

# Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society

No.23—1998/1

## The Society

Founded 1908, the SSS works to modernize English spelling for the benefit of learners and users worldwide. It currently has members and associates on four continents, focuses research from many relevant disciplines, and campaigns to educate and influence public and political opinion.

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## The Journal

The *Journal* normally appears twice yearly and is edited by Christopher Upward, School of Languages & European Studies, Aston University, Birmingham

To submit material for publication, see guidelines inside back cover.

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## 1. Editorial

### Chris Upward

#### Progress on the dictionary route

Perhaps least explored of all the possible routes to spelling reform described in the SSS's *Principles and Practicalities* leaflet is the dictionary route. Initially, that means persuading dictionaries to recommend the systemically better or best spelling forms among the thousands of alternatives that currently bedevil written English. Thus *yogurt* would be unequivocally recommended in preference to *yoghurt* or *yoghourt*.

Lately, however, some progress on that route is evident. First, American member Cornell Kimball (Item 4) has gained lexicographical acknowledgment that *thru* is sometimes used in printed, edited matter. Second, Pam Peters of Macquarie University, Australia, together with Cambridge University Press and *English Today*, has launched the Langscape survey of English usage, starting with variant spellings involving E (eg, *ageing* or *aging*?); all SSS members have been invited to support the SSS response to this. Third, the American Literacy Council reports (p19) that it has received from Random House a list of 4,000 alternative spellings in one of their dictionaries. It should be a challenge to the SSS to analyze that list as it has done with the 61 Langscape alternatives.

#### Running the SSS

The recent spurt in SSS membership and activity is demanding more of the mainly London-based committee than it can now easily perform. Hence some promising proposals from members for new activities have not been embraced with the alacrity they deserved. In response to this situation, the Committee is now seeking a part-time paid assistant. But the Internet offers other ways of transcending present limitations, showing how distance need be no obstacle to participation in SSS affairs: Allan Campbell edits the SSS newsletter and serves on the Committee from New Zealand, and other members with email may like to consider whether they could contribute from afar. On the other hand, the Society's work inescapably has a local dimension too. Most institutions (eg, the media, publishers, public authorities) that we may try to target are firmly rooted in one country or another (UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc), and co-ordination of members in our several countries through national, regional or local subcommittees is a prerequisite to approaching them.

#### New CS leaflet

Distributed with JSSS 23 is a thoroughly updated and largely rewritten new edition of the [Cut Spelling introductory leaflet](#). It takes account of 6 years of further experience and development of CS since the previous leaflet appeared.

#### Features of this issue

Kingsley Read is remembered for his design of the Shaw Alphabet, as displayed in the dual alphabet edition of *Androcles and the Lion*, which was distributed until recently as part of the SSS 'New Member's Pack'. Yet he has not figured prominently as a personality in the annals of spelling reform, and there is a demand for more information. Thus the SSS from time to time receives inquiries, for instance asking how to contact him, tho in fact he died a quarter of a century ago. In *JSSS* 23 we are privileged to revive his work in the form of a paper he wrote in 1972, which we are able to reprint thanks to Professor Michael Twyman and the Shaw Alphabet archive at Reading (pronounced *Redding*) University. The Shaw Alphabet may never have been part of the mainstream of thinking about a practical spelling reform for English, but it remains a daring monument of notable typographical and systemic elegance to the potential for a genuinely 'optimal' (*pace* Noam Chomsky) writing system for English.

The articles by Valerie Yule (Item 3) and Cornell Kimball (Item 4) examine two rather different pragmatic approaches to spelling reform. Valerie applies her insights as a psychologist to explore the potential for spontaneous simplification of spelling by countless individuals on the Internet, where spelling standards are already observed to be more relaxed than in traditional writing on paper; and then relates this to the need for systematization and standardization. Cornell draws lessons from the successes and failures of previous 20th century attempts to implement simpler spellings and suggests how we might best proceed now in the light of those experiences.

As an object lesson in handling the controversies inevitably generated by spelling reform, in Item 7 we summarize in some detail (with full translation of the concluding section) Gerhard Augst's pamphlet refuting some eleventh-hour objections to the current German spelling reform. This historic event repays careful study of both its practical and theoretical aspects. It deserves the plaudits of spelling reformers everywhere for many reasons: its systematic approach, its willingness to compromise combined with the determination to overcome a long series of difficulties and obstacles, and, perhaps most impressive of all, the efficiency with which, despite all public controversy, it is being jointly implemented in the German-speaking countries (tho a last-minute hurdle in the Federal Constitutional Court still has to be surmounted). It is a model from which English has everything to learn, however different the circumstances.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J23, 1998/1, pp3–7 in the printed version]*

## **2. Sound-writing 1892–1972: George Bernard Shaw and a modern alphabet Kingsley Read**

We are grateful to Michael Twyman, Professor of Typography and Graphic Communication at the University of Reading, for permission to reprint this memoir which was written for an exhibition in the university library in 1972. It subsequently appeared along with the photograph of Kingsley Read taken in the late 1940s, in 1983, in the catalogue to the Shaw Alphabet archive in the University's Department of Typography and Graphic Communication. We also have to thank Read's daughter, Mrs Mavis Mottram, for her encouragement in reviving her father's work. Subheadings and endnotes are added. The SSS previously published items on the Shaw Alphabet in its Newsletter (Bob Brown, [April 1991](#), Item 2) and in [JSSS 18 95/1](#) (Alice Coleman, 1995, Item 6).



### **1. Origins and advantages of written speech**

Neither words nor alphabets have always been used in records. Cave men recorded hunting exploits pictorially. The earliest crude symbols to be written were unrelated to words; they were 'pictographs', simple standardised drawings, hundreds of which were needed to convey imprecisely a very limited range of ideas. With more precision, Chinese writing employed thousands of 'ideographs', which only experts could read and write.

Then, 3000 or more years ago, came the highly economical, easily applied, exactly meaningful, writing with 'alphabets'. Given readers who spoke the writer's language, a few graphic symbols (now called 'letters') could serve to represent the few basic sounds with which a whole language was spoken. Words became visible as well as audible. The Phoenician, Greek, Etruscan and Latin languages were adequately represented by as few as 22 to 25 letters.

Roman civilisation and the Roman church made Latin the international language of writers in Britain and throughout Europe for roughly 1500 years. Although by 1400 AD Chaucer and Wyclif were using a form of English, it was not the English we now speak. To the Latin alphabet a letter W had been added. Later, U and J became letters with sounds distinguished from those of V or I. But as Latin C, Q and X have sounds otherwise represented (by S or K or KS or GZ), only 23 of our 26 letters could serve us for sound-matching, even if used consistently in our spelling. As there are at least 40 significantly differing speech sounds employed in speaking English, we lack 17 single letters for single sounds. To write these 17 sounds by means of couplets, triplets or quads of letters (such as SH, THE, CH, WH, TCH, OWE, AWE, EIGH, OUGH) is ambiguous, unmethodical and wasteful. While we continue to use the Latin alphabet with only three added letters, spelling largely depends on memory, not on method. An alphabet of some 40 or more simpler characters would eliminate the waste of labour and materials caused by our traditional spelling irregularities. Writing and printing would occupy far less space. It is this resulting *economy*, still not fully appreciated, that Bernard Shaw grasped and fostered. His aim was not conceived as educational but utilitarian.

## 2. Sweet's approach to a desirable modern alphabet

The story told in this exhibition begins with an unusual kind of alphabet concerned with economies in writing, published in 1892 by Henry Sweet of Oxford, a great authority on phonetics, the science which analyses speech into its few significantly different sorts of sound. Sweet's analysis of spoken English into some 40 sorts of sound was not original. Isaac Pitman among others had used 40 sound-sorts matched by as many characters, both for an abbreviated shorthand and for longhand (romanic) sound-writing.

The most distinctive feature of Sweet's *Current Shorthand* was that his characters always kept their appointed place on the horizontal 'writing line'; whereas Pitman's and other fast shorthands, by joining ends to beginnings in any sequence of characters, makes words wander variously from a ruled or imagined writing line — a wandering much exaggerated where long words are fully spelled. For typewriting and type-set printing the aligned sequence of lettering is essential.

Sweet's lettering, then, conforms to the traditional three main kinds of characters: Shorts, which stand on the imagined writing line with their tops aligned on an 'upper parallel' (like orthodox letters *a e m n o u*); Talls, which (like *b d f h k l*) stand on the writing line but ascend well above the height of Shorts; and Deeps, which (like *g p q y*) are top-aligned with the Shorts on the upper parallel but descend well below the writing line. This is a neat and familiar manner of writing: Talls and Shorts keep an imaginary writing line well defined, while Deeps and Shorts equally preserve an imaginary upper parallel.

Less happily, Sweet employed two more categories of lettering: one so enlarged as to be both Tall and Deep (like a script letter *f*), the other of less height than the Short letters: neither the too large nor the too little letters serving to preserve either parallel's level at all. Furthermore, Sweet's own writing distorted the small letters in order to link them fore and aft with larger letters. He held the too common belief that for fast writing the writer may only lift the pen between words.

In using Short, Tall and Deep lettering, Sweet conformed to tradition. Quite apart from any use of abbreviated spelling, he gained speed by enlarging his alphabet to spell all single sounds with single letters. That is, he used no 'digraphic' sound-spelling such as TH, SH, IE, AY. Moreover, Sweet's characters are among the simplest graphic shapes known to geometry: they are mostly single penstrokes, without dottings, crossings or 'diacritical' markings such as dictionaries use to define a letter's pronunciation. Such markings would involve pen-lifting and hand movements additional to any required in advancing from one letter to the next. Sweet's alphabet served to spell, to write, (and could have served just possibly to type) with simpler, as well as fewer, letters than are used in orthodox English. It was in this respect that it provided a crude model worth refining as recommended by Shaw: not to serve still as shorthand, but as an all-purpose modern alphabet.

Dr Abraham Tauber's book, *George Bernard Shaw on language* (London, Peter Owen 1965, p30) states that Shaw first met Sweet as early as 1879. It is well known that Sweet became in some measure a prototype for Henry Higgins, society speech trainer, in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, written in 1912, the year of Sweet's death.

### 3. Shaw's appeal for a wholly new alphabet

Shaw habitually drafted his own writings almost fully spelled in the 40-letter alphabet of Pitman shorthand. He may well have found this unsatisfactory for re-reading and revision. It could spell sounds unambiguously, having an adequate number of letters. But as its script was unaligned, it certainly could not serve also for typing and type-set print. Moreover, Shaw was very knowledgeable and interested in fine typography. At the age of 85, he appealed to "type designers or artist-calligraphers, or whatever they call themselves, to design an alphabet capable of representing the sounds of the following string of nonsense quite unequivocally without using two letters to represent one sound or making the same letter represent different sounds by diacritical marks." The nonsense test-piece was intended to cover all English sound-sorts and to discover designers who truly recognised them. He then went on to recommend Sweet's alphabet as a suitable point of departure for his designer (see pp26–27 of Shaw's preface to *The Miraculous Birth of Language*, by Professor Richard Albert Wilson, London, Dent, 1941).

This Preface, dated February 1941 but not published till the autumn, gives Shaw's most precise instructions, though his public campaign opened with a long and important letter to *The Times* of 14 April 1941. Only years later was the letter to *The Times* made known to me, but while I was myself experimenting with a sound-spelling alphabet, my attention was drawn to Shaw's appeal in the Preface.

How many others responded seriously to his appeal I was never able to discover, though I tried. Shaw dissuaded me from contact with or influence by others. But from acknowledgement postcards he had printed, it would seem that there was no lack of misdirected proposals and gratuitous advice; for there he stated concisely what he sought and what he repudiated. Especially notable is his dismissal of all "schemes spelling English phonetically with the old ABC". He sought a wholly new alphabet — "to be used and taught concurrently with the old alphabet until one or the other proves the fitter to survive". He would not consider tampering with orthodox English spelling or its traditional alphabet: these were to be left undisturbed — and unimproved.

What — beyond courage — qualified Shaw to demand a new English alphabet? Though an Irishman to the last, he certainly possessed authority on the pronunciation of English. From 1926 to 1939 he served on the BBC's Spoken English Advisory Committee. When Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate and first Chairman of the Committee, died in 1930, Shaw succeeded him as Chairman for the next ten years. The Committee included several exponents of phonetic writing. Bridges himself had with the help of the calligrapher Edward Johnston, produced a large and graceful alphabet. Daniel Jones [\[1\]](#) and A Lloyd James [\[2\]](#), both expert in phonetics, later became professors. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson was, among other things, the best Hamlet of his day. Logan Pearsall Smith, with Robert Bridges, inaugurated the Society for Pure English.

By 1936, the Committee had grown to 24 members, of whom seven were senior academics. Other advisers included well known speakers such as Lady Cynthia Asquith, Kenneth Clark and Alistair Cooke. It is therefore not surprising that Shaw developed a keen interest in creating an alphabet fully allied to speech. His association, on this Committee, with phonetic experts must surely have helped him to crystallize his own ideas for a modern all-purpose alphabet.

#### 4. Read's early attempts

What were my own qualifications to further Shaw's intentions? It may be enough to say that in my teens I went with a scholarship to Birmingham School of Art and there learnt lettering and designing under the headship of Robert Catterson Smith, a one-time Kelmscott craftsman; and that between the wars I designed and commercially supplied large lettering in various fashions and materials. On the phonetic side I had taken a course of speech training, and had studied several phonetic alphabets, including those of Bridges and Sweet. If I was particularly qualified at all, it was in having some practical experience, both graphic and phonetic. When, around Christmas 1941, I read Shaw's Preface, I was 54, old enough to back keen interest with long perseverance.

After a month's preparation I submitted to Shaw

- (a) a tentative alphabet of 47 letters
- (b) reasons for choosing them, and
- (c) their transcription of his test-piece of nonsense.

To these I added

- (d) a sheet of variously styled lettering to show how the alphabet might be adapted in writing, printing or display, to scribble a note or engrave a monument, to print books or make neon signs.

His printed acknowledgment postcard, dated 27 January 1942, bears an exceedingly kindly, almost excited footnote. He showed my first crude attempt to others. To my repeated enquiries for advice from him or others helping him, he only replied that I was better left to my own devices. I am aware of two or three cases in which he subsequently commended to recognized authorities my grasp of his intentions.

At his desire, in 1943 I prepared a manual with examples, entitled *Sound-writing: a method and an economy in spelling*. Shaw found it "admirably clear", though he disliked some "graceless lettering". His belief that "for handwriting the words must be written without lifting the pen" is one I cannot share. Schools no longer require it. His own signature to this letter shows three harmless liftings of the pen in his name "Bernard".

This letter begins with advice to consult Mr I J (later Sir James) Pitman [\[3\]](#), of shorthand and publishing fame, whose experience of phonetic alphabets is unrivalled. Mr Pitman dissuaded me from immediate publication and encouraged me in further improvements of the manual's alphabet.

#### 5. Developments before Shaw's death

In the autumn of 1944 Shaw announced in *The Author* (quarterly journal) his intention to make a Will promoting a new alphabet. He had already in a letter dated 19 July 1944, told Pitman "...so I wash my hands of the business, and leave the field open to you to do the job with a grant in aid from the Public Trustee..." It is certain that no abler and better situated co-ordinator could have been chosen to see the task through, even if Pitman's personal leanings were more educational, less specifically utilitarian, than Shaw's.

Three years later, in 1947, Mr Pitman and Dr Daniel Jones visited Shaw to urge upon him the aims of the Simplified Spelling Society. Their reception is related fully by Pitman in his introduction to Tauber's *Shaw on Language*. Their Society's commitment to using none but our accustomed 26 letters of the alphabet — and consequently to digraphic spelling of sounds — was anathema to Shaw: he was adamant against it.

The Will, finally signed on 12 June 1950, does not specifically exclude the use of familiar letters of the alphabet, but it was evident to the Trustee from Shaw's published writings that he had intended the use of a wholly new set of between 40 and 50 characters. If further evidence were needed, it exists in Shaw's private correspondence quoting my grasp of his intentions as a guide.

The Will was wilfully made in language more Shavian than legal in so far as its Clauses 35–38 dealt with the alphabet. Beginning with Sub-section 35(1), it calls in effect for some estimate of the world's man-hours wasted in writing and printing English with an alphabet of 26 instead of 40 or more letters; and a valuation in money of those wasted hours. This impossible task was entrusted to Mr P A D MacCarthy who, having investigated, could only report that no reliable data exists for any meaningful estimate. Sub-section 35(2), also in Mr MacCarthy's care, deals with transliteration of *Androcles*, which presented a few problems mentioned in his Appendix to *Androcles*.

Although Shaw's letter to *The Times*, his Preface to Wilson's book, and his private correspondence refer explicitly to an alphabet for printing from type as well as for script, the Will makes no definite provision either for or against using printers' type in *Androcles*. Clause 35(2) provided funds "to employ an artist-calligrapher to fair-copy the transliteration for reproduction by lithography, photography or any other method that may serve in the absence of printers' type". In brief, the Will permits, if necessary, a departure from normal letterpress printing. It was agreed that no such departure was necessary.

## **6. Subsequent developments**

Shaw died on 2 November 1950. It was not until royalties from *My Fair Lady* swelled the estate that his executor, the Public Trustee, could put into effect the Will's Clause 35 concerned with the alphabet. By then this Clause had been challenged and its validity had to be tested in the High Court. After a costly hearing, it was pronounced legally invalid.

An appeal being denied at first, Mr Pitman sought my help to implement Shaw's intentions without resort to his estate. One result worth mention was a leaflet showing the economy of letters and space made by my then proposed alphabet, compared with an orthodox type-setting. By taking the Lord's prayer as an example, the phonetic values of my lettering were evident without a key. Here I already used the alphabet which was destined to become a competition entry. However, largely by Pitman's exertions, the dispute was settled by allotting no more than £8,300 to execute Clause 35 relating to the alphabet.

## **7. Competition, discussion, and choice of alphabet**

Thereupon, the Trustee announced a world-wide competition to secure ideal designs for a Shaw Alphabet. Though this clearly reduced my own chance of formulating it, my previous work was not unknown to the Trustee who in January 1958 persuaded me to illustrate and discuss competition requirements on BBC's programme, *Panorama*.

Clause 6 of the Trustee's 'Advertisement M.4405.V' stated that "it is implicit in the Will and in Mr Shaw's writings" that the main object is "saving of labour ... a means of writing and printing the English language which will be more economical of the writer's time, of the paper and ink of the printer, and of transport and storage, yet convenience and ease in reading are of importance... Practical problems of typography will be taken into account". Clause 7 adds that "designs of



shorthand codes for verbatim reporting and designs for reforming the existing alphabet by addition of analogous letters will be disqualified".

Competitors had a year in which to prepare their alphabetic entries. I saw no reason to amend my Lord's prayer alphabet, nor to submit alternative entries. The Advertisement offered inconclusive counsels on sound-sorts to be represented. I hardly believed it possible to arrive at a perfect alphabet without finally pooling the wisdom of competitor(s) and judges.

In view of Shaw's stipulated speech model, "that recorded of His Majesty our late King George V", I went to Broadcasting House to have a number of the King's recordings played over to me. His pronunciations varied according to context as with all other speakers. I also went to type-founders — the Monotype Corporation — and consulted printers, becoming convinced that *Androcles* ought to be type-set, not reproduced from a calligrapher's fair-copy as the Will permitted "in the absence of printers' type". I wrote to Mr Pitman on 18 November 1958 that fair-copying "is superfluous. Worse, the very absence of type provides a gratuitous argument for opponents ... The Will provides for propaganda costs. The fait accompli is our best, most widely intelligible propaganda". His reply agreed: he too had taken stock of the possibilities.

My competition alphabet was accompanied by examples, type designs, and detailed reasons for sounds and characters chosen. It proved to be one of 467 entries, many of them from abroad. None met exactly the ideals of the judges. However, I found myself among four competitors sharing the honour and the prize. Our four entries are best compared as scripts, though hardly as typography, in renderings of the Lord's Prayer reproduced in a trade journal, *Print in Britain*.

Mr P A D MacCarthy, from Leeds University's Department of Phonetics, was undertaking a transcription of *Androcles* in the new alphabet as soon as one could be adapted and approved. He was therefore asked by the Trustee "to collaborate with one or all of the four designers mentioned... (see the Foreword to *Androcles*) to produce the best possible alphabet..." Various revisions were considered till finally each designer's latest attempt was re-written by a disinterested calligrapher for comparison. The selectors chose mine as closest to their requirements, discussed with me a few possible alternatives, and nominated me for appointment as designer responsible to the Trustee and his adviser. My letter of appointment is dated 19 July 1960.

### **8. The Shaw Alphabet in print and typewriting**

A month later, on 18 August, I brought to London the finished Shaw Alphabet. It was fully discussed with Mr Pitman and with Mr J T Harrison (of Stephen Austin and Sons, Hertford, who produced type and printed *Androcles*) and it was adopted by the Trustee. I then proceeded to make the die-cutting drawings — 30 times print size — in three distinct styles required for stage directions, the names of speakers, and the dialogue.

Mr MacCarthy was by this time transliterating the play while on secondment to Lahore University, Pakistan, and a good deal of printers' proof revision fell to me. New and old versions of the play were printed on facing pages, matching exactly line for line, without either over-running the other. The task of securing tolerable typographic spacing was not easy. An edition of 40 000 paperback copies was issued commercially by Penguin Books Ltd. Their refinements of typography in the orthodox version inspired me to emulate it in the new alphabet. Our joint result was chosen as one of the National Book League's 'best printed books of 1962'.

Apart from this Penguin commercial edition, the Trustee distributed gratis to all Head Public Libraries of Britain, the Commonwealth, North and South America, and to all National Libraries of the world, a total of some 13,000 hard-back copies which should still be available. [4] The Shaw Alphabet itself, and both editions of *Androcles*, were published on 20 November 1962, with a press conference and publicity on television.

No-one needs to know the new alphabet to see immediately that *Androcles* demonstrated a marked economy; for the lines of its orthodox text are exactly 50% wider than matching lines in the Shaw Alphabet. Normally, line-widths would not be shortened; but books in the new alphabet would occupy one-third fewer pages, using that much less type and ink; they would be lighter for handling, transport and shelving, and a good deal cheaper. Questioned in the press conference as to cost, Mr Harrison replied that his type-cutter and type-setter had used no unusual procedure or machine. Except for its novel letters, it was a perfectly normal type, normally printed.

It is also immediately clear that the new letters are consistent in their sound-writing. As to the economy in printing, rather less than half of it comes from single-letter representation of single sounds — ie from avoiding digraphs; more than half comes from simpler and narrower lettering.

Since that day, it cannot be said that alphabetic economy is technically 'impossible' — or even difficult. The fait accompli proves Shaw's point. A transliteration of part of Lincoln's Gettysburg address exhibits good typography in the Shaw Alphabet. An article on the new typography was commissioned by Indian Print and Paper, a Calcutta trade journal.

For my part I was determined to carry the accomplished evidence further — further than the Will specifically required. Throughout 1962 I had been preparing plans for a Shavian type-writer, and on propaganda grounds the Trustee accepted quotations obtained from Imperial Typewriters Ltd, Leicester. The special letters were cut for around £70 and thereafter a normal portable machine (44 keys, 88 characters) was available at the current catalogue price of £29. The Trustee provided Mr MacCarthy and myself with the first two such machines. The keyboard not only carried the Shaw Alphabet, numerals, punctuation marks and sundry signs: it retained 26 Roman capital letters for orthodox addressing of envelopes.

I used my Shavian typewriter to produce a quarterly journal called Shaw-script; for correspondents sought more reading practice than *Androcles* gave them. The original typescript was reduced and offset printed by Rank-Xerox Ltd, Birmingham.

## **9. Correspondence, evidence, and current developments**

We needed practical evidence that all sorts and conditions of persons, at home and abroad, can easily learn and write and spell with the Shaw Alphabet. Such evidence depended upon an organised correspondence invited by Sir James Pitman on page 16 of *Androcles*. By the time his invitation was published, he had become so fully engaged in other activities that he sent me an SOS. If correspondence was to be organised at all, I must do it.

I accepted the task with an entirely free hand, for it was possible that minor problems, unforeseeable by theory, might emerge from the alphabet's use by persons of all sorts, ages and dialects. A *Guide to Shavian Spellings* was prepared and I awaited results. Experience thus gained, being largely technical, is detailed elsewhere. Enough to say that Londoners, Scots, Americans, while raw beginners, regarded their personal speech as the 'proper' English, but were contentedly conforming in a matter of weeks to the printed spellings of *Androcles* and the

journal *Shaw-script*; for a ready conformity saves thought and meets readers' expectations. It was observed that unskilled or hasty scribblers wrote no less decipherably in the new alphabet, but that four of its characters tended to be malformed grotesquely.

After four years of handling correspondence it seemed clear to me that some graphic and phonetic changes in the alphabet would increase its already striking facilities. With this — possibly unique — practical experience to go on, it seemed a duty to implement it in a final alphabet, one differing even less from the now unalterable Shaw Alphabet than that had differed from Sweet's.

So, with help and encouragement from writers willing to test changes rigorously in circulated correspondence, I gradually evolved the 'Quickscript Alphabet'. Its manual, issued late in 1966, is in the British Museum Library, the Library of Congress and elsewhere, including Reading University Library (where the technicalities and history of these alphabets is documented).

Since early 1967 Quickscript has been used satisfactorily. Among those able to speak with equal experience of both Shaw-script and Quickscript are Professor Russell Graves of North Carolina University, who drafts his stage plays in Quickscript, and Mr E J Canty of Portsmouth, who was a fellow competitor in 1959. All who have experience of writing in both alphabets prefer Quickscript's facilities and its relative simplicity in sound-writing.

It is to be doubted whether the Sweet-Shaw-Read line of evolution can go much further. Its use is learnt with ease. It enables both script and print to be done with marked economies. If research establishes the greater efficiency of a modern alphabet in advance, another generation may see it "used and taught", as Shaw hoped, "concurrently with the old alphabet until one or the other proves the fitter to survive."

### Notes

- [1] President of the Simplified Spelling Society 1946–68.
- [2] A Lloyd James wrote the Preface to the 5th edition of the Simplified Spelling Society's *New Spelling* (1940).
- [3] President of the Simplified Spelling Society 1968–1972 and originator of the Initial Teaching Alphabet.
- [4] A total of 265 remaining copies were passed to the SSS in 1991, and have since been distributed mainly to members.

THE SHAW ALPHABET			
(Key for writers provided with <i>Androcles</i> )			
Double lines — between pairs show the relative height of Talls, Deeps, and Shorts. Wherever possible, finish letters rightwards; those starred * will be written upwards. Also see heading and footnotes overleaf.			
	Tall	Deep	
peep	ʃ	l	bib
tot	t	f	dead
kick	d	p	gag
fee	J	r	vow
thigh	θ	q	they
so	S	z	zoo
sure	ʃ	ʒ	meaSure
church	ʃ	ʒ	judge
yea	\	/	*woe
hung	h	g	ha-ha
	Short	Short	
loll	l	o	roar
mime*	ʃ	ʒ	nun
	Short	Short	
if	i	h	eat
egg	ʃ	ʒ	age
ash*	ʃ	ʒ	ice
ado*	ʃ	ʒ	up
on	ʃ	o	oak
wool	v	ʌ	ooze
out	<	>	oil
ah*	ʃ	ʒ	awe
are	ʃ	ʒ	or
air	ʃ	ʒ	err
array	ʃ	ʒ	ear
	Tall		
Ian	r	ʌ	yew

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[Valerie Yule: see [Bulletins, Anthology, Quarterly, Journals, Newsletters, Personal Views 10 & 16, Media, Books.](#)]

### 3. International English Spelling and the Internet

#### Valerie Yule

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Modified spelling in this article commences with an introductory minimal cutting of surplus letters, and extends later to moderate deletion and consistent spellings for /f/ and /j/.

#### Abstract

The present time of unfettered public experiment on the Internet is an unprecedented opportunity for world-wide testing and introduction of a more consistent and simple English spelling system suitable for international use. Assumptions about the nature and introduction of spelling reform must be reconsidered. Strategies now available for reform include acclimatising readers of the Web and email to the possibilities and advantages of spelling change, encouraging them as writers to experiment with more convenient spelling forms, and arousing awareness of these possibilities through new multimedia methods of teaching reading. Once begun and discovered to be personally beneficial, spelling reform can become hard to stop, and prepared for official systematisation.

Words on the screen differ from words on the page. The Internet makes different demands upon writers and readers and sets further criteria for spelling reform. 'Bad spelling' on the Net shows problems and trends that spelling reformers can take into account. Features of this 'people's spelling' support propositions that present English spelling could be cleaned up and systematised for international use. Criteria and possible features of such an international spelling for English are set out.

#### 1. Literacy on the Internet

Six great inventions have progressively extended human communication: language, writing, the alphabet, printing, broadcasting, and now the Internet. The Net opens two-way global communication to the ordinary public, on a scale beyond the press or talkback radio. Cyberspace is a universe of great excitement, change and flexibility. Popular enthusiasm and flowering of ingenuity are rather like that of Shakespeare's England when the invention of printing had come into full flood. Popular spelling on the Net and bulletin-boards in this time of constant change can help to show what spelling principles may prove most useful to fit the needs and abilities of writers and readers of English throughout the world. This priority for observed rather than assumed needs and abilities has often been overlooked by spelling reformers with 'ideal' spelling systems (Yule, 1986). The business committee at my old school once approved a new school uniform. It was so neat and pretty — it looked ideal. But it took no account of the needs and abilities of the schoolgirls. It did not fit their variety of shapes nor their spurts of growth, and it could not stand the rough-and-tumble of the playground.

It is often asserted that electronic media will replace books, and that print on pages will become obsolete — for example, an Australian writer, Dale Spender, has thrown out most of her library of 2000 books, to spend her time on electronic networking, regarding it as a superior form of communication. The prospect of losing books would be frightful, for print and screen are complementary, not alternatives. However, they make somewhat different demands on literacy.

## 1.1 Reading on screen

In the early 1980s, the subjects in my literacy experiments were up to twice as slow in reading text on screen as in print. I and others of my generation still find text on a computer more difficult to read, and cannot read a screen in a single pass, as I can a page of print. Anything at all complex must be downloaded and then read 'properly' from the printout.

In contrast, a younger generation is more familiar with screen than books, and their reading skills may be so tuned that books are the more difficult for them. Some student newspapers are now printed in the same small sans-serif font as emails, and older staff find them hard to read. Possibly undergraduates do not.

Readers of email and the Internet have an interest in being fast skimmers who seek to get the gist quickly rather than settle down to carefully digest solid meat, as in reading masterpiece books. Text on email and Internet must be read fast when access time is limited and costs money. Instant print requires instant decisions and dismissals. One email address may receive a hundred messages a day from several mailing lists. What sort of writing system do these new-style readers need? This generation listens to information in sound-bites. What are the features of word-bites for its reading? Would spelling reform help them?

Their most obvious need is for an economical spelling that they can quickly recognize and process, and quickly keyboard in, without the hold up of a spellchecker, much less a dictionary. Many of the younger generation have been taught to 'look and guess' before they 'look and check' with phonics, if they have any. Few Net-users are going to decode or encode words like *apreesheeyate*, speech-sound by speech-sound. What writing system and reading strategies can facilitate accurate and fast guessing?

## 1.2 Writing on screen

Writing that is prepared off-line for electronic communication is commonly electronically spell-checked so that only homophones are spelled 'incorrectly'. But on-line composition for email and interactive communication on the Net is usually unrevised. An informal check suggests that the overall rate of errors is still about the same as in everyday handwriting, well under 1% of words written, partly because it is still more elite than popular in its active contributors. But as more of the population get caught in the Web, the number of 'bad spellers' grows. They find that here they are freed from everyday anxiety about their disability. Readers on chat sites, for example, put up with each other's mistakes — it is useless to be affronted or let misspellings disrupt reading flow as when reading printed pages. This performance loosening of attachment to a single standard of 100% accuracy will have consequences. Some teachers lose their grip on TO (Traditional Orthography) through too much reading of students' ill-spelt work — what hope now for the rest of us?

## 2. Spelling on the Internet

The electronic communications systems now developed into the Internet and electronic mail were designed by English-speakers who did not have in mind languages other than English. Consequently Europeans communicating via email may have to leave their accents and umlauts and cedillas behind, so that their written language is transmitted plain and unadorned. French and German correspondents tell me that this lack of diacritics has not worried them — they understand their written language regardless. If this competence is general, then it may have implications for Continental spelling reforms, apart from the special needs of learners to be able to pronounce new vocabulary. It also has implications for English spelling reform on the Web, and for how much and what phonemic information is essential even for poor readers.

'Bad spelling' in electronic communication indicates the real needs and abilities of the people more surely than 'bad spelling' on paper. Writers on paper are more aware of permanence and the nearness of critics. They can usually write in less haste and can criticize their first efforts. When unsure they are liable to try to spell as dreadfully as traditional spelling, and make 'imitative mistakes' and insert more doubled consonants, to make sure. My granddaughter aged six wrote 'I like to serf' and then, for fear of being wrong, she amended it to 'I like to surghe'. On the Internet, however, senders are usually communicating with equals who are distant, not at their elbow.

They realize that their writing is ephemeral, they do not have time to deliberate, and they expect that they will not be blamed for slips and errors.

There are continual claims that ability to spell has declined since pupils no longer spend up to a third of primary schooling on spelling. In Britain, the public indignation of the literati is aroused that Oxford undergraduates in English Literature in 1995 should make errors such as *abolishion*, *angery*, *capatilist*, *collosal*, *disollutioned* and *excpresed*. In Australia critics complain about shop notices such as *apalstry* 'upholstery', *termata's* 'tomatoes', *optical practioner* and *weaklys*. But at the same time that English spelling generally is assumed, with some evidence, to be declining as an accomplishment even for the educated, people are finding that they can have freedom in spelling on the Internet. So how do they spell?

Six common features that might be called 'Principles of Bad Spelling on the Internet' are illustrated in the following message on an electronic bulletin board:-

This is a LEGAL NOTICE: You are not permitted to post messages containing quoted text from either private messages sent to you (as a reply or otherwise) and Published text. without consent from all applicable parties. If this does not pertain to you then ignore it but if it does take notice.

### 2.1 Usually fonetic

This is seen in *eather*, *ignor*, *reasonably*, *bieng*. Writers on the Internet tend to resort to reasoning and relating print to speech when rote memory for spelling fails them. They try to resort to the original alphabetic principle, but it is often poorly applied because most people are ignorant of any basic alphabetic system that underlies English spelling.

### 2.2 Dropd lettrs

'Bad spellings' are usually streamlined rather than elaborated since Internet messages tend to be typed in a hurry. Message senders might type *apresiat* or *apreshat* but they do not write *apreesheeyate*. The most common Internet 'bad spellings' omit surplus letters, as in *aplicable*, *ignor*, *heirachies* and *privet* for 'private'. Even letters that are part of the structure of a word can slip off, as in *premere*, *demonstated*, *headin*, leaving bare bones.

### 2.3 Dubld lettrs oftn dropd in email

This is seen in *aplicable* and *permitted*. Adding double letters is rarer, except for old favorites like *dissappoint*, *occassion* and *begginer*.

### 2.4 Problems in spelng vowels.

When poor spellers attempt to spell vowel sounds by analogy with other spelling patterns for the same sounds, they usually choose the more common or simpler patterns — as in deriving *eather* from *eat* and *ignor* from *for*. Shwa vowels set the greatest problems, as in *privet* and *potain* for 'pertain', when writers do not know either the formal pronunciation or the root of a word. *Privet* contains an inappropriate extension of the 'silent e' principle used to indicate a preceding long vowel as in *libel*.

### 2.5 Slurring

This arises in informal speech. Ignorance of the formal pronunciation used in public speaking means that many poor spellers have only their own personal dialect forms of words to go on, as with *subbarin* 'submarine' and *crobbirate* 'corroborate'. With present English spelling, local pronunciation is usually handed on by word of mouth, like Russian Gossip. Runaway development of English dialects is encouraged when speakers cannot rely on 'spelling pronunciation'. The end results of slur are illustrated in the notorious guide to Australian English, *Let's talk Strine* (1965; = 'Let's talk Australian'). Much slurring is normal elision in articulation, as in *industrilised* and *tecnicly* and the accepted sh/ch pronunciations in *picture*, *special*, *question*. More distant straying from formal pronunciation may be worth resisting by two strategies: by teaching the classical and internationally recognised roots of words — so retaining

for example *economy* rather than *icanamy* — and by a consistent standardised spelling system, to operate as a guide to speech, a check, and a benchmark.

## 2.6 Slips

These are an extra hazard for readers — as in *cna't*, *rouble* (cf, 'trouble') *tje*, *ti* ( for 'to') and *fansatic*. Slips in writing correlate significantly with bad spelling in general, so improvement of poor spellers' chances of systematic spelling would reduce their risk of making slips that they fail to pick up themselves.

## 2.7 Unintelligible spellings

Forms like *ovid* and *cimea* are hazards encountered when learners try 'spelling as u speak' without knowing any principles for spelling.

## 3. WWW spelling reform opportunities

There are now many web-sites for everyone who is interested in spelling and its improvement. Now knowledge about the nature of English spelling can spread, which hardly anyone ever learnt in school or teachers' college, and which has been next to impossible to get published for the general public. This ignorance has been one of the greatest barriers to realising that reform is possible as well as necessary. Newcomers might find it hard to sort out the most helpful sites, but the Simplified Spelling Society site is a good lead. They will find a wide range of ideas, lively discussions, and no single solution offered, but at this stage that may be no bad thing.

Useful reforms of spelling can start to spread the way fashions spread and American culture spreads. In electronic mail, dropping surplus letters is likely to be taken up first, as the simplest and least disruptive change, and as correspondents meet such changes again and again. Individual aficionados can add a standard message of explanation after their everyday correspondence in the way that many mailing lists carry a standard note at the bottom for their particular campaign. If easier spelling can catch on with youth and the disadvantaged through rap, koori, and other internet sites and interactions, as it already has in the world of brand-names and advertising, then no amount of indignant pedantry in newspaper letter-pages may be able to counter the infection. What print was for the victory of vernacular tongues for literacy, the Internet could be for the victory of an improved writing system.

This form of temporary destabilisation of TO will have its downside, in that most individuals who take up spelling changes that appeal to them will not also take on a dictionary to ensure that they are applying changes with any degree of appropriateness. To work towards a final stable and official system requires establishment of an international academy at the organizational level, and continuing efforts to educate the current generation in the principles of an alphabetic writing system. This underlines the importance of several different versions of a 'Help Yourself to Read' video, already badly needed for wider literacy, to be major tools to help everyone to understand i) that English spelling is silly, ii) that there is an underlying alphabetic system to it all, and iii) that it is possible to use clean-up spelling based on TO *now*.

## 4. The final outcome

Until a writing system is devised that is a revolutionary breakthrough that will cross languages, like Chinese but without its disadvantages, attempts at a completely new English spelling system can only muddy the waters. What is feasible now is to clean up, update and systematise the system that already exists. But it is desirable in offering the first steps, to have some idea of where the full reform may go, as some move faster than others towards this goal.

## 5. Criteria for improved spelling on WWW

Seven criteria are required to improve the present system of English spelling for popular use:

### 5.1 User-friendly

The writing system must meet the needs and abilities of all categories of user and learner. This must be established by empirical research, and for this, the Internet and bulletin boards can be major forums and experimental sites. The costs are nil, the returns are immediate, and development can be fast. The most useful improvements will catch on because they are efficient and

practicabl. Application of reserch on human abilities and needs is an essential foundation — reserch into children's natural spelling, how beginrs lern to read and rite, adult reading efficiency and spelling preferences, trends in spelling changes, and relationships of English with other alphabetic spelling systems. (Yule, 1991).

## **5.2 Moving towards standardisation**

This goal is desirabl, because if all spelling becomes idiosyncratic, reading is slowed down and becomes more error-prone. The English language would become less rathr than mor useful for international communication. Nevertheless, we can expect most individuals to pick up change piece by piece, and erratically at that.

## **5.3 Compatibl with print heritaj**

In the long term, a final reformd English spelling will become dominant and only scholars will need to read anything that has not been reprinted. But in the medium-term, TO (traditionl orthografy) should remain decipherabl by readrs even when it is no longer used by writers. And in the short-term, no reform can come in with imediate popular acceptatance unless it is backward compatibl. In its first stage, to be acceptabl, a reform must be immediatly easily readabl by everyone already literat in TO.

## **5.4 Compatibl with othr languages**

An increasing proportion of the vocabulary of all modern languages — in technology, commerce, science, culture and life-style — is held in common and comes from the same sources, particularly through English and including the representation of classicl derivations and suffixes. Insofar as this sharing improves worldwide communication, resistance by linguistic chauvinists is deservedly futile — there are betr ways to develop local pride. Any English spelling reform should not conceal interlingual resemblances in this vocabulary.

## **5.5 Economy**

Reformd spelngs must be economicl in costs, materials and in time required to lern and to use. The first steps particularly must be understood in minuts, not months, and the later steps should have an intuitiv quality so that they can be pickd up by readers and used by writers with minimum guidance and without special courses.

## **5.6 Anyone can start any time**

Anyone can start to apply any of the principls at any time — in personl corespondence, e-mail, commercial advertising and bulletin boards. The principls should therfor be such that writers in a hurry can take them up one at a time, and they should also be constantly availabl, set out clearly, for those rarer spirits who will be intrested in understanding the whole system first, and who can be leadrs of 'spelling fashion'.

## **6. Problem points**

Some issues in improving English spelling for international use cannot be solvd by lojic or argument until there has been some popular experience of possibilities. Some problems are set by the nature of the English language itself and the limitations of 26 lettrs of the roman alfabet to represent it, and other difficulties result from long-standing contradictions within TO. So far cognitiv psychologists have not been keen to move into th necessary reserch, nor have grants been availabl to encourage them. A time of flux allowing public experiment in changes from TO spellings on the WWW and in responses to subtitling on television coud be the most inexpensiv ways to find out popular needs and preferences prior to systematising and establishing the fittest surviving principls.

### **6.1 The practicabl or the ideal?**

Do reformrs start with what is immediatly feasibl, or hold out for what is theoreticly ideal but may never be possibl? The position taken here is that if the ideal ever becomes immediatly practicabl, well and good — but the situation now calls for what may be possibl now, that might lead into that ideal.



## 6.2 Where to start

What will the market out there be most likely to welcome first? Observation suggests that two points can be taken up without fuss.

Surplus letters in words can be eliminated, that serve no purpose to represent either meaning or pronunciation. This pleases writers who like to save effort and solve spelling problems. Readers tend to dislike disturbance of what is familiar, but omission of letters disturbs less than changing them, and readers may not even notice deletions, especially towards the end of words. Up to this point the spelling in this article has been this minimal cutting. Cutting can then be taken further, as it becomes a more familiar principle. Spelling for unclear schwa vowels can be further clarified, through omission of spelling for vowels omitted in modern speech, as in *different*, and by replacement with syllabic consonants as in *answer*, *common*, and *spelling*.

Consonant spellings can be made more consistent, with /f/ and /j/ consistently spelled with f and j, as in *fotograf* and *enjin*.

## 6.3 Options in spelling

Since for the present Internet and international spelling must retain the Roman alphabet, the most difficult issue in the redesign of English spelling is the representation of the nineteen or so vowel phonemes with five Latin vowel letters. One-to-one sound-symbol correspondence may be desirable in the long term but is not immediately practicable. Instead, in the short-term, a TO-compatible spelling system could reduce TO's unpredictable collection of over 200 spelling patterns for vowels to a maximum of 3–4 predictable spelling patterns for each vowel phoneme. This would allow for positional spellings, learner's extra aids, and options of either digraphs or one-key single characters using diacritics. This would greatly reduce the problems of ESL and native learners to a manageable task, and allow improved methods of teaching.

## 6.4 English and continental vowels

An important question is whether adoption of continental European vowel spellings would promote or hinder English as the world's international language. My present thinking is that it would hinder. Firstly because the English language itself differs too much in its basic vowel phonemes, secondly, for its pairing of 'long' and 'short' vowels, and thirdly, that in cross-lingual comparisons of similar vocabulary, the two vowel systems are often parallel, as in the words for *education*, *camera*, *felicity*, *politics*, *competition*. Finally, by far the most significant English vowel phonemes are the 'short' vowels a e i o u, as in *bat bet bit dot but*, which have a frequency that is far greater than that of the respective Continental phonemes.

As long as phoneme/grapheme differences between languages are consistent, they can be learned in half an hour, as English-speakers find when they learn to say German or Italian.

## 6.5 Representation of long vowels

A major problem to be settled in improving English spelling, as distinct from replacing it with something new, is how to represent English 'long' vowels — the sounds used for the alphabet letter names a e i o u. These are a mixed bag of speech sounds linguistically, but in the English language they often pair off with the 'short' vowels, as in *nation/national*, *oppose/opposition*, *final/finish*. Many reform proposals involve novel digraphs for these phonemes. Pinyin examples and J H Martin's *Initial Learners' Spelling* (1981, 1986) suggest that the single characters for short vowels might also be used for medial and initial long vowels, possibly with an unobtrusive diacritic.

## 6.6 Words sounded or spelled the same

The English language contains a high proportion of homophones, most of them spelled the same, as homographs, but many others are distinguished in TO as heterographs. A few very common homophones may continue to need spelling distinction to avoid confusion when reading text — chiefly *too*, *two*, *to* and *for*, *four*, *fore*. But context automatically clarifies the meaning of most other homophones and prevents confusion when they are spelled alike, e.g. *can*, *wil*, *sound*, *letter*, *major*.

Howevr spelng reforms wud clarify th pronunciation of many words which in TO have th same spelngs but ar pronouncd difrently, eg, *wind*, *bow*, *desert*, *minute*, *elaborate*, *estimate*.

### 6.7 Spelngs of importd words

Respel as much as posibl, recognising that maveriks wil remain, especally words from very difrent writing systems, such as French. We need mor study of how such vocabulry is respeld in other modrn languajes that also import new words.

### 6.8 Representing irregular stress

This is oftn a problem for yung and overseas lernrs of English. Some current stratejies might be systematised, eg, dubl lettrs, as in *umbrella*, and vowel spelngs such as in *deturjnt* and *disturb* rather than *deterjnt* and *disterb*. Cutng schwa spelngs oftn clarifies stress, as in *mistri/misterius*, *defr/defur* for 'deaffer/defer', *dezrt/dezurt*.

### 6.9 Representng gramr

To what extent does 'visibl gramr' enhance speedy reading for meaning, as some cognitiv psychologists claim? For exampl, is there valu in a stable final s for plural endings and verbs, and final d for participls, rathr than forcing riters to make aural distinctions between th terminl fonemes in *cats/dogz* and *skipt/robd*? Here, again, look also at what lernrs find hardr to lern and what they find easy.

### 6.10 The 'sibilant syndrome'

As Govind Deodhekar (1995) and othrs hav pointd out, TO has multipl spelngs for final non-plural /s/. If final s is used for plurals and verbs, then what systematic spelng can be used in words like *dress*, *glance*, *dense*, *impasse*, *coalesce*, and *cactus*?

### 6.11 Fonemes without grafemes

Three English fonemes hav no designated grafeme: schwa, /zh/ and one or othr of the u-vowels as in *but*, *put*, *truth*, etc.

The 'obscure vowel' is representd in TO by many difrent spelng patterns, but it comes in four degrees of obscurity, which cud be clarified by th spelng, eg, in th first sylabl of *perturb* th vowel is miniml tho stil observabl, and in th second sylabl it is stressd but stil obscure. Th unstressd shwa can be clarified in public speakng, as in *republic*, but it can be so overlookd that it can be completely omitd, as in *difrent*, or representd by a syllabic consonant, as in *caml*, *chikn*, *dolr*.

Th English foneme /zh/ is a product of articulation, and cud be representd by zh or by anothr digraf (zi) which wud be closer to TO, as in *vizion*, *treziur*.

The vowel in *but/put/truth* is an issue in itself, and any solution sets some problems.

## 7. Implementation

An oficial internationl English spelng has most hope of successful establishment folowing a transitionl softning up that cud be startd up thru th electronic media.

Unpublshd experiments indicate (altho they require replication) that it is esier to adapt to readng a chanjed spelng if th chanjes ar all at once, rathr than to keep re-adjustng to new stajes. Howevr, most peple may not even try to read an email mesaj that is in ful frontl reform without prior 'softning up', and on th Internet and e-mail, where there is mor ongoing riting and interaction than is posibl via printd pajes, it may be a mor efectiv policy to gradually acimatize web-surfrs and emailrs to chanjes by two giding principls.

Th first steps in any needed chanje ar oftn th most dificult. Once chanje is found to be profitabl, it accelerates as th more conventionl membrs of th public start conformng to th new spirit. Th process is complex but has similaritis to chanje in othr fashions for apearances, rathr than to how th conceptually mor simpl step of deciml money was imposed. Pragmatism as wel as riters' human imperfections wil mean that tempory inconsistencis ar unavoiabl during transition. At

first there might be as many proposals put up as there are spelling reformers, but popular approval and usage are more likely to sort them out than the judgments of those who have the least interest in reforms — that is, educated professionals.

In 1971 the present author published a *Pocket Guide* for bad spellings — a small card that could be carried in the pocket, for poor spellers and others to use as a consistent 'sensible spelling'. A readily updatable simple pocket guide to principles of spelling, carried on the Internet, could become the preferred dictionary for the Web, to facilitate fast and efficient Internet spelling by anyone.

When readers can choose whether or not to read something in print on screen or page, and so must be attracted to read it, writers should take no risks, and offer their texts in spelling that begins with TO and only gradually moves into letter deletion and change. Readers who take notice may then decide to move on their own initiative to make changes in their own spelling and even seek further information about the bases of change.

But if readers desire to read the content of a message, through necessity or interest, then reformed spellings can be accelerated, because motivation to read the content will be directing the readers' attention beyond the medium of the spelling to the message it conveys. Learning is then incidentally, acclimatising and desensitising.

Writers should therefore gear their use of spelling changes according to the category of reader they are currently addressing.

It seems to me that reformed spelling must begin in the adult world or it will not get going at all. Simultaneous campaigns can be undertaken for setting up an official international body to monitor and evaluate during the period of change and officially implement the end result, with the support of governments and accreditation by dictionaries, so that it is then 'appointed to be learnt in schools'. Experiments can also be encouraged in schools, such as learners' initial spelling and dictionary keys. Teachers, children and the public must be taught the nature of the English spelling system, so that they can perceive for themselves that improvement is possible.

Transition can be bridged with a period in which dictionaries accept alternative spellings for more words than the several thousand sets they already admit. Some lexicographers, as at the Australian Macquarie Dictionary Research Centre, are exploring directions for more consistent spellings, and new editions of dictionaries could use reformed spellings as keys to pronunciation.

English spelling reform has missed the boat for reform several times when change might have been feasible, eg, after World War II, when many other countries were able to introduce major or minor reforms during an enthusiastic climate of post-war reconstruction, and later, prior to spelling checks and translators, improved English spelling might have been commercially useful for computers. Now reform has another opportunity, as popular usage on the Net and email can be a means of introduction and testing of reformed spellings. Then a final authorised scheme can be assured of successful operation, and have the advantage of positive public attitudes, which is essential for any official scheme to succeed.

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## Note

An exampl of systematising TO to provide an internasionl spelng for English. Note th attempts to resolv th issues that hav been discussd.

A sistm for internasionl comunicàtion (Yule 1998) bàsd on th prinsipls discussd can be compatabl glòbali with clasicl and English lònwurds in othr languages and with Romanss and Tùtonik relatifs, as wel as with TO itself. It is imediatly readabl by readrs of TO, and can be lernd in ten steps, not by ròt-memorizng unpredictabl spelngs as with TO. At furst inconsistensi in rìtrs' aplicàtion must be expectd, but tempori instabiliti is resolvd by its ofisial intrnasionl establishment.

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[Cornell Kimball: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 4. Pragmatic Strategies for Promoting Spelling Reform

### Cornell Kimball

Cornell Kimball is a transportation engineer who works for the highway department in California. He has been interested in language as a hobby for a couple of decades, and has read much about language in his spare time. His detailed look into the workings of the English language led him into an interest in spelling reform.

An earlier version of this proposal was conveyed to the 1997 AGM of the SSS. It is here presented in an amended and extended form.

#### Looking at earlier efforts

I've done a lot of reading on the history of spelling reform. Some of the ways in which we're trying to advance it have been tried before. I am most familiar with the American experience, and the examples that I illustrate are all from that. But I think that these can apply to spelling reform anywhere.

#### The press

One idea is to persuade editors of newspapers, magazines and books to use simpler spellings in their publications. A prominent example of a publication using simpler spellings was that of the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Tribune* adopted 80 simplified spellings in 1934 for the paper's in-house style. There was much controversy against it, and the *Tribune* whittled down their list over the years. The number of simpler spellings in use was reduced by about half after a few years, a few adjustments were made in the 1940s, then the list shrank further in the 1950s and 1960s. The *Chicago Tribune* 'threw in the towel' on this in 1975.

Other American periodicals have also used simpler spellings. In the first few decades of the 20th century, when the (American) National Education Association was promoting its list of 12 simpler spellings (*thru*, *tho*, *catalog*, etc.) and the Simplified Spelling Board was promoting its spellings, some newspapers and magazines did use some of these spellings. However, in every case, the publications went back to the conventional spellings.

#### Dictionaries

Another idea is to get simpler spellings into dictionaries. Once in, the thinking goes, people will start using them. But this very thing has been done before. During the 1940s and 1950s, Funk & Wagnalls, an American publisher and maker of dictionaries, listed the Simplified Spelling Board's 300-plus simpler spellings alongside the conventional spellings in their volumes. Thus, entries read such as:

rough (ru&f) *adj.* 1. having the texture  
ruf of coarse or....  
debt (de&t) *n.* 1. a state of owing money  
det or other....

This might have seemed like a breath (the use of this and other "e" for "ea" spellings is explained later in this article) of fresh air which would encourage such forms, but the inclusion of these spellings in a major dictionary for many years still didn't create any increase in their usage.

I have contacted dictionaries and periodicals to further simpler spellings, as noted in my article in the [December 1996 SSS Newsletter](#) Item 5. I have sent dictionary editors citations of a few alternative spellings appearing in print, and I have tried to encourage writers and editors at periodicals to use a few simpler forms. What seems possible there is to strengthen the positions

of a few alternative forms already in use. As noted in a news item in the [March 1998 \*Simpl Speling\*](#), Item 1 Random House dictionary altered a couple of entries in response to citations I sent in of *thru* and *such*. However, I don't think any one of us can go much beyond that right now. I think that the only way to get editors to accept additional simpler forms is to first get a number of people — who will include a number of people beyond our current ranks — supporting those spellings.

### **Government**

We are also trying to persuade government officials to implement use of the spellings. This too has been tried. American President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the United States Government Printing Office to use the Simplified Spelling Board's 300 or so proposed spellings. This order was issued on August 27, 1906 (while the U.S. Congress was in recess). This was thoroly resisted by the Government Printing Office and others who were to carry it out, and when Congress readjourned that fall, they revoked Roosevelt's order: Congress voted, 142 to 24, that "no money appropriated in this act shall be used (for) printing documents...unless same shall conform to the orthography...in...generally accepted dictionaries." Thus, it ended up that simplified spellings were used only in written items coming from the White House itself, and at that, only 12 were used. When Theodore Roosevelt left office in January 1909, the *New York Sun* had a huge, one-word headline in response: **THRU**.

### **Public campaigning**

So, we've had dictionary makers, newspaper editors, and government officials institute the use of simpler spellings. But none of these efforts have wethered the controversies. Why? From what I've read, it's because these spellings had the support of a few editors or officials — but didn't have the support of the public as a whole.

To make this really happen — and stick — we're going to need more than editors and government officials on our side. We need to broadcast the word to a much larger audience. We need public, grassroots support — not just official support.

To publicize the spelling situation to a large number of people is an enterprize requiring money of course, and a lot of it, and this isn't something that we can turn around and do right away. As the first step in this, we simply need to build membership. With a greater amount from dues some years down the line, we'll then have increased funds with which to begin 'selling the public'.

### **Advertize to recruit teachers**

My proposal is this: that the Society place adverts or other forms of announcements in a number of publications, such as the 10 American journals listed below, to recruit new members.

In looking at spelling reform efforts, I have found that teachers have often been spelling reform's greatest ally. Many in the Society are educators (educationists) already. There are undoubtedly other teachers out there who are sympathetic to the idea — the only problem is, they've never heard of a 'Simplified Spelling Society', or of any organization promoting spelling reform, for that matter. Of the 10 magazines listed, 9 are aimed at teachers. The other magazine is the organ of the 'World Future Society', a group looking at what may come in the future, and I think we may find a few potential members among that readership too.

All 10 magazines are published in the United States. I chose publications that I could get information on, and of course most of what I could obtain were American periodicals. Too, there are many potential members in the U.S., given its size. It should be stressed tho, that this idea should naturally and ultimately be expanded to include advertizing in publications in many countries.

## **Titles for advertizing**

The magazines I proposed we consider advertizing in are these (information on format descriptions and circulation figures comes from *Ulrich's International Guide to Periodicals*.)

*Learning* – Creative ideas and insights for teachers. Contains teaching tips and curriculum ideas for kindergarten thru middle school. Circulation: 285,000.

*Instructor* – Features articles on a variety of topics of interest to elementary school (kindergarten thru grade 6) teachers. Includes articles on computer applications for teaching techniques, educational software reviews, and children's fiction book reviews. Circulation: 254,000.

*Teaching K-8* – A magazine for teachers of preschool thru grade 8. Articles cover innovation and techniques of individualized instruction. Circulation: 133,000.

*Teacher* – Provides a national communications network for teachers, enabling them to be better teachers and effective teachers. Circulation: 100,000.

*Technology and Learning* – The leading magazine of electronic education. Features, reviews, news, and announcements of educational activities and opportunities in programming, software development, and hardware configurations. Circulation: 80,000.

*American Educator* – Main organ for the American Federation of Teachers. Circulation: 700,000.

*Reading Teacher* – A journal of the International Reading Association (Newark, Delaware, U.S.A.). Circulation: 65,000.

*English Journal* – Main journal of the (American) National Council of Teachers of English. Circulation: 57,000.

*Educational Researcher* – Journal of the American Educational Research Association. Contains news and features of general significance in educational research. Circulation: 19,000.

*The Futurist* – Main organ of the World Future Society (Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.). A journal of forecasts, trends, and ideas about the future. Circulation: 30,000.

It was later pointed out to me that the British-based SSS Committee is focusing its efforts on British institutions at present. So, I am emending my proposal, and am now suggesting that the SSS advertize for new members in a few British publications which are similar to the American ones just noted. Too, any American members can look into running ads in some of those magazines and possibly handle the details of placing the ad, and members in other countries could do the same with teachers' magazines in their countries.

## **Public profile**

There have been many discussions, both now and in the past, as to what plan the SSS should adopt. "What scheme should we back?" is a question often wrestled with. My observation is that, during the 120 years that we've had organized spelling reform efforts, many optimal schemes with great backing arguments have been made, altho none of that has furthered our efforts to improve English spelling.

Another observation I make is that very few people are aware that there even are any kind of spelling reform activities going on now. In short, hardly anyone knows we exist. When I 'met' Allan Campbell by e-mail about three years ago, and I told him about Better Education thru Simplified Spelling (I still hadn't found the Simplified Spelling Society), Allan commented that he'd never heard of something like a group dedicated to spelling reform. There are undoubtedly other people out there who are quite supportive of reform but who have never come across any mention of such organizations.

Spelling reform's most important allies, as well as its most vocal opponents, are teachers. As I noted in my proposal, I think that teachers would be a good source of potential members. Too, as I am beginning to learn, one obstacle to newspapers, etc. using spellings such as *thru* and *tho* is that teachers and others concerned with education write letters of protest. Per one source I've corresponded with, many of the letters to the *Chicago Tribune* opposing its use of simpler spellings came from teachers — while, as well, many of the letters supporting simpler spellings came from teachers. Joe Little's article in the July 1997 *Newsletter* keeps us abreast of this too, as he notes a newspaper copy editor who mentions such aspects. So, I think our priority right now should be to reach out to teachers and PTA groups, both to get some new members and to 'quell' the reservations that others of them have about spelling reform.

### Alternative forms currently in use

I'll note what some members have written recently in SSS publications — Dan MacLeod in letters to both the *Journal* and *Simpl Speling*, Robert Craig in a *Simpl Speling* article, and Harry Cookson in a letter to *Simpl Speling* — there are certain alternative forms in use by 'the public'. I think it would be most effective to go along with these right now, rather than trying to sell some grand scheme. Too, while we as reformers may believe in really going thru and overhauling English spelling, we must remember that it is general human nature to want to keep things familiar. I surmise that most people will resist any great change.

Now of course, as we're making our point to people about the need for change, some will naturally ask, "What spellings are you planning on changing?" For that reason, I do believe that we should have some sort of *short* plan (with fewer words even than the current German spelling reform has, at the outset).

As recent letters from members have reminded us, *thru*, *tho*, and a few other gh simplifications have some circulation in popular usage. To this I'll add observations about some other spelling changes, such as noting that in American English *catalog* has supplanted *catalogue* as the standard, more commonly used spelling over the past few decades, and that *analog*, *dialog*, and others have some currency as variant forms.

One type of change with a healthy track record is the use of -ize rather than -ise in 'American' spellings, e.g. *realize*, *organize*, *summarize*. Now there are also 20 or so words in which the standard American English spellings do have -ise for the /aiz/ sound. But for a few of these, there are variant forms with -ize that can be found in some dictionaries: *advertize*, *surprize*, *comprize*, *merchandize* (when it's used as a verb), *exorcize*.

### Opportunities with GH

I agree it might be a good idea to have some proposal to show the public which way we're planning to go. And one part should be those GH simplifications which already have some usage:

*thru tho altho thoro donut nite*

(Note: As of now, *lite* is only widely used for the specialized meaning of "having fewer calories or less substance" but not for other meanings of *light*, which is why it's not included.)

Too, we could add solid compounds with *thru* and *thoro*, and other -Ough to -O changes:  
*thruout breakthru thoroaly thoro fare boro furlo*

And, for all countries except the United States, promote greater use of these two forms which are standard in American English (and seen many times in Canadian English):

*plow draft* (for all meanings)

We might want to hold our GH changes to just this. It is tempting to add those other cases where GH is pronounced as /f/, but there will likely be disagreement over exactly how to respell these. Most reform plans propose, say, *tuf* and *laf* as the new spellings for *tough* and *laugh*. However, Dan MacLeod notes seeing *tuff*, in his letter in JSSS 22, and in my article in the December 1996 *Newsletter*, I note finding *tuff* as well. Too, I have found several cases of *laff*, in print no less, but haven't seen *laf* anywhere. Rather than debating the merits of *tuf* vs. *tuff*, I think that for our initial set, we're best off to avoid potential disagreements which could drag the thing down. Let's go with those changes that we and others agree on (those words listed in the paragraphs above), and save these unsettled points (how to respell *tough*, *laugh*, etc.) for later.

There has never been complete agreement on how to respell *thought*, *bought*, etc. — some want *thot* for *thought*, some think it should be *thaut*, still others support a third or fourth way — so I think those too are best left off for now.



### **-ogue > -og and -ise > -ize**

The -Logue to -Log changes as in *catalog* are modest; these aren't the highest frequency words, nor is the -Logue ending the most treacherous aspect of English spelling. However, these form a group of changes with 'momentum' — as noted, the -Og variants are for the most part dictionary-accepted, and having something that already has some official sanction, in my opinion, lends a credibility to the movement. So, for most of the English-speaking world (excepting the U.S.) add:

*catalog.*

And for all countries, promote:

*analog dialog monolog travelog  
deolog prolog epilog.*

You can also include -Gogue to -Gog changes:

*synagog demagog pedagog*

I stated above that, of the words where -ISE is currently standard thruout the English-speaking world, a few have variants with -IZE listed in dictionaries. So, let's also promote all -ISE to -IZE changes — stress the current American -IZE forms in other countries, and promote the remaining changes everywhere. For all, for starters, promote those that are variants in American English:

*advertize surprize comprize  
merchandize (verb) exorcize*

- (There is a problem, I will readily admit, on adopting the spelling *advertize*: What do we do when we come to *advertisement*, given that some people pronounce the ISE as /is/ or /iz/ while others say it as /aiz/? This is indeed a problem, and granted, one not yet with a solution. However, I promote *advertize* because it *is* in some dictionaries, and I think such things can really help us get moving.)

And we could add remaining ones (which aren't yet variants anywhere); among these are:

*compromize disguise guize surmize exercize enterprize chastize franchize*

With this class of words, as with all initial reforms, I think we should be prepared to only go part way at first if it turns out that some individual changes get a better reception than others. There might, say, be a willingness to go with *compromize*, *enterprize*, and changes to the other -MISE and -PRISE words, and at the same time be, say, a strong resistance to writing *sunrize* and *clockwize*, or to *revize* and *incize*. If that occurs, let's be willing to go with only some changes rather than trying for all, to at least get the thing going.

### **Part of Lindgren's SR1**

Now, shouldn't we show the public that we want to go beyond that? In my personal opinion, no. However, the general feeling in our organization is that we should be pioneering some new types of changes as well. With that in mind, if we wish to add something else, I recommend adopting part of Harry Lindgren's SR1, which advocates regularly spelling short /E/ just as E.

Why SR1? We pretty much all agree that OUGH is a priority for change, but there are many opinions as to what should be delt with beyond that. However, I have noticed a number of reformers giving *fairly high* priority to changing Ea to E when a short /E/ is sounded.

As I've stated, I believe that the changes we make in our 'first step' should not be too great. And another reason that I believe SR1 is a good one to go with is because the changes don't alter too much of the word's form. Many, admittedly worthwhile, changes are rejected by 'the public' because the new form is 'too different looking' from the conventional spelling. SR1 has changes such as going from *cleanliness* to *clenliness* — no one has trouble immediately recognizing those as the same word, and I believe this will help in public acceptance.

Another, not unimportant, reason that I think we should choose the particular spellings listed below if we want to extend things a bit: this particular set is already 'in use' within the SSS, as it's part of the *Simpl Speling* 'house style'.

I've been told that there were some objections to SR1, especially concerning words such as *eny*, *agen*, *sed*, where it was noted that not all English speakers used those pronunciations. (I am told that *any* is often pronounced like *Annie* in Irish English, for example.) Perhaps then a 'modified' SR1, minus these 'problem' words, could be what we use.

I noted above that it might be best to hold off on changing spellings where GH currently represents /f/, as disagreements over what spellings to use (one F or two) could bog us down unnecessarily. Similarly, with many SR1 words, potential disagreements may come up between reformers and 'the public' as to *how* to respell the words.

Reform plans would generally call for respelling *ready* as *redy*. But when I've seen this word respelled in advertizing and such, it's *reddy* (or even *reddi*). I've seen *steddy* (or *steddi*- in compounds). So, I suggest that we hold off on proposing changes where the form we propose might 'conflict' with what the public would go with.

The question here, of course, is whether to have one consonant after the E or to double that consonant. To avoid cases where this is an issue, I recommend just words where two or more consonants currently follow the short E sound.

Thus, the SR1 forms I recommend as an initial set:

*helth welth stelth relm*  
*wether fether lether hether frend*  
*breth bredth brest abrest*  
*clense clenliness trecherous trechery*  
*delt ment lept dremt brekfast*

I have left off *gess* and *gest* — there will likely be arguments that the dropping of the U here is not the same as the dropping of the A in *breath* or the I in *friend*. Again, I think that at the outset, we're best to avoid those changes that might raise additional objections — we can get to those later.

### **Conclusion: support first, reform second**

You may be looking over the words in the groups above and thinking, "But there aren't many changes here which would help children who are learning how to read and write." And you're right, there aren't. But organized spelling reform has been trying to get such changes implemented for over 120 years, and plans with any kind of sizable changes have never gained either wide or lasting support. There does, tho, seem to be a willingness to go along with *a few* changes.

From all I've read on reform and that I see at present, I believe that this can only be done in steps. We need to build support first, and win people over to *the whole idea of changing spellings*. These first words are not ment by any means to make a major reduction in spelling problems, but are to get the ball rolling; and the only way I see of doing that is to 'win over' a now-skeptical public by proposing just a few spellings, along the lines of what popular usage accepts.

Summing up, I think our main focus over the next several years should be getting more members, both to raise more revenue and to spread the word of the need for reform. And rather than being too concerned with finding the best possible scheme, I think we should adopt a small body of words which has a base in what others are already using, and that should be what we present to the public.

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## 5. Susan Baddeley pays tribute to NINA CATACH (1923–1997)

The untimely death in Paris on 25 October 1997 of Nina Catach has deprived the world of linguistics in general, and of spelling studies in particular, of one of its most brilliant and most active members. With the research team she founded at the French national research centre CNRS in 1973, she produced a stunning amount of work on all aspects of spelling, culminating in the huge Historical Spelling Dictionary. As president of AIROE (French equivalent of the SSS), she long campaigned for a simpler spelling of French, and was the main driving force behind the *Rectifications de l'orthographe française* which were approved by the Académie française and by linguists and lexicographers in 1990.

Nina was born in Cairo, which may help to explain her fascination for writing systems. She began her career as a teacher, then became a university lecturer, writing her thesis on French orthography in the 16th century (1968). Shortly after, she founded her research team at the CNRS with the name HESO (*Histoire et Structure de l'Orthographe*, which by a widening of scope, though with the same initials, later became *Histoire des Écritures et Systèmes d'Orthographe*). Influenced by the then dominant Structuralist models in linguistics, and by the works of the Soviet linguist V G Gak, she devised a conceptual model of French spelling, the *plurisystème graphique*, which served as a base for all her future research and that of her followers, whether in a historical, synchronic or peda-gogical perspective. This model, which represents spelling as a complex, multi-faceted construction, whose various components can have different functions (phonological, morphological, logographic/distinctive) placed her on a middle ground between 'phoneticists' (who believe spelling should reflect pronunciation and nothing else) and 'ideographers' (who believe writing should be entirely independent of speech).

Although Nina was capable of fine theoretical reasoning, her work, unlike that of some French intellectuals, was never abstruse, and she never delighted in jargon for its own sake. A favourite rejoinder of hers, after reading many a scientific article, was "ce n'est pas clair, ça". But she loved debate, and was equally at home with the finest brains of the world and with ordinary people, whom she never failed to win over with her humour and her good sense.

Her main scientific achievement was the Historical Spelling Dictionary of the French Language (Larousse, 1995), which was her life's work. However, her curiosity and her insatiable appetite for work led her to supervise and to carry out many other projects: among others, a computerised phonetisation programme for French, a spellchecker, a database of historical spellings, and innumerable books and articles, many of them aimed at and accessible to the general public.

Nina's work and ideas will be carried on, no doubt, by her numerous followers and by the many teachers and scholars she trained and inspired over the years. But her loss as a human being will be harder to come to terms with: she was unique, and irreplaceable, and we will all miss her very much.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J23, 1998/1, p19 in the printed version]*

## **6. American Literacy Council — Highlights of 1997.**

### **Chris Upward**

We here present a shortened version of the American Literacy Council's report of its activities in 1997. For details of the ALC's Spell-Well program [\[1\]](#), see [JSSS 22](#), Item 6.

Over 1997, the ALC focused on

- 1) equipping partner-ships arising from adoption of ALC's audiovisual literacy program, and
- 2) assisting members striving to increase the efficiency of English orthography.

#### **1 Sing-Sing**

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) class at Sing-Sing Correctional Facility was one of ALC's most significant literacy partners in 1997. After being introduced to the Spell-Well [\[1\]](#) program by ALC president Edward Rondthaler, ABE teacher David Lally adopted it. Months later, he reported students (reading levels 3rd–5th grade) using the program regularly and that, by comparison, the progress of the control group was notably slower — indeed, it continued to dwindle as it heard of the more successful Spell-Well [\[1\]](#) group practicing reading skills while creating practical pieces of writing.

#### **2 Literacy Partnership**

The good relationship forged in 1996 between ALC and Literacy Partners (Literacy Volunteers of New York City) again elicited praise in '97. Though the Sound-Spell [\[1\]](#) program had helped several adults there, Jean Fargo, set to take charge of LP's PC resource room, wanted to see it used elsewhere. She was taken to see Brooklyn's Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center, where she observed the program and heard positive feedback. Later, she received further positive feedback from her predecessor, who described her use of the program with a number of marginally literate adults. Fargo then went ahead with earlier LP plans to obtain copies for additional literacy students.

#### **3 Random House**

After long negotiations by ALC, the Random House Corporation compiled a 'Random House Webster's College Dictionary Variants List' and then generously donated it to ALC. This list displays all 4,000 words with variant forms in the 1997 dictionary (such as theater/theatre). Random House tells us the variant spellings are nearly identical in frequency to the primary spellings, a dicey prospect for newly literate writers and readers. ALC will provide teachers and students with short lists of high frequency variant spellings, for use as appropriate. For a gratis copy, visit the ALC website: [www.under.org/alc](http://www.under.org/alc) [\[2\]](#)

#### **4 Windows 95**

A generous, anonymous donation enabled ALC vice president (and resident PC wiz) Ed Lias to make substantial progress on a much requested Windows 95 version of ALC's literacy software, available in April 1998. Advance orders receive two for the price of one.

## **5 Salvation Army**

ALCs software and software-related work at the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) in Brooklyn drew rave reviews, especially the efforts of ALC managing director Joe Little. According to Ruth Droz, ARC's Education Director, Sound-Spell [1] has been extremely helpful, especially with an "unreachable and belligerent" student who "took to the program quickly" and works with it still. Droz then recommended Sound-Spel [1] to other ARC education directors.

## **6 New York City**

Julie Har-el, Staff Development Director for New York City's Department of Youth & Community Development, farmed out ALC's literacy program to various community-based organizations for trials. One site has used it in a high level Basic English class to help pupils write compositions, and plans to involve more ESL pupils in early 1998. At a 2nd site, the program is used with lower level ESL students who have various levels of literacy in their native tongue. In the end, Har-el offered the ALC program to additional sites and recommended that DYCD invite other community-based groups to submit proposals describing how they would use the ALC program to advantage.

## **7 Gessler Publishing Company**

In a second annual display of generosity and goodwill, Gessler Publishing Company, distributor of ALC software (and 175,000 catalogs), agreed to provide a list of schools that have bought the program. ALC is glad to learn that clients benefiting include: Harrison School District (CO), Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Center (WA), International School (Indonesia), Sacramento County Office of Education (CA), University of South Florida (FL), Dingman/Delaware Middle Schools (DE), Wilson County Schools (NC). So ALC sees the program assisting students in far-flung settings. Indeed, in 1997 ALC contacted the Gessler clients from '96 and discovered various uses of (and questions concerning) the program. ALC hopes to offer schools and school districts similar service in '98.

## **8 Broadcasts**

In May, Joe Little featured on a nationally televised, 90-minute MS-NBC literacy panel discussion. He emphasized the irregularities of English spelling and examined the factors that perpetuate English illiteracy. Later, Little and company discussed a wide array of remedies & resources available to speakers of English, including ALC's own home-page on the Internet [www.under.org/alc](http://www.under.org/alc) [2]

## **9 Webpage**

The ALC's webpage was accessed over 3750 times in 1997, surprisingly often for a newcomer to the WWW. While at the site, 135 visitors used a free downloadable demo of the software, dozens requested member packets & literature, and many others were searching for literacy or spelling information that ALC provided for them.

[1] The software was later renamed Sound-Write.

[2] See later [ALC web](#).

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, J23, 1998/1, pp20–23 in the printed version]

[Gerhard Augst: see [Journals](#)]

## **7. Answering the Critics of German Spelling Reform**

### **Rechtschreibreform — eine Antwort an die Kritiker**

#### **Gerhard Augst & Burkhard Schaefer**

Christopher Upward here summarizes (see Editorial for comments) a recent pamphlet replying to criticisms made of the current German spelling reform: Gerhard Augst & Burkhard Schaefer *Rechtschreibreform — eine Antwort an die Kritiker* 'Spelling Reform — an answer to the critics', Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1997, ISBN 3-12-320690-4, 49pp. Professor Augst (University of Siegen) is an editorial adviser to JSSS.

#### **Foreword**

Konrad Duden's Orthographic Dictionary of 1902, stated that the aim of the spelling reform that had just been introduced was to provide a uniform standard for written German everywhere (replacing separate conventions for Prussia, Bavaria, etc). It was emphatically not intended that the new spellings should remain unchanged for all time.

Today's reform, which was agreed in July 1996, had been in preparation since 1974, so it was surprising that fresh opposition to it should arise in September 1996 and generate so much controversy in the press. The aim of the present pamphlet was to respond to substantive objections. Polemical attacks would be ignored.

#### **Contents**

The pamphlet is structured as follows:

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*III. Concluding remarks followed by Bibliography.*

### **1 General arguments for & against reform**

#### **1/1 Reasons for reform**

Duden had always said that the rules for spelling must be simple enough for everyone to master. Back in 1872 he had written, "Writing is not just for scholars, but for the masses, who demand no less than that it be easy to handle correctly." However, after 1902 the publishing industry asked him to provide a more sophisticated set of rules for its own guidance. In 1915 these far more complex 'publishing' rules effectively superseded the simpler 'school' version, and in the 1950s the West German Ministers of Education confirmed the resulting 'Duden' orthography, with all its complexities, as the standard.

What is needed is a set of clear rules with as few exceptions (let alone exceptions to exceptions) as possible. Orthography in the modern age should be a workaday tool, like speech, and not involve fancy elaborations. But unlike speech, spelling requires unambiguous rules, which must be laid down by the state.

#### **1/2 Writing versus reading**

The needs of both readers and writers must be considered, not of writers alone. The rule for capitalizing German nouns was designed to help readers, despite the problems it causes writers. Yet historically some distinctions designed to help the reader proved unnecessary; thus the 18th century distinguished *seyn* 'to be' from *sein* 'his', though 20th century readers happily accept the form *sein* for both meanings. So today we must ask of every spelling distinction: do the benefits for readers outweigh the difficulties entailed for writers? We must further remember

the psychology of fluent reading, which depends less on subtle differences of spelling than on a broader understanding of the context.

### **1/3 The reform as compromise**

Many critics complain that the reform was imposed without warning or consultation. Yet discussions have been in train for over 20 years (indeed in Austria and Switzerland since the 1950s), proposals were in the public domain in 1988, and most details of the reform were agreed and published in 1992. In 1993 reactions were invited from dozens of interested organizations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and there was intensive consultation involving German-speakers elsewhere too. Over 2,000,000 copies of the outline proposals were published, and education officials and government representatives of all the relevant countries participated in the decision-making at every critical stage from 1986 onward. The reform represents a compromise between different interests, and no one can expect it to incorporate all their personal preferences or theories. (The pamphlet then lists 30 steps — meetings, conferences, publications, discussions, etc, etc — taken from 1974 to 1996 in the preparation of the reform.)

### **1/4 The new 'Spelling Commission'**

The new Commission, based in Mannheim, takes over the role of German spelling authority tacitly played by the Duden Spelling Dictionaries from the beginning of the 20th century. Initially the Commission will consist of members of the bodies that prepared the present reform, to which they will put the finishing touches. In due course the Commission will turn its attention to the future development of German spelling and will acquire new members, including linguists and specialists in literacy teaching.

### **1/5 How dictionaries apply the new rules**

Two dictionaries, Duden and Berthelsmann, have immediately incorporated the new spellings, but critics have estimated that the new editions contain 10,000 inconsistencies. These are, however, inevitable, being partly a matter of time (Duden himself took until 1910 to apply the 1902 rules in full) and partly due to varying treatment of alternative spellings allowed by the reform. But the critics have also discovered some unresolved problems, such as whether *S/spinnefeind* 'bitterly hostile to each other' should be capitalized, as *Spinne* 'spider' is a noun, though the whole compound is an adjective. It will be the Commission's task to resolve such matters. Other worries concern the uncertainty of competing dictionaries replacing Duden as the sole authority, and the lack (so far) of a comprehensive word list.

### **1/6 Writers and the new spelling**

Writers are especially vociferous among opponents of the reform — as they always were in the past. It seems they have a stronger attachment than most people to the spellings they use in their work. A more general concern is that the coexistence of school texts printed before and after the reform will produce 'chaos'. But everyone will face reformed and unreformed reading matter over the next 20 years, we know that pupils will not be confused, and they will learn that spellings do not stay unchanged for ever. The literary classics, present no problem either: new editions of works from past centuries have often been silently respelt, though specialist editions, or writers with a particular orthographic point to make, can always be printed using whatever spelling is desired. Small spelling changes of the kind proposed by the reform do not of course affect the meaning of the works in question (the pamphlet demonstrates this with three differently spelt versions of a poem by Goethe, one from 1814, one from 1972, and one in the new orthography).

## **2 Specific aspects of German spelling**

### **2/1 General**

The German writing system uses an adapted form of the Roman alphabet, and its rules tell us a lot about the meaning and structure of text as well as how words are pronounced. It is not purely phonetic.



## 2/2 Preserving base-word forms

The reform changes none of the traditional sound-symbol correspondences of German — in fact, a 1988 proposal that *AI* be regularized to *EI* was rejected as unacceptable (eg, *Kaiser* not changed to \**Keiser*). But some individual spellings are changed to align derived words more closely with their base forms. This too has aroused controversy.

### SS or ß?

This feature of written German was notoriously troublesome. The rules for choosing between *SS* and *ß* (eg, *Fluß/Flüsse* 'river/rivers', but *Fuß/Füße* 'foot/ feet') were too complicated for many users (not least foreign learners). The reform introduces a simple rule "SS after a short vowel, ß after a long vowel or diphthong" (so now *Fluss/Flüsse*, but *Fuß/Füße*), thus taking the pronunciation as a guide, and not varying the spelling of a base word depending on what inflection it may have. Some critics found this change excessive, but others wanted it go farther and follow Swiss practice by abolishing *ß* altogether. This more radical solution was rejected for the sake of historical continuity (ie, backwards compatibility). The commonest word affected is *daß* 'that' (conjunction) which now becomes *dass*. In 1992 it was proposed this word be merged with its homophone *das* 'that' (pronoun), but this failed to gain approval.

### Related words

The basic rule should be that words perceived to be related should spell common syllables alike, thus *behende* 'nifty' is respelt *behände* because it is perceived to derive from *Hand*. Some critics disputed this derivation and objected to the change for that reason. However, it has been generally accepted since the 19th century that etymology should not override transparent sound-symbol correspondence in deciding how words are spelt in German. Other changes based on the same principle include *belemmert*>*belämmert*, *plazieren*>*platzieren*, *numerieren*>*nummerieren*.

### Triple letters

Compound words in German occasionally place a word ending in a double letter before another word beginning with the same letter. Prior to the reform, a set of 10 rules was needed to decide that the three repeated letters should sometimes be reduced to two, and sometimes not. Henceforth three will always be written, thus former *Schiffahrt* 'shipping' from *Schiff* + *Fahrt* now becomes *Schiffahrt*. Critics find this 'ugly', but the pamphlet justifies the tripling by the principle of consistent base-word spelling. Critics may be reassured that tripled letters are relatively rare anyway, and hyphenation is allowed as an alternative (*Schiff-Fahrt*) for writers whose visual sense is offended.

### Foreign words

Every language faces a dilemma as to whether to naturalize the spelling of foreign words: use the foreign spelling, and the word may be indecipherable to readers ignorant of the source-language; but naturalize the spelling, and foreign learners may be perplexed and international spelling patterns are undermined. At different times in the past German has been more, or less, inclined to naturalize. The forms *Accent*, *Boomerang*, *Bureau*, *Carrousel*, *Elephant*, *Shawl*, *Strike*, *Typhoon* (as in English and sometimes French) were normal in the 19th century, but are today written *Akzent*, *Bumerang*, *Büro*, *Karussell*, *Elefant*, *Schal*, *Streik*, *Taifun*. The present reform has been cautious on this point, merely suggesting some current trends be taken further. Thus, because the forms *Fotograf*, *Telefon* are already current, it is recommended that other words containing the strings *GRAPH*, *PHON*, *PHOT* be allowed spelt with *F* too.

## 2/3 Word division

Nearly a quarter of the pamphlet is devoted to this topic. The question of what constitutes a word, ie, how words should be juxtaposed — with a space between, or else a hyphen, or by actual joining together — inevitably produces uncertainty. German has a tradition of joining words together as solid compounds, but there have been many inconsistencies and complications in practice. Critics have gleefully pounced on inconsistencies in the reform proposals in this area, but many involve rare words, and in practice 'mistakes' are rarely obtrusive. Many arise by false analogy, as when two parallel idioms have traditionally been

written one as a single word, the other as separate words; yet with other idioms alternative spellings as one or two words have always been tolerated.

Even among the critics of reform, few disagree that the traditional rules and practice were far more complicated than necessary. The experts accept there can be no straightforward, watertight rule covering every possible instance. The best that can be done is to provide general guidelines with key examples, and then list all common occurrences in the dictionary. Despite the predilection for forming solid compounds in German, both past recommendations and the present reform urge "If in doubt, split words up". This principle does not seriously disturb readers but it helps writers. It also implies rules are needed more to decide when to join words together than when to split them.

The pamphlet goes on to define various common patterns of compounding (eg, with prefixes) which will remain unchanged. For other patterns that have always caused uncertainty, writing as separate words is henceforth to be considered the default procedure. This means that certain expressions previously written solid will in future be split (eg, *gefangennehmen* 'to take prisoner' to be written *gefangen nehmen*). In general, if the expression can ever be split, it should always be so (thus, the above expression was always split in a structure such as *ich nehme ihn gefangen* 'I take him prisoner'). Elsewhere, splitting will be optional. The famous anomaly of split *Auto fahren* 'to drive a car' beside solid *radfahren* 'to ride a bicycle' will be resolved, giving *Auto fahren, Rad fahren*. Many critics of this aspect of the reform revealed an erratic grasp of the old rules on this point.

The pamphlet reprints an announcement made by the weekly newspaper *Die Woche* in December 1996, that after some debate it was going to implement the reform forthwith: it had concluded that in practice the reform made less difference to the familiar appearance of written German than some critics had alleged.

## **2/4 Capitalization**

The uniquely German practice of capitalizing the initial letters of nouns has long been controversial. Most Germans observe most of the rules most of the time, but learners and adults who lack practice in writing often flounder. Difficulties arise above all with the 5% of words in non-sentence-initial position whose noun-status may be ambiguous. The pamphlet illustrates the dilemma with a leaflet from the Federal German Railways in which some nominalized adjectives are wrongly capitalized. The reform clarifies some doubtful cases by further capitalization of potential nouns and decapitalization of some fixed expressions. The critics of these changes again frequently revealed in their arguments their own shaky grasp of the old conventions.

## **2/5 Punctuation**

Error analysis has shown that the former complex but rigid syntactical rules for use of the comma in German were subject to frequent misapplication. The reform tries gently to shift the criteria away from syntax and toward clarity of expression: the comma should not serve primarily to point up clauses and phrases as constituents of sentence structures, but to guide the reader toward correct understanding. Previously rigid rules will now be somewhat relaxed and greater discretion allowed to the writer.

## **2/6 Line-end hyphenation**

German has traditionally had rigid and complex rules for determining where hyphens may be inserted when a word is too long to fit at the end of a line. These rules were originally designed for printers in the days of letterpress, but have been imposed on schoolchildren (ie, everyone) through most of the 20th century. Yet most people do not need rigid rules, other than that di- and tri-graphs (eg, CH, SCH) should not be split. A complication has traditionally been that one set of hyphenation rules (based on syllables) applied to native German words, and another set (based on original morphemes) applied to learned foreign words. The reform introduces a single, syllable-based rule for all words, regardless of origin. Critics have opposed this, believing for instance that 'everyone' recognizes SYN- in *synonym* 'synonymous' as a prefix that should not be split. The reform rejects any implied distinction between 'learned' words and the rest, and

recommends a free choice of syllabic hyphenation as *sy-nonym* or etymological hyphenation as *syn-onym*.

### **3 Conclusion**

Whereas the above represents a summary of the first 47 pages of the pamphlet, we here translate its one-page conclusion in full.

To be accepted as legitimate, political decisions have to be made via agreed procedures, and contro-versies have to be settled by compromise. The two are interdependent. Once a compromise has been sanctioned by the approved procedures, then for it to be effectively implemented we must be confident that the terms of the compromise will not be reneged upon.

The procedures through which the spelling reform has passed were long and difficult, lasting, on the political level, from 1988 to 1996. The compromises were often painful, indeed the intervention by Mr Zehetmair (Bavarian Minister of Education) triggered a final battle in 1995. Once the Conference of Education Ministers had made its decision and the 'Declaration of Intent' was published in Vienna, the procedures were effectively complete, and there was now a basis for a whole series of concrete decisions. The populations of the German-speaking countries accepted that the spelling reform was going to happen; governments, publishers, schools, computer firms and many millions of citizens drew the practical consequences, confident that those decisions were binding and could be depended on.

Everything we do both in our private lives and in the public and political arena is based on expectations of dependability. For this reason, the scope for changing the decisions already made must be kept to a minimum.

We acknowledge that skilled writers in particular will find it (more) difficult to adapt the spellings they have learnt and mastered. This will be so especially when in certain cases the reasoning behind the old rules — for example visual distinctions that illuminated difficult points for the learner — itself no longer applies. That is the reason why many accomplished writers in particular feel uncomfortable with the new spellings and rules, and even find them repugnant. But aesthetic discomfort is not by itself sufficient reason for making changes now that the reform has passed through such a long process of preparation. For instance, there was disagreement to the very end over whether a single vowel should be allowed to be hyphenated off from the rest of a word. But the decision has now been taken. People who don't like it can easily avoid separating vowels off in this way; but so as not to cast doubt on the dependability of the whole reform process, such people should at least be tolerant enough to 'suffer in silence' when others apply this hyphenation rule.

Another aspect of this dependability is that people should abide by the compromises that have been reached. If everyone who had been involved in the reform were to use the present debates as an excuse to bring up again all their old arguments which had previously been outvoted, no reform would ever get off the ground.

As for other critics of the reform, our experience enables us to say that criticizing the old orthography is comparatively easy, and that the real challenge is to draw up a completely new set of rules. We have travelled a long way from pure linguistic theory to a proposal capable of gaining general support, including that of the politicians!

If, for all that, the new rules produce occasional spellings which future work on the dictionary shows to be untenable, then they should be changed, though as discreetly as possible, so as not to call the overall dependability of the reform into question. We have indicated a few instances of this in Section II above.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 23, 1998/1, p31–33 in the printed version]  
[Zé do Rock: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal Views](#) [Media](#), [Book](#).]

## 8. Virtuoso Orthographic Hichhiking

### Christopher Upward reviews *Zé do Rock fom winde ferfeelt*

Zé do Rock (1995) *fom winde ferfeelt*, Berlin: Edition diá, 280pp, ISBN 3 86034 1383. Th reviewer thanks Dr Christina Schäffner of Aston University (Birmingham, UK) for donating the work in question, and its author Zé do Rock for his comnts on th first draft. This review is ritn in Cut Spelng.

#### 1 Th book

This remarkbl work defys definition in terms of jenre. It is at once a kind of picresq autobiograficl 'novl' and an orthografic and linguistic tract. It starts off using today's (wel, actuly yestrdays, bergng in mind th latest, ie, 1996, reform of ritn jermn) standrd ritn languaj; but by th end it has led th readr into an orthograficly and gramaticly simplifyd and intrnationalized derivativ wich is radically difrnt from 20th century jermn. Without th step-by-step exposition of th systm provided by th authr, its later sections myt indeed wel verj on th incomprehensibl.

#### 2 Th hichhiker

Th book describes itself (p279) as a "sprachbuch mit reisebericht" ('languaj book with travl report'), but th emfasis cud just as wel be reversd. Most of it is devoted to an entrtainng acount of th hero-authrs 11-year hichhike thru nearly al th major and many of th minor cuntris of th world. Readrs wil enjoy his sardonic obsrvation of th cultur-specific absurditis (and worse) he experiences in one cuntry afr anothr. Howevr, wen he coms to aply his merciless wit and devastating insyts to th readrs own cuntry, smiles may wel be wiped from faces by unpalatbl home truths. For Zé do Rock has no respect for anything or anyone: not for th lejons of petty officials around th world hos chief plesur seems to consist in harasng hichhikers; and not for today's conventions of ritn jermn -or of any othr languaj.

#### 3 Th orthografr

Yet th narator is much mor than a rootless, if perceptiv, driftr. He is also an outstanding polyglot, born in S. Brazil wher jermn cultrl influence is very strong and shoing an indefatigbl facility for pikng up at least a smatrng (in th case of jermn, english and spanish much mor than a smatrng) of th local languaj wherevr he gos. Tho speakng jermn efectivly as a nativ, he is criticl of that languaj and yerns to se it simplifyd, initialy in th way it is ritn, and subsequently in its very structur. Th book thus servs not only as a travlog, but also as an acount of th authrs ideas for th simplification of jermn -wich ar then imediatly implmtd for almost th rest of th book. (This tecniqe is remisnt of th *Cut Spelling Handbook*, hos Chaptrs 3–5 set out th rules of CS and in th process begin to use them.) He regards jermn spelng as esir to reform than othr aspects of th languaj, and therfor concentrates on simplifyd spelng for th first 200 or so pajes, reservng structrl reforms for th final 50 pajes. But pajes 110–126 ofr a diversion: as he tours th cuntris of Europ, Zé do Rock playfully aplys to jermn those featur of ther riting systms wich appear most vividly exotic to forenrs.

#### 4 Simplifyd spelng

Standrd modrn jermn is designated 'schwerdeutsch' ('hevy' or 'difict' jermn, wich we shal henceforth abbreviate as SD), and th simplifyd target form 'ultradoitsh', henceforth UD. To demnstrate th efect, a paragraf (from p225) is now givn in UD spelng, folod by th equivlnt (pre-reform) SD version and an english translation. Som of th ideas wil seem familir to english spelng reformrs...

**UD** ic kann den loiten, di für aine ferainfacung sind, nur raten, mit ultradoitsh im alltag anzufangen. wenn ma klar macen will, das ma kain ignorant is, kann ma auf brifen zum baispil oben sraiben: disa brif is auf ultradoitsh abgefasst. im jar 1995 nur mit den 2 enderungen,

kleinschreibung und einigen umgangssprachlichen formen: niemand kann es einem verbieten, wir leben ja in einer demokrati. oder?

**SD** (using pre-reform jermn) Ich kann den Leuten, die für eine Vereinfachung sind, nur raten, mit Ultradeutsch im Alltag anzufangen. Wenn man klar machen will, daß man kein Ignorant ist, kann man auf Briefen zum Beispiel oben schreiben: dieser Brief ist auf Ultradeutsch abgefaßt. Im Jahr 1995 nur mit 2 Änderungen, Kleinschreibung und einigen umgangssprachlichen Formen: niemand kann es einem verbieten, wir leben ja in einer Demokratie. Oder?

**English** (CS) I can only advise people who favor simplification to start using ultrajermn for everyday purposes. If one wants to make it clear that one is not just illiterate, one can for instance write at the top of letters "This letter is composed in ultrajermn". For 1995, just the 2 changes: no capital letters, and a few colloquial forms: no one can tell us that is forbidden -after all, we do live in a democracy. Or do we?

### 5 Simplified words

The last part of the book goes beyond mere spelling reform (called 'ultradoitsch light', p275), which implies no change in pronunciation. Pages 226–280 make even more radical changes to word-forms themselves, eventually producing 'stark-ultradoitsch' ('strong UD'). This section is introduced as follows (p226): "was ab nu kommt sind keine vorschläge für die deutsche sprache mehr sondern trostlos" ("the rest of the book represents pure fantasy, rather than serious proposals for the jermn language"). The result is almost a new language, with irregular verb forms regularized, many inflections reduced, and certain common words anglicized. A comparison of the following sentences (from p275) with their SD equivalent shows how much further than just simplified-regularized spelling stark-UD goes.

**Stark-UD** die japaner verdienen gut, nur ich als schwarzarbeiter verdiene schlecht. so kann ich nicht sparen, um weiterzukommen, und die entscheidung ist getroffen: ich fliege zurück nach deutschland.

**SD** Die Japaner verdienen gut, nur ich als Schwarzarbeiter verdiene schlecht. So kann ich nicht sparen, um weiterzukommen, und die Entscheidung ist getroffen: ich fliege zurück nach Deutschland.

**English** The japanese earn well, but as an illegal worker I earn poorly. So I can't save to travel onward. The decision is taken. I shall fly back to Germany.

### 6 European spelling variation

The author spends pp112–130 traveling round Europe, highlighting the confusion of the different writing systems he encounters by applying each one to jermn in turn. The resulting text is not easy to read, indeed without some knowledge of the languages concerned even jermn readers may find it incomprehensible in places. The book thus conveys to the ordinary reader the impression of orthographic chaos that visitors from linguistically more homogeneous parts of the world must receive when touring Europe.

Standard jermn sentences, already adapted by a number of UD rules, thus appear, more or less ludicrously, as follows (the 'foreignized' english versions were proposed by Zé do Rock in correspondence with the reviewer):

In Italy standard jermn *wir sehen fast alles, was uns der Reiseführer empfiehlt* becomes (p112) *vir sen fast tutto vas uns il raisefira emfilit* ('ui si almosta tutto that is recommended to us by the guidebook' = 'we see almost everything that is recommended to us by the guidebook').

In Greece standard jermn *die griechischen Gebiete im Osten wirken schon ziemlich orientalis* becomes (p117) *di helenisson gebiete im osten wirkon schon zimlich orientalis* ('the greek areas in the east already appear rather oriental' = 'the greek areas in the east already appear rather oriental').

In Turkey standrd jermn *die türkische Sprache finde ich gut* becoms (p120) *di türkü[s]e s[prache find ich güt* ('i find the türküş language gööd' = 'I find th turkish languaj good').

In Denmark standrd jermn *Dänemark ist ein sehr flaches Land, der höchste Berg ist 80 Meter hoch* becoms (p123) *Danmark is en ser flaches land, de høchste berg is 80 meter håch* ('denmark is a verig flåt kantri. De høest mounten is onlig 80 meter hy' = 'Denmark is a very flat cuntry, th houest mountn is 80 meters hy').

In Sweden standrd jermn *die Deutschen müssen erstmal eine Studie machen* becoms (p124) *de deusken myssen ärstmal en studie maken* ('de germanor myst först make a studi' = 'th jermns must first make a study')

In Finland standrd jermn *wir wollen weitertrampen* becoms (p124) *wiir wolen waitaträämpen* ('wii wont tuu hichhaik fuurtha' = 'we want to hichhike furthr').

In th Nethrlands standrd jermn *holländisch ist eine Sprache zwischen deutsch und englisch* becoms (p127) *hollands is een spraach twischen duits en englis* ('duich is a language between germaan en englis' = 'duch is a languaj between jermn and english').

In France standrd jermn *die französische Orthographie ist tatsächlich eine Katastrophe* becoms (p128) *die franceusische ortografi is tatseschlich aine catastrofe* ('l'orthographie française is realment a catastrophe' = 'french orthografy is realy a catastrophe').

## 7 English

Th rules of english spelng, it wil be noted, ar not aplyd to jermn here as ar th rules for these othr languajs, for th obvius reasn that english has no rules. One myt even say ther is no such thing as 'typicl' english spelng wich is suseptbl to such imitation -tho as Frank Knowles has demnstrated [1] it is posbl to produce a statisticl aproxmation to th spelng patrn of any languaj, including english. (Again, in corespondnce, Zé do Rock atemptd an anglicized version of jermn, hos main featur was a librl spatrng of Gh digrafs.)

Th book nevrtheless dos hav som things to say about english. Th languaj, he remarks (p100), is simpl, but th spelng (like that of french) is a 'katastrofe'. His rules for UD state (p219) that loanwords shal as far as posbl hav ther spelng jermnized, othrwis jermn wil sufr th same fate as english: "di englenda ham massenweise französische wörta importirt und ire rectsraibung nic ferarbaitet, so das es fast unmöglich geworden is, aine fonetische rectsraibung für di sprace zu konzipiren" ('th english hav importd loads of french words, but nevr adaptd ther spelng, so that it is now almost imposbl to conceve of a fonetic orthografy for th languaj').

Th authrs jermnization of english words involvs mainly vowls. Short A becoms E, as in *heppi bend* 'happy band', and long A is foneticized to E/Ee, as in *erport* 'airport' and *okee* 'okay'. English long E is foneticized to I, as in *bim* 'beam', *isi* 'easy', and *dutifriishop* 'duty free shop'. Th long I of *time* is foneticized as Ai in *getaimt* 'timed'. The various Er, Ir, Ur spelngs becom Ör, as in *sörwis* 'service', *tishört* 'teeshirt', and *sörf* 'surf'. Varius O-vowels ar rendrd as in *no-hau* 'no-how' and *boi* 'boy'. Short U becoms A, as in *pank* 'punk'; wile th long U-sound in *computer*, *intrvew* is ritn Iu, thus *kompiuta*, *intawiu*.

Regarding consnnts, we find C rendrd as K or Ss/S, as in *komiks* and *rissaikel* 'recycle'; and ther is consnnt-dublng at th end of som monosylabls, as in *popp-hitt*. Th english J-sound is spelt Dj, as in *immidj* 'imaj', *djip* 'jeep', with plain J reservd for french J. A curius consequence of th UD rules, arising from th jermn pronunciation of initial prevocalic S as /z/ is that english *slum* becoms *sslam*. An orthografic pun is seen in th frase *the shoe must go on* (meanng TO shoe, not show).

## 8 Steps to simplfyng jermn

Zé do Rock proposes that each year a few simplifications or regularizations should be introduced to the German language (a schedule reminiscent of Harry Lindgren's concept for staged reform in English [21]). The main changes proposed for German are now described.

One of the biggest bugbears of today's German is the rule that nouns are capitalized, the problem being that it is often unclear which words should rate as nouns. Zé do Rock's first rule (for 1995) is therefore to write ordinary nouns with small letters (p11).

Despite dire warnings from traditionalists of reduced legibility, this quite dramatic change to the appearance of the language can be seen from Zé do Rock's own book scarcely to impede the reader at all. More disorienting is the extension of this lower case rule to the beginnings of sentences. This leaves the preceding full stop as the only sign of a sentence break, and the minute visual distinction between full stops and commas becomes critical for fluent reading. The effect on the 'grammar of legibility' does not appear to have been considered in propounding this rule. But at the same time the previously strict rules for placing commas in German are relaxed (p14).

Many of the simplifications involve cutting redundant letters, as with Cut Spelling in English. Certain common words which are reduced in colloquial speech have their original form reduced accordingly (p13): conventional *ist, nicht, nichts, man, nun, jetzt, einen, einem, sehen, Frauen, ziehen, haben* become UD *is, nich, nix, ma, nu, jezt, ein, eim, sehn, fraun, ziehn, ham*. Various unnecessary long vowel indicators are removed, thus *fühlen* 'to feel' aligns with its rhyme *spülen* 'to rinse' as *fülen*, *Tier* 'animal' with its rhyme *dir* 'to u' as *tir*, and *Moos* 'moss' with its rhyme *los* 'loose', etc, as *mos*. The fricative digraph *Ch* is cut to *C*, giving that letter an altogether new value; the first person singular pronoun *ich* 'I' is then written *ic* (which happens also to be the Old English form, though not pronunciation, of the same word). Greek *H* disappears from *Ph* (p52) and *Th* (p45), so *Philosophie, Theorie* become *filosofi, teori*. Silent letters disappear from French loans (p54), as when *Etat* becomes *eta* and *Niveau* becomes *nivo*. Doubled consonants are simplified except after short stressed vowels (p57), thus *Million* (long, stressed *O*) becomes *milion*, but *Kaffee* ('coffee' with stressed *A*) keeps *Ff*. The cumbersome trigraphs *Chs, Sch* as in *nächst* 'next', *Fisch* 'fish', which are pronounced as English *X* and *Sh*, are shortened (pp131, 139) to produce the English forms *next, fish*. Foreign *Ch* digraphs are variously regularized (p113), with *Chauffeur, Cholera* becoming *shoför, kolera*. The *Ck* digraph is cut to *K*, *Deck* becoming *dek* (p135). Initial *Pf* is reduced to *F* (p161), so that *Pferd* 'horse' becomes *ferd*, and final *Tz* to *Z* (p174), with *Schatz* 'treasure' becoming *shaz*. The very common unstressed ending *-Er*, is reduced to *-A*: *besser* 'better' thus becomes *bessa*.

So far UD appears to proceed largely along Cut Spelling lines. However, there are also several rules for regularization without shortening. Among consonants, the ambiguous letter *V* which in SD usually represents /f/ (just as *F* does) but sometimes stands for /v/, which is otherwise spelt *W* in German, is abolished; this Anglicizes *Volk* as *folk*, but de-Anglicizes *Veranda* as *weranda*. And the letter *T* is changed to *Z* when pronounced /ts/ (p171), with *Nation, Patient* becoming *nazion, pazient*. Among vowels, the umlauted *A* (*Ä*) becomes *E* (p186), so that the rhymes *Schädel/Wedel* 'skull/fether-dust' align as *shedel/wedel* and *Kälte/Zelte* 'cold/tents' as *kelte/zelte*. The diphthong/digraph *Ei* is foneticized as *Ai* (as in English *Thailand*), which is occasionally found already, as in *Kaiser*; the verb *reiten* 'to ride' is then respelt *raiten*. The diphthong/digraph *Eu* is foneticized to *Oi*, turning *deutsch* 'German' into *doitsh*. Unstressed *Y* may be replaced by *I* (p179), so that *Psychologie, System* are written *psicologi, sisteem*; but *Ü*, conversely, can be written *Y* as in Scandinavia, with *lügen* 'to tell a lie' and *müssen* 'to have to' becoming *lygen, myssen*, and so aligning with stressed *Y* in *fysish* (SD *physisch*) 'fysical'.

Contrary to CS rules, additional letters are sometimes inserted. For instance, the rules for showing short stressed vowels may require a following single consonant to be doubled (p102). To show that *Titel* 'title' does not rhyme with English *beetl* nor with *hotel*, but with *litl*, UD writes *tittel*; similarly, to show that *fit* is not homophonous with English *feet*, the final *T* is doubled to give *fitt*. Since *E* in final syllables (open or closed) is normally pronounced as schwa, it is doubled in exceptional cases when it has a stressed long value, so turning *Phänomen, System* into *fenomeen, sisteem*. Spellings are also lengthened in compound words (as indeed is also required by the current reform of German) by the tripling of consonants at morpheme junctions, as when *Bett + Tuch* 'bed + cloth' was traditionally written *Bettuch* 'bed sheet' with *Tt*, but is to be reformed as *Betttuch* (UD *betttuc*) 'bedsheet' with *Ttt*.



UD abolishes several complex rules for word-division and the rule distinguishing *Ss* and *ß* is made more logical - also a feature of the 1996 reform. But whereas the latter distinguishes traditional *Schoß* with long *O* from *schoß* with short *O* by writing *Schoß/schoss* respectively, UD gets rid of *ß* altogether and writes *shosz/shoss*. Above all, the retrographs *das* (neuter definite article, etc) and traditional *daß* (conjunction 'that') are merged as *das* (the 1996 reform doesn't go that far, still distinguishing *das/dass*); the UD merger eliminates the cause of perhaps the commonest misspelling seen in German - the difficulty the traditional *das/daß* distinction causes can be imagined by supposing a parallel distinction in English between *that/thatt* in sentences like *I think thatt that is so*.

A final impression of UD (adapted from p213) may be gained from the following paragraph, whose sentiments will again strike a cord with English spelling reformers:

**UD** di sprache is der boden, auf dem di gedanken gehen. viele menschen haben den löcherigen boden, den sie halbwegs kennen, lieber als einen glatten boden, den sie nicht kennen. dagegen habe ich nichts einzuwenden. andererseits versuchen aber viele dieser leute zu beweisen, daß ihr boden gar nicht löcherig ist, und die glatte schicht, die man anbietet, den boden löcherig machen würde.

**SD** Die Sprache ist der Boden, auf dem die Gedanken gehen. Viele Menschen haben den löcherigen Boden, den sie halbwegs kennen, lieber als einen glatten Boden, den sie nicht kennen. Dagegen habe ich nichts einzuwenden. Andererseits versuchen aber viele dieser Leute zu beweisen, daß ihr Boden gar nicht löcherig ist, und die glatte Schicht, die man anbietet, den Boden löcherig machen würde.

**English** Language is the ground on which our thinking proceeds. Many people prefer the potholed ground they are halfway familiar with to smooth ground they are unfamiliar with. I have no objection to that. On the other hand, however, many of these people try to prove that their ground is not potholed at all, and that the smooth surface we are offering would actually create potholes.

## 8 Conclusions

German spelling today has a reputation for being regular, at least compared with English. Yet that regularity is not entirely symmetrical, in that it benefits readers more than writers. For instance, the reader cannot mispronounce the rhyming verbs *fühlen/spülen*, as the graphemes *Üh* and *Ü* here have the same unambiguous sound value before the single *L*; but the writer may be uncertain which spelling to use for which verb and misspell them as *\*fülen/\*spühlen*. In general, simple long vowels typically have two or three possible spellings in German; thus, long *A* may be written *A* before a single consonant (eg, *Tal* 'dale'), or *Aa* (eg, *Aal* 'eel'), or *Ah* (eg, *Mahl* 'meal'); but their sound value is unambiguous, since short *A* by contrast requires two following consonants, as in *alle* 'al', *alt* 'old'. Retrophones, whose pronunciation is not explicit from the spelling or by contrast rare. One recurrent type was mentioned above: the long *O* of *Schoß* conflicted with the short *O* of *schoß*, and the 1996 reform disambiguates them by writing *Schoß/schoss* while UD has *shosz/shoss*. Another type is exemplified by *Montage*, which by standard sound symbol correspondences (long *O*, velar *G*) means 'mondays', but can also be a French loanword with short *O* and palatal *G* (cf, English 'montage'); UD disambiguates these by spelling the latter *montaje*. But such ambiguities are merely blemishes on an otherwise quite regular system.

Zé do Rock seems to object to two features of SD most of all. First there are the strict but arbitrary rules for capitalization and punctuation; and second there is the general clumsiness of German spelling, as most characteristically seen in the SCH trigraph which English reduced to *Sh* some 500 years ago and which UD also respells as *Sh*. The aim to lighten and economize the writing system is what UD most obviously shares with CS in English, as is clear from the parallel samples of UD, SD and CS above. Indeed p224 remarks that UD offers a roughly 10% economy, with similar savings in timber field for paper - exactly as claimed for CS. If one word epitomizes the shortening effect of UD, it is perhaps *almelic* which is reduced by 30% from SD *allmählich*. CS Rules 1 (cutting letters irrelevant to pronunciation) and 3 (doubled consonants simplified) are widely applied in UD, but the potential of CS Rule 2 (chiefly, use of syllabic *L*, *M*, *N*, *R* as in *botl*, *botm* *butn*, *butr*) is less obvious in German and (with arguable exceptions for syllabic *N* as in UD *gen*, *zien*, *fraun* for SD *gehen*, *ziehen*, *Frauen*) is not explored. However, it is worth considering what the effect of CS Rule 2 might be in German. UD felt the need to lengthen the endings of SD *Phänomen*, *System*, to *-een*, *-eem* to show the long stressed *E* and avoid confusion



with the very common unstressed inflections -En, -Em, as when the adjective *gelb* 'yellow' becomes *gelben* or *gelbem*; but if the latter were reduced to *gelbn*, *gelbm*, then -En, -Em could unambiguously represent the long stressed vowels of SD *Phänomen*, *System*. A further feature of CS is that it aligns the spelling of many English words more closely with their equivalents in other European languages. We recall that UD reduced such SD forms as *ist*, *nächst*, *Fisch* to English *is*, *next*, *fish*, but on the other hand, by jennily Germanizing foreign loans, UD tends to accentuate the differences between German and other languages (though some UD respellings of English loans, such as *isi* for *easy*, might recommend themselves to English reformers).

For this reviewer, one of the most rewarding aspects of the book was the experience of getting to grips with a radically reformed orthography in a language other than English. The result was to confirm the truth of John Downings' principle of the 'transfer of skill in language functions' [3], which reassures us that readers adapt readily to even the most revolutionary of reformed orthographies. After the initial encounter, few of the unfamiliar UD spellings caused the slightest discomfort in reading. But the few exceptions demand special attention for the lessons they may teach us.

The most serious obstacle to fluent reading was the loss of capital letters (as explained in §8 above). Once or twice the decapitalization of a noun caused this reviewer to stumble, as when the plural noun *Formen* 'shapes' (UD *formen*) was mistaken for the verb *formen* 'to shape'. The merging of the SD retrographs *wider/wieder* 'against/again' as UD *wider* for both provoked repeated stumbles. The loss of the Dehnungs-H (lengthening H) could make monosyllables hard to recognize at first, as when traditional *eher* 'rather', *hohe* 'high', and *Uhr* 'clock' became UD *ea*, *hoe*, *ur*; the most outrageous effect of losing this H, quoted humorously, was UD *eeenlic* for the invented compound *eheähnlich* 'marriage-like'. Finally we may note that Zé do Rock is inconsistent in indicating vowel-length, sometimes deleting length markers on the grounds that there are few competing forms, but elsewhere inserting them for no compelling reason. Thus in SD the short E of *strecken* 'to stretch' is reliably shown by the 'dubbed' digraph Ck; but UD writes *streken* on the grounds that long E does not normally occur before K, and confusion is therefore unlikely; but conversely SD *Titel* is respelled *Tittel* to prevent such confusion. Certainly this reviewer stumbled over *streken* (there is a German town called *Altenbeken* with long E before K), and believes that, whether or not conflicting forms exist, an ideal orthography should represent phonemes as unambiguously as possible, and in German one should be able to predict that a vowel letter before a single consonant is always pronounced long.

Altogether, *from Winde ferfeelt* (distorted from the German title of the film 'Gone with the Wind' and perhaps translatable as 'Wobegone with the Wind') proved a delightful and adventurous book to read. The surprising combination of travelogue and spelling manual had its logic in the constant cross-references to many different languages and spelling systems. Despite the narrator's self-presentation as a semi-educated neer-do-well, the book is full of perceptive comments on people and places, languages and spellings. While the extreme 'stark ultradroitsh' lays no claim to being a realistic reform proposal, basic UD offers a bold attempt at streamlining the rather ponderous, if fairly consistent, German spelling system. Some of Zé do Rock's proposals are included in the 1996 reform, but many of his ideas go much further. They have been noted by the new permanent commission on German spelling reform in Mannheim, so perhaps we shall hear more of them in the future.

A final note: Zé do Rock is now glad to be known as the SSS's first Brazilian member.

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 23, 1998/1, pp28,29 in the printed version]  
[Chris Jolly: see [Bulletins](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Media](#), [Books](#).]

## **9. Progress of the National Literacy Strategy**

### **Christopher Jolly reviews a recent paper from the NLS**

*The Implementation of the National Literacy Strategy* published August 1997 for the National Literacy Strategy by the Department for Education and Employment (London), 55pp.

#### **1 Strategy document**

This 55 page document sets out the Government's strategy for raising literacy standards in England and Wales. It is the successor to documents published at a consultative conference in February 1997 which was attended by Chris Upward and myself.

The document is not the working document for schools but rather the strategy document, which is therefore of interest to anyone concerned about the course of literacy education.

The overall impression from the document is that the objective is excellent, but that the strategy is not focused or rigorous enough. It does not properly reflect the factors known to raise literacy standards, and hence, in itself, is unlikely to achieve the aims set out.

The strategy's target is that "By 2002 80% of 11-year-olds should reach the standard expected for their age in English (ie, Level 4) in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests" (§2). Such a clear target is very useful.

#### **2 Subjective assessment**

However when we look at what that expected standard is, the lack of rigour shows: "In responding to a range of texts, pupils show understanding of significant ideas, themes, events and characters, beginning to use inference and deduction" (page 43). Measurements against such a standard are likely to be non-comparative and subjective, and hence of less value than they could be.

The document states that the tests should give detailed information and be marked externally (§61). This suggests that they will be criterion-referenced tests (such as the SATs [Standard Assessment Tests]), rather than the simpler, and more comparative standardized tests which could be administered by teachers in much less time. It is claimed that external testing will "ensure greater public credibility" and that the tests "should be consistent over time".

However since the tests are likely to be subjective, rather than standardized, both public credibility and consistency may be difficult to achieve.

#### **3 Structured teaching**

The most important proposal to come from the National Literacy Project is the Literacy Hour (§16). This is to be "a structured hour each day devoted to literacy for all pupils" (p7). This is an excellent concept, and a welcome reversal from the unstructured teaching that has been associated with 'cross-curricula' and 'topic based' teaching.

The document also gives an outline of how this hour is to be split up with 30 minutes given to whole class work, 20 minutes to group work, and 10 minutes to a whole class review (p51). This should be very helpful. In particular it should lead to a better balance with more whole class teaching.

Other positive signs are the encouragement for "high levels of teacher 'higher order' interaction with classes, high frequency of questioning (especially with challenge) and frequent provision of feedback", and for the "structured classroom, with a limited range of activities being pursued at any one time and a limited range of lesson goals in any session" (§12). These are the 'direct instruction' and 'whole class teaching' approaches that are known to raise standards.

#### **4 Phonics fudged**

However, the biggest disappointment with the proposals in this document is the inability to translate fine words about phonics into sensible proposals. Indeed the document seems to shrink from phonics the closer it comes to practical implementation. There is reference to "opposing sides" which have "loyalty to phonics or real books", and it then goes on to say that "while this often shallow debate has raged, research and understanding of 'best practice' have moved on" (§11). We deserve better than this from a policy document. The debate is far from shallow, but is at the heart of raising standards. Research and best practice, not to mention cabinet ministers, continue to confirm the need for early systematic phonics.

What we needed from this document was positive guidance on the reading debate. We needed to know how phonics and storybooks should be integrated in the Literacy Hour, and in the teaching.

True, the document does call for children "to draw on ... phonic knowledge" and other skills, although this is simply for "reading for meaning" (§13). It also states that successful teaching should "teach all aspects of literacy explicitly, directly and intensively" (§13). However, it falls short of calling for specific teaching of phonic skills. For instance, there is no call for children to be taught all the letter sounds of English despite repeated research studies (eg, Bond & Dykstra 1967, Chall 1967, Tizard 1988) which show that the number of letters a child knows early on is the best indicator of their future reading ability.

This inability to see the need for teaching phonic skills continues throughout the document. In the proposals for dividing out the Literacy Hour the references are to "shared text work", "sentence work", "independent reading" and "guided reading" (p51). There is no reference to time being taken specifically to teach letter sounds, blending or phonological awareness.

Similarly, parents are urged "to spend 20 minutes or so each day either reading to children or hearing them read" (p9). Again no reference to parents being urged to teach their children the alphabet, despite the proliferation of suitable books in the shops and in most homes with young children. Indeed, it has been said that the reason middle class children do better in learning to read is because they have been given more of these skills at home.

For the government the advice is to "invest in resources, for example 'big books' and multiple copies of books for shared reading" (§40). Again, no reference to investing in phonics material, despite the existence of such material which is very effectively used in many schools.

This failure to incorporate phonic teaching is reminiscent of some of the earlier editions of the National Curriculum. It is unfortunate that the nine members of the Literacy Task Force probably included only one member, Professor Barber, who is intimately aware of the research findings on the early use of phonics, and this evidence has not been allowed to come through in the document.

The current edition of the National Curriculum, and of the National Curriculum for Teacher Training, are much more rigorous in this respect, and require such phonic teaching. In this sense the Literacy Task Force document represents a return to less effective teaching. In itself it is unlikely to lead to success in the objectives that have been set.

The document does state (§23) that schools can opt out of the National Literacy Project if "the school can demonstrate, through its literacy action plan and schemes of work and its performance in National Curriculum Key Stage tests, that the approach it has adopted is at least as effective". This option is therefore likely to be available to those schools which do include early systematic phonics (unless their literacy action plan is not approved as a result).

The achievement of the National Literacy Target will clearly depend on raising the literacy standard of the many children who now fail. It is therefore unfortunate that the section on Children with Special Needs (§77–80) gave no room for radical new initiatives, such as teaching reading with reformed orthographies. Such initiatives (eg, the Initial Teaching Alphabet) have succeeded in the past, and deserve to be considered here.

## **5 Importance of training and instruction**

Training is given a welcome emphasis in the document, though there must be some doubt about the actual training, given the nature of the strategy. There is a call for the "employment of some 200 or more local educational authority (LEA) consultants" to give literacy training and to support professional development in schools" (§40). Yet it is surprising the document did not call for this training to be carried out by the much larger numbers of LEA advisors and educational psychologists as a whole. There is a tight timescale for recruiting and training such a number of consultants since the programme starts in September 1998. The existing LEA advisors and psychologists may be a better route, and indeed they have already shown a keen interest in the proposals.

Within the proposals there is a risk of schools becoming immersed in a whole new level of bureaucracy and meetings. There is a call for a "whole school strategy" (p8), "detailed and practical schemes of work", a "school literacy action plan", and the setting of "literacy targets" (§43), along with the prescriptions of the literacy hour. Some planning is obviously necessary but schools will be naturally weary of taking on a whole new raft of non-teaching-time obligations.

There is evidence within the document of insufficient understanding that all children start unable to read, and that success comes from being taught at school. There is reference to baseline assessments (§63) that will "enable schools to set individual targets for progress" and of the "learners' varied needs" (§12). It is also suggested that successful teaching "involves early identification of what pupils already know about language" (§13). In fact research shows that the child's background is relatively unimportant, be they middle class or 'disadvantaged', or speaking English as a foreign language or as their first language. If they have structured systematic instruction, including early explicit phonics, they are all more likely to achieve.

Keeping a clear focus on instruction in school is important and there has to be some doubt as to whether this is fully realized. For instance OFSTED is asked to ensure that whole school strategies include "promoting literacy across the curriculum" (§66). This suggests a return to the much less effective cross-curricula teaching. The expected success of the Literacy Hour concept will come from its focus on the specific teaching of reading. To encourage clutter in the curriculum in this way is to undermine the concept.

There are other ways the good objectives of this document could be undermined by not focussing enough on instruction at school. There is a call, for instance, for government to find "cost effective means of getting advice to parents via the health visitor network and doctors' surgeries". As it happens, my wife is a GP, and the upheaval and pressures in her profession continue to be enormous. She already resents being expected to be an unpaid assessor for the Department of Social Security. Her profession would see as ridiculous the suggestion that this should be extended to giving unpaid, informed advice to parents on the teaching of reading. The correct route for giving reading advice to parents is through the school.

## **6. Strengths — and weaknesses**

Overall, the impression is of an important and visionary objective which runs the risk of failing through the shortcomings of this document. Some good will come from it, such as the Literacy Hour, and the good idea for a National Year of Reading starting in September 1998. But if the objective that has been set is to be reached it is unlikely to come from the plans in this document.

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 23, 1998/1, p30–31 in the printed version]  
[Chris Gledhill: see [Journals](#), [Newsletter](#)]

## 10. Reform through International Auxiliary Languages

### Christopher Gledhill reviews *Lango*

Robert Craig & Antony Alexander (1996) *Lango* — *Language Organisation* Douglas, Isle of Man, 87pp (ISBN 0-9529446-0-X)

#### 1 International auxiliary languages

The overall aim of *Lango* is to set out an alternative view of the international language problem and to propose a reformed version of English as an international auxiliary language. The argument builds up to a spelling reform proposal, although the main strength of the book lies in the initial chapters and their argument that modified international English ('Lango') would allow for rational spelling reform. Well over half of the book is dedicated to discussing the development of English and there is a considerable variety of discussion as the authors build up examples of other auxiliary languages, from French and Esperanto to Chinese and Creoles.

For a publication that is published by the authors, 'Lango' is a relatively substantial book (87pp), and at best entertaining. Although the book's main aim is to argue the possibilities of specifically adapting English to international use, unfortunately little space is given to what the authors actually put forward as the international auxiliary language. There are promising hints in the initial chapters, but nothing is said of them when the time comes to put them together. One interesting idea is to import vocabulary to English from other languages in order to replace homonyms. But there is no justification of why homonyms are such a problem and the proposal is dropped in the later chapter that tries to deal with Lango's vocabulary.

#### 2 Letters reassigned

Similarly, spelling reformers are likely to be disappointed by the project as presented in Chapters 16–18. The principle is to effectively create a new alphabet: reserving the roman uppercase for vowels and the lowercase for consonants. This allows for some pretty radical reassignments. Rational linguists and spelling reformers would perhaps reassign letters with some mnemonic for sound according to an existing system, but Craig and Alexander plump for shape of letter, breaking completely with the conventions of the roman alphabet. So the letter A symbolizes /ð/ as in *the*. I presume this is because of the slight typographic resemblance to the Old English symbol 'thorn', but again there is no discussion of this in the book. They do argue grounds for D to represent the vowel /ɒ/ as in *frost*, and there are many other changes, but the reader is left to figure out what motivates the bulk of the system. Chapter 18 shows us what this does to "Our Father, which art in heaven", which becomes '.BU .fMaU, wle Mt In hEvUn' (full stops indicate capitals in the Lango system). Considering that the authors spend a lot of the book stating that the language is to be based as far as possible on what most speakers of English and other languages are familiar with, this is way too disruptive.

#### 3 Unjustified assertions

Unfortunately, there are numerous factual and stylistic slips, and the experienced spelling reformer or linguist will wince at the way certain arguments are presented. There are many good points, but almost every fact is accompanied by a judgement that is either unbelievable or unjustified in the text. There are descriptions of languages that 'do not have parts of speech', or have only 'partial phonologies', the infinitive is described as 'essentially a self-directed imperative'... The structure of English and Finnish is said to affect the behaviour of English and Finnish speakers, and Shakespeare's neologisms are termed failures when they 'did not stick'. I could go on... The basic problem is that these pseudo-facts are unsupported by academic or rational argument and act as a frustrating distraction from the main aims of the book. If the authors want to describe the linguistics of English, they should direct us to Crystal's encyclopedias and get on with the main theme: the future of a planned international language. Topics chop and change, amid repetitions and contradictions. The expert reader is not of course the intended target of the book, but I doubt many people will appreciate the pomposity of some

of the writing, or understand why terms like 'praxis', 'climacteric' are so emphasized. Nonetheless, the non-linguist would probably enjoy the introductory chapters and appreciate the glossary, although they will not find 'climacteric'...

#### **4 Basic contradiction**

The ultimate problem with this book is not the quirky presentation or the unjustified nature of some of the proposals but a basic contradiction. In the opening sections the authors insist that organic, small-scale, almost 'democratic' change is better than rational approaches proposed by academics (Esperanto is the main culprit here). But they then go on to propose their own highly biased and idiosyncratic system for the express attention of an 'international language committee'. The real point should be the insight that international communication does not have to be bound to one rationalized artificial language or to a dominant but irrational national language but can be a happy medium of the two: an internationalized, modestly streamlined version of English which would permit a degree of flexibility with its written form. I don't doubt that much of what Craig and Alexander predict will come to pass: they present some convincing evidence and much of what they claim is common sense. Yet their treatment of the subject and their proposals are based on a naive view of language and are far less realistic or intriguing than their initial description of the problem.

[Paul Fletcher: see [Journal 31](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal View 2](#)]

## **11. English as a Global Language**

**David Crystal (June 1997) English as a Global Language, Cambridge Univ. Press, ISBN 0-521-59247-X, £12-95**

### **Paul Fletcher reviews**

The rise of English to its present-day dominance among the world's languages started with the Pilgrim Fathers' expeditions to America and was then extended by colonialism and the political and commercial dominance of Britain in the 19th century and of the USA in the 20th. Although the seeds were sown earlier, the meteoric rise of English has happened since 1950, and the collapse of communism has left the USA, the main English-speaking power, without a rival.

David Crystal is one of the world's leading experts on language and a former professor of linguistics at Reading University. He has written and broadcast widely on English and edited a number of Cambridge University Press encyclopedias.

His lively and interesting account is not marred by the jingoistic and anecdotal approach used by so many writing about English. Instead he first defines what is meant by a global language, then he explains why English has become pre-eminent: the historical reasons, the cultural foundation, and the cultural legacy, in particular the use of English by international agencies, Hollywood, scientific research, Teaching English as a Foreign Language and the Internet.

Unfortunately, Crystal makes only passing reference to our eccentric spelling and rather discounts it as a stumbling block to the rise of English. His thesis is that despite any intrinsic difficulty in a language, its survival or popularity depends entirely on politics, culture and commerce.

He confidently predicts an ever widening role for English standardized by modern communications in parallel with the continued development of local forms of the language. For spelling reformers this means that to concentrate on the internationally used form of the language must be the first priority and that users of the local dialect or form of English can be left to their own devices (and possibly retaining TO).



[Steve Bett: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 12. Sounds and Symbols in American English

**Bea Schramm (1994) *Sounds and Symbols in American English: Keys to Phonics and Spelling Patterns*, Lafayette, IN, 52pp, ISBN 0-9640725-0-5**

### Steve Bett reviews

The proponents of phonics as a method for teaching reading are often the source of ammunition for spelling reform. The book by Bea Schramm is a good example. Schramm, until her retirement, was the director of a high school reading lab. She felt that the knowledge of phonics and spelling patterns enabled many of her students to master the art of reading. Her 52-page book is a well organized attempt to reveal the hidden code. The chapters include: long vowel sounds, short vowel sounds, spelling vowels, consonants, word lists, 2-vowel spelling patterns.

Schramm distinguishes 45 distinct sounds. She lists all the different ways these 45 sounds are spelled in English. At no time does she suggest that the code is inconsistent and inefficient. She provides lots of rules such as "The letter G can stand for the J-sound when the G is followed by E, I or Y. The exceptions to the rule include *get*, *give*, *girl*, and *gift*. The letters L, R, M, and N at the end of a syllable always carry a schwa-sound with them as part of their pronunciation: *prism* and *subtle* become 2-syllable words because of this."

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 23, 1998/1, p33–34 in the printed version]

## 13. Adlt Litracy Standrds in Britn

### Chris Upward reviews two recent studis

**Basic Skills Agency (March 1998) *Survey of Adult Literacy and Numeracy Levels in every district and unitary authority in England*, London: Basic Skills Agency, foldr of 8 sets of stapled sheets of outline data (also available on CD Rom, ful brekdown of data ward by ward).**

**Siobhán Carey, Sampson Low, Jacqui Hansbro (1997) *Adult Literacy in Britain*, London: The Stationery Office (for Office for National Statistics), 195pp, £30, ISBN 0-11-620943-7.**

Th reviews ar rith in Cut Spelng.

### BSA jeograficl survey

JSSS has regulrly reportd on th past surveys of adlt litracy standrds produced by the british Basic Skills Agency (formerly Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, or *ALBSU*). Many of those surveys hav had direct or indirect spelling implications of som intrest or importnce. Th Agencys latest excrise in this field (tho th actul survey was contractd out) difrs from erlir work in being jeograficly specific: its findngs sho how adlt litracy standrds vary markedly from one locality to anothr — from th best result of a population with just 9% lo or very lo litracy levls, to th worst result with 24.4%. Th purpos of th survey is to enable local orgnizations to target particulr needs, especialy in aplyng for govrnmnt grants for taking litracy deficits. Thus this BSA survey is seen to mesh with govrnmnt policy of rasing litracy standrds (se pp28–29 abov regardng th National Literacy Strategy) and is timed as a prelude to th " millenium" (*sic*).

Unlike erlir BSA publications, wich typicly had th format of slim paperbaks, th presnt report is not formly 'publishd' at al (no ISBN), but consists of a foldr of 8 stapled sheavs of A4 sheets. Th first sheaf is a press-relese, th secnd a jenrl introduction to th litracy survey, th third sets out how th survey was administrd, th fourth givs th results for th difrnt localitis county by county, and th fifth givs th results in ordr of achevemnt from best to worst, district by district. Th remaining thre sheavs present simlr data, but relating to numeracy, not litracy.

Altogethr 8,804 intrvews wer conductd thruout England by questionair in th respondnts homes, with quota controls set for aje, jendr and workng status. Th respondnts wer selectd as fluent english

speakers aged 16–60 who had been at least partly educated in the UK. As summarized in the press release, "the literacy tests covered tasks like reading a short note, a recipe and a medicine bottle label, spelling words like *apply* and *writing*, and extracting information from the Thomson Directory", but writing was not otherwise tested. The questionnaire took, on average, 30 minutes to complete for literacy and numeracy together.

Overall, 15% of respondents were classified as 'low' or 'very low' for literacy, with more than twice as many, (33%) low/very low achievers for numeracy. Incorrect answers for over 15% of the literacy questions rated a 'low' classification, while 'very low' was given for over 32% wrong answers. For three reasons we may surmise that the 15% classified as 'low/very low' might be an underestimate for the population as a whole. One reason is that interviews were conducted in people's homes, which automatically excluded the homeless and prison-inmates who are known to suffer high levels of illiteracy. A second reason is that a further 3% failed to complete the test, when — we may again surmise — many perhaps felt unable to cope with it. And the third reason is the exclusion of non-fluent-English speakers.

Geographically the distribution is as one would expect. Every one of the 11 best scoring localities (under 10% 'low/very low') lies in the rural or prosperous suburban southeast of England, with 5 in Surrey alone, 2 in Buckinghamshire, and 1 each in Berkshire, Essex, Hampshire and Cambridgeshire. Conversely, nearly all the 12 worst scoring localities (20% or more 'low/very low') lie in inner cities or traditional industrial areas: 5 of the 7 at the very bottom of the table in inner London, 2 on Merseyside, 1 each in Durham, Manchester and the West Midlands; slightly less expected among these lowest scoring localities are Corby and Leicester. Some of these areas are characterized by a high proportion of non-UK educated adults — yet these were excluded from the survey.

If the survey enables government to target areas in greatest need, and (via the more detailed breakdown available on CD Rom) local authorities to target points of greatest need even more precisely, it will have proved its worth. The fact that the results of the worst localities are around 250% worse than those of the best cries out for action.

### **International survey**

If there were reasons for thinking the above BSA survey might have underestimated the problem, that may seem confirmed by another survey, *Adult Literacy in Britain* (henceforth ALiB), published a few months earlier under more official auspices than the BSA, being mainly funded by the Department for Education and Employment. This gives a figure of 22%, as against the BSAs 15%, for low literacy (to be precise, for the lowest of 5 levels of literacy). Curiously, it was co-commissioned (though not published) by the BSA and attracted the comment (as reported in the press) from the BSAs Director that the problem seemed worse than had been thought — perhaps the BSA survey was already at the press.

As with all surveys, we must beware of assuming that like is being compared with like. Several differences immediately vitiate direct comparison between the BSA and ALiB surveys: the sample used for ALiB is less than half the size (3,800) of that used by the BSA; the subjects' age-range rises to 65, not 60 (older generations have lower levels of literacy); it contains no writing or spelling element, indeed the ALiB introduction (§1.2) virtually equates literacy with reading only; the figures for numeracy ('quantitative literacy') are grouped with those for 'prose literacy' and 'document literacy'; and finally it covers Britain rather than just England. Comparisons between the 15% for low literacy levels found by the BSA survey and ALiB's 22% are therefore not very meaningful.

The two surveys also differ in their focus. First, while the BSA picked out variations in literacy between parts of England, ALiB does so between countries, both within the UK (the Welsh score lower than the English and Scots) and internationally (especially Chapter 6), since it forms part of the International Adult Literacy Survey which will eventually cover 20 countries. In this it makes amends for the lack of British involvement in the 32-country IEA survey (1993) which was discussed in *JSSS 19 1995/2* (pp5–8). Second, ALiB investigates various social angles of literacy, as implied by the chapter titles 2. *Distribution of literacy skills*, 3. *Literacy skills and work*, 4. *Literacy in everyday life*, 5. *People with low literacy skills*. Third, it is a far more substantial production than the BSA folder with its stapled sheaves. In total 195 pages long in full A4 format, pages 8–79 discuss the findings and illustrate them with charts; pp81–155 consist of statistical tables; and the rest provides background material, such as sample literacy tests. Altogether it is an impressive publication.



While ALiB presents a mass of interesting information on many aspects of literacy levels in society (eg, correlated with gender, age, education, employment, income), spelling reformers will be chiefly interested in any with orthographic relevance. These are in fact rather few. Comparison of literacy levels between English and a single more regularly spelled language is apt to highlight the harm done by the present antiquated condition of English spelling. In an international survey, on the other hand, such differences tend to be blurred by other variables. This effect was seen in the IEA survey mentioned above, and it is seen again in ALiB, indeed, as reading rather than writing is the focus, any spelling effect is swamped by other factors. Nevertheless, the findings of Chapter 6 (*Literacy skills in other countries*), the longest in the book, are of special interest.

Figures are given for nine countries: Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland (French and German separately) and the USA. Assessment was based on performance with three types of text, 'Prose Literacy', 'Document Literacy' and 'Quantitative Literacy', and graded into 4/5 literacy levels: 1 (the lowest), 2, 3, and 4 combined with 5 as the highest. No aggregated scores for the three types of text together are given, but they are easily calculated from Table 6.1 on p67. The weakest scores by far came from Poland, but otherwise the three countries with the largest percentage of performers in the lowest literacy level were the three English-speaking countries (in ascending order) Great Britain, the USA and Canada. If we then calculate the balance of performances between the two lowest levels and the 2/3 highest levels 3 and 4/5, the following scores emerge: Poland -73, Great Britain -3, USA +7, Switzerland (German) +8, Switzerland (French) +16, Canada +22, Germany +27, Netherlands +39, Sweden +72. Sweden had the best scores by every measurement, and the English-speaking countries scored quite well at the top level, besides having the largest numbers after Poland at the bottom level.

The survey also contains a vast quantity of interesting more detailed data that we cannot discuss here, except to make one point: Table 6.3 (p70) shows that while most countries, especially Poland, display a marked improvement through the generations (the 56–65 year-olds whose education was disrupted by the World War II have by far the worst scores), there is least improvement in the English-speaking countries, and the youngest generation of Americans (16–25-year-olds) actually shows a decline, with as many poor performers as in the oldest generation.

We already commented that it is hardly possible to draw direct conclusions from this survey about the effects of the irregular spelling of English. However, the relatively poor showing of the English-speaking countries is at least consistent with such systemic difficulties, and furthermore the decline in literacy levels among the youngest generation coincides with the widespread fashion for neglecting phonics in literacy teaching in those countries. This latter deficiency is now being remedied, but the spelling system remains unmodernized, with consequences clear in the classroom if not from this survey.

As noted above, the survey is overwhelmingly concerned with reading rather than writing skills. Previous surveys (eg, NFER, BSA) have shown how much easier (hence cheaper) it is to assess reading than writing levels. Yet this imbalance between the two facets of literacy does beg questions, as implied by the finding that people consider their level in reading to be higher than in writing and numeracy (p41, §3.7). How important is writing, compared with reading, to people's ability to function in society? How well do reading levels correlate with writing levels? Can we afford to neglect writing relative to reading? How far can we, or should we, separate the two?

The overall picture created by ALiB is of significant inequality in literacy standards as measured along many different social dimensions both in Great Britain and internationally. We may feel that such findings merely confirm what any observer would have intuitively expected, but at least we do now have confirmation, indeed the survey presents a wealth of empirical data that policy makers will do well to take on board in the future (perhaps the National Literacy Strategy is already doing so). The need for some kind of remedial action is implicit in the findings that a very large number of people even with poor literacy need reading skills at work, and that the change of employment patterns from heavy industrial to high-tech makes higher literacy demands.

The next question is what should be done about it, and on this ALiB has nothing to say; the BSA survey at least enabled clusters of low achievement to be targeted, though it does not say how. Neither survey mentions the dire state of English spelling as a factor depressing literacy levels generally.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J23, 1998/1, pp24–27 in the printed version*]

## 14. Edward Carney English Spelling

### Christopher Upward reviews:

Edward Carney (1997) *English Spelling* London & New York: Routledge, ISBN 0-415-16109-6, 99pp.

This review is rithn in Cut Spelng.

### Authr, Series

Edward Carney will be nown to many readrs as authr of th most substantial study of english spelng of th past decade: his massiv *A Survey of English Spelling* (1994) was revewd by Roger Mitton in *JSSS* 19 (1995/2). His new book, revewd here, clearly derives from th erlir magnum opus, reflectng much th same atitude and drawng on its precursrs analysis and rich resorces.

Th new book is publishd in Routledges series of Language Workbooks, editd by Richard Hudson, wich reflects th new demand for 'languaj awareness' materials in british education. It is advrtised on th bak covr as aimd at " absolute beginners" , but David Crystal recmends it, also on th bak covr, as " of enormus valu to teachrs" . So ar teachrs abslute beginrs in english spelng? This ambivlnce of levl, as we shal se, also marks th content of th book.

### Structur

Th book consists of 14 short chaptrs ('units'), namely: 1 Speaking and writing, 2 Finding phonemes, 3 Long and short vowel pairs, 4 Marking vowel length, 5 Complications in length marking, 6 Some consonant spellings, 7 Some vowel spellings, 8 Look-alikes and sound-alikes, 9 Sound-alike affixes, 10 The spelling of names, 11 Rules and mistakes, 12 More than letters, 13 American and British spelling, 14 Spelling reform. We thus start with a foundation in th alfabetic principl of sound-symbll and symbll-sound corespondnce, proceed thru varius areas of wel-nown dificlty, and end with a considration of how english spelng myt be regulrized in th futur: for spelng reformrs in particulr, a thoroaly plusing developmnt.

Th units hav a varid structur, with sections of exposition, excrcises and sumry, and tables and figrs placed intrmitntly. Th units take up only 72 of th ful 99 pajes, with 21 of th remainng pajes givn over to ansrs to th excrcises. Near th end, befor th index, ar twelv titles sujetd for furthr readng: sevn of ther authrs ar past or presnt membrs or asociats of th SSS. Theory or practis?

On one levl, th work has som of th apurtnces of an academic textbook. It begins by introducing basic concepts, such as fonemes, digrafs, short/long vowl distinctions, etc. Here and ther we dip into th histry of english spelng, lernng for instnce about th Gret Vowl Shift, and th efect of boroing from french, latn or greek. Tecnicl terms ar explaind and then used in sentnces like (p43) "If the stem is phonetically an English free form verb, it is fairly safe to use <-able> (7 exampls folo). A bound verb stem with the same lexeme generally requires <-ible>" (8 exampls). This may be as sound a description of th -ABLE/-IBLE variation as can be devised, but wethr it cud help riters to make th distinction themselvs must be doubtful. Othr theoreticl distinctions may also be questiond: dos a book on spelng need to distinguish fonetic and fonemic analysis? dos Carneys distinction between 'emty' lettrs such as th B in *debt* (tho pronounced in *debit*, wich he dos not mention) and 'inert' lettrs such as th G in *sign* (as pronounced in *signature*) shed any lyt on th use of silent lettrs in english words? In fact, most ar ther not to exemplify 'emty' or 'inert' categris, but because they wer formrly pronounced (a few wer insertd by false analojy); but countless othrs wer discardd wen they cesed to be pronounced (eg, GH from *fligh*, now rithn *fly*). It is historicl accidnt, in one way or anothr, not som modrn linguistic distinction, that acounts for ther use today.

On anothr levl, th book is a practicl primer. Excrcises giv practis in identifiyng fonemes, decoding fonemic transcription, anylyzng th purpos of dubld consnnts, and spotng homografs and homofones. Unit 9 ofrs gidance to poor spelrs on a numbr of variant word-endngs, as between -ANT/-ENT, -ABLE/-IBLE, -ER/-OR, -EER/-IER, -ETTE/-ET, -ICE/-IS, -ISE/IZE, and th prefixes EN-/IN-. Many spelng reformrs ho hav confined themselvs to desyngng a fonemicly regulr

orthography rather than studying the present spelling of English will find the patterns and structures demonstrated in this and other units of the book very revealing. One might expect that Unit 11 ('Rules and Mistakes') would be of most use to poor spellers, but it is not. It implies, but does not quite say, that there are no watertight spelling rules in English. As for mistakes, numerous patterns of error are listed, but they are put down to bad teaching and the 'complexity' of the system; redundancy, which is to blame for 2 out of 3 errors, is not mentioned.

### How awful is English spelling?

Readers of *JSSS* will doubtless judge this book partly by its attitude to spelling reform. Here the picture is mixed. The heart sinks at the question-begging remark right at the start (p2) that English spelling "serves its purpose better than it is usually given credit for" (what sort of quality measurement is that, exactly?). Likewise, the repeated, uncritical assertion that (eg, p29) "letters have a useful purpose by indicating links with related words" provokes the response "what, even if the confusion they cause outweighs that usefulness? Why exactly is it 'useful' that the G in *sign* shows a link with *signature*?" On the other hand, Carney frequently gives vent to his irritation with the waywardness of English spelling: certain patterns are described as "troublesome", "notorious", even "a disaster area".

That his mind is not closed to reform is shown by the final Unit, which is chiefly devoted to the question, in particular to a very reasonable account of Cut Spelling and New Spelling 90, both of which he considers "very radical". A less radical alternative which he mentions would be to regularize a number of the most irregular forms using existing patterns, for instance replacing -IGHT by -ITE. This is surprising in view of the systemic and cyclical problems entailed by forms with silent final -E — but then Carney approaches English spelling very much as an academic linguist, not as a sociologist or a classroom methods specialist. The big obstacle he sees to any kind of spelling reform is "political", though he does not discuss the implications of that. The implementation of English spelling reform is not necessarily only a political question.

### Strengths and weaknesses

Beside the systematic, structured approach to teaching about English spelling (for the book is very much a teaching, or learning, tool), a major attraction is the elucidation of subtle patterns of sound-symbol correspondence which few readers will have been previously alert to. It is here that the book's claim to try "to show the underlying regularities in English spelling" is made good. However, whether that amounts to an overall underlying regularity is debatable: the question of why and how the world's prime language comes to have "disaster areas" is not addressed. Reference is made to the "design" of the system, but how, when, and where we can find the blueprints, to that no answer is given. This is a pity, when a single paragraph on historical development could have made it clear that whatever design once existed has long been lost. All in all, it is hard to see in English spelling anything other than an agglomeration of accidents.

It is when Carney leaves his pattern-tracing that we become most uneasy. Unit 1 begins: "Writing seems to have evolved out of picture-painting some 8,000 years ago" — two half-truths that add up to nothing like the whole truth (the earliest writing evolved out of counting systems more like 6,000 years ago). Unit 8 begins: "In any writing system that has evolved over a long period of time, you will find examples of *homographs* and *homophones*." But other alphabetic writing systems (with the partial exception of French) really do show a more or less clear design, and the arbitrary tangle of homographs and homophones that characterizes English just does not arise.

The book can certainly be recommended to spelling reformers (who are hardly "absolute beginners"), as they are bound to learn things about the present spelling of English which they did not know before (as this reviewer did). But it is best regarded as a challenge to find exceptions to the patterns listed, indeed to question the assumptions that underlie its basically apologetic view of English spelling — and we must be grateful for the publicity it gives to reform.

## 15. LETTERS

Letters are welcomed on any matters raised by items appearing in JSSS, or on any observations or experiences relating to spelling that readers may wish to report.

### Ridicule

I've just been thinking about *RIDICULE*. What I fear most as the death knell of any renewed effort to simplify spelling is ridicule. I'd rather face irate teachers of English who claim that we are destroying the beauty of the English language than I would David Letterman or Jay Leno taking a few deft potshots on their TV programs.

Obviously the more radical systems are wide open to derision. (I'm not saying we shouldn't explore and debate the pros and cons of the radical systems among ourselves. On the contrary, this is extremely valuable since it

[1] helps us work through the logic of every approach,

[2] serves as a method of brainstorming to make sure we have all the possible ideas available for consideration, and

[3] prepares us for having to make the hard decisions on how to address certain problematic spelling issues. I *am* saying, tho, that any proposals for radical systems will provide a field day for the stand-up comedians.)

But even some of the more modest proposals can be easily mocked. Some examples:

- Using K for all hard C-sounds makes simply-spelled English look like the German that is spoken on the old Hogan's Heroes TV comedies. I think it was all these K's that led to that joke about the EC using English as the official language only to have it turn into German. (And it's jokes like that which can kill the effort.)
- Cut Spelling starts to look an awful lot like the old American advertisement for a semi-phony system of shorthand that you saw in comic books and tabloids: "If u cn rd ths "
- Using -SHUN for -TION (*informashun*) looks like some illiterate writing with a crayon on a piece of wood. (Note that I am indicating the downside and opposite of what I promoted some months ago, ie, that we pay attenshun to how illiterates spell, since it gives us tips on what seems intuitive to people. Also be aware that I personally like -SHUN. I'm just saying that these are the kinds of things we need to watch out for, since they can be so easily mocked.)

Too many double vowels (OO, EE) make English look childlike somehow.

So Lesson Number One of *RIDICULE* is to evaluate from this perspective every change we might suggest, the better to head off an attack by comedians. For example, I think this speaks to putting a few vowels back in CS for the high volume words like *the* which don't cause problems anyway.

This brings us to Lesson Number Two. Ridicule is a weapon we can use, and Lord knows, English spelling is a sitting duck. I'm thinking of the ditties about wrongly spelled words that make it thru spell chequers, and the like. Or on another level, the classic *ghoti* for *fish*, using the GH from *laugh*, the O from *women*, and the TI from -TION.

Obviously, everyone has been doing this all along. All I'm promoting here is the explicit understanding that ridicule is a powerful tool that we can use to tremendous advantage.

I personally would like to get everyone's favorites of this type, and maybe we can make a more concerted effort to get our mockeries of TO on the web and in letters to the editors.

Now that I've been part of the simplified spelling network for a few months, I'm beginning to see ways of promoting a campaign. So stay tuned as I have a chance to write up some of my thoughts and share them. (Next installment: Getting Shakespeare on Our Side.)

**Dan MacLeod, New Jersey, USA**

## Fine finish to Finland's Finnish

When I was living in Finland I asked about literacy levels, and was told that all Finns could read and write unless they were mentally retarded. I don't know about dyslexia in Finland — perhaps they don't have any. I do not know the Finnish word for dyslexia; it is not in my English-Finnish dictionary either.<sup>a</sup>

One Finn told me that he always thought the funniest question that he heard one Englishman ask another was, "How do you spell your name?" Fancy having to ask that sort of thing!

The Finnish word for *to spell* is officially *tavata*, but in my experience it is a word that no one uses because there is normally no need for it. *Tavaus* translates in my dictionary as "spelling (by syllables)", suggesting that there is no other way of spelling that a Finn might discuss or consider. One does not have to learn to spell Finnish words, any more than one has to learn the figures for a number that has never cropped up before. If one needs to put, eg, *two thousand, two hundred and ninety seven point six* into figures, even an Englishman knows what to put down, without someone having to teach him that particular number. There is no system like 6 before 3 except after 7 to consider.

I have a large dictionary for Finns about Finnish words with explanations in Finnish (*Nykysuomensanakirja*, 1966). I have looked up *tavata* in it. *Tavata* normally means *to meet*. It can mean *to spell*, but more in the sense of 'spelling out', as in using the Finnish equivalent of ABLE, BAKER, CHARLIE, DOG, EASY, FOX, etc, to give information over a crackly radio link. As the two final explanations of *tavata* in its spelling context, the dictionary says roughly:

- 1) In foreign, but especially English language situations it means: to enumerate from letter to letter how a word is written.
- 2) In England, foreigners in particular are often asked "How do you spell your name?"

In other words, the concept of spelling as we know it is not something that a Finn normally comes across, unless he is dealing with non-Finnish matters.

**Colin Davies, Berkhamsted, UK**

(Dr Davies is currently preparing an [article on Finnish spelling](#) for a future issue of JSSS. — Ed.)

## Iberian oddities

Just back from a holiday in Andorra, where the normal language is Catalan (not to be confused with Spanish). Great to see such spellings as *Xampu* to wash your hair in, *Xampanye* to drink, and a *Xef* to do the cooking. Also to note that all vowels in Catalan are pronounced as a schwa when in unstressed position, irrespective of the spelling: it makes the words look like Spanish but sound like French.

I was also delighted to spot a hefty tome (c.200 pages) in a bookshop on "the most common errors in Spanish spelling" (original title in Spanish of course), for use in Spanish schools, totally disproving any arguments that Spanish spelling is fully consistent, phonemic, intuitive, and a role model for English. I'd bet you can find similar books for Italian, German and other alleged ideal systems; you certainly can for Dutch and Danish, not to mention French of course.

**John Gledhill, Coventry, UK**

## SSS apprenticeship?

Kate Greenland suggests (*JSSS* 1997/2) — 'not seriously' — that preparing one's own scheme would be a useful qualification requirement for new members.

More seriously I suggest that expertise in marketing, or a career as a salesperson, or at least some experience in selling more than the odd unwanted bicycle or table lamp at a garage sale would be a more useful skill for the SSS at this stage.

We have had a plethora of schemes, many of them ingenious, but we have failed to change English spelling. We are fortunate to have many educators and academics in our ranks, but we seem desperately in need of members with an ability to market our product. Scheming without selling is training without playing.

**Allan Campbell, Christchurch, New Zealand**

## Cut spelchekng statistics

A wile ago I received a draft articl from Chris Upward in Cut Spelng.

I decided to use th oportunity to set up a Cut Spelng Custm Dictionry on my computer. I hav Microsoft's Word 97 set to corect spelng as I typ. Th program hlylts evry suspect word with a wigly red line. Moving my cursr from err to err, I clikd to se wat sujestions th program wud make for replacemnt of th CS 'mistakes'. Wat very quikly struk me was how frequently th spelchekr ofrd th corect TO form.

Belo ar a few lines of th articl with each 'corectd' word folod by an index. This shows th order of th sujestion, with 1 as th sujestion of first choice, 2 as th secnd, &c. X indicates that th spelchekr was unable to find a suitabl sujestion. Z indicates that th spechekr faild to recognize th CS form. Th figr 1 hides th numbr of times th corect sujestion is th only sujestion.

Here is a sampl of th output:

*Th3 mature anglo-saxn1 spelng1 systm1 cudZ hav2 developd1 into a straitforwrdX modrn1 orthografy1 like jermn1 or swedish1. Howevr1, th3 normn1 conquest scochd2 that possibility1 by injectng1 contra-dictry1 spelng1 patrn2 from old french1, wich1 wer2 themselvs1 contradictd1 by later loans from latn1 and greek1. Then, around th3 15th century, major chanjes1 in pronunciation gave a jolt to th3 systm1 of letr1-sound corespond-nce1 from wich1 we hav2 stil1 not recovrd1.*

Altogethr th articl containd 851 words using CS rules, of wich 527 had th same form as in TO, and 324 (38%) wer actuly cut. For th 324 cut forms, th spelchekr gave th TO equivlnt in a total of 303 (94%) instnces, with 197 (61%) as its 1st sujestion, 35 as its 2nd sujestion, 13 as its 3rd (plus 45 x *th*), 7 as its 4th, and 6 as its 5th (including 5 x *ther*). It faild to find a corect TO equivalent for only 21 (6%).

So it seems spelchekrs, like humans, find CS quite esy to 'read'.

**Nicholas Kerr, Sidcup, Kent, UK,**