

Spell4Literacy



Name spells a change.

Media release: January 2004.

The **New Zealand** section of a group advocating spelling change has adopted a new name.

The Simplified Spelling Society here is to be called **Spell4Literacy**.

Allan Campbell, the society's New Zealand spokesman, announced the change.

He said the society was often seen to be advocating spelling change for its own sake, but there was more to its campaign than that.

International literacy surveys showed that the complexity of English spelling was a major cause of the large gap between children who mastered reading and writing and those who did not, he said.

Updating spelling would help in raising literacy levels.

He said the society needed to draw attention to this, and the new name was designed to do this.

Spell4Literacy is asking the parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Science to look at the connection between the English spelling system and literacy standards, with a view to initiating international action to update spelling in order to improve literacy standards. In the meantime, the new name will apply only to the New Zealand section of the society, which is based in England.

The website remains at www.spellingsociety.org

Lettr from Allan Campbell

to politicians, related groups, and Joe Bennett, on our new lettrhed. In the ones to the Minister of Education and the chair of the select comittee, i reminded them of our request for an inquiry.

Dear

We have changed our name!

The Simplified Spelling Society in New Zealand is to be known as Spell4Literacy.

Too often, we are seen as advocating spelling change for its own sake. There is more to our campaign than that.

A major reason for the poor literacy standard of less able pupils in New Zealand - and in the whole English-speaking world - is the complexity of English spelling. International literacy surveys show English speakers have the largest gaps between able and less able learners.

The inconsistency and unpredictability of spelling has led to children having greater difficulty in learning to read and write than is necessary. Many children overcome this handicap, but others do not and are put off reading and writing.

The Society believes it is now the only group focusing solely on spelling change as a way to improve literacy learning. It wants its new name, Spell4Literacy, to make plain to all the close connection between spelling and literacy.

In the meantime, the new name will apply only to the New Zealand section of the Society, which is based in England.

If u would like more information please ask, or check our web address, which remains at www.spellingsociety.org .

NZ Educational Institute 25/01/2004

SPELL4LITERACY

Thank you for your letter (6 January 04) advising of the society's change of name. Congratulations on your attractive branding of the organisation.

It was interesting to view the comments on text messaging and electronic spellchekers on the society's website. Thank you for drawing the website to our attention.

Yours sincerely
Sandra Aikin
for National Secretary

Call for New Zealand to lead spelling reform.

by Amanda Warren. 10 Oct 2005. Christchurch Press.

A spelling reform group is renewing calls for a parliamentary review into how children learn to spell.

Spell 4 Literacy wants English spelling overhauled internationally to make it easier to learn.

The group, the New Zealand branch of the international Simplified Spelling Society, is about to launch a campaign for a parliamentary review into the teaching of spelling in New Zealand schools.

It will be the fourth such attempt to effect change, after three unsuccessful applications to the education and science select committee.

Convener Allan Campbell said he hoped continued pressure on the Government would result in action.

Campbell attracted publicity this year when he went to the United States to protest outside the national spelling bee competition in a bid to call attention to the spelling reform cause.

He said too many children were struggling to learn to spell and it took English learners on average much longer to grasp spelling than learner of other languages.

"We want our spelling improved, and when I say improved I mean changed to the degree where kids don't have to struggle to learn to read and write," Campbell said.

In response to critics who said it would be too difficult to change the way the English languages was spelt, Campbell said: "well, you've got to start somewhere."

He believed New Zealand, being a small country where new ideas were more easily introduced was perfectly placed to lead international change.

While the group had no firm idea on what spelling system should be introduced, most preferred a more phonetic system.

"The main thing is it should be consistent," Campbell said.

Remedial spelling expert Craig Jackson, also a member of the spelling reform group, has developed a programme to help poor spellers by encouraging phonetic spelling in the first instance.

Quirky spelling blocks many from becoming literate.

Mar. 2006. Press Release: Spell 4 Literacy.

The Christchurch and Auckland regional finals of the New Zealand Plunket Spelling Bee (respectively, this Thursday, March 16, and following Thursday, March 23) are to be picketed by Spell 4 Literacy, a New Zealand group advocating spelling change.

"We want to draw attention to the fact that, altho many children, such as bee participants, hav the ability and persistence to master much of our quirky spelling and become competent readers and writers, there ar others who, thru no fault of their own, ar not so fortunat," said Allan Campbell, a spokesman for the group.

"If we want our literacy standards to match those achieved by some non-English European languages, we need to make our spelling an easy tool to master, and not an irritant and hurdle to overcome."

Spell 4 Literacy congratulated those who wer competent enuf to participate in the bee, but their good fortune should not hide the fact that English spelling was a huge and unnecessary hurdle for many. "Unnecessary because other languages hav shown that updating spelling can make it a logical, easy-to-manage tool that eases, not hinders, literacy learning," Campbell said.

The bee, open to year nine students, has four regional finals, in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland, befor a national final in Wellington on April 1. Competitors and their schools compete for numerous prizes. The national winner will go to Washington, DC, to participate in the Scripps National Spelling Bee final, where the winner's major prize is \$US12,000.

Spell 4 Literacy is also calling for the parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee to hold an inquiry into ways of upgrading spelling so it helps the acquisition of literacy.

OUP survey and NZ SSS member responses.

Children are wizard at 'tabloid spelling' by Sally Pook

The Daily Telegraph. Wednesday, September 4, 2002. page 7.

Today's children are a generation of "tabloid spellers", not hesitating when asked to write the name David Beckham but at a loss when it comes to Jane Austen or William Shakespeare.

According to a survey by Oxford University Press of more than 400 children aged 10 to 12, understanding words associated with popular culture – such as "metatarsal", the small bone in the foot that Beckham broke before the World Cup, or spelling "Hogwarts", the wizard school in the Harry Potter books — often present few problems.

However, children struggle with common, everyday words such as "favourite" or "parliament".

Vineeta Gupta, the senior editor of Oxford Children's Dictionaries, said: "We were surprised at how many children had managed to spell even quite difficult words correctly if they had a connection with popular culture that caught their imagination.

"Nearly 15 per cent, for example, could spell metatarsal — a word almost unheard of before Beckham's fitness problems — but only 11 percent managed millennium.

And while it wasn't surprising that only 10 per cent could spell mystique, a whopping 37 per cent assumed that it could only mean the girl band Mis-teeq, which they did spell correctly."

OUP said the poll might fuel concern about the influence of "trash culture", but added that the findings were positive in that they showed what children could do when they were interested.

"Battle Droid", for example, a word that originates from the Star Wars films, was spell correctly by two-thirds of the children. Words associated with football, such as "squad" and "defender", did equally well.

But only eight per cent knew how to spell the name of Jane Austen. And Shakespeare — although having several historical variations — was believed by some children to be two words.

Ms Gupta said: "We expected results to reflect current sessions, but were surprised at how the spelling of common everyday words suffered in comparison."

Nick Seaton, the chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, said the survey showed that the government's national literacy strategy was not working as it should.

"Popular culture is having much more influence on young people and the teaching they are getting in primary schools, and this clearly needs to be remedied," he said. "Children are not getting the knowledge that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives."

Spelling quiz. Per cent spelt correctly

Hogwarts	85	David Beckham	80	Squad	78
Defender	77	Battle droid	66	Theatre	62
Favourite	58	Eighth	56	Application	55
Shakespeare	32	Parliament	28	Edinburgh	24
Metatarsal	15	Playwright	13	Millennium	11
Mystique	10	Jane Austen	8	Personnel	7

Christchurch Press, New Zealand. [September 13]

Sir — Normally we can be good at what interests us, or is easy.

Because the words interested them, children in the Oxford University Press's survey (September 5) surprised by spelling *hogwarts* and *metatarsal*, both partly logical and easy to memorize. Not many memorized *playwright* or *mystique*. Logic was of little help.

Potential contestants in next year's US National Spelling Bee are now memorizing words such as *kittel*, *aition*, and *giaour*. Only some will remember them, even tho all want to.

Memory is an inefficient way to learn spelling. Learning each word individually takes time, with no guarantee that it can be recalled when needed.

Logic is a much better method. Learn the basics, and unknown words can be tackled confidently, without having to be committed to memory.

Unfortunately, in English it doesn't work well. When we upgrade our spelling, it will.

— **ALLAN CAMPBELL, SSS member.**

[September 17]

Sir — When will the Simplified Spelling Society realise that it is not the spelling of words that is wrong or doesn't work, it is that over time the pronunciation has changed.

When the English language was first being written down 1000 years ago, the words were spelt as they sounded (as advocated by the Simplified Spelling Society).

A *knight* was a "*Kaa-nig-hit*", *plough* rhymed with *stuff*, as *rough* still does. Even by Shakespeare's time words were spelled according to the pronunciation of the writer.

Just eemajeen threein ti reeed ae bik reeteen bein staarlieceen.

— KEN CLARK

[September 19]

[In a few words] Ken Clark (September 17) is concerned that spelling reformers don't understand that English spelling and pronunciation have drifted apart over the last 1000 years. We knew that. We also believe that it would be easier to respell '*knight*' as, say, '*nyt*' than to repronounce it as '*cnihʔ*', which then meant *youth*.

— IAN HUNTER, SSS member.

[September 19]

Sir — Of course the Simplified Spelling Society realizes that our spelling reflects original pronunciation. Is Ken Clark advocating we change pronunciation to match spelling? Good luck to him!

It is easier to change spelling. Among the languages that have done so in the past century are Afrikaans, Albanian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, German (recently), Greek, Hebrew, Irish, Malay/Indonesian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese.

English last did so when Samuel Johnson published his dictionary in 1755, and Noah Webster published his in 1828.

The proliferation of English pronunciations (some caused by dysfunctional spelling) now precludes an orthography fully reflecting pronunciation. However, spelling can be made regular.

Not only does this make sense, it also makes learning to read and write easier. We anguish over literacy levels, and spend a lot on educational resources to improve them. Regular spelling will help in that.

— **ALLAN CAMPBELL, SSS member.**

[September 20]

The trend towards simplified spelling seems to be another symptom of the laziness inherent in modern society. But those of us who can still be bothered to make an effort should take heart in the belief that the same people must eventually become so lazy that they will no longer bother to breed and, sooner or later, be responsible for their own extinction.

— BRENT HIGGISON.

[September 25]

[In a few words] I presume that Brent Higgison, not being one of us "lazy" spelling buffs but an admirer of the old ways, wrote his letter with a quill pen, sealed the envelope with wax, jumped on his horse and rode post haste to the office of The Press to deliver it. Or did he use a computer, typewriter, or ball pen? Old ways aren't always best.

— **ALLAN CAMPBELL, SSS member.**

[September 30]

Sir — As my horse stands ready for another mad dash, I would like to respond to Allan Campbell (September 25).

I switched to an electronic typewriter several years ago, then only because quill pens were becoming so hard to find.

I am all for progress, but simplified spelling seems to suggest that the development of the language might, some day soon, draw to a grinding halt. Is this a matter of drastically shortening the length of the marathon so that even the most lethargic of us has a chance of winning?

If that is the case, it is not difficult to imagine that we might end up perusing each edition of *The Press* while huddled together in a cave.

— BRENT HIGGISON.

[October 2]

[In a few words] Brent Higgison can relax, as the language and spelling develop on slightly different paths. But English-speaking children develop their reading and writing skills at a much slower rate compared to many non-English-speaking countries. The only lethargy I see is in the continuation of such an inefficient spelling system.

— **CHRISSEY PARKER, SSS member.**

[October 3]

[In a few words] I am not advocating changing pronunciation to match spelling, only to point out that a living language is always changing and evolving, so any rules are going to be outdated very quickly. When it comes to a spooble respell of *knight* as "*nyt*" — is tat "y" a shote "i" as in *Egypt*, or an "i" as in *by*, or an "e" as in *lonely*, or a "y" as in *your*. Possible pronunciations of this *nyt* are *nit*, *net*, and *nyet*.

— KEN CLARK

[October 3]

Sir — There are good reasons to simplify English, but I suspect reform would kill it as a written language.

For all its sins, English is a rapaciously acquisitive repository of history, in both spelling and grammar. If we were allowed to write it as we spoke it, in no time at all the residents of Cardiff, Calcutta, Kingston, Cleveland, Kowloon, or Kaukapakapa would no longer be able to write to each other. Heaven knows, they have enough problems conversing.

Without the anchor of the past, and with no central authority like the Academie Francaise, simplified English would quickly disintegrate. Truth is, I doubt they've much chance of altering anything. The language has too much momentum, too many diverse influences.

Of course, the simplified English supporters' wish may come true as the cellphone texting generation grows up, and txt bcoms th norml mod.

— IAN ORCHARD.

[October 5]

Sir — Ian Orchard (October 3) is concernd that simplified spelling of English would lead to chaos as residents of Cardiff, Calcutta, etc, would all adopt mutually unintelligible spelling systems.

Writing phonetically would indeed produce international chaos, as a glance at differences in International Phonetic Association coding of New Zealand and British dictionaries would attest.

But there are many non-phonetic spelling proposals which are much simpler that traditional spelling, yet are at least as "accent deaf".

Internashnli, lerning to reed and ryt iz a multi milyn dolr industri, and thaer is lots of room for saevings.

— IAN HUNTER, SSS member.

[October 15]

Sir — Thanks to Ian Hunter (October 5) for his letter on simplified spelling. I now know I am completely against the whole concept.

When I got to his last paragraph (written "simply") I had to slow down to half the speed I had been reading at before, in order to decipher it. It was like reading a five-year-old's writing.

It did not make the paragraph much quicker to write. The word "*savings*" (spelt "*saevings*") actually had more letters in it than usual. "*Read*" was spelt "*reed*" — no shorter, no easier to

learn, and no distinction from the plant "*reed*". The same goes for "*there*" (spelt "*thaer*"), "*of*" ("ov"), and "*industry*" ("*industri*"). And "*internashnli*" needs no further comment.

So called "simplified spelling" would create enormous confusion for many years, with no really obvious benefits at the end of the process. We hav a system that works, why bother changing it?

— SAMUEL DENNIS

[October 17]

Sir — Samuel Dennis (October 15) found that a short example of a coherent simplified spelling was hard to read after probably less than a minute's practice. Hardly surprising.

However, he did correctly observe that it was like "a five-year-old's writing". And therein lies the rub.

Five-year-olds try to write consistently, because they don't know the myriad exceptions. And it is so much easier for learners to master a consistent spelling system.

Thoughtful readers could imagine the worldwide benefits if we could reduce the cost of teaching kids to write by, say, 20 per cent, and improve literacy by 20 per cent.

For how many centuries did our ancestors say about Roman numerals : "It works, so why bother changing it"?

— IAN HUNTER, SSS member.

[October 17]

[In a few words] Samuel Dennis (October 15) judges spelling reform from one system out of hundreds. What about the front-page example (October 5) where cars were selling for "lo bux"? Spelling is changing, and I would prefer organised change to these individual schemes. The Simplified Spelling Society is aware that both learners and users need spelling that is accessible rather than alienating.

— CHRISSY PARKER, SSS member.
