

**News8.** [*Underlined words and letters are presented as headings or in italics here.*]



## **Simplified Spelling Society Newsletter. Summer 1985**

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Founded in 1908, the Society has included among its officers: Daniel Jones, Horace King, Gilbert Murray, William Temple, H.G. Wells. Its stated 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:

President: Professor John Downing

Chairman: Chris Jolly

Secretary: Stanley Gibbs

Treasurer: Laurie Fennelly

Public Relations Officer: Mona Cross.

Enquiries and subscriptions (£5 p.a.) to the Secretary.

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Editor of this **Newsletter** is Mona Cross, but material for future issues should be sent to Chris Upward, at home or at work: Department of Modern Languages, Aston University. Material for the Winter 1986 number should be sent before Christmas 1985.

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## From the Editors

### 1. Mona Cross writes:

July 1985

Dear Members and interested people

As you see, this News Letter is a joint effort. Chris Upward came to my aid in spite of the fact that it was a busy time for him at University. I'm sorry that, for health reasons, I have to give up the work of News Letter editor. It has been such a pleasure to hear from you and to know of your ideas. Chris Upward is the kind of person who will feel the same. He, too, will regard the News Letter as the link which draws us together to form a Society.

As you will have noticed in the article "The Shorter the Sweeter" of July 1984, Chris advocates "Cut Script". In this he is at one with Professor Abe Citron and Valerie Yule. However, although that links up with the Committee's pressure for the omission of redundant letters, it does not lean towards the aim of making reading easier to learn by children and foreigners. Most of the letters I receive from members are concerned with phonetic scripts which contain minor variations on the proposals of the Society's Working Party

Mr Dalglish of Chertsey writes "Any attempt at phonetic exactitude must fail for the widely different pronunciations used in different areas". I think he's right. I believe that phoneticians ignore the adaptability of children. My niece in Wigan reads "bath" for "bath", but my niece in Staines reads "bahth". Neither would be grateful for an alteration in the spelling. The boy who reads "'e 'ad 'is 'at on 'is 'ead" would feel the same if the aitches were omitted.

Although the Society may concern itself less with a fully phonetic orthography it will undoubtedly continue to press for the omission of redundant letters such as those in debt, knee, brought, ready.

I wish more of you were coming to the Conference which is being organized for the weekend of July 26 in Southampton. Time, distance, cost are inhibiting factors but the three Conferences which I've attended have been very rewarding. The people who speak are so alert, so forward looking — and they're most friendly.

It's friendliness as well as thoughtfulness which comes across in your letters to me. I shall miss you and your articles but I look forward to seeing your name again in the News Letter which Chris Upward will edit.

Wouldn't it be a pleasure to feel that ordinary people and teachers became familiar, with our ideas? At the moment most have never heard of them. Maybe that can be the object of our future activity?

I wish you a happy year, and a reward for your interest in Spelling Reform.

Mona Cross

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

## 2. Chris Upward writes:

Mona's editorial letter explains how I come to be involved with the Newsletter. I am sorry it is a little late in appearing: I have to plead the short notice at which I took over, the priority I had to give to the Conference — and the fact that I am learning the ropes. I hope readers will forgive the delay. But I must first pay tribute to Mona's work in producing the Newsletter so regularly over the last few years, and to her fortitude in preparing this issue in such trying circumstances.

As a relative newcomer to the Society, I must be a stranger to many readers: so let me introduce myself. I studied French and German nearly 25 years ago, but I also have a smattering of several other European languages. Although since 1970 I have been lecturing in German at Aston University, in Birmingham, I have more recently become interested in Linguistics, and it is this, together with my knowledge of the orthography of other languages, that gives me my particular angle on the subject of spelling reform of English. But I have Valerie Yule to thank for first arousing my interest in it, with an article on Cut Spelling.

What of future Newsletters? It had already been agreed that a new cover would soon be adopted, which hope you will see on the next issue. The printing will be at Aston University, from which some new ideas on layout may arise. I shall be trying to encourage contributions from experts outside the Society, and the different sections in the Newsletter can perhaps include one for snippets of news and amusing (or horrifying) misspellings that readers may like to send in, and another for reports on meetings of the Society. The next issue however will be largely taken up by papers and reports from the Southampton conference. For later numbers I look forward to receiving your articles, letters, news, interesting orthographical specimens, but above all perhaps your ideas and comments about how you would like your Newsletter to develop in future.

One thing is very apparent from the various contributions to this Newsletter: there are societies and groups of spelling reformers, not to mention individuals, round the world, all producing lists of possible reforms, and while these lists often have words or patterns in common, they also often demonstrate different views, both of the best way to spell particular words or phonemes, and of the priorities that should be given to this or that kind of reform. It is clear that these differences will have to be reconciled if spelling reformers are to mount an effective, united campaign, and readers may like to communicate their thoughts on this problem. What is needed is a concept that will embrace all but the most eccentric possibilities, so that the public can be offered a scaled menu of alternatives. But more of this in the next issue: at least one idea has already been suggested.

### 3. Professor A C Gimson Vice-President of the Society

As many members will know, the Society has lost one of its eminent Vice-Presidents. His colleague, Dr John Wells, Reader in Phonetics at University College London, wrote to the Society telling of the death in his sleep of Professor A C Gimson on 22 April this year. As a successor, both at University College London and in the Society, to the now almost legendary figure of Daniel Jones, Professor Gimson leaves a great gap in both spheres. Members may wish to write of their recollections of him for a future newsletter. An obituary appeared in the Times on 27 April, emphasising his academic distinction particularly in the study of English pronunciation, but alas did not mention his interest in spelling reform. However, his authoritative work, 'An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English', will live on, and through it his knowledge and expertise will continue to benefit the Society: the Society's present Working Party which is revising 'New Spelling' finds itself repeatedly referring to Professor Gimson's work for guidance, and is much indebted to its profound and comprehensive analysis of the spoken language, with all the implications that has for the written form.

## Spelling Reform round the World

### 4. 'Spelling Action' (Australia),

'*Spelling Action*' (Australia), whose January–March edition is the last to be edited by Harry Lindgren (Garry Jimmieson has now succeeded him), states its aims as follows: 'The acceptance of SR1 and present spellings as alternatives, and no other spelling reform until SR1 is widely accepted. The SR1 rule: The clear short vowel-sound as in bet is written E.' The cover, has a splendid cartoon showing a small schoolgirl stumping her t.o. teacher with the question: 'Well, if S-E-D doesn't spell "said", what does it spell?'

The editorial discusses the 'Great Spelling Debate' triggered off in the Australian 'Sunday Mail' by Bill Herbert (see his letter in the correspondence section of this Newsletter), and shows how two dimensions to the spelling-reform question in Australia have emerged: the first is the argument between supporters and opponents of any kind of spelling reform, and the second is the argument between the SR1 camp represented by 'Spelling Action' and the Herbert camp, which advocates an attack on the GH problem as the first stage.

A substantial article by Professor T R Hofmann from Japan comments sagely on this kind of disagreement: 'We need unity rather than scrappy infighting... If we need a battle-cry, let it be 'Any reform is better than none!'. He then goes on to make a point about SR1 such as has also been made in England: the regular cutting of A in the large majority of SR1 words which contain the pattern EA=/e/ (e.g. head = hed) constitutes an incontestable and totally rational improvement on t.o.; but the ragbag of other changes included in the SR1 list, such as any=eny, are by no means so easy to accept. (Indeed at the Southampton conference this July Professor Gregersen of New York pointed out that one of them, ate=et, is quite simply wrong for Americans who always pronounce 'ate' as 8.)

Harry Lindgren responds to such objections with his usual rumbustious vigour, which is gratifying to read if one agrees with him, but one does wonder what success this style has in persuading the unconverted...

### 5. The Simplified Spelling Society of Canada

(President Ted Culp, Toronto, Ont., Canada) advocates the following 15 reforms as a Fase 1 measure:

1. The ending -our has been changed to -or: color, labor, rigor.
2. The silent E which comes after a short-vowel sound in the only or last syllable, has been dropped: hav, som, gon, lov, hous, etc.
3. The ending -gue has been changed to -g: catalog, demagog, leeg, etc.
4. The PH (for the F sound) has been changed to F: fantom, falanx, atmosfeer, alfabet, paragraf, fosfor, etc.
5. The last letter of a double consonant (except in: all and -all) has been dropped: gras, glas, staf, wel, wil, til, etc.
6. The A of the digraf EA, when EA sounds like E as in 'let', has been dropped: hed, ded, brest, heven, etc.

7. The EA digraph which sounds like the long E as in 'feed' has been changed to EE: each, teech, leed, eest, feest, etc.
8. The A of the digraph -ear-, when -ear- sounds like -er- as in 'term', has been dropped: ern, erth, lern, perl, etc.
9. The word 'ov' replaces 'of', which has been pronounced 'ov' for a long time.
10. The ending -re has been changed to -er: center, theater, liter, meter, specter, etc.
11. The ending -le has been changed to -el: middel, littel, appel, simpel, struggel, etc.
12. The long and final U sound is written as final U in thru, tu, yu, du.
13. The I of the digraph -ir-, when -ir- sounds like -ur- as in 'turn', has been changed to 'u' in the following: gurl, gurdel, burd, furst, burch.
14. The O of the digraph -or-, when -or- sounds like -ur- as in 'turn' has been changed to U: wurd, wurid, wurk, wurship, wurm, etc.
15. The silent B has been dropped in: dum, thum, lam, dout, det, etc.

## 6. 'Speling Magazin' (Canada)

In '*Speling Magazin*' (Sept–Dec 1984), edited by Ken Tillema, Orthografi, Chatham, Ontario, Canada, there is correspondence about simplification of the spelling of numerous medical terms, whose meaning is made all the more elusive for the lay person by their frequently grossly distended and irrational spelling. A news item in the *Magazin* begins:

'De le Inuit et European lanques dans Canada, le orthografi de Anglich est trop difficile. Of all Nativ and foren langwajes in Kanada, th speling of Inglich is most difikolt. Le espelant de mots sur papier est non ressemblant le entendais son dele mots.

And it ends:

Si y (ils) praises U, demand l'gouvernement à institut reform de lettresant pour Français parleurs. If it pleezes yu, ask th Parlement tua institut impruvments for letering out meenings for Canadion speakers

The bulk of '*Speling Magazin*' is written in a roughly phonographic system, which does however have the feature of spelling post-accentual shwa + L as OL: edukasionol, prinsipol, unspelabol.

## 7. Germany

In *Germany* the spelling-reform issue has been much more alive in recent years than in the English-speaking world, although paradoxically the spelling of German has a much higher degree of phonographic regularity than English. The problem with German spelling has in fact been quite different from the root problem in English, which is the uncertainty about which letter to use for which sound in which word.

In German, the difficulties arise over certain conventions. When must one write words with capital letters? When they are nouns — but such is the power of German to turn verbs and adjectives into nouns that it is often unclear which words actually are nouns. When must one write a comma?

Usually, to separate finite clauses — but again, recognising the appropriate finite clause defeats most people at times. Where must one hyphenate words that have to be split between lines of text? The strict rules differ according to whether a word is of German or foreign origin. And when must one join verbs to associated words to form a compound, and when not? If one joins a noun to a verb, does it cease to be a noun?

A standard orthography came later to German than to English — not until 1862 did the Prussian Ministry of Education insist that schoolchildren should all be taught the same spelling, and Duden produced his first spelling dictionary in 1880. In 1901 a conference at which the Austrians and Swiss were also represented cut the redundant H in words like Thor, Thier, but did not show the Kaiser the disrespect of cutting it in Thron. Since then there have been scarcely any changes — except that 'scales-maker' acquired an extra A (Waagenbauer) to avoid confusion with its homophone 'vehicle-maker' (Wagenbauer).

In the last 20 years the question of the above-mentioned writing conventions has been (off and on) under discussion. Back in 1973 the West German education authorities (in consultation with the other Germanspeaking countries) agreed that capital letters should be reserved for proper nouns and the beginnings of sentences — but neglected to take any steps to ensure their decision was implemented! The prospects now are less bright, as a more conservative (and Conservative) mood has swept West Germany, and the political opposition to change is greater than it was. Internationally, there are gradations of enthusiasm: the GDR in the East is firmly on the side of this reform, Austria is more or less for it, Switzerland is cautiously waiting to see which way the cookie crumbles, while West Germany, on whom it all depends, is at present an obstacle. The great names of the past were always divided on the question too, most notably those fraternal Dr Johnsons of German, the brothers Grimm — Jacob was for the reform, Wilhelm against.

It is estimated that 80% of mistakes in written German come under one of the headings listed above. In June 1984, the Minister of Education for Rhineland Palatinate was interviewed by 'Der Spiegel' news magazine on the subject, and made to write a dictation. Here is how he performed (corrections for his 6 errors are italicized in brackets):

Wir sollten das bislang Erreichte nicht geringschätzen, aber in bezug (*Bezug*) auf unsere Auslandsaktivitäten wäre es das beste (*Beste*), die Kooperation mit den Skandinaviern so bald wie möglich wiederaufzunehmen (*wieder aufzunehmen*). Mit den Schwierigkeiten — sie haben in der letzten Zeit überhandgenommen — wollen wir rasch fertig werden, nicht zuletzt aus Imagegründen.

Vor Verhandlungsbeginn müssen wir uns aber noch darüber klarwerden (*klar werden*), welche Wünsche und Forderungen von seiten (*Seiten*) der Gesprächspartner an uns herangetragen werden könnten und inwieweit sie überhaupt Rechtens (*rechtens*) sind. Von vornherein muß sichergestellt sein, daß sich ein möglicher Kompromiß nicht zuungunsten unseres Unternehmens auswirkt.

The Minister favours reform.

CU

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## Correspondence

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

### 8. From *Ayb Citron*, Better Education thru Simplified Spelling, Michigan, USA, two letters:

1. Bill Herbert, who has organized Australian Society for Simplified Spelling, and I have been corresponding on possible short word list on which groups working on simplified spelling in various English speaking lands could agree. We now agree on the following list of thirty words:

|         |        |         |       |          |                 |
|---------|--------|---------|-------|----------|-----------------|
| ought   | aut    | nought  | naut  | light    | lyt             |
| though  | tho    | thought | thaut | fight    | fyt             |
| through | thru   | caught  | caut  | might    | myt             |
| hicough | hicup  | taught  | taut  | fright   | fryt            |
| plough  | plow   | tough   | tuf   | eight    | ait (ate = ayt) |
| enough  | enuf   | rough   | ruf   | right    | rt (write= ryt) |
| slough  | sluf   | laugh   | laf   | cough    | cof             |
| dough   | do     | height  | hyt   | thorough | thuro           |
| drought | droust | night   | nyt   | freight  | frayt           |
| brought | braut  | sight   | syt   | draught  | draft           |

In support of differential spelling of homophones please glance at enclosed comic strip from DETROIT FREE PRESS, 25 May 1985... When the bear says 'Airplanes', the reference is to Wilbur and Orville Wright, a play on words impossible if all 'rights' are spelled alike.



I hav on file a number of examples of this play on words made possible by differential spelling of homophones. For example, a business school advertises that it will teach people 'how to right a letter'. Much pleasure as well as some accuracy would be lost to our written forms if we abandon differential spelling of homophones where differentiates.

2. REVISED NEW SPELLING looks pretty good, much improved over NEW SPELLING. I hav seven suggestions (there are more, but I will hold this to seven.) I write as a member of SSS.

1. For purposes of GAINING ACCEPTANCE, hard C should be retained. As long as C is always hard (except in the digraph CH) it will giv children no problem. Words such as 'kat' and 'kan' look odd and sloppy and will make acceptance of the system much more difficult than need be.

2. For purposes of acceptance Q should be retained. Since Q ALWAYS has the sound of /kw/ 'quick', 'quality', 'quiet', etc, can be spelled as 'qik', 'qaluty', 'qyet'. I recommend that the present alphabet be retained. Even if you retain the spelling of proper names, people whose names begin with Q will strongly resent the dropping of Q from ordinary spelling, as will many other people.



3. For purposes of acceptance, I recommend retaining Y for /ee/ at the end of words such as 'meny', 'lykly', 'nesusery', 'hapuly', truly' or 'trooly' etc. Whenever we can, we should stay with present practice. We are still not overworking Y, because it can easily be perceived in final digraphs such as 'ly', 'ry', 'ty', and at the end of words such as 'meny', 'funy', '.glory', 'hapy', etc.

4. I believe that E (now used to make A, E, O, U long and also long in final position) should have only one other use and that is as short E as in 'bed', '.sed', 'fed', 'let', 'red', etc. Other than that let E alone. The closest sound we now have for schwa is U as in 'cur', 'fur', 'murmur', 'femur', 'purpose', 'turn', etc. A word such as 'difficult' should be spelled as 'diffucult'. A word such as 'paragraph' should be 'perugraf'. All the 'ar', 'er', 'or' endings should be 'ur'. Two principles are involved: the best sound we have for schwa is really 'u'; and E will be overworked.

5. The initial sound in a word such as 'aside', or 'abound', is U as in 'up', 'but', 'hut', 'cut', etc. We should therefore use U in such words; i.e. 'uroez', 'usyd', 'ubowt', 'utak', etc. People do not say /a/ in articulating these words, they say /u/.

6. Because of present common pattern of 'day', 'may', 'say', 'lay', 'ray', play', 'stay', 'gay', 'hay', 'nay', 'way', etc., we should express long A as 'ay'. Thus we should write: gray, grayt, fayt, hayt, stayt, layt, aybi, taybl, faybl, rayt, etc.

7. I believe that we should express at least ten of our MOST COMMON words (in addition to 'a', 'i', 'u') in one letter...

*(The penultimate page of the [February 1985 Newsletter](#) Item 13 lists the 100 abbreviated forms of Professor Citrons . SPD SPLNG, with their frequencies — EDITOR)*

Frequencies are taken from 'Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English', by Henry Kucera and W. Nelson Francis, Brown University Press, Providence, R.I., 1976, pages 6, 7, 8.

The frequency of one of these words means the number of times it was found used in a million words taken from assorted representative texts, including newspapers, fiction, non-fiction, law, business materials, educational materials, letters, etc.

The total frequency of 222,839 for the 25 words (*i.e. those reduced to 1 letter — EDITOR*) means that a student mastering these 25 words would have at command over 22% of the words needed to write and read English at the high school level.

Since the average English word consists of five and a half letters, a million words involves 5,500,000 letters. In these 25 words we find we have saved 382,005 letters, which is 6.94% of five and a half million. Thus we can say that if these 25 words are used, we will save nearly seven percent of the time and effort taken to write English....

Finally, I urge the serious consideration of SPD SPLG. Here is the first paragraph of the three on page 93 of NEW SPELLING, in SPD SPLNG:

T ansur, thn, tu this objecn z tt wht givz no trubl i t spoekun langwij z nt lykly tu giv trubl i its ritun form; n tt if i wn or tw caysez trubl uroez, it wd b cownturbalunst by t uvoyduns o ambiugueuty in uthur caysez.

In this form this paragraph requires only 165 letters, whereas the REVISED NEW SPELLING text requires 198 letters. SPD SPLG, in this passage, produces a saving of over 16 percent over REVISED NEW SPELLING.

In a sentence such as: Do you have the experience for the job? D u hav t x f t job? SPD SPLG produces a saving of 60%.



[Robert Craig: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 9. From Robert Craig, Weston-super-Mare, Avon.

Dear Mona

Please find enclosed my latest version of the Gettysburg Adress. As you will see the spelling used is nearer to Nue Spelling than wer my previous efforts, but is mor fonetic than Nue Spelling.

The chief feature is the use of Q as a vowel. I hav been reluctant to use Q in this way, but it is an ancient practice to use consonants as vowels — the Greeks derived our present vowels from Semitic consonants. Q = 0 in ON, O = O in COME.

### LINKON'Z GETIZBORG ODRES

Fqqrskqr and sevon yiorz ogou aar fathorz brqqt fqrth qn this kqntinont o nyu neyshon, konsiyvd in liborti, and dedikeytid tu tho prqpozishon that ql men ar kriyeytid iykwol. Nau wi ar engeyjd in o greyt sivil wqr, testing whethor that neyshon, qr eni neyshon sou konsiyvd, and sou dedikeytid, kan lqng endyur. Wi ar met qn a greyt batolfiyld qv that wqr. Wi hav kom tu dedikeyt o pqrshon qv that fiyld az o faynol resting-pleys fqr thouz nu hiyr geyv ther layvz that that neyshon mayt liv. It iz qltogethor fiting and prqpor that wi shud du this, bot in o larjor sens we kanqt kqnsikreyt this graund. Thouz breyv men, living and ded, hu strogold hiyr hav konsikreytid it fqr obov aar pqqr pauor tu ad qr ditrakt. Tho world wil litol nout nqr lqng rimembor whqt wi sey hiyr, bot it kan nevor forget whqt they did hiyr.

## From Ted Culp, President, Simplified Spelling Society ov Canada, Toronto, Ont. Canada ([see the SSSC proposals](#) Item 5):

I am riting about English speling reformation. Yu kno that we need it *now*, and that we hav wasted alrede 50 years becauz ov very sereus errors.

We must now avoid all major errors, the biggest ov which iz trying tu develop a fully reformd nu speling. This shud *not* be dun, and it must *not* be dun. I see now that the SSS alrede haz adopted a lot ov speling reforms (5 lists by the Wurking Grupe). This iz more than enuf — exsept that sum or all ov Fase 1 /SSSC reforms shud be adopted by the SSS.

Yu now hav only one dominant and prinsipal task: tu promote, tu uze, tu difuze, and tu screem continuously about theez eesily acseptabel reforms.

We must avoid errors that wil create further debilitating disasters.

## From A C Daigleish, Chertsey:

... My own views on spelling are those of a complete layman. I am concerned that, in the search for technical excellence in the system proposed for adoption, we produce something that is unacceptable to the millions without whose complaisance we will get nowhere.

An acceptable system must have an appearance similar to t.o. and must be as readily comprehended as t.o. by the masses. Any attempt at phonetic exactitude must fail from the widely differing pronunciations used in different areas.

For these reasons I am attracted to the idea of reform by radical omission suggested by Christopher Upward in the July 1984 'News' and I fear that the Working Party is on the wrong track.

## **10. From *Rae Elser*, Veterans Administration Hospital, Lyons, New Jersey, USA,**

An excerpt from several notes he has sent, this one dated 29 May 1985, concerning political affairs in America:

Jak Andersn iz not iksplicit, bət ie think hi haz insied infərmaeshn. Hi sez, "Volcker wil probəbli leev dhə Fedrəl Rizəəv Baud əəli nekst yìə." Ie feeəl wi shuud get maugijiz on kondəminiəm uenits bie 31 Disembə — bifau hiz səksexə rilesiz dhə wotə bihiend dhə dam əv det — runəwae inflaeshn.

## **From *Bill Herbert* convenor of *Advocates of Simplified Spelling Australia*, Kenmore, Queensland, Australia,**

Several letters developing the idea of a list of 'unphonetics' as a first stage, the following being its latest form (but [see letter from Ayb Citron](#), above, for, further details):

First step of 30 words all now using unphonetic GH (ough, 6 pronunciations! augh, igh). A write-in invitation in Queensland newspapers showed high 85% favour change for ough and augh. New and old spellings can co-exist with new gradually gaining, as happened in metrication in Australia

...

Further steps could be foreshadowed — SRI, drop final E, F for PH, gross unphonetics like one, once, tongue, does, some, was, foreign, yacht.

## **From *Garry Jimmieson* Editor of '*Spelling Action*', North Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia:**

... Many thanks for the issues of your 'Simplified Spelling Society Newsletter'... The material you are printing is most interesting and informative — there's certainly a lot happening.

Please find enclosed a copy of "Spelling Action", the first of many I will send your Society. I believe all communication lines must be kept open and honest — even if we disagree on issues. Harry edited this one, for my first one will be coming out before the end of June — not long now! Keep your issues flowing off the presses.

## **From *Gilbert Rae*, W Hampstead, London:**

The article entitled 'Phonetic Simplification of English Spelling' (Newsletter February 1985) has on the left side of its last page a list of words with the letter O converted to long U, excepting the word 'two'.

The author now thinks that it would be a more practical arrangement to convert 'two' in the same way as the others, making it 'twu'. This restores the link with twa/twain/twice/twin.

The bottom words of the list — 'toe' and 'tow' — can be omitted for the present.

## **From *David Sephton*, Primrose Publishing, Cambridge:**

... We are involved with 20 foreign languages, and I must confess that the thought of simplifying the spelling of most of them fills me with consternation.

I feel that the final objective is admirable, but surely the changeover period for introducing a major change in spelling of any one language would be chaotic.

How do you answer the point that the current spelling of words reflects significant depths and

changes in the language over a long period, and gives pointers to meaning?

## Articles

[Kenneth Ives: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Book](#)]

### 11. Kenneth H Ives: Adoptability Criteria Applied to SSS Stage 1

SPELLING REFORM STAGE 1, as adopted by the Simplified Spelling Society in April 1984, brings together the various reforms which have considerable backing in the field. What is needed, in order to get them readily adopted, is a "repackaging" for "adoptability" — easy teaching and learning for those who become interested in adopting spelling reforms. The following principles may well guide such an effort.

1. Most speakers and writers of English were not taut by fonetic rules, and the fonics of present English are so riddled with exceptions and alternatives that most casual users cannot easily and reliably apply a fonic rule. Hence:
  - a. Lists of words affected by a proposed change are essential. These, should contain the most frequent examples of the change.
  - b. For memorizability and for use by proofreaders, these lists should not exceed 15–25 words for any one change. The full list for SR 1 is 264 words, the short list 72 words. The revised list for DUE is 58 words. Both are unworkable.
  - c. Derivatives of words on these lists, which axe similarly pronounst should be similarly respelt.
2. Experience in publishing materials with some simplified spellings indicates that readers more often balk if more than about 1% of words are changed in spelling at a time (at least in early stages). This means several changed words appear on an average page in a small (14x22 cm or 5.5x8.5") book.
3. Some words need more than one change in spelling. This can confuse followers of reform if they are askt to change their spelling of a word a second time soon after the first change. In practice, this may mean that such words should be left off short lists of examples until their final spelling change is made. Some of these may need to be grouped into an early reform step.
4. Each step should have a clearly defined change or set of changes.
5. Examples given should usually include all those given in the most frequent 2,000 words (occurring 50 or more times in a million). These account for about 80% of words in an average text. A word counting less than 50 would appear less than once in 80 pages in a small book.
6. Early steps should include some of the most difficult and confusing of present spellings.
7. Early steps should include changes with the highest acceptability ratings, from surveys of potential adopters.
8. After a change has been introduced, words needing this change in addition to an earlier one can be included in lists for the second change. Words needing previous changes as well as this one can be included in lists for this change.

Applying these criteria to STAGE 1, we get a "teachable" package of 5 steps for adoption one at a time by adults.

STEP 1: Drop silent "gh", change it and "ph" to "f" where so pronounced,  
with some vowel spelling changes.

SR OUGH: altho, tho, thru, thruout; enuf, ruf, rufly, tuf; baut, braut, faut, aut, saut, thaut, thauts.  
(These 15 words count 3,449 in a million average words of text.)

SR AUGH: caut, dauter, taut; laf, lafing, laft. (These 6 count 326)

SR PH: emfasis, fenomena, fenomenon, filosofy, filosofical, filosofer, fone, telefone, fosforus,  
fotograf, fotografic, fotografs. (These 12 count 424)

These 33 words of Step 1 count 4,199 or 0.4 % of an average.text.

STEP 2: Short "e" sound spelt "e". (SRI)

List 1: agen, agenst, ahed, alredy, eny anything, ded, deth, frend, frends, hed, helth, hed (verb),  
hevy, insted, meny, ment, redy, sed. (These 19 words count 8,246)

List 2: bred, brekfast, breth, frendly, frendship, heded, heding, helthy, heven, hevily, lern, lerning,  
redily, spred, thretning, wepon, wether. (These 18 words count 898; range 26–83)

The 37 words of STEP 2 count 9,144 or 0.9 %.

STEP 3: Silent (useless) "e" dropt in "ar, hav, -ate" words,

SR DUE 1. ar, we'r, you'r arn't. (These count 4,641) hav, havn't, I'v, we'v. (These count 4,138)  
accurate adequate appropriate climat, definite delicate desparat, elaborat (adj.), estimat  
(noun), favorite graduat (noun) immediat inadequate privet, separat (adjective), ultimate  
unfortunatly. (These 17 words count 902)

These 25 words of STEP 3 count 9,681 or 1%.

STEP 4: Silent (useless) "e" dropt in "were, more, -ne, -se" words.

SR DUE 2: wer; mor, moreover, furthermor; befor, scor, wor. (These 7 count 6,782)  
determin, doctrin, examin, gon, medicin. (These 5 count 411)

defens, els, expens, fals, hors, hous, household, intens, loos, promis, purchas, vers, wors.  
(These 13 count 1,425)

These 25 words count 8,618 or 0.9 % for STEP 4.

STEP 5: Drop silent "e" on "-ive" words pronounced "iv"; other -ve words.

List 1: activ, creativ, curv, detectiv, effectiv, executive, giv, impressive, liv (verb), nativ, negativ,  
objectiv, relativ, sensitiv, twelv. (These 15 count 1,378)

List 2: attractiv, collectiv, competitiv, consecutiv, destructiv, effectivness, exclusiv, expressiv,  
extensiv, initiativ, involv, legislativ, massiv, primativ, productiv, respectivly. (These 16 count  
526; range 26–44)

These 31 words of STEP 5 count 1,904 or 0.2 %

Total STEPS 1–5, 147 words counting 33,546 or 3.4 %.

Final "s" rules for step 4. "-s" pronounced "s" except: 1. plural and possessive pronounced "z"  
except "ts". 2. Frequent words pronounced "z": as, has, is, his, was.

What these STEPS leave out are less frequent examples of the proposed changes. Thus STEP 2  
lists 37 of the 264 words affected. List 1 accounts for over 80% of occurrences, List 2 for another  
10%.

In conclusion, STAGE ONE as initially presented has too many examples for easy adoption at one  
jump — 177 words in shorter lists. It would make over 3% of changes in an average text. From  
experience, both factors are more difficult than the average user would find manageable. STAGE  
ONE was therefore reorganized, and divided into five STEPS for easier adoption. The principles  
proposed can be used to guide further spelling reform steps.

## 12. Kenneth H Ives: *Some Early Further Steps in Spelling Reform*

With the adoption of Spelling Reform STAGE ONE by SSS in 1984, attention can turn to development and discussion of further stages. The 8 principles for "adoptability" proposed in a previous article need to be applied in these proposals.

Irregular words, and those requiring more than one change, are likely to be left aside if reform steps adhere to one rule each. Hence gathering many of these into an early reform step would clear up many troublesome anomalies.

Since "z" is the least used letter in the alphabet, though its sound is 12th in frequency, at 3% of total fonemes, wider use of the letter seems called for as an early reform. The rule that "-s endings in plurals and possessives are pronounced 'z'" is so regular, and has so many examples, it should be let stand. The frequent examples of "-s pronounced 'z'" (as, has, is, his, was) are a special problem and should also be left for later. This still leaves a great many which could well be regularized early.

The present rule for past endings is easy for writers, "add -ed", but not for readers. Adopting the reading rule to spellings would not increase the total rules, and would simplify reading. The rule is "-ed is pronounced 't' after k, p, s, sh, x, l m, n." Words which have already made the change include built, felt, kept, meant, sent, slept, swept (952 count, or 1/10 the total so pronounced).

The most frequent letter in the alphabet is "e". Both SR1 and DUE steps improve the regularity of its use for the short "e" sound. Another early reform might well improve the use of "ee" for long "e" sound. At present, the most common spelling for this sound is "final -e in short words" — be, he, me, she, we. This is regular, and follows a more general rule that final single vowels are pronounced long, as if followed by an "e" (as many were earlier) (go, so, are examples of this larger rule). The next common spelling for long "e" is "ea" which is non-fonemic, and is used for several other sounds. While the "e-consonant e" spelling is less common than "ee", and is regular for readers, no rule helps writers to tell when to use that spelling.

Short word lists follow for a second stage of 6 proposed early steps of spelling reform.

Step 6: Irregular words, and 2+ change words.

wun, wunce, wuns, everywun, wun's; dun. (These 6 words count 4,336)

urly, urlier, urth; foren, grate (adj.), gratefully, grater, gratest; ieland, ielands; masheen, masheenery, nasheens; moov, mooving; nolij, peepl, peepls, skeem, wimen. (These 20 words count 3,175)

naiborhood, naibors, naiboring; thuro, thuroly. (These 5 count 183)

These 31 words of STEP 6 count 7,694 or 0.8 %.

STEP 7: "s" pronounced "z", plus some vowel changes.

theez, thoze; becauz, cauz, cauzed, cauzes; uze (verb), uzed, uzing; mezure, mezured; faze, fazes, fizical, fraze, frazes. (These 16 words count 5,373)

clozed, houzes, huzband, muzic, muzical, oppozit, otherwise, prezent, prezentad, propozed, raized, rize, roze, rezult, rezults, thouzand, thouzands. (These 17 words count 2,237)

These 33 words of STEP 7 count 7,610 or 0.8 %.

STEP 8: "s" pronounced "z" — more irregular and less common words.

bizness, bizy, cuzin, dizeez, duz, duzn't, eezily, eezy, reezon, reezons, sez, seezon. (These 12

words count 2,326)

chooz, choze, chozen; dezire, dezired, exercize, houzing, looz, noze, obzerved, pozitiv, prezence, raiz, refuzed, reprezented, suppozed, surprzed, unuzual. (These 19 words count 1,150; roots range 50–79)

These 31 words of STEP 8 count 3,476 or 0.3 %

STEP 9: "-ed" endings pronounced "-t".

List 1: askt, developt, dropt, establisht, finisht, fixt, lookt, markt, publisht, pusht, talkt, stopt, wisht, workt. (These 14 words count 1,946)

List 2: accomplisht, approacht, attacht, burnt, distinguisht, equipt, jumpt, mixt, parkt, promist, remarkt, rusht, slipt, spelt, stept, washt. (These 16 words count 562)

These 30 words of STFP 9 count 2,508 or 0.3 %.

STEP 10: "ee" for long "e" sound; "ea" spelt words.

List 1: cleer, cleerly, eech, eest, feer, heer (verb), heering, increes, increest, leev, reeving, meen, meening, meens, neer, neerly, reech, reecht, reed (verb), reeding, reel, reely, yeer, yeers. (These 24 count 5,971)

List 2: appeer, appeerance, appeered, appeers; deel, deer (adjective), eez, eezier, heet; leed, leeding, leeders, leadership; seet, teecher, teeching, teem. (These 17 count 1,442)

These 41 words of STEP 10 count 7,413 or 0.7 %.

STEP 11: "ee" for long "e" sound; "e consonant e" and "ei, ie" words.

e-e: compleet, compleeted, compleetly; concreet, extreem, extreemly, heer (Adverb), meer, meerly, seens, seveer, supreem, theem. (These 13 words count 1,783)

ei, ie: acheev, acheeved, acheevment; beleef, beleev, beleaved, beleevz; breef, briefly, cheef, feeld, feelds, receev, receeved, yeeld. (These 15 words count 1,412)

These 28 words of STEP count 3,195 or 0.3 %.

The 6 STEPS proposed for STAGE 2 have 194 words, count 31,896 = 3.2 %.

Steps 7 and 8 would increase the use of the letter "z" from 0.06% of letters to about 0.33%, over 5 times its present use, affecting over 60 of the 2,000 most frequent words.

The use of "-t" for past endings pronounced "t" expands them to about 3 times as many occurrences, raising "-t" spellings to 40 % of past endings so pronounced.

Steps 10 and 11 would about double the use of "e" spelling, from about 16% of "long e" sound to about 30%, and drop "ea" spellings from 19% to 9%.

In conclusion, even tho short lists are used, for "adoptability", substantial increases in fonemic regularity can be achieved by these proposed early steps of spelling reform. One reason for making these changes early is that future steps can then include examples needing s/z, -ed/-t, and ee changes, as these simplifications will already be familiar.

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

### 13. David Stark: Alphabetic Consistency in Reading

To someone interested in spelling reform, it may seem axiomatic that the inconsistent and complicated relationship between the written and spoken word in English is the main cause of literacy difficulty among English speaking people. However, there have been many studies into literacy problems in English, and in the books produced, little or no mention is made of the orthography as a factor, nor of reform being considered as a solution to the problem. Where previous attempts at reform are mentioned, they are quickly dismissed as irrelevant.

Certainly, the mental processes involved in reading and writing are far more complex than most spelling reformers realise. Reading is not just "barking at print", and writing involves far more than matching graphemes to phonemes. Spelling reformers, if they are to be taken seriously, must not regard reform as an abstract theoretical puzzle, but must understand the reading and writing processes and the part which more consistent phonographic correspondences could play in making literacy easier to acquire.

Let me leave the writing process for another article and first of all consider reading. A large number of studies have been carried out into reading problems, but unfortunately the results of these are seldom encouraging for spelling reformers. Probably because linguists do not consider the orthography as a variable factor, they tend to look to other areas of the reading process to seek solutions to reading problems. Also, many studies seem to infer that the English orthography does not pose much greater difficulty than alternative orthographies in other languages. Figures are often quoted to show that about 4–5% of the people in certain non-English speaking European countries, with more alphabetically consistent orthographies than English, have serious reading difficulties. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit in Britain estimated that 6% of the adult population in England and Wales is functionally illiterate.

Assuming that one can be satisfied that the criteria used in measurements of literacy in different languages are comparable, one is inclined to conclude that English speaking people suffer little more, if at all, from reading problems than our foreign counterparts.

Furthermore, one study suggests that only 1% of Japanese have severe reading problems. If this figure is true, it challenges the belief that an alphabetic orthography is automatically better than an ideographic one. While it may take an entire school life to master the minimum of 2000 characters necessary for functional literacy in Japan, results appear to indicate that the efficiency of being able to translate directly from visual symbol to meaning is worth all the effort. One American study substituted English words by Chinese ideographs, and found that many retarded American readers mastered these in a matter of weeks, whereas they had struggled for years to absorb alphabetic relationships.

Let me try to find an explanation for these apparent anomalies, anomalies that is for advocates of spelling reform, by exploring the part which phonographic correspondence plays in the reading process. Spelling reformers may be surprised to find out how small a part this is.

Reading is all about drawing meaning from written or printed text, meaning which is being conveyed by the author. The whole exercise is a detective hunt, a process of using clues in the text to build up hypotheses of intended meaning, and testing these to confirm if they make sense, based on one's own experience and knowledge. One could also use the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle, where one is trying to build up an overall picture of a subject using individual pieces which can be separately identified but which have limited or variable meaning on their own, out of



context.

One might expect alphabetic relationships to play an important part in the identification of the individual jigsaw pieces, that is, the individual words in text. One might use sequences of individual letters or digraphs to build up pronunciations which one would recognise as meaningful words. While there is some scope for such an alphabetic analysis, in practice we only partly use alphabetic clues in reading, preferring instead to identify whole words, parts of words and groups of words as visually meaningful elements. We usually go straight from printed word to meaning without trying to determine pronunciation.

To understand why we do this, we must understand what "short term memory" is, how it works, and how it holds information until a search has been made in the "long-term memory" for clues to meaning.

Short-term memory is capable of holding small amounts of information for a short period. It is ideal for remembering telephone numbers between looking them up in a phone book and dialing them. A short telephone number of 6 or 7 digits can be remembered in this way, but if an area code of perhaps 4 or 5 more digits is added one will usually have to write the number down, unless of course the area code is held in one's long term memory.

Short term memory is also necessary for mental arithmetic. Imagine one is adding up a string of numbers, say  $8+7+3+5$ . One would start by adding 7 to 8 to give a sub-total of 15. The 8 and 7 would then disappear from the short term memory, leaving the sub-total to be added to the 3. A new sub-total of 18 is remembered for as long as it takes to add this to the 5 to achieve the result of 23.

While individual numbers will usually be processed one at a time using relationships stored in one's long-term memory (for example  $8+7=15$ ), to save time one might take pairs of numbers which one knows add up to 10 and process these as individual units. For example, one might start with the 8 and notice the  $(7+3)$  as a combination which means 10, and go straight from 8 to a sub-total of 18.

The combination of letters to form a word uses short term memory. Supposing a child learning to read comes up against the word "consult" and does not recognise it, that is, the word is not familiar enough to him for its visual image to be stored in his memory. He would then try to determine the pronunciation of the word, since he will know many more words by their pronunciation than by their visual appearance.

The most common pronunciation of each letter is placed together on a string, /k+ɔ+n+s+l+t/. It does not usually matter if this is only an approximate pronunciation of the word, as the person will have heard the word pronounced in varying dialects and in various conditions, and will be able to jump from unknown pronunciations to a close, familiar one.

Short term memory is required to process the combination of the six digits, remember the combination long enough to explore the meaning of the resultant word, and fit the word into context before the context is forgotten. This will be difficult for a child who has recently started school and has not developed the necessary mental agility.

A slightly more experienced reader will have learned a shortcut to reduce the burden on the short term memory. He will realise that words consist of syllables, and will process the word "consult" as /kɔn+sɒlt/ leaving two syllable units to be retained in the short term memory while the search for meaning and context is made. The chances are that he will have come up against the syllable

"con" several times before, and have its pronunciation stored in his long term memory. This would be useful for longer words like "consonant" which would be much easier to process as three syllable units instead of nine graphemes.

In a single glance, one can only process four or five letters every second. If a child had to rely on processing every individual letter, he would plod through a text at a rate of about 60 words a minute. Any speed of less than 100 words a minute places too large a burden on the short term memory, and by the time he reached the end of each sentence, its overall meaning would have been forgotten.

Our brains are accustomed to making sense of dialogue spoken at 100–200 words per minute. Speech slower than this will burden the short term memory by asking it to hold individual words and phrases while the brain is waiting for meaningful chunks of dialogue to be conveyed. In such circumstances, the listener becomes bored and sleepy. A reading speed of 200 words per minute is a good target for students of reading to aim at, and an experienced reader will achieve about 300 words per minute, largely by learning to ignore auxiliary and unnecessary words.

A child must quickly learn to process whole words at a time so that only the occasional word has to be broken down into smaller units; and it would be beneficial if some of these units were syllables rather than individual graphemes. Use of "look and say" techniques might continue to be relevant, even if the orthography were revised so that it became alphabetically regular and simple.

If the reading process is primarily morphographic rather than alphabetic, opponents of reform argue that alteration of the orthography to become consistently alphabetic would render it a less efficient tool for reading.

Reformers must concede that, for example, the eradication of homophones would increase the semantic searching process in reading, and that the memorising of common homophones does not significantly increase the learning process; nor does the representation of inflections by morphographic means rather than alphabetic, for example, -s to represent the plural inflection whether the pronunciation is /s/or/z/ (there are also good arguments for using the alternative -z in a revised orthography).

A spelling reformer would naturally seek to make the orthography as completely consistent alphabetically as possible, but should realise that the inclusion of very common words which did not comply with the defined alphabetic rules would not make it significantly more difficult to learn. Nor would the inclusion of some consistent syllabic elements, like -tion for /ʃən/. While whole word and syllable recognition can be compatible with a strictly alphabetic standard, it may be necessary in practice to appease the protests of existing literates by allowing the retention of some features of traditional orthography.

There may be some dubiety about the need for alphabetic consistency in common words, or for phonographic accuracy in all letter/phoneme relationships in long words. However, the facility for children to work out at least the approximate pronunciation of visually unknown or unfamiliar words plays a vital part in the learning process. Children can learn how to read words without constant help from their teacher; and alphabetic clues will always be necessary for identifying less common words and for separating visually similar or confusing pairs of words, like inert/invert or was/saw. Mute letters and letters which can have three, four or even more possible pronunciations will cause confusion and slow the identification of individual words, so placing great strain on the short term memory.

If the percentages of people in different countries with reading difficulties quoted earlier are correct, showing English to produce a slightly larger number of poor readers, many people would argue that the fairly small gap (about 2%) could be made up with appropriate remedial action and extra teaching. The educational establishment is loath to consider the orthography as anything but unimpeachable, even if they do recognise that it has shortcomings; and many people will not even admit this.

Certainly, the present educational establishment tends to ignore the very positive benefits which greater alphabetic consistency would afford, especially in the learning process. Unfortunately, since so few educational psychologists regard spelling reform as a serious alternative, there have been few studies to show how these theoretical positive benefits would translate into practice.

In one of the books mentioned below, the author ponders at one point on how interesting it would be if one could compare English with other languages which have different kinds of orthographies. But unfortunately it is found that practically all the research into reading difficulties has taken place in English speaking countries. The author questions this no further, at least in the book. Spelling reformers know the answer. There have been so many studies into reading difficulties in English because the English orthography is so difficult.

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