

## SS10.

### ***simpl speling* November 1999** **newsletter of the simplified spelling society** **Editor: Allan Campbell**

Society founded 1908

Working for planned change in English spelling for the benefit of learners and users everywhere

Web: [www.spellingsociety.org](http://www.spellingsociety.org)

#### **MPs to hold inquiry**

A committee of British MPs is to look at why English children are behind continental children in literacy and maths.

Submission of evidence is sought. Society secretary Masha Bell (see below) expects to have guidelines soon.

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## 1. Email group debates reform proposals

The July meeting of the Society committee was told the members' email discussion group was vigorously debating various aspects of implementing reform.

About 12 people were trying to compile a list of reform proposals which could eventually be put into a ballot for the whole membership to vote on. Members of the group had put forward various ideas for initial reform. Two different proposals were then discussed and voted on. Zé do Rock was organizing the voting and recording the outcomes. (See below.)

The secretary, Masha Bell, was planning to classify, with help from discussion group members, the errors of TO among the 6000 most common English words which she had now compiled.

She believed this classification might enable the Society to explain more clearly to the public why English spelling was difficult to master. It might also be useful to members when they were asked to vote for the measures which they would like to see included in an initial reform.

## Publishing rules altered for members' *Personal Views*

Redefined rules restricting orthographical choices will govern future decisions to issue *Personal Views*, the occasional publication for Society members wishing to air their proposals for spelling change.

At its July meeting the committee decided the three *PVs* in the pipeline (#10–12) would be published as planned.

But in future the Society would publish only those *Personal Views* which used the current alphabet, did not use diacritics or accents, and did not assign new values to current letters.

Paul Fletcher, the committee member in charge of *PV* publication, was asked to rewrite the guidelines to authors accordingly. Members seeking publication of their schemes by the Society should ask for the revised guidelines.

It was suggested authors with email should offer their schemes for an initial peer review by the email discussion group, before submitting them to Paul.

## Changes to spelling competition

This year's competition for International Spelling Day has been changed from that advertised in SSJuly99.

It is now for collections of spellings on the internet and in emails which strike you as being more sensible than what we have now.

Prizes: Individual collections — Booklets on spelling games, and spelling cartoon memo booklets.  
Best collection from a school — A take-home *Teach Yourself to Read and Spell* video and manual.  
The usual competition rules apply, subject to a minimum of ten entries in each section.

All contributions without a prior copyright may be included in publications in aid of literacy innovations, unless entrants prefer not.

Send your entry to: The International English Spelling Competition by email or by post to Valerie Yule

Closing date: September 9, 2000

## 2. This 'n' that from here 'n' there

### Italian student studies SSS

A guest at the Society's July committee meeting was Nicoletta Tonizzo, an Italian student of English and German at the University of Udine. She is writing a history of the Society from its foundation until now, focusing in particular on spelling proposals developed and supported by the Society (New Spelling, ITA, Cut Spelling). The dissertation is her final step to her degree in English language and literature.

Her work includes an introduction on the problem of English spelling and a short account of the reform proposals of the past 400 years. The work is in Italian, but the conclusions (10–15 pages) are in English. She thought she had enough material about the history of the Society but wanted to know something more about its present activity.

She thought it unlikely we could make an impact with our current small membership.

She had found learning to spell English much harder than German as it required so much memorizing — but her biggest problem was the pronunciation of unfamiliar English words that she came across in reading.

Nicoletta has now joined the Society.

### Canberra-based writer, and SSS member, Mark O'Connor has been appointed Olympic Poet.

### Young Brits favor 'Americanisms'

**Gregory Byron** — Young people in Britain are abandoning traditional pronunciations in favor of 'Americanisms', while older people remain loyal to the Queen's English, a survey of fonetic preferences has found.

Two-thirds of people aged under 26 now call a schedule a *skedule* in contrast to 92% of over 65s who still say *shedule*, according to research by a linguistics and foneties professor, John Wells, who has compiled a new edition of the Longmans *Pronunciation Dictionary* [due out about now].

He also discovered that half of young people pronounce *ogle* as *oggle* while 95% of over-65s would rather *oagle*.

The survey of 2000 people from all over the country — the largest of its kind in Britain — revealed a growing fondness among the young for saying *veycation*, and for stressing the first syllable in *princess* rather than the latter.

But few say *nitch* rather than *neesh* for *niche*, and only 3% of those questioned say *sighmultaneous* for *simultaneous*.

Professor Wells, of University College, London, found strong differences of opinion over many of the 100 words covered by the survey. The debate over *scone* illustrates the point. Two-thirds of people prefer *sconn* but a third steadfastly prefer *scoan*. He commented: 'There seems to be no

difference between the north and the south of England, altho the Scots are solid for *sconn*. Some English people think that *sconn* is ordinary and *scoan* is posh, but others think it is the other way round.'

His research also uncovered a tendency of young southern people to adopt a northern lilt. *Chance* was pronounced *chans* by 60% of young people whereas 80% of over-65s preferred *chahnce*. He added: 'Older people will be shocked that under-26s prefer mischiev'ous to traditional mis'chievous.'

© *The Guardian*, London. Professor Wells is a vice-president of the Society.

### **Another name spelling change**

In July, the West Bengal State Assembly unanimously agreed to change the spelling in English of India's largest city from *Calcutta* to *Kolkata*, to reflect its Bengali pronunciation.

The changing of municipal names has become common in post-colonial India. *Bombay* is *Mumbai*, *Madras* is *Chennai*, *Cochin* is *Kochi*, *Trivandrum* is *Thiruvananthapuram*. The new forms are slowly becoming common usage.

Some Bengalis say *Calcutta* was coined by English overlords who could not pronounce *Kolikata*, a village near where they landed.

A letter writer in *The Times of India* claimed mere change of pronunciation and spelling did not shake off the colonial legacy. '*Kolkata* is just a way of Bengali pronunciation, where *a* becomes *o*. If historical names are to be really revived, then it should have been *Saptagram*, and not *Kolkata*.'

**Further to the report on Valerie Yule's Babl in the July issue, Tom Zurinkas points out he has a Truespel version of Scrabble, reported to the emailing group last year.**

### **Creativity — in story and spelling**

The heading *They rite vividley, but they cant spel* in the *New Zealand Herald* in July summed up one of the findings of National Education Monitoring Report #12 on Writing Assessment Results 1998. This was a quadrennial study of primary school children's writing at year 4 and year 8 (about ages eight and 12 years).

Spelling was one of the skills monitored. Among the findings was that spelling accuracy improved from year 4 to year 8, with 90% of year 8 pupils spelling at least 90% of their words correctly.

But the pupils' perceptions of their spelling ability did not coincide with this. Asked how good they thought they were at spelling, 30% of year 4 pupils answered 'heaps', 48%'quite a lot', 16% 'Ca little', and 6% 'not at all'. For year 8 the respective figures were 18%, 43%, 29%, and 10%.

*The Otago Daily Times* made no mention of spelling in its report, focusing on girls outperforming boys at most writing tasks. Many other papers ignored the report altogether.

[Zé do Rock: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal Views](#), [Media](#), [Book](#).]

### 3. What one member has been doing

#### Wanderlust brings spelling challenges

##### Zé do Rock, Germany

[This article was written in progressive zingush but has been altered to *Simpl Speling* style. Readers can see zingish first stage in paragraf (1), complete zinghsh in (8), and RITE in (9).]

(1) I always had quite a few spelling mistakes, and we mite consider this a subconscious help for our caus, mitent we? I hichhiked around the world for 13 years, visited 105 countris and had lots of trouble with robbers, police, and women. And of cors with languages. Every time i was confronted with a new one i began thinking how i could simplify it.

I ended up in Germany, where I wrote a book called Fom winde ferfeelt. In the book I tell about my trip around the world, using a spelling system I call *Ultradoitsh* (ultra-German). The first chapter is in normal German, and at the beginning of every chapter I explain briefly a new spelling change. From this moment I write accordingly till the end of the book.

The book was quite successful in the media, because it was published when the discussion about German spelling reform started. It appeared in 30 TV programs and more than 100 newspaper reviews. It is cult and it's still selling a few hundred copies a month, after four years.

I translated and adapted the book for Brazil, calling the new spelling Brazileis. There I used a political argument: 200 years after our political independence, we should declare our linguistic independence from Portugal. Stop saying we speak bad Portuguese and start saying we speak good Brazilish. We just have to adapt the spelling to our spoken language.

In Brazil the media success was much bigger (70 million people saw me on TV) but the sales much smaller, because the book got known as a language book, and only intellectuals buy this kind of book in Brazil. Unfortunately they didn't like it. Some journalists said: 'He spells like illiterate people. If he's successful the illiteracy will grow!'

In my performances I let the public vote about one change in spelling. So I was able to create *Wunschdeutsch* (wish-German), which is quite milder than *Ultradoitsh*. People vote for changes they have problems with. Otherwise they vote against, even if the change is logical and economic. That's why they didn't want *oi* for *eu* or *sh* for *sch*. These are quite regular features in German. The same happened in Brazil, where nobody wants *Riu di Janeru* or even *Hiu d Janer*. OK, it is a *u* (*oo*), but everybody knows that a final o is pronounced u, so why change it?

In 1998 I published the science-fiction *Ufo in der küche* (*Ufo in the kitchen*), written in *Wunschdeutsch*. No big success so far. Here the problem was: People who liked the courage of *Ultradoitsh* were disappointed with this very mild form (which was as hard to read as the first paragraf of this article); people who didn't like the first book because of the spelling didn't buy the second one at all.

(8) I hav reform projects for inglish, french, and spanish. The inglish skeem is cald zinglish (zé-inglish). I think that a fonetic inglish looks like swahilly; it's tu far from TO. So I disided to criate a skeem that respecets inglish patterns. Peepal can reed and rite it perfectly without preevius TO nollege; eeven the stres is cleer. The prise tu pay is the relativly hy number of rools. But at least it is a skeem i can uze evrywair; evrybody understands me.

(9) I'm looking for a publisher for the English version. Originally I wanted to write it in zinglish, but I mite write it in RITE, spelling, the scheem we'r building together in the SSS e-male group. Now we'r just taking decisions for the first stage. Every member can make sugestions and vote; i count the votes. This dusnt meen that most members suport the idea, but most **voters** do. Sum members dont vote, sum vote but dont like it becauze the system is too 'mild', sum becauze it is too much. Wat the voters hav decided so far, you can see in this paragraf. I'm writing acording to the current RITE (Reducing Irregularities in Traditional English spelling).

When the first stage is ready, we'll propose it to the SSS, where all members should have the opportunity to vote for or against any change. Then we should ideally organize a poll among the normal public to check whether the scheme has changes that fewer than 50% approve. It doesn't mean that the SSS would ignore all other schemes, but that it would use it as the house spelling instead of TO. It is just absurd that a society that combats TO uses it. How can we expect other people to use alternative spellings, if we, the preachers, don't do it ourselves?

Quite a few members are protesting already. The Society should use **my** scheme, and if it doesn't use **my** scheme, then it should use TO, but **never** somebody else's scheme. The only way out from this autistic situation is a scheme created by as many people as possible.

[Allan Campbell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Spell4Literacy](#)]

## **4. Editorial**

### **Leave it to the pros**

**Allan Campbell**

A common suggestion with members' votes in the Society's recent strategy poll was that we need an agreed spelling scheme as a basis for an upgrade, staged or one-step.

While our existence attests to our agreement on the need for change, we have never agreed on how to change. Did our adoption of New Spelling further our cause?

Our concern at TO does not extend to a common approach to fixing it. Our ideas differ and no one has so far managed to bring us into line. We are amateurs, free spirits. Nobody can demand compliance or results from us.

So, in searching for an agreed plan for change, are we attempting the impossible? Are we setting ourselves up for failure?

The ultimate decision makers are unlikely to hand us the task of devising and implementing the changes. It will be given to people paid to achieve a result. In other words, professionals.

They — possibly including Society members — will be commissioned by a coalition of governments, publishers, educationists, lexicographers, or international organizations with the ability to act. We may be asked for suggestions.

So why not leave the hard graft to them? They will have the means.

However, no authority will take up the task until they see the need.

That's our role. 'We are the lobby group for spelling, the agitator to goad the powers to action.

We should concentrate on creating dissatisfaction with TO, leading to the appropriate authorities taking up the cudgels.

As employers holding the Pay checks, they will demand results from the people they commission.

But we have to spur them to it.

## 5. Letters

### What's the first step?

#### George Lahey, USA

Now that we've decided to take things a step at a time, what's the first step? People who say we need to lay out the entire program before beginning are probably right, but that seems unusually onerous. Why not pick the thorniest problem, and then solve it?

The thorniest problem is almost certainly the representation of the long vowel speech sounds. The simplest solution is, as proposed by Dr Rondthaler, to add an *e*, giving us *ae*, *ee*, *ie*, *oe*, and *ue*. Dropping the *e* from the vowel-consonant-*e* sequence is simple enough, and placing it after the vowel itself is almost automatic when you do that. I'd suggest we go with this.

### Building a house style

#### Robert Craig, England. (Abridged)

Let's start to build a house style. If more than 50% of votes favor a change (that could be 66% if you like) then that would be incorporated into the house style. Anyone could put a proposal to the membership. This would be an example of the membership's preference for option B in the recent survey being implemented. *Simpl Speling* is the vehicle to develop this house style.

Most correspondents favor *tu*. This differentiates between *o* and *oo*, eg, *tu* but *so*. Let *to* be replaced by *tu*.

L is never pronounced in *could*, *should*, *would*. Let these be *coud*, *shoud*, *woud*.

*Break*, *great*, *steak*. Let these be *breik*, *greit*, *steik*.

Reasons: 1) it involves only change of *a* to *i*; 2) *ei* is the most internationally accepted spelling for this sound.

I don't like *U*. Let this be *yu*, or revert to *you*.

Let *oo* as in *good* and *ou* as in *could* be *uo*, eg, *guod*, *cuod*, *buok*, *luok*, etc.

### Adjust over the years

#### Cornell Kimball, USA

In *German Life*, a US magazine about German life (October/November 1995) Gerhard Weiss reported on the German spelling reform. He mentions the previous reform of German spelling in 1901 and goes on, 'In the 20th century, however, language has exploded beyond traditional boundaries. Grandfather's spelling rules no longer reflect today's realities.'

He tells of a decision in 1994 for a 'modest' spelling reform, and comments, 'Of course, in many ways, these "modest" proposals simply follow common sense.... Revising spelling rules every 90 years or so is not quite revolutionary. What is really proposed here is an adjustment, not radical change.'

Does this attitude exist for many people regarding English spelling, or can we create it? Can we soften the English-speaking world to accept at least some spelling change à la German? I'm hopeful.

## **Rhotic schwa, the hidden foneme**

**R Stygall, UK** (Abridged)

Taking the definition 'A foneme may be thought of as the smallest contrastive linguistic unit which may bring about a change of meaning' (Gimson's 5th ed), then:

- 1) There is a contrast between the final vowel in *beta* and *baiter/beater*, for rhotic speakers, therefore two neutral vowels are involved, a 'rhotic schwa' and a 'non-rhotic schwa'. The words *forward* and *foreword* contrast neutral vowel length.
- 2) As the abbreviation *com* (as in *com.link*) contrasts with *calm* for British speakers, short *o* is an English foneme. Since the *o* in *lost* is pronounced in the USA as *laust* the orthographic short *o* cannot be considered as always representing the allofonic 'short *o*/long *a*'.
- 3) There is no fonemic contrast between a non-rhotic schwa and the 'neutralized *a*' (as in *cup*), but since stress is a foneme in English, they can be separated. Thus the same vowel in *uncover* has secondary stress, then primary stress and is finally unstressed (for non-rhotic speakers).
- 4) There is an allofonic contrast between *laud* and *lord* and between *lava* and *larva*, for rhotic speakers but not for non-rhotic speakers.

This gives an English repertoire of seven vowels, length, 22 consonants and two kinds of stress, making 32 available fonemes. Since non-rhotic accents, like RP, do not separate the two neutral vowels, they only have a complement of six vowels.

The full vowel list is: an open, unrounded vowel (*a*); a middle, front, unrounded vowel (*e*); a close, front, unrounded vowel (*i*); an unclose, back, rounded vowel (*o*); a close, back, rounded vowel (*u*); an unrounded, central vowel with a rhotic element (*r*) and an unrounded, central vowel without a rhotic element. The supra-segmental foneme 'length' is associated with five of these vowels.

While it is true that the contrast between a short and a lengthened vowel may also be a contrast of quality (lax/tense), in the broadest terms, they can be represented by the same symbol.

There are many instances of multiple fonemes; diphthongs, triphthongs, affricates and even lengthened vowels, but only single fonemes are being considered here.

## **A call to get 'into real action'**

**Elizabeth Kuizenga. USA.**

I propose something that could unify us and get us into real action.

Recently I've talked to people about what we're up to. When I began I talked about spelling reform, and no one wanted to hear. These two words in combination are about the two most off-putting words in our language. So instead I talked about promoting English as a Global Language (EAGL) for literacy, commerce, global unity, and cross-cultural understanding.

Bingo! Everyone's 100% on board!

Then I tell them the inconsistent way we spell English is a hindrance to this end; not sacred and can be changed; and if it were changed, they could still write in TO and they could read the new orthograpy because it would be backwards compatible. Everyone gets excited about it!

So I propose we use this approach, not just for verbal and moral support, but also to get financial backing. A lot of it.

Surely our commitment is enuff to go beyond our little discussions about the pros and cons of magic e.

Here's my proposal and my commitment:

- Let's raise \$1 million — quickly.
- Let's call our promotion EAGL.
- Let's develop, research, and teach a new orthograpy. Let's buy a huge media campaign.
- Let's hire professional fundraisers and grantwriters to continue funding the project.

Who might be interested? International corporations? Government agencies and foundations concerned with literacy rates? Peace-keeping foundations? Filanthropists? Ecology foundations? The computer/ techno industry? Maybe u can think of others.

I say let's do it, go professional, leave the English-spelling-reform-is-my-hobby days behind

## 6. Winning spelling jokes

[Two of Tom Lang's winning International Spelling Day jokes. Spell-checker's suggestions are in parentheses.]

Bob was feeling a little bit rough  
With a sore throat and voice very grough (*grouch*)  
He said, What shall I do?  
I'm feeling so blo (lo)  
I'll try a quick cure sniffing snough. (*slough*)

Have u ever tried spelling *manoeuvre*?  
U'll have to be a quick moeuvre (*mauver*).  
But with a sound scheme  
It'll go like a dhreme (*dharma*)  
As simple as using a hoeuvre. (*whoever*)

### And another Lang spelling joke

Bill spent several hours drinking liquor  
Then said, Now I'm feeling much siquor. (*liquor*)  
It's going to mache (*mach*) my wee belly ache  
And give me a pain in my tiquor. (*liquor*)

## 7. Net chat. Excerpts from a few of the posts in the SSS internet discussion group.

### Support from minorities?

#### Valerie Yule. Australia

A great help could be to organize the handicapped groups, like dyslexics, to demand some improvements to their task. And also ESLs and immigrants.



A migrant to Australia told me he thought there should be an English 'spelling for migrants' and let the other Australians keep their. . own spelling. And aboriginals should be moving, altho I can't encourage them to do so. They do have a song called *Bran Nue Dae* and a school called Koori Kolej (*koori = aboriginal*) so they have made a start but I can't get them to really organize!

#### Nelson Helm, USA.

If I want to influence laws and customs about whether stores may be open on Sunday, I strive to influence public opinion, for the legislature will follow a majority. But if I want to stop apartheid, I strive to influence laws directly, mostly thru the (non-democratic) courts because 100% consensus among minorities will not win at the polls.

I expect reforming spelling would help ESL [English as a second language] students. But I expect the majority to spell however they want, so I also expect ESL students will not significantly help us win reform. I recommend public relations and advertising over lobbying.

### The best [In response to a claim that 'We are amateurs'].

#### Chris Upward. England

No need to be so modest. The collective knowledge of the SSS is the best there is, anywhere. There are no 'professionals'. Even people who've written massive books on English spelling (I won't name names here) don't understand it as we do. We combine a wide range of experience from many walks of life. The academic 'experts' typically have a narrow perspective and can't see the wood for the trees. The ones who understand the complexities of english spelling know nothing about literacy. The ones who know about literacy haven't considered how literacy could be made easier by simplifying spelling. Etc, etc. We have to broaden their horizons.

### Functions of e

#### Jean Hutchins, England

Teachers doing SpLD courses do not understand the different functions of e. They were surprised when I gathered up the reasons (cribbed from another teacher).

1. Magic e, or modifying e, changes the preceding vowel sound, e.g., hat, hate. Also in toe, potato/otatoes.
2. Softening e, affecting preceding c always and g mostly as also does i and y but not a, o, u, e.g., cent, gem. In cage the e has two functions, which is why u need d in cadge!
3. Silent e after v, as no real English word ends in v, e.g., have.
4. Silent e after s, to show the word is not plural or the third person verb, e.g., house.
5. Silent e, for no reason at all that I know of, e.g., come.
6. Silent e, absolutely stupidly, in suffixes, e.g., baby/babies.  
(This would be one of the first I would abolish.)

[Jean Wilkinson: see [Newsletters](#)]

## 8. Jean Wilkinson, USA, writes: The undercover agent, namely *Uh*

*'Daddy, how do u spell a, like a boy, a girl?'*

'Ha! That one is both easy and complicated, funny and unfunny!

'The easiest way is *a*,

but if u have to think about it a while and u say, "Well, uh .. ." , then u write it *uh*.

When u ask, "Is it time to go to school?" the *o* in *to* comes out the same sound.

We're used to seeing it spelled *u*, as in *cup*, but sometimes u don't have a clue as to what letter or letters u're going to need.

*Umbrella* uses it twice, first as *u* and then as *a*.

*Onion* uses it twice, but as *o*!

*Mountainous* also uses it twice — can u find it? Yeah, first it's *ai*, then it's *ou*.'

*'Daddy, is that fair?'*

'Well ... uh. . . .'

*'Does it get ridiculous?'*

'U better believe it, honey. Are u ready for a long trip thru the alfabet? *Uh* will show u a lot of scenery!'

- |                       |                           |                          |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>a about</i>     | 8. <i>ei forfeit</i>      | 15. <i>ie-e patience</i> |
| 2. <i>a-e pirate</i>  | 9. <i>eo pigeon</i>       | 16. <i>o carrot</i>      |
| 3. <i>ai mountain</i> | 10. <i>eou courageous</i> | 17. <i>o-e welcome</i>   |
| 4. <i>au epaulet</i>  | 11. <i>i pencil</i>       | 18. <i>oi-e tortoise</i> |
| 5. <i>e angel</i>     | 12. <i>i-e engine</i>     | 19. <i>ou enormous</i>   |
| 6. <i>e-e license</i> | 13. <i>ia parliament</i>  | 20. <i>u medium</i>      |
| 7. <i>ea pageant</i>  | 14. <i>ie patient</i>     | 21. <i>u-e ferrule</i>   |
|                       |                           | 22. <i>y ethyl</i>       |

*'Oh, Daddy! Couldn't we just use one letter? One way?'*

'U know — most languages do! Take Italian or Spanish, for instance. When they make a spelling rule, they hardly ever break it.'

*'Why don't we do that?'*

'Good question. In Europe, countries have fixed up or are fixing up their spelling. Even Chinese has an alfabet now, along with picture-writing. We did try. And some of us are still trying.'

## 9. Disappointing response to advertising trial

Allan Campbell

A trial advertising campaign over three months aimed at New Zealand primary school teachers drew mixed results.

In November 1997 the Society's committee placed a small advertisement for new members in *The Times* (SSMar98) at a cost of £270. One response was received. A suggestion was then made to try a similar ad in *The Guardian*, at a similar price.

At the time it was thought teachers should be targeted as they were the adults most likely to benefit from improved spelling. On hearing of the Guardian proposal I suggested to the committee that a series of 'teaser' ads would be more effective than a single one. I offered to investigate the New Zealand educational publishing scene to see if there was a way of having a series at a cheaper rate.

I found the NZ Educational Institute (the primary school teachers' union) fortnightly newspaper, NZEI Roteou, would run a series of six 2cm by 2-column ads for \$360 (approximately £120). It had a 22,000 circulation and was read by about 28,000.

I proposed the six ads have a similar content — basically the address to inquire from — but that the heading vary with each. I also suggested they talk of something more positive than 'simple' spelling, and settled on 'Better Spelling'

Thus the six insertions each bore a heading starting 'Better Spelling' followed respectively by: *for better reading, for better writing, for better teaching, for better creativity, for better use of class time, for better spelling.* [One is shown below.]

The committee approved the proposal as a relatively cheap trial.

The ads (the final two in two-color) appeared among a block of other ads, in the final term of 1998 and the first term of 1999.

We received nine replies. One email reply did not supply a postal address when requested, so I could not send all the follow-up material.

This material included a letter expanding on the themes of the six headings of the advertisements, the blue SSS information and enrolment card, and a printout of three newspaper letters telling of English-speaking parents in Prague, Wales, and Jakarta finding their children were learning to read and write the local language more easily than they were learning to do so in English.

One respondent joined immediately. I did not hear from the others.

In March 1999 I sent a letter and a short questionnaire with an sae to these people asking why they had not taken it further. One said he could not afford it at the time but now could; 'please bill me'. I sent him details about joining, telling him he'd have to send his sub to England. I have heard no more.

In total, six responded to this survey. Five had read only one of the advertisements; one had seen two of them

Four said they had thought we might be able to help them with their class work; two had always been interested in the subject; and one was curious — had never heard of us.

Four found we were not what they thought we were; two could not afford the subscription; and one was deterred by the Society being based overseas.

Two replied to a request for suggestions on what we should do. One said we should target specific schools; and the other said we should supply 'heaps of free information.'

My conclusions? I was disappointed that we drew such a small response from the size of readership. I hope we learn something from it.

While I think the idea of making the message more positive than 'simple spelling' is valid, perhaps there is a 'better' way of doing it than 'simply' renaming it *better*. This gave a message to four respondents that we were offering them something to improve their classroom teaching. Maybe 'improved spelling', 'upgraded spelling', 'updated spelling', 'modernized spelling', or 'simpler spelling'.

It was also interesting that most respondents said they saw only one of the ads. More justification, I think, for running a series.

I think we need to make it easy for people to join. Paying the subs locally rather than the hassle of getting bank drafts or checks for overseas payment should also be considered. [This is now being trialed in New Zealand, with subs being paid to me with a corresponding reduction being made in my *Simpl Spelling* expense claim.] I think we should look at a cheaper membership, with reduced benefits, for students or others who find £10 too much.

And I think there might be something in the caution Valerie Yule gave us that in her experience teachers were not as good a target as we might think.

*[This is an edited version of the report to the committee]*

**Better Spelling for better reading!**

**Interested in the Simplified Spelling Society's aims?**

Information: Allan Campbell

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

## 10. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

### Hotlinks

URLs for spelling related websites that are worth checking

**Easy conversion to reform spelling:** [no longer available]

The Perlscript converter runs on a remote server and requires no set-up. U simply cut and paste the text, article, or chapter that u want to convert into a window on screen and click the convert button.

**Spelling for kids:** [no longer available].

Alan Mole's new website oriented toward youngsters.

**Net lies and falsehoods:** <http://urbanlegends.miningco.com/culture/beliefs/urbanlegends>

A place to check before spreading urban myths and virus hoaxes. Our discussion group has had its share of false alarms sent by well-meaning members. Before perpetuating one of these hoaxes, check them out at one of the places on the net devoted to checking out these stories.

### Spanglish for high school?

What would English look Like if it were transcribed into the orthografy used for Spanish?

<http://204.196.54.50/Spanish/spangish.htm>

Bifor an orthografi can get tu frst beis, wan m'ast identifai an odiens that wil uz it. ITA w'rkt for a wail in the 'rli 1970s b'at lakt steing paup. It waz aftr ol jast an inish'al tiiching alfabet.

### Abbreviated vowel chart

caet(cat)	cat(cot)	aiz(eyes)	ar(are)	ir(ire)
ej (edge)	h'r (her)	leit (late)	er (air)	
it	ski	fiu(few)	ir (ear)	
o (awe)		boat	boi (boy)	or (ore)
cuk (cook)	tu	tuulz	Luis (Louis)	tur (tour)
ap (up)	ago	sofa	haus (house)	aur (our)

I am propoazing Spanglish bi uzd in hai skuul langwij clasas. If after l'rning tha orthografi thei du nat continiu to uz it for English, thei wil continiu to uz it for Spanish. Spanglish is an ASCII espanyol.

Spanish has no schwa or ^ sound so one either extends the use of a [ah] to include [uh] or one invents a new symbol correspondence such a @=uh. Merging fonemes will create some ambiguities but they will be no worse than TO.

Unlike most reforms, Spanglish retains some redundancies such as *ci*, *ce* for *si*, *se* and *ca*, *cu* for *ka*, *ku* and *qu* for *kw*, *ciudad* (*citi*), *cuidado* (*kerfal*; *careful*), *centro* (*central*). This allows a certain amount of traditional distinctions — *cirial*=*cereal*, *sirial*=*serial*.

## Dealing with the arguments against spelling reform

Justin Rye (<http://www.xibalba.demon.co.uk/jbr/ortho.html>) brilliantly deflates 12 common arguments against spelling reform (loss of homophone distinctions, etymology, literature, reading speed, etc) on the way to stating the real reason reform is impossible:

'Anglophone nations are too lazy, ignorant, and superstitious; even if u were world dictator, u'd never get them to co-operate on a project that involved this much work and was this insulting to all their ludicrous national traditions.

Americans think any attack on their *honor* is un-American, Brits are stuck in the Middle Ages, and Australians of course think literacy's for poofs.... Besides, none of them can think straight about fonological issues, largely because their brains are hopelessly clogged with Anglo-Norman delusions'

To the argument that reform would rewrite 'Do you want to?' as *dzhawonnuh?*, Rye responds, 'Who said anything about a fonetic system? All we need is one that's roughly grafemic ('one reading per grafeme') and preferably fonemic ('one spelling per foneme) and/or morfemic ('one spelling per morfeme').'

He concludes: 'The flaws of the standard orthograpy are indefensible — but it has an extensive installed user base, and can thus afford to ignore criticism in exactly the same manner as Fahrenheit thermometers, QWERTY keyboards, and certain software packages, which can all rely on conformism, short-termism, and sheer laziness for their continued survival.'

## Alfabet of redundancy

Almost every letter in the alfabet is irrelevant to pronunciation in at least one word. Almost every letter is absent from pronunciation guide spelling in some word. A partial listing is below: Also check the *Cut Spelling Handbook* and the *Journal of the SSS*.

**A** in *hed*: *head*, *dead*, and *lead* should be the same as *fed*. The *a* was once a schwa sound: *heh-uhd*.

**B** in *dout* and *bomb*: *doubt* should be the same as *about*, *loud*, *snout*; *bomb* should be the same as *mom*.

## Talepeace

From a slide shown by a senior consultant at a high powered conference about university student funding: 'Students and they're expectations'.

## **11. simpl speling. November 1999. members' supplement**

### **Reports from July committee meeting**

An Australian member, Mark O'Connor, told the meeting he is trying to patent a facility which can offer choices of writing systems for reading text on computers, altho for legal reasons he could give no details. He believed that in Australia the idea English spelling is unnecessarily difficult may slowly be gaining acceptance. In a recently published book, *Right Words*, the eminent authority on Australian English, Steven Murray Smith, dwells on spelling problems at some length.

The Society had 146 members, but 29 had still not paid their 1999 subscriptions. Eight had joined since April. Since summaries of membership as at December 31, 1998, had been distributed by membership secretary Jean Hutchins, she had received a request for 18 addresses from one member. This led to concerns about confidentiality, and her workload.

Masha was asked to liaise with Chris Jolly and Nick Kerr on reviewing the Society's investments, and perhaps to consult a financial adviser.

The committee's two previous decisions that for the time being it lend no more than moral support to the International Spelling Day, suggested by Valerie Yule, was reaffirmed after receiving a request from Allan Campbell that it reconsider its reluctance to sponsor the day.

The Society now owned a volume containing four issues of its early newsletter, *The Pyoneer* (March 1917 – February 1918). Chris Upward was thanked for obtaining it.

English Today was to publish a curtailed version of Chris Upward's submission to the Langscape survey. In its current issue an article by Keith Davidson slightly ridiculed the idea of spelling reform. Chris intended to reply.

Chris Upward was to be interviewed by BBC World Service about spelling.

John Reilly is to help Chris edit JSSS, specifically with contributions from the US..

Allan Campbell sought guidance on what he, as New Zealand representative of the Society, could and could not say on its behalf. He set out his ideas. These were acceptable to the committee. It was felt that every effort should be made to emfазize points of agreement among members and to minimize disagreements.

### **Members make suggestions on strategy**

Members voting in the Society's recent strategy poll suggested:

- a need to have an overall plan, system;
- a need to take reactions into account;
- a need to educate people about the harm of TO.

In more detail, some of the suggestions are:

### **A voters (16) (Single stage, 'Big bang')**

First agree on a system. Initial stages to be part of single-stage reform. B acceptable if it followed a pre-ordained pattern.

ALC's Soundspell with TO of 20 short words minima es opposition, avoids step-by-step pitfall (eg, mesure, mesuer, mezher). Start with Grade 1 in schools and progress yearly.

CS is simple, practical; does not need preliminary stage, tho individuals free to use one.

Drastic action, clarity needed. Small steps would confuse. Piecemeal reforms will still leave TO irregular. Later reforms might contradict earlier ones.

Use IPA — already in dictionaries, simple symbol-phoneme correspondence, nothing to unlearn.

Any useful reform needs a better alphabet.

Phonetic spelling not suitable for English. A modified system, simpler for children but easy enough for adults, is needed.

Vote issue not important. Concentrate on persuading important people about the harm of TO.

### **B1 voters (15) (staged, a few big steps)**

Politicians are unlikely to buy A. A would meet with resistance from the Establishment.

B1 best compromise. Must not be too big or too small. B2 irksome, long, needs adjustments. Costly.

Stage 1, integrate US/Commonwealth spellings, consistent short vowels; 2, More consonant reform, cut silent letters, systematic vowel changes; 3, vowel reform.

Need for advance planning, clear objectives, intellectual foundations.

### **B2 voters (24) (staged, many small steps)**

A would provoke maximum public resistance, bad reactions. Might be unreadable to many.

Only way forward; to overcome opposition. Softly, softly. Most likely to succeed. Sets a precedent to reassure public.

Preserves continuity.

Publicize the trouble spelling causes for many.

Need bigger stages as longer-term plan.

No more than 185 words (I 85 in Germany resisted). Steps about 50 words. Start with tho, thru, U, foto, -ize/-ise, -or/-our.

All SSS members should use simplified spellings when writing to friends. Develop a house style that others might use.

Need to establish a language commission.

## **B voters (2) (did not stipulate B 1 or B2)**

Removing redundant letters the main plank of a first stage. One initial small step, then a few big steps.

## **C voters (8) (other; includes one A+B 1, one A+B2)**

Devise a transcription scheme, use to generate lists, implement them incrementally.

Need a complete scheme for implementation in small steps. Publish options, present all systems, evaluate scientifically.

Reform is desperately needed for beginning readers. Include children's suggestions.

Big fast change except most common words.

Aim to create international auxiliary rather than improve TO.

[Masha Bell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Pamphlet](#), [Leaflet](#), [Media](#), [PV13](#), [Book](#),

## **Compiling basic vocab list**

*Masha Bell*

My main preoccupation has still been trying to ascertain exactly what is wrong with TO. I presented the results of my analysis of the 3 000 most frequent words from the Cobuild corpus in the last issue of this newsletter, but I gradually became dissatisfied with the size of this sample. For one, it contained rather too many derivatives (e.g., *act* — *acted, acting, acts*).



I also started to compare it with other lists of common vocabulary like the 250 key words in reading produced by Murray and McNally, and the 500 most common word list of the American Literacy Council and found that many words on those were missing from my Cobuild list. When I compared it with a 2000-word children's dictionary I found very little overlap between the two.

I therefore set about to merge the various common vocabulary lists with the vocabulary from two basic lists for children. I tried to delete all plurals and inflected words at the same time, as well as compounds like *backpack* if their parts already appear separately.

I now have BEV (a Basic English Vocabulary) with just over 4700 words. This may well reduce to about 4500 when I delete all the derivatives and duplications in compounds.

Working with the list makes me think that it contains quite a bit more than absolutely basic vocabulary. I have also found out that most pocket size dictionaries for foreign learners contain around 3000 words. So the size of BEV is probably big enough for a comprehensive and definitive analysis of English spelling problems.

This latter task has suddenly become an urgent matter. As I was departing for my summer break at the end of July, I read on route to Dover that a UK committee of members of Parliament would be

looking into why English children tend to lag about two years behind most of their continental counterparts in literacy and maths. Anyone would be free to submit evidence to them in writing and might be invited to appear before them in person after January 2000.

I have since spoken to a member of that committee and should soon receive details about its remit and guidelines for submissions to it, but together with Zé do Rock and Jean Hutchins I have already started to prepare the evidence. Some other members of our internet discussion group occasionally help too. Contact me for more information.

In the first instance we are just trying to separate words with sound spellings from those with problems. I have felt for some time that as an aspiring reformer I should know pretty accurately what proportion of English words have spellings that can be reproduced by applying English fonics and how many have to be learned by heart.

Such an analysis might also put an end to the futile fonics versus whole-word debate that has been raging in educational academic circles for over half a century. When we have finished categorizing the words with spelling difficulties according to their different problems, we shall be able to show the memory loading that learning to spell English imposes.

I hope to publish this as a little booklet which could be very useful to teachers, pupils, and parents and also serve as a pronunciation guide to L2 learners. It will be particularly useful for sending to everyone who claims that mastering English spelling is not really such an onerous task or that poor literacy is just the result of bad teaching.

From a reform point of view it will show which words are in most dire need of repair, which ones have bearable faults, and which can be left as they are. I hope that this might provide a rational basis on which we can base recommendations for reform.

### **October meeting summary**

Discussed at the October committee meeting were the revision of the Society's aims and objectives in the light of the membership vote on strategy; Alan Mole's new website for teenagers; presentation of evidence to the British parliamentary select committee on early years education; Society funds; new guidelines for *Personal Views*. Expanded report in the next issue.

### **Upgrade for Society's website**

The SSS website has been updated. A pamphlet by the late Bob Brown on types of spelling reform proposals for English and the late G N Deodhekar's Lojikon have been added.

**Coming meeting dates** January 29, 2000, and the AGM on May 6, 2000.

**Guidelines** on presentation of members' schemes as *Personal Views* are available from Paul Fletcher.

**Attendance, July:** Committee — Jean Hutchins (chair), Masha Bell (minutes), Paul Fletcher, Leo Chapman, Gerald Palmer, Gwenllian Thorstad, Chris Upward.

Member — Mark O'Connor. Visitor — Nicoletta Tonizzo.

Apologies — Chris Jolly, Nicholas Kerr, Tony Burns, John Gledhill.