

Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society J26, 1999/2.

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1. Editorial Chris Upward

Comparative literacy

A theme that JSSS has pursued consistently from its inception in the mid-1980s is the comparative difficulty of the writing systems of different languages. It has always seemed important to emphasize this theme, and for two reasons. First, knowledge of how other languages are written and have been modernized in accordance with the alphabetic principle especially in the 20th century illuminates the anti-alphabetic deficiencies of English and its extraordinary resistance to modernization. And second, comparison with other languages can provide a powerful argument for spelling reform to persuade a public that has always been woefully unaware of the orthographic shortcomings of English and their consequences for literacy: comparison can provide hard evidence for the educational damage wrought by the traditional spelling of English, where the difficulties of English seen in isolation can be dismissed as inherent in the process of learning to read and write.

A pioneer in this field was former SSS President John Downing, when he edited *Comparative Reading* over 25 years ago, and when he propounded the notion of the transferability of literacy skills between languages ([JSSS 1987/2](#) Item 4). Since 1990 some individual studies have appeared, notably SSS Research Director Gwenllian Thorstad's comparison between literacy acquisition in English and Italian ([1991](#)) and JSSS editor Chris Upward's comparison of misspelling tendencies in English and German ([1992](#) Item 11).

But now, in 1999, interest in the question has suddenly burgeoned. Early in the year Wydell and Butterworth published their case-study of a learner who was dyslexic in English but possessed above-average literacy skills in Japanese (see Item 11). Next, in June, the British Dyslexia Association held an international conference on Multilingualism and Dyslexia, where several papers demonstrated the greater difficulty of literacy acquisition in English compared with various more regularly spelt languages. And now a collection of papers has appeared under the title *Learning to Read and Write: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective* ([Harris & Hatano](#), Cambridge U.P.), which repeatedly makes the same point.

It should not need enormous powers of persuasion to convince the authors of such studies that the next logical step after recognizing the problems caused by the unpredictability of English spelling is to work for the improvement of its predictability.

Some features of this issue

Cornell Kimball's paper takes up the misspelling theme once more, but gives it several new slants. Unlike previous studies published in *JSSS* over the years, his contribution deals with the errors of relatively well educated adults. First considered are published lists (their number and size are a symptom of the troubled state of English spelling) where there is wide agreement as to which the worst 'demons' are. Next the WWW is searched to cull over 200,000 examples of the most frequent offenders as used by Internet discussants, over two dozen being misspelt 20% or more of the time, and a few over half the time. As in previous error-analyses, it is overwhelmingly redundant letters (silent letters, unstressed vowels before L, M, N, R, and doubled consonants) that are seen to trip writers up. The article finally moves on to examine how certain aberrant forms have increasingly entered dictionaries as acceptable 'variants', and whether this offers a promising route for spelling reform. No doubt this is one way in which English spelling does progress — but the pace is awful slow.

John Shipley concludes his account of the Chicago *Tribune's* forty-year use of its own fluctuating selection of simplified spellings.

George Anderson reports on his researches into the support given to spelling reform organizations in the early years of the 20th century both in America and Britain by the wealthy Scottish-American industrialist-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The article shows up clearly the benefits and hazards of financial reliance on such an individual: money makes many things possible, but he who pays the piper expects to call the tune, and the tune may amount to no more than the whims of one person who does not necessarily have a clear grounding in the issues involved. The Simplified Spelling Society may owe its initial survival and achievements to Andrew Carnegie's backing, but it is fortunate today in enjoying the legacy of another industrialist (Sir George Hunter) who, unlike Andrew Carnegie, did not terminate the funds once death had terminated his control.

Several items report on the aftermath of the 1996 German spelling reform. Until mid-1999 controversy and resistance have tended to dominate the headlines, but now it seems the mood is changing. The press is increasingly adopting the reformed spellings, opponents appear hysterical and isolated, and the new norms are becoming established. Patience and determination are paying off. That is not to say that the public is equally happy with all the new word-forms, but now a process of discrimination is setting in, where the really useful innovations are accepted, but perhaps some instances of linguistic purism for its own sake that do not meet public demand are being ignored. Altogether the recent German experience with spelling reform offers a range of valuable lessons for would-be emulators in the English-speaking world.

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

2. Common Misspellings and Dictionary Alternatives

Cornell Kimball

Cornell Kimball is a transportation engineer who works for the highway department in California. He has been interested in language for a couple of decades, and has read much about it in his spare time. His detailed look into the workings of the English language led him to an interest in spelling reform. He previously contributed the article 'Pragmatic Strategies for Promoting Spelling Reform' to [JSSS 23–1998/1](#), Item 4.

0 Abstract

This article first explores some of the more frequently occurring misspellings among generally more practised users of English (as opposed to misspellings made by those first learning how to spell English). The study has two parts: one looks at previous collections of misspellings published in books, and the other is a study the author made to find some more commonly occurring misspellings made on the Internet — specifically in comments made to the many discussion groups on the 'Net (the World Wide Web, per se, was not a part of that study). Following that is a list of some spellings that are given as variants in American English dictionaries — covering forms from *thru* for *through* to *spacial* for *spatial*.

1. Introduction

Several studies of misspellings have been published in the *Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*. Bernard Lamb ([1998/2](#) Item 3) looked at misspellings made by a group of students writing on genetics, and Ken Spencer ([1998/2](#) Item 5) analyzed 'modeling' of errors made by 7- to 11-year-olds. Chris Upward ([1997/2](#) Item 11) looked at British Examination Board studies of 16-year-old students, and ([1995/1](#) Item 11, [1996/1](#) Item 11) at British tests of adult literacy. Another important article of his is the two-part discussion of 'Err Analysis', looking more at the types of errors made by younger students.

In the study I made, I first surveyed lists of frequently misspelled words which had been published in books. The lists ranged in size from one with 50 misspelled words to one having 860 such words, and the levels each list applied to spread from high school students (age 14–18) to staff writers.

I later looked at how words were misspelled in discussion groups on the Internet. Some of the past studies of misspellings in *JSSS* looked more at what types of errors were most commonly made by younger students; others, like Bernard Lamb's, looked at errors made by older students who are more 'practised' spellers. All in all, my studies covered more practised spellers. In particular, those 'on the Internet' tend to be more educated and perhaps 'more practised' spellers than the population in general.

2. Misspellings from general sources

The initial part of the study, surveying published lists of frequently misspelled words, comprized eleven lists, nine taken from American English usage and two from British usage (I live in the U.S. which explains the predominance of American material). The details of these eleven lists are given in the references at the end of this article.

Here are the words found most often on those lists.

On 10/11 lists of commonly misspelled words:

accommodate, embarrass, grammar, forty, separate.

On 9/11 lists:

business, harass, necessary, parallel, privilege.

On 8/11 lists:

all right, calendar, committee, commitment, conscientious, description, existence, government, height, immediately, indispensable, maintenance, occurrence, perseverance, rhythm, seize, transferred.

3 Misspellings in Internet discussions

I also searched a database containing the comments which had been made to Internet discussion groups (a realm of the Internet called 'Usenet') over the course of a few months. I used a search engine named Deja News <http://www.deja.com/home_ps.shtml>, coming up with a count of how many times a word was spelled with the conventional spelling and comparing this with how often it was spelled with an alternative form, or 'misspelled'. (Others in cyberspace had done similar, tho smaller, searches.) My pool of words came from those listed above which appeared in the majority of the 11 published lists of commonly misspelled words; from some articles in *JSSS*; and spellings which had been mentioned as 'candidates' by others. It should be noted that this is not a 'scientific' selection, that is to say that altho I tried to find as many such cases as I could, there may be some very frequently occurring misspellings that I didn't think of and which aren't in this survey

Spellings other than the standard form were used more than 33% of the time for these words in posts to Usenet discussion groups:

minuscule	68%	perseverance	36%
millennium	57	supersede	35–50
embarrassment	55	(superseded)	(44)
memento	50–60	noticeable	35
occurrence	44	harass	34
accommodate	40	inoculate	34
(accommodation)	(39)		

Next are words that were misspelled between about 20% and 33% of the time in posts to the newsgroups:

mischievous	32%	separate	23%
occurred	31	(inseparable)	(21)
embarrass	30	preceding	22
(embarrassed)	(29)	(preceded)	(21)
indispensable	29	definitely	20
privilege	28	gauge	20
questionnaire	28	(gauges)	(25)
pastime	24		

And the following were misspelled between 10% and 19% of the time:

existence	18%	precede	13%
publicly	18	(precedes)	(11)
weird	17	rhythm	12
misspell	16	conscientious	11
(misspelling)	(15)	hierarchy	11
grammar	15	calendar	10
withhold	15	conscious	10
miniature	14		

Anecdotal evidence and personal observation indicate that a few other cases where non-standard spellings are frequently used on the Internet are *alright* for *all right*, *alot* for *a lot*, and *it's* for the possessive *its*. However, search engines don't look for extremely common words (asking one to search for posts with the word *the* would turn up just about every post ever made) and looking for two-word phrases (*all right*, *a lot*) is trickier than for a single word.

In giving results for these searches, the search engine gives a numerical count of all occurrences of a particular form — I simply used those numbers, and did not usually need to read thru each individual post. But to determine the rate for the possessive *its*, I would need to look thru each individual post to determine whether *it's* was used incorrectly for the possessive *its* or whether *it's* was used correctly for the contractions *it is/it has*. So, I didn't search for these three cases, but it may well be that *all right*, *a lot*, and the possessive *its* are among the most frequently misspelled words in Internet postings. (This situation — where the misspelling problem is that *its* is misspelled as *it's* — is the opposite of the situation for beginning spellers, whose frequent error insted is to misspell *it's* as *its*.)

A few other words to note, with misspelling rates below 10% in items posted to Usenet discussion groups, were:

commitment, *conceding*, *occasionally*, *seize* 9%; *conceded*, *paralleled*, *sovereign* 8%; *repetition* 7%; *commission*, *concede*, *counterfeit*, *forfeit*, *maintenance* 6%; *concedes*, *height*, *receive*, *threshold* 5%; *committee*, *deceive*, *forty*, *immediately*, *necessary*, *proceed* 4%; *conscience*, *foreign*, *parallel*, *proceeds*, *sincerely* 3%; *government* 2%; *business* 1%.

4. Comments on Internet findings

Minuscule, *gauge*, *misspell*

For these words there are also dictionary-given alternative spellings.

Minuscule has been written as *miniscule* so often in so many places that *miniscule* is a valid variant in some dictionaries, as detailed in section 10 below. Now since *miniscule* is an acceptable variant spelling, it could be said that technically one isn't 'misspelling' *minuscule* by writing *miniscule*. However, the purpose here is to see how often people spell a word in a way other than the (one) accepted standard, with a thoro distinction made between 'standard' spellings on the one hand versus anything else.

With *gauge*, the dictionary-accepted variant is *gage*, but the situation is different from that of *miniscule*. In certain fields (science, engineering), *gage* is the more commonly used, that is, it is the 'standard' spelling. In the figures above, I have simply not counted *gage* one way or the other (by using the criteria I mentioned in the previous paragraph, *gage* would be listed with the 'other than standard forms'). This search noted *gauge* occurred 8879 times for *gauge* and *guage* 2211 times. I computed its misspelling rate from those two: $2211/(8879+2211) = 20\%$. (I also found *gage* occurred 1848 times during the same period, but did not add that to either of the totals.)

For *misspell*, etc. some use the hyphenated forms *mis-spell*, etc. insted. Further, *misspelled* is common in the U.S., while *misspelt/mis-spelt* is the usual form in most other English-speaking countries. I didn't count the hyphenated forms of *mis-spell* either as standard or non-standard. I found 486 instances of *misspell*, 91 of *mispell*, and 52 of *mis-spell*. I calculated its rate using $91/(486+91) = 16\%$, without including the 52 for *mis-spell*. Cases of *misspelled* totaled 2254; *mispelled* 452; *mis-spelled* 209; for *misspelt* 148; *mispelt* 32; *mis-spelt* 70.

Supersede, *memento*

I give the misspelling rates for these as ranges (35–50%, 50–60%) rather than as specific numbers.

There's a computer product made by a company named Asymetrix which is called 'SuperCede for Java'. Some of the posts I found in searching for *supercede* were about Asymetrix's SuperCede. (The search engine is not case-sensitive, so *supercede*, *Supercede*, *SuperCede*, etc. were all found). I searched for occurrences of *supersede*, *supercede*, *superceed*, and *superseed*. The form *supersede* made up around 45% of the total. There were only a few occurrences of *superceed* or *superseed*, while almost all the rest — just about 55% — were *supercede*. From reading thru many of the posts, I determined that at least two-thirds of the time *supercede* was being used for the word *supersede*, while one-third or less it was for Asymetrix's SuperCede. This meant that when the word *supersede* was intended the spelling *supercede* was used for it at least 35% (roughly two-thirds of 55%) of the time. Thus I set a very broad range, from 35 to 50%.

Similar factors affect the results in determining a misspelling rate for *memento*. Here too there's a name used to merchandize computer products which skews the numbers. And another factor comes into play: one thing to consider in doing this study by searching Internet files is that some of these spellings are also words in other languages. You can ask this particular search engine (and others) to search in only one language. But in searching for *memento*, and for its usual misspelling *momento*, and selecting a search for only English-language posts, a number of posts in Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese came up. So I pooled a sample to get an idea of what percentage of all posts might be in those languages. Taking all that into account, I arrived at an approximate misspelling rate for *memento* between 50 and 60%. And here too, as with *minuscule*, the common 'misspelled' form — *momento* — can be found given as a variant in dictionaries, but I count *momento* as a 'misspelling', altho considered valid by some language mavens, for the reasons explained earlier with *miniscule*.

In some other cases where there are similarly-spelled words in other languages (e.g. *occurrence*, *accommodation*) I had to make sure that the results I was getting were in English. For those cases (using an 'English-only' search criterion) only a minuscule number of posts written in other languages slipped in, and it was only for *memento/momento* that this significantly affected results.

Mischievous, height

With these words, some of the non-standard spellings I found also reflect widespred non-standard pronunciations each has.

Mischievous is often pronounced as if there were an I (or E) between the V and the -OUS. The spellings found in this survey and the number of occurrences of each were:

<i>mischievous</i>	1203		
(with -vious or -veous)		(other misspelled forms)	
<i>mischeivous</i>	255	<i>mischeivous</i>	51
<i>mischievous</i>	182	<i>mischevous</i>	15
<i>mischeivous</i>	30	<i>mischivous</i>	8
<i>mischieveous</i>	7		
<i>mischiveous</i>	7		
<i>mischeiveous</i>	2		

Height is sometimes pronounced as if the final T were TH as in *think*, and some of the misspellings of *height* were those ending in -TH, e.g. *heighth* and *highth*.

5. Frequencies of some Internet forms

The numbers of individual spellings found for some of the other words in the Usenet discussions were:

accommodate	9220	accommodation	4135
acomodate	5862	acomodation	2395
accomadate	233	accomadation	104
accommadate	32	acommodation	57
acommodate	23	accommadation	42
acomodate	21	acomodation	6
acommadate	1	acommadation	1

definitely	90565		
definatly	17904	definatley	247
definitly	2434	defenitely	158
definatly	1609	defenitly	48
definitley	322	defenatly	44

(a few each of: defenatly, defanatly, defanatly)

embarrass	2425	embarrassment	6585
embarass	877	embarassment	7121
embarras	135	embarrasment	578
embarress	33	embarasment	75
embaress	19	embarressment	63
embaras	1	embaressment	48

(and a handful each of: emberassment, emberrassment, embaresment, emberasment)

harass	3037		
harrass	1262	herass	13
harras	305	harress	1
harness	15		

indispensable	2050		
indispensible	625	indespensible	70

noticeable	7888		
noticable	3819	noticiable	18
noticable	322	noteceable	5
noticeble	36	notacible	1

occurrence	5508	occurring	6747
occurance	2109	occurring	3823
ocurrence	1983	ocurring	111
occurrance	221	ocuring	4
ocurrence	43		
ocurrance	8		
ocurence	3		

privilege	7035		
priviledge	1050	privalege	38
privelege	521	privelidge	36
privledge	331	privlage	21
priveledge	238	privaleedge	18
privilage	212	privilage	15
privelage	134	privellege	12

privelige	61	privlidge	12
privlege	40	privlige	11
(a few each of: privilege, privalige, privalidge, privillage, privillage, privelledge)			
rhythm	8341		
rythm	452	rhythem	78
rythym	307	rythum	46
rythem	140	rhythum	19
rhythym	121	rithm	11
(a few each of: rythim, rhythim, rithum, rithem, rithim)			

6. Combining these two sets

Here I have a sort of 'combined results' of the Internet study (summarized in Section 3 above) and the 11 published lists (section [2]). The table below has the words which appeared on nine or more of the eleven published lists and/or were misspelled 20% or more of the time in the study of posts to Usenet discussion groups:

	Misspelled Approx N% of Time on Usenet	On N of the 11 Published Lists	Misspelled Approx N% of Time on Usenet	On N of the 11 Published Lists	
accommodate	33+	10	indispensable	20-33	8
harass	33+	9	definitely	20-33	<8
occurrence	33+	8	gauge	20-33	<8
perseverance	33+	8	mischievous	20-33	<8
embarrassment	33+	<8	occurred	20-33	<8
inoculate	33+	<8	pastime	20-33	<8
memento	33+	<8	preceding	20-33	<8
millennium	33+	<8	questionnaire	20-33	<8
minuscule	33+	<8	grammar	10-20	10
noticeable	33+	<8	forty	<10	10
supersede	33+	<8	business	<10	9
embarrass	20-33	10	necessary	<10	9
separate	20-33	10	parallel	<10	9
privilege	20-33	9			

7. Comparison with a British survey

In [JSSS 1995/1](#), Item 11, in a review of the (British) Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (now called the Basic Skills Agency), Chris Upward notes an October 1992 survey conducted by that unit: 1000 adults were asked to spell the words *necessary*, *accommodation*, *sincerely*, *business*, *separate*, and *height*, and only 17% spelled all six words 'correctly'.

This is how those six words compare with my studies of the published lists and Internet postings. (*Accommodation* and *sincerely* were on fewer than eight of the published lists so they are not in the chart in Section 2 above; *accommodation* was on two of the eleven lists and *sincerely* was on seven of them.)

8. A 'Misspelling' gains entry to dictionaries

As related earlier, *minuscule*'s usual misspelling, *miniscule*, has been used so often that it's now entered in dictionaries.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage (1989) has an entry "miniscule, minuscule", part of which notes:

This spelling [*miniscule*] was first recorded at the end of the 19th century (*minuscule* dates back to 1705), but it did not begin to appear frequently in edited prose until the 1940s. Its increasingly common use parallels the increasingly common use of the word itself, especially as an adjective meaning 'very small'.

During the last half of the 20th century, dictionaries have been adding *miniscule*. A telling case comes with the *Concise Oxford* dictionaries. The Eighth Edition, published in the mid-1980s, does have an entry for *miniscule*, but labels it as 'erroneous'. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition* (1995), tho, lists *miniscule* as simply a 'variant' spelling.

The *American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition* (1992) gives *miniscule* as a full-fledged variant of *minuscule*, as does *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition* (1993). Merriam-Webster's has been listing *miniscule* in their dictionaries since at least 1971.

Miniscule is listed in the *Random House College Dictionary, Second Edition* (1997), and the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition* (1987) also has an entry for *miniscule*, with a usage note stating that while "this newer spelling is criticized by many, it occurs with such frequency in edited writing that some consider it a variant spelling rather than a misspelling." *Miniscule* is given in the *Chambers Dictionary, New Edition* (1993), which I know thanks to fellow Society members John Gledhill (via e-mail) and Tom Lang (via snail mail). And *Macquarie's Australian Dictionary, Second Edition* lists *miniscule* as a variant spelling, which is confirmed thanks to Valerie Yule.

Also noted in the "miniscule, minuscule" entry in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* is this:

It may be, in fact, that *miniscule* is now the more common form. An article by Michael Kenney in the *Boston Globe* on 12 May 1985 noted that *miniscule* outnumbered *minuscule* by three to one in that newspaper's data base.

That entry concludes with this statement on the spelling *miniscule*:

Our own view is that any spelling which occurs so commonly, year after year, in perfectly reputable and carefully edited books and periodicals must be regarded as a standard variant.

9. Reflections on the above misspellings

I looked for common threds in the most frequent misspellings in the survey of Usenet discussion groups. (As for the published lists, none gave the actual incorrect spellings found, only the one standard form, so I only had the Usenet data to go on.) For the word that I found misspelled the most often, *minuscule*, the usual spelling error was for one letter to be substituted for another: *miniscule*. For the 'next highest scoring' word, *millennium*, the spelling error usually made was to omit one of the letters: *millenium*.

In looking at all the words misspelled 20% or more of the time in that study, I found both those types of errors, plus a couple of other types — inserting an extra letter and transposing letters. The way in which each of the main words (not every derivative is listed) was most frequently misspelled, by type, as follows:

Letter omitted: double consonant made single

accommodate: accomodate occurred: occured
embarrass: embarass questionnaire: questionnaire
millennium: millenium

Letter omitted: vowel

noticeable: noticable

Letter substitution: vowel

definitely: definately minuscule: miniscule
indispensable: indispensable separate: seperate
memento: momento

Letter substitution: consonant

supersede: supercede

Letter added: consonant

harass: harrass perseverance: perserverance
inoculate: innoculate privilege: priviledge
pastime: pasttime

Letter Added: Vowel

preceding: preceeding

Omission + Letter Substitution

occurrence: occurance

Letter Omitted + Letter Added

mischievous: mischevious

Adjacent Letters Transposed

gauge: guage

Looking at possibilities for spelling reform relating to these findings, I have an observation to note.

Four commonly used 'misspelled forms' noted in this study can be found in dictionaries: *alright*, *momento*, and as just detailed, *miniscule*.

Then, a passage on page 14 of *The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage* reads:

Like *momento* and *miniscule*, some misspellings finally become so commonplace that they can make it into dictionaries. In fact, it seems likely that many more such spellings will gain legitimacy now that computers are used to sift through electronic files of newspapers and periodicals to count how words are used and spelled.

The editorial in [JSSS 1989/2](#) points out certain alternative forms that are given as acceptable variants in some dictionaries (*surprize* is an example noted), even tho these forms may be considered 'errors' in some circles. The theme continues looking at such 'dictionary-accepted non-standard spellings' and what this may bode for the future, and the editorial closes, "Then such common forms as *accomodate*, *seperate* might be proposed as a new standard."

I look at the cases of *alright*, *momento*, *supercede* and *miniscule*, and statements such as the one on computer searches from the *New York Public Library* guide. And my observation here is that there may be hope in the idea intimated by the JSSS 1989/2 editorial of some of the more frequently occurring misspellings gaining dictionary acceptance, initially as variants, and later as standard.

I'm thinking not so much of the particular spellings I just noted here as of the overall concept. Indeed, going from *supersede* where S is regularly used for the [s] sound to *supercede* is a step backwards, and many a reformer will wonder how much of an improvement *alright* is, as its spelling still contains a GH. But beyond those specifics is the fact that dictionaries — which have long held to 'correct' spelling — are admitting some forms which have been (and still are by many) considered 'misspellings'. This I see as a potential opening of the door.

This next section looks at some spellings that are acceptable variants, including a few cases such as *miniscule*, plus many others that have made it in the dictionary for various other reasons.

10 Some spellings given as alternatives in American English dictionaries

Key to names of dictionaries

- AH3 = American Heritage, 3rd Edition (1992)
- MW10 = Merriam-Webster's Collegiate, 10th Edition (1993)
- W3NI = Webster's 3rd New International (1961) [unabridged]
- RHC2 = Random House College, 2nd Edition (1997)
- RHU2 = Random House Unabridged, 2nd Edition (1987)

This list of alternative spellings found in dictionaries covers three publishing houses, but only one citation is noted here per publisher. If a word is given as appearing in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate 10th, then no mention is made of its entry in the unabridged edition from that dictionary maker (Webster's 3rd New International), and if a word appears in Random House College 2nd, then its entry in the Random House Unabridged is not noted. This list does not include any spellings which are standard (in all major dictionaries) in British English. Each spelling given below appears simply as a regular variant in the dictionaries listed, unless otherwise noted.

Words ending in -ogue

- analog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- dialog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- epilog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- homolog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- monolog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- prolog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- travelog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- synagog* AH3, MW10, RHC2
- demagog* MW10, RHC2
- pedagog* MW10, RHC2

(entry for *Decalog* given below)

Words containing -ough

<i>donut</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>altho</i>	AH3, MW10; 'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2
<i>tho</i>	MW10; 'a simplified spelling' in RHC2; 'informal' in AH3
<i>thoro</i>	'a simplified spelling' in RHC2; 'nonstandard variant' in MW10
<i>thru</i>	MW10, RHC2; 'informal' in AH3
<i>drive-thru</i>	RHC2
<i>see-thru</i>	RHC2
<i>sluff</i>	(for slough meaning 'shedding/discarding/ shirking') MW10, RC2

Words containing -IGH

<i>hifalutin</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>hijinks</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>hi-tech</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>hi-hat (cymbals)</i>	MW10
<i>penlite</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>nite</i>	MW10; 'an informal, simplified spelling' in RHC2

(entry for *lite* given below)

Words ending in -IE, -EE

<i>eery</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>pinky</i> (for <i>pinkie</i> 'the little finger' in U.S.)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>aunty</i>	AH3, RHC2, W3NI
<i>calory</i> (for <i>calorie</i>)	MW10, RHC2,
<i>stymy</i>	AH3, RHC2
<i>toffy</i>	MW10, RHC2

(entries for *anomy*, *hanky*, *kiddy*, *smoothy* given below)

Words ending in -ise

<i>merchandize</i> (verb)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>exorcize</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>surprize</i>	AH3, MW10
<i>advertize</i>	MW10, RHU2
<i>emprize</i>	RHC2, W3NI
<i>comprize</i>	RHU2, W3NI
<i>enterprize</i>	W3NI

Words ending in -ETTE

<i>briquet</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>buret</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>cigaret</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>curet</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>stockinet</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2

Words ending in -E

<i>absinth</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>epinephrin</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>lissom</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>anilin</i>	AH3, RHC2, W3NI
<i>thiamin</i>	MW10, RHC2

Words with MM, PP before inflections

<i>kidnaped</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>kidnaped</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>kidnaping</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>programed</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>programer</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>programing</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2

(entries for *diagramed* and *diagraming* given below)

Words varying Y/I

<i>aneurism</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>sillabub</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>sirup</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>tike</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>sirupy</i>	AH3, RHU2
<i>timpanum</i>	AH3

(entries for *Gipsy*, *lacrimal*, *lacrimator*, *Pigmy*, and *silvan* given below)

Words varying Ph/F

<i>calif</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>fantom</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>fantasm</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>telfer</i>	RHU2, W3NI
<i>fantasmagoria</i>	RHU2

Words containing ae, oe

<i>archeology</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>esthete</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>esthetic</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>esthetically</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>subpena</i>	RHC2, W3NI

(entry for *ameba* given below)

Words varying LL/L

<i>cancelation</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>tranquility</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>idyl</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>chlorophyl</i>	AH3, RHC2, W3NI

Words ending in -EFY

<i>liquify</i>	AH3, MW10
<i>rarify</i>	AH3, MW10
<i>putrify</i>	W3NI

Words varying by one fewer vowel

<i>cag(e)y</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>ca(u)lk</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>ga(u)ge</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>g(u)ild</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>glamo(u)r</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>h(e)arken</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>ste(a)dfast</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>troll(e)y</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>mulle(i)n</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>h(e)ight</i>	RHU2, W3NI

Words varying by one fewer consonant

<i>dum(b)found</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>guer(r)illa</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>mac(k)intosh</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>veg(g)ie</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>cutla(s)s</i>	AH3, RHC2, W3NI
<i>com(m)ingle</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>c(h)alcedony</i>	AH3, W3NI
<i>cas(s)ette</i>	MW10
<i>camel(l)ia</i>	W3NI

Words varying by two fewer letters

<i>frantic(al)ly</i>	AH3, RHU2, W3NI
<i>tic(k)-tac(k)-toe</i>	MW10, RHC2
<i>accident(al)ly</i>	MW10

U (for you) 'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2

One letter substituted

<i>linguini</i> (for <i>linguine</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>miniscule</i> (for <i>minuscule</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>spacial</i> (for <i>spatial</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>swob</i> (for <i>swab</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>swop</i> (for <i>swap</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>tendonitis</i> (for <i>tendinitis</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>vizor</i> (for <i>visor</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>cockateel</i> (for <i>cockatiel</i>)	AH3, RHC2
<i>queazy</i> (for <i>queasy</i>)	AH3, MW10
<i>momento</i> (for <i>memento</i>)	MW10, RHU2
<i>supercede</i> (for <i>supersede</i>)	MW10, RHU2

Two letters within word switched

<i>cadaster</i> (for <i>cadastre</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>gingko</i> (for <i>ginkgo</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>chaise lounge</i> (for <i>chaise longue</i>)	MW10, RHC2

Letters different, letters switched

<i>aline</i> (for <i>align</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHU2
<i>alinement</i> (for <i>alignment</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHU2
<i>doat</i> (for <i>dote</i>)	RHU2, W3NI
<i>tressel</i> (for <i>trestle</i>)	MW10

Letters different, and fewer, than standard

<i>blest</i> (for <i>blessed</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>brusk</i> (for <i>brusque</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>equivoke</i> (for <i>equivoque</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>rime</i> (for <i>rhyme</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>templet</i> (for <i>template</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>unblest</i> (for <i>unblessed</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>mixt</i> (for <i>mixed</i>)	RHU2, W3NI; 'archaic' in AH3
<i>unmixt</i> (for <i>unmixed</i>)	RHC2, W3NI
<i>gimme</i> (for <i>give me</i>)	'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2
<i>gonna</i> (for <i>going to</i>)	'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2
<i>gotta</i> (for <i>[have] got to</i>)	'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2
<i>luv</i> (for <i>love</i>)	'eye dialect' in RHC2
<i>wanna</i> (for <i>want to</i>)	'pronunciation spelling' in RHC2

As noted at the beginning of this list, there are no spellings here which are considered standard in all major British dictionaries (e.g. *Oxford, Chambers, Collins*). Below are a few 'special cases', where the spelling shown is considered standard by some British dictionaries and variant by others.

<i>anomy</i> (for <i>anomie</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>kiddy</i> (for <i>kiddie</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>bandana</i> (for <i>bandanna</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>silvan</i> (for <i>sylvan</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2

First-given spellings for *hanky* and *hankie* differ by American sources too:

RHC2 has:	<i>hanky</i> or <i>hankie</i>
MW10 has:	<i>hankie</i> or <i>hanky</i>
AH3's citation reads:	<i>hankie</i> also <i>hanky</i>

The main part of this list does not have any proper nouns. Here are variant spellings for a few words that are often capitalized as 'proper nouns'.

<i>Decalog</i> (or <i>Decalogue</i>)	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>Gipsy</i>	AH3, MW10, RHC2
<i>gipsy</i>	RHC2
<i>Pigmy</i>	AH3, RHC2
<i>pigmy</i>	MW10

Miscellaneous variations

Some further cases are less clear. *Alright* is given as a variant for *all right* in MW10 and RHC2, but those entries also contain usage notes stating that while *alright* occurs often in dialog and informal writing, *all right* is still the only form for formal writing. AH3 gives *alright* as a 'non-standard' spelling.

Ameba is the first-given spelling in most American medical and scientific dictionaries as of the late 1990s, and the entry in RHC2 (1997) reads "*ameba* or *amoeba*". However, MW10 (1993), AH3 (1992), and other non-medical/non-scientific American dictionaries list *amoeba* first with *ameba* as second preference.

Chanty is an acceptable variant of *chantey* for AH3, MW10 and RC2. Further, *shanty* is an acceptable variant of *chantey* in all three, and AH gives *shantey* as a valid variant as well.

When *diagram* is used as verb, inflected forms are given in RHC2 as "*diagramed* or *diagrammed*, *diagraming* or *diagramming*"; but AH3 and MW10 reverse them as "*diagrammed* or *diagramed*, *diagramming* or *diagraming*".

Is *e-mail* an acceptable variant of *E-mail*? According to RHC2 (1997), it's more than that, as *e-mail* is the first-given form, with the entry "e-mail or E-mail". In MW10 (1993) the entry gives "E-mail" with the capital letter as the only possibility.

With *eying* and *eyeing*, we find RHC2 gives "eying or eyeing", while AH3 and MW10 list "eyeing or eying".

For *flier/flyer*, *frier/fryer* AH3 and RHC2 put *flier* as the first-given form with *flyer* as the variant. MW10 has *flier* first for most meanings, but notes that *flyer* is the usual spelling when it means "advertising circular" with *flier* then as the variant. With *frier/fryer*, AH3, MW10, and RH2 list *fryer* first, with *frier* as the variant.

Fuze is given as a variant for *fuse* meaning the device, including the cord, used in detonating a bomb or charge, and for the verb from this which means "to attach a fuze to" in AH3, MW10, and RHC2. AH3 and RHC2 don't give *fuze* as a variant for *fuse* when it means "to meld together", etc, but MW10 does note *fuze* as a possible spelling for all meanings of *fuse*. W3NI and RHU2 list *defuze* as a variant for *defuse* as well.

With *gizmo* we see cases similar to the *ameba* spelling and others, as sources differ in the first-given form. AH3 and MW10 list it as "gizmo also gismo". The entry in RHC2 reads "gizmo or gizmo".

For *lacrimal/lachrymal*, MW10 has "lachrymal or lacrimal" and the entry in AH3 gives it as "lachrymal also lacrimal" for both (related) senses of the word. RH2, tho, gives *lachrymal* as the main spelling for one of those meanings, "of, pertaining to, or characterized by tears" with *lacrimal* as a variant for that; it then gives *lacrimal* as the main spelling when the sense pertains to the *glands* that secrete the tears (as opposed to the actual tears) with *lachrymal* as a possible variant in that case.

And for *lacrimator/lachrymator*, MW10 has "lacrimator or lachrymator", RHC2 gives it as "lachrymator or lacrimator". AH3's entry reads "lachrymator also lacrimator".

Lichee is a variant for *litchi* in AH3, MW10, and RHC2. Further, AH3 and MW10 list *lychee* as a valid variant.

Lite is used in published, edited matter generally for one specialized meaning, "having fewer calories", or figuratively, "having less substance". It isn't used much in print for other meanings of *light*, but is emerging as an entity on its own, which has, as a discrete word, developed an additional figurative meaning. AH3 has an entry for *lite* which reads:

lite ... adj. *Slang*. Having less substance or weight or fewer calories than something else: "*lite music, shimmering on the surface and squishy soft at the core*" (Mother Jones).
[Alteration of LIGHT 2.]

LIGHT 2 in that edition is the adjective meaning "not heavy, exerting little force", etc. LIGHT 1 is *light* meaning "luminescence".

In MW10 the entry for *lite* is: "lite ... var of 4 LIGHT 9a." In that volume, 4 LIGHT is the adjective meaning "not heavy, exerting little force", etc. (1 LIGHT is luminescence; 2 LIGHT is the adjective "not bright" or "pale"; and 3 LIGHT is the verb meaning "to brighten".) Definition 9a of 4 LIGHT reads:

9a: made with a lower calorie content or with less of some ingredient (as salt, fat, or alcohol) than usual < ~ beer > < ~ salad dressing >.

RHC2 has: "lite ... *adj.* an informal, simplified spelling of LIGHT 2, used esp. in labeling, naming, or advertising commercial products. — liteness, *n.*" LIGHT 2 in that dictionary is for the adjective meaning "not heavy", etc. Note that RHC2 also gives a word "derived" from *lite*, the noun *liteness*.

Another note on that spelling is that while no dictionary lists *lite* as a valid variant for *light* in terms of "luminescence", two dictionaries (noted above) do list *penlite*, and in that word *-lite* does refer to luminescence.

Smoothy and *smoothie* are another case where first-given spellings differ. MW10 lists it as "smoothy or smoothie"; RHC2 gives "smoothie or smoothy"; and AH3 has "smoothie also smoothy".

MW10 and RHC2 list *tictac* as a variant of *ticktack*, while AH3 gives *tic-tac* with a hyphen as *ticktack*'s variant spelling.

11 Sources and references

Eleven published lists of common misspellings

Cassell Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1990). This gives a list of 205 misspellings under 'Words Commonly Misspelt'.

Davidson, Wilma (1994) *Business Writing. What Works, What Won't*, New York: St Martin's Press, pp196–201 (397 such words). Aimed, as the title says, at those writing business letters, etc. The heading for this list is "Easily Misspelled Words".

Furness, Edna L (1990) *Guide to Better English Spelling*, Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, pp233–36 (500 Words). This book actually has several lists of such words, based on different levels. The list used here is headed, "The Remington Rand List of Words Most Frequently Misspelled by Adults."

Furness, Edna L (1990) *Guide to Better English Spelling*, Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, pp175–95 (605 Demons). As stated above, this book contains a number of lists for different levels, and those other lists (like the Remington Rand list noted above) are from other sources as well. This particular list is the author's own, the introduction of which begins "The 605 spelling demons ... These 605 are among the most frequently misspelled words in the English language."

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The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1995 (1995), Mahwah, New Jersey: Funk & Wagnalls, p597 (52 such words). This book is aimed at the general reader seeking information. The heading for this list simply reads, "Commonly Misspelled English Words"

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3. The Forgotten Crusader: Andrew Carnegie and the simplified spelling movement

George B Anderson



Andrew Carnegie devoted much of his time, energy and fortune to the American Simplified Spelling Board, yet his biographers have little or nothing to say on the matter. Here we have the fullest account yet of that forgotten story. George B Anderson is a retired primary school teacher. A Glaswegian, he now lives in Fife on the east coast of Scotland within walking distance of Andrew Carnegie's cottage, a local tourist attraction. He continues to put the case for reform whenever and wherever the occasion presents itself in the Scottish print medium.

0 Abstract

This paper expands a short article by the late Bob Brown (1995) on Andrew Carnegie's involvement in spelling reform. It counters the disparaging one-liners found in biographies and articles on Carnegie. It shows how Carnegie first became involved and to what degree, and describes the infighting among reformers during the four-year gestation period of the Simplified Spelling Board (SSB) in the U.S.A. and how Carnegie's personality affected events. We are reminded of the hostility the reformers faced and of some of their successes. We gain an insight into Carnegie's state of mind when he broke with the SSB. Finally, his dealings with the spelling reformers in the UK are briefly touched on.

1 Andrew Carnegie: brief biography

About a dozen or so miles north of Edinburgh, Scotland, lies the town of Dunfermline. It has an ancient Abbey, parts of which go back to the 9th century, and is the resting place of Robert the Bruce. Its ancient ruined Royal Palace was the birthplace of seven Scottish queens and two Scottish kings. A stone's throw away is a weaver's cottage, once the home of Andrew Carnegie — 'Steel King of America'.

There, on November 25, 1835, the first son of William and Margaret Carnegie was born. He lived there for twelve years, receiving four years of formal schooling at the nearby Rolland Street primary school.

The cottage was in fact a home-cum-workshop — upstairs the main living quarters, downstairs reserved for handloom weaving and where Andrew's father had his damask linen business. Life had always been a struggle, but the mass production of the huge new linen factories meant the end of the cottage industry. In 1848 the Carnegies emigrated to Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, to join relatives already there.

At only thirteen years of age Andrew began his working life as a bobbin boy in a factory, then on to a job with Pennsylvania Railroad. But it was as a speculator in stocks and shares — 'the goose that lays the golden eggs' — that Carnegie acquired his early fortune. His uncanny ability to play the market eventually led to his becoming a steel manufacturer, and, later, one of the richest men in the world.

Having amassed his fortune, he began giving it away. Free public libraries were financed, the first in 1881 in his native Dunfermline, and thereafter throughout the United States and the rest of the English-speaking world. By 1910, when he officially retired from business, his philanthropy extended to colleges, schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and associations, including the spelling reform movement in America and Britain. All told, he gave away about \$350,000,000 in his lifetime. Today, many of his legacies continue in the form of trusts.

He died in Lenox, Massachusetts on 11 August 1919 in his 84th year, nine months to the day after the guns of Flanders field fell silent — a carnage he laboured tirelessly to prevent.

2 Process of research

It was in a 1995 newsletter put out by the Simplified Spelling Society that I first encountered an article concerning Andrew Carnegie's involvement with spelling reform. It was by Chris Upward, Editor-in-Chief, and the late Bob Brown, then Secretary of the SSS, and was entitled 'Founding Fathers: who were the men who launched the Simplified Spelling Society?'. Chris concentrated on the Society's five Grand Old Men who founded the SSS in 1908, while Bob Brown presented a short piece entitled 'The Carnegie Connection'. My curiosity was aroused.

I began my research in the reference room of the Dunfermline Central Library, searching the Carnegie papers. Nothing. Not a word on his involvement with the Simplified Spelling Board, based in New York. I read biographies, I made enquiries at the Carnegie Cottage, I wrote several letters to Newspapers in Fife and to various sources in the United States. At the end of it all I had collected very little in the way of hard archival information. From the Acting Secretary of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, based in Menlo Park, California, I was informed of the following: "I have asked scholars at the Foundation if they were aware of archival materials dealing with (spelling reform) and no one here was familiar with Carnegie's interest in that area." [\[1\]](#)

Fortunately the acting secretary mentioned a number of sources based in the U.S. that might be able to help. One was Dr. John Hayes, the specialist for 20th century political issues at the Library of Congress, Washington DC. To be informed that Carnegie's personal papers and correspondence are kept there was more than I had hoped for. Eureka!

Within weeks I had a reply. Imagine my feeling of disappointment, which, in turn, gave way to disbelief on being informed: "The Carnegie papers in possession of the Library of Congress contain a single folder dealing with Mr. Carnegie's interest in spelling reform. It contains only two clippings. I enclose copies ... the folder is in box 259 of the Carnegie papers ... There is, in addition, a large collection of correspondence in the Carnegie papers. The correspondence, however, is organized chronologically (not by subject) and is beyond my capacity to search all this for letters dealing with spelling reform. I hope these clippings are of some assistance to you." [\[2\]](#)

Two clippings in a folder, in a box marked 259 after three years of probing! The devastating news answered at least one question that had puzzled me — why had so many biographers failed to flesh out the bones of this story, a story which took up more than 14 years of the man's life, plus a good deal of his fortune both in the United States and in Britain?

Until someone can nitpick his way through the contents of the Carnegie archive in the Library of Congress, Washington DC, all we have on the subject is this article. It is limited in scope and should be regarded as a footnote, a detail of a much larger canvas.

3 Origin of Carnegie's interest in spelling

The beginning of the 20th century was a time when Andrew Carnegie's devotion to the cause of world peace was at its height.

What could be a more effective agency than that all men should communicate with each other in the same language, especially if that language were English? It became his hope that English would become universal, "the most potent of all instruments for drawing the race together, insuring peace and advancing civilization." But to this there was "a chief obstacle" to be overcome. "The foreigner has the greatest difficulty in acquiring it because of its spelling." But the instrument he chose to improve matters — the American Simplified Spelling Board — took almost four long years to get off the ground. Indeed, a look at its history shows the Board could well have died at birth.

Although the Spelling Reform Association (SRA) in the U.S.A. was moribund at the beginning of the 20th century, wide publicity was given to the vigorous activities to promote spelling reform carried on in the National Education Association (NEA), led by E O Vaile of Chicago, and spelling reform was sometimes debated in the press (Tauber, p 164). But it was Melvil Dewey, of Dewey Decimal library classification fame, who is credited with getting Carnegie on board. Other figures were Brander Matthews, a professor at Columbia University and Dr C P G Scott, Etymological Editor of the Century Dictionary.

Whilst working for the NEA in 1902, Vaile told Dewey that he had sought financial help from Carnegie to assist the work on new spellings he was undertaking, but that the philanthropist had refused.

Having earlier been involved in Carnegie's endowment of American libraries, Dewey decided he would apply for funds to promote spelling modernization, explaining the potential of amended English spelling as a medium of international communication for world peace. Despite touching on one of Carnegie's favourite interests, Dewey's request received no reply.

By chance, sometime later, Dewey found himself at dinner with Carnegie and "for four solid hours" talked of his ideas on reforming English spelling. Carnegie must have been impressed, for he pledged \$ 10,000 per year for ten years. [\[3\]](#)

There were conditions: the agreement had to be kept in confidence and there was to be no publicity regarding his involvement. A third condition was that the money would only be provided if Dewey could assemble twenty university presidents to form a Board.

This oral commitment, made by Carnegie in April 1902, proved, subsequently, to be anything but watertight, as we shall see.

4 Carnegie's 10 word strategy

There is little doubt that Carnegie saw the merits of spelling reform but that difficulties lay in the detail. We get the impression he wanted the reformers to tread cautiously, yet sometimes he expressed annoyance at their lack of progress. And it was Melvil Dewey who was usually first in his line of fire. That it usually came in the post must have irritated considerably.

In a note dated 2 April 1903, at a time when the campaign was struggling to get off the ground, Carnegie's exasperation is clear (Tauber, p168). He reminds Dewey of "the ten most awkward words" to be reformed and questions whether the prominent men who pledged to use them would in fact do so.

Furthermore, he had little patience with the conferences being held to discuss strategy. It was all just "more talk to Carnegie. "I want practical results for my money," he tells Dewey. Here again we detect his somewhat contradictory stance on reform — a mixture of caution and impatience.

Carnegie had as yet put nothing in writing, so the new Language Board was reluctant to switch to a higher gear. Some even began to question Carnegie's intentions, and they had good reason. Replying to Dewey's concerns over finance Carnegie reminded him that not only did he want the "signatures of the leading educationalists on board, but that he wanted evidence that they were using the improved spellings — "Until that is done, I have nothing to do in the premises."

Carnegie was further angered when news of his involvement leaked to the press. His failure to underwrite his promises to Dewey were damaging both to the movement and to Dewey in particular.

What Carnegie did not know, but may have suspected, was that Dewey did not want the Board to be bound by the limited reform proposed by Carnegie.

At the beginning Carnegie had insisted that the words "reform" and "phonetics" were to be avoided, as he thought they would be prejudicial to the cause; that "over-zealous reformers" were to be kept in the background, and people put up-front "who could carry weight with the stupid public". (Tauber, p 165)

Almost two years after the first meeting in 1902, the conflict over the extent of the reforms was still unresolved. In a querulous letter dated 14 January 1904 he told Dewey, "I have made up my mind that reform in spelling can only come by degrees". The result was deadlock. On one side was Carnegie determined only to reform the "ten most awkward words", and on the other side was Dewey suggesting to his friend Vaile that the only way to accomplish what he wanted was to have a sort of "French Academy"! (Tauber, p 172) [\[4\]](#)

When next they met, Carnegie told Dewey that he wanted not research or a broad approach to the problem, but a militant publicity campaign. A circular was sent out to selected individuals who would promise "to use habitually in my own writing at least ten of the twelve shorter spellings adopted by the NEA." Vaile, who, according to Dewey, "works like a Trojan", helped draw up a list of names who would publicly sign Carnegie's pledge.

By early 1905 the difficulties and doubts on both sides dissipated. Carnegie went public for the first time in a letter to *The New York Times* on 22 March 1905, indicating his own bias toward a mild reform, adding: "This effort is no fad, no attempt at a phonetic system."

5 Simplified Spelling Board formed

On 29 April 1905 the Editor of the *Century Dictionary*, Dr. Benjamin E Smith, reported to Dewey that a meeting of prominent signers of the pledge was to be held at the home of Brander Matthews in New York. From this meeting a practical plan evolved.

Minutes of the meeting were sent to Dewey, designed to be forwarded to Carnegie with the intention of pinning him down. Though not yet officially in existence, Brander Matthews acted as chairman of the 'Simplified Spelling Board'. It was May 1905.

Finally, Dewey showed Carnegie the names of supporters of the statement he sought. On 12 January 1906, some four years after his first discussion with Melvil Dewey, Andrew Carnegie wrote out orders for \$15,000 a year for a spelling reform office in New York, \$5,000 more than he first promised, perhaps as a salve to his conscience for the long struggle. [5]

Significant in the lengthy, drawn out negotiations was the establishment by Carnegie of the clear understanding that he was to be at the helm in policy making. Subsequent SSB history reflects Carnegie's control, which some saw as "dictatorial". Carnegie paid the piper, and insisted on calling the tunes.

In a public statement issued from Hot Spring, Virginia, Carnegie again reiterated his hope that English would, in time, become a world language "insuring peace and advancing civilization", and that a reformed spelling system would hasten the day. But he again took the opportunity to put his mark on future development. "The organized effort I have agreed to finance is not revolutionary — far from it, its action will be conservative. Word after word it will endeavor to improve the spelling and the language — slowly, of course, but hastening the pace if possible... Hundreds of scholarly men have agreed to use improved spelling for twelve words. These words are already well started in actual use. Other simplifications will be suggested."

Here Carnegie is referring to the twelve "reformed" spellings [6] already sanctioned by the National Association, namely: 'bizness' for *business*; 'enuf' for *enough*; 'fether' for *feather*; 'mesure' for *measure*; 'plesure' for *pleasure*; 'red' for *read* (past tense); 'ruf' for *rough*; 'trauf' for *trough*; 'thru' for *through*; 'tuf' for *tough*; 'tung' for *tongue*; 'yung' for *young*. Other modifications were lined up but kept under wraps.

6 Public reactions

In Britain there were cries of horror. The poet Swinburne viewed the entire exercise as "a barbarous, monstrous absurdity", whilst Conan Doyle stormed, "Reformed spelling might become universal but it would cease to be the English language." There were blunt warnings that the language of Shakespeare and the Bible was under threat from across the Atlantic.

But there was support for the reforms as well. President Theodore Roosevelt not only supported Dewey's efforts, he promoted them within the White House and initially ordered all government printing offices to use the Simplified Spelling Board's new spellings. (Marks, 1985) [7]

A number of American newspapers not only agreed with the changes, but used them. The editor of the *State* newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina, spoke for most of the SSB's supporters: "This reform is unquestionably needed. Our spelling is not only absurd, it is dishonest. It does not represent, it has never fully represented, our spoken language ... to keep up such a farce is not worthy a sensible people ... (the Simplified Spelling Board) must face and overcome a prejudice that has its roots in the granite of ignorance, which it takes to be pride in the language and a lordly conservatism."

Mark Twain, an early opponent, thought the reforms proposed by the SSB did not go far enough. He wanted a "sudden and comprehensive rush". Were this to happen, "We all know quite well what would happen. To begin with, the nation would be in a rage; it would break into a storm of scoffs, jeers, sarcasms, cursings, vituperations, and keep it up for months — but it would have to read the papers; it couldn't help itself... By a sudden and comprehensive rush the present spelling could be entirely changed, and the substitute — spelling be accepted, all in the space of a couple of years; and preferred in another couple. But it won't happen, and I am as sorry as a dog. For I do love revolutions and violence."

But the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* would have none of it. It spoke of destroying the 'genius' of the English language. "We put on one side any sentimental affection for old forms in an old and dear literature. But we do think and venture to say that the proposals of spelling reforms are more likely to make ,confusion worse confounded' .. than make it easier for the foreigner." A correspondent in the *New York Times* suggested that the "Bored of Speling" should begin with simplification of their own names — "Androo Karnage", "Brandr Mathooz" and the like.

If a dozen or so changes to spelling could provoke such venom, worse was to follow (Tauber, p179, footnote 3) [\[8\]](#) when the reformers suggested dropping U in words like *labour*, and substituting F for PH as well as a phonetic rendering of GH, as in *cough*, changes which Carnegie himself endorsed. Journalists and the literati in general had a field day.

7 The Board's response

Matthews, as Chairman, countered with an article in November 1906, that the spellings, now about 300, were merely selections from among thousands of possible simplifications to be considered and that the principle of simplification was the important thing.

Carnegie also hit back. To Whitelaw Reid of the *New York Tribune*, he wrote: "Amused at your calling improved spelling movement 'a fictitious movement' ... move up, move on before old age comes — don't be an old fogey — if you can help it." When his critics attacked him for changing *bright to brite*, Carnegie retorted that books in Queen Anne's time printed *spighte* for a word since shortened to *spite*, and that fish in Elizabethan times was spelt *fysshe*.

The Board's first official statement (Tauber, pp 174–78) of its policies came in a published circular, issued on 2 March 1906.

It pointed out that English had a destiny as an international tongue. Only its spelling kept it from fulfilling that role. Gradual simplification would save time in education, and reduce costs in printing.

The Board's statement refuted the objection that etymology would be obscured by improvement of the spelling. Changes in orthography had long been taking place and would continue to do so. The statement concluded that the 'twelve words' put forward for modernizing were a good beginning.

Brander Matthews, as spokesman for the SSB, developed the statement further in an article published 14 April 1906. He pointed out that earlier movements for reform failed to accomplish much because their leaders did not take into account natural conservatism. The SSB would avoid the errors of unrealistic fanatics and was prepared to progress slowly. Matthews' article was later issued as Circular No.4 of the SSB. All this was almost a carbon copy of what Carnegie had preached from Hot Spring the month previous.

It was necessary for the Board to constantly restate these principles to correct distortions of its position, and to stress its philosophy of moderation.

Not only was it necessary to combat reactionaries [9] who sniped at every turn, but some within the SSB, particularly Vaile and Scott, needed reining in occasionally, neither happy with some of Carnegie's dictatorial antics; Scott, at one point, coming close to resignation. Between 1906 and 1913 the SSB produced four lists of simplified words, but thereafter decided to concentrate on wider adoption of the lists.

8 Carnegie in decline

By the end of 1914 Carnegie was a broken man. The crusader for peace was shattered by news of the carnage in France. "Happiness is all over for the nonce", is how he put it to his 'old shoe', John Morley. This sense of despair had its effect on what was, up until now, an amazing constitution for a man of eighty.

Signs of a break were apparent as early as 16 January 1915. He received a letter from Brander Matthews which included a list of daily newspapers that had adopted the reformed spellings. Carnegie was not impressed. "Please note," was the reply, "not one Eastern paper. I see no change in New York and I am getting very tired indeed, of sinking twenty-five thousand dollars a year for nothing here in the East." (Wall, p893) [10] He was further irritated to learn that his own trusts' annual reports were seen to be taking "a step backwards in reference to spelling."

On the 5 February 1915 he was subpoenaed to appear before the Industrial Relations Committee which had been appointed by President Wilson to study the whole field of labour-management relations in the United States. (Wall, p1026) [11]

By all accounts he put on a brilliant performance, letting it be known that he had enjoyed the encounter. But it was to be Carnegie's last public appearance. The big occasion, the crowded, overheated conference room, took its toll. He returned home tired and suffering from a slight cold. The weariness persisted for days and developed into bronchitis and then into pneumonia. By the middle of March he was seriously ill.

As he slowly recovered, even the early spring sunshine did little for his spirits. He would sit for hours, staring into space, saying nothing, and showing no interest in anything or anyone. He would make many attempts at letter-writing, but after only a few words he'd be seen pushing the paper aside and would withdraw into himself. (Wall, p1028)

9 Carnegie breaks with simplified spelling

It is against this background that we must judge his oft-quoted letter of 25 February 1915.

It was written by a man in his eightieth year, in poor physical health and plunged into deep depression by the war raging in Europe, his long personal crusade for world peace lying in tatters. Reforming English spelling was probably the last thing on his mind.

The precise reason why Carnegie broke with the Simplified Spelling Board is not clear. Most say that it is because he thought progress had been too slow. If this is so, it is difficult to reconcile with his belief from the very beginning that progress would have to be gradual — "not revolutionary", "slowly", "conservative" were words he used to describe the pace of the reforms he was financing. He even emphasized that change would not come from the top: "Amended spellings can only be submitted for general acceptance" he told the editor of the London *Times*, "It is the people who decide what is to be adopted or rejected."

Suffice to say that on that fateful day in February he wrote to Holt (Wall, p893), who was then President of the Board; "A more useless body of men never came into association, judging from the effects they produce." And as if all the years of struggle with the reforms were flashing across his mind he added: "Instead of taking twelve words and urging their adoption, they undertook radical changes from the start and these they can never make... I think I have been patient long enough... I have much better use for twenty thousand dollars a year." And as if to emphasize the seriousness of his intentions, he dispatched a copy to Robert Franks, his faithful business secretary. The Board continued its activities until 1920. Over a 14 year period Carnegie's donations to the Simplified Spelling Board amounted to \$283,000.

It was always a condition that Carnegie's dollars had to be matched by results. Some on the Board thought he carried this dogma to excess and complained sometimes of too much interference. That the piper could not call the tunes from beyond the grave may be the reason why Carnegie left no provision in his will for the yet unfinished work of the Simplified Spelling Board.

10 Before Carnegie and after

Movements for the modernization of English spelling had been in existence long before Andrew Carnegie's first encounter with Melvil Dewey.

As far back as 1876 the International Convention for the Amendment of English Orthography met in the United States and developed into the Spelling Reform Association, which in turn became the National Education Association, a body that was in existence when Carnegie became active.

When the Simplified Spelling Board's annual funding dried up, some of its supporters reactivated the SRA, which later merged with other smaller groups and today is known as The American Literacy Council. In 1978 Better Education thru Simplified Spelling (BEtSS) was formed in Detroit. Both have ties with the Simplified Spelling Society based in England.

11 Carnegie and the SSS

Carnegie's influence on the spelling reform movement was not confined to the United States. Whilst on holiday at Skibo Castle in Sutherland in the north of Scotland in the autumn of 1908, he wrote two letters to the Simplified Spelling Society (Brown, pp10–11), which was meeting in London for only the third time.

Both letters were read to the Committee. Referring to the enclosed cheque for \$ 1000 (worth some £25,000 now) he stated he would make "no further promises, because everything depends on results." He outlined progress in America, concluding: I congratulate you upon the eminent men with whom you are surrounded, and shall watch anxiously your doings. I hope you will send me copies of all documents produced so that I may keep in touch. We are marching rapidly on the other side and the dear old home is either to join the procession and march, or be left behind."

The other letter expanded on the problem of future funding. To Carnegie's mind, funding the newly-formed Society with foreign money would go down badly and would do more harm than good or, as he put it, "a separate British society supported by an alien would never do." (Brown, p 10)

But the likelihood of future financial help remained open: "I can only be one of the subscribers. Please make this point clear." (Brown, p] 1) [12] Carnegie continued to provide extensive funds for the Society, as the accounts for 1915 show, despite worrying about the radical nature of its proposals. Along with the £1000 sent in early spring came a cautionary note: I shall support no mode of Simplified Spelling that does not advance step by step. I am satisfied that anything like a complete new system is impossible (to implement). We are making great progress here by taking up twelve words at a time."

As in the United States, funds from the great crusader dried up after his death in August 1919.

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Notes

- [1] Letter from J Wilson, Acting Secretary, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 11 Sept. 1997.
- [2] Letter from J E Haynes, Manuscript Historian, 20th Century Political History, The Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- [3] Carnegie's funding was increased to \$15,000 in 1906. Tauber, p173.
- [4] Letter from Melvil Dewey to E O Vaile, 22 July 1904.
- [5] Tauber, p173. Funds given to spelling reform by Carnegie vary according to source.
- [6] Word list taken from *Current Literature; Literature and Art*, May 1906, p497, 'Andrew Carnegie's Spelling Crusade'. (Produced by The Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Modification 14 deals with *-our* endings like *labour/labor*, *flavour/flavor*, etc.)
- [7] Marks' gives a fuller account of President Theodore Roosevelt's promotion of reformed spellings at the White House.
- [8] Tauber speaks of a bound scrapbook of nationwide newspaper clippings from 1898 to 1907 of public comment on the proposed new spellings, but I have been informed by Merriam-Webster Inc., Springfield, Mass., that they don't "have anything so formal". (Letter, 9 December 1998)
- [9] Tauber, pp173–74.
- [10] Wall's extensive notes list a manuscript by Andrew Carnegie on 'My views about Improved Spelling 1906–1915' that can be found among Brander Matthews' Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, p 1106, Note 20.
- [11] It is here we learn of Carnegie's failing health "around early February 1915", when he broke with the SSB.
- [12] A grand total of Carnegie's giving to the England-based Society is not available. According to Brown "funds dried up after his death in August 1919".

4. Spelling the Chicago Tribune Way, 1934–1975, Pt. III

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Abstract

This article falls into the following divisions:

Pt. I The spelling reforms

1. From 1934 until the autumn of 1955, soon after the death of the owner-publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormick;
2. from late 1955 into 1975. (Published in JSSS 24, Item 2.)

Pt. II Responses

1. The Tribune staff;
2. Readers;
3. Books, periodicals, domestic and foreign newspapers. (Published in JSSS 25, Item 2.)

Pt. III Conclusions

1. Uncertain allies, especially dictionary publishers;
2. Causes of abandonment of the reforms;
3. Possible influence.

Acknowledgments. As for Pts. I & II.

Part III Conclusions

1 Uncertain allies, especially dictionary publishers

The *Tribune* never managed to attract enduring support for its spelling reforms. Initially, it spoke of the "scores upon scores of identical shortenings (e.g., dropping the second L in *crystalize*, as in accepted *traveler*), that will come to pass when learned societies, universities, and energetic editors can persuade English-speaking peoples to accept thoroughly rationalized spelling of the English language." [1] As the years passed without such organisations as the National Education Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, universities such as Illinois or Michigan, and "energetic editors", wherever, having entered into the experiment, the *Tribune* editors went from "when" to expressing a hope. "... we have adopted simplified spellings of a few dozen words, including *frate*," it said 12 years later, "in the hope that our readers, including the editors of other publications, will come to accept the changes." [2] Nine years after that, hope was flagging: "We hoped that other publications would be attracted by the commonsense and etymological rightness of *sherif* and *tarif* for example, but this hope has been disappointed." [3] Years afterward, when the *Tribune* officially abandoned the experiment, editorial disappointment shifted focus, attributing its failure in part at least to "... the writers of spelling texts [2] would not yield" to adopt *Tribune* spelling. [4]

In summer 1939, shortly after the *Tribune* queried its readers as to its adopting the shortened forms of the *tho* and *thru* groups, the president of a firm manufacturing scientific models (e.g., globes and anatomical models) for schools and furnishing the accompanying instructional manuals and guides, wrote to urge the changes. Citing National Education Association adoptions made years earlier, he stated, "Our company in all of its correspondence and in the various teachers' manuals and books that we prepare uses the revised spellings of these given

words." Many textbook publishers, he added, also use them, and all dictionary as "sanctioned the shortened forms." [5]

Whatever the encouragement in 1939 from this firm in the field of science education, the *Tribune* had received much more important letters from editors of a book-publishing firm, the John C. Winston Co., of Philadelphia, at the outset of the experiment. The first letter on simpler spelling in *Vox Pop* ('Voice of the People', the letters to the editor column), in fact, came from Dr William Dodge Lewis, co-editor of *The Winston Simplified Dictionary* along with Drs Thomas Kite Brown and Henry Seidel Canby. [6] Dr Lewis, those saying he could not "go the whole way with the simplified spelling board...", hoped that other papers would adopt the *Tribune's* list — its first one of 24 words — to which, he also hoped, it would add another. "Naturally," Dr Lewis went on to observe, "we book publishers cannot follow as rapidly as we should like to, but if we could get together — a most difficult procedure — I should be heartily in favor of adopting your list. I am sending it to some of my friends in other publishing companies in the hope that some such action may result." Results of any such action, given its occurrence at all, rest in the Winston Company archives, wherever they may be, the company having been swallowed up in a merger years ago (and that new company having then being remerged). It was, nonetheless, a promising idea, that of Dr Lewis.

Several weeks later, Dr Thomas Kite Brown, another of that editorial triumvirate at John C. Winston Co., wrote an important and disheartening letter that James O'Donnell Bennett, in charge of the newspapers spelling reforms, made centre-piece of an article. The letter, he said, "is among the most interesting and revealing received by THE TRIBUNE since..." it began its experiment. What the letter revealed, the headline epitomised: "WHY DICTIONARY // MAKERS AVOID // SANER SPELLING // They Fear One Another, Says Authority." [7] Dr Brown actually concluded on an optimistic note, applauding the *Tribune's* effort and suggesting that it may be "the final fillip that will put simplification over. No great newspaper has ever before tried... We will be right in the forefront of those issuing revised dictionaries," he added encouragingly, "if there seems to be a chance." [8]

The bad news had come upfront, seemingly to preclude any such chance from developing. The five major — Dr Brown wrote "great" — American and British dictionary houses, he asserted, do not trust one another. One of them was then on the verge of publishing "a new revision — a world event, really — the first real revision since 1910. They keep their plans secret, but there is not a chance in the world that they will simplify more than to a vanishingly small extent." The dictionary was, of course, Webster II — the second edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* — issued as "an entirely new book..." later in 1934. If its editors simplified even as much as "to a vanishingly small extent", it would need a lexicographer's experienced eye to detect it. Were even one of the unabridged dictionaries to venture into simpler spellings on its own, Dr Brown asserted, it would not survive owing to "prejudice and competition". One of them had tried it many years ago, according to information he received from an editor at that firm, who said "that the publishers still shiver at the recollection and give the idea of a repetition of the attempt a safely wide berth."

Their own dictionaries, bearing the general title of *The Winston Simplified Dictionary*, in fact gave several simpler spellings. "We are not completely medieval," Dr Brown stated, citing the *tho-thru* group as alternative spellings — this, several years before they became *Tribune* spellings — and the words ending in *-gog* and such forms as *dulness* and *fulness*. But these, he concluded, "go about as far as we thought we dared to go." They actually went somewhat farther, as Bennett may well have realized.

Bennett seems to have been familiar with the dictionary — at least *The Winston Simplified Dictionary. Practical Edition*, its then latest version dating from 1932 — [9] and its reception over "the last several years it having "gained favor", in his words, "in public schools because its definitions and etymologies are simple and its type large." What he did not remark and what Dr Brown obviously broached in his letter, was its effort at simplifying spellings. Of the 80 shortened spellings in the *Tribune* list through March 18, the *Winston Dictionary* gave about 25 as preferred spellings or permissible variant spellings, including, in addition to some of those Dr Brown instanced, *bazar*, *drouth*, *fantom*, *harken*, *instalment*, *lacrimal*, *rime* and *tonsillitis*. Clearly, then, in the editorial group behind the dictionary, McCormick and Bennett had supporters ready to advance the experiment.

Yet even then, there were those at another dictionary house who, potentially, might have turned out to be even stronger allies. This was the group at Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Company that had produced "America's first determinedly popular dictionary, ... *Standard Dictionary of the English Language* [that] appeared in 1893..." [10] and in several other editions over the years, the one relevant here having been published in 1932. Isaac Kaufman Funk, along with his founding partner, Adam Willis Wagnalls, was sympathetic to simplified spelling from the beginning and joined the Simplified Spelling Board. [11] Their very popular dictionary became Bennett's primary lexicographical support for his spelling reforms in the *Tribune*, and with good reason. In the dictionary's introductory section on spelling, the editors expressed their preference for simpler spelling, mentioning, as well, the American Philological Association, the Spelling Reform Association, and the Simplified Spelling Board. This preference governed other sections of front matter, specifically a sub-section on "Spelling Reform." [12]

Bennett occasionally cited various organizations, as well as the OED, when their orthographic or dictional recommendations meshed with his. But of the two dictionaries that Bennett put head-to-head, Funk and Wagnalls' *Standard Dictionary* and Webster's *New International Dictionary of the English Language* (the last revision of Webster I, in 1933), Funk and Wagnalls' won heads up. Bennett cited the two dictionaries about 15 times each in those four articles from late-January to mid-March, 1934 presenting the *Tribune*'s simplified spelling. Twice he wrote of "the conservative Webster" approving of a spelling," that epithet being quite unsuitable for Funk and Wagnalls'. More characteristic are such citations as Webster's having adhered to *missile*, while Funk and Wagnalls' gave *missil*, the *Tribune* spelling, as second choice; or in the spelling of *eclog* and other words ending in *-gue* Funk and Wagnalls' had "boldly dropped the UE. Webster has not. [14] Bennett knew that the editors and publishers of both *The Winston Simplified Dictionary* and Funk and Wagnalls' *Standard Dictionary* walked the same orthographic tracks as he. The editors of one dictionary wrote to the *Tribune* to say so, as previously indicated. A cursory glance at the front matter of the 1932 Funk and Wagnalls' dictionary, which clearly had been the edition Bennett used for his articles, would have revealed immediately where the editors' sympathies lay concerning reformed spelling.

It is idle to speculate on the outcome of *Tribune* spelling had Bennett and the editors at John C. Winston Co. and at Funk and Wagnalls' sought to reinforce one another's efforts to reform spelling. The obvious point is that they did not seek to collaborate. The *Tribune* relied on hope. Hope could not suffice.

The *Tribune* editors announced publicly in 1955 that they were severely cutting back on simpler spellings. But the symbolic retreat had actually occurred in 1939 in that memo from the managing editor conveying McCormick's directive on simplified spelling to the staff: "...we will go back to Webster in the case of the words now spelled in the *Tribune* as follows..." with the 38 words appended. [15] Bennett had retired at the end of January 1939. Two months later the experiment was seriously weakened, even though a few spurts of energy were to come in the following years (eg, with *frate* and the *tho-thru* group). The Webster to which the managing editor referred was, of course, the 1934 Webster, Webster II.

Ironically, the failure of the Tribune staff and the dictionary house editors to come together led ultimately not only to the cessation of the Tribune experiment but also to the demise of the Funk and Wagnall dictionaries themselves. At just about the time that McCormick and his spelling editors first went back to Webster, the Funk and Wagnall dictionaries began to fall out of favor, finally ceasing to appear in the 1960s. "Isaac Funk's determination to promote spelling reform, which had been sustained in all the company's dictionaries," a lexicographic scholar has stated, "proved their undoing. These reforms, which remained integral to the dictionaries until the 1940s, gradually alienated readers." [16] "From now on," ran that editorial in September 1975 definitively ending the experiment, "Webster's Third will be our guide, first variants preferred." [17] This directive returning the *Tribune* to the conservative Webster brought the process to its formal conclusion.

2 Causes of abandonment of reform

The alleged villains of the piece were the schoolteachers, whom all too many sources derisively called schoolmarms. They made easy targets, behind whom ranged a whole complex of other groups and, to move from the human to the abstract level, all those relevant socio-cultural forces at work in America when the *Tribune* conducted its experiment. That usual suspect, the general conservative tendency of speakers of a language to shrink from abrupt change, no doubt has a supporting role to play here. [18]

The *Tribune*, not many years into its experiment with simplified spelling, deliberately began to let it slide, finally to abandon it. McCormick himself had mightier campaigns to wage — against that would-be dictator, F D Roosevelt; against the insidious efforts of Communists, both domestic and foreign, to bring down America and its way of life; and against those who would subvert freedom of the press, that thin line of defense against government tyranny — to give sustained attention to reforming spelling. Thus for him and his spelling editors to have relied on the hope that others would follow the *Tribune's* example constituted a rationale for inaction, a turning away.

"Why, with all its righteousness and force," one commentator asked in 1934, "has not the *Tribune* been more successful in effecting reforms? Many an editor, striving to be a success in his community, asks himself an identical question and seldom finds the answer. The truth is that all newspapers are a shade futile." [19] Though according to this same commentator, McCormick campaigned for his reforms "arrogantly", his arrogance, if that is what it was, proved futile against *Tribune* advertisers on one matter only, their unwillingness to accept its way of spelling in their advertisements. [20] Simpler spellings, these businesses believed, distracted from meaning.

Confusion apparently also reigned in the newspaper's editorial rooms: a *Tribune* staffer remarked that their efforts to achieve that consistency that is the hallmark of good style were continually frustrated by exceptions to their simplified spellings -if *hammoc*, "why not *knoc* or *noc*? ... what about *ough* in *enough*?" [21] The *Tribune*, however, did not spread orthographic "confusion" by other means than its pages. Its nationally syndicated wire service, the Chicago Tribune Press Service, apparently did "not simplify any spellings." [22] As *Time* had phrased it, "Prime reason for the return to standard spelling is to bring the *Trib* style closer to that of wire services, most other papers, and current teaching in the U.S. journalism schools." [23]

Additional socio-cultural forces had their impact, notably generational changes within Chicagoland and demographic shifts bringing newcomers into it. These changes introduced a new readership to the *Tribune* unfamiliar with its experiment with simplified spellings. In the absence of any continued editorial explanation of the experiment itself, these readers may well have thought that *Tribune* writers could not spell. Once only, so far as I am aware, did the editors trouble to explain its spelling policy in all those years between late 1955 and late 1975. This was not in an editorial, but in a reader-response column, 'Action Express', to which a recent arrival from St. Louis had addressed the query, "Just why and when did The Tribune decide to toss out *though* and *through* in favor of *tho* and *thru*?" — this in 1972.

The letter-writer received his answer, brief, to the point. [\[24\]](#) The response, tucked away in a column less likely to be read than an editorial, suggests what *Tribune* editors and staffers interviewed in the earlier 1970s confirmed — that simplified spelling no longer fitted in with their image of the *Tribune* and with their plans to remake the newspaper. Clayton Kirkpatrick, then editor, and McCrohon, then managing editor, kicked over the traces of the Medill-McConnick eras by ridding the front page of the political cartoon, the chauvinistic slogan 'The American Paper for Americans', and the picture of a business or factory flying the American flag. The layout of the newspaper underwent changes as well. "In an interview [in 1973], McCrohon agreed that 'abandoning these trick [sic] spellings is part of the new look. I think most people will say it's about time.'" Another member of the *Tribune* staff, Jackie Wells, who apparently wrote the 1974 *Tribune* style book, furnished a fuller explanation:

Clayton Kirkpatrick ... made the decision and it was cut and dry. Thru, thoro and altho are being thrown out. Kirk wants to get rid of all of them.

Tribune spelling appears somewhat ridiculous. Going against tradition is very hard. The Tribune spelling didn't have a conscious effect upon the readers. But it had an effect upon school children who can't spell. Like [sic] Kirkpatrick said: "We tried and it didn't work. [\[25\]](#)

Why, then, did the *Tribune* way of spelling return to the conventional after 41 years? The answer has to be a tangle of teachers and technology, human contrariness on both small and large scale, and the heirs to a business wanting to remove from it the stamp of their corporate father and grandfather, first in 1955 and again 20 years later, so as to replace it with their own — one, they judged, more in tune with the mid and later 20th century. McCormick's way of spelling was thru.

3 Possible *Tribune* influence

As anyone who has read thus far will readily grasp, this section is to be, regrettably, the shortest one of all. Earlier sections of this article have noted an instance or two in which someone credits the *Tribune* with having influenced a choice of reformed spelling. The question of any larger or longer-lasting impact upon word-spelling admits of no direct answer.

The only major newspapers "to show any sign of emulation..." were the New York *Daily News*, owned by McCormick's cousin, Joseph Patterson, and the Washington *Times-Herald*, bought by McCormick in 1949 and brought under his direct control two years later. The New York tabloid went "little beyond *nite*, *alright*, *foto*, *fotog* and *fotographer*," H L Mencken observed, "in all of which the influence of *Variety* seems to be quite as palpable as that of the *Tribune* — indeed, I may add, more palpable." As for the *Times-Herald*, simplified spellings the *Tribune* way, such as *frate* and *photograf*, showed up on its pages. "But," a veteran staffer and editor on this newspaper said, "for several reasons, the effect [of making over the whole paper on the *Tribune* model] was unfortunate," McCormick's simplified spellings apparently contributing in their way to this effect. [\[26\]](#)

Otherwise, the print record of possible influence consists of here a word and there a word. The *Milwaukee Journal* — to stay with a newspaper for the instant — noted parenthetically that it, too, continued using *cigaret* and *dialog* — this in 1975. But it gave no hint of *Tribune* influence." Can one attribute to the *Tribune* the spellings considered acceptable as in this passage, written in 1979: "Today's dictionaries not only accept the truncated OG [as in *catalog*, *dialog*] but such *Tribune* neologisms as *skilful*, *drouth*, *fantom*, *harken*, and *canceled*."? [\[28\]](#)

Is it nearer the mark to suggest that in the instance of these words and possibly some others (eg, *tranquility*) the *Tribune* way of spelling reinforced and perhaps gave defining approval to the general acceptance of these forms? In other words, that the *Tribune* was an important, possibly in several cases the most important, influence, among others, stretching back into the later 19th century? For, after all, the spelling reform movement in America alone has a history going back to those 18th-century rationalists, Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster. Robert R McCormick's way of spelling helped sustain that history when few others did.

Notes & references

CDT = 'Chicago Daily Tribune'

CST = 'Chicago Sunday Tribune'

- [1] CST, Feb. 11, 1934, Pt.1, p.10, c.6.
- [2] Edit., "To Phyllis Who Might Spell It Phreight," CDT, Wed., Aug. 7, 1946, Pt.1, p.16, c.2.
- [3] Edit., "Helping Johnny to Spell," CST, Aug. 21, 1955, Pt.1, p.20, C.1.
- [4] Edit., "Thru is through, and so is tho," CDT, Mon., Sept. 29, 1975, Pt.2, p.12, c.1.
- [5] CDT, Fri., Aug. 11, 1939, Pt.1, p.10, c.7: letter, dated Chicago, Aug. 3, from L P Denoyer, who was President, Denoyer-Geppert Company. This company, which then produced maps, globes, charts, and anatomical models of various kinds for schools, is now the Denoyer-Geppert Science Company, producing only the models for educational use. I thank Mr. Alfred Heidrich, President, for filling me in on the company's history. Its archival records do not go back into the 1930s.
- [6] Letter, dated Philadelphia, Pa., Jan. 30, "A Book Publisher on Spelling," CDT, Sat., Feb. 3, 1934, Pt.1, p.12, c.6.
- [7] Bennett art., CST, Mar. 25, 1934, Pt.1, p.8, c.1.
- [8] Dr Brown had remarked in the previous paragraph that the *Tribune* should have "some royal fun in exposing the ignorance... of those..." who will insist, for example, on the S in *island* as derived from *insula* and the U in *tongue* as from *lingua*.
- [9] This edition ran to 1260 pages; according to the National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints, the largest Winston dictionary had 1362 pages. Bennett, in referring to it as having 1500 pages, seems to have rounded it upwards.
- [10] Jonathon Green, *Chasing the Sun: Dictionary Makers and the Dictionaries They Made* New York: Henry Holt and Co., [1996], p.447.
- [11] Green (1996), p.448, and Abraham Tauber, *Spelling Reform in the United States*, N.Y.: Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation 1958, pp. 116–117.
- [12] Funk and Wagnalls' *New Standard Dictionary of the English Language* ... New York & London, 1932, pp.xii, xxix, xxxviii, and 2780 (an Appendix on the rules of the SSB).
- [13] CST, Feb. 11, 1934, p.10, c.4, under *bagatel*; and CST, Feb. 25, 1934, p.1, c.3, under *program*.
- [14] CST, Feb. 11, 1934, p.10, c.7; and CST, Mar. 18, 1934, Pt.1, p.9, c.2.

- [15] Memo, dated Mar, 30, 1939, in the McCormick Research Center.
- [16] Green (1996), p.449. Whatever data Green might have had supporting his statement that Funk and Wagnalls' spelling reforms alienated readers, that data does not appear in his book. In an earlier article, 'Simplified Spelling in Government Publications', *American Speech*, 29:1 (Feb. 1954), 36–44, George R. Ranow used Webster II (!) to illustrate his point (p.44) that "the eagerness of the dictionaries to reflect the shifts in spelling and even the stronger desire of the printers to be ever, even if so slightly, ahead of the dictionaries..."led to some 200 now recognized simplified spellings, either as preferred spellings or variants.
- [17] Edit., "Thru is through and so is tho," *CDT*, Mon., Sept. 29, 1975, Pt.2, p.2, c.2. Webster's Third had appeared in 1961.
- [18] William Safire, "On Language: Smilin' Thru?" *New York Times Magazine*, Sun., May 2, 1993, p.14, c.3, furnished a representative comment of this nature: "Certainly usage tends to simplify spelling (alright, already), but native speakers hate to be told by philologists, advertising copywriters and other brisk neatness freaks how to fix the old lingo. We'll make it easier in our own time, the public seems to say — just don't push us." Safire had mentioned McCormick earlier in the column. I thank Cornell Kimball for bringing it to my notice.
- [19] 'The Chicago *Tribune*', *Fortune*, IX:5, May 1934, p.108.
- [20] See Waldrop (1966), *McCormick of Chicago*, p.106. I have not tried to ascertain whether Tribune advertisers sought to introduce their own shortened words into their copy during McCormick's day.
- [21] James Vicini (1973), p.65, interview with James Hallman, *Tribune* graphics editor, Sept. 28, 1973, in 'Under the Spell of the *Chicago Tribune*'. Senior Thesis. MacMurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois, Dec. 1973.
- [22] Vicini (1973), p.53. I have not tried to verify Vicini's assertion.
- [23] 'No More Frater Traffic', *Time*, XCVII:4, Jan. 25, 1971, p.47.
- [24] *CT*, Mon., Nov. 6, 1972, Sect. 1A, p.1. The answer reads in part, "A gradually lessening deluge of protest has been washing against Tribune Tower ever since [the introduction of reformed spelling in 1934]. While The Tribune was praised by philologists for its innovative move in using such spellings as catalog, analog and glamor, purists, spelling bee champions and others raised their voices in objection. Hence, the list was revised to where only a few shortened spellings remain a part of Tribune style today." Vicini (1973), p.69, summarized an interview, Sept. 28, 1973, with L A van Glissengen, assistant to the editor of the *Tribune*, Clayton Kirkpatrick, in which van Glissengen made the point about demographic change as a cause of the newspaper's abandoning the experiment.
- [25] Vicini (1973), pp.68–9, for the Wells interview, conducted on Sept. 28, 1973; and p.70, for the McCrohon interview, conducted on Sept. 29, 1973.
- [26] See for this material, Mencken, *The American Language, Supplement II* (1948), p.295; Waldrop (1966), p.106, where he spoke of this ill effect without entering into the reasons; and "The Colonel's New Guns," *Newsweek*, Sept. 17, 1951, p.80.
- [27] 'Tribune Gives Up on Spelling Crusade', in Accent section, *The Milwaukee Journal*, Wed., Oct. 1, 1975, p.3.
- [28] Joseph Gies, *The Colonel of Chicago*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. (1979) p. 102. On *catalog*, see Stuart Berg Flexner, *Listening to America: An Illustrated History of Words and Phrases from Our Lively and Splendid Past*, New York: Simon and Schuster Co. [1982], p.215.

5. The German Reform: Judgment by the Highest Court and a Little Local Difficulty

Chris Upward summarizes headline stories from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 15 July 1998, and a report on p10 of the *Frankfurter /Allgemeine* of 29 September 1998. Many of the arguments are of interest as potentially relevant to spelling reforms elsewhere. JSSS reported on the German reform most recently in issues [21–97/1](#) (Item 8), [22–97/2](#) (Item 8) and [23–98/1](#) (Item 7).

Final legal approval

On 14 July 1998 the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (BVG, Federal Constitutional Court) removed the final legal barrier to implementing the German spelling reform. The Court declared the reform was “constitutional”, did not infringe the rights of people who preferred to continue writing in the old way, and was to be used in schools from 1 August 1998, even if one of the *Länder* (states of the German Federation) rejected it.

The main objection to the reform had been brought by two parents from the north German state of Schleswig-Holstein. Although the objection was actually withdrawn a week earlier, the Court decided it was nevertheless in the public interest for its ruling to be published. The objectors argued that the reform infringed the constitutionally guaranteed rights of parents to determine their children's upbringing; but the Court ruled that the schools shared educational responsibility with parents. The state of Schleswig-Holstein itself did not accept the objection, since the new rules would make writing easier for children.

Other legal arguments against the reform were: that the State's remit did not extend to language, which 'belonged' to the people; that education was the province of the federal states, not of the national government; that if one of the states refused to accept the reform (as Lower Saxony had temporarily done), that would prevent its overall implementation; and that spelling reform required a special law and could not simply be decided by the Education Ministers of the states (together with Austria and Switzerland). All these arguments were rejected by the Court in its 60-page judgment (posted on the Internet on the grounds that the reform was too limited in its effect to threaten any constitutional rights, with only 0.5% of words undergoing any change (not counting words switching from ß to SS); it was being introduced gradually over a period of 7 years (1998–2004); and if individuals or states refused to comply, communication between them and the rest of the German-speaking world would not be impaired.

Coping with the Schleswig-Holstein problem

The Constitutional Court's judgment was not quite the end of the matter. One outstanding problem was that a referendum on the reform had been agreed for 27 September 1998 in Schleswig-Holstein. In the event, this produced a majority of 56.4% of the electorate against, versus 29.1% in favor of the reform.

This outcome placed the Schleswig-Holstein Minister of Education in a dilemma: she could not ignore the result of the referendum, but both she and her government were committed to the reform. She therefore planned to issue a decree to the effect that both old and new spellings would count as correct in schools, the new spellings were to be neither taught nor practised, and textbooks and dictionaries using either the old or the new spellings would be permitted.

But she also made clear the problems that would ensue. Teachers' and pupils' time would be wasted. Schools would be confused, as 90% had been using the new spellings for two years already, and almost all schoolbooks had already converted (Schleswig-Holstein could not finance special editions for its schools). It was educationally irresponsible to hold out against the reform, which would put the state's children at a disadvantage if they moved elsewhere in Germany.

Opponents were still active throughout Germany, gathering signatures in protest. These were, however, nowhere near sufficient to meet the requirements for further referendums, and the teaching profession had come out in favor of the reform. Many of the claims of the opponents were absurd, but they had perhaps one valid point: that not every reformed spelling was necessarily well-advised, and that in due course such cases should be reconsidered.

Now that the new Spelling Commission has begun its work in Mannheim, with the remit of overseeing plans for future reforms of German spelling, the machinery for undertaking revisions is in place.

Prof. Gerhard Augst writes from Siegen, Germany:

Reform in the German-speaking countries is being implemented very gradually. The period since the government decision (1 July 1996) has been occupied with court cases. The opponents of the reform have been very busy. Numerous petitions were launched in Germany, though so far only one (in Schleswig-Holstein) has succeeded. The new spellings have been fully adopted in schools from 1 August 1998, and government bodies have made the change or are in the process of doing so. The German-language news agencies scheduled their change from 1 August 1999, though they have not accepted every detail of the official reform. Some major newspapers, such as *Die Zeit*, *Der Rheinische Merkur*, have compromised between old and new spellings. Particularly where alternative forms are allowed, most users are going for a variant.

(See also [letter from Zé do Rock](#), p35)

6. Opposition to the German Spelling Reform

Gavin Hutchinson

As part of his degree program in Modern Languages at Aston University (graduated 1998) Gavin Hutchinson spent the summer of 1997 working in Münster, Germany, where he researched his dissertation on the legal aspects of the German spelling reform. In the present article he summarizes certain aspects of that dissertation.

1 Challenges to the spelling reform

The specific challenges to the reform of German spelling took place in a context of profound resentment of the project. Numerous statistics were published in the German media, claiming to illustrate this unpopularity. Perhaps the most striking example of this came in the shape of a Forsa opinion poll in 1996. The German weekly news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, reported at the time (44/96, p71) that the survey showed three quarters of the German population to be in favour of stopping the reform. *Whatever reservations one* may have about such surveys, the fact that 75% of the sample opposed the reform could only lend credibility and momentum to the campaigns led by opponents of the reform.

2 Parents, politicians, writers against the reform

Who then were these opponents? One major group were parents of schoolchildren, who would have to learn the new rules and write in 'reformed' German. These parents made up the majority of those who took legal action against the reform. In fact, when the wave of opposition was at its peak in 1997, more than 20 cases were lodged in the German Administrative Courts (*Verwaltungsgerichte*) by parents.

A second group of critics of the spelling reform consisted of politicians. On the one hand there was the group of Members of Parliament led by Detlef Kleinert, of the liberal FDP, who lodged an appeal specifically against the planned use of reformed German as the administrative language of Germany; more of this group later. On the other hand several prominent politicians took the opportunity to criticize the reform without committing themselves to campaigns against it. One such politician was the President of the Federal Republic, Roman Herzog. Whilst Herzog neither went as far as criticizing the content of the proposed reform, nor called the legal validity of the introduction of the reform into question, he rejected the idea that such a reform was necessary. However, whilst branding the reform as pointless, Herzog was reported as saying that his opposition to the reform would be restricted to "carrying on writing in the old way" .

Other politicians, by contrast, demanded a more radical review of the situation. One of the most interesting examples of this is the case of the liberal Member of Parliament and then Foreign Secretary, Klaus Kinkel, who in November 1997 spoke out in favour of (at the least) postponing the reform. This development was especially interesting given that Kinkel — in his role as a cabinet member — had twice officially acknowledged the proposed reform. At the time Kinkel expressed no misgivings whatsoever about the reform. The fact that this apparent change of heart came immediately after an *Oberverwaltungs-gericht* (Higher Administrative Court) had ruled against the reform, leads one to believe that opponents of the reform had some influence, subconscious or otherwise, on politicians. This opinion is further reinforced by Kinkel's acknowledgement of an argument proposed by reform opponents, namely that the conference of education ministers (*Kultusministerkonferenz* or *KMK*) responsible for implementing the reform *in the 16* states of the Federation — did not have the constitutional power to introduce

such a change. Although such developments alone could not halt the reform, the influence of the protesters on leading politicians was clear proof of the strength of the protest movement.

This movement was further reinforced by prominent authors. Such heavyweights as Martin Walser and Günther Grass signed the 'Frankfurt Declaration' composed by the previously unknown teacher of German, Friedrich Denk. This declaration criticized the content of the reform, predicting dire consequences if it were allowed to proceed.

Yet, as with criticism from politicians, this general criticism from the literary community was insufficient to halt the reform. Opponents therefore turned to the nation's courts and judges to try and stop the spelling reform.

3 The general public against the reform

The anti-reformers who brought cases to court saw them dealt with in two ways: in a 'Full' hearing or in a 'Preliminary' hearing.

3.1 Full Hearings

In this situation the parents who wish to see the reform stopped apply for a ruling ordering the relevant *Bundesland* (*Federal State*) *not* to apply the reform to their children's education. Such a situation arose in the Administrative Court in Berlin in 1997. The court found in favour of the parents, thus forcing the *Bundesland* of Berlin to withdraw the reform solely for the 3 children of the family bringing the case. The decision applied only to these 3 children, as the German Administrative Courts refused to hear cases in the name of whole classes of children or of entire regions. A decision could only apply to more than one set of children if it emanated from the highest court in Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe. As this court gave no decision until the summer of 1998, minor battles occurred in various courts all across Germany. Most of the cases were taken in Preliminary Hearings.

3.2 Preliminary Hearings

This type of hearing is intended to offer temporary legal protection to a party until a definitive judgment is reached. A decision in favour of a reform opponent in such a hearing would exempt the affected children from the reform until the decision was overtaken by one of three events. First, the Constitutional Court might reach a definitive decision. Second, if the hearing had ruled that the reform had simply been introduced too early, the decision would cease to be valid on the 1.8.98 (this was the official start date for introducing reformed spellings in schools, but most schools had started earlier to avoid an overnight changeover). Third, if the grounds for a judgement against the reform were the lack of a law to give it judicial validity, then it follows that the introduction of such a law would nullify the judgement against the reform.

The intricacies of the German legal system, as well as the fact that no consensus for or against the reform was developing amongst the judges concerned, meant that prior to the decision of the Constitutional Court no resolution to the situation was in sight.

3.3 Volksinitiativen

Beside court cases, the anti-reformers were armed with the option of *Volksinitiativen* (Public Initiatives) to attack the reform. The aim of these Initiatives was to bring about either a parliamentary disqualification of the reform or a referendum, whereby each *Bundesland* would vote simply for or against the reform.

However, opponents of the reform resorting to such Initiatives faced numerous and demanding hurdles. First, each Initiative had to be judged acceptable in form and content in order for the

case to be heard by the regional State parliament — not a foregone conclusion. One Initiative that fell at the first hurdle was that in the state of Lower Saxony, which was rejected in 1997 by the State's electoral authorities, as the latter had not been approached by the proposers of the Initiative about the correct form of the petition.

According to the regulations governing Public Initiatives, the State parliament would have four months to examine the petitioners' case. The Initiative's demands could vary, but were likely to take the form of a Bill reversing the decision to reform German spelling. This was the case with the most widely publicized Initiative, which originated in the state of Schleswig-Holstein. The theoretical consequence of parliamentary acceptance of such a Bill is that it would become law forthwith; should the parliament vote against the proposal this would not be the end of the road for the proposers of the Initiative — they could then seek a referendum.

The Initiative in Schleswig-Holstein showed that demanding criteria had to be fulfilled for a referendum to be successful. Having collected a preliminary figure of 20,000 signatures just to have their application heard, the protesters then had to find the support of 5% of the regional electoral roll to be sure of a referendum, and of over 400,000 voters for the referendum itself to succeed. Little wonder that a definitive decision was reached in the German Constitutional Court before the referendum process could be completed.

4 Legal arguments of the anti-reformers

The arguments presented in German courts by opponents of the reform were as complex as they were diverse. Before attempting to summarize them, it should be pointed out that, whilst some criticism was levelled against the linguistic quality of the reform, not one of the court cases brought against the reform took issue with the content or the linguistic quality of the reform. The two main arguments cited in the courts by reform opponents were as follows. First, it was claimed that the reform contravened the *Grundrechte*, or Basic Rights, of the population, and this rendered the reform unconstitutional. Second, it was argued that the *KMK*, the conference of States' education ministers responsible for the reform, did not have the authority to dictate on such a 'basic' matter.

Whilst separate in theory, these two arguments were often cited together in actual court cases, as many opponents of the reform considered the matter to have acquired 'basic' status, on the grounds that Basic Rights were being compromised. This brings in the question of the *Wesentlichkeitsprinzip*, or principle of essentiality. More of which later.

4.1 Contravention of Basic Rights

These Basic Rights (*Grundrechte*) are the rights laid out in Articles 1–19 of the German Constitution. Opponents of the reform claimed that it contravened certain of these rights and called for the 'unconstitutional' reform to be stopped.

The rights which were cited most often in the courts were: the right to free development of personality (Article 2.1); the right to freedom of written expression (Article 5.1); and the right of parents to raise their children as they wish (Article 6.2). Parents referred to this parental right, claiming that the *KMK* could not force their children to write according to the new rules, as the Constitution says the right to make such decisions falls to parents.

Two cases from 1997 give a practical example of how these arguments were received. Clearly, the reformers had a winnable case. A judge of the Administrative Court in Hanover, capital of the state of Lower Saxony, found in favour of parents who had based their case on their

parental rights. However, a judge in the equivalent court in Munich, capital of the state of Bavaria, denied the possibility that parental rights were being contravened. Such developments made it evident that the 'parental rights' argument was no guarantee of success for reform opponents. As mentioned already, no consensus of opinion developed amongst the nation's judges, the courts contributing to, rather than eliminating, the confusion about the validity of the reform.

4.2 Challenges to the KMK's authority to reform spelling

Again there are two theoretically separate arguments against the reform, which were often mentioned as one. In the Administrative Court in Wiesbaden, capital of the state of Hesse, in July 1997, it was claimed that the executive branch of the state, ie, the Government, and therefore the *KMK*, as representing all 16 states together on the spelling reform question, could not introduce such a fundamental reform. According to opponents of the reform, only a law, introduced by the legislative branch, ie, Parliament, would suffice in such a 'basic' matter.

This principle of 'essentiality', not mentioned in the constitution but recognized by the Constitutional Court, dictates that all decisions on 'essential' matters for the country can only be taken by the legislative branch, ie, Parliament. The most famous application of this principle came in the 1970s, when the Constitutional Court ruled that the introduction of sex education in German schools was a 'basic' matter and therefore required an accompanying law.

As mentioned earlier, there were also claims that the *KMK*'s spelling reform was invalid as it came from an inter-state, rather than national, ie, federal, body. Reformers countered this argument by referring to the fact that it was normal practice for educational matters to be decided on an inter-state level.

5 Limited success of reform opponents

Given that the reform was not brought down by its opponents, their actions can only be judged as unsuccessful overall. Hopes of the reform being halted were dashed in 1998 when the Constitutional Court, Germany's highest court, ruled that the reform could proceed (see report on p20).

Although they won individual court cases and the support of prominent politicians, writers and large sections of the population, the ultimate aim of the opponents of the reform was to have it stopped definitively — and in this they failed. That is not to say that the anti-reform movement seemed incapable of success at the time. In 1997 alone, 7 courts found in favour of anti-reformers, raising hopes that the Constitutional Court would do the same. Yet these decisions by themselves were never enough to stop the reform and were subject to many qualifications. Decisions against the reform from the lower courts only applied to individual plaintiffs and were always open to revision by a higher court.

6 Role of politicians in the debate

Opposition to the spelling reform emanating from the *Bundestag*, the lower house of the German parliament, was less striking than that from the public but is still worth mentioning.

6.1 Members of Parliament opposed to reform

A group of MPs dissatisfied with the reform rallied behind Liberal MP Detlef Kleinert. They were protesting against the proposed use of reformed German as the official language for state business, rather than about the reform in the nation's classrooms.

This group originally made a clear request for the government to scrap plans to use reformed spelling in state business. At the time it appeared that the group had a good chance of success, given that the unpopularity of the reform was not confined to one party. Yet the MPs were no more successful than the other opposing movements in stopping the reform. In March 1998 the *Bundestag* accepted the proposal of a compromise drawn up by its legal committee, according to which a committee would simply report back on what the linguistic community thought of the reform. The fact that the critics of the reform did not oppose this suggestion was a sign that their opposition to the reform was weakening. This unexpected stand-down remained unexplained by the anti-reform group. It may be that the spirit of compromise — described below — shown by the reformers had convinced their opponents that the reform lay in good hands. A sceptic may prefer to believe that the diminishing opposition in the *Bundestag* to the reform was due to reduced interest in the reform.

6.2 Attempts at compromise

At the start of 1997 there were hopes that a compromise would be produced by politicians, which would satisfy not only MPs, but all other reform opponents as well. In hindsight, these hopes were over-optimistic. Despite attempts of the reformers to reach a compromise, not one person bringing a case against it withdrew their complaint from the courts in 1997.

It cannot be denied that the reforming groups made a concerted effort to make the reform more acceptable to their critics. As regards the content of the reform, the KMK began to react to criticism in 1997. For example, the spelling commission set up by the IDS (Institute for the German Language — the German academic body responsible for the reform), announced at the start of 1998 that both variants (old and new) for more words would be allowed under the reform.

The reformers also reacted to accusations of undemocratic procedures, by trying to increase the role of the legislative, ie, parliamentary, branch in the reform. For example, the KMK suggested a *Staatsvertrag*, a policy document which would be signed by representatives of the German state, by other German speaking countries and by the parliaments of all 16 German states or *Bundesländer*.

It was, however, no great surprise that such suggestions failed to convince the plaintiffs to drop their cases against the reform. First, this is because none of the court cases challenged the content of the reform, as we have already seen. Second, the aim of the anti-reform groups was not to see the reform accompanied by a political contract or similar document, but rather to tumble the reform altogether.

7. Testing Readability: a small-scale experiment

John Gledhill

Dr Gledhill is Registrar of Coventry University, UK, and researched the history of Dutch spelling for his doctoral thesis. A shortened version of the following report appeared in the Society's newsletter [Simpl Speling in July 1999](#) (Item 4).

Design of experiment

Searching for something different for office staff to do at my University in the week before Christmas, 1998, I decided to seek their views on a variety of spelling systems sent to me for this purpose by members of the Simplified Spelling Society. The idea was to give participants the same text spelled in several different ways, to see which they felt was the easiest to read.

The full text was about one side of A4. It cannot be repeated here for reasons of space, but a sample is given in the lines below. The text was taken from a student handbook, so that the terminology would be familiar to the respondents.

- 1 *Every module has a level attached to it. The main levels are 1, 2 and 3, corresponding roughly to the standards expected of a first year, second year ...* (TO)
- 2 *eVRE MoJXL HaZ a LeVeL aTacT TX iT. hu MAN LeVeLZ oR 1, 2 aND 3, KOReSPoNDig RuFLE TX hu STaNDoRDZ eKSPeKTeD uV a FRST YER, SeKoND YER ...* (Bruce Beach)
- 3 *Evry modul has a levl atachd to it. Th main levls ar 1, 2 and 3, corespondng rufly to th standrds expectd of a first year, secnd year ...* (Allan Campbell)
- 4 *Evri moduel haz a lev'l atacht too it. The maen lev'lz aar 1, 2 and 3, kor'sponding rufli too the stand'rdz ikspektid ov a feurst yeer, sek'nd yeer ...* (Ron Footer)
- 5 *Evri moduel haz a levl atacht too it. The maen levlz aar 1, 2 and 3, kor'sponding rufli too the stand'rdz ikspektid ov a feurst yeer, seknd yeer ...* (Ron Footer)
- 6 *Evry modul has a levl atachd to it. Th main levls ar 1, 2 and 3, corespondng rufly to th standrds expectd of a first year, secnd year ...* (Chris Upward)
- 7 *Evry module has a levl atachd tu it. Th main levels ar 1, 2 and 3, corespondng rufly to th standrds expectd of a first year, second year ...* (Valerie Yule)

Text 1 is in current standard English spelling (Traditional Orthography or TO);

text 2 is in ANJeL (ANJ),

texts 3 and 6 are variants of Cut Spelng (CS),

texts 4 and 5 are variants of New Spelling (NS), differing only in the treatment of the schwa and the use of dh for voiced th in the second version;

text 7 is Surplus-Cut (SC).

Respondents were asked two questions: "How easy did you find it to understand?" and "How acceptable would it be to use as the normal form of spelling?" The texts were presented in the above order, which was deliberately chosen (a) to ensure that 'normal' spelling came first so that respondents were presented with the context and the terminology, (b) to put similar proposals near to each other to see if they got the same score (ie, to eliminate the tendency to give a high score merely because it was easier than the preceding version). The number of staff in the experiment was too low to be able to vary the order of the texts, which would have helped eliminate variation based on that order; instead they were deliberately given the texts in the same order so that this variation (if present) was a constant that could be ignored.

Sixteen staff were invited to take part and were given the texts; seven of them couldn't grasp what was intended and declined to take part. The figures below are therefore based on the 9 who could understand the basic assumption that there was such a thing as alternative spelling. That in itself is an interesting figure: nearly half the respondents simply took TO as an unchanging constant, even as an axiom.

As an optional extra, respondents were invited to report how long it had taken them to read the various versions. Not all offered timings. Of those who did, the length of time needed seemed to correlate well with their opinion of the acceptability.

Results

The results were as follows (marks out of 10):

Orthography	Ease of reading	Acceptability	Time (mins.)
TO	9.9	10	2.3
ANJ	2.2	1.7	5.5
CS A	8.6	5.3	2.4
NS A	6.3	3.0	3.1
NS B	6.4	3.1	3.3
CS B	7.9	5.1	2.3
SC	7.9	5.1	2.3

If we merge the variants we get a clearer picture, with Cut Spelng a clear leader at 8.1 for ease of use and New English Spelling at 6.4; with 'acceptability' at 5.2 (including two scores of 10/10) and 3.1 respectively. ANJeL was a complete shock to all those taking part, and elicited several puzzled comments. The time taken to read Cut Spelng was notably close to the time taken for TO.

Respondents were also invited to amend their scores after reading all the variants, so that they could moderate to some extent any influence in the order of texts. Five did this: one made CS 1 mark easier, but 3 made it 1 mark harder; one made NS 1 mark harder; the fifth changed all "acceptability" scores to zero from the previous scores of 1 or 2. Overall that did not appear to change the relative ordering noted above.

Discussion and conclusion

It is possibly discouraging that 3 of the 9 respondents found all alternatives unacceptable, and that *all* gave 10/10 for the 'acceptability' of current normal spelling (only one gave 9 for 'ease of reading' of TO; all the rest were 10/10).

As a further control respondents were asked whether they (a) knew shorthand, and (b) knew any foreign languages. This was to try to control for familiarity with different ways of writing sounds. There did not, however, appear to be any bias in the scores attributable to these other skills. Only one had admitted to not having either of these skills; and one volunteered that they knew the IPA — intriguingly that was the person who changed 'acceptability' to all zero.

The respondents consisted of the following, though it is impossible to check for any influence this may have had on the response: 1 male, 8 female; well educated (6 to graduate level); age mid-20s to mid-50s.

One respondent passed the test to a friend who is a language teacher. As well as making negative comments on the whole idea, this teacher also submitted comments on the consistency of each scheme. Most of these comments related to the treatment of the schwa, and inconsistency between, for example, *facilitis: penltis, levl : level*; most of these, to be honest, were simply typographical errors in the samples submitted by the originators.

This was a very modest attempt to see how people totally untutored in the idea of spelling reform would react to a range of changes, from the extreme to the straightforward. The outcomes probably reflect the extent to which each diverges from TO. Reactions to more extreme proposals were strongly negative.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 26, 1999/2 pp25,26 in the printed version]
[Zé do Rock: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal Views](#), [Media](#), [Book](#).]

8. An Excursion into Icelandic Orthography

Zé do Rock

Iceland was one of the few countries Zé do Rock did not visit on the 11-year hitchhike that inspired his orthographic travelogue *fom winde ferfeelt* (written in German, reviewed in Cut Spelng in [JSSS 23](#), Item 8). Now active in the SSS, he here gives his orthographic impressions from a recent trip to that island. His text combines the cutting elements of his own simplified version of English spelling with some of the idiosyncrasies of written Icelandic.

A headline sample of printed Icelandic:

Háværar kröfur gerðar um afsögn Jeltsíns forseta.

Icelandic is quite a famous language, especially considering it is only spoken by 270,000 people, which is less than some districts in big cities. It's famous because of its conservative features, which explain why Icelanders say they can read thousand-year-old texts without any problems. It's to preserve that quality that it bans the import of foreign words into the language — they have an Academy which at the site of a foreign word immediately invents or composes a new Icelandic word.

I didn't go to Iceland to study the language, I just went there to enjoy the weather, the wind and the cold. But I tried to get a grasp of the language and found an ancient book translated into English as *The First Grammarian*. This failed to change the "bad orthographic manners" of the emergent new language Icelandic, but it became one of the most important books for the study of Old Norse. I don't know too much about the history of spelling reform projects, but that's certainly one of the oldest, being written around the year 1200. The author is anonymous and he not only complains that Icelandic is getting away from the alphabetic principle, but he also laments that Icelandic and English are drifting apart.

Well, I personally don't lament it, I wouldn't be very happy if we had to speak something like Icelandic as the international language. Although I have to say, at least they have fewer silent letters, and you can learn the rules where these silent letters are. That's something English could learn from Icelandic.

Although the Icelandic alphabet came from Old English, it has no C, Q, W or Z. The C can be spelt with K (eg, *kaffi*) or S (eg, *sentimetri*), the Q with K (*kvikasilfur* 'quicksilver'), and they don't need W or Z. Two letters survive from Old English which modern English has lost, representing the (for many non-native speakers) difficult TH sounds: Ð (lower case ð) representing voiced TH, and Þ (lower case þ) representing voiceless TH.

The pronunciation also has a kind of funny burp sound: to pronounce *höfn* 'haven', try to say *hurpen* with silent R; you have already pronounced the *hur-*, and then you have to burp and close your mouth, so that the /pn/ comes through the nose. For a word like *steinn* 'stone' you have to say *steden*, but the DN is pronounced with this burp-effect. One advantage of Icelandic is that it doesn't have (for foreigners) funny vowels as English does, like short A, short U, ER, etc.

Stil, it has one thing in common with english: in other germanic languages, long vowels ar just the same as short vowels, but pronounced long, wile icelandic and english hav long vowels that ar pronounced quite differently from the short ones. Long A corresponds to english OW in *how*, long E is actually like YE in english *yet*, long O is a difthong as in english RP *clothe*, long U is 'continental', ie, as in english *include*, but the short U is something between shwa and german Ö.

Let us use U for shwa in this text, as the icelanders do, eg, there ar lots of endings with U in icelandic, such as *vegur* 'way', *fullur* 'full'. And to shó long vowels in ícelandic, ú just put an acút accent on the vowel. Quít ésy, as só meni reformurs shó. If english had priservd the accents it sumtíms úsed in óld english to shó long vowels, probably ther wud bé no problems kéing them in on compúturs and uthur ríting divíces today. But it hasnt, and now it séms to bé too lát.

Ícelandic speling is quít far from the pronuciátion. Móst leturs hav 3, 4 or évun 6 valús. But ther ar strict rúles, so eny ícelandur nós how tu pronounce an unnón wurd. A forenur has quít a fú dificultis, as wé can sé in the varius valús of the letur G:

- 1 at the bigining of a sylabul bifor A, Á, O, Ó, U, Ú, Ö, AU, L, N, R: 'normul' /g/, as in *gata* 'street' (not 'gate').
- 2 sylabul-initialy bifor E, I, Í, Y, Y!, OE, EI, EY, J: palatized G, a bit lík soft G in english, as in *gefa* 'giv'.
- 3 Bitwén vowels or bitwén vowel and R and ð: /j/ (ie, like english Y in *yes*), as in *dagur* 'day'.
- 4 Wurd-end aftur vowel: /j/, as in *sög* 'saw' (noun).
- 5 Bitwén vowel and I, J: /j/ , as in *bogi* 'bow' (for arrows)
- 6 Bitwén vowel and L, N: /g/, as in *gagn* 'usefulness'
- 7 Bitwén F, G, L, R and vowel: /gv/, as in *öfgar* 'exageration'.
- 8 In *guð*: /gv/, as in *Gufni* (proper nám).
- 9 Bitwén L and D, G, T, N, S and bitwén R and ĩ, T, N: sílunt, as in *margt*.

Thats ól rathur complicáted. It's the prís pépul hav tu pá for béing ábul tu réd thousand-yér-old texts. Úsualy wot hapuns is not that the language as a hól stopd its évolútion, ónly the ritun language did — in ícelandic sum centuris bifor inglish.

Thá dónt hav PH, bikos thá dónt hav grék wurds; and insted of SH, thá rít SK, like SC in old inglisk.

All in all, íslandisk sounds lík grék béing spóken by! fins. The vokabulari is not as púr as the íslandurs klám: í hafa hurd thaþ a hundrað (íslandurs luv *ð* and *þ*) yérs agó ther vur much mor 'internasional' ords, but sins thá founded an akademi vich has bèn 'kléning' the language, such ords bikám much rerur. Meny tíms thá had tu kombín nú ords from old íslansk ones, and í vil giv hér sum exampuls:

<i>togleður</i>	'pull-lether'	rubber
<i>kvikmynd</i>	'living pictur'	film
<i>lyðeldi</i>	'persons power'	democracy
<i>þjóðveldi</i>	'pépls power'	republik
<i>heimspeki</i>	'worlds wisdom'	filosofy
<i>hreyfill</i>	'moov maker'	motor
<i>eind</i>	'unity'	atom

<i>verkfræðingur</i>	'work expert'	engineer
<i>sími</i>	'wire'	telefon
<i>tölva</i>	'number orracal'	computer

In a núsápur it is rély harð tu finna non-germanisk ords. *Biscuit* is a 'small cake', in islandsk *smákaka*. Stíl, if ú gó tu a kafé, ú'l find ords lík *kaffi*, *sykur*, *súkkulafi* 'chocolat', *café au lait*, etc. And a pizza is a *pizza*, évun if ðe íslandurs sá ðat ðis is no islansk ord. Thá sá ðat ðe rít ord is *flat baka*, but í'v nevr sén ðis ord, evryvair ðá ofur pizzur. ðe ord is ólsó purfektli diklínabul in islansk: *pizza* 'a pizza', *um pizzu* 'about pizza', etc, ðe plúrul *pizzur* 'pizzas', *pizzur* 'about pizzas', *pizzum* 'from pizzas', etc. ðer ar 8 kás endings, but ðe artikul is at ðe end of ðe ord, so vé hav tu lurn 16 endings: *pizzan* 'ðe pizzas', *pizzurnar* 'about ðe pizza', *pizzunum*, *pizzanna*, etc. *Pizza* is a kvít regulur ord, but an ord lík *mafur* 'man' is a bit hardur: *maður*, *mann*, *manni*, *manns*, *menn*, *menn*, *mönnum*, *manna*, etc. Ólsó ðe konjugátions arnt veri simpul, and ðer ar évun 3 ords for inglish *they*: ðe plurul for *he* (*feir*), ðe plurul for *she* (*ðær*) and ðe plurul for *it* (*ðau*).

And ðe náms: ðá dont hafa family náms, ónli a kristian nám and ðen ðe faðirs first nám + *son*. Só if yor nám is *Mikael* and yor faðirs nám is *Jon*, yor nám vil bé *Mikael Jonsson*. If ú er a vuman, ú vil get ðe fyrst nám + ðe faðirs (or sumtíms muðirs) nám + *dóttir*. If ú vont tu bikum an íslandur, ú hafa tu ajust tu ðat system. Vladimir Ashkenazy, ðe fámus pianist and konduktur, vonted tu bekum an íslandur, but he didnt vont tu chángé his nám. In his kás, ðá sed, vé kan mák an ekseption: ðe nám Vladimir Ashkenazy var aloued. Sumtím látur anuthur gy hú vonted tu bikum an íslandur aplíd tu get ðe nám Vladimir Ashkenazy. Aftur ól, þessi var aloued, vosnt it?

ðe temperutur var ólveis around 10°C. In ðe sumer. Hou ðe vinter is, ú kan imagin ven ú nó ðe language: ðe ord for 'weather' is *veður* vich ólsó méns vind, ðe ord for 'winter' is *vetur*, and ðe ord for 'wet' is *votur*. Ól ðés ords ar kvít similur, arnt ðá? Í mén, *wether-winter-wet* arnt exactly far from éch oður, but in islansk ðá ar olmóst ðe sám.

Tu kompensát for þessi problums, ðe landskáp is grát and fasináting: desurts and béches in ól kolurs, volkánós, and Ísland is surtunly ðe ónly kuntri in ðe verld við mor ðan 3 vaterfalls per inhabitunt. Bikos ðer ar not meny pépul and bikos ðer ar réali lots of vatenfalls. And í'm just tauking about ðe vatnfalls ðat kum from ðe mountins, not about ðe vuns ðat kum from ðe sky!. Of kors ðer ar meni geysirs, and nou í nó ðat néiðer ðe britisk nor ðe amerikansk pronunsiátion of ðe ord is rít: ðe rít speling vud bé *gaser* in inglisk, pronounsed lík ðe kvestion "gay, sir?"

ðá ét fisk, pizza and hamburgurs, but sumtíms it gets a bit wérd. ðeir móst fámus dish is kald *hákarl*. Þessi is a shark. ðá fisk it and bery it for 3 manþs, then ðá ét it. Hraw! Or hrotten, as sum pépul mít sá.

And ðe íslandurs, ðe folk? Vel, ðe íslandur ar frendly, but it is veri difikult tu fínna vun. And the konklusion: í vud by their fisk, but vudnt import éiðer ðeir veður or ðeir speling...

Coppyrite zé do rock, coppyrong also zé do rock

9. E-mail and a 'Benchmark' Spelling

Edward Rondthaler

Edward Rondthaler is president of the American Literacy Council (ALC), successor to the American Philological Association's organization established in 1876 to address the problem of English spelling. He has served as a link with the movement's American leaders during the last half century, having worked with most of them in fine-tuning the simplified notation now sponsored by ALC. His vocation is closely tied to the visual word, being co-inventor of the first successful breakaway from metal typesetting, an innovation essential to the automation of simplified spelling, regardless of its ultimate notation or form.

Abstract

The most promising way to introduce a logical spelling into the mainstream is by making the newer spelling easy to use *before* it is put to memory. E-mail users probably represent the largest segment of society oriented toward innovation. Their computers can be programmed to dispatch an e-mail message in parallel lines of T.O. and simplified — automatically. This vivid comparison of the two spellings will enable many to evaluate the merit of change and pick up the simpler spelling as desired. Only by the *automatic* generation of such comparisons will this be achieved. The technology and logical notation are both available. Sufficient funding is now the sole barrier to fulfillment.

Need for a 'Benchmark'

In [JSSS 23](#) Item 3 Valerie Yule admirably serves the cause of spelling reform by showing us how the internet opens up "an unprecedented opportunity for world-wide testing and introduction of a more consistent and simpl spelling system suitable for international use." She points out, moreover, that the invented or abbreviated phonetic spellings often used by writers on the internet may suggest the kind of spelling reforms that might ultimately be accepted.

Dr.Yule mentions, perhaps without as much emphasis as it deserves, that in order to assess these shortened e-mail spellings properly we need what she aptly calls a "benchmark" spelling — a logical, consistent standardized English spelling system against which the merit of the casual spellings suggested by internet users can be evaluated. At present our assessment of such spellings is made by comparing them with traditional spelling which, when used as a benchmark, is as capricious and erratic as a roller coaster. Without a reliable standard to keep us on a straight track we're likely to end up with a glut of new spellings that are no less confusing than what we now have. It is only against a benchmark of reasonably good sound-to-sight sight-to-sound matching that we can be sure that a particular change will not introduce ambiguity or muddy the waters for other changes — much as the spelling of the trade name 'Insulwall' is completely at odds with 'U-Haul'.

What pronunciation should set the standard?

A century ago British Received Pronunciation (RP) was the hallmark. But two world wars and a shrinking empire have reduced the supremacy of RP. Meanwhile radio, TV, telephone, travel, cinema and song have largely merged the various U.S. regional dialects into a relatively uniform pronunciation — General American — now spoken by almost a quarter of a billion people. Is there any reason why the benchmark spelling should not represent the pronunciation of more than half of all who speak English?

One of the virtues of using General American as the norm was pointed out by Mario Pei, the Columbia University philologist. Dr. Pei states in his book, *The Story of the English Language*, that Americans often let spelling influence pronunciation, with the result that schwas tend to be pronounced in a diluted version of the particular vowel with which they are written — as indicated in dictionaries such as the exemplary *Oxford American*. To quote Dr Pei: "American [diction] generally preserves more of a spelling-pronunciation than does English [diction]. It neglects the obscuring of unstressed vowels and the drastic lopping off of unstressed syllables which is characteristic of British speech... It also, incidentally, proves the power of the written language over the spoken." To whatever extent this is the case, a carefully sound-matched spelling should discourage our tendency toward careless articulation and encourage more distinct pronunciation of our sixteen vowel sounds. In like manner a sound-matched spelling should lead toward more uniformity of English pronunciation worldwide, and a better chance of having it fulfill the dream of a true lingua franca.

The first order of business, then, is to set up a benchmark spelling that is easily read by those who are literate, and clearly represents the alphabetic principle applied to the speech of the majority of English speakers. This particular spelling need not be heralded as the be-all and end-all of reform. It will simply get us on track in the year 2000 by being phonetic, accurate, unambiguous, and applicable to all our comwords — ie, words that are not ordinarily capitalized. It is the starting point for reform, and should satisfy those who see the benefit of spelling English words as they sound — with, perhaps, the exception of a few short, high frequency words like *of, is, as* etc. Accompanying this sturdy beginning should be a commitment to examine our spelling at regular intervals for further stream-lining or changes to keep it in sync with speech.

In seeking a candidate for the benchmark spelling one could hardly find a notation better qualified to represent General American speech than the New Spelling originally proposed by the British in 1910, published in book form in 1941, and slightly modified, later on, with a few American updates. Software that automatically translates typed T.O. into this basic spelling is now available on the internet at www.under.org/alc. [1]The program in its present form is primarily tutorial, but with adequate funding it could be made not only to serve the need of an e-mail sender bent on reform, but to win the respect and perhaps the embrace of e-mail receivers who may never have considered simplified spelling as a real, viable possibility.

When this software is ready for use the sender, having typed the message in T.O., will have the choice of three ways to send it. It will not be necessary to use a spellchecker because the program will have already automatically corrected any T.O. errors as they were typed. (These automatic T.O. corrections are performed in a unique way designed specifically to make error repetition less likely.) To dispatch the message in T.O. the sender will press the 'Send' button. To send it in simplified only, he or she will press the 'Send Simplified' button. But, *as an ideal means of introducing the recipient to logical spelling*, the sender will press the 'Send Dual' button —

and the message will be transmitted automatically in parallel lines of T.O.
and the mesej wil be transmited automatically in parralel liens of T.O.

and simplified, word under word, as you see it here. Thus each receiver
and simplified, werd under werd, as U see it heer. Thus eech reseever

will get examples of simplified spelling on subjects in which he or she is
wil get exampls of simplified speling on subjects in which he or she is

definitely interested, displayed in a format that can be grasped easily —
definitely interested, displayed in a format that can be grasped easily —

a clear format that is vividly and efficiently presented, is comfortable
a clear format that is vividly and efficiently presented, is comfortable

to the eye, gives the reader the whole story, and serves as the quickest
to the eye, gives the reader the whole story, and serves as the quickest

possible start toward learning to use the rational spelling as a viable
possible start toward learning to use the rational spelling as a viable

option for both reading and writing. It would be difficult to find a more
option for both reading and writing. It would be difficult to find a more

effective means of self-teaching. The program uses context in selecting
effective means of self-teaching. The program uses context in selecting

the logical spelling for homonyms like live-live, wound-wound, read-read,
the logical spelling for homonyms like live-live, wound-wound, read-read,

etc. and, as in speech, resolves there-their, chews-choose, here-hear, etc.
etc. and, as in speech, resolves there-their, chews-choose, here-hear, etc.

by sound. A few rules, such as the e-marker for long vowels (except at the
by sound. A few rules, such as the e-marker for long vowels (except at the

end of certain words) will, of course, be learned in time. But the parallel
end of certain words) will, of course, be learned in time. But the parallel

lines can be expected, of themselves, to do a large part of the teaching.
lines can be expected, of themselves, to do a large part of the teaching.

The basic technology for a 'Send Dual' button is now available. Adapting it to e-mail, as shown
above, rests on the emergence of a philanthropist who sees that the dual format will be
intriguing to the world's most avid supporters of innovation and most tolerant to change — the
avant-garde internet millions. Occasional pressing of the dual button by e-mail users can pave
the way to solving the baffling, demeaning English illiteracy problem at its root.

Dr Yule points to an experiment indicating that spelling change is probably easier if made all at
once rather than piecemeal. Such full change is entirely in keeping with the dual format.

Her last pages focus chiefly on steps that could be taken to entice internet users to inch their
way into mastering a logical spelling. The "Send Dual" button should make inching one's way
unnecessary. Few would choose to swim the English Channel when a ferry is available.

10. Lobbying Literacy Policy Makers: Tony Blair and David Blunkett Chris Upward

[JSSS 21 1997/1](#) (Item 11), [22 1997/2](#) (Item 12) and [24 1998/2](#) (Item 9) carried correspondence between the SSS and various authorities responsible for literacy in the UK; and [JSSS 25 1999/1](#) (Item 10) carried correspondence with equivalent authorities in New Zealand. We here print our most recent correspondence with the UK authorities.

To: The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, M.P.
The Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street, LONDON SW1A 2AA
11 October 1999

Dear Prime Minister

Combating the Conservatism of English Spelling

Our Society was very struck by your call at this year's Labour Party conference for conservatism to be combated in all its forms, and for Britain to be modernized from top to bottom.

Our concern is with a particularly damaging form of conservatism, where modernization would benefit educational standards and written communication wherever the English language is used: the archaic and confusing spelling of so many of its words.

We congratulate the Government on already raising literacy standards. However, if we are to reach the standards so much more easily achieved in most advanced non-English-speaking countries, the problem of English spelling irregularity will have to be addressed.

As the homeland of English, Britain is well placed to give the world a lead in making the written language more learner- and user-friendly, and we will be glad to advise further on the practicalities of doing so.

What is needed is a long-term strategy for managing the modernization of English spelling. As a first step, we urge the Government to make known its intention to investigate the benefits and implications of initiating such a process.

We hope you can respond positively to our call for a particularly insidious manifestation of conservatism in our culture to be publicly acknowledged and its alleviation considered.

Yours sincerely

on behalf of the Society's Committee

cc The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, M.P., Secretary of State for Education and Employment

DfEE Department for Education and Employment
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
Westminster, London SW1P 3BT
The Simplified Spelling Society
2 November 1999

Thank you for your letter of 11 October addressed to the Prime Minister concerning English spelling. Your letter has been passed to me for response as the National Literacy strategy falls within my team's responsibilities.

It is encouraging to hear from people like yourself who support the Government's desire to raise standards of literacy in our schools.

I understand that a colleague, Simon Conroy, has replied on behalf of the Secretary of State. I attach a copy for your information.

Yours sincerely
Jan McIntosh, Literacy Team

To: The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, M.P.
Department for Education and Employment
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON SW1P 3BT
11 October 1999

Dear Secretary of State

Combating the Conservatism of English Spelling

Our Society has pleasure in sending you a copy of a letter we are addressing to the Prime Minister on the subject of literacy standards and English spelling.

We hope that you may have the opportunity to discuss this with the Prime Minister as a possible developing feature of your literacy policy. We would naturally be glad to discuss the matter further with you.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Society's Committee

DfEE Department for Education and Employment
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
Westminster, London SW1P 3BT
The Simplified Spelling Society
29 October 1999

Thank you for your recent letter to the Secretary of State concerning literacy standards and English spelling. I have been asked to reply on his behalf.

It is very interesting to read a copy of the letter you have sent to the Prime Minister and I know he is as interested as I am to hear ideas from those who care about raising standards of literacy in our children.

The Government is committed to raising standards, not only in literacy but also in numeracy and that is why we have introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for primary age pupils. The Key Stage 2 results this year suggest that the strategies are working, with a 5% increase in literacy and a 10% increase in numeracy. However we are not complacent and we are aware that there is much to be done, we need to build on these achievements. Thank you for your letter.

Yours Sincerely
SIMON CONROY, Literacy and Numeracy Operations Team

11. Anglo(-Japanese Non-)Dyslexia Christopher Upward

Chris Upward summarizes and discusses the report 'A Case-Study of an English-Japanese Bilingual with Monolingual Dyslexia' by Taeko N Wydell and Brian Butterworth. JSSS previously published the following article on Japanese: Christopher Seeley 'The 20th Century Japanese Writing System: Reform and Change' in No. [19-1995/2](#), Item 13. The present review is written in Cut Spelling.

1. Comparing literacy between languages

Evidence for the harm done to literacy levels by the unpredictable spelling of English has always been important to the Simplified Spelling Society in refuting the skepticism it often encounters in making its case. One kind of evidence that has been accumulating in recent years arises from comparison between literacy standards in different languages with different writing systems, both alphabetic and non-alphabetic. A pioneering work in this field was edited ([1973](#)) by former SSS President John Downing, though its comparisons were impressionistic rather than statistical. More recent studies with detailed statistical analysis for pairs of individual languages include: Thorstad ([1991](#)) for Italian versus English learners; Upward for English students in English and German ([1992](#)); Landerl et al. ([1997](#)) for German versus English dyslexics.

2. Dyslexia and Japanese, granularity and transparency

The research paper discussed here first outlines the development of scientific thinking about the nature of dyslexia, concluding that it now appears not as a single, homogeneous disorder, but as a range of disabilities that each sufferer is differently affected by. Difficulty in recognizing and manipulating the sounds of words (phonological deficit) is, however, a recurring feature, as are poor short-term memory and genetic predisposition to literacy problems.

The Japanese writing system(s) is/are then described, as functioning on two levels. One level is the almost entirely predictable phonetic representation of syllables by single symbols (*kana*). The other is the use of Chinese characters (*kanji*) which may be read in a variety of unpredictable ways. Japanese writing thus differs from alphabetic writing in not requiring phonemic analysis of syllables, i.e., consonants are represented jointly with the vowels that follow them.

Dyslexia as seen in alphabetic languages is relatively rare in Japanese, and seems to arise from difficulties of visuo-spatial perception (i.e., of memorizing the complex structures of the characters), rather than of phonemic processing. This suggests a 'hypothesis of granularity and transparency', by which dyslexia will be less common 1) in writing systems where the relationship between sound and symbol is more predictable (=more transparent), and 2) where the elements in the writing system (letters, characters) are supra-phonemic, so they require less detailed analysis, and their 'granularity' is coarser, i.e., their symbols represent at least two successive phonemes rather than just one.

This hypothesis could explain why dyslexia may be rarer in Japanese than in English. First, the *kana* syllabary of Japanese represents the sounds of syllables more predictably than the letters of written English represent English phonemes, i.e., an important part of written Japanese is more transparent than English. Second, both the *kana* symbols and the *kanji* characters are more coarsely grained (i.e., have coarser granularity) than the letters of the Roman alphabet used in English. In terms of transparency English is thus at a considerable disadvantage from the learner's point of view, and in terms of granularity all alphabetic writing systems are at a disadvantage compared with Japanese. (This is not to say that Japanese may not have disadvantages of its own, such as the long time required for learning a sufficient number of *kanji* characters, but they are not at issue here.)

3. The case history

That is the background to the analysis of the literacy problems experienced in English by AS, the teenage son of highly literate Anglo-Australian parents living in Japan. AS had all his schooling in Japanese schools, but spoke English at home, where he received a thorough grounding in written English. His school

performance in jernl was wel abov th avraj for japnese students of his aje, except for his litracy in english. Here, quite severe difictis had been noticed erly on by his parents, and at th aje of 13 he was diagnosed as dyslexic in english.

In vew of this disparity between his problms with english and his abov-avraj performnce in japnese, AS undrwnt detaild asesmnt of his litracy standrds in both languajs. For both japnese and english, th reserch took care to compare his performnce with aje-machd monolingual subjects. Th paper describes his impressiv proficiency in handling th profound ambiguitis of th sino-japnese *kanji* caractrs, wich gave him a readng aje in japnese wel abov his cronlojicl aje; and th syllabic *kana* symbls causd him no trubl, wethr they representd real words or nonwords, th latr being especialy significnt since dyslexics in english typicly find nonwords hard to decode.

In english AS had no difictly with th alfabet as such, and his ability to anlyz fonemes was norml. Howevr, wen it came to identifiyng hole ritn words in english his performnce was poor. His 'dijit span', ie, his ability to take in lettrs preceding and folloing th one on wich he was focusd, was only 5, wel belo avraj (this is an efect of poor short-term memry); a consequence of this is that, since japnese words require fewr 'dijits' than english, his ability to absorb hole words in ritn english was autmaticly less than in japnese, wher for instnce a singl *kanji* caractr may represent a hole word. AS cud repeat polysyllabic english nonwords quite succesfully, but found som consnt manipulation tasks hard in english. In singl-word readng tests, he wud al too ofn substitute a word of simlr apearnce for th corect one, evdnce that his fonic decoding was weak. This showd very strongly in his atemts at readng nonwords.

Variis tests mesurd ASs performnce in ritn english against that of both english and japnese students of th same aje. These tests found him always to perform significntly worse than th english control group, and jenrly worse even than th japnese controls, tho his comand of spoken english and his lifetime exposur to english wer far superir to thers. In particulr, wher th japnese students comnly misspelt english words by using alternativ permisbl spelngs for th sounds concernd, ASs spelngs wud mor ofn be randm gesses.

4. Discussion points

Wydell & Butterworths reserch represents a valubl adition to th evdnce for th difictis that th traditionl orthografy of english causes by comparisn with that of othr languajs. Spelng reformrs wil find th acount of curent litracy testng techniqes intrestng, and wil welcm th multilingual perspectiv adopted, wich includes refrnces to chinese and danish (problmatic riting systms), italian, jermn, malay and spanish (al relativly straitforwrd riting systms, with jenrly predictbl sound-symbbl corespondnces) beside, of corse, english and japnese. Th acount givn of th simplicitis and complexitis of japnese, with its two *kana* sylabris and ambiguus use of chinese caractrs (*kanji*) is a useful introduction to its unque riting systm.

A numbr of ideas developd in th paper ar worth reflectng on.

Friths (1985) concept of stajes in litracy aquisition (an initial 'logografic' staje, then an 'alfabetic', and a final 'orthografic' staje) is at one point aplyd as a benchmark for ASs developmnt, altho todays undrstanding of th importnce of fonics for initial litracy must cal it into question (as is indirectly hintd elsewher in th paper). Recent experience of oposing initial teachng methods surely sujests that they, rathr than any predetermd 'staje', ar wat decide how lernrs first com to grips with alfabetic riting.

The concept of difrng granularity of riting systms afectng ese of litracy aquisition is thot-provoking. Is th notion convincing that japnese *kana* symbls and *kanji* caractrs (once lernt) ar esir to read (especialy by dyslexics) than alfabetic script because they stand for longr segmnts of speech, fal within a shortr dijit span and do not require fonemic analysis? Let us compare th consnt + vowel valus of japnese *kana* with othr syllabic riting systms, such as ethiopic (Bloor, 1995) or indian devnagri (Coulmas, 1989) or, despite gretr structrl variability, korean hangul (Sampson, 1985): in these a symbbl for a givn consnt is distinguishd by a predictbl aditionl markr for th folloing vowel, but they hav a simlr rufly square shape to *kana/kanji*; shud they then be hardr to read than japnese because they mark consnts sepatly from vowels? Being mor predictbly structurd, surely they shud be esir to lern. Furthrmor, may we not considr alfabetic

riting with regulr sound-symbll corespondnces to be simlrlly syllabic, only with a horizontl sequence of consntnt markrs insted of havng them integrated into th vowel symbll itself? Wy shud *can, fan, man, pan* or *kid, kill, kin, kiss* be hardr to read than th same syllabls representd by a singl (perhaps compound) symbll? In th case of AS, it wud seem that his limitd dijit span may hav hindrd his alfabetlc readng, but conversly lernrs with impaird visuo-spatial awareness ho hav trubl lernng japnese caractrs myt find alfabetlc readng esir. Ther is a gret deal mor that one wud like to no about readng processes in japnese befor comng to firm conclusions on such questions; for instnce, is silent readng jenrly fastr in japnese than in alfabetlc languajs? and how do japnese readrs react wen they meet unfamilir *kanji*?

Finaly, we do not no how severe ASs difictis wud hav been if 1) he had been introduced to ritn english thru systmatic fonics, and 2) if his alfabetlc languaj had been far mor transparently spelt than english, eg, if he had been a spanish-japnese bilingual.

Insofar as limitd dijit span agravated ASs difictis with ritn english (perhaps it dos for many dyslexics), we may reflect how much help they wud derive from simplfyd spelng in english that significntly shortnd th avraj length of words. Cut Spelng for instnce uses som 10% fewr letrs than dos traditionl orthografy — thus wen th 6 letrs of *freight* ar cut to 4 in *freit*, th reduced word length fals within a 5-lettr dijit span.

5. Conclusion

Tho larjly a singl case study, th implicatns of this reserch paper ar far-reachng for our undrstandng both of dyslexia and of th difrnt impact of difrnt riting systms on th process of litracy aquisition. Without concluding that english spelng needs reformng, it puls no punches in pinng a major part of th blame for ASs problms on its lak of transparency, and increses th quotebl evidnce availbl to spelng reformrs in making ther case.

Abundnt fresh evidnce of a simlr kind comparng litracy in sevrll othr languajs to that in english has apeard since th Wydell-Butterworth paper, in a colection of papers editd by Harris & Hatano ([se belo](#)). This wil be revewd in *JSSS 27 — 2000/1*.

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12. Wat can welsh teach english? Christopher Upward

Chris Upward discusses issues arising from David Reynolds, Wynford Bellin & Ruth ab Ieuan (June 1998) *A Competitive Edge: Why Welsh Medium Schools Perform Better/Mantais Gystadleuol: Pam fod Ysgolion Cyfrwng Cyraeg yn Perfformio'n Well*, Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs, 28pp in English, 28pp in Welsh ISBN 1 871726 39 5, £10. The article is written in Cut Spelling.

0. Abstract

After pointing up some striking differences between the regular Welsh and irregular English writing systems (§1), this paper describes a report on the superior educational standards achieved by Welsh medium secondary schools compared with their English medium counterparts (§2). The report ascribes the gap in standards to the more favorable ethos and motivation of the Welsh medium schools; but this paper asks whether it may in fact be due to higher literacy levels in primary schools (§3). In §4 examples are given of the learning advantages gained from more regular spelling in other languages and, over nearly 150 years, in English too (i.t.a., etc), and the possible neurocyclical reasons for this. The final section (§5) suggests future research to test the hypothesis that higher educational standards result from the more regular spelling system of Welsh.

1. The Welsh writing system

The format of this pamphlet, *A Competitive Edge*, demonstrates its bilingual credentials: it has two front covers, one in English and one in Welsh, but no back cover. Whichever end one starts, English or Welsh, one works through the text to page 28, which is a center-page spread where the one language faces the other upside down.

Although written Welsh may strike the uninitiated as unpronounceable, its system of sound-symbol and symbol-sound correspondences is in fact quite regular and far easier to master than that of English. The distinctive appearance of the spelling is due in part to its heavy use of W as a vowel, as in *cwricwlwm* for English 'curriculum'. The Welsh alphabet itself differs from the English in not using the letters J, K, Q, V, X or Z, but giving several digraphs their own slots in the alphabetic sequence, most famously perhaps FF and LL. It also uses occasional diacritics, in particular the circumflex accent to show long vowel values. Its distinctiveness is in part also due to its history: despite 1,500 years of cohabitation with English on the main island of Britain, the vocabulary and spelling of Welsh show surprisingly little English influence, as can be seen from a comparison of the English and Welsh versions of the reports title under the main heading above.

Some indication of the simplicity and regularity of written Welsh is seen in the spelling (showing a number of Cut Spelling features) of the few English loanwords found in the Welsh half of the pamphlet, i.e. *posibl* (appearing in the mutated form *bosibl*), *busnes*, *coleg* 'college', *economi*, *grw^p* 'group', *natur*, *polisi*, *sampl*, *stori*, *tabl*. Some words of Greek and/or Latin derivation are spelled as in English: *data*, *drama*, *ethos*, *normal*, *person*, *sector*, *system*; while other words are interestingly, but quite regularly, different from their English cognates: *actif*, *ffigur*, *ffocws* 'focus', *lefel* 'level', *proffesiwn* 'profession', *tancer* 'tanker'. A heavily disguised loanword is *Saesneg* 'English', with its echo of Scots *Sassenach* and ultimate source in *saxn*. Beside these words are several of Latin origin much altered in such forms as *disgyblaeth* 'discipline' and *pobl* 'people' (mutated to *bobl*) from Latin *populus*; such words originated in the centuries of Roman occupation before the Anglo-Saxon arrival in Britain in 5th–6th centuries, when the ancestors of the Welsh formed the native British population.

2. Th Competitiv Ej

Th report here undr review is wel ritn and atractivly produced, with only two orthograficl errs noticed by th revewr in its english half. It has six chaptrs, hos titles outline th content clearly:

1. The Controversy about Welsh Medium Education,
2. The Growth of Welsh Medium Education,
- 3 The Effectiveness of Welsh Medium Education: using school inspection reports,
4. The Effectiveness of Welsh Medium Education: the intakes to the schools,
5. Some Social Outcomes in the Two Systems,
6. Some Informed Speculations on what makes the Welsh medium schools more effective.

Th story told is of a revival of th welsh languaj in education, th first welsh languaj scool being foundd in 1939 and furthr scools foundd especally thru th 1960–80s. Behind this developmnt lay a drive and determnation on th part of parents and educationists to surmount obstacls and establish a ful infrastructur ranjing from nursry scools to scoolbooks and teachr-training institutions. Th scools soon aquired a good reputation (betr than that of paralel english-languaj scools), wich has persistd to th presnt day. Th aim of th reserch was to establish wethr that reputation was deservd, and if so, to ask aftr its cause.

Th reserchrs lookd at publishd examnation results and inspectrs reports on 44 scools in South Wales. They found (p15) that th "Welsh medium sector is clearly rated as more effective in every area studied by the inspectors", is "significantly better in the teaching of English, as well as Welsh", and in the teaching of modern languages. To ensure that these results wer not distortd by welsh scools taking in mor children of hyly motivated parents or english scools receving mor socially disadvantajd children, th reserchrs carrid out a rigrus comparativ analysis of two welsh medium and two english medium secndry (comprehensiv) scools in th same rejon of South Wales. Wen al variabls had been alowd for, th welsh scools wer stil found to perform betr by evry one th many criteria aplyd.

In Chaptr 6, th report sujests a host of posbl reasns for th superir performnce of welsh scools, al of them intanjbl factrs to do with th beneficial ethos of th welsh medium scools and th hyr motivation of ther parents, teachrs and children. Th lead authr, David Reynolds, is a major playr in th presnt program to rase educationl standrds in England (especialy in mathmatics), and, in keepng with such concerns, th preface states: "It is argued that some of these factors may be transferable to th non Welsh medium sector." Howevr, th advantajs of th welsh medium scools ar shown to be in many ways specific to th social climat asociated with th welsh languaj, and th reports Policy Recommendations (p3) express som pesmism: "Many of the reasons for the success of the Welsh medium sector may be difficult to emulate," altho "Somehow the English medium sector ... needs to generate greater effectiveness."

3. Th factr of primary scool litracy

Th reports Policy Recommendations end with a clarion cal: "...We regard it as extraordinary that a sector of apparent effectiveness should remain both unresearched and ... unrecognised at the level of public policy. ... Our view is that, if they are understood and their methods spread, Welsh medium schools have within them the capacity to effect a renaissance of educational provision in Wales generally." To wich we myt ad th question: "Wy only in Wales?"

Th causes of th gretr efectivness of welsh medium schools wer identifyd, as we saw, in such factrs as ethos and motivation, wich may not be redily replicbl elswher. Yet we may sujest a furthr, mor concrete factr wich is not examnd in th report and wich, givn th politicl wil, cud indeed be replicated. This factr, we shal here begin to speculate, may be first noticed in th primary baseline from wich th secndry scools develop ther own standrds. Primary education in jenrl is only mentiond in pasng in th report, altho curent policy in England is based on th premis (Barber, [1998](#)) that childrens levl of litracy at aje 11 is th best predictr of ther performnce in al subjects at aje 16. (One wud like to no mor about th implications of this claim, ie, wethr it

amounts to more than the banal, though of course important, observation that children who do well at age 11 tend to do well at 16 too).

With regard to the Welsh situation, let us trace this causality in reverse. If children educated in Welsh are performing better at age 16 than their English-educated counterparts, it seems likely that their level of literacy at age 11 was also better. If that can be established, then we need to pursue the reasons back to earlier stages in the educational process and ask whether the crucial factors may lie in the greater learner-friendliness of the Welsh writing system than of the English. If this were so, it would help to explain the superior performance of Welsh-medium learners at every level and in every subject (including English, for which see below).

4. The i.t.a., Sister John and the neurocology of alphabetic literacy

It has been repeatedly noted that regular writing systems allow literacy skills to be acquired faster, more effectively and with better motivation than does the irregular writing system of English. This has of late been shown by comparative studies of literacy standards between English and other, more regularly spelled languages, thus Thorstad (1991) between Italian and English, and Upward (1992a) between German and English. But in earlier times there has been ample evidence relating directly to English, when regularized writing systems, culminating in the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) in the 1960s–80s, were used to teach initial literacy skills. The experience of these systems over 150 years from the mid-19th to the late 20th century in both the UK and the USA is outlined in Upward, (1992b). All show the reverse effect of the present irregular spelling of English, which is seen constantly to trip learners and many adult users up in their attempts to read and write: a trap-free writing system offers an immense boost to fluency by the simple expedient of not tripping users up and thereby avoiding the 'cognitive confusion' (Vernon, 1957) generated by the highly irregular English spelling system. Furthermore, when learners transferred after some six months from the i.t.a. to traditional English spelling, the solid foundation in basic literacy techniques showed up in long term benefits to their literacy standards years later. This effect was explained by Downing (1987) by the transferability of skills once properly mastered. That could be why Welsh medium schools achieved better results even in English: their literacy skills gained in Welsh were then transferred to English.

Yet the benefits of a simple, regular writing system may go beyond enhancing fluency in reading and writing and thereby performance in every school subject. The possibility of profound, additional gains was first hinted at in Sister John's experiment, carried out in an infant school in Liverpool in the 1960s. As reported by Downing (1967), her experiment showed children who had acquired their first literacy skills via the regular i.t.a. significantly outperforming in certain non-literacy skills (pattern matching and recognition) children who had learned via the irregular traditional English orthography. What this implies is that, if children are trained in the systematic, exact observation and logical thinking that literacy in a regular writing system entails, they are able to transfer these skills to other activities. In other words, the benefits to their intellectual growth went beyond just the acquisition of literacy skills.

Intriguing though that conclusion may have seemed in the 1960s, it is not until the 1990s that it can be seen to fit into a broader understanding of how the brain develops, as described by the modern science of neurocology. This tells us (Rose, 1992) how the learning process works by repeated sense impressions (e.g. regular spellings) building up neural pathways in the brain, which, if they are sufficiently reinforced, come to constitute clear memories susceptible of recall. The power to recall what has been learned in terms of the predictable sound-symbol correspondences of a regular writing system thus becomes far stronger than the power to recall the vagaries of an irregular system like traditional English. From this we may surmise that effective memory pathways that have been laid down in the course of regular literacy acquisition contribute to the wider development of the brain that can then be applied to other intellectual tasks. In this way, mastering a regular writing system in the early stages of schooling provides a firm foundation for a child's subsequent education than does having to wrestle with an irregular writing system. Diane McGuinness (1997) depicts this as improved economy of brain chemistry when a skill reaches the level of automaticity.

5. Futur reserch into anglo-welsh litracy?

Th reports peface and policy recmendations state that ther is an urjnt need for furthr reserch into th fenomnn of hyr achevemnt in welsh-medium secndry scools. Th argumnt presentd in §3 & 4 abov sujests that reserch shud be undrtaken to test th hypothesis that th lernr-frendlir riting systm of welsh is th precondition for those hyr standrds. Th folloing questions sujest themselvs:

- 1 Ar th hyr standrds acheved by welsh medium secndry scools bilt on hyr standrds acheved by welsh medium primary scools?
- 2 If so, in wat year of primary education can those hyr standrds be first identfyd?
- 3 Can such hyr standrds be linkd with hyr litracy levls acheved in th first years of primary education?
- 4 If so, how dos litracy teachng and aquisition in welsh difr from equivlnt procedurs in english?

If, as th hypothesis proposes, th regularity of th welsh riting systm wer shown to be th ke to th advantajs of welsh medium education (contributing perhaps even to th ethos of th scools and motivation of teachrs, pupils and parents), th question of transferability to english medium scools wud appear in a new lyt. For as long as th superir ethos and motivation ar ascribed to a vage spirit of welsh nationl enthusiasm, they may indeed not lend themselvs to esy transfer to english medium environmnts — as th report itself half fears. But if they ar found to emnate from qualitis of th welsh riting systm that cud be aplyd to english, then th conundrm is inherently solvbl: reform english spelng, and th desired efects shud arise in english too, as indeed they always hav don wen initial litracy skills hav been taut thru regulrized spelng systms such as th i.t.a.

Al this may extend th hypothesis too far for th taste of som of todays reserchrs in th field, but it has th merit of being falsifybl acording to th best scientifiic methodolojy. Howevr, quite apart from providing a testbed for that particulr hypothesis, anglo-welsh bilingulism ofrs an invalubl resorce for reserchng th sycolojy of litracy in othr ways too. As th report points out, so far it has remaind stranjely unexplord, but we may hope that th reports findngs represent a first step toward a propr apreciation of th welsh dimension of th british litracy sene. And if subsequent reserch on th contrastng efects of two such difrnt riting systms co-existng on th same iland is publishd, it may wel prove grist to th mil of english spelng reform.

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4. McGuinness, Diane (1997) *Why Children Can't Read and what we can do about it*, London: Penguin, pp172–173.
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13. 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.

Parallel routes

I advocate a parallel route, as I feel it is impossible to rectify English with its present orthography. People in all five continents are familiar with the system. Books, newspapers, signboards, software, dictionaries, grammar books, etc, are geared to present orthography. Governments, publishers, employers, schools are supporters of existing orthography. Whole establishment in English countries favours current system. By English countries, I mean UK, USA, Canada, Australia, NZ and not just England. A better term would be EMT (English Mother Tongue) countries. Non-EMT countries are making increasing use of English language.

At present EMT = 300 million, English-knowing non-EMT = 400 million. Among non-EMT, there are about 40 million persons in India. Non-EMT people are interested in their own languages and likely to oppose English spelling reforms. Our priorities in India are how to control population explosion, how to stop communal riots, how to remove poverty. There is absolutely zero interest in India about English spelling reforms. We have spent millions of dollars buying and making books to teach English, making signboards and using English for all high level business, and we cannot allow that investment to go waste. We learn English spellings by heart, but then whole business opportunities and modern knowledge become available to us.

We have our various scripts, which help us to write pronunciations while we learn English. For example, in my school days, I used an English-Marathi dictionary, with pronunciations and meanings in Marathi script. Thus English in Marathi script is a parallel route for me. That inspired me to design a Roman-script-based new route for English. If some SSS members feel that the English spellings can be reformed within the original route, I would say my best wishes are with you. Please go ahead. If SSS Constitution does not permit a parallel-route solution, please ignore my views.

Language is like a flood. It is difficult to control it. It is difficult to change Hindi, Marathi, French orthographies too. The problem is not that of English alone. But a parallel route has a chance of success. I tried Roman script as an optional scheme for Marathi etc, but I could not convince people. But now I find Roman script being used actively by Marathi people for email. Thus, a parallel route has suddenly opened! People use it with any symbol-sound relations, but a time may come to standardize. A change within existing orthography is not as simple as changing from feet-inches to metres. We measure quantities like feet, kilograms maybe for two minutes in a day. But we read, write, print a language for say eight hours in a day. I look to future. Mankind needs a link language after all. English, with reformed spellings, could be that language. This parallel route could be called Globish.

Madhukar Gogate, Pune, India

Collapse of anti-reform party

I agree that the spelling can't be changed overnight in all English speaking countries. The German reform was at first only for schools and state departments. The German reform says that till the year 2005 the old spelling is considered obsolete but not wrong. After that it will be considered wrong.

As reformers, we wouldn't be forcing anyone to use the new spellings, except that schools would have to teach it.

As the traditional spelling would remain acceptable in English, some people might continue using it, but start gradually using reformed words, especially the more they see them written. Some of these people might accept it but not be sure how to use it. Other people might not accept it but slowly get used to it, as it is happening in Germany. Some would certainly start using it although they didn't accept it.

The democratic state can't force any citizen or organization to spell according to the new spelling — only their own employees, like any company, which in the case of the state, means teachers and officials.

But the moment the German news agencies decided to spell with the new spelling, all the papers switched to it, even the most conservative ones, even Der Spiegel, which swore 2 years ago that it would never write in it. People are complaining less and less. The book publishers are changing gradually, as they're afraid students and pupils won't read their books because otherwise they'd get confused.

It's funny. Now that the reform has been introduced, all the hysteria has gone. Even Schleswig-Holstein, where the protestors won a referendum, is slowly 'going back' to the new spelling, arguing that they have to spell like the rest of the country. The papers in Schleswig-Holstein are writing in the new spelling, so it is getting ridiculous and confusing for the students to stick to the old spelling. Parents stopped complaining, only the most fanatic anti-reformers are still trying to save what they can.

The anti-reformers argued that the reform would cost 4 billion marks, but if that is true (certainly you can make a calculation where that is true, as well as a calculation where you prove that the country would make a profit of 4 billion) it would cost another 4 billion marks to go back to the old spelling. Suddenly they didn't care about the costs anymore.

Zé do Rock, München (Munich), Germany

Pros and cons of speech synthesis

The successful use of a speech synthesizer with regularized spelling is excellent news. I gather that speech-activated computers are still quite troublesome largely because of the vagaries of English spelling.

Voice activated software or voice recognition software is used successfully by many, especially dyslexics and people who cannot use keyboards for long periods for various reasons. Such software is remarkably clever in what it does achieve.

The problems are: that the software needs very high specification computers, the user needs to learn the system and remember to speak consistently, to have the skill of composing orally, and to say punctuation and commands exactly. The system always enters correctly spelled words, but these may not be the words you want, a) because your words are not yet in its dictionary b) you have mumbled them. The big problem for dyslexics is proof-reading, because they cannot tell whether it has entered the words they want.

Jean Hutchins, SSS Mem Sec. Surrey, UK

Kounting C

I did a word count for C and K as used in a list of the 1000 most common words. (My ambitions to do a program for the purpose collapsed when I realized I would have to devise an algorithm for how to pronounce the words. If you could write an algorithm, we would not need spelling reform. Ah!) In any case, the results are pretty lopsided:

- C = /k/ 89 instances
- C = /s/ 43 instances
- C in combinations 22 instances (only two of this set, school and schools, have /k/ sounds)
- K & Ck = /k/ 43 instances
- K with other values 9 instances (these are K as in know and in think)

There are also 6 instances of Q = /k/ in this list.

A particularly interesting finding is the rarity of K = /k/ as an initial letter. C = /k/ occurs 67 times as the first letter of a syllable, though in no case does C = /k/ occur before e or i. K = /k/ occurs just 12 times at the beginning of a syllable. On the other hand, C = /k/ occurs non-initially only 22 times, while K = /k/ occurs non-initially 31 times. In every case where K is non-initial in a syllable, it is either final or would be final but for an ending. (e.g., works) or a silent letter (e.g., like).

There seems to be a surprising amount of regularity here.

John Reilly, New Jersey, USA

Testing reform proposals by speech synthesis

I just tried a little test on two versions of a passage, one in Cut Spelling, the other using miscellaneous respelling rules (RITE). I fed the texts into the speech synthesis engine of Dragon Dictate, to see how it would cope.

The engine looks first for correctly spelled words in TO, and then uses a look-up table to find the rite pronunciation, and words not found are then pronounced according to a set of 'Fonic Rules' intended to guess the best possible match.

I have to report that the RITE speech was rite, but the CS version caused a few trips, especially th, which was sounded out as tee aich. RITE was the clear winner.

I will repeat the test with longer passages and report on the outcome.

Damian Bonsall, Cheshire, UK

Heavy diacritics

During my 14 months in Vietnam, I've picked up some information about the Vietnamese writing system. It uses the Roman alphabet with lots of diacritical marks to indicate tones. The Roman alphabet was introduced about 150 years ago by a French priest, at which point the Chinese writing system previously used for Vietnam was dropped. The Roman system seems close to 100% regular, but it's very cumbersome with so many diacritical marks. Also, there are some strange choices, with Đ meaning /d/, but D (without that horizontal line) meaning /z/. Also, some of their sounds do not convert; for example, in Ngoc the final C is a C and a P combined. Further, Minh is two thirds of the way between Min and Ming, but actually neither. I know some educated Vietnamese who could write up the merits and demerits of their system in good English, but they wouldn't see them from a Western viewpoint. I imagine romanized Chinese pinyin lacks tonal marks, so is only a rough guide to speech; Vietnamese writing is much more exact.

Mell Carey Hanoi, Vietnam

14. JSSS 26 1999/2: Literature Received

In the past 6 months JSSS has received the following publications:

- 1 From American Literacy Council Literacy Bulletin Board , Bulletins.4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11.
- 2 Department for Education and Employment Improving Literacy and Numeracy. A fresh start (The report of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser).
- 3 English, the Journal of the English Association, Vol.48, No. 191, Summer 1999; No.192 Autumn 1999.
- 4 English Association Newsletter, No.161, Summer 1999; No.162, Autumn/Winter 1999.
- 5 English Today, No.59, July 1999, No.60, October 1999.
- 6 Language and Literacy News, newsletter of the United Kingdom Reading Association, Summer 1999, Autumn 1999.
- 7 nfer news, Spring 1999, from National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough, UK.
- 8 QUEST, the Journal of the Queen's English Society, No.72, July 1999.
- 9 Reading, July 1999, Vol.33, No.2 July 1933; No.3 November 1999; from UK Reading Association.
- 10 Rechtschreibung, newsletter of the Bund für vereinfachte rechtschreibung (Federation for simplified spelling), Zürich, No.178, June 1999: No.179. October 1999.
- 11 Sprachreport, from the Institut für deutsche Sprache, Mannheim, Germany, 2/1999, 3/1999.