

# Simplified Spelling Society, Journal, 1988/1. J7

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## The Society

Founded in 1908, the Simplified Spelling Society has included among its officers: Daniel Jones, Horace King, Gilbert Murray, William Temple, H G Wells, Sir Jaynes Pitman, A C Gimson, John Downing. Its aim is to "bring about a reform of the spelling of English in the interests of ease of learning and economy of writing". Its present officers are:

Vice-Presidents: Professor David Abercrombie, W Reed, Lord Simon of Glaisdale

Chairman: Chris Jolly

Treasurer: Alun Bye

Secretary: Laurence Fennelly

Public Relations Officer: Mona Cross

Trustees: Angus Dalgleish, Stanley Gibbs, Elsie Oakensen.

Enquiries to the Secretary.

Subscriptions (£5 or \$10 p.a.) to the Membership Secretary and Editor (see below).

## The journal

The *Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society* appears three times a year.

Editor and Membership Secretary: Chris Upward

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Permission to reproduce material from this *Journal* should be obtained from the Editor and the source acknowledged.

**Editorial consultants are:**

Professor Nina Catach, Paris III University and Director of BESO, CNRS

Professor Edgar Gregersen, Queens College & Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Professor Francis Knowles, Department of Modern Languages, Aston University

Professor Julius Nyikos, Washington & Jefferson College, New English Orthography Institute,  
Washington, Pennsylvania

Dr Edward Rondthaler, Typographic Council for Spelling Reform & American Language Academy,  
New York

Dr Donald G Scragg, Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies

Valerie Yule, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 7, 1988/1 p2 in the printed version

[Chris Upward: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Pamflet](#), [Leaflets](#), [Media](#), [Book and Papers](#).]

## 1. Editorial

### Chris Upward

#### THIS ISSUE

Firstly we welcome our team of editorial consultants listed above, some of them old friends of the Society, some of them valued new acquaintances. We look forward to their views, suggestions and advice, both on the role and shape of the *Journal* and on all aspects of spelling in its international context. Their association with us lends authority to our voice.

Dominating this issue are papers given during the first part of the [Society's 1987 Conference](#), at which the notion of efficiency in spelling was explored from a range of angles. A prerequisite for any kind of detailed study of the pros and cons of alternative spellings is a global, or, as it was termed, "cosmic", overview of what spelling is, whence it came, and where it may be heading to. That overview was provided by Tom McArthur, whose paper stresses the way in which technological change can totally overthrow old concepts, old needs, old possibilities. So it was when printing came, and so it may be also with the new electronic media — as shown indeed by the Society's own *Journal*, an example of the new genre of cheap, yet presentable, desk-top publication, which would not have been feasible just five years ago, and which enables us now to experiment freely with all manner of spelling systems.

Whether by chance or not, the Japanese connection features three times in this issue: Tom McArthur's paper ends with a hint as to its significance, John Skelton links it with the roman alphabet, and Thomas Hofmann writes directly from Japan.

Through Valerie Yule's report, news reaches us of a remarkable event down under: the 1986 Australian Style Council. Though it confined itself to the here and now of existing spellings, rather than, as with the SSS, the heady realm of spellings that might one day be, it demonstrates that spelling is a matter of practical importance for a wide constituency of people who can influence spelling policies. If the southern hemisphere can do it, why not the northern?

Again and again our contributors reinforce the message that our perspective must be worldwide; but at the same time we are dealing with the visible, evolving minutiae of alphabetic symbols, past, present and future. This multifariousness is part of the fascination of the subject: it is science and art, psychology and politics, geography and technology, all rolled inextricably into one. It is a widener of horizons for its devotees. While on the one hand it may help the school round the

comer, on the other it may help mankind as a whole communicate more effectively and in consequence more constructively with itself.

### **LEAPFROGGING WEBSTER**

Hence a recurrent anxiety among reformers is whether English spelling can be reformed without destroying the written standard on which English as a medium of world communication depends. The need to coordinate reform worldwide may seem daunting: some may conclude that worldwide reform is a pipe-dream, and others that each English-speaking country should go its own way regardless. However, Noah Webster's departures from British spelling early in the last century, which are generally used in America today without causing the disintegration of world English, perhaps suggest a way forward.

Most distinctive American forms differ from the British by shortening: they may drop a redundant vowel, as in *ax*, *esthetic*, *fetus*, *labor*, *mold*, *mustache*; or simplify doubled consonants, as in *traveled*, *wagon*, *worshiped*; and a number of shorter American forms involve two or even three letters: *boro*, *catalog*, *jewelry*, *plow*, *program*, *sulfur*. In some cases the American form replaces a letter, as <s> in *analyze*, <e> in *artifact*, *carcass*, *gray*, *inclose*, or <c> in *defense*, *skeptic*; or it switches letters round, as in *center*, and there are even a few British spellings which are shorter than the American: *biased*, *centred*, *skillful*. The visual impact of the differences is mostly slight, but there can be little disagreement that the shorter forms tend towards 1–1 greater regularity, as well as being more economical.

Redundant letters are a major defect of t.o., and shorter forms are a small improvement. If they were adopted world-wide, the world standard would be strengthened, not weakened. (It is interesting to see how far the Australian Style Council prefers the shorter existing form, whether American or British.) Yet the fact that some marginally different, shorter alternatives now exist, and only slightly disturb the standard, shows that, if everyone adopted all the present shorter forms, one or more English-speaking countries could then afford to go a bit further, and remove additional redundant letters. By leapfrogging Webster in this way, we could at least ensure that discrepancies between the present shorter, mostly American spellings and the new streamlined forms were no greater than today.

Which letters might be the first candidates for excision? Nearly all the current proposals for a first stage reform concentrate on cutting redundant letters. Thomas Hofmann suggests DUE forms like *ar*, *wer*, *hav*; Harry Lindgren and the Australian Spelling Action Society call for all the *head* words to lose their <a>; Bill Herbert and the Australian Simplified Spelling Association are targeting <gh>; and SSS's 'big five' proposal of 1984 include more or less all these, plus the conversion of <ph> (and where appropriate <gh>) to <f>. There is surely a basis for world-wide consensus here — a consensus that would bring American and t.o. closer together, as well as moving towards Cut Spelling and even Ayb Citron's SPD SPLNG.

Leapfrogging suggests a model for later stages too: advanced spellers in one country would be overtaken by more far-reaching reforms elsewhere, and be spurred on to go further in turn. But they would all be moving in the same direction, making written English more economical, but avoiding the worst pitfalls of conflicting pronunciation.

### **NEXT ISSUE**

The next issue will contain the second main instalment of papers delivered at the Society's 1987 Conference.

## 2. Correspondence

### UKRA Conference 1987

**From Sue Palmer**, UKRA Information Officer and Newsletter Editor, Reading and Language Consultant, Truro, Cornwall:-

In his [review of the 1987 UKRA Conference](#), Alun Bye suggests that I am a supporter of the notion of spelling reform. I don't know what I said to give that impression, but I must correct it. I am not, and never have been, a supporter of spelling reform, and I am sorry to have given a wrong impression. Perhaps Alun Bye mistook my interest in your Society's work, and my sympathy with your reasons for undertaking it, for support.

As someone who is deeply interested in language, I find the mechanics of Cut Spelling fascinating, and I must admit its a *very* seductive system — it wouldn't take long to learn and it really rather elegant. However as I've just contracted to write a series of spelling books for primary children, it would be biting the hand that feeds me to approve of it any further!

I relish the opportunity to discuss the merits of various spelling systems. And as a teacher I must admit to being very much moved by the argument that simplified spelling would help more pupils to attain high standards of literacy and to reap the benefits such standards imply. However, despite all this, I cannot support your Society's aims. My attachment to the English language, warts and all, is in the end greater than academic interest or professional (and, perhaps, political) sympathy.

I shall not attempt to present any linguistic or other academic arguments for retention of the written language in its present weird, wonderful and totally irrational form: I imagine you have heard such points debated many times before by people far better qualified than me. But underlying such arguments for those of us who oppose your aims there is, I think, and emotional attachment to our native language which runs very deep indeed. For me, English is more than a tool of communication or the raw for material one plays with in composition: it is the embodiment of my cultural heritage — it is part of me and I am part of what it represents. To some extent, the English language is interwoven with my identity, and that makes me very jealous of it. Perhaps it seems petty to object to superficial changes in the spelling of the language (especially when there might be so many benefits to be gained from such changes), but *I must* object: those inconsistencies and irrelevancies you would wish to eliminate are part of 'English' — and the word can refer not only to the language but to the people who speak it. If, in our pursuit of an easier, tidier, more manageable future, we lose our closest ties with the past, then I fear that the loss will be a grievous one. Cosmetic surgery may *seem* to attend merely to the surface, but perhaps Michael Jackson could testify how greatly it affects the whole soul!

This I shall continue to concentrate my own efforts on helping children to overcome the difficulties our present spelling system presents. However, since I know we share many aims and interests, my very best wishes to the SSS. And though I disagree entirely with what you hope to do, I can't help being fascinated by how you wish to do it!

*Readers may like to test their powers of persuasion in replying to this widely held view. — Ed.)*

## 'STORYING' AND SPELLING

From **Valerie Yule**, Monash University, Victoria, Australia:-

I enjoyed the [account of the 1987 UKRA conference](#) written with Alun Bye's inimitable touch. I was interested in his send-up of 'storying' as the latest fad — that is, letting children choose the storybooks they would like to learn to read rather than following a set reading scheme. I am particularly interested in details about how it is to be done, in view of UKRA's general view that phonics is not essential to the acquisition of literacy, as declared in a conference motion in, I think, 1986.

In 1985 I described a teaching technique that does use children's own choices of reading books, but requires concurrent revelation of the structure of writing system, including the open secret that English spelling is silly. (*Reading*, 1980, 13.2.31–8, 'The COLA reading scheme'.) The label Consumer Oriented Library Acquisition was suggested by a colleague who thought a title like that might be needed to gain respect. It did not, at the time. A detailed case-study of its recent use is in press. ('I was a dyslexic bookworm: Success story 2.' — *Australian Journal of Remedial Education*.)

Using COLA techniques, a good teacher could improve reading teaching by using books that children chose, but an average teacher, or an anything-can-be-done-badly teacher would find that 'storying' without skilled phonics teaching resulted in more work or more trouble than the yellow-brick-road of a set reading scheme. The moral is that until English spelling is improved, only the brightest young learners are going to be able to read easily when they want to independently from almost the beginning.

No Spelling Reform, No Storying

## Spelling Reform as a Theme for Students of Linguistics

From **Hilary Nesi**, Centre for English Language Teaching, University of Warwick:-

I am interested in the issue of spelling reform primarily because it provides a useful thematic link between topics on our new BEd Linguistics course. For example, with a group of students who already have a fair grounding in phonology, this term I have looked briefly at regional varieties of spoken English, and also at historical developments in the lexis and pronunciation of English. Next term we shall be looking at language variation in written texts. An end-of-term assignment concerning the consistencies and inconsistencies of English spelling seems like a good way to tie together the various strands, and it can be approached from a variety of angles according to individual taste.

Although I am (at present) non-partisan, I know that many of our overseas post-graduates are very strongly in favour of spelling reform, and I look forward to discussing with them some of the issues raised in your *Journal*.

## Cut Spelling

From **Roger Mitton**, Birkbeck College, University of London, who has recently written on *Spelling Checkers, Spelling Correctors and the Mis-spellings of Poor Spellers*:-

I find it hard to say whether Cut Spelling would be easier or not from a computer's point of view. It all depends on what sort of mistakes people would make when using it. Since part of the purpose of CS is to remove many of the oddities in TO, and since it is the oddities that cause so many of

the mistakes, I suppose there ought to be fewer mistakes to correct in the first place, so in that sense the task of correction would be easier. On the other hand, misspellings that are hard for a computer to correct are those where lots of words are plausible candidates, and it's not clear to me that CS would be any better than TO here. As you know from Information Theory, getting rid of redundancy is not necessarily a good thing — if someone omits a letter from a word with several 'unnecessary' letters in it, it may not matter since the result still looks like what was intended, but, if every letter counts, the omission of one is more serious.

The automatic conversion of (correct) CS into TO, and vice versa, ought to be fairly straightforward, the only real problems arising when TO distinguishes between words spelt the same in CS (and perhaps vice versa).

From **Jean Hutchins**, British Dyslexia Association, Redhill, Surrey:-

I am trying to type directly in CS. It must be like this for a dyslexic — go slowly and think twice about evry word, and then go bak and corect som; and like dyslexies, ther wil be a lot of words that I do not realise ar rong! I shal probably find that, like a dyslexic, I avoid som intresting words because I can't spel them!

*(That must be th tecniqe for beginrs, but th saving grace is th rule 'if in dout, dont leve out' — wich ensures that any 'mistakes' made ar closer to TO . — Ed.)*

Two experts at th Dyslexia Centre ar of th opinion that CS gos too far, so that derivations ar lost, but wud like to see th most unreasnabi words chanjed, e.g. *frend, garantee*. Incidental, pupils rarely hav difficultis with *two*, but I hav nevr succeedd in teaching wen to use *too*.

Perhaps children cud hav and use macrons for long vowels.

*(Macrons ar used like this in John Henry Martin's new IBM-sponsrd initial teaching orthograpy Wnting to Read in th USA — Ed.)*

A maths teacher once said to me, "Maths has to be exact, but English need only be approximate!" I disagreed strongly at th time, but now think he is ryt about english. In fact estimation is now an importnt part of maths, so he was rong ther. Aparently examinrs do not penalise rong spelings provided they ar readable except in english.

Yr first list of words in section 8 on p.10 of th jurnl (1987 No3) *is blissful!* Al my pupils hav pronounced every as evry, and speld it that way. They rite *cum, sum*, but that is too big a chanje.

Why hav u kept th <e> in *ranje, exchanje*? Surely it was ther to make <g>=<j>, not as a majic <e>, rarely gos thru two letrs?

*(It is tru majic <e> rarely relates to a vowel folod by two consnnts, but ther ar a few patrns like waste, table, chanje, wher majic <e> is needd to distinguish thm from last rabl, flanj, etc. — Ed.)*

From **Roger Gleaves**, Wandsworth, London:-

Having put Cut Spelling to the test I find a number of points that puzzle or irk me.

I know double consonants are not liked, but when both are pronounced, then should they not both be written (e.g. *unnatural?*)

*(Maybe so — but even hyly litrat peple make mistakes over this now, riting openness for instance. Th idea is to make things as simpl as possbl. No dout this question wil need mor discussion.— Ed.)*

*Gret, brek* etc. do not read as they are intended to be pronounced, and would confuse, I submit.

Likewise *qite*.

*(Certnly gret, brek ar not ideal, but they ar closer to th sound than great, break, which look like rhymes with beat, leak. Th only alternativ is actuly to chanje letrs, wich CS delibratly avoids as it afects th apearance of words too much. Regarding qite, a new refinement of CS is now to keep <u> aftr <q> wen it is pronounced, so we rite quite, but rnosqito, tecniqe.—Ed.)*

From **Traugoft Rohner**, Winnetka Illinois:-

In your system, I would not use th for the even tho I think th a desirable change. Why? Simply because th will receive more resistance from English speaking people than the change would warrant. There are many arguments for changes (simplifications), but in my estimation it is desirable to make a minimum of them initially. I would like to have more examples of Cut Spelling than the few given in the Cut Spelling leaflet.

## Japanese Learners

From **Professor Th R Hofmann**, Hokuriku University, Japan:-

The usual problem is not spelling — Japanese seldom mistake that, for they commonly learn (or appear to learn) the spelling of a word long before they hear it, & often enough with a pronunciation given in katakana, a phonetic writing system excellent for writing Japanese (& horrible for English — not distinguishing /b, v; r, l; a: ʌ; d:, and so on). So there are some predictable errors, & some more, but in pronunciation, not spelling. They do *not* seem to be distracted much by strange spellings, as i. they are used to kanji, which often have unpredictable pronunciations, & ii. they are seldom taught the correspondence between (vowel) letters & sounds. I am laying some emphasis on that (<ī >=[i], <ě>=[ε], <ī >=[ay], <ē>=[i:], etc) & a few Japanese professors are moving in that direction — after which (10–30 years from now) we might find spelling &/or pronunciation errors of the English kind. Unfortunately, most British (tho not US) dictionaries now use IPA for pronunciation, so it is an uphill battle. Perhaps you could advise?

*(Does John Skelton's article on romaji [p.23] suggest some ideas? If the sound-symbol correspondences of romaji were applied to English, that would be some progress! — Ed.)*

## Homonyms in French

From **Susan Baddeley**, HESO, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, Paris, and AIROE:- I was very interested in the article about homonyms in the [SSS Journal 1987 No.1](#). The question is rather more complex in French: whereas in English they tend to go by pairs, in French you often get whole series of them (like *vin, vin, vingt, vint, vint, vain* or *saint, sain, sein, seing*). A lot of homophones rely on mute final letters rather than on, say, different ways of transcribing vowels, and the final mute letters are often lexical morphemes pronounced in the derivatives (such as *saint/sainteté*). A lot of our future Historical Dictionary is taken up with homophones: many of them were created in the 16th century, when, with the extensive use of etymological letters, it became possible to distinguish between pairs like *conte* and *compte*, and *dessin* and *dessein* which are of the same origin, and which were formerly spelt in the same way. As we stand at the present, we don't plan to simplify homophones.



### 3. Form and Reform: the Four Great Communicative Shifts

#### Tom McArthur

Born in 1938 and a graduate of both Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities, Tom McArthur has held varied educational posts: in the British Army, in schools in England, Scotland, and India, and at the Universities of Edinburgh and Quebec. He now edits *English Today* and is preparing a major new work: *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. We here print with his permission an edited transcript of the talk with which he opened the [Society's Fifth International Conference](#) in July 1987.

#### 0 Abstract

This general description of a new way of looking at the history of writing will not provide a solution to all the problems of spelling reform, but may provide a framework within which traditional problems can be re-examined. The four great historical communicative shifts are:

1. the acquisition of speech, including its storage by mnemonic means
2. the acquisition of script, including the alphabet
3. the acquisition of print, with its appearance of perfection and standardizing tendencies
4. the acquisition of other media, esp. electronic, including keyboard and screen.

#### 1 Public views of spelling reform

Working with Cambridge University Press, my particular concern is the magazine *English Today*, which has if nothing else a variety of picturesque covers. It is what we call 'the international review of the English language', that is, its subject matter is everything conceivably to do with English. One of the topics that has emerged, not through editorial planning, but through the persistence of a variety of correspondents, is spelling reform. Reactions range from curiosity and in some cases respectful interest to total disdain and utter amusement.

As editor of *English Today* I am constrained and personally inclined to try to be nice to everybody. That means that I talk with the most radical and the most reactionary of people with views on what English should be and what people should be doing with or to English, and why other people should stop doing what they are doing to English. So we have had a rich correspondence on the subject of spelling, and almost every issue has a weird letter in it. It is weird not because of its content, but in terms of its presentation, because it is in somebody's conception of what a simplified or reformed spelling should look like, and of course every one is different. The readers see that every one is different, and certain readers draw certain conclusions from this. Some might say, isn't it fascinating, every one is different, and others say, isn't it stupid, every one is different.

I thought that the magazine ought to do something about simplified spelling at some stage, because it seems to be such a central issue in the English language.

Working with Oxford University Press, my particular concern is the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, to stand alongside the very well known *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, recently revised by Margaret Drabble. We hope to publish in 1990–91. Again, one of the things I feel we have to do in that volume is describe the history and the nature of the spelling reform movement adequately and with respect.



## **2 A personal view**

This does not mean that I am personally convinced that spelling reform is either worth having or likely to happen. I think I can safely say that I have an open mind in the matter, but I am extremely curious about the attitudes involved, not only of those who are committed to spelling reform, but also of the majority of people with their very puzzled and often disdainful attitudes. I am interested in the reform movement as a phenomenon with all the ripples, all the effects it has, as it occurs in the late twentieth century.

In recent years, from the scholarly point of view, I have also become more and more interested in the history of reference materials, which has forced me as a linguist to become interested in the language and the formatting of reference materials over not decades or centuries, but millennia. I sometimes describe this approach as 'cosmic'. Some of the ideas are by no means my own ideas alone, although I like to think I have cornered part of the market, but they have come, and are coming, from a number of different scholars, most of whom do not know each other personally. A trend is developing.

## **3 Scholarly views: Eisenstein and Ong**

For example, we have the American scholar Elizabeth L Eisenstein who has published with Cambridge University Press a wonderful book, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. She has said that lip-service has been paid to the importance of the printing press, but people have not seriously looked at why the printing press is important and at what social, cultural and psychological effects the printing of language has had on our activities and our mentalities.

Another seminal book is by a Jesuit scholar from St Louis, Walter Ong. He has written a number of interesting books on the subject, but the main one is *Orality and Literacy*. Walter Ong has in particular pointed out to our civilisation that we are "far-gone literates". We are almost so "far-gone" into literacy that we have forgotten the roots from which we come, which he calls "orality". It's not that we are not 'oral', it's not that we don't talk to each other, but he argues that we have become so committed to literacy that we cannot conceive the previous much longer span of time when people had no conception of literacy. We cannot conceive of that time except as a variant of literacy. He gives as one of his examples of this the phrase "oral literature", and he says it is a ridiculous term, and it is a ridiculous term. It is a hindsight term.

## **4 Text-bound thinking**

It is used when people look from the ivory tower or from the printing press or from the world of education outward to *aboriginal* ethnic types who haven't managed to get their foot on the ladder of literacy. They are thought of as illiterate, unlettered, or pre-literate, which is an interesting state, because to be pre-literate implies inferiority. Ong says, the concept of oral literature is projected backwards from literate societies, whose thinking is text-bound, on to people who had no conception of text.

It is interesting that Ong and others have not offered an alternative expression for oral literature. There are people in the business of discussing orality who continue to use the expression 'oral literature', although Walter Ong indicated that they should not. I am fascinated that two different people in two different parts of the world, myself and a scholar at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, have invented the same word at almost the same time for what people are calling oral literature (see below).

## 5 The historical perspective

In addition to Eisenstein and Ong there are such commentators as Antony Smith in *Goodbye Gutenberg — the Newspaper Revolution of the 1980's* who is concerned with newspapers, with the printing press, and with orality in these matters, and Roy Harris at the University of Oxford who is concerned with the origin of writing. Each of them recognises that they are dealing with part of a matrix, a cluster of much larger issues, all of which are dependent on each other.

I approached the same issues from the point of view of a maker of dictionaries. My profession tends to take the dictionary as given, it doesn't think too much about it, it tends to look at the last one and then prepare the next one. Over the fifteen years or so in which I've been involved in lexicography, however, I began to delve further and further back into its origins, and finally produced, published by Cambridge, *Worlds of Reference*, which is much more than just a book about dictionaries. I found that I couldn't talk about dictionaries without bringing in encyclopedias. I began to be curious about why we have books at all, and whether their shape was the only shape the human race had tried. Parchments and papyrus and clay tablets and various other things came into the circle of my interest. But not only those, because all of those were successful in some sense. I also became interested in the failed technologies. There have been a number of failed structures for the presentation of knowledge described in *Worlds of Reference*.

## 6 Revolutions and shifts

In the process I tried to synthesise two conceptions: one was the word 'revolution', especially in the phrase 'communication revolution', and the other was the word 'shift'. 'This led to the idea that you could have an enormous upward movement in the experience of the human race, as if we were lifted from one rung to another of a ladder (which sounds dangerously like Social Darwinism). Because there's a ladder, people who are one rung higher up tend to look down with smug condescension on the people on the rungs below, whether they still exist, or whether they were there in the past.

Out of this I tried to create a model of what I call the four great communicative shifts. This is not a platonic ideal model. I don't believe that somewhere up in a corner of the galaxy there are chiselled among the stars the four great communicative shifts. This is just a model. It is useful or not, it is more useful or less useful, it is simply something to help us reflect on this particular phenomenon.

## 7 The first shift

The first of the great communicative shifts happened so long ago that it is almost pointless trying to date it. Let us suppose it was something like 50–100,000 years ago. The acquisition of speech is interesting because all the equipment was there long before speech itself evolved. In the anatomical and physiological arrangement of the human being, you have the primary apparatus for breathing, eating, drinking, spitting, grunting; and over a long period of time this primary apparatus acquired a secondary set of functions. It took a long time, but compared with the much longer duration of physical evolution this first shift was short and sharp.

Within that shift there was a subshift, which I call 'storage speech'. We can store our speech today by using modern technology, but at the time of the original first shift human beings had no external means of holding on to anything that you could call knowledge, except possibly through cave art and the like. Our ancestors and the diminishing oral societies around the world today needed storage speech.

## 8 Storage speech and orature

I think one can describe the phenomenon of storage speech in some detail, but I'll only mention one or two of the main points here. Stylisation is a marker of this kind of speech, as are rehearsal and training. You don't normally stylise conversation. But when I give a formal talk, I'm doing various things which are quite stylised, although they're fluent. My body movements are synchronised with my speech in a conventionalised way. What I do as such a performer goes back to the creation of storage speech thousands of years ago. It is something human beings have learnt to do and have transmitted down the generations, and as Walter Ong says, we have not been able to think about it enough because the other shifts get in our way. Storage speech is stylised, rehearsed, formulaic, and repetitive; it is fitted together with formulas, as for example most obviously in poetry.

Storage speech is rhythmic. I don't use storage speech when I give a talk; I use something which the Greeks called rhetoric: a delivery system. But if we didn't have any other supports, I couldn't give a talk in quite that way. Instead, would be reciting in the way I was taught Homer's *Iliad* in Glasgow many years ago. But even the way I was required to memorise Homer was not the style of the ancient Greeks. When I recite, I'm regurgitating text. But before there was text, people bolted formulas large and small together, and no second or third performance was ever the same. They had no yardstick, nothing permanent, yet they created enormous projections of genealogy and epic and other cultural databases, plot driven, to enable their cultures to survive, and to believe in themselves, to value themselves, and maybe to wage war with their neighbours who had a different set of plot-driven techniques.

That's where we all came from, that is orality. But there are certain kinds of storage speech which need to be called something more delicate than that. The word that the lady in Kenya and I simultaneously created is 'orature': which is a blend of oral literature. It overcomes the idea of literature being superordinate and oral literature subordinate, because orature came before literature. There is no question of superiority.

## 9 The second shift: script and scribal culture

Normally people talk about the second shift as being the invention of writing. I would like to be more specific and talk about it as the invention of the technology of script. We have a strong tendency in our society to talk about writing, and use it as a generic term to include print. We talk about reading and writing, not about reading and typing, or reading and typesetting and so on. Writing is a useful generic term, but I'd like to talk about script and scribal cultures, following Eisenstein and Ong.

Eisenstein said it is very difficult for members of a print culture to imagine what the world was like before print. Scribal cultures are marked by many things, but one of the most important points about them is that nobody in a scribal culture expects universal literacy. The idea of universal literacy doesn't come until late in the third shift. In a scribal culture it is a matter of pride and expectation that only a very small number of people, almost entirely male, and eventually religious males in many cultures, is responsible for recording on surfaces. They were also responsible for the copying — they controlled whether it was done individually as in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, with a single copyist making a single copy, or whether someone dictated and twenty copyists took it down, all slightly differently, all doing their best, all getting it slightly wrong. This is how the idea of corrupt texts came into the world.

## 10 The alphabet

The second shift had a subshift that is of particular interest to spelling reformers. The second shift began round about 3500 BC in Sumer in the south of Iraq. Quite a long time passed until about 1500 BC, 1000 BC, when half way between Egypt and Babylonia the alphabet was created.

The alphabet arose in three main stages, from the ideogram, through the syllabogram, to what we call a letter. An ideogram is an idea expressed in a symbolic fashion. The number 5 is an ideogram, because it can be pronounced *cinq*, *cinco*, *five*, *fünf*, whatever you want, and you interpret it as the Chinese interpret their ideograms, according to your own phonic system. First there were ideograms, and in a kind of evolution you move to syllabaries, syllabograms, and then comes the breakthrough.

Evidently this breakthrough only occurred once in the history of the world. Only one basic clutch of primitive alphabets arose, around Phoenicia and Canaan, but they were the key to the future. I would like to suggest that the alphabet was a bit like the creation of the computer. It spread in all directions. All the alphabets derived from that one source, as far as we know.

The alphabet achieved a particular impetus when it reached Greece, because the Greeks put vowels in. We have often wondered how the Greeks managed to develop so rapidly round the sixth, fifth, fourth century BC. A major factor that facilitated the creation of Greek philosophy, logic, grammar, and a whole range of other things, was the availability of alphabetic writing. We have been so impressed with it that many of us in the western world think that an alphabet is the supreme writing system, and that because alphabets are rather good, syllabaries are a bit suspect, and ideograms are useless. We therefore dismiss the Chinese with their 40,000 ideograms; and the Chinese today have said that they will have to do something about them.

## 11 Printing

The second shift lasted for quite a long time, from the fourth millennium BC up to 1450 AD, when Gutenberg is credited with inventing the printing press. The remarkable thing about movable type was its beauty. The calligraphy of the scribes was beautiful as well, but the printing press was beautiful in certain rather special ways. You could produce enormous numbers of copies, and none of them was corrupt unless the original was corrupt (and you could argue about that). You could also create in stages: you could start using longhand, then you could process it into the first copy, and it could be proofread, and then it would come out looking beautiful.

This vision of unaltering type has had an enormous impact on our own culture, because for the first time in human history we had a clearcut conception of 'proper' language—proper language not just for the little guild of scribes, but for anybody who claimed to be educated and anybody who claimed to use the standard language.

## 12 Orthography and standard languages

The idea of a standard language was largely influenced by orthography, which means 'the right way of writing'. Not long after the word orthography entered our culture, so did the word orthoepy. Most people have never heard of orthoepy because it died out, but one of its cousins, elocution, still survives. The idea of orthoepy was that if the printed page could be so beautiful, so could the spoken word.

Those languages that dominate education — in the western world at least — are the languages which got into print first, and stayed there. Dialects, junior languages like Scots and Gaelic, Catalan and Occitan and so on, got into print later and had much more trouble staying there. Of

course the idea of a standard print language made the alphabet much more interesting than it was before — you met it everywhere you went.

The curious thing about these forms of language is that people tend to canonise or classicise or divinise them. Just as Homer came to be thought the greatest epic writer ever, and just as people worship Shakespeare, so also many people worship the earlier forms, not only of literature, but of orthography. Those forms were created for practical, technological purposes by printers in collaboration with writers — Caxton was a good example of this. They created and filtered and processed and finally fixed. Fix was a word loved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They 'fixed' the written language, and Samuel Johnson wanted to and was encouraged to 'fix' the spoken language, but discovered he couldn't do it. Dictionary-makers and others continue to try. Writing does have an effect on the standard language at least.

In the course of time with any language, as it becomes the language of print, its orthography is either created for that purpose, or the existing orthography is polished a bit, and then freezes, and becomes holy. And if not holy, it becomes *familiar*. That is one of the biggest single obstacles to spelling reform.

### **13 The fourth shift**

The fourth shift is actually a whole cluster of subshifts, the central one of which is the computer. There is photography, cinematography, the telephone and telecommunication, television, radio, audio-recording, the whole battery of high-technological activities which have blessed the twentieth century. Social Darwinians believe that all this is a process of continuous improvement, but it can also be argued that you lose things along the way.

The centrepiece of the fourth shift is the computer, a most demanding instrument. It will do wonderful things for us, it terrifies us and it excites us, and we haven't begun to discover its full potential — we're still on the edge of this new shift. The fourth shift enables us to see the other shifts more clearly. Here at the end of the twentieth century English spans the globe (like Latin during the second shift in Europe). English spans the globe and so does the computer; they go together: English is the primary language of the computer. That is something which must be extremely important in any discussion of the adaptation of spelling.

### **14 Reform or re-form?**

The title I gave this talk was *Form and Reform*, but we could put in a hyphen, giving us *Re-form*. *Reform* means there's something wrong with what went before, but some people insist there's nothing wrong with our English spelling as it is: they say that it is beautiful, it has been polished over the generations, it is a heritage we must hand on, and in any case, how can you change all the existing literature? I suspect that *reform* is less likely than *re-form*.

Just as storage speech declined in value when script was created, and that is a technological matter, just as script declined in value when print was created, and that is a technological matter too, so print and the orthographies traditionally connected nowadays with print and script may cease to be as interesting and as important, as we move into a world where writing and computers become inseparable.

At the moment computers can cope with the peculiarities of English or French spelling, because the computer is not being asked to do anything truly human. But as time goes on we shall be asking computers to do things that resemble more human activities, one of which is voice recognition, and the translation of the voice into computer language. Another thing we shall ask

computers to do is not simply to present language that we have already given to them, but to create language responses of their own. It may turn out that the people who prime or program the new technology for such purposes will discover that our orthography is not good enough. They will not primarily be interested in education or logic. They will be interested in whether the machine can do the job, just as people were interested in what a printing press could do, or what a scribe could do, or what a Homeric bard could do, in days gone by.

### **15 Technological motivation for reform**

Such bodies as the Simplified Spelling Society are logically concerned with the shaping or reforming of English orthography for practical purposes like education and international communication. I suspect we should be thinking towards the day when their aims coincide with commercial and technological need. I suspect that only technological pressure will make any difference. Reform will come when that pressure is so great that the commercial and technological people who want things done will want to talk with people like the Simplified Spelling Society, for their own reasons. In the process, the Simplified Spelling Society might get done some of the things that it wants done, for *its* reasons.

### **16 The Japanese factor**

I would like to finish by pointing to one community in the world which is becoming obviously important now in a way that ten years ago was not so obvious. That community is the Japanese, who are extremely interested in high technology. The Japanese are also among the people in the world who use ideograms — kanji, minimally adapted from Chinese. If you can read kanji, you can read a lot of Chinese. That is one of the bonuses for learners of Japanese: they learn to read a bit of Chinese.

The Japanese have got kanji, or ideograms, as well as two sets of syllabograms, the *kanas*. One set, hiragana, is for traditional syllables of Japanese, the other set, katakana, is for foreign words in the Japanese language, which are syllabified in the Japanese style. Written Japanese mixes all three, kanji, hiragana and katakana. This isn't apparent to the foreigner who has not learnt to read Japanese, but the Japanese themselves see the three running together. This affects them neurologically, psychologically, culturally, in ways of which we have little conception.

The Japanese are also experimenting with *romaji*, that is, representing their language in our roman alphabet, so that they end up with four sets of symbols. And a very large number of Japanese learn all four. Which if you think about it is a great deal more than Westerners do. They're doing it by the million, they have a lot of money, and they have a lot of computers. We should watch them. They are learning English in equally large numbers, and may well have a say in the reformation, if and when it comes, of English orthography.

## Discussion

Tom McArthur's talk was followed by extensive and wide-ranging discussion both of matters he raised and of other issues concerning spelling reform. The main points made are here presented in edited, anonymous form, but the chief contributors to the discussion were, beside Tom McArthur himself, Govind Deodhekar, Edgar Gregersen, Patrick Hanks, Chris Jolly, Julius Nyikos, Edward Rondthaler, David Stark, Ronald Threadgall, Chris Upward.

### **1 The origin of printing**

Gutenberg's genius was not so much the invention of the printing press, which already existed, as of moveable type cast from a single matrix. He put the binding machine used for binding codices together with the use of matrices in a cyclical rhythm. If we look at cuneiform in ancient Sumer, we can see the ancestry. Archeologists have dug up some of the tokens which were the ancestors of cuneiform. If we look at Egyptian hieroglyphics, we can see the pictographic ancestors. In the same way we can go to China and Korea, and find antecedents for what Gutenberg and his friends did. The term printing press is interesting because both words come from the same Latin verb, meaning 'to squeeze'. One might argue that the cyclic squeezing process is the earliest stage of the industrial revolution, although it was not automated. It was mechanical, but it was much later before it could be properly automated, that is, driven by anything other than human arms. However it was a cyclic, repetitive, industrial process.

There is no evidence that the Chinese proto-press itself ever reached Europe; it was news of that press that reached Europe. The Moslems were not interested in it because they didn't want to go beyond script: they had the words of god and the hand could handle them. They didn't want to use the Chinese technique for printing the Koran, which was by and large the main thing they wanted to publish. They had the opportunity: they used paper, good paper, but not the press. The Europeans got better paper from the Moslems among other things, and they heard about the Chinese press. They recreated it, put it together with the bindery, introduced the metal letters, and created a cyclic activity. And of course the consequences were so enormous that we take them for granted. Because we take them for granted, we don't think about the impact of the page on our minds and the idea of constant, continuous, perfectly structured lines.

### **2 The invention of the alphabet**

On the question of whether the alphabet was invented only once, there is some evidence it was really invented three times, independently. One of course was the famous middle-eastern Greek alphabet. But there was also an invention in the Sudan by the Meroitic-speaking people, which of course had no consequence for the rest of mankind; but it was in fact an instance of a real alphabet. Egyptian writing was probably the dominant influence on the development of the alphabet, and there are pre-alphabetic qualities in the late hieroglyphs, hieratic script and so on.

Then the Koreans also invented an alphabet. Its origin is evidently rather like that of printing press. The Korean king who is credited with their alphabet is believed to have heard of, if not seen, European lettering. That is what we call stimulus diffusion, and reminds one of Sequoya, the Cherokee who created a syllabary after seeing alphabetic writing. There is a form of writing found in West Africa which is speculably a form of diffusion from the Sequoya syllabary. But it is perfectly



possible that there were two peoples who didn't know about each other but who were moving along the same lines. Discussion of this whole question must always carry the qualification "as far as we know".

### **3 Japanese**

The Japanese have a great advantage. Some Japanese claim that Japanese writing gives them an advantage over everybody else because it uses both cerebral hemispheres. Language is located in the main in the left hemisphere if you're right-handed. In Japanese it is a matter of the spatial, physical layout, the calligraphic, artistic aspect of their writing system, which must in all probability also make use of aspects of the right hemisphere which is concerned with vision and space.

### **4 The keyboard. past, present and future**

We may regard the keyboard as a late development in the third shift in the use of printing. It arose when an American, Christopher Latham Sholes, invented the typewriter. The keyboard of course is crucial to the fourth shift. The history of the typewriter is interesting socially. The word *typewriter* was also used for some time for the typist, of whom the vast majority were women. They became modern versions of scribes and copyists. They were not creative in terms of content, but in terms of presentation, which was a lower grade activity. Secretarial work needs touch-typing, but most other people, journalists included, don't touch-type, they bash. Perhaps they bash because they don't want to be associated with typists as such. There may ultimately be an element of sexism about it. In the early days the keyboard was an ancillary tool: text was first handwritten, it was then handed to an intermediary who typed it, who handed it to another intermediary who set it, who handed it to the publisher who smiled, and it was the author and the publisher who got all the glory. But you hear managers, who run everything, say, "and thanks of course to my secretary, who runs everything". Similarly we find "the person without whom this book could never have been produced" mentioned in small letters at the bottom of the page or credits. However on the whole upper management won't touch the keyboard, because it seems to be beneath their dignity.

But the keyboard has been revolutionised and is becoming more and more important. Hitherto when we talked about literacy we meant using something like a pen. But in France they now have a means of interfacing with the computer where you don't need to type. They call it a 'slate' and it is a means of using a computer for idiots. And the idiots are the managers, in this respect, because the managers sit there and handwrite, and up it goes on the screen, because these fellows haven't got round to the remarkable idea of actually pressing down keys with their fingers. Not because that is difficult, but because of the status of the person at the keyboard.

But the keyboard is going to win. Oval lights and tracker bags and slates and other things will no doubt be very important, but the keyboard is going to be very central and important for quite some time. That I think will be part of the literacy we now require. My friend and colleague David Crystal wrote an article on literacy in *English Today*, and he said the problem of people who are not literate is that the literates constantly raise the ante. Literacy is becoming constantly more complex. Whereas even at the beginning of this century, to be literate it was sufficient to be able to read a book and produce handwriting. Today to be wholly functionally literate, there is a host of things you have to be able to do, and do well. To be orally articulate, people are regularly expected now to be able and willing to take part in phone-ins, to use the phone, to be on radio, to be in a television studio audience, if not out front, to be met in the street and asked for an instant opinion. That is the degree of spoken articulacy that is now expected. A similar extension of expectations applies to literacy, and many present-day literates are frightened by the prospect.

## **5 Spelling and elitism**

The idea has been suggested that spelling reformers have been too much involved in spelling invention and alphabet invention, when probably it's society that needs changing. By making reading and writing easier we expect to democratise society. Yet paradoxically the two languages which have advanced democracy most have been French and English which are probably the most difficult alphabetic languages to learn. Perhaps this is no coincidence: if only certain people who have the ability or the means or the privilege are able to become literate in French and English, it stops too many people getting to the top, and it would not do for too many people to be vying for power at any one time. The same might apply to Japanese. Because English is full of syllabic and morphographic elements, literacy has a strong visual component, and is not just phonetic. Thus, it is suggested, perhaps the type of people who get to the top in British society can visualise things in an abstract fashion.

## **6 Do phonemes exist?**

Roy Harris, who is a professor of linguistics at Oxford, has written a book *The Origin of Writing*, published by Duckworth, in which he says some most interesting things about writing. People assume that writing is a simple parallel to speech, and he argues that writing is really something rather different, although it happens to be analogous to speech on occasion. He says that the alphabetic achievement conditions our way of thinking about sound: because the sounds of language were once separated out into between twenty and thirty letters, we assume there are analogous units in sound, which we call phonemes, and that they number between twenty and fifty. Harris even says it would be difficult to create a theory of phonemes unless you were already alphabetic. This however would imply that the Chinese could never have conceived of phonemes.

## **7 Phonemes and spelling**

Perhaps spelling reformers put too much emphasis on the phoneme-grapheme relationship, whereas regularity should be their prime target, which can also be achieved by means of morphographic and syllabic elements. It is in the nature of communication that you must be able to handle it atomistically, or in clusters, and that even if you set out to produce a perfectly phonemic script, there would develop clusters in due course in relation to psychological assumptions about how elements work in the language. We would end up with iconographic and other elements, whatever we tried to do, because we communicate in part in that way. If you have a message, consisting of element, element, element, element, element, you will always cluster some of the elements, and then interpret them holistically, without atomising them. This appears to be inherent in human thought-patterns.

## **8 Text layout: spaces and directions**

Another development in the use of the alphabet concerns spaces between words, which were not part of the earliest writing. We regard words as separate entities today because we're used to seeing them in writing, but the spaces do not exist in speech, they are just aids to reading. Reading Ancient Hebrew for instance is difficult simply because there are no spaces. Spacing came into its own with the printing press, although it existed before.

The arrangement of text in lines all going the same way was a development from the middle of the second shift, the scribal period. Previously there was no set direction — alternate lines might be written in opposite directions.

## 9 Women and literacy

Among the Tuareg in the Sahara — a little ethnographic detail — it's the women who are literate. Evidently Hiragana, the dominant syllabary in Japan, developed among women in the Han period. The men in Japan were too busy struggling with Chinese.

The novel, one might argue, is the product of the printing press in the third shift, but the novel is not easy to define. The word itself, which means new, came in a little after the printing press. But the novel has appealed very much to women, who were kept out of education and the learning of Latin and various other fields in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It's only now that we're beginning to rediscover the early women novelists, like Aphra Behn in the seventeenth century, who were very literate, and you notice that the novel nowadays is very much something by and for women. It would be interesting to pursue the ethnography of male and female approaches to a variety of things.

We may recall the title page of Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), which says it is intended for "gentlewomen or any other unskilful person." He was not necessarily being condescending, but he represented the social fabric of the time, because the Latin words were only known by the male population, who'd been educated in it.

In fact, he was one of the people who was opening education up, and literacy in the third shift has been an enormous benefit to women, although we're not necessarily aware of it because so much of their history has been submerged over the last 300 years. Women's presses and groups are rediscovering a large number of women who were quite prominent in their day, and who have for one reason or another been overlooked since then, leaving just Jane Austen and the Brontës.

## 10 Romanisation of Chinese, Japanese

The question of whether there are technical reasons why Chinese and Japanese have not gone over entirely to the roman alphabet is one thing. General MacArthur wanted to impose it on Japan after World War II, and it does take the Japanese a long time to learn the prescribed number of kanji characters. But when languages adopt the roman alphabet, they may do so not primarily because it is efficient for them, but rather because it is the dominant writing system worldwide. Alphabets are pretty efficient, but then so can syllabaries be.

## 11 Debating the advantages of simpler spelling

The inconvenience of a highly irregular orthography such as English is particularly apparent to those who have been educated initially in a highly regular orthography such as Hungarian or Finnish, with their one-to-one relationship between phonemes and graphemes. In such languages learning to read is a relatively straightforward business. Not merely does English spelling lack logical transparency, but learners are subjected to the learning of illogic. To make matters even more complicated, in English the names of the letters often do not correspond to the sounds they represent, thus introducing a third level of inconsistency. To overcome this, many English-speaking children are taught letters by their sounds and not by their traditional names.

It is however sometimes asserted that in languages such as Hungarian there is no literacy problem whatsoever, except where schooling may be inadequate; but this claim is also challenged, on the grounds that the evidence is anecdotal. Such was the case quoted of the American boy educated

in Mexico, who on being asked how he learned to read and write in Spanish reported that at the beginning of the year the teacher explains the sounds of letters, after which the children can read or write anything they can say.

One should not think that there is a true analogue between symbols on paper and the sounds of a language. Literacy may well come more easily to Hungarian or Spanish children as well as in a number of other languages. However the difference is relative. There are inherent problems in recognising communicated material visually from symbols, no matter how well they are supposed to correspond to the analysis of a language. Some people, who are educationally disadvantaged in whatever way, will have problems in any language.

We can see a continuum from the languages which have a neater system to the languages which have abominable systems, with innumerable intermediate degrees. But one cannot argue that there is no illiteracy whatever in any language, because the problems are much more complex than that, even though such a view may be denounced as arrogantly anglocentric.

Two further instances of the advantages of a highly phonographic orthography like Hungarian are cited. Hungarian children read translations of Dickens, Mark Twain, etc., years earlier than English-speaking children can read them in the original. (One would need to be confident the style of the translation was of equivalent difficulty to the original. Thus modernised Dickens would also be easier to read in English than the original text.) A second instance is of the Hungarian grandfather with fading eyesight asking his six-year-old grandchild to read him an article about nuclear physics: the child will read it fluently and correctly, and the grandfather will understand everything he wants, even though the child does not.

Apparently 70% of Spanish children learn to read and write before they go to school, which must also be significant.

It may come as a revelation to English-speakers when they first try to learn a language with a relatively regular orthography such as Greek or Hebrew: they may realise for the first time that logic can be applied to writing.

Likewise it makes a great difference in teaching English if the learner can rely, as with the Initial Teaching Alphabet, on being able to use a given symbol to represent a given sound. Children who are i.t.a.-trained enjoy reading more, and therefore they go on reading — and one 'must not forget that a lot of English people only read and write because they have to, not for the sheer joy of it, in fact large numbers of children give it up before they leave school.

It is only to be expected that a simpler system will achieve its effects faster, but it is not necessarily easy to believe that many people will turn to reading and writing with pleasure simply because the writing system no longer places such barriers in their way.

Even if one accepts many objections to the arguments in favour of simplified spelling, such as that the Germans only read more Shakespeare than the English because their translations are modern and they don't need an explanation for every other word, or that the Cambodian and Hungarian writing systems are modern, nevertheless one must concede that in some countries there is an enormous amount of illiteracy. If we confront an average child with a writing system that is basically consistent and another average child with a system like that of English, the first child will be able to read much more quickly and read much more advanced kinds of writing.

Those with experience of teaching adult illiterates will know the frustration of having to spend two years teaching somebody written English, and only to make limited progress. That is reason enough to want spelling reform. Another argument is precisely that English is an international language, and the world needs it to be simpler.

Much of the resistance to the idea of spelling reform comes from the widespread but mistaken idea that the writing system *is* the language.

To test the validity of the criticism of English spelling, an experiment was carried out. A selection of reading pieces

from one of the most used American 6th grade readers was translated into German, and it was found that German-speaking children from the sixth grade, the fifth, the fourth, the third, the second and even the end of the first grade could read them. The results are all recorded on tape, and even without understanding a word of German, one can hear the fluent, beautifully intonated reading. And then all these children were able to answer questions on the passages that were designed for American sixth graders. There is a vast quantity of such evidence. Korean children did exactly the same, and the same experiments are to be conducted for French and Italian and Polish.

One may ask what effect the different dialects of Hungarian have on the acquisition of literacy. Dialect speakers have to learn the literary language, which is then consistently represented in the writing system, and is in turn perpetuated in the writing system.

## **12 Standards, norms and strategies**

Part of the problem of English spelling is that it was based upon the elevated form of the East Midland dialect, as used around about the time of Caxton and Shakespeare, and was more or less fixed by people like Addison and Steele and Pope and Dryden. But for a reformed orthography today we probably need a standard English which is roughly agreed with the nations of the English-speaking world. And that is a problem. Perhaps such a standard is only likely to be achieved if there's a technological impetus behind it. If on the other hand reforms are introduced which are not based on such a standard, there is a danger of breaking up the English language community, and dictionaries would need different spellings for different dialects. A standard on the other hand need not be based on any one dialect, nor need it be considered as a dialect itself.

A standard is a norm, in this case a literary norm, a print norm, a script norm, whatever one wishes to call it. And undeniably the current norm for written English is exceedingly difficult, in fact it is 400 years out of date. But if the norm is to be changed, the problem is to decide what it should be changed to. Should it be changed to match an existing pronunciation, and if so, how is a consensus to be obtained? The problem is very nearly, but not quite, insoluble. One might think in terms of omitting most of the vowels, which is where most of the variations between accents lie; but probably that is not the answer. Probably it will be economic and technological pressure that will bring about the breakthrough.

## **13 Pronunciation norms**

To allow speech-recognition by machine, people would need to speak to the machine clearly, with each syllable distinct. And then it would be necessary for the speaker to accept a standard, regular pronunciation, such as RP, Especially for the vowels. But as we know, it is not easy to teach people to reproduce a given pronunciation. It is much easier to design a machine to speak with a given pronunciation than to get people to use one in such a way that the machine can recognise

their words.

Dryden and Addison believed spelling could standardise speech, and Johnson believed it when he started his dictionary, though not when he finished. Speech changes independently, even RP has changed within living memory. RP is disintegrating in terms of the pronunciation taken by Daniel Jones in 1917 in the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* which for many years was a kind of bible. One can tell that that RP isn't spoken any more by listening to the old second world war newsreels. Very few people have that clipped way of speaking any more.

There is an argument that such changes have occurred because there is no regular orthography which can be used as a yardstick. There are observable tendencies to spelling — pronunciation, and speaking 'proper' means speaking more closely in line with the spelling, rather than in dialect. On the other hand an example from the foreign learner's point of view shows how great the divergence is: a foreign learner is generally persuaded that the following sentence is spoken English: "You should not have done that" Now what native English speakers in fact say is: "You shouldn't 'v done that." That has to do with the rhythm of the language rather than the orthography which does not depict rhythm.

#### **14 Speech synthesis**

A computer will believe in writing, but not in speech. And that's part of the problem. At the moment computers are taught speech backwards, if you like, in terms of writing, but the sound is like the voice of a Dalek. A lot of work has been done on this speech synthesis, and a lot of the most successful speech synthesis doesn't deal in phonemes. It deals in what we call parameters, which produces something like this. You have a basic rhythmic sound such as *eu-eu-eu-eu*, and then you put another parameter on top of it, and it becomes *heu-neu-beu-keu*, and then you put another one on and it becomes *hau-nau-bau-kau*, you take out the nasality, and you get *how now brown cow*. That is possibly how we create speech too.

#### **15 Political and technological dimensions**

As well as a technological motivation for spelling reform, there is a political dimension, in the sense that decisions have to be taken, perhaps by individuals in their private writing practices, but particularly by policy-makers and professional decision-makers. And here, besides possible pressure from industry, science, technology, there can also be pressure from the educational sector, where the shortcomings of the present spelling of English are most acutely felt. It is here perhaps that the traditional spelling reform movement feels most at home, and where its campaigning role is most obvious. The biggest obstacle to reform at present is the sheer weight of public ignorance about the nature of the problem and the possibilities of reducing it, if not of completely overcoming it. If the spelling reform movement can now enlist a new constituency of support, that of technology, it will have taken an important step forward.

## **4. The End of Short Cuts**

### **The use of abbreviated English by the fellows of Merton College, Oxford 1483–1660**

**John M. Fletcher & Christopher A. Upton**

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#### **1 Spread and standardising of the vernacular**

The Tudor and early Stuart periods brought great modifications in the use and character of the English language. By 1660, the vernacular had largely ousted reliance on Latin by the church in England and had challenged its supremacy in the universities. The position of Norman-French as a language spoken by the aristocracy had been totally undermined and its survival in law seemed an anachronism. The substantial contribution to literature made by the major figures of the English Renaissance had ensured that the vernacular was now used by most writers of prose and poetry. Disputes within the English church had discouraged the role of the vernacular even in theological controversy. English by 1660 had become more fixed in its grammar and spelling. During the period 1483–1660, the use of abbreviated English illustrates the rapid development of the language towards the more standardised form that we have today.

#### **2 The Merton College Register**

The appointment of Richard FitzJames, master of arts and doctor of theology of the university of Oxford, as warden of Merton College on 20 March 1483 inaugurated an important period in the history of the college. Amongst his many contributions to the development of its structure, administration and wealth was his inauguration of a register of college decisions and activities, the *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis*. [\[1\]](#) The register has been kept from 5 March 1483 until the present.

#### **3 Latin and English**

For our purposes, reference will be made to the register from its beginnings until the Restoration, 1660. During this time, entries were hand-written usually by the subwarden of the college. The normal medium was Latin which remained throughout this period dominant in the universities. From time to time, however, the compilers of the Merton register were compelled to insert lengthy sections in English. Correspondence with non-academics that contained important information relevant to the college, legal decisions and such documents as contracts, indentures or agreements with estate officials were necessarily recorded in the register for future use; such material was usually in English. The different compilers had before them the written examples left by their predecessors since 1483; in consulting these entries, fellows making particular insertions may have been influenced to copy an outmoded style of writing. Also, the continuous use of Latin written in the early days in a much abbreviated form, perhaps encouraged fellows to maintain a similar style for their entries in English. Nevertheless, the survival of this register, compiled, by well educated academics over a long period of time, enables us to make some estimate of the wider changes in the use of abbreviations during these years.



#### 4 Abbreviations

The early fellows of Merton had been trained in a style of writing that had been developed with great sophistication during the medieval period. The need to economise on expensive parchment and vellum and the absence of supplies of cheap paper had encouraged the use of a highly abbreviated style of writing in Latin. Individual scribes, communities and nations naturally introduced their own special techniques in writing, but this occurred against the background of a commonly inherited and understood system of abbreviations recognisable to all educated readers. The spread of schools and universities in the later medieval period strengthened and expanded the use of this Latin 'shorthand'. Not only were scholars eager to reproduce as rapidly and as cheaply as possible the textbooks that were required in large numbers in all universities, but the introduction of new technical terms known to all working in a particular field enabled scribes to extend their use of abbreviations. Alongside shortened words that can easily be deciphered by readers with a small acquaintance with medieval calligraphy occur those abbreviations and symbols that only the expert aware of the meaning of the text can understand. For example, it was usual to omit the letters <m> or <n> that occur so frequently in Latin words: *poetā* (*poetam*), *assēsu* (*assensu*); such abbreviations present little difficulty. On the other hand, the writer of, for instance, a logical tractate could use such shortenings as *u<sup>a</sup>* (*universalia*), *b<sup>or</sup>* (*minor*) *a<sup>or</sup>* (*maior*) which are not at all clear to an inexperienced reader. Those fellows who compiled the register at Merton in the late fifteenth century were accustomed to read mostly manuscript books and write for dissemination in such books. Even when early printed books were known, they too usually employed the abbreviated Latin used by scribes in the contemporary universities. When Merton fellows wrote in the vernacular, it is not surprising that, where possible, they adopted the types of abbreviation that they were accustomed to utilise when writing Latin.

#### 5 Uncertainty of interpretation

On 3 March 1484, Merton College made a presentation to Stratton St. Margaret. [2] The writer of this entry leaves any editor with several major problems of transcription. It is impossible to know whether at the end of several words (*Stratton, nominacion*) one or two letters are intended. The compiler writes these words with what seems to be a suspension sign after the final <n>, in this manner: *Stratton<sup>o</sup>*.

Elsewhere, it is difficult to know exactly how the writer intends that words should be spelt. Is *owr<sup>o</sup>* to be lengthened as *ower*, *owre* or *owrr<sup>o</sup>*? Is *ther<sup>o</sup>* to be *there* or *theer<sup>o</sup>*? Is *for<sup>o</sup>* to be *fore* or *forr<sup>o</sup>*? Is *vicar<sup>o</sup>* to be *vicarr* or *vicare<sup>o</sup>*? The suspension sign at the end of *sam<sup>o</sup>*, however can hardly be intended to indicate anything but *same*.

#### 6 Influence of Latin abbreviations

The presentation also shows clearly the influence of a style of writing derived from Latin usage. The omission of <er> in the centre of words or at the end is marked, as in Latin: *mast<sup>o</sup>* (*master*), *M<sup>o</sup>ton* (*Merton*). The common practice of abbreviating *pre*, *pro* and *par* or *per*, especially at the beginning of Latin words, is continued in the written English: *p<sup>o</sup>sent* (*present*). In a letter written a few years later, on 19 March 1484, [3] and copied into the register because it contained complaints about the chaplain of Burmington, this pattern of abbreviation is more strongly evident. Again we find *byshons* (*paryshon[er]s*) and *p<sup>o</sup>st* (*prest*), with the Latin abbreviation of the prefix. The heavily abbreviated *comēde* (*commende*) and *contr<sup>a</sup>ry* (*contrary*) are clearly derived from contemporary Latin usage as are *w<sup>t</sup>* (*with*) and *servants* (*servants*). The omission of <er> occurs in *lov<sup>o</sup>* (*lover*) and *man<sup>o</sup>* (*maner*) and of a letter in *commende*, as above, and *thē* (*then*). The scribe here has simply treated the English words as he would his normal Latin vocabulary. We also find suspensions for which we can give no definite spelling: *for<sup>o</sup>*, *her<sup>o</sup>*, *mor<sup>o</sup>*, *own<sup>o</sup>*, *or<sup>o</sup>*.

## 7 Reluctance to spell endings

It will already be apparent that one of the major difficulties in transcribing such extracts in English concerns the treatment of the endings of abbreviated words. A letter from the college on 16 August 1484 [4] illustrates the problem, with some further indication of the different approach to the use of abbreviations by different compilers. Here, again, we have the usual insertion of a suspension sign at the end of words ending in <r> (*pleasur<sup>o</sup>, brother<sup>o</sup>, wothe<sup>o</sup> [other]*), but also for some words ending in <m> (*whom<sup>o</sup>*). Somewhat unexpected is the Latin form adopted in an abbreviation of another <er> ending: *yo<sup>2</sup>*, presumably this is intended to be *yoer* (*your*), but there is no certainty about this. There seems a marked reluctance to spell out such endings in detail. In an indenture concerning the sale of timber on 20 October 1485 [5] we find *wych* (perhaps *wyche*) and *spryngg<sup>e</sup>*; the second suspension seems to be derived from the Latin, but, whereas in that language the <-es> ending for many third declension nouns in the plural is fixed, for the English word we are unable to say whether *spryngges* or *sprynggs* is intended. Similarly, in a note of legal advice in July 1486, [6] we are unable to determine whether the written word *wryting<sup>o</sup>* is meant to inform us that the word should end with an <e>, or when *strength* is so written in an indenture of 15 June 1486 [7] if the abbreviation sign over the <h> indicates a letter to follow.

## 8 Patterns of abbreviation

The constant introduction into the writing of English of abbreviations derived from medieval Latin continues throughout these years. Sometimes omitted letters are indicated in brief above the remnants of the word: *p<sup>a</sup>y* (*pray*), *g<sup>e</sup>te* (*greate* or *grete*), *w<sup>i</sup>yn* (*withyn*). The omission of <er> is often indicated by an abbreviation sign: *div<sup>o</sup>se* (*diverse*). Reference to the common Latin word-ending <-io> or <-iones> with the replacement of the <i> by an abbreviation sign is repeated in a similar way in English: *condicōn*, *obligacōn*. Occasionally the Latin form is combined with a reluctance to state the ending of the word: *p<sup>o</sup>ior<sup>o</sup>* (*prior* or *priore* or *prioer*).

The readiness of compilers to use forms that were familiar to them from their reading of Latin manuscripts was perhaps strengthened also by the character of the documents they were transcribing in English. Presentations, indentures and such formal legal transactions had themselves usually their sources in a Latin or Norman-French original; they had by their nature at an early date often become stereotyped, so that only the relevant names and dates had to be changed to fit a different situation. The entry of abbreviated, standard forms into the English language can easily be understood. However, of more significance to the development of the language itself is the result of such a method of writing, that it absolved the writer from the necessity of spelling out in detail all the letters of the word he was forming. In the case of one of our examples above, for instance, the scribe did not have to make a decision about whether to write *greate* or *grete* since the abbreviated form of the word did not expect this of him. So long as such short cuts were employed, many of the niceties of spelling could be ignored, especially as the grammatical structure of the English Language, unlike that of Latin, did not require a firm decision about the exact ending of each word.

## 9 Examples from the 1480s

Although fellows of Merton in the late fifteenth century abbreviated many English words when compiling their entries for the college register, they never rivalled the extent of their contemporaries' use of abbreviation in Latin. An indenture of 4 January 1487 [8] in English begins as follows:

Thys indenture made betwene mast<sup>r</sup> Rychard FfitzJames clerk & warden off Marton College in Oxford & y<sup>e</sup> felysship of yē same place on y<sup>t</sup> oon pte and Johñ Warley of Coreh<sup>a</sup>m ī y<sup>e</sup> counte of Surr<sup>r</sup> gēilmā and Thom<sup>a</sup>s Warley off London goldsmyth...

A few months before this, in August 1486, [9] an indenture written in Latin commences:

Hec indentura fca int<sup>r</sup> Ric<sup>r</sup> Ffitziames custodē collegii de M<sup>r</sup>ton<sup>r</sup> in Oxofñ & eiusd<sup>o</sup> collegii scolares ex una pte & lohe<sup>o</sup> Leverens de Chessindon in com Surr<sup>r</sup> husbandman<sup>r</sup> ex alt<sup>a</sup> pte testat<sup>2</sup> q dict<sup>r</sup> custos & scolar<sup>r</sup>s unanimi assēsu & o<sup>o</sup>sensu o<sup>o</sup>cesserūt...

The similarity in the use of abbreviations in both passages is clear, but the writer has a much easier task in shortening the Latin version by his reliance on an accepted code of practice.

### 10 Growing use of books after 1500

The long wardenship of Richard FitzJames, from 1483 until 1507, coincided with a time of noticeable change in the character of Oxford intellectual life. The printed book, rare in 1483, had begun to appear in rapidly increasing numbers in the university bookshops. The donation of John Neele to Magdalen College library in 1489 contains many printed books amongst its forty two items. [10] At Merton, it was thought useful to repair the manuscript books in 1504, [11] but the last distribution to the fellows of books from the unchained collection seems to have been made in 1519. [12]

By 1520, shortly before FitzJames' death, John Dorne could list for sale in Oxford over two thousand books, most of which were printed texts. [13] The scribes and their techniques were no longer required for the mass production of academic works, nor was it so necessary for scholars to master the art of writing and reading the Latin shorthand of the schools. Indeed, this style of writing had itself ceased to be fashionable amongst learned academics influenced by the impact of the New Learning. As numerous surviving documents, and the Merton register itself, show clearly, scholars who wished to be considered as members of the contemporary society of humanists, wrote in an italic hand.

Here the earlier, highly technical abbreviated Latin of the medieval academic was scorned, as were often the subjects he had studied. FitzJames was probably born around the year 1445; at the time of his death in 1522 these changes had been affecting Oxford society for some years.

It would not be surprising, therefore, to see the warden's method approach to the writing of English in his old age reflecting a tradition that was rapidly disappearing. In 1503, when he was perhaps in his middle or late fifties, he wrote a letter to the subwarden fortunately pasted into the register, so giving us a copy of his own hand: [14]

Mast<sup>r</sup> subwarden<sup>r</sup> y o<sup>o</sup>mēde me to you. And wher<sup>r</sup> y wrot to you the last wyke that y trouyde itt good to differr<sup>r</sup> thelection<sup>r</sup> ov<sup>r</sup> to quīdena<sup>r</sup> t<sup>h</sup>nitatis y have be thought me syn<sup>r</sup> that itt woll be then<sup>r</sup> a bowte mydsom<sup>r</sup>. Wher<sup>r</sup> ffor<sup>r</sup> y se ytt kan<sup>r</sup> not be so o<sup>o</sup>veniētly syn<sup>r</sup> o<sup>o</sup> scolers to be chosin<sup>r</sup> must entre in to the college be ffor<sup>r</sup> midsom<sup>r</sup> yff we doo well to godd<sup>e</sup> plea<sup>z</sup> and o<sup>2</sup> founders intent which syn<sup>r</sup> ys so y p<sup>a</sup>y you kepe fforth yo<sup>2</sup> day off election<sup>r</sup> appoyntyde wher<sup>r</sup> y kum<sup>r</sup> or<sup>r</sup> not as off lyklihode y schall not the worse...

## 11 Medieval yields to 'modern'

Clearly, the aging warden is writing in the manner of a scholar trained in the traditions associated with the Latin shorthand of the manuscript book.

If the style of FitzJames' letter is compared with that of an indenture also written in English and entered in the register shortly afterwards [\[15\]](#), the differences are striking:

Allso itt is agreed atwix the said ptys th<sup>t</sup> the said Gilb<sup>t</sup> shall well & trwly content & pay to the said warden & scolers ther<sup>o</sup> successors or assignes for all the said wood und<sup>o</sup> fo<sup>r</sup>me above r<sup>o</sup>hersid bowght.

Traditional Latin abbreviations, especially suspensions of <er> or <e> and the contraction of <par>, remain. The general appearance of the first passage is certainly 'medieval' while that of the second is 'modern', if we may be allowed to use these terms. Significantly, the writer of the indenture does not replace the first syllable of 'content' with a symbol, as FitzJarnes would probably have done.

## 12 Stereotyping

The style of writing of the English entries in the register for the first half of the sixteenth century becomes more stereotyped. A few standard abbreviations deriving from the Latin remain in use and there is still a tendency to avoid any commitment to the exact ending of certain words. As an example, here is the entry of a condition relating to an obligacion of November 1516: [\[16\]](#)

The condicion of this obligacion<sup>o</sup> is suche that if the above bounden Richard Symonds and Oswald Mitford on<sup>o</sup> theyr partie well & truly pfo<sup>r</sup>me ob<sup>o</sup>ve fulfill and kepe all & singre coven<sup>ant</sup><sub>e</sub> grau<sup>ant</sup><sub>e</sub>...

However, as late as 1544, an official document in English appointing an attorney to act on behalf of the college against those damaging flood-gates in Cambridgeshire is written in the following Style: [\[17\]](#)

... to pcure ent<sup>o</sup> & psecute all suche wryt<sub>e</sub>, actions pcesses as ys or shalbe thowghte nedefull & necessarie for o<sup>o</sup> behofe o<sup>o</sup>nyng the wrongefull & iniuste vexat<sup>o</sup>n & molestati<sup>o</sup>n don to & aienste the sayde warden)...

This entry seems to hark back to the manner of writing of the late fifteenth century. It is so different in character to other contemporary entries that we must suspect that the writer placing in the register what was a formal, legal document imitated not only the words but also the abbreviated form of an older original. Archaic styles of writing could survive and individuals could adopt an older abbreviation as a deliberate indication of their interest in the past.

## 13 Fewer abbreviations in late 1500s

The great majority of entries for the second half of the century show a marked tendency to reduce the use of abbreviations. But commonly used words such as *with*, *your* and *our* are regularly abbreviated to forms *w<sup>t</sup>*, *yo<sup>r</sup>* and *o<sup>r</sup>*; occasionally an <m> or <n> is omitted and the loss indicated by a stroke above the word; the prefix <par-> is often shortened. The appearance of such entries is shown, for example, in a letter of complaint from the college in 1556: [\[18\]](#)

These are to doo yow to wete that I w<sup>t</sup> mye cōpanie off Merton<sup>o</sup> Colledge have certayne knowlege that ye alter and change at yo<sup>r</sup> pleasure the gleebe lands off ou<sup>o</sup> psonage of Pontelande in such wyse that in fewe yeres to cūme ou<sup>o</sup>

land<sub>e</sub> shall nott be knowen fro<sup>v</sup> yo<sup>re</sup> and others...

Sometimes not even these few, and easily decipherable, abbreviations are used. A condition for an obligation of 1578, [19], for example, contains only one shortened English word: *y<sup>e</sup>* for *the*, a usage which was to persist for several generations.

#### 14 Seventeenth century

Entries for the early seventeenth century in English contain only a few, clearly standard abbreviations. In 1610 the warden and fellows wrote to accept the offer of a donation to increase the allowances made to the postmasters — undergraduate scholars of the college. [20] This letter contains only the following abbreviated words: *y<sup>e</sup>* (*the*), *w<sup>ch</sup>* (*which*), *p<sup>o</sup>rtion* (*proportion*), *ev<sup>y</sup>* (*every*), *w<sup>th</sup>* (*with*), *p<sup>o</sup>testation* (*protestation*), *ev<sup>v</sup>* (*ever*). Paradoxically, in view of the original medieval motive for the use of abbreviations, it is, with few exceptions, the shorter rather than the longer words that are now reduced. Similarly, in a protest made by a fellow against the election of new members in 1642, [21] the only shortened words are *y<sup>e</sup>* (*the*), *m<sup>tie</sup>* (*majesty*), *w<sup>ch</sup>* (*which*), *m<sup>r</sup>* (*master*) and *o<sup>r</sup>* (*our*). On the eve of the Restoration, the warden, detained at Gresham College in London, wrote to the fellows on 20 July 1658 excusing his absence at the annual election of new officials; the letter was in English and was copied into the register. [22] The writing is clear, and the construction of the words and sentences presents little difficulty to the modern reader. The warden shortens *college* to *coll*, *which* to *w<sup>ch</sup>* and writes *y<sup>e</sup>* for *the*; otherwise there are no abbreviations. When compared with the written English of his late fifteenth century predecessor, Warden FitzJames, it is clear that the calligraphy of Warden Goddard in 1658 reflects the attitudes of a different literary and scholarly world.

#### 15 Moving towards a standard

Such a development has some implications for the establishment of a recognised form of the English language. When it became usual to write out in full almost all words, especially the longest, and to give in detail the precise endings of words that had earlier been only vaguely and indefinitely indicated, then the move to accept a standard, 'correct' form of any particular word must have been strengthened. Earlier writers did not have to consider this, since a stroke of the pen to indicate a contraction avoided the need to make such decisions. The virtual abandonment of the use of abbreviations in writing English by the middle of the seventeenth century, therefore, marks a move away from a flexible treatment of the form of the language and towards a gradual acceptance of a convention in spelling that, for good or ill, we have inherited today.

#### 16 Changing needs and writing practices

Finally, we must consider why the fellows of Merton over this period of time curtailed their use of abbreviations when writing both English and Latin. The medieval forms evolved in response to special circumstances, especially in the academic world of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The cost of the handwritten book was prohibitive, yet no university could function without ready access to at least the fundamental works required as set reading by the various faculties. Lecturers could pass on a certain amount of information, but lecturers needed texts and both masters and students required to make notes. Such scholars had little time or need to produce the beautiful manuscripts commissioned from the well-rewarded professional scribes. The copies they made were for utilitarian purposes, written as quickly as possible on as little paper or parchment as possible. Hence the need to evolve a highly abbreviated script often comprehensible only to readers themselves expert in the subject. The advent of the printed book ended these special circumstances. By the middle of the sixteenth century, many scholars were in possession of considerable libraries. The printing industry consumed large amounts of paper, itself stimulating an

outburst of manufacturing activity. Oxford scholars, now without worries about the cost and accessibility of paper, writing for those publishers who would print their works, had no reason to continue to use the abbreviated forms obligatory for their predecessors. Moreover, humanists encouraged the use of an 'italic' as against a 'gothic' script; the latter came to symbolise all that was associated with the 'obscurity' and 'backwardness' of medieval scholasticism. Shorthand became a means of transferring quickly the spoken word to the written word, an intermediate form between what was said and what was printed rather than itself a form to be reproduced.

## 17 Conclusion

We have examined here the written texts produced by a group of individuals, highly educated academics, in a special context, a well organised and long established institution. It would be interesting to learn if the abandonment of abbreviated English proceeded more rapidly or more slowly elsewhere; would, for example, literate members of societies in northern and western regions, less open to the influences of London and the universities, retain older usages longer? Did lawyers and clergymen, whose daily routine required the writing of many similar documents whose form had been long since determined, retain not only older words and constructions but also earlier abbreviations? Do we have the same pattern of development in universities — on the continent and in Scotland, also affected by movements we have discussed above? We have no space to consider such problems here, but we hope to have drawn attention to a minor but interesting and neglected aspect of the development of the English language during the Renaissance.

## NOTES

[1] The register has been edited in three volumes for the period 1483–1603 for the Oxford Historical Society. However, since these editions do not always include full transcripts of the English material contained in the register and give no idea of the abbreviations, of Latin or English, used by the compilers, all references here are to the first two MS volumes of the register kept in the college archives. The notes refer to both volumes as *RA.*; folio references are to the first volume and page references to the second. We are grateful to the warden and fellows of the college for permission to consult their records and sincerely thank the archivist, Dr J. R. L. Highfield, and the assistant librarian, John Burgass, for their ready help and cooperation. Our secretary, Françoise Bannister, as always, gave us her ready assistance.

[2] *RA.*, f. Sv.

[3] *Ibid.*, f. 9.

[4] *Ibid.*, f. 14.

[5] *Ibid.*, ff. 22–22v.

[6] *Ibid.*, ff. 25v–26.

[7] *Ibid.*, f. 27.

[8] *Ibid.*, f. 31.

[9] *Ibid.*, f. 29–29v.

[10] J. M. Fletcher, 'A Fifteenth Century Benefaction to Magdalen College Library', *Bodleian Library Record*, 9(1974), 169–72.

[11] J. M. Fletcher and C. A. Upton, 'The Repair of Manuscript Books in Merton College Library 1504', *Archives*, 17 (75) (1986), 138–43.

[12] F. M. Powicke, *The Medieval Books of Merton College*, Oxford, 1931, p. 248.

[13] The list is printed in *Collectanea* 1 (O.H.S.), Oxford, 1885, and *Collectanea* 2 (O.H.S.), Oxford, 1890.

[14] *RA.*, f. 139

[15] *Ibid.*, f. 139v.

[16] *Ibid.*, f. 234v.

[17] *Ibid.*, f. 293.

[18] *Ibid.*, f. 310.

[19] *RA.*, p. 64.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 414.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 7, 1988/1 p17 in the printed version]



[David Stark: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 5. Defining a Literary Phonetic Standard for World English

### David Stark

David Stark is an architect who has been grappling with the design problems of English orthography over the last ten years, since he started tutoring adult illiterates. The following is a summary of the paper he presented at the Simplified Spelling Society's Fifth International Conference in July 1987. The ideas it contains were also discussed in previous issues of the Society's *Newsletter*, subsequently *Journal*.

In the history of spelling reform, it has usually been assumed that spoken language is the base from which regular spellings are formed. Perhaps this is to be expected when so many spelling reformers have been scholars of phonetics, and no conference on spelling reform would be the same if it were not for the moments when discussion is diverted to argue the 'correct' pronunciation of a word.

The premise of my series of articles for the *Journal* and my address at Conference was that the written word is the basis of alphabetic orthography in a multi-dialect language, and not the spoken word. The latter is too variable and indefinable for most people for it to be used as any more than a rough guide to the 'approved' pronunciations which can be used for spelling.

For example, if we decide RP should be the reference dialect, how do we know who speaks it? the Queen? Frank Bough? all middle-class people brought up in SE England? Even if we could define it, how can we ensure that it is familiar to every person throughout the world who wishes to read and write English? If the standard pronunciation is based on one dialect, how do we counter the resentment felt by adherents of other dialects to the increased importance of the one chosen?

In any major language with an alphabetic orthography, the written word, which is available to all who wish to read and write, is the starting point. From this, hopefully with the aid of regular alphabetic rules, a spelling pronunciation can be defined. I call this the Standardised Spelling Pronunciation or SSP. The SSP is learned, and with the alphabetic rules, converted back into written form when required. Any help from one's own knowledge of the spoken word, where this may happen to coincide with a part or the whole of the SSP, will be regarded as a bonus in helping one to remember the SSP.

The SSP's used for spelling are frozen abstracts and not living speech. They form a literary standard which cannot be a mere transcription of dialect. Phonetic experts must realise that budding literates will not analyse word pronunciations in the same way that they do. An ordinary person will know that there are 26 letters in the alphabet but will have no idea how many phonemes there are in his dialect.

The unstressed vowel schwa will not exist for most people as there is no letter to represent it. A phonetic expert would analyse the word *Sanfrancisco* as having at least two unstressed or schwa vowels. However, a speller will need to split a long word like this into manageable units (usually



syllables) in order to process it. If he has heard Frank Sinatra sing that he has left his heart in San/fran/cis/co, he will have no problem spelling the vowels in the word. Taken syllable by syllable, all vowels are stressed.

The scholar eager to learn to spell will not bother if many words indicate an SSP which does not accord with a familiar spoken pronunciation. An extreme example is the word *meringue* which can easily be learned by remembering the SSP /meringyoo/. However, this aspect is more important to a spelling reformer, who, wishing to keep the revised spelling of a word like *tune* as close as possible to the t.o. spelling, can safely suggest an increasingly obsolescent pronunciation as the SSP, rather than re-spell the word as <choon>.

If English existed in only one small geographical area with a relatively homogeneous dialect community, the SSP's could be designed to relate, more or less, to well known spoken pronunciations. Unless we accept that different spellings are possible for different parts of the English-speaking world, the spelling reformer will find it impossible to match the SSP's and the spoken word for more than a minority of English literates.

However, if we adopt a 'loose fit' strategy in the rules which form SSP'S, we can introduce some leeway into the relationship between SSP's and familiar pronunciations. If in these rules we adopt a minimalist approach in the number of phoneme contrasts we recognise, we can match SSP's to more dialects.

For example, the vowels in the words *lass* and *pass* are different in RP. The sound split from a previously single vowel did not occur in General American or in many other dialects. In some dialects, where the split has occurred, it has taken place in different ways to RP. Many Australians use the shorter vowel whenever /n/ or /m/ follows. Other Australians, West Indians, New Zealanders and South Africans always use the longer vowel. Scottish and Northern Irish accents always use the shorter one. If one grapheme were given to both phonemes, the relevant SSP's would be less dialect-specific, and more people would get more help from their own accent in memorising the SSP's.

There are several, potentially confusing pairs of phonemes which can get the same treatment. However, we will be limited in this by considering the number and importance of the minimal pairs involved. These are pairs of words in which the particular phoneme contrast is the only difference between them. If there are only a few minimal pairs like *aunt/ant* the possible confusion between such words when they are spelled the same will be no greater than when we spell homophonic pairs identically in a revised spelling system.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 7, 1988/1 p18,19 in the printed version]

[Ronald Threadgall: see [Journals](#)]

## 6. The Initial Teaching Alphabet: Proven Efficiency and Future Prospects

### Ronald A Threadgall

Ronald Threadgall is General Secretary of the United Kingdom i.t.a. Federation, Editor of the Federation's Newsletter, and former Head of the Remedial Department at Clacton County High School, Essex.

Few Spelling Reformers can be unaware of the Initial Teaching Alphabet, and some will have used it and enjoyed doing so. Essentially it is a phonetic alphabet consisting of 44 letters to represent the 40+ sounds of English, so that spelling is consistent. It is not intended to replace our traditional orthography, but to be used as an initial learning medium so that reading and writing can be more easily learnt.

It began with Sir Isaac Pitman. Shorthand, up to his time, had been based on the written word, but his shorthand was based on the sounds of the language, and we know how successful that idea was. Sir James Pitman had a very close relationship with his grandfather, and took a great interest in his work. It was from this beginning that he developed i.t.a. After working with Bernard Shaw and others on a new alphabet, he felt that, laudable as this was, a new alphabet was not a viable proposition, and that even a simplified spelling structure was not likely to commend itself in the foreseeable future. He therefore invented i.t.a. to help people learn to read.



I stress that i.t.a. is not a method for the teaching of reading and writing, but an initial learning medium. There are many ways of using it. Among our National Committee members there are at least four very different ways in which it is used. One of its strengths is that it is flexible and can be adapted to all kinds of circumstances.

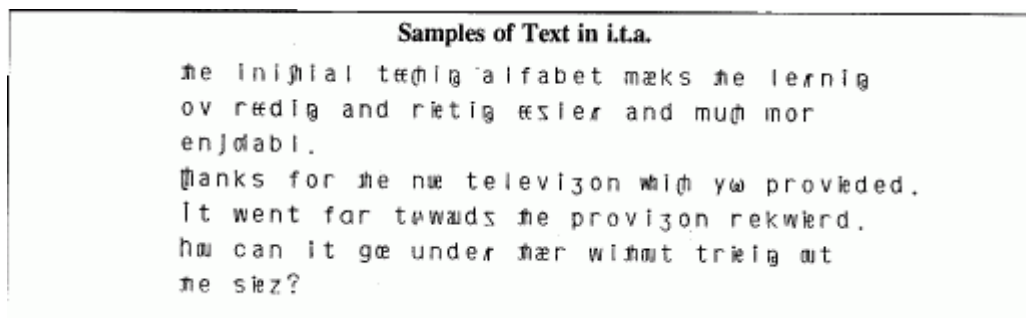
From 1961 it was used experimentally in Oldham and other places, under the auspices of the University of London. The last President of the Simplified Spelling Society, the late John Downing, was heavily involved at this stage and produced the Downing Readers which are still widely used today. All the schools taking part were infant schools, and there it had immediate success. It was very well researched, involving such people as Vera Southgate, John Blackie and Donald Sadler.

Considerable advantages were soon noticed. The beginning stages of reading were completed much faster, and children very quickly took to writing. Because reading was easier in this medium, the children read much more, thereby gaining a greater facility for it and a greater enjoyment from it. Much, and much better, creative writing flowed from their pens. I meet a number of people who know little about i.t.a. but are aware of this fact. Just as the children 'enjoyed their reading and writing, and such enjoyment is a great spur to learning, so the teachers gained enjoyment from the

teaching. No longer was there the eternal queue of children at the teacher's desk to ask "Miss, how do you spell ... ?". The teacher was now free to go among the children and help with style and vocabulary and ideas. There was also no waste of time on the children's part, less opportunity for fooling about, and no break in their concentration.

There was limited use with older children, with adults, in the army, and in prisons; but the full potential of i.t.a. in these situations was not fully realised, as infant material was used, and even material specially written was very dull. It was not fully grasped that with i.t.a. the repetition of words was not necessary, nor did vocabulary need to be restricted.

I began using i.t.a. in 1965. I was involved in Remedial Education, and was not satisfied with what I was achieving. I was not happy while there was one child who was illiterate or even semi-literate. I came across i.t.a. and thought it might be some answer to the problem. After a course by Peter Daffyn, and some time in making myself proficient in this new medium as well as working out how I could use it in my rather different situation, I experimented by teaching one class with i.t.a. and another parallel one with T.O. It was soon clear to anyone that the i.t.a. class was romping ahead of the other. We found it to be just as successful in a multi-ability situation as in a streamed set-up. At last one could abandon the 'cat sat on the mat' type of literature, and give these older children material within their interests and vocabulary. You can read the account of all this in the leaflet "Sir's Magic Alphabet".



One of the great benefits of i.t.a. for older children was the speed at which they learnt to read. In six months to a year they were all proficient at reading and writing in T.O., and could keep up with their peers, instead of drifting further and further behind as previously was the case, because their reading and writing no longer held them back, as all the difficult or special subject words could easily be written in i.t.a. Discipline rapidly improved because the children were now too busy to misbehave.

Why is it then that i.t.a. seems to have failed? Firstly, I think, it was too successful at the beginning. The news of its success escaped from the experimental situation, and many teachers and educational authorities grabbed at it as the panacea for all ills, and without adequate training and preparation dived in. I.t.a. is a tool and as such needs careful and skilful handling. Giving someone a chisel without any directive as to how to use it could produce very poor work and would probably be very dangerous.

A Foundation had been set up to foster the work of i.t.a. During the 1970s this foundered for lack of funds and other reasons, so there was a lack of support for teachers and schools. Some were unaware of the range of materials available. Also the bad ideas about teaching reading re-surfaced in new guises, and i.t.a. was considered to be out-dated. 'New' ideas took over, promulgated by H.M.I.s and advisers who were wholly ignorant of i.t.a. and what it had achieved.

The United Kingdom Initial Teaching Alphabet Federation was formed in 1978 by teachers who were using i.t.a., for the support of schools using this medium and for the promotion of further use of it. It has gradually taken over the functions of the Foundation in this country. It gives advice and help to schools, teachers, parents and students; provides books and other materials, training courses and an annual conference, as well as advertising and generally promoting the use of i.t.a.

We are not just propping a system up. We are looking ahead and working hard for the future. We are working for the time when the efficacy of i.t.a. will be widely recognized, and our skills be more in demand.

We have recently produced a pre-reading phonic kit, which has awakened considerable interest. We have produced, and are continuing to produce, materials with older vocabulary and interest levels for older children and adults. We have produced a literacy pack for adults with cassette tapes, and we are about to revise that. We are making contacts with parliament and politicians. We have recently made a submission to the Kingman Committee. We are involved in teacher training, both in courses we run ourselves and in lectures and courses run in teacher training establishments. We are becoming more involved in adult education, and are endeavouring to get i.t.a. used in prisons again. We are beginning an experiment in the use of i.t.a. to help parents to teach their children to read before they go to school. Our Annual Conference brings many people together to discuss and consider literacy in its many aspects. In all we are doing much to combat illiteracy.

Its strength lies in its sound educational basis. In every subject except English one begins with what is simple and moves to the complications later. One does not start teaching mathematics with logarithms! I.t.a. begins in a simple phonetic way, and when confidence and facility have been gained it moves on to the complications of our orthography. In a remedial situation it provides a real new start, and this has a great psychological effect, raising confidence in all directions. The great thing is that it engenders an interest and enjoyment in reading and writing that continues beyond school. This does not show up in research, but I find that those taught by i.t.a. go on enjoying their reading and writing and thus gaining greater proficiency while many taught using T.O. give up using such skills and so they atrophy. Another strength is its adaptability to all kinds of uses and situations, such as learning English as a second language, and the learning of foreign languages. It could even adapt to Cut Spelling!

### **Further Reading**

John Blackie & Donald Sadler *i.t.a.: An independent Evaluation*

John Downing *The Initial Teaching Alphabet Explained and Illustrated*

O M Gayford *i.t.a. in Primary Education*

Maurice Harrison *Teaching Reading — An i.t.a. Approach*

Sir James Pitman *Alphabets and Reading*

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 7, 1988/1 p20–22 in the printed version]

[Thomas Hofman: see [Bulletins](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletter](#)]

## 7. International Requirements for Spelling Reform

Thomas R Hofmann

Thomas Hofmann is a Professor of English in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hokuriku University, Japan), as well as teaching linguistics at Kanazawa University. His recent book 10 *Voyages in the Realms of Meaning* [1] is popular in Japan. He has been long active in questions of spelling reform. An earlier version of this paper was submitted in absentia to the Simplified Spelling Society's 5th International Conference, July 1987.

### Spelling reform: why & how?

For the last few hundred years, there has been a growing desire to reform the spelling of English, sometimes stronger & sometimes weaker. One reason is that greater portions of the people are expected to be able to read & write, & that the irregularities & conflicting aspects of standard English spelling cause serious problems for children & undoubtedly slow their education. Also, there are slow but unavoidable changes in the pronunciation of any language from generation to generation, so if its writing is based on pronunciation, but does not change, there is an ever increasing disparity between spelling & pronunciation, until eventually 'die dam breaks' & an entirely new system of spelling is adopted.

Many interested people have proposed changes, often specialists of language (e.g. O Jespersen), literature (e.g. G B Shaw), or education (e.g. G Dewey), or merely people who have suffered from the system as it stands. Sometimes the proposals are for radical change, as in Shaw's new alphabet, based on the belief that the dam must break soon. Others propose only minor, but planned, changes hoping that by letting some water over the dam in a controlled fashion [2], we will be able to relieve the pressure slowly, & keep as much continuity as possible in our written language, often fearing a complete break with the past. I will argue here that only this latter way is possible, from the present uses of English as well as from a more modern understanding of what language is & how it changes, with some additional notes on how its changes can be encouraged & guided.

In this last 50 years, English has become effectively the world language, a fact that is beneficial to the whole world as well as to people whose native language is English. However, it means that far more people than ever before devote much time & energy to learning it, with its archaic & haphazard orthography. This is annoying to many native English speaking peoples at least, for its inefficiency as well as its potential for increasing errors in communication. Nevertheless, this international character of modern English places definite limitations on the types of change that are now possible.

### Basic assumption: success as criterion

In any proposal for spelling reform, success is the most critical thing: *a reform without success might as well not have been proposed*. This can not be said too loudly or too often by anyone who is serious about wanting to actually get some reform. Even a perfect system or merely an ideal reform is only something to fill magazine pages or books with unless it has a chance of success. It will only take people's energy & time arguing about it, drawing them away from reforms that would be more likely to succeed, though perhaps less perfect.

For practical people who want to see improvement in our spelling, then, I think they must look first at the chances of success of a reform, & only if it is, conceivable in 10 or 50 or 100 years, will they

bother about how good it is, & whether it can be made better. From this perspective, then, I want to consider what is possible, that is, what has a chance of succeeding, in the present era where English is used in many countries.

### Limits

I am convinced that no thoro-going reform of spelling is possible for English at the present, with its present blush of success as *the* world language, & also because many different countries use it as a native language.

Rather, the only hope with any promise of success seems to lie in a series of small reforms that will take root & be adopted by other countries — reforms that make the present system more logical & remove at the same time some of the more confusing aspects of English spelling. Such reforms can be resisted only on the grounds of etymology (which few care about), or simple dislike of change. Yet with every such reform that is successful, i.e. it becomes the new standard & is preferred by most people under 30 years old, then the pressure for further reform, as well as the number of further proposals, will multiply.

### Successful reforms

As language is only a convention or agreement, existing in the form it does only because its users agree that it does (& because they do it by habit), a writing system can be modified quite radically if a strong government forces it on a people who are willing to change. Thus Turkey changed from the Arabic script to a roman alphabet in very few years, as Korea has largely abandoned kanji ('Chinese' characters) in the last few decades in favor of the native script, or Vietnamese not so long ago. Less than radical changes can be effected quickly & easily by authoritarian governments, as in both Russia & China after their revolutions.

Factors that favor systematic reforms can be gleaned from these examples:

1. an authoritarian government
2. a largely illiterate populace
3. a shift of political power away from the literate classes.

These are not conditions we can expect in English-speaking countries in the near future. It appears, indeed, that *nowhere*, at *no* time, has a systematic reform of more than 1 or 2 spelling patterns been successful, in any democratic country. [3] Obviously we cannot advocate dictatorships for the sake of spelling reform.

Moreover, even if we had dictatorships in the English speaking countries & illiterate populations that could look forward to a change, each country would undoubtedly choose to make different reforms. First, each country has identifiable differences in pronunciation, though these are not very significant. However, & 2nd, there are strong forces of nationalism that will lead many to want a distinctive brand of writing for their own country, as the US did partly to cut its ties with England & partly to make, more profits for its publishers. Even where overt nationalism & publishers' interests are absent, it is easy to imagine a general feeling, for example in Australia, that there is no need to write the way Brits write, if the LTK alone makes a revision. And predictably there will be a movement in Scotland (as well as other countries), to have their own distinctive variety.

In contrast to this, Dutch has successfully pursued a series of reforms over many decades, in spite of being a national language in 3 countries (Netherlands, Belgium & South Africa [4]), multitudes of dialects, literate people & democratic governments. English, used in many more countries, has successfully reformed the spellings of many individual words (e.g. *show*, *draft*, *jail* [Am.]), but few systematic changes like <-our> to <-or> in *colour* &c) because they became associated with nationalistic feelings. The 'American spellings' were successful in the US because of nationalism,

but were unsuccessful in the rest of the English world for precisely the same reason. The minor differences that resulted have encouraged some (especially the French) to distinguish the 'American language' from the English language.

Because of the forces of nationalism, then, as well as a lack of a single authoritarian government over all the English-speaking nations, many reforms will have the effect of splitting English into a family of languages, as Latin was split into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese & French. This excludes many reforms (especially for the vowels that are pronounced differently in different regions, the <-augh> & <-ough> should go, as well as nearly all thorough-going reforms.

### **English as the world language**

For fear of sabotaging the status of English as the world language (in spite of its atrocious spelling), we must & the people will resist any reform that might not be adopted in both major centers of English, namely the USA & England.

English is the world language today largely because it is the native language of so many people & so much money & so much science. If some extensive reform were adopted on one side of the Atlantic Ocean that was refused on the other, neither variety would be so predominant over other countries of the world, & scientists in Japan would not be half so likely to publish their work in English, for far less people would read it – they might as well publish in Japanese, far easier for them, & still have nearly as many people read it. The French & the Russians the same. Today, anyone, in any field, from commerce to politics, to science or sports, who wants to talk to the world, must do it in English. As a result, any world-class action is in English, & all aspiring people must learn English — even the Russian government. We & our children have an advantage from this, for we don't have to learn Russian or Japanese. True, English spelling is difficult, but the whole world is better off if it does not change too rapidly, for it saves everybody the need of learning several foreign languages.

If, on the other hand, there were 2 Englishes (as the French continually try to suggest), this whole structure will collapse like a house of cards. They would be 2 languages among many others, & we should have to return to learning foreign languages (learning our horrible spelling is easier than that). Learning to read the other varieties of English might be easier than learning our present system of spelling, but we should also have to learn Russian or Spanish or perhaps both, & Japanese for some purposes.

Practical reformers & practical people seem to sense this disadvantage inherent in reforms that might not be acceptable to all the English nations. Although our present spelling is quite troublesome there is considerable advantage to the whole world in not changing it too fast or in a way that splits the English nations into 2 or more ways of writing.

### **When?**

If the only reforms that can be successful while English is both very dominant in the world, yet split among many nations, are small limited reforms, then we cannot hope to see a really rational spelling system in common use in our lifetimes. But we can make a start that will be followed by others if it is successful. My feeling is that although it is a long journey, & one which may never be finished, we must start, & that means taking a 1st step, as small as it may be.

A note of hope, however. Linguistics has discovered in the last 20 years that although languages change their pronunciation in simple & systematic ways over hundreds of years, the pronunciation changes 1st in one word, & then in another, & so on through the vocabulary, over several lifetimes. Over the centuries, a language changes in a systematic way, but only by changing one word, then another, then another, & so on. There are powerful forces at work here, for nobody guides or



pushes these changes, but the people as a mass keep at them until they are complete. If we fight these forces, we are bound to lose, but if we can harness them, they will do our work for us.

In fact, all the successful reforms of English spelling have also been of this nature, word by word [5]. Thus we may suspect that the most immediate success would be for small groups of especially difficult spellings to be replaced by systematic spellings.

### How?

How to go about it? Because English is a rather democratic language, I once believed that the only way to go was to begin using a reform & encourage others to use it too. Precious little success have I had, & the same result was obtained for reforms put into practice by the major educator G Dewey (spelling <-ive> as <-iv>), & a major Chicago newspaper (spelling *freight* as *frate* &c). Others have advocated systematic reforms that touch nearly every word, & some make the language unrecognizable. They have seldom gained adherents, & it is now more generally accepted that to be successful, a change must maintain the readability of present writing. I would now like to suggest a new, more promising way.

Suppose that a small reform (preferably as a list of 10 or so words, each obviously in need of reform) were given legal sanction as being equivalent to the present-day standard forms for all laws & government affairs in the US, & that these forms should be used in all governmental documents if & when the British Parliament approves the same list. We can see this (or vice versa, as the case may be) standing a serious chance of success of being approved on both sides of the Atlantic — within 3 or 4 years!

Law is a serious stumbling-block for reform. If there is no enabling legislation to define the new forms as equivalent to the old ones, lawyers and law-makers must refuse to use a reformed word for fear that some sharp lawyer might argue that it is meaningless in some contract or business agreement, or to have some other meaning (based for example on some Old English word). Without such legislation, then, a reform cannot be used in business correspondence, on traffic tickets, on road signs, & in short for anything that has financial consequences in daily life. This could condemn a reform to be a toy for personal letters & maybe some literature (especially comic books). Even newspapers might be sued for libel by misconstruing a reformed word! However, enabling legislation of this sort should not be hard to come by; the US has had laws allowing the use of metric measures for many years.

Once a reform is adopted by both the UK & US governments, it will soon be common in all English speaking countries, with the rest of the world following quickly. If a government uses an identifiable style, that alone accounts for much usage, & the organizations that deal with the government will quickly fall into line. With a major government's adoption, even just legal sanction, dictionaries will begin including it, & if it is used & a good reform, people will fall into its use in private & public communication almost without noticing it. It will indeed be hard to resist.

### Recap

Beginning from the position that it is worse than pointless to propose a reform that has no (significant) chance of success, I have argued that any reform that will divide English into 2 or more camps has little chance of success for that reason alone. And if in spite of such resistance, a reform that split English were adopted, then English would lose much of its status & use as a world language. We should not only have to learn the other way(s) of writing English, but also the foreign languages that non-English people would use when they no longer have English to write in, but must choose between American & British. This will be worse for us, as well as for non-English people, than learning our present atrocious spelling.



Instead, I argue that a short list of reformed spellings for words that are universally seen as troublesome for everyone (e.g. *laugh*, *laughter*, *cough* & the like) should be proposed to parliaments, 1st as legal equivalents, & later as the forms to be used in governmental work, providing that the same list is adopted on both sides of the Atlantic. This will guarantee that English retains its status as the world language, & it matches closely the way that languages change naturally. Being a small change, there can hardly be an easier pill to swallow, & being both small & well-defined, publishers & writers will find it easy to conform to. Further, it is the only kind of reform that has had notable success in democratic countries yet.

With one small success, the pent-up pressure for reform in English spelling will rise in all English countries, & the march to a better spelling system will have begun. As much fun as it may be to plan a journey, no trip can begin without taking a 1st step, so I hope that we will be able to compromise on a short list of words that can be reformed similarly in all countries, that all people can be convinced need reforming.

In short, I believe that the time for grand schemes & plans is past, & to get any reform at all, we must settle on a small but realistic plan that will succeed.

## NOTES

[1] available from HokuShin, 1-1 Oh-machi, Toyama, Japan 920-30 for 2660 yen or \$US 21.30 (or yen equivalent in sterling).

[2] One such moderate reform, DUE or Drop Useless E's, would revise systematically the spellings of all words that end in <e> where the <e> does not indicate the correct (modern) pronunciation, as *are* is not pronounced like *care* but like *car*, & should therefore be spelled as *ar*. In the remainder of this discussion, partly as a demonstration, I apply it to *are*, *were*, *there*, *have* & *some*, making *ar*, *wer*, *ther*, *hav* & *som*, as well as adopting the short, informal & phonetic (the so-called 'American') spellings of *though*, *through* & *thorough*, making *tho*, *thru* & *thoro* respectively.

[3] Japan might be seen as exceptional, for it reformed its phonetic writing & limited the use of kanji after having lost the Pacific War. Altho it was under US occupation, the occupation authorities apparently stopped encouraging reform after they discovered that illiteracy in Japan was significantly lower than in the US. That is, altho the 1st factor is true, it was more or less irrelevant in this case. More significant was the general feeling of failure of the old ways, & thus the willingness to change. This case might motivate a 4th factor: 'general desire to abandon the old ways'. This was surely contributory to other radical changes, such as in China & Russia after their revolutions.

[4] The South African variety, Afrikaans, is felt by its speakers to be a separate language, & becomes more so when it rejects the reforms in the Netherlands & its Belgian variety, Flemish.

[5] The change of <-ick> to <-ic> might seem to be an exception, but properly speaking, it was only a single suffix that was changed. More technically, we should state this fact as 'morpheme by morpheme'. Thus the British scholars were replacing <-our> endings (not a suffix) by <-or> until the American rebels did it systematically, & blocked further reform in loyal areas.

## 8. Sound and Symbol: the Case of Romaji

### John Skelton

John Skelton has taught English and Applied Linguistics in Spain, London, Oman and Singapore, and is now Director of Studies of Aston University's Language Studies Unit. He has travelled widely in Asia and has been learning elementary Japanese for many years.

#### 1 Origin and use

The Japanese writing system was hailed by the first missionaries to Japan as an invention of the devil (a judgment with which not all students of the language have disagreed over the years), and it was those same missionaries who made the first attempts to render into the roman alphabet the sounds of the language.

The use of *romaji*, with which this article is concerned, is at once very widespread and very restricted in contemporary Japan. It exists firstly as an aid to foreigners.

Thus for instance the names of tube stations in Tokyo appear in *romaji* — though as no such concessions are made on overground trains, and Tokyo itself does not have street names, this can often be less help than is necessary. Similarly, brand names often appear in *romaji* — a necessity in an export-obsessed country. Secondly, *romaji* have value as fashionable chic, appearing in slogans on the twee T-shirts so in vogue all over east and south east Asia, the English mangled and the sentiments ghastly — no one who has seen a Japanese woman in her mid-twenties proclaim from her T-shirt, "We are little people. We should laugh and play" can sustain undamaged a belief in the dignity of humanity. (See Dougill [1987] for further examples and discussion).

#### 2 Converting sound into symbol

*Romaji*, then, is fairly unusual in written scripts in that it is not the major, or a major, vehicle for written communication between speakers of the language. On the other hand, the way it operates to convert sound into symbol, and the linguistic decisions involved, are at once typical and instructive. I should add that in the present paper I shall concentrate on the more widely used Hepburn system: the other principal system, *kunrei-siki* (as it would write itself), has been officially preferred but is less common and, because on the whole it makes a less detailed attempt to match Japanese sound with the English equivalent, is linguistically less interesting.

All writing systems strike a balance between phonetic fidelity and economy and — when regularised by a Royal Society, an Academia, or by some such smaller but no less dictatorial authority as the anthropologist — between regional variation, if any, and standardisation. In some languages the writing system may carry further information, as English carries part of its etymology enshrined in its spelling (where /f/ is written <ph> the word is usually Greek, and so on). And all attempts at romanisation refer back to a shifting but related set of sounds, based on those of Latin, to go back no further. Thus in any language written with roman characters the sounds associated with individual letters will be broadly similar, if seldom identical.

#### 3 Systems for writing Japanese

The situation with *romaji* however is different from that of the major European languages or from the myriad tribal languages which have never been written in any other way. Japan had a literate culture centuries before the arrival of Europeans, and it is as well to give a few words of explanation about this first of all.

Originally, then, ideographs were borrowed from Chinese, retaining sometimes their Chinese meaning and sometimes their Chinese sound. Many of these ideographs came to be associated with other sounds and other meanings as well. Thus the first character in the Japanese name for their own country, which resembles a capital <E> with a vertical line closing it off down the right hand side, has readings (known as *on* readings) based on Chinese pronunciations: *jitsu* and *nichi*.

And it has readings (*kun* readings) in which the ideograph retains the Chinese meaning but represents a native Japanese word: *hi*, *ka*. The *on* readings need not represent lexical words, *kun* readings do (though *ka* here is a bound morpheme). The meaning of this particular ideograph is either *day* or *sun*. And of course in the combination romanised as *Nihon* or *Nippon* it means *sun*, but exasperatingly is pronounced /ni/.

Given this complexity the invention of two syllabaries, known collectively as *kana*, individually as *hiragana* and *katakana*, is unsurprising — in any case the structural differences between Chinese and Japanese (they are as different from each other as from English) render Chinese ideographs a clumsy way of capturing the grammatical facts of Japanese. Now the *kana* themselves are a linguistically self-conscious and sophisticated means of symbolising the range of possible syllable sounds in Japanese. Those who attempted romanisation, therefore, found themselves in the unusual position of having three sources to draw on: the sounds of the spoken language, the way in which it was normally written, and two attempts to offer a simpler and phonemically accurate means of representing it.

#### 4 The letters of *romaji*

I turn now to *romaji* itself. Twenty two different roman letters are used in the romanisation process. Those excluded (in the Hepburn system; *kunrei-siki* also omits <c, f, j>) are <l, q, v, x>. However <c> only appears in the combination <chi>, pronounced as in *cheese*, and <f> only in <fu>, as — more roughly this time — in *full*. The five vowel symbols used are <a, i, u, e, o>, this being the Japanese order; and a basic rule of thumb for *romaji* pronunciation, which might as well be introduced here, is that vowels are to be sounded as in Italian, consonants as in English. These five vowels cover the five monophthongs in Japanese, and also appear in ten diphthongs.

Such, then, is the basic system. But the learner requires, more or less explicitly, further detailed information.

#### 5 Pronouncing the letters

a) As in the case of all foreign languages written with the roman script, the learner needs more information about the exact pronunciation — the exact place in the general area of sound conventionally represented by the roman character. Thus a textbook might point out that <w> is like English <w> but pronounced with spread lips, that <f> has a definite /h/ quality and so forth.

One letter, <r>, represents a sound which has no real English equivalent. It may in fact frequently be perceived as having a /d/ quality. That is to say, the general ethos of 'best approximation', of choosing a roman letter representing a broadly similar sound, verges here on the misleading. This is, however, the only sound which is seriously problematical. Compare the problem faced by romanisers of Arabic.

b) There is a general rule that double consonants and double vowels do not have their English equivalents. Both are held for longer, and for roughly twice the articulation of single consonants or vowels. Japanese has numerous minimal pairs where the distinction is made by the opposing of single or double sounds. The distinction is recognised in the *kana* system, as one would expect.

Where the consonant is a stop, as in *gakkoo* (*school*), the articulation is held for a beat before being released, as in Italian. To English eyes the pronunciation of <oo>, as here, or <uu> as in *Kyuushuu* (the island written in English as *Kyushu*), as long versions of <o> and <u> respectively, may seem psycholinguistically odd, and it is interesting that many textbooks prefer to write a single <o> with a line over it to show the doubling.

c) There is also a general rule that <i> and <a> are devoiced between voiceless consonants or at the end of a word following a voiceless consonant. Since the verb markers which (very approximately) correspond to a kind of present and past tense, among other uses, are <-masu> and <-mashita>, this devoicing is extremely common both in the real language and in elementary textbooks, and the sounds are typically perceived as <mas> and <mashta>. The devoicing is not marked in *roman*, and the result is misleading, mispronunciations of such proper names as

*Takashita* by newsreaders relying on *romaji* being commonplace and understandable.

What seems to have happened here is that, with such sequences as <-masu> and' <-mashita> being normally written in *hiragana* (as bound morphemes are in Japanese), and therefore with symbols representing /ma/, /su/ and so forth, the *romaji* are based not on the sounds of the language but on the *kana* system in which they are encoded. It is an interesting point that *romaji*s used to reflect a syllabary, and indeed might just as easily be regarded as a syllabary itself.

d) This brings us now to the question of sounds which are allophonically distinct in Japanese, but phonemically distinct in English. This is a difficult relationship for romanisers of any language. As far as Japanese is concerned, it may be said in general that the decisions taken for the Hepburn system do not always appear to be formally consistent, but are psycholinguistically easy to use, while *kunrei-siki* perhaps achieves greater formal elegance but at the expense of what is known these days as user-friendliness (for instance, <siki>, as above, is pronounced "shiki").

Thus <g> is pronounced as in English *go* where word initial, but as a velar nasal when medial by many speakers, and the subject postposition, <ga>, one of the most common grammatical particles in the language, is also often pronounced with a velar nasal. This distinction in sound is not recognised in *romaji*.

## 6 The *kana* table

Contrast this decision with the representation of the sounds of the *kana* table, which Japanese children learn as English children their alphabet. It begins as follows:

a i u e o  
ka ki ku ke ko

and is read (and chanted) from left to right. The next consonants to be dealt with are, in order, <s, t, n, h>. Of these, only <n> is straightforward. The group yields (for Hepburn):

sa	shi	su	se	so
ta	chi	tsu	te	to
na	ni	nu	ne	no
ha	hi	fu	he	ho

Some of these sounds resemble closely the English equivalents implied by this *romaji* transcription — the embarrassing pronunciation in an advertising jingle of the Tokyo department store *My City*, for instance. Some do not, at least to my ears, though all are potential areas of difficulty for Japanese learners when it comes to sound discrimination in English.

A psycholinguistically interesting point, in this general area, is the case of syllable final <n>, which is in fact the only consonant that may close a Japanese syllable. As in, English, phonemic /n/ assimilates to [in] before a bilabial, and it ought therefore to be written with <n> in *romaji*. In fact, in some systems it is, and in some it is not: thus one finds both *empitsu* and *enpitsu* for *pencil*.

## 7 Conclusion

Such, then, are the decisions taken in the romanisation of Japanese. A restricted set of letters is used to write a larger number of sounds, and where there is a choice to be made between formal accuracy and psycholinguistic ease, Hepburn at least has gone for the latter, though it perhaps carries with it an increased risk that learners of Japanese will take Japanese sounds to be more like English than they really are.

## Reference

J Dougill, 'English as a Decorative Language' *English Today*, October 1987.

## 9. Can Cut Spelling Cut Misprints? Christopher Upward

The Cut Spelling used in this article removes redundant letters from t.o. as follows:

1. It cuts letters irrelevant to pronunciation (*def*),
2. It uses syllabic <l, m, n, r> in most post-accentual short syllables (*metl, atm, prisn, detr.*), it regularizes inflections as <d, s> (*hintd, bushs*),
3. It simplifies most double consonants (eg, *bigr, agravate*). Where appropriate it also replaces <gh, ph> by <f> (*tuf, filosofy*), <g> by <j> (e.g. *jinjr, juj*), and <ig> by <y> (e.g. *syn, hy*). A refinement used here for the first time is that <u> is only dropped after <q> when silent: e.g. *mosqito, tecniqe* but *question, quite*. Readers are invited to comment on the spellings used.

The advice of Wendy Berliner, editor of the AMMA journal report, and Anne McHardy, news editor with *The Guardian* are gratefully acknowledged in the composition of this article, but they are of course not responsible for any statements here made.

### 0 ABSTRACT

A study of patterns of misprint in the press suggests that Cut Spelling could reduce their occurrence. While a reduction in misspellings would require the orthography to be regularised, a reduction in misprints would be the product of statistical and sociological factors. In the corpus examined for this study, most misprints involve single letters, and are most likely to occur in the least obtrusive position, i.e. in the second half of longer words. A reform like Cut Spelling, which shortens words, thereby makes misprints more obtrusive and, it is argued, more likely to be noticed and corrected. The study is limited in scope, but if its findings are valid, the implications need to be taken into account when considering reform-strategy.

### 1 MISPRINTS: DEFINITION & SOURCES

#### 1.1 Different causes of misspellings/misprints

The *Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society* 1987 No.3 (pp. 21–24) contained an analysis of misspellings, and demonstrated that many of them are in some way connected with the redundant letters found in t.o., a fact that is of considerable significance in determining priorities for a first stage spelling reform. Misprints on the other hand do not immediately suggest any such obvious lessons for spelling reform strategy, since their causes are usually quite different. Thus handwritten misspellings are often made by less skilled writers, they typically arise from failure to master an irregular spelling system, and they can be reduced if the system is made easier to master; but printed and typed text is normally produced by skilled writers, most of whose mistakes will probably result from lack of care rather than ignorance. Furthermore such text is more likely to be proof-read before being released. However newspapers in particular are published under pressure and are well-known for their frequent misprints, and the question is at least worth asking whether these exhibit specific patterns, which might lend themselves to improvement by a spelling reform of the Cut Spelling type.

#### 1.2 Text selection

In compiling a corpus of misprints for this analysis, the press was used as the sole source, on the assumption that it would provide the greatest density of examples. Down-market papers were not selected because they contain less text (tabloid format) and a more limited lexical range. Among 'quality' British newspapers *The Guardian* has a reputation (from which it derives a certain wry satisfaction rather than a sense of shame) for its many misprints — hence its nickname, *The Grauniad*, which, so an apocryphal story has it, actually appeared once on the masthead; and it was chosen as the main source. As a control

some comparable texts were scanned from *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. As it happened, the period from which the copies of *The Guardian* were chosen for investigation was unusually fruitful for misprints, not because of that reputation for typographical inaccuracy, but because by chance *The Guardian* was then in the throes of transition from the traditional linotype technology to the new techniques of direct inputting: text was as a result appearing in print with far less careful checking than normal, or occasionally even completely unchecked. An additional fortuitous factor that probably contributed to the high density of misprints found was that the copies used were first editions, whereas many misprints are weeded out in later editions. By 1988 however *The Guardian's* new technology is installed, new working practices have evolved, repeated checking (normally by at least 6 pairs of eyes — the inputter, newseditor, subeditors, proofreaders, etc) is again the order of the day, and far fewer misprints are expected to occur than during the difficult period of transition. In fact fewer misprints are now likely even than before the introduction of new technology, because now that text is correctly immediately onscreen, the confusing and messy business of pencil overwriting is a thing of the past: the copy is now clean and fully legible; furthermore, although in the old days the linotype operator could remove further errors that had not previously been spotted, new errors may also creep in at that stage. The data used in this analysis should therefore emphatically not be quoted as evidence for the typographical incompetence of *The Guardian*; but the large number of errors found undoubtedly made the task of analysis much easier.

### 1.3 Search-methods and overall findings

All the news-items (i.e. all continuum prose text, but not advertisements, tables, listings, etc) in a single issue of *The Guardian* (Tuesday 4 August 1987) were carefully scanned once only, and some 160 misprints found, scattered very unevenly over 21 pages of the 28-page newspaper. The front page, with 19 misprints, and p. 8 (foreign news) with 18 misprints contained many more than any other page; the next worst were 3 pages with 11, and 3 pages with 10 misprints each. To obtain some idea of the proportion of misprints discovered in a single reading, pages 1 and 8 were reread, and a total of 5 further misprints found (i.e. about another 14%). The pages on which the largest number of misprints occurred were for most part those which are set under the greatest pressure and with least opportunity for checking. That the front and foreign news pages are particularly prone to misprints was confirmed by the finding that the two equivalent pages in the issue of Thursday 6 and Saturday 8 August also contained many misprints, 10 & 24, and 12 & 10 respectively, and that the weekly *Education Guardian* supplement, for which over 24 hours checking time is available, contained fewest misprints (3 over 2 pages). As a control of the frequency of misprints found in *The Guardian*, the front page and the foreign news page of *The Independent* (Wednesday 5 August), *The Daily Telegraph* (Friday 7 August) and *The Times* (Saturday 8 August) were also searched, and were found to contain 8, 16 and 12 errors respectively. Thus these three generally comparable newspapers were found to contain a total of 36 misprints as against a total of 93 for the equivalent pages in three issues of *The Guardian*. However, as we have seen there were special reasons for *The Guardian's* bad performance.

## 2 ANALYSIS OF TYPES AND FACTORS

### 2.1 Types of misprint & their proportions

In the earlier analysis of misspellings it was necessary first to define which non-standard forms should actually be counted as misspellings, and in particular whether only mistakes involving letters of the alphabet constituted misspellings in the strict sense. In the present analysis of misprints an even wider range of unintended forms was observed than with misspellings. Hardly any of the misprints could however with certainty be diagnosed as misspellings in the sense that the writer probably did not know how to spell a word 'correctly'; the two most likely misspellings of this kind found in the *Guardian* corpus were both retrographs that had been confused: *flare* written for *flair*, and *discrete* for *discreet*. Nearly all the other misprints were readily attributable to haste, carelessness and inadequate checking. They broke down as follows:

- i. over two-thirds involvd a singl letr in a word being omitd, insertd, reversd or substituted
- ii. about 10% involvd th presnce, misplacemnt or absnce of a hyfn
- iii. 7% involvd an absnt, superfluus or rong word
- iv. 6% involvd th misuse of upr or loer case letrs
- v. 5% involvd an apostrofe
- vi. 4% involvd successiv words apearing with no intrvening space.

## 2.2 Linguistic frequency v. obtrusivness

How is this variation in frequency of th difrnt typs of misprint to be interpretd? We may hypothesise two factrs, wich we wil cal linguistic-typograficl frequency and obtrusivness respectivly. At th most superficial levl, it is evidnt that th frequency of a givn err-typ bears som relation to th frequency of th linguistic-typografic form in wich it ocurs: hole-word errs (7%) for instnce ar far less comn than singl-letr errs (over 213), for one thing simply because ther ar many times fewr hole words than singl letrs, and th mere oportunity for hole-word errs to ocur is corespondingly less. We may hypothesise that th obtrusivness factr wud oprate as folos: th frequency of givn err-typs shud corespond inversely to visul obtrusivness. In othr words, th mor imediatly obvius an err is, th less frequently it shud tend to ocur, because th most obvius errs ar most likely to be noticed, and corectd. No dout sycolojicl experimnt can provide data on this point.

## 2.3 Varying effect of th two factrs

Th two factrs may eithr reinforce or work against each othr. Thus th overwhelming prepondrnce of singl-letr errs wud be th product of both factrs working togethr: letrs of th alfabet ar by far th most comnly ocuring caractrs in english prose, and individuly they ar relativly unobtrusive. On th othr hand, altho words ar only a few times less comn than letrs, and far mor comn than punctuation marks or othr non-alfabefic symbls, ther relativly hy frequency is larjly outweid by th obtrusivness of errs involving hole words, wich only acount for 7% of al th misprints (but here th obtrusivness factr is working both ways: an extra word is contextuly obtrusive but its gestalt dos not in itself jar on th readr). Th least comn category of err, th joining togethr of sepat words (4%) shos th absolute dominnce of th obtrusivness factr: th typografic form involvd here is th space (wich is omitd wen sepat words ar joind), and it has hy frequency, ocuring afr evry word except th last in any text; but if two sepat words ar joind togethr th misprint is very obvius because th gestalt is at first glance not usuly recognisable as a word at al; so in th foloing exampls from th corpus, *ofthe*, *thisludicrous*, *washowever*, *inthe*, th joind forms at once jar on th readr with ther stranje apearence. Despite th hy levl of oportunity for them to ocur, such word-joining errs in fact ocur less frequently than errs involving th apostrofe, altho th linguistic-typograficl frequency of th latr is far less; but clearly, in th case of th apostrofe, th obtrusivness factr is lo, since in fluent reading we se them scatrd (at first glance, seemingly almost randmly) around th text without ther gretly afecting th familir gestalt of words; indeed that may be one reasn wy lernrs find it so hard to mastr ther corect use. Confusion of upr and loer case letrs (6%) is, as one wud expect, infrequent on both counts: initial letrs ar th most obtrusiv in words, and upr case letrs ar used chiefly to start sentnces and propr nouns, and so ar relativly uncomn.

## 3 SINGL-LETR MISPRINTS

### 3.1 Relativ obtrusivness of err-typs

Singl-letr misprints constituted over 2/3 of th total, th 113 cases subdividing as folos:

- i. 48 involvd omission of a letr, as *notfication*
- ii. 31 involvd insertion of a letr, as *continiu*
- iii. 25 involvd substitution of a letr, as *comsumer*
- iv. 9 involvd reversl of 2 letrs, as *govenrment*.

Here again, we need to ask why some kinds of single-letter misprints are so much more common than others. For our purposes here we shall disregard the possibility that some letters of the alphabet may be more conducive to misprints than other letters, in particular that adjacent keys on the keyboard may be confused (e.g. in *continue*, <i, u> are adjacent, and in *consume*, <m, n> are adjacent); the tendency for such errors to occur may have lessons for keyboard design, but not obviously for spelling reform. It then appears we can perhaps establish an obtrusiveness-gradient *within* this category of error, just as was implied in §2.3 *between* the different categories. We may surmise that letter-reversal is least common since by affecting 2 letters it is most obtrusive whereas omission, insertion or substitution only affect 1 letter and are therefore less obtrusive; and we may surmise that omission is the least obtrusive form of misprint, since it introduces no unfamiliar letters.

### 3.2 Lessons for spelling reform, especially CS

Now one of the fundamental tenets of Cut Spelling (CS) is that a spelling reform which chiefly only omits redundant letters will be visually far less disruptive than a reform which substitutes letters. Visually disruptive is however a synonym for obtrusive and it therefore comes as no surprise that misprints involving the omission of a single letter should be substantially more common than other kinds: they are less easily noticed, and so less likely to be corrected. The fact that the insertion of a letter was the second most common misprint is of some relevance to the backwards compatibility of CS, since it shows that words with extra letters in them are not too disruptive for the reader; in the same way *t.o.*, with its additional redundant letters, would have to appear not too disruptive to children taught CS. And the fact that substitution and reversal were least common among the single-letter misprints suggests that these kinds of spelling-change are the most disruptive for the reader, because most obtrusive. It was also noticeable that although CS usually cuts out under 15% of letters from *t.o.*, over 28% (14) of the 48 single-letter omissions were letters that are cut in CS, as shown in brackets here: *w(o)uld*, *register(e)d*, *Pen(n)ine*, *manag(e)ment*, *ac(c)omplishment*, *w(h)inges*, *non(e)*, *Americ(a)n*, *W(h)itehead*, *bound(a)ries*, *se(e)*, *damn(e)dest*, *Fol(l)ey*, *diagram(m)ing*. This again supports the notion that CS is a 'natural' procedure since it implies that careless writing has some tendency to omit the same (redundant) letters as CS, rather than simply omitting letters at random. This observation gives us a first reason to think that the introduction of CS might reduce misprints as well as misspellings.

### 3.3 Late position of missing letters

Our next observation concerns the position of missing letters in words. Since letters occurring toward the end of words are less prominent, hence less obtrusive than those occurring near the beginning, we might expect the missing letters to occur on average near the end than the beginning. Our 48 words printed with a letter missing contain a total of 394 letters in *t.o.* If we then count the positions of the missing letters in all the 48 words (i.e. the missing <a> in *American* is the 7th letter out of 8, and therefore carries a score of 7) and add them up, they total 244. The mean length in *t.o.* of the 48 words (394 divided by 48) is just over 8.2 letters, and hence in their misspelled form only 7.2, but the mean position of the omitted letters (244 divided by 48) is 5.08; in other words, the missing letters tend to occur in the middle or second half of words more often than in the first half. We note that CS Rule 2, which cuts vowel letters in many post-accentual syllables, by definition also affects the ends rather than the beginnings of words. Here again, we have a hint that CS may help reduce a certain category of misprint.

### 3.4 More letters omitted from long words

One would expect longer words to be more prone than shorter words to misprints by letter-omission, both because longer words have more letters to lose and because a single-letter error would be less obtrusive within a long word. A very rough average word-length in the *Guardian* was established from a 370-word article in which the median word-length was found to be 5 letters (i.e. roughly as many words had more than 5 letters as had fewer). But this figure by itself would produce a biased result, because if letters were omitted at random, the larger number of letters in longer words would inevitably mean that most omissions occurred in longer words anyway. To compensate for this bias, a different median word-length was calculated, based on the total number of letters in the 370-word text, which proved to be 1945. When this was divided by 370, it



produced a median word-length of 7 letters (i.e. roughly as many letters occurred in words with over 7 letters as occurred in words with under 7). This means that if letter omission was random, the median length of word in the list of misprints would have been 7. In fact it was 9, with the following distribution: in the 48 words a letter was lost in:

one 3-letter word	five 4-letter words	five 5-letter words
three 6-letter words	four 7-letter words	four 8-letter words
nine 9-letter words	eight 10-letter words	four 11-letter words
three 12-letter words	one 13-letter word	one 14-letter word

With the normal caveats about the size of the sample, this distribution suggests that, presumably for reasons of unobtrusiveness, misprints are more likely to arise from letter-omission in longer words than in shorter words. If that is correct, we here have a third indication of a positive effect of CS in tending to reduce misprints: in CS the average word-length is reduced, there are fewer letters that could be omitted, and any omission would be more obtrusive in the shorter word, more likely to be noticed, and more likely to be corrected.

### 3.5 Single-letter insertions

The above observations concerning the prevalence of letter-omissions in long words are further supported by the same tendency in the case of letter insertions. We would expect a rogue additional letter to be less obtrusive in a long word than in a short word — and so it proved. The mean length of the t.o. form of words in our 31-word sample containing extra letters was 7.2, and the misprinted length therefore 8.2, compared with the median of 5 calculated in §3.4. Again, the conclusion must be, longer words are more likely to attract extra letters in misprints than shorter words are, because the extra letters are then better hidden. And because CS shortens words, it would militate against such letter-insertions.

## 4 OMITTED WORDS OF SHORT

Though having far less statistical significance even than the above small samples of single-letter misprints, it is worth noting that the 4 hole-word omissions in the corpus were all very short function words: *the*, *a*, *of*, *to*. It would seem the reader can skim text without necessarily noticing the absence of such words. Perhaps this tendency would increase if the average length of word decreased, but the small number of cases found in the *Guardian* corpus (a little over 2% of the total misprints) suggests it would be an insignificant problem.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

While the benefits of CS in reducing misspellings should be quite dramatic, and while at first sight misprints appear to offer a far less promising area for improvement by spelling reform, the analysis presented here seems to suggest that CS may somewhat reduce the frequency of misprints too. The improvement cannot however be precisely identified as was possible with misspellings: one cannot say that CS would abolish this or that type of misprint. Rather, it seems there is a general tendency for misprints to hide away in the second half of longer words, and if words are shortened as in CS, especially by removing redundant letters in final syllables, then statistically this should result in fewer misprints per 100 words of text. Whether it would result in fewer misprints per page is a rather different question: since CS enables more words to be printed on each page, it is quite conceivable that the misprints-per-page ratio would scarcely change. This however raises a far profounder question that will one day need exploring too: what implications does more economical spelling have for the printing industry?

## From around the World

### 10. AUSTRALIA

#### **Style in Australia: current practices in spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, capitalisation, etc.**

#### **Review by Valerie Yule**

ed. P H Peters, *Style in Australia: current practices in spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, capitalisation, etc.*: proceedings of 'Style Council 86', edited for the Dictionary Research Centre, Macquarie University, N.S.W., Australia. 196pp. ISBN 0 85837 588 S. Valerie Yule is in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia.

#### **The 1986 Australian Style Council**

*"The cagy pediatrician favored overfed osculators, emphasising sizable, digestable funneling"*

This represents a summary of some of the style preferences recommended at the end of the Style Council held at Macquarie University in New South Wales, 1986.

The 1986 Style Council was regarded as the first such gathering to be held in Australia, and possibly in the English speaking world, and received wide national publicity. It was a meeting of over a hundred people from the media, publishing, education, academia and government departments, and it was timely because a thoroughly revised second edition was being prepared for the Australian Macquarie Dictionary, the Australian Government Publishing Service was planning a re-edition of its Style Manual, various newspapers were revising house styles, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation also had questions for its Standing Committee on Spoken English. The topics of the Council covered spelling principles, pronunciation, foreign words, abbreviations, contractions and acronyms, punctuation, hyphenations and wordbreaks, formats for business correspondence, capital letters, sexism in language, colloquialisms, trademarks and technical language. This review focusses on content relevant to spelling and spelling change.

The general attitude of the Council was expressed by Arthur Delbridge, quoting Eliot's "teach us to care and not to care", in emphasising the need to agree on what to care about and what not to care about in language and language changes. The hope expressed by the editor of the Collins Australian Dictionary was that the Style Council could demythologise spelling issues by applying logic to them.

#### **Principles recommended for Australian spelling**

1) *Independence when change is desirable.* Australians perforce use both American and English forms of spelling, although some schools and newspapers stick to one form and some to the other. But Australians are coming to the point of feeling that they "can and should make their own decisions about it". (And the point was made that Australians don't keep to the English pronunciations given in their dictionaries, anyway.)

"The spellings handed down to us by tradition are not necessarily the best for present purposes... We are certainly in a position to make decisions independently of both the British and American position," said Pam Peters, of Macquarie University Linguistics Department. Australians have already begun to do this — for example, the government Public Service Style Manual and all

Australian newspapers endorse *ise/isation* endings for polysyllables, rather than American *ize/ization* or the mix of both found in Britain, she said. So that means that we do not have to bother with any special exceptions to the general rule.

2) *Elimination of exceptions from general rules.* Examples of recommendations are given below. Teachers commented on the extra expense and time which schools and migrant education service had to devote to teaching details of exceptions to learners.

3) *Propositions for spelling change as new words become familiar.*

i. There are dynamic elements in our spelling system

ii. We should expect the spellings of borrowed and newly formed words to change as they settle down, Arthur Delbridge proposed. "What is a useful spelling at an early stage of the word's history may be cumbersome later on," suggested Peters. Proposals for reform were aimed at streamlining orthography for ordinary communication and ensuring that people with a normal education could be confident of their ability to spell.

iii. Delbridge also suggested that where there is a choice of spelling variants, we should adopt the one which reflects aspects of meaning which are important for contemporary writers and readers, but the meeting, which gave a majority for his first two principles, was undecided about this third one.

### **Spelling trends**

So many new words have to have their spelling decided including new imports from other languages. "Presenting a clear visual identity for words is in fact one of the most important functions of our spelling," said Peters, who gave as an example, to *check a cheque*. The Malay word *amok* is given an additional Australian aspect of meaning when it is spelt *amuck*. "Words which have no close relatives in the language are difficult to use and spell, and spelling variants which improve their connections are likely to be popular." "When etymological detail is no longer meaningful we might as well accept the variants that are unencumbered with it" — for example, *leukaemia* comes from the Greek word *haim* meaning blood, but who recognises the connection in the spelling *-aem* today?

Longer spellings may help when the word is new, but later, for example, *co-operate* can become *cooperate* while *mousey*, *mileage* and *smoke-o* can become *mousy*, *milage* and *smoko*, on analogy with earlier words *lousy*, *dosage* and *wino*. (*Milage* is still used as in "what's the milage in kilometers to Newcastle?" and *smoko* can be a tea break.) Compounds often begin as two words, spaced, then they may be joined with hyphens, and then spliced, even at the expense of apparent phonology — such as *foothold*, *uphill*, *shepherd*. Often the sources of the words are forgotten, for example, how *umpire* came from the origin *un-peer*. And should spelling soon follow elisions that become universal in speech? — such as the way we now say /laibri/, /tempri/ and even /pli:s/, and may soon all be joining the high proportion of speakers who say /trifik/ and /bli:v/. (p.45)

### **Rationalisations recommended by the Council**

1) Rules for <-able, -ible>. Latin formations with <-ible> have been confused with the modern English ending <-able>. To take, <-able> as the single broader principle for the form would reduce spelling problems, and also help writers to be more aware of how such words are constituted.

2) <y, ie> <-ie> endings are often used for new words, which later take on the common ending of -y. For example, spellings *cabbie/cabby*, *cookie/cooky*, *yabbie/yabby*, often the <-ie> ending gives a colloquial and informal connotation

that seems to be part of the words — for example, ‘the *rellie* (relative) with the *hottie* (hot water bottle) and the *kiddie* with the *trannie* (transistor radio)’ and *prezzie* for a present.

Tops are dear IM sorry what little bushy done with it is still to come down on is so important it what is now a 3) <-er> as a single principle, dropping <-or>. One is the English and the other is the Latin agentive ending, added to a verb to make a word for the doer of the action, but they mean the same. To understand the distinction, writers need to know language history and when particular words came into the language, in order to help spell them correctly. This is hardly worth it, so why not just <-er>?

### **Some recommendations towards Cut Spelling**

Delbridge remarked that he had been told in China that Chairman Mao became keen on a drastically reduced list of simplified characters for general use in writing Chinese because he had bad memories of having to lug around, during very mobile warfare, the heavy field equipment needed to print the older character sets.

1) *Junction device — double or single letters?* Doubling <l> may be a good idea when the final syllable is stressed, eg. *rebellng* (cf. *regretting*), but why *revelling*, when we do not double letters for other consonants, such as in *budgeting* or *fidgiting*? The American practice of single <l> was recommended.

2) *Replacing <-our> with <-or>*. There are only about thirty words left which have the <-our> problem, because 18th century changes took <u> out of many other words, such as *errour*, *governour*, *horrou* and *terrou*. Spelling is not only shorter but easier if the surplus <u> is deleted, because then there are no confusing questions when suffixes are added — for example, reduction is required with words like *humorous*, *vigorous*, but there are contradictions such as *humorist* yet *colourist*, *honorary* and *honorific* yet *honourable*. With a single principle of <-or> the problems disappear. This form is taking over from <-our> in the Australian press. Pam Peters found that six of the quality press papers with a combined circulation of 1,500,000 in 1985 used <-or>, while five with a combined circulation of only 700,000 used <-our>. But they all varied in whether they would use American or British patterns of spelling in style guides for other words, and the decisions were made by individual editors, not by publishing houses.

3) *Dropping <e> from a suffix* except where it is needed to indicate soft <c> or <g> (junction devices p 27). Some words have retained <e> while the construction is relatively unfamiliar in the word, and then dropped it later, for example *arguable*, *likable*, *unmistakable*, *usable*. (This may shorten words, but for some words <e> can be a modifier for a preceding long vowel, and it might seem easier to have a general rule of just adding a suffix without modifying a root. And the alternative spellings of <s> and <j> for <c> and <g> would bear discussion.)

4) *<ae> to <e>*. Words like *paediatrician* could be spelt like *pedagogy*, as they come from the same Greek root.

5) *Sulfur* now replaces *sulphur* in technical spelling.

6) Some specific words discussed which are sometimes found in shortened spelling included *dreamt*, *spelt*, *earnt*, *leant*, *burnt*, *chancy*, *homy*, *phony*, *signaled*, *tonsillitis*, *capuccino*, *frangipani*, *guerilla*, *rack* (for *wrack*) and *ruin*.

## Survey of Style Guides

Pam Peters surveyed nine Australian newspapers, and where there were equal preferences for alternative forms, weighed in the Australian Government Public Service style manual (AGSM) and Macquarie Dictionary (MD) too. The survey shows there is more variation in the spelling principles used in Australian publications than one might expect. What follows is a selection from this survey, set out to show the ratio of preferences for shorter and longer spellings of words.

1) Shorter versions preferred: *livable* 3:1, *encyclopedia* 5: 1, *hemoglobin* 2: 1, *medieval* 2: 1, *primeval* 2:1, *aborigine* (n) 3:2, *abridgment* (AGSM + MD) 1: 1, *amok* 4:2, *bullseye* (not bull's eye; MD) 1:1, *chaperon* 3:1, *draftsman* 3:1, *guerilla* 5:2, *hoofs* 3: 1, *mementos* (MD) 1:1, *papaw* 2:1 *phony* 3:2, *program* 6:1, *rack (and ruin)* 3: 1, *salvos* (MD) 1: 1, *scarfs* (MD) 1: 1, *skiing* (not ski-ing) 4:2, *smoko* OVID) 1: 1, *tying* 3: 1, *veranda* 4:2.

2) Equal preferences for versions: *blamable/blameable*.

3) Longer versions preferred: *ageing* 5:2, *likeable* (AGSM + MD), *mileage* 4:2, *rateable* (AGSM + MD) 1:1, *saleable* (AGSM + MD) 3:3, *unshakeable* (MD) 2:2, *sizeable* (AGSM + MD) 3:3, *archaeology* 2:1, *haemorrhage* (AGSM + MD) 3:2, *leukaemia* 3:2, *annexe* (n) 3:1, *cappuccino* (MD) 1:1, *co-operate* 4:1, *frangipanni* (MD) 1: 1, *hara-kiri* 3: 1, *ju-jitsu* 2: 1, *liquorice* (AGSM + MD) 1: 1, 3:3, *sheikh* 3: 1, *tonsillitis* 3: 1, *wharves* (MD) 2:2, *yoghurt* (AGSM +MD) 1: 1.

4) Preferred form closer to more common pattern: *bale* (out a boat) 3:2, *caster* (*sugar*) (MD) 1: 1, *gaberdine* 2: 1, *gipsy* 3:2, *inquiry* 5: 1, *jail* 6: 1, *jibe* (in sailing) (MD) 1: 1, *miaow* (MD) 1: 1, *titbit* (MD) 1: 1, *tsar* (MD) 2:2.

5) Not closer to possibly more rational pattern: *flier* not *flyer* 4: 1, *gibe* 2: 1, *marijuana* 3:2, *marquis* 2: 1.

(These examples show what inconsistencies exist — as well as current trends towards simplification.)

## Survey of spelling practices

The spelling practices were surveyed of over a hundred members of the conference — professionals in education, media, publishing and computing, concerned with style manuals, lexicography and the Australian language.

84% use <-able> in *preventable* but only 16% in *deductable*

72% use <e> in *likeable* but only 38% in *usable*

51% use <-er> in *adviser* but 16% in *carburetter*

26% use <e> in *encyclopedia*, etc.

15% use <-or> in *honor* etc.

13% use in <e> in *fetus* etc.

0% use single <1> in *traveling* etc.

## Survey of spelling preferences

If given a free choice

74% would use <-or> in *honor*, etc.

69% would reduce <x> to <e> in *encyclopedia*, etc.

68% would reduce <oe> to <e> in *fetus*, etc.

54% would drop <e> before <-able> unless needed to protect soft <c> or <g>.

51% would not double <l> in *traveling* etc.

32% would use <er> in all agentives with current verb except for <-at> types like *calculator*

31 % would use <er> in all agentives  
27% would use <er> in all agentives containing a verb in current usage  
10% would keep <er/or> status quo.

Preferences for omitting full stops:

97% in abbreviations consisting entirely of capitals, eg MP  
94% in degrees awards etc, eg PhD  
89% in NB  
72% in eg, ie  
66% in abbreviations consisting of lower case eg am, asap  
43% in No = number

### **Some comments**

What an admirable and memorable Style Council! For those of us interested in spelling, there is much to learn.

One point that comes out clearly is how closely spelling is related to other aspects of language and the writing system. It's not just a matter of words — but of meaning and communication as well.

Some analogies might also be made from attitudes to the spelling of new and unfamiliar words to attitudes to spelling necessary for learners, for whom all written words are new and unfamiliar. For example, it is possible that spellings which are useful in learning to read may become actually cumbersome after the written words have become familiar — and we might look at the examples of some other countries, such as Israel and Japan, which give learners of reading more crutches than the literate adults require.

A second analogy is provided by transcribing Delbridge's remarks (p 45) about spoken language 'purists', to refer to spelling:

"No small group, however voluble, outraged — or self-righteous, no small group however committed to past forms because they are past forms, or to outmoded ideas of correctness, is likely to be able to impede... change... If the larger educated community, for its own unscrutable reasons takes it up and adopts this pattern, that is that. In time people in that grouping will find it unremarkable and hence acceptable and pleasing. People always find pleasing that which has a sufficiently high frequency of occurrence in the (spelling) type they elect to take on as their model, provided there are no disqualifying overtones of vulgarity, pertness or affectation."

(Nevertheless, our Australian pioneers still have a long way to come. In the last census in which Australians had to spell their religion, *Presbyterian* was spelt 383 different ways. I have the list.)

## 11. FRANCE

### **AIROE: an association for Spelling Reform in France**

Susan Baddeley is a member of the HESO research team (Histoire de l'Écriture et des Systèmes d'Orthographe) at the CNRS in Paris. AIROE: Association pour l'Information et la Recherche sur les Orthographes et systèmes d'Écriture.

#### **THE ASSOCIATION**

AIROE was founded in France in 1983. Originally an offshoot from a research team working at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, its main aim, as its name suggests, is to *inform* all those who may be directly or indirectly concerned about the problems of French orthography. Present members include linguists, university professors, schoolteachers, psychologists, journalists, typographers and members of the general public.

The Spelling Reform work group, although only one of several groups which make up the association, is by far the largest and most active. It was therefore natural that the Annual General Meeting of AIROE, held in Paris on November 18th 1987, should be largely devoted to their latest spelling reform proposals. These proposals were outlined by the group's president Philippe Cibois (who is also president of AIROE), before an assembly of about 50 people, including the eminent linguist André Martinet.

Modern French spelling is, together with English, one of the most complex spelling systems in Europe today. Ever since the 16th century, writers, grammarians and printers have been trying to find ways of simplifying it, and many reform proposals have come and gone. In recent times, reforms (which were carried out periodically in the past) have come to a halt. With today's economic and cultural competition, and the prospect of a united Europe in 1992, many are worried that French is losing ground, and will be unable to take up the challenge. The difficulties of French spelling are just one more reason for not learning it.

The difficulties of French spelling are a day-to-day trial for the millions of people unable to master it. It is one of the main causes of failure among schoolchildren; many professions are closed to people who "cannot spell", and it is a harsh standard for selection at many levels. A recently-founded "National Spelling Championship" (which has enjoyed great success) has shown that even the best spellers cannot avoid making at least some mistakes, and that there are whole areas in which no firm rules exist, particularly in the spelling of compounds and of loan-words.

Many difficulties in French spelling are anomalies, forms which have no function or justification (even etymological), and "everyone" agrees that something should be done about them. However, "everyone" includes a large body of otherwise well-informed public opinion, which believes, as one of our most eminent linguists recently put it, that a reform is "technically necessary, but socially unthinkable". There is no institution of authority willing to impose reform, and inertia is in fact the hardest force to overcome. A precedent is therefore needed: as Philippe Cibois pointed out, recent reforms of the monetary system and of telephone numbers caused a certain discomfort for a short time, but everyone got used to them in the end.

It is therefore absolutely necessary that a certain number succeed, even if only to prove to our reform) that it can be done. After much discussion, the Reform group have proposed a "minimum" reform, which was unanimously approved by the AGM. A few words should first be said about the reasons and principles which dictated the present proposals. A study of previous reform proposals

reveals that in the past reforms have succeeded only when all those concerned were in complete agreement amongst themselves, and when the reforms affected a limited number of clearly-defined issues. The term "reform" itself is also best avoided, as for many people it is synonymous with phonetic spelling. The AIROE proposals are therefore being presented as a simplification, or regularisation of the existing system, which will not greatly alter the appearance of words as people are used to seeing them. These proposals are also being presented as a long-term project, which will take several years to be fully accomplished, with children being taught the new forms at school, and older people being able to continue to use the old orthography if they wish.

### **AIROE'S PROPOSALS 1. Regularisation**

The first set of reforms concerns a limited number of particularly anomalous words, relics of past notation which are now in contradiction with modern rules of transcription. These include words such as *oignon*, and *événement*, *médecin*, etc., which will be spelt *ognon*, *évènement*, *mèdecin*, in accordance with present pronunciation.

### **2. The Circumflex Accent**

This accent is also in many cases a relic: in words like *maître*, *tête*, it was used to show the presence of a long vowel, an opposition which has almost died out. In other cases, the accent is used to show an open or closed vowel, or a back or front vowel. However, its use is very often anarchic, and it often leads to wrong pronunciations due to hyper-correction. The only cases in which it can be said to still be functional are in the distinctions between homographs such as *tache* 'stain' / *tâche* 'task'. Leaving out the circumflex accent would simplify things for keyboard operators, and would have the advantage of leaving a margin of freedom for certain regional pronunciations.

### **3. Doubled Consonants**

Many doubled consonants in French, as in English, have a diacritical value, i.e. if they were simplified, accents would have to be introduced to compensate for them. A lot of doubled consonants also appear in high-frequency monosyllables. For these reasons, AIROE has chosen to avoid for the time being a large-scale simplification of doubled consonants and has restricted its reform proposals to a limited set of words in which the greatest anomalies occur. In words derived from nouns ending in <-on> the consonant is sometimes doubled, sometimes not, and this leads to irregularities within families of words: we write for example, *fonction*, and *fonctionnel*, but also *fonctionalisme*. As for very recent words like *distribution(n)alisme*, even the best dictionaries do not agree amongst themselves. AIROE therefore proposes to simplify the doubled consonant in these types of derivatives.

### **4. Past Participle Agreement**

This is one of the most problematic aspects of French written grammar, and also one of the hardest principles for foreign learners to grasp. In most cases, agreement is purely a feature of the written language. However, studies of present tendencies reveal that more and more people fail to make the agreement even when it appears orally, such as in *la faute que j'ai commise* (or *commis*). AIROE feels that this increasing latitude in the spoken language should be echoed by a similar tolerance for written forms, and that failure to note the past participle agreement in writing should no longer be considered as a mistake.

### **REFORM STRATEGY**

It should be stressed that these simplifications are not intended to be imposed: it is important that people should have the choice whether to use the old or the new form, and especially that use of the new form should be accepted in examinations, etc. Given the choice, we have no doubt which forms people will choose to adopt in the long run.

The AIROE proposals have been sent to a number of linguists and public figures, many of whom



have already given their support. The next step will be to publish our proposals and arguments (with a list of signatories) in the national press. In the meantime, members of AIROE have agreed to adopt the 'new' forms in their own writings.

We also hope to persuade lexicographers to recommend the 'new' forms as acceptable variants in their dictionaries: an exhaustive list of 'old' and 'new' forms of all words affected by the reforms will be drawn up in the near future.

If the reform is absolutely watertight, already in use and recommended by people whose opinion may carry weight, we are confident that institutions such as the Académie Française (which recently dropped several reforms it had decided to adopt in 1975) and the Conseil International de la Langue Française (CILF) will be forced to take heed of it.

This reform will affect all French speakers, and those who use French in other countries. If you would like to give your support to AIROE's petition, or if you would like further information on the subject, please write to the association: international collaboration on such important issues can only help our mutual projects to succeed.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 7, 1988/1 p32,33 in the printed version]*

## **12. GERMAN-SPEAKING EUROPE**

### **Institut für deutsche Sprache: Sprachreport 4/87**

This latest issue of the quarterly report from the Institut für deutsche Sprache in Mannheim contains (pp.10–12) an account by Dr Wolfgang Mentrup of the latest developments on the spelling reform front as it affects Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, and Switzerland. We here summarise the main points.

#### **The Meeting**

The 5th meeting of the International Working Party for Orthography took place at Zürich University in September. The institutional participants from the four countries were:

- 1) the Commission for Spelling Questions from the Mannheim Institut für deutsche Sprache (West Germany)
- 2) the Orthography Research Group of the Zentralinstitut für Sprachwissenschaft of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR and the University of Rostock
- 3) the Orthographic Co-ordination Committee of the Austrian Ministry for Education, the Arts and Sport
- 4) the Working Group on Spelling Reform of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Education Directors.

#### **Punctuation**

The strict punctuation rules are a very troublesome feature of written German today. Basic principles and a set of rules for reform were agreed in 1986, but were now laboriously reconsidered, revised and refined, and a definitive system proposed. The inner resistance of even the experts present, in breaking with the ingrained linguistic habits of a lifetime, proved considerable. Particularly awkward was the question of how to punctuate parenthetical clauses.

The rules fell into three main groups: 1) marking the ends of sentences, 2) punctuation within sentences, 3) indicating quotations. Grammatical terminology was avoided as far as possible, rules being illustrated by examples instead.

What the Working Party wanted to do above all was to simplify rules that had proved too complicated for average users and therefore led to frequent 'mistakes'. Thus currently the sentence *seine Bereitschaft zu helfen war groß* has no comma, but the almost identical sentence *seine Bereitschaft, ihr zu helfen, war groß* requires two; but a comma is optional in *er beginnt (,) laut zu sprechen*. The new proposals are more permissive, allowing such sentences to be written with no comma. A comma is still obligatory however before many conjunctions, such as *daß*,, an admittedly more elementary rule that will nevertheless continue to trouble many foreign students of German.

### **Compound and foreign words**

The Working Party attacked the problems of compounding (in Germany they write *um so mehr*, but in Austria either *umso mehr* or *umsomehr*) and of foreign words, but we shall have to wait for further work to be completed before any useful conclusions can be announced.

### **The political situation**

Of particular interest to non-German spelling reformers is the political background to these discussions. Although the political authorities recently rejected proposals for generally abandoning capital letters for nouns, the climate is more favourable to the new proposals. The Interior Ministry and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the states in West Germany have asked the Mannheim Commission for its ideas on reform — though not on the sensitive issue of capital letters for nouns.

### **Future steps and past travail**

The next meeting of the Working Party (1988 in Austria or East Germany) aims to finalise the rules for compounding (including hyphenation), propose rules for spelling foreign words, and discuss phoneme-grapheme correspondence. The present series of discussions has already lasted over 20 years, but seen in a longer perspective they stretch back in effect to 1901, when today's spelling rules were sanctioned. The motivation and guiding criterion is user-friendliness, but if the signs at the moment look hopeful, the task has often appeared Sisyphean, and few of the participants expect to be crowned in glory as a result.

## **13. INDIA**

### **Some Views on the English Spelling Reform**

Madhukar N Gogate, Executive Director of Roman Lipi Parishad, the movement for romanisation of Indian languages, Bombay, sent the following to the Society's 5th International Conference.

1. English language originated in England, but is no longer England's monopoly. English is an international language. That is its glory. That is its handicap.
2. English is spread in many countries in varying degrees. Its impact on India is profound. To give a striking example, Britain has 5 million investors dealing in shares, etc, whereas India now has 8 million. They apply for new shares, transfer old stocks, read company reports, receive dividend warrants and so on, all in English.
3. India has background of nearly phonetic scripts for its languages. Despite this and big usage of English, India has zero interest in English spelling reforms. Personally I am interested in reforms, but when I discussed the subject with some thinkers in Bombay (such as teachers, businessmen, literature-lovers, etc.), I got no support.
4. There are two main reasons why Bombay thinkers are indifferent to spelling reforms.
  - a) The language problem is sensitive in multilingual India. Schoolchildren have to learn 2 or 3 languages and if an extra language — English with reformed spellings — is to be studied too, it may prove crippling.

b) Despite irregular spellings, English has status because of its rich technical literature. That is why non-English countries teach their students English. Cost of revising literature and retraining is prohibitively high. As a developing country, India cannot afford such projects. India may oppose spelling reforms at this stage.

5. Differences in British spellings (defence, colour) and American spellings (defense, color) pose difficulties. When two sides are adamant, for reasons of national identities, it creates a bad impression. My sincere request is that the reformers come to some unanimity. Admittedly this is a difficult task, since different persons have different opinions, different fads. But please note that when reformers interfight, the general public would prefer Status-quo.

6. Bombay thinkers refrained from giving opinions on details — whether cat should be respelled *kat* or *kaet*, etc. May I offer suggestion? Please consult professionals — like scientists, doctors, engineers, bankers. One may respell *cat* as *kat* but respelling C-vitamin as K-vitamin would be disastrous. Please try to make compromises considering both phonetic accuracy and convenience. Nothing is perfect in the world, and spellings need not be highly phonetic. Second suggestion is to come out with package reforms and not dose-by-dose reforms. Developing countries, even affluent United States, would not be able to spend funds on revising encyclopedias again and again. Third and last suggestion would be to present a package solution (unanimous if possible, or a set of alternatives) to various national governments. Every nation has its ego and would like to be consulted. Let us treat English-spelling-problem as a world problem, since English is a link language. Let the topic come for discussion at levels of Commonwealth and United Nations. This may prove time-consuming but that cannot be helped. In the process, the reformers should be prepared to accept some changes proposed by the World Community.

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 1988/1 7 p33 in the printed version]

[Stanley Gibbs: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Leaflet](#)]

## 14. 1971/72 New Spelling Amendments

### Stanley Gibbs

Sometimes I have noticed the 1948 and 1956 versions of *Nue Speling* quoted in the Society's correspondence. In fact during 1971–72 some important 5 amendments were made, and the *Nue Speling* as amended is the official policy for the Society until our revised version is officially approved. All of these amendments were designed and proposed by Herbert Wilkinson. The amendments are:

#### *Resolutions II 1971*

1 <dh> to be removed, <th> to represent <th> in both *that*, *thick* etc.

2 <oo-uu> to be reversed, thus *guud food*, *fuul moon* etc.

3 Alternatives *aafter/after*, *baath/bath* to hav a singl <a>: *after*, *bath*, *pas*, *gras* etc.

4 Replace *ue*, *uer*, *ueth*, *Uel*, *uerself* by *yoo*, *yoor*, *yooth*, *Yool*, *yoorsey*. But *u* to be used for *you* (*yoo* = *yew*).

5 For children, a ligature to be inserted during the learning stage only: consonants <ch, sh, thin, this, wh, zh, ng>, vowels <aa, ae, ee, oe, oo, ie, oi, ou, ue, nu>.

#### *Resolutions III 1972*

1 Double <r> to follow the five short vowels (formerly restricted to <arr, orr, urr>. Thus *karri*, *horrible*, *hurri*, and now also *cherri*, *lirrik* etc.

(Note: the idea was to make a tidy rule: all five short vowels have a following <r> doubled: <arr, err, irr, orr, urr, — SG)

2 Adoption of <o> for the long sound at the end of words: *tomato*, *kaliko* etc.

3 Adoption of *wur* insted of *wer*, to line up with *hur*, *sur*, *fur*, *stur*, *blur* etc; thus eliminating *wer* as a wordsign.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 7, 1988/1 p33 in the printed version]*

[Ayb Citron: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## **15. English Spelling, the Underclass, and the Distribution of Power.**

**Ayb Citron**

Ayb Citron is Exec. Dir. of BEtSS Better Education thru Simpl. Spelling.

A miserable inefficient English spelling system designed with a foreign alphabet in feudal eras for leisure classes, and used today in technological societies, constitutes an extreme case of cultural lag.

Spelling reform, brushed aside by the academic establishment, has been identified, when thought of at all, as a matter of pedagogy, as a debate in curriculum, or low-priority discussion in psycholinguistics.

However, the use of writing over its six-thousand year history reveals a clear trend — it spreads from use by a privileged few to wider usage by additional groups and classes. Furthermore, this history shows that, in general, those who use writing, whether nations, classes, or individuals, possess more power than those who do not.

Our own culture is now moving into a post-modern, computerized, information-processing, service-centered economy which demands higher levels of literacy than ever before. It is at this point that our educational institutions, despite remedial programs, are failing to reduce the number of illiterates in the population.

Illiterates and functional illiterates are especially helpless in the complex and technical society around them: they form an increasingly large sub-group characterized by multiple problems and constituting a relatively unyielding underclass.

The support of this tenacious and slowly multiplying group, costly in all social services, is felt as a growing burden by the other sectors of the economy.

A direct approach to this problem, which would be effective in radically reducing it, is a rationalized spelling system, with an emphasis on pre-school education and a re-emphasis on basic skills in the primary grades. The key element here is a reformed, rationalized spelling system along phonetic lines. This will mean the continuation of the wider distribution of power thru the wider distribution of literacy.

Further, a rationalized spelling system will improve the writing and reading skills of all Americans, and will stimulate greater productivity and vigor in the total economy.

Thus, the issue of spelling reform should be seen as Promethean, as an effort to meet the crisis in our society by the transmission to wider groups in our population of the means to power.

Spelling reform is not a mere 'matter of curriculum', it is an issue of the re-distribution of power.

## 16. A Literary Potpourri

### 1. REPRINTING HISTORICAL SPELLINGS

#### How do you spell Shakespeare?

*William Shakespeare. The Complete Works: Original Spelling Edition* edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford, 1456pp. £75, ISBN 0 19 812919X.

Opponents of spelling reform often claim that reform would make English literature inaccessible if the great works were not reprinted in the new spelling, or it would prevent them being appreciated, because their present appeal is inseparable from the 20th century spelling in which they are now usually read. These objections can be countered with observations such as: no spelling reform could be introduced that made existing texts unreadable; spelling reform is designed to make reading (and especially learning to read) easier, so literary works would become more accessible; older works are today already read in 'reformed' (or at least, modernised) spelling, so their appeal for modern readers hardly depends on the spelling; and we do not read them in the spelling intended by the author. But although the objections are clearly unfounded, the question of how to spell modern editions of old texts is serious, and one that spelling reformers cannot ignore.

A useful discussion of some of the technical issues involved appeared on 21 May 1987 the *London Review of Books*, with a review article by Frank Kermode entitled 'How do you spell Shakespeare?'. It discussed the orthographical problems facing the editors of the new Original Spelling Edition of Shakespeare (bibliographical details above). We here summarise those points that may have implications for the future reform of English spelling.

For nearly 40 years the merits of original spelling editions of Shakespeare have been debated. Arguments in favour of such editions are that modern spelling seriously misrepresents Elizabethan English, it can destroy rhymes, and (despite distortions introduced by printers) the 'original' spelling may show what the author actually wrote. Against that, it has been objected that, as errors in the original sometimes have to be corrected, the new edition would not all be genuinely original; the 'original' spelling was not Shakespeare's own spelling anyway, but that of copyists, printers and proofreaders; if the purpose is to give the text an Elizabethan flavour, it is not a flavour the Elizabethans themselves would have been aware of, as for them it seemed as normal as modern spelling does to us; and photographic copies of original editions are anyway more reliable than newly typeset editions; a better alternative is the Hinman edition of Shakespeare, consisting of facsimiles of the best surviving copy of each page of the First Folio, and thus superior to any single original volume. Even so, printing-house practices and compositors' vagaries still represent a largely unexplored minefield of typographical variation.

The editor of the new edition, Professor Stanley Wells, wrote the best account of the problems of modernising Shakespeare's spelling in 1979. One difficulty in recreating 'original' spellings is that of 'silent alteration'. For example, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the original edition has the phrase *pannelled me at heeles*, but later it was realised that *pannelled* made no sense, and that Shakespeare must have intended *spanieled*. However an earlier original spelling edition used the older form *spannell'd*, thinking it more appropriate than modern *spanieled*, but this was mere conjecture. So which spelling should a new 'original' edition use? Likewise in *Henry V* the Folio has *table* when the meaning suggests *babbled*, but Elizabethans would probably have written *babeld'*, so again, which form is now appropriate? Then there are differences between the Quarto and Folio editions of *King Lear* — the former has *roges for* the latter's *rogues*; so which should now be adopted?

The original spelling edition contains an essay by Vivian Salmon on 'The Spelling and Punctuation of Shakespeare's Time'. It seems that both Shakespeare himself and his compositors were very fanciful in their spellings: the latter added letters to fill lines, and substituted letters for those they had temporarily run out of. Furthermore they sometimes worked from transcribed text, and proofreaders may have introduced further variants.

Frank Kermode ends his article by doubting whether original-spelling editions have any significant advantage over facsimile editions.

Can we draw any lessons from this analysis for the treatment of literature in a putative reformed English orthography? The chronological gap in the case of Shakespeare is some four centuries, but with writing only one or two centuries old the problem does not now arise in anything like so acute a form: the Nonsuch edition of Jonathan Swift's works from the early eighteenth century preserves his spellings, creating a faintly antiquated flavour but scarcely distracting the reader. But how would it be if editions of novels that were written just twenty years ago appeared to young readers as strange as Elizabethan spelling does to us now? Several considerations may lead us to suppose that no real problem would arise. One is that people would easily become accustomed to the alternative orthographies (in Yugoslavia people read both the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets without difficulty). Another is that it is largely the more skilled readers who would wish to read texts more than a few days old. A third consideration, as already mentioned, is precisely that the essential criterion for a Stage I reform is that it should not appear too radical. A fourth point: objectors often imply the expense of retypesetting and reprinting would be prohibitive, but unreformed reprints could always be allowed, and with computerised typesetting, the changeover need not be expensive anyway. In short, although spelling reform would give rise to some tantalising dilemmas for the editors of literary reprints, the fears so often expressed by readers of the classics would appear unfounded.

## 2. REPRESENTING DIALECT

### **Charles Dickens: from *The Pickwick Papers***

From Chapter XXXIV. First published in book form 1837.

*The following slightly abridged and linguistically almost surrealistic excerpt of dialogue from the trial scene in Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* is based on the confusion of /v, w/ that was characteristic of Cockney English in the nineteenth century. Readers may like to ponder the logic of Sam Weller saying he spells his name with <v>, which his father (the voice in the gallery) pronounces as we, although he calls his son Samivel.*

"What's your name, sir?" inquired the judge.

"Sam Weller, my lord," replied that gentleman.

"Do you spell it with a 'V' or with a 'W'?"

"That depends upon the taste and fancy of the speller," replied Sam; "I never had occasion to spell it more than once or twice in my life, but I spells it with a 'V'."

Here a voice in the gallery exclaimed, "Quite right too, Samivel. Put it down a we, my lord, put it down a we."

### 3. A FUTURE ENGLISH? Russell Hoban: Riddley Walker

London: (Jonathan Cape, 1980) Picador, 1982, 214 pp., E3.50, ISBN 0-330-26645-4

*This remarkable novel is set in a primitive community some 3,000 years after a holocaust has devastated civilised life. English has undergone significant changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and spelling. The latter has a strong resemblance to Cut Spelling, with forms like: shel, tel, wel, stil, til, wil, ar, wer, befor, mor, candl, litti, rniddl, tho, thot, thru, yung, yu, cud, suddn, hart, reddy, lissen aftrwds, chyld, dryd, dy, fynd, hy, kynd, lyk, mynd, myt, shyn, sylent, guyd. Final consonant strings ar reduced, as in las, groun for last, ground; and the past tense of verbs inflects with <-t> rather than <-d>, e.g. kilt for killed.*

*Russell Hoban writes: "Years ago I read ... Voices in the Dust by Gerald Kersh. In... the future ruins of London little humanoids about three feet high ... sing corrupted versions of old songs such as Who Killed Cock Robin?:*

Ookil 'karabin

Isapara mibanara

Ikil 'karabin Ikil 'karabin

Ookil 'karabin Ookil 'karabin

I found this language distortion very beguiling... I began *Riddley Walker* in perfectly straight English but early on there began to be very limited language corruption... and various neologisms creeping in. As this began to spread I recognized that it was perfectly natural... In developing my vernacular I trusted my ear which being an American ear has in it the sound of black vernacular and that of the Appalachian hillbillies."

*Here is the opening of Riddley Walker:*

"On my naming day when I come 12 1 gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there hadnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen. He dint make the groun shake nor nothing Ue that when he come on to my spear he wernt all that big plus he lookit poorly.

He done the reqwyrd he ternt and stood and clattert his teef and made his rush and there we wer then. Him on I end of the spear kicking his life out and me on the other end watching him dy. I said, 'Your tern now my tern later.' The other spears gone in then and he wer dead and the steam coming up off him in the rain and we all yelt, 'Offert!'

The woal thing fealt jus that littl bit stupid. Us running that boar thru that las littl scrump of woodling with the forms all roun. Cows mooing sheap baaing cocks crowing and us foraging our las boar in a thin grey girzel on the day  
I come a man."

## 4. SPOOF SPELLING

Luis d'Antin van Rooten: *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames*

London: Angus & Robertson 1968

*This collection of 40 very short poems (from which we reprint one below), apparently in French and garnished with elaborate pseudo-annotations, will totally mystify French readers; on the other hand, English-speaking readers able to pronounce French spelling may gradually realise that the language is in fact somewhat nearer to home... Permission to reproduce this version of a famous nursery, or 'Mother Goose', rhyme has been granted by Angus & Robertson (UK).*

Chacun Gille [1]

Houer ne taupe de hile [2]

Tôt-fait, j'appelle au boiteur [3]

Chaque fêlé dans un broc [4] est-ce crosne? [5]

Un Gille qu'aime tant berline à fetard. [6]

[1] Gille is a stock character in medieval plays, usually a fool or country bumpkin.

[2] While hoeing he uncovers a mole and part of a seed.

[3] Quickly finished I call to the limping man that

[4] Every pitcher has a crack in it. If a philosophy or moral is intended, it is very obscure.

[5] "Is it a Chinese cabbage?" It is to be assumed that he refers to the seed he found.

[6] At any rate he loves a life of pleasure and a carriage.

## Spelling Curiosities

### Fride Souls

On 15.5.1987 the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewed Ruth Perry's *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, the biography of an early English feminist, quoting the following from an 18th century luncheon menu: "*Fride souls, I more hen, salid, stude frute and brill creem.*"

### Furgie

On 15.10.1987 the Duchess of York, known to the press as Fergie, visited the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, on her birthday. The Birmingham *Daily News* reported: "Royal birthday-cake makers were left red-faced when one cake read *Happy Birthday FURGIE.*" Embarrassed; trainee chef Gillian M... 17, admitted she had no idea she had made a spelling gaff. 'It was not my fault. I asked the pastry chef where I work, and he told me how to spell it.'"

### Hindoostanee

Spelling variation in words not originally written in the roman alphabet has long been a feature of English. Collins Dictionary gives 4 forms for the Chinese fruit *lichee*, *lichi*, *litchi*, *lychee*, and a recent catalogue of microfiche reprints of 19th century writings on linguistics includes these spellings of language-names: *Arabaic*, *Asante*, *Bengalee Bengali* — 1821), *Burman*, *Cingalese* (1821; *Singhalese* — 1830), *Eskimaux*, *Goojurattee*, *Hausa* (1843; *Hausa* — 1877), *Hindee*, *Hindoostanee* (1829; *Hindustani* — same author 1831), *Kafir*, *Kisuaheli*, *Manks*, *Mosambique*, *Sanscrit*, *Suahili* (1882; *Swahili* — 1884), *Teloogoo* (1821; *Telugu*, 1852), *T'hai*. We note that the later forms tend to adopt international values for long vowels in place of the eccentric traditional English <ee, oo>, as when *Hindoostanee* became *Hindustani*.

### Fo'c's'le

Certain groups of English words have been prone to shortening, thus in the days of sail *bosun* (*boatswain*), *cox*, (*cockswain*), *fo'c's'le* (*forecastle*), *gunnel* (*gunwale*), (1815; *sou'wester* (*southwester*). In this century widely used technical and scientific innovations have also been shortened, initially sometimes with an apostrophe: *bus* (*omnibus*, 'bus), *kilo* (*kilogram*/-*gramme*), *phone* (*telephone*), *photo* (*photograph*), *plane* (*aeroplane*, *airplane*), *pram* (*perambulator*), *pub* (*public house*). The electronic age seems to be producing a group of its own: *bit* (*binary digit*, cf. *pram*), *fax* (*facsimile*, cf. *cox*), *tele* (or *telly*? cf. *kilo*, colloquial still for *television*, but for how long?).