read and write.

But we will be creating the wrong impression by implying that the pupil should be *made* to express himself. An adult is hesitant when asked to speak before an audience, and so are many children. The "secret" behind this new method of instruction, or guidance, is to make the child feel free to speak. The pupil should be encouraged to want to speak and share his experiences with others. The keyword in this new system is stimulation.

In introducing teachers to the new language syllabus, the Johannesburg College of Education invited Mrs. Dianna Adler, who has lectured on this method in Britain and Australia, to demonstrate and lecture on her methods of helping children towards more effective speech.

The first of these methods is acting out imaginary situations to stimulate the child to physical and oral, activity. Discussion follows the telling of a story, pertinent questions encouraging full answers. In this way the pupil is helped to develop his powers of imagination, observation and initiative. As effective speech is a two-way process, the child is first taught to listen, then to speak. Cooperation and courtesy are always given, and expected.

Oral language lessons, often in the form of games, is another method to help the child to achieve effective communication. Each game has a specific aim, such as accuracy of retelling, learning to give a message, and observing less superficially.

Poetry speaking is the third method towards effective speech. The teacher should guide the child towards an appreciation of poetry, which is a most difficult use of language. Here again, compulsion is avoided by giving the child a choice between a number of poems. The class is then divided into groups so that each pupil may participate in speaking and learning a poem. The child is taught to reflect the poet's ideas, and he is guided in this by the teacher and his group.

Another part of this work is speech exercises. The aim of these is not always obvious to the children. The child repeats sounds in imitation of animals and machines, and thereby exercising his vocal chords and speech muscles. While he must be taught to project his voice, to encourage effective speaking, he must realise that it is not achieved by shouting. This also applies to the

teacher, for it is possible to be audible without being intelligible.

Throughout all teaching the speech of the teacher is of paramount importance, as it acts as a model for the children. The teacher, by inspiring the child to think, talk, and discuss a subject, helps him to become an individual who first feels, thinks, then speaks. Through working with language, the whole child is developed. He becomes sensible and confident, and can cope more easily with the inside and the outside world.

The teacher should stimulate interest in the work by conveying her enthusiasm. Every lesson must be planned towards stimulating the child to activity, either thoughtfully or audibly. It is, of course, important for the pupil to speak unaffectedly. The pupil must be guided towards speech for a real purpose, and he will use it with confidence in later life.

The new *Primary School English Syllabus* emphasises that to apply these methods of speech work, the teacher will have to become reoriented towards two-way communication. Answering is just as important as posing questions. However, special training in this method of teaching is not essential. Once the teacher feels the importance and realises the value of the new methods, he is in a position to implement them. For although it is not given to all of us to bring home the beauty of the spoken word, we can be stimulated to speak effectively at all times. The future of their jobs may depend upon this.

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 pp18–20 in the printed version*]

## 9. Our Readers Write Us

### Printing and Phonetics

Dear Mr. Tune:

by Ivor Darreg

My last visit to the library showed that they still are continuing to acquire books on language at an amazing rate, considering how short on funds they claim to be. Someone must be doing research who requires the downtown library rather than the universities.

Kantner & West's Phonetics-revised edition of 1960, is one of their latest. This has passages in IPA including normal texts and nonsense-words for dictation and practice of unusual combinations of sounds.

They also have Oxford Univ. Press, 1971, anthology of selections on phonetics and orthography and spelling reform by Henry Sweet. Two versions of Bell's *Visible Speech* are used, not merely cited, and almost all the published roman-alphabet systems that he knew about.

The question of digraphs is gone into very thoroly, anticipating most of what has been said since then.

The main changes since then are that hand-setting of type is out of style now, which means that inverted letters are no longer so easy to print; and the typewriter coming into use means that italic letters become underlining (and therefore a diacritic) and diacritics become far more practical than

new letters.

That might change again with all the new electronic printing processes – the so-called "non-impact" methods in particular. They have reduced costs tremendously and in addition, freed the innovator so he can use any symbols he wants.

I have just encountered a new situation with regard to ligatures. A couple of recent German paperbacks printed by some kind of photsetter were brought here, and it turns out that the f-ligatures make themselves! That is, the kerned f *overlaps* certain following characters and fuses into a ligature, even when that ligature would not be available in ordinary type. There are many words in German where unusual combinations occur: aufheben, treffbar, Aufklärung, ungefähr (in this last the kern on the f overlaps but does not completely overshadow the first dot over the a-umlaut). Often the machine does not space enough so that the serifs on ll fuse, for instance. They are beginning to use a similar machine in this country, which also fuses f with certain following letters, but not in quite the same way. Anyway the phenomenon suggests that someone could devise deliberately-overhanging characters to get more mileage out of an alphabet. Not quite the i/t/a principle but second cousin to it.

Recent issue of *Psychology Today* magazine contains an article on "speed reading" with some unusual typographical "illustrations." I found it only by accident – I was at a branch library where I seldom go. The article is intended to be a blistering debunking of the popular courses in speed reading, such as Evelyn Wood's Reading Dynamics. I know a couple of people who took that course three years ago and who are not *that* disillusioned with it. They complain about the promotional methods and salesmen rather than the method itself.

The point that might be of interest to you is what the author of the debunking article has to say about inhibiting of subvocalizing when reading. That is one of the Reading Dynamics Course's obsessions – that all incipient or rudimentary signs of speaking while reading be completely suppressed. The author of the article disagrees.

The quarrel, then, would seem to hinge on a point crucial to phonic and spelling questions: Is written language a grouping of symbols for sounds or just a peculiar set of visual Gestalten preferably apprehended as Chinese ideograms? Thus the phonic-vs.-whole-word argument is recast in another form here.

Meanwhile the speed-reading courses are being promoted in Europe as well as here and the advertizing gets more and more high-pressure and blatant. You are more likely to find the magazine *Psychology Today* in a branch library than in the main one.

Latest *Electronic News Weekly* carried a brief article about the surprises encountered by a Harvard group when they visited mainland Chinese computer people – they seem to be ahead of the Russians in some respects and also there was a very brief mention of voice-recognition research. This seems odd because recognizing the "tones" of Chinese would be very difficult indeed. (They are rises and falls of pitch, not absolute pitches, so the usual filters would not help to recognize them.

**Yours, Ivor, Los Angeles, Calif.**

## The International Aspects

Dear Mr. Tune:

Harold C. Luth

I would like to suggest

1. That your President of the U.S.A. be asked to issue an invitation to the Prime Ministers of each English-speaking nation to send representatives to a conference in U.S.A.- to discuss how English can best be simplified, with special emphasis on making it more phonetic, with the view to hastening the adoption of Simplified English, as a universal means of communication; and that such conference set up an executive for the purpose of taking the necessary steps to carry out the advice and recommendations of the conference.
2. That the U.S.A. sponsor a resolution to the U.N. "That all nations be invited to take steps to simplify their respective languages, and make them more phonetic." No. 2, if passed, would act as a bolster to no. 1.
3. That a company which is about to publish a new edition of a small dictionary, be invited to publish the suggested phonetic alternative of words, which are not spelled as they are pronounced, as an alternative.

The far-flung English Speaking Union has a policy of extending the use of English in foreign countries. The U.S. section should be asked to assist you in getting the suggested conference.

Prince Phillip is the President of the British section of the English Speaking Union.

You might find you can get the English Speaking Union to sponsor the conference. That would be fine.

Hoping for some international aspects to this spelling reform movement,

I am, yours truly,

**Harold C. Luth, N. Caulfield, Vic., Australia.**

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §6.11 p105 in the printed version*]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 p19 in the printed version*]

**Quo Vadis.**

**Dear Newell:**

**Kingsley Read**

Accept my belated thanks for the Summer Number with the Reading University's Press handout as front page news. Nice of you. I'm happy to say the exhibition has been continued until October. Evidently with some interest. And here let me tell you that the *typography* of the Shaw Alphabet (in a setting of the Gettysburg Address) was the Reading University's interest. It excited their Typography Unit.

I have tried at least four times to suggest a program of action for your consideration. I have given it up – as too reasonable for an unreasoning world. You therefore have my sympathy.

Your own patience seems wearing thin. *Vide p. 11*, Ed. comment: "Apparently it is out of fashion to cut the Gordian Knot." And the apt (tho not universally true) space filler on p. 19: "Every creative act is a sudden cessation of stupidity." Good for you!

No doubt your readers and subscribers are about 98% teachers or educational authorities. They are steeped in tradition. They neither can nor really wish to do more than palliate bad spelling. They seem to want a minimum of "progress" and no full cure. I won't go so far as to say they would be out of work if spelling were automatic, variable from t.o. so long as it remained immediately intelligible to all English speakers, methodic enough to need no sustained teaching.

The truth is, few of your contributors have had the international correspondence to read and write phonemically that has come my way, serving to establish beyond possible doubt that we can communicate much more rapidly than we are accustomed to and with no chance of misunderstanding. Teachers are at bottom shaky believers in phonemic spelling. The will, the drive, is lacking for its success. Even i.t.a. (which is no cure) meets this disbelief or, worse, opposition by school staff. I have seen it and heard it volubly. *Faith is the prime essential.*

Meanwhile, there is from teachers and "researchers" (God save the Mark!) the sort of second- or third-hand repetition of difficulties, mostly obvious, which assume continuance of using 52 characters (small & CAPITALS) digraphically instead of 40 characters capable of true phonemic spelling. The assumption is the basis of one article after another, in one issue after another. And I beg you to consider your own SPB dedication – "to find the causes of difficulties in learning reading and spelling."

The one cause, and the one cure, is well established: Non-digraphic sound-spelling is the cure. Who doubts it?

No-one pretends that "sudden cessation of stupidity" is possible in spelling for public use. The breakdown will be gradual, and only less stupid. But it must *aim at* becoming mono-graphic, and not digraphic sound-spelling.

I have wondered whether the easiest and best first step is the elimination of the capital alphabet, using only a dotted 'name-sign (mr. 'newell 'w. 'tune) to distinguish proper names. The survival of capitals to begin sentences is no less ornamental than when they were fancy coloured letters in a manuscript. Capitals have no spelling function whatever.

When this is done, phonemic spelling can resort to a real and different sound value assigned to 17

or more former capitals. Men of belief in phonemic spelling can type, print, as well as write and read phonemically and intelligently. Practical spelling tests can be widespread, with consequent faith in results. You could print, first one page, later half of each issue, in such a 40-letter alphabet so that readers could see how intelligible are spellings which do not agree with their own speech habits. Shakespeare, Bacon, Queen Elizabeth I and the Pilgrim Fathers only cared to be precisely understood. How a word was spelled was nothing to them. (This is not to recommend diverse spellings as a virtue in itself or even ultimately likely in the common words which are 90% of our writings).

Fortunately, a mixture of upper-with-lower-case lettering is so aesthetically abhorrent that a re-styling of the additional characters – or better still, of the whole alphabet to be simpler – would be demanded for any but experimental spelling. Then the aesthetics and economics of alphabet-making could be taken seriously.

This brings me back to your dedication to "*learning* reading and spelling" when 30 or 40 times as long is spent in *using* reading and spelling (writing). Like the teaching profession, your dedication thus barks up the wrong tree. Won't you consider rededication: "to spelling phonemically without digraphs"?

The most "closed mind" knows perfectly well what the radical cure is; the conveniently "open mind" dodges away from taking a stand or advising action.

Easy for me to talk. Nevertheless, think it over. I do appreciate your giving your readers an opportunity to air their pet peeves and to discuss the issues.

Most sincerely, *Kingsley Read*, Abbots Morton, Worcester, United Kingdom (Eng.)

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### **My dear Kingsley:**

Your thought-provoking letter deserves an equally thoughtful reply. While it is true the learner will be using for the rest of his life what should take only a short time to acquire if the learning is made easy, we must not forget about the adults who so arduously acquired a proficiency in reading our T.O. They would object strongly to being forced to go back to school to learn a new system (with many new letters) which would look like Greek to them. Therefore, nearness to T.O. is an important reason for advocating a digraphic system of simple spelling.

To establish a new Augmented Roman Alphabet, just look at all the obstacles that must be faced -- as shown by the *Folly of Alphabet Reform*, by Benedictus Arnold, 3rd. If you can answer all these objections satisfactorily, then I'll listen more carefully as to how you expect all our present adults to change so completely their long-established reading and writing habits. In Turkey, that was possible because of two important conditions: They had a dictator who railroaded the act thru the legislature, and the good argument presented against the old Arabic system, that because of its difficulty of learning, only 9% were literate. So the other 89% did not have to unlearn anything.

Conditions here are just the opposite. Adults, of whom there are about 97% literate, would not readily give up their facility in reading and writing to embrace (and spend considerable time learning and gaining facility in) a new alphabet -- which would help them very little.

To strive for such a goal is as insurmountable as establishing a colony on the moon -- and just about as likely of attainment. We must be practical and accept a digraphic system, like World English,

which, while not perfect, is a goal of possible attainment. A 42 or 43 character system could be used as the fonetic key in a new dictionary of simplified spelling. Its use in this manner could greatly familiarize our adults with a new mono-grafic alfabet, which perhaps might be used in general printing in some time in the future.

Our readers come from all walks of life. Some are only interested in minor improvements in learning to read -- some are alfabetees. We strive to give something to please all.

Cordially,  
*Newell*

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### **An appeal to the English Teachers**

Dear Sir:

**by A. T. Kumarasawmy**

in re. the conventional spelling -- Spel(ing) bound!!

Children hav tu reed in between leters the sounds ov leters that ar simply not ther. They ar askd not to reed som leters which ar akchualy ther in words!

Som leters stand for diferent sounds in diferent words – that is, other than ther own in the alfabet. Children hav tu remember hundreds ov such words, failing which they hav tu riet speling impozishons.

Milions ov yeers at being spent thruout the English speaking world yeerly in memorizing the kunvenchunal speting or serching for it in dikshonaries, by the 500 milion English speakers -- eech meny thousand tiems thru-out lief -- even yeers after leeving primary skools. Bilions ov stashnery is being spent -- waisted -- yeerly.

Tu quote the words ov a few authorities, the konvenshonal speting is 'weird,' 'whimsikal,' 'inefektiv,' 'inkredibl,' 'antiquated,' 'kumbras,' and most inkonsistent. And yet the konvenshonal speling is being insisted upon tu reed and riet modern English making it difikult for children tu reed and riet most ov ther mother tung.

This is mayhem – an iluzhan!

The konvenshonal speling is a hardship, a barbarity, a handikap tu the langweej; a puzzl and a brain-strain tu children and a lief-long trubl tu literets.

In the konvenshonal speling ov meny words (16th senchury) spelt fonetikaly wer left out and most ov the words wer formd after word-patens ov som foren langwejes which wer themselvs haf-fonetik, thus borrowing the speling trubl ov other langwejes! Meny words kulid hav ben formd -- fonetikaly spelt -- with the availabl 26 leters ov the English alfabet.

The speling difikulty may dubl itself in the next 30 yeers -- tu trubl about a thousand milion English speakers in 2000 A.D. The langweej wuhd hav absorbd thousands ov words mor by then. If thees words wer tu be formd in the konvenshonal way, it wuhd rezult in mor speling trubl. Langwejes having fonetik alfabet hav no such speling trubl (almost al langwejes in India hav fonetik alfabet).

The eezy way to lern a langweej is with fonetik alfabet – and English is no exsepshun. English belongs tu the Indo-European langweej family; Al that is required is tu ad a few mor leters tu maik it fonetik. If eny atempt is maid to reform the speling with 26 leters, it wil end in failru. But if eny

new letters were adopted the adult literates may not welcome it. Hence, the only way is to reform some of the letters of the English alphabet (besides, no radical changes have been made in the conventional spelling of words so far as possible). A difficult, time-consuming task indeed!

The spelling trouble may not be much individually, but in the aggregate, it is a colossal problem. It will become a super-colossal problem in the future. Hence there is urgent necessity to adopt phonetic spelling. Some may say that they have no spelling trouble and that the spelling trouble is exaggerated. It is not the general's but the soldier's boot which pinches!

A few others may say that all the books so far published may become obsolete if phonetic letters are adopted. Actually, the adult literates will read as usual all these books for decades to come. Children who learn English with the phonetic spelling can also read them without much difficulty. A large number of reprints of important and classical books appear yearly – in cheap paper-backs. Publishers also do not keep large stocks anticipating sales after years. There can be no more difficulty in adopting phonetic letters than in the introduction of the Metric system. Above all the interests of the children of this generation and those generations to come should count more than anything else.

A few hours practice will make it clear how smoothly English words flow -- written with phonetic letters. A few more hours practice will make it very undesirable to go back to the conventional spelling of English words.

This is an appeal to the English teachers; -- first for the children's right to learn the easy way with a phonetic alphabet – to first for the freedom from the life-long spelling trouble.

**Yours faithfully, A. T. Kumarasawmy, Malleswaram, Bangalore 3, S. India**

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### **Teaching Devices**

**Dear Sir:**

**Carl E. Crona**

I've received your name and address from Dr. Helen Bonnema. The enclosed \$2.00 are for the previous two issues of S.P.B. Spelling reform, proposed alphabets, phonetic typewriters, have become an obsession with me!

Thinking about the possibility of phonetic writing instruments staggers the imagination! Countries with phonetic orthographies would be able to use (maybe are using) the instrument as a teaching device. Voice from tape recorder fluently, correctly would pronounce words, syllables, sounds of letters, digraphs, diphthongs, to a sound-activated writing device whose writing material would be projected on to a movie screen. Students could speak to it to realize whether or not they were pronouncing correctly. Teachers could transliterate T.O. in a matter of seconds! Publishers, translators, others connected with wording, writing would utilize such a device.

But what about countries with non-phonetic orthographies! From seeing the *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, I can see a glimmer of hope! Then maybe Americans will someday be able to use that phonetic writer.

I didn't know that there was such an active interest in spelling reform. Step by step reform is a good idea. Step one, eliminating the useless silent letters, would greatly encourage the young reader and speller.

**Monte Vista, Colo.**

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## How Many Symbols?

Dear Sir:

Claus C. Gerber

One of the features of our traditional orthography which I believe has not been stressed as much as it should be, is the English literary notation.

Not only the average person, but linguists and educators seem to think of the English notation as consisting of the English alphabet only. Altho the English alphabet of 26 letters is a very important part of that notation, it constitutes less than a tenth of the 280 letter combinations used as spellings in the commonly written English language. (Ed. note: 550 according to Godfrey Dewey)

The 26 alphabetical letters and the 5 digraphic consonant symbols make up the group of primary symbols. These 31 primary symbols are used in the traditional orthography to spell all the English speech sounds; but in spite of that we use 250 secondary symbols to spell the same sound. Of the 250 secondary symbols, only two (*e* and *n*) are single letters. The other 248 are multi-letter symbols, containing 2 to 5 letters, each. Because these 250 secondary symbols spell only the sounds also spelled by the 31 primary symbols, all 250 are superflous symbols within the traditional notation.

There are, of course, many other cogent reasons for the advocacy of spelling reform, but this superfluity of literary symbols is one that deserves more consideration.

Kansas City, Mo.