

# Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

## §18. Principles of English Spelling in Relation to Language

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*[Spelling Reform Anthology §18.1 pp238-240 in the printed version]*

*[This text is different from the article of the same title in SPB Spring 1971 pp4-15 in the printed version]*

### 1. The Deceitful Words of English, by Newell W. Tune.

While not the only cause of confusion in the English language, these "look-alike, say differently" pairs or triplets of words are certainly the most irritating of vexing. In "The Psychology & Teaching of Spelling," (1934), Thomas G. Foran says, "Homonyms form one of the most difficult groups of words that pupils are called upon to spell." The English language is not the only language plagued with homonyms yet it appears to have more than its share and certainly more than are necessary - if any are really necessary at all' The Chinese have developed a method of distinguishing between homophones by the change of pitch for the several meanings of words pronounced the same. Unfortunately, it is not very practical to indicate pitch in printing, altho the word could be printed differently. Hence, the spoken language must be handed down from one person to another - from mother to child - largely by the sound and from one generation to another. This is an unfortunate barrier to reform.

The several terms used to describe these anomalies are confusing to many persons. Perhaps this is due largely to the vagueness of the definitions in the dictionaries. It didn't help matters very much when the catch-all term, "homonym" (meaning the same name) was invented as a general term to cover all cases of confusion and misunderstanding due to identities of either spelling or pronunciation, hence should include both homophones and homographs.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says of homonyms:

- "1. a word having the same pronunciation as another but differing from it in origin, meaning and often (but not always in spelling, as 'bare' and 'bear'; a homophone, q.v.,
2. one of two or more having the same name."

The American College Dictionary does not clearly explain these words either, as "Homonym:

1. a word like another in sound and perhaps in spelling but different in meaning, as 'meat' and meet.'
2. a homophone.

3. a homograph.
4. a namesake."

The Thorndike-Barnhart Desk Dictionary says the same as #1 of the A.C.D. Murray's Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 1933, is no better when it says: Homonym: the same word used to denote different things. b. Philology - applied to words having the same sound but different meanings." It said nothing about spelling.

The Doubleday Encyclopedia, 1931, also confuses the issue with: "Homonym: a word which has the same sound or the same spelling as another, but a different meaning. Examples are: rite, write, & right; bear, (verb) and bear (substantive) and bare; fair (adjective), and fair (substantive) and fare. The term homophone has also been used for such words."

*(Editor's note: But which of these two classes of words?). How can a person have a clear understanding of these terms after reading such definitions?*

Since none of the modern encyclopedias printed since 1950 even list any of these words, one has to go back to the 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. printed in 1910, in order to get a clearly understandable definition. It says of homonym: "(Greek) having the same name. A term in philology for those words which differ in sense but are alike either in sound or spelling or both. Words alike only in spelling but not in sound, e.g., 'bow', are sometimes called 'homographs,' and words alike only in sound but not in spelling, e.g., 'meat', 'meet' are called homophones." But that is all! No definition of any other homo- or hetro- word is given. Rev. Walter N. Skeat, in his Etymological Dictionary, 1882-1924, gives a list of homonyms, but his list includes only those homographs which are spelt and pronounced the same. No other published list, was found in the five years before the first edition of this monograph. Since 1962, two books were published. See addendum.

Another well known encyclopedia, Webster's New International Encyclopedia, 1925, not only gives a good description, but tells the difference between homonyms, homophones, and homographs. It says:

"Homonyms: words that agree in form, but differ in origin and meaning. A familiar example of this class of words is *sound*, which in its different meanings goes back to the Latin *Sonus*, Scandinavian *sund*, and the Anglo-Saxon *gesund* and *sundian*; or the verb *bear* and the noun *bear*. Many homonyms are often distinguished by the accent, as *absent* (the adjective) and *absent* (the verb). Strictly speaking, these are not homonyms, but homographs, since the exact correspondence is confined to the spelling. A third term is also used, 'Homophones', words that agree in sound, but not necessarily in the spelling (and meaning), thus 'write, right, and rite,' or 'meet, meat, and mete' are homophones." It implies, but does not give examples of homophones that are spelled the same, such as *bay*, a color - a tree - an inlet of the sea - a division of a barn - a howl of a dog - the verb of the latter. Perhaps this is because so many words have multiple meanings.

Foreign encyclopedias show more lucid writing in their definitions. For example, the Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada, pub. by Hijos de Esposa, Barcelona, 1925, (translated):

"Homonym, adj., said of two or more persons or things which have the same name, and words which have the same written form but have different meanings e.g. Tarifa (city) and tarifa (a tax exacted). See also homofono and homografo. A means of describing persons equal in namesake." The French *La Grande Encyclopedie* says "said thus of words which having the same pronunciation, are different in meaning. The words having the same spelling, as *tendre* (adjective) and *tendre* (verb), are called perfect homonyms; the others having a different spelling, are ordinary homonyms, for

example: *ver*, *verve*, *vert*, *vers*, *vair*. It is due to the action of the phonetic rules," principally the rules of derivation, being the changing pronunciation which has given the same value to the sounds formerly different or which have left silent some of the letters formerly pronounced. In the derivative languages, the homonyms are such that are opposites of doublets (synonyms), thus they are called words of converging derivation. Homonyms are the principle source of a play on words (puns). Such lists of homonyms have been made, notably by Philipon de La Madelaine and by Poitevin."

Before continuing our search thru the dictionaries, let us see how many of these bewildering terms there are.

First, there are two prefixes, homo- and hetero-.

Then, there are three suffixes, nym, phone, and graph.

Combined together they make six compound words - but not necessarily six different meanings, as some give the same meaning by another method of approach.

Let us consider the word "homophone", which means "same sound." All of the dictionaries do not give a complete description of the meanings of this word. Webster's Collegiate and Thorndike-Barnhart, 1958, are practically the same:

Homophone,

a letter or symbol (character) having the same sound as another. The letters *c* and *k* are homophones in the word 'cork'."

While the American College Dictionary says:

"Homophone, phonetics.

1. a word pronounced the same as another, whether spelled the same or not; as *heir* and *air* are homophones.
2. (in writing) an element which represents the same spoken unit as another, as (usually) English *ks* and *x*." Such a definition produces an overlapping with the meaning of homonym.

Homographs are something quite different, as the name indicates "same writing." Thorndike-Barnhart tells no more than you can derive from the name.

Webster's Collegiate says:

"Homograph, one of two or more words identical in orthography, but different in derivation and meaning, as *fair* (a market) and *fair* (beautiful); *lead* (to conduct) and *lead* (a metal)."

Nothing is said about pronunciation, so one does not know for sure if the latter two words are pronounced the same or differently (which they are). More confusion!

The American College Dict. only tells half of the information, with:

"Homograph. a word of the same written form as another but of different origin and signification, as *homer* (a home run) and *homer* (a unit of measure.)"

Hence, we are forced to go abroad to get the entire information. The Enciclopedia Universal Illustrada says:

"Homograph. (Etim. from Gr. same, and to write),

adj. applied to words of different meaning which are written in the same manner (spelling), e.g. *haya* (tree) and *haya* (past person of the verb 'haber')."

In the studies of reading made easy for the deaf and deaf mutes, it is not rare to find the expression 'homograph', which has as its foundation in the action to consider the movements of

the lips and of the tongue to speak in what manner letters constitute the word. see homophone." In other words, to try to find which letters represent the sounds spoken.

The hetro-family of words is even less well known, not only to the public but apparently also to the dictionary makers and publishers. While Webster's, the A.C.D. and Murrays list hetronyms, the Thorndike-Barnhart fails to mention any words with this prefix.

Webster says:

"Hetronym.

1. a word spelled like another but differing in sound and sense, as *sow* (a pig) and *sow* (to strew seed). opposed to homonym.
2. a different name for the same thing, especially a name that exactly translates a name in another language, as *bread* is a hetronym of the German word: *brot*."

No cross reference is made to homograph, which is exactly the same as class

1. hence one wonders if this lack of cross-reference is due to carelessness, confusion or some other reason. The A.C.D. also fails to give the cross-reference. Murray's Shorter Oxford English Dict. 1955, gives: "Heteronym. one or other of two heteronymous terms.
2. a word spelled like another but having a different sound and meaning; opposite to homonym & synonym, 1889." Yet it has no reference to what it is synonomous. The first part of the definition violates the first rule of defining: that the word being defined shall not be used in the definition.

As for heterophones, all of the dictionaries fail to list this word, including Webster's Collegiate, Webster's New International, American College, Thorndike-Barnhart, Murray's Shorter Oxford, Murray's New English Dict. on Historic Principles, Funk & Wagnall's New Std. !956, Winston, 1946, Century, vol IV, 1911, and all of the encyclopedias. Apparently none of them even heard of .he word, yet they misuse another word to define just what a heterophone is intended to mean (by dissecting its parts):"different sound" (for the same spelling).

The misused word is heterograph.

Many dictionaries seem to be unsure of its use, so they omit this word. These are: Thorndike-Barnhart, Murray's Shorter Oxford, 1955, Winston, Century, Collier's. Most of those that do list the word, give only a definition similar to that of the American College Dict.:

"Heterography. a spelling different from current usage."

Only 3 give the complete (albeit partly erroneous) definition:

Webster's Collegiate says (and Webster's New International slavishly copies it).

"Heterography.

- a. spelling differing from standard current usage.
- b. spelling in which the same letters represent different sounds in different words or syllables, as in current English orthography, *g* as in *get*, and in *ginger*."

Funk & Wagnals says:

"Heterography.

1. orthography in which the same letter represents different sounds in different words or syllables, as *c* in *camp* and *cent*.
2. spelling varying from the standard.
3. heterophemy. a. relating to or characterized by heterography."

Apparently none of these three tried to analyze the word "heterograph" to see if it was intended to mean what they say it does. Even a rudimentary knowledge of Latin should tell a person: "different writing," not "different sound." If so many dictionaries are confused, omissive or incomplete, how can the general public be expected to have a clear conception of the meaning of these words? Who should be considered responsible for these words being confused or deceitful? - the dictionary makers?, the teachers?

Here are definitions for each of these words which the author hopes will clear up the existing confusion by classifying property each word according to its derivation.

"Homonym.

1. the same sounding name (altho it may be spelt differently).
2. Said of two words spelt and pronounced alike but differing in origin, meaning and/or usage, as *bay*, a color - a tree - an inlet of the sea - a division of a barn - a howl of a dog - the verb of the latter."

This definition is in conformance with the list of homonyms compiled by Rev. Walter W. Skeat, Litt.D, D.C.L, LL.D, Ph.D, F.B.A. in the *Etymological Dictionary*. He was considered to be one of the most famous authorities on English words.

"Homophone.

1. a letter or character which expresses the same sound as another, as *c* and *k* in *cook*, *qu* and *key*.
2. a word having the same pronunciation as another, but differing from it in origin, meaning and spelling, as *beart* and *bare*.
3. said of the names of two or more persons or things having the same pronunciation but different spellings."

This method of classification separates homophones from homonyms and is also in conformance with Skeat's list. It has the definite advantage of removing the confusion between the two terms.

"Homograph.

1. a homonym.
2. one of two or more words identical in spelling, but different in derivation and meaning, and sometimes in pronunciation, such as *lead* (verb) and *lead* (p.p. of verb, to lead), and *lead* (a metal, plumbus); *fair* (beautiful) and *fair* (a market). Includes homonyms as well as heteronyms and heterophones."

While this makes this term the largest inclusive term of these six, it is still in conformance with present dictionaries. This definition removes doubts as to the similarities and differences between the six words.

"Heteronym.

1. a word spelt the same as another, but differing in sound and meaning, as *sow* (a pig) and *sow* (to strew seed).
2. a different name for the same thing, esp. a name that exactly translates a name in another language, as *bread* is a heteronym of the German word *brot*." (Webster's New International, 1934). # 2 is not included in the meaning of homograph, q.v."

This definition is an exact quotation, with the addition of the last sentence.

"Heterophone.

1. said of two or more syllables or words of different pronunciation and meaning but spelt the same. Frequently, these are different parts of speech, such as *to read* (verb) and *read* (p.p. of *to read*), *absent* (adjective) and *absent* (verb).
2. spelling in which the same letters represent different sounds in different words, as *g* in *get* and *ginger*, *ch* in *church*, and *school*, *loch*, *yacht*, *machine*. See homograph, which includes both heterophones and # 1 of heteronyms."

This new definition fits more properly with the facts.

"Heterograph.

1. a spelling differing from standard current usage.
2. spelling in which different letters represent the same sound" as *g* in *gin* and *j* in *jinn*, also these words *sea* and *see*; *bear* and *bare*. A homophone, q.v."

This new definition fits in properly with the facts. The list of syllabic heterographs is only representative, as these are almost limitless. They are not considered to be homophones.

The following tables include examples of each word classification. A comprehensive list of homonyms (as of 1882-1909) can be found in Skeat: *Etymological Dictionary*. This list has 1782 homonyms in 784 sets of pairs, triplets, quadruplets (bay has six meanings). Most of these are also correctly termed homographs. It does not say that the list is complete, and it does not include such commonly known homonyms as *molar* (pertaining to teeth) or (pertaining to mass of matter), and such homographs as *minute* (time), (small). Undoubtedly there are many new homonyms created by new scientific uses, inventions, and the consequent terminology.

The list of homophones is admittedly incomplete. The editor will welcome calling attention to omissions to any of these lists. The list of homographs is supposed to be fairly complete, but additions have come in from time to time.

Almost any kind of a reform of our spelling would, by its very nature, eliminate all the homographs and consequently all of the present confusion caused by them. At the same time, all completely phonetic systems of reform and many of the systems of partial reform, would create more homographs. Many persons have thought that this is undesirable and consequently have weakened their proposed systems of reform by perpetuating differences in spelling for homophones. Apparently, they have never noticed that thousands of words in the dictionary have multiple meanings. "Run" tops the list with 104 different meanings, *break* has 43, *cut* 42, *fall* 64, *light* 64, *make* 57, *spring* 40, *square* 39, *strike* 68, *turn* 62, to mention a few.

However, Dr. Benjamin Franklin wisely explained that spelling differences to indicate a difference in meaning is unnecessary, in his letter to Mary Stevenson, as follows: dated Sept. 28, 1768:

"Dear Madam: The objection that you make to rectifying our alphabet, 'that it will be attended with inconveniences and difficulties' is a natural one; for it always occurs when any reformation is proposed, whether in religion government, laws, or even as low as roads and wheel carriges. The true question then is not whether there will be no difficulties or inconveniences, but whether the difficulties may not be surmounted; and whether the convenience; will not, one the whole, be greater than the inconvenience. In this case, the difficulties are only in the beginning of the practice; when they are overcome, the advantages are lasting. To either you or me, who spell well in the present mode, I imagine the difficulty of changing that mode for the new is not so great, but that we might perfectly get over it in a week's writing. As to those who do not spell well, if the two difficulties are compared, viz., that of teaching them true spelling in the present mode and that of

teaching them the new alphabet and the new spelling according to it, I am confident that the latter would be by far the least. They naturally fall into the new method already, as much as the imperfection of their alphabet will permit; their present spelling is only bad because it is contrary to the present bad rules; under the new rules it would be good. The difficulty of learning to spell well in the old way is so great that few attain it; thousands and thousands writing on to old age without ever being able to acquire it. 'Tis besides, a difficulty continually increasing, as the sound gradually varies more and more from the spelling; and to foreigners it makes the learning to pronounce our language, as written in our books, almost impossible.

Now, as to 'the inconveniences' you mention. The first is, that 'all our etymologies would be lost, consequently, we could not ascertain the meaning of words: Etymologies are at present very uncertain; but such as they are, the old books would preserve them, and the etymologists would there find them. Words, in the course of time, change their meanings, as well as their spellings and pronunciation; and we do not look at etymology for their present meanings. If I should call a man a knave and a villian, he would hardly be satisfied with my telling him that one of the words originally signified only a lad or a servant; and the other, an under-ploughman, or the inhabitant of a villiage. It is from our present use only, the meaning of words is to be determined.

Your second inconvenience is, that 'the distinction between words of different meaning and similar sound would be destroyed.' That distinction is already destroyed in pronouncing them; and we rely on the sense alone of the sentence to ascertain which of the several words, similar in sound, we intend. If this is sufficient in the rapidity of discourse, it will be much more so in written sentences which may be read liesurely, and attended to more particularly in the case of difficulty, than we can attend to a past sentence while the speaker is hurring us along with new ones.

Your third inconvenience is, that 'all books already written would be useless.' This inconvenience would only come on gradually, in the course of ages. You and I, and other now living readers, would hardly forget the use of them. People would long learn to read the old writing, though they practised the new. And the inconvenience is not greater than what has already happened in a similar case in Italy. Formerly its inhabitants all spoke and wrote Latin; as the language changed, the spelling followed it.

It is true, that at present a mere unlearned Italian cannot read the Latin books; though they are still read and understood by many. But, if the spelling had never been changed, he would now have found it much more difficult to read and write in his own language; for written words would have had no relation to sounds; they would have only stood for things; so that if he would express in writing the idea he has when he sounds the word 'vescovo,' he must use the letters 'episcopus.' In short, whatever the difficulties and inconveniences now are, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter; and sometime or other, *it must be done*, or our writing will become the same as with the Chinese, as to the difficulty of teaming and using it. And it would already have been such, if we had continued the Saxon spelling and writing used by our forefathers.

I am, my dear friend, yours affectionately, B. Franklin.

-o0o-

Poor Newell's Almanac - (after Ben Franklin's) - a collection of 1001 Wise sayings, Gems of Wisdom, Mottoes, Humorous quotations, gathered from many sources. Suitable for toastmasters, after dinner speakers, teachers, politicians, clergymen, and anyone who wants to put their audience in a good mood. You will find something suitable for almost any occasion. Send \$1.00 for this 12 page pamphlet to Newell Tune, Hollywood, Ca, and enjoy its humor.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §18.2 pp241,125 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1970 pp17-19 in the printed version]

## 2. Readability - an analysis of what it is, by Newell W. Tune

Without doubt, readability is a multifaceted subject that has not often been explored because of the complicated factors involved. There are at least four quite different aspects to readability. But first, let us define the term. Miles A. Tinker's book, *Legibility of Print* (Iowa State Univ. Press, 1963-4) is an exhaustive treatment of the subject. On page 5, he says that "the recognizability of printed symbols is ascertained by a short-exposure technique that gives the speed of perception which shows the quickness and accuracy by which letters, digits, words and phrases can be perceived. This method has been found useful for *determining the relative legibility of the letters of the alphabet*, digits, mathematical signs and particular letters in different type faces, and the roll of word-form in the perception of materials printed in lower-case versus upper-case type." Naturally this same technique could be used to evaluate new alphabets in comparison with our Roman alphabet.

I would like to offer this condensed version of the above statement: "Readability is the ease and speed with which a reader is able to decode and understand the words on something presented to him for scrutiny." If anyone has another definition, we would like to hear it.

Print legibility is only one facet of readability. At least three other factors are also important: 1. subject matter or context, 2. grammatical construction, 3. spelling.

Considering first the subject matter, it should be obvious that words and subjects not in the reader's understanding vocabulary can be spoken if the reader knows how to decode the printed symbols but understanding is not possible. And after all, is the subject matter then readable to this particular reader? - obviously, no! You can test this on yourself by reading - or trying to read - any one of the highly technical professional journals, such as the American Medical journal, Electronic News, Datamation, Corrosion (journal of the Corrosion Engineers). After trying out this test, you may be able to understand why a set of primers designed for pupils in England, where snow, ice and sleet are mentioned, is not understandable to a pupil in central or South Africa. The same is true of urban dwellers' children who may never have seen a live pig, cow or sheep.

The second, grammatical construction, may not be so readily apparent to one who has never taught foreigners, especially those from some European countries where they have an entirely different order of noun, verb, adverb and adjective. One quotation I remember well because it struck me so funny at the time, was attributed to some Scandahoovian in Minnesota - fresh off the boat from the old country. It goes: "Throw the horse over the fence some hay." Perhaps you have come across similar ones?

While this does not seem like a big obstacle, it does mean that such a foreigner must reorient his thinking along a different and often opposite grammatical order of words. This will not be true to any extent of children born and raised here, as they learn grammatical construction from the speaking of their parents - usually the mother. But it does show how a mother's grammatical mistakes are perpetuated in her children. Also is her dialectic pronunciation. It takes a skillful teacher to correct these long-used speaking habits.

The third, our erratic spelling, has been castigated for centuries by spelling reformers as an important cause of the difficulty in learning to read. And certainly, a non-phonemic spelling is

unreadable to a child who naturally expects that printed words should be indicators of the spoken words. No matter what the *method* of teaching reading, whether by phonics (direct or implied), or look and say (from which the pupil is supposed to infer that the printed word portrays the spoken sounds), or a combination of these presented in either words, phrases or sentences, it is inescapable that the child must eventually (altho gradually) learn by heart (sight, or spelling) all the hundreds - nay, thousands of irregular spellings that should, but do not, accurately portray the spoken words. One group of letters alone /ough/ has so many different pronunciations that any foreigner wonders if the English-speaking people, who tolerate such idiotic inconsistencies, are as bright as they pretend to be. For example: The *slough* was like *dough*, but with a *thought*, a *cough* and a *bough* the *tough* driver got team and wagon *through*. Another showing /ou/, A *tourist*, poor *soul*, on a *journey* to a different *country*, took *recourse* to *roulette* but *found out* he *could* only *double* his *troubles*. 9 different pronunciations for /ou/ and 7 for /ough/. (Ref. Dr. Clarence Hotson).

Just how bad is our English spelling? In two articles in this magazine for Spring, 1969, with the titles, "How phonemic is English spelling?" and "How nearly phonetic is English spelling?," the conclusions were that our spelling is far from being either phonemic or reliable. The unweighted figure given was 22.3% phonemic. The other article gave the rough figure of about 1/4 phonemic. That means that roughly 3 out of 4 words a pupil tries to read in an ordinary 3rd grade reader are probably unreliable as to being true indicators of the child's spoken language. With such an unreliable tool to present to the unsuspecting child, is it any wonder the child rebels and sulks, or thinking he is stupid, gives up and drops out? Sir James Pitman recognized this handicap and wisely created a smoothly paved detour around the rock-strewn, chuck-hole pitted road to reading with T.O. presented with vain hopes by other learning-to-read publishers. They depend on using regular words in their beginning presentation. It does little good to clear away the smaller boulders at the beginning of the journey if the pupil has to stumble thru the pitfalls before he has gained confidence in his ability to decode new words.

Just how can these four handicaps to readability be overcome? Taking them in order:

1. The type for beginners should be only lower case serif, which is the most easily legible (and least confusable between symbols).
2. The subject matter must be tailored to include only words in the child's spoken vocabulary and in his familiar sphere of living.
3. The grammar should be simple, straight forward and uncomplicated.
4. The spelling should be as regular as possible and equally as important, as phonemic as possible, so that the pupil never encounters any irregularity until he has gained complete confidence in his ability to read. If this means at first using a new alfabet that is truly phonemic, then that is your inescapable answer. Q.E.D.

Now that you have learned about readability, you might like the opportunity to try out your knowledge with experience. On the next page is a passage in two radically different systems: one, a phonetic alphabet well-known and used in teaching the finer points of phonetics - the International Phonetic Alphabet. The other is probably almost as well known but not used so extensively. It is the combined result of the best phoneticians in England and America and has successfully stood the test of many transliterations. It differs greatly from the I.P.A. in that it is strictly Romanic spelling, using digraphs where needed instead of new letters.

Read both passages as best you can and then decide which is the easier to read. Try to decide *why* one is much easier than the other, using all the knowledge and help from the above article, as well as your experience. Next, encode the same text in your own system and make a word by word comparison with these first two - first to see that the transliteration is accurate, then to see if yours is clearly understandable with no possible points of confusion. Be honest with yourself or you will defeat your own efforts, which should be to improve the reliability of your system.

The final test of readability of your system will come when you encode the Nonsense Prose in it. See page 9, Spring, 1970, S.P.B. This will show up its weak points, if you are really looking for them. To a mother duck, her duckling isn't ugly.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §18 p125 in the printed version]*

by Liliias E. Armstrong, 1927, Univ. of London Press in International Phonetic Alphabet.

## 2. AN ENGLISH PHONEMIC READER

(The IPA version quality is too poor to transcribe. It was not included in the Tune anthology.)

### **umbrela moeralz, bie Alpha of the Plow, frum Pebbles on the Shore; in World English.**

but ie leev him tuu 'iz unriechus komueningz. hee'z wun ov thoez peepl hoo hav what ie mae kaul an umbrela konshuns. yoo noe the sort ov person ie meen. hee'd never puut 'iz hand in anuther'z pokit, or forj a chek, or rob a til - not eeven if 'ee had the chans. but hee'l swap umbrelaz, or forget tuu riturn a buuk, or taek a riez out ov the raelwae kompani. in fakt hee'z a ththoroeli onest man hoo alouz hiz onesti the beni - fit ov the dout.

p'raps hee taeks yuur umbrela at random frum the barber'z stand. hee noe hee kant get a wurs than 'iz oen; hee mae get a beter. hee duznt luuk at it veri kloesli until hee'z wel on 'iz wae. then, "deer me! ie'v taekun the rong umbrela, "hee sez, with an aer ov surpriez, for hee lieks reeli tuu feel that hee'z maed a mistaek. "ie, wel, it's noe ues goeing bak nou," hee'd bigun. "and ie'v left him mien!"

it's thus that wee plae hied-n-seek withh our konshuns.

### **Umbrella Morals, by Alpha of the Plough, from: Pebbles on the Shore, in Traditional Orthography.**

But I leave him to 'is unrighteous comunings. He's one of those people who have what I may call an umbrella conscience. You know the sort of person I mean. He'd never put 'is hand in another's pocket, or forge a check, or rob a till - not even if 'e had the chance. But he'l swap umbrellas, or forget to return a book, or take a rize out of the railway company. In fact he's a thoroughly honest man who allows his honesty the benefit of the doubt.

P'raps he takes your umbrella at random from the barber's stand. He knows he can't get a worse than 'is own; he may get a better. He doesn't look at it very closely until he's well on 'is way. Then, "Dear me! I've taken the wrong umbrella, he says, with an air of surprize, for he likes to feel that he's made a mistake. "I, well, it's no use going back now," he'd begun. "And I've left him mine!"

It's thus that we play hide-n-seek with our conscience.

Transcribe the example in your system here:

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §18.3 p242 in the printed version*]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1980 p4 in the printed version*]

### 3. The Etymological Argument FOR Spelling Reform, by Valerie Yule\*

\*Old Aberdeen, Scotland.

Etymology has always been considered a good argument against spelling reform - so that the spelling of words should show their historical origin. This despite the fact that this demand is made of no other human tool, not even language itself. The occasional attempt, such as trying to make the first motor-cars look like horseless carriages, has always been laughed or shunted out of existence.

The 'etymological argument' also ignores the fact that English orthography is just about the only one in the world today, apart from French, where etymological interests are not expected to be sufficiently satisfied by looking up a dictionary, rather than daily handling fossils.

In the past, the spelling of words has even been made worse by attempts to bring back supposedly original spellings *which were mistaken* (e.g., the *ghost*, *doubt*, *debt*, *knight* arguments among scholars.)

However, the argument is still often made (e.g., Smelt 1975, Barnitz 1980) that a knowledge of etymology will make it easier to understand how words are spelt, and examples are given, often showing that while pronunciation has changed, the spelling has remained unchanged.

Yet the evidence given is always anecdotal, and as far as I know, no thorough count has ever been made of the relationship of present spellings to their historical analysis.

Suppose such an analysis should show how often the original spelling would conform more closely to our pronunciation today than do the corruptions it has undergone?

As an example of this empirical approach, a study has been made of all the words in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* containing the pronunciation short e as in *bet*.

Most of these words are in fact spelt with e as in *bet*. 275 words are not. These consist of 67 root words and their variations. For example, there are 42 words in the dictionary that incorporate the root word *head*. These 275 words can be divided into four groups, according to their etymological origin.

36% of the word roots and 34% of the total words which are not now spelt with e to represent short e, were *originally spelt with e*. 27% of the word roots and 22% of the total words have the sound e spelt with different vowel combinations, but *none are the same as in their original versions*.

15% of the word roots and 12% of the total words come from Old English words originally spelt with joined *ae*, which is now reversed into the spelling *ea*.

Of the rest, only 22% of the word roots and 32% of the total words now containing the short *e* pronunciation use their original vowel spellings - (and 15% of these total words are variants of one word, *head*, and five of the root words are now almost archaic - *enfeoff*, *guelder*, *haecceity*, *pall mall*, and *seamstress*.)

Over a third of the words in English spelling in which the sound *e* is not simply spelt *e* would therefore be brought back to their original spelling of that vowel if Spelling Reform 1 were adopted: "Spell the short *e* sound *e* as in *bet*".

If we added words that were often spelt *e* in straight sound-symbol correspondence by writers such as Shakespeare and Milton before spelling was standardised, it is likely that more than half of the present irregular spellings of short *e* would justifiably revert to regularity. (e.g., *det*, *plesure*, *spred*, *medow*, *dremt*, *thret*.)

There have been too many arguments about English spelling based on only anecdotal evidence (cf Chomsky 1970, refuted by Downing 1979 and by Yule 1978, but still quoted regardless). There has been too much research on spelling that looked only at what is wrong with children who can't learn it.

It is now time for spelling research that checks out the arguments of anti-reformers, including the etymological argument. How often, in fact, could spelling difficulty be reduced by reverting to original spellings that still matched modern speech?

#### 1. *Words with the short e sound originally spelt with e.*

24 root words plus 70 related words.

ate (O.E. etan)	leaven. (F.levain)
breadth (obs. brede)	measure (F. mesurer)
breakfast.(O.E. root, brecan)	pheasant (A.F. fesant)
dread (O.E. dredan)	said (O.E. secgan)
endeavour (F. en+devoir)	stealth (O.E. stelan)
guess (M.E. gessen)	thread (M.E. threden)
haemorrhage (F. emoragie)	treachery (O.F. trechereus)
heaven (O.E. hefen)	tread (O.E. tredan)
heavy (O.E. hefig)	treasure (O.F. tresor)
instead (O.E. root, stede)	wealth (O.E. wela)
jealous (O.E. gelos)	weather (O.E. weder)
leather (O.E. lether)	zealous (M.E. zele)

(Spellings of only 2 might be justified by pronunciation of related words: *break*, *say*)

2. *Words with present irregular spelling of short e sound not justified by spelling of origin* (17 root words + 41 related words)

any (O.E. aenig)	jeopardy (O.F. iu parti)
again (O.E. ongean)	leant (O.E. hlinian)
breast ((.E. breost)	peasant (A.F. paisant)
bury (O.E. byrgan)	realm (A.F. reaume)
feather (O.E. gefithrian)	sweat (O.E. swat)
friend (O.E. freond)	threepence (O.E. threo/thri)
guest (O.E. giest)	dreamt (cogn. G. traum)
heather (M.E. hathir)	pleasant (O.F. plaisant)
heifer (O.E. heahfore)	

3. *Words with original Old English spelling æ joined.*

(10 root words + 24 related words) breach, cleanse, dealt, health, meadow, meant, read, ready, spread, weapon.

4. *Words with vowel spelling unchanged from original words.*

15 root words (5 almost archaic) + 41 associates to *head*, and 27 other related words. From Old English: bread, dead, deaf, lead, head, leapt, enfeoff, seamstress, threat, many. From others: leisure, leopard, guelder, haecceity, pall mall.

## References.

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*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 3rd Ed. 1934, Oxford U.P.

Smelt, E. (1975), *How to Speak, Spell and Read English*, Y.M.C.A., Melbourne. Australia.

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It is also time, I think, to consider planning a complete issue of *Spelling Progress Bulletin* under the heading of "The evidence against anti-spelling Reform arguments" which would contain reprints and summaries of all the facts, research, etc. that need to be brought together for ready reference and more effective use.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology* §18.4 pp 243-246 in the printed version]  
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin* Winter 1971 pp8-11 in the printed version]

## 4. On 'Spelling' and 'Spelling Reform', by Wm. Haas\*

\*Introduction to the book, *Alphabets for English*, reviewed on SPB Winter 1971 pp17,18

### Introduction

Elementary education enables us, by a mere process of habit-formation and without much expense of thought, to acquire some of the basic achievements of our civilization. We 'learn the figures' without marvelling at the efficiency of the 'Arabic' notation (which, had he but come upon it, would have given supreme delight to any Roman geometer or trader); and we learn to read and write without recognizing the enormous achievement of the alphabet. It is true that the 'thoughtlessness,' with which we now acquire and use these gifts from a distant past, has its advantage - it permits us to learn it all very early and to save our thought for other things. But such semi-automatic inheritance can be a drawback. Flaws may begin to develop in the equipment which is passed on as a fixed social institution; and without clearer awareness of its working structure and significance, we should hardly be able to deal with its defects.

### Part I

The art of writing is one of the ancient arts and crafts in which the science of language has its origin. It is among the oldest of them, obviously reaching back as far as the beginnings of recorded history. Since then, the development of linguistics has continued to yield further technological advances: dictionaries and grammars of hundreds of languages, methods of language-teaching, notations for a variety of purposes, from logic and mathematics to shorthand and computer programming. But among these advances and, indeed, among all the gadgets of our modern age, the most ancient achievement - the art of writing, and especially alphabetic writing - remains unsurpassed in importance to the present day. As human civilization could not even begin to develop without this art, so a training in it remains the first step - the inevitable first step - for every child entering upon his cultural heritage.

**Of all intellectual traditions, none are more firmly established than those which are passed on to little children in their first years of school.** Such traditions tend to continue unchanged - safe from argument, and inaccessible to criticism. This is their power as well as their weakness. We never think of them. We are too young to do so when we learn them; and having learned them, we are loath to expend thought on what by then is a mechanical skill. We are glad, at last, to be able to think of *what* we read or write, without being distracted by problems of how to do it. No wonder, then, that we are instinctively protective about our mechanical skills. But to protect a mechanical skill is, precisely, to avoid thinking about it. For thought about it threatens all the advantage it has of saving thought for something else.

This explains why the mere sight of a new alphabet is enough to deter many who would like to learn Russian from even making a start. Proposals for spelling reform or alphabet reform arouse a similar instinctively defensive opposition. Such violent reactions are not quite so irrational as they are sometimes made out to be. True, the task of memorizing a new set of letters is easy enough. Once the art of reading has been acquired through one set of symbols, it takes very little time and effort to 'know' the use of another. But 'knowing' is only the first step; for we have not learned a new alphabet until we have made our use of it as 'thoughtless' and mechanical as the use of the old one had been. And this takes a lot of time. It is because of the difficulty of replacing it, that we are always ready to defend a semi-automatic habit. We do not relish the prospect of being spelling toddlers once more.

And yet, it would be a pity if all the knowledge people have of this supreme tool of civilization were to remain for ever at a toddler's level. Indeed, we might succeed, some day, in raising even this level, if we can bring ourselves to see in 'spelling' something more than the dead letter of tradition.

Attempts are being made at present to enliven the teaching of arithmetic in our schools. Mechanical exercises are to be replaced, or at least supplemented, by mathematical explorations. The children are to do arithmetic as an answer to questions they have first learned to ask. It is not impossible that, some day, the teaching of writing will be enlivened in a similar way.

At present, however, among those who have acquired the art, there are surely not very many who know of the discovery which made it possible. And yet, it was a sensational discovery. When Plato wished to illustrate the power and techniques of scientific analysis, he was fond of referring to this marvellous reduction of all speech to just a few 'letters.' The facts which are the foundation of alphabetic writing must have been unexpected as well as hidden. How else could we explain that, in the long history of the human race, the alphabet appears to have been discovered only once - by a Near-Eastern people speaking a Semitic language? All the alphabets we know appear to be descended from this one source.

That the practically infinite number of utterances which may be produced and understood in a community should be capable of being reduced to a limited number of 'units of meaning' (ideas, words, roots) - this has occurred to many. Significant elements, however, such as words, must still be counted in thousands. No efficient technique of writing could be based on assigning thousands of different symbols to the thousands of lexical elements. In a society operating with such a convention (as the Chinese still do), as is as is as it is obviously very difficult for all its members to become literate; the task is too hard, and too time-consuming.

The idea that analysis of utterances could be pushed further - that is, beyond identifying significant units - to yield smaller recurrent elements which, though *constituting* significant utterances, may themselves *have no meaning at all* - this idea cannot have been easy to come by. And the result of such analysis ('phonological analysis') was truly surprising: the practically infinite number of different utterances turned out to be capable of reduction to just a few dozens of recurring 'sounds.' Now, and only now, was it possible to represent any of that unlimited number with the help of just a few dozen signs; and also possible, at once, to spread scholarship from a few priests and clerks to the people, and to develop that kind of modern society which relies on the literacy of its members.

This is a great story; one can understand Plato's fondness for it. But among all the children in our schools, and among the adults who have learned to read and write when they were children, and how many have ever experienced anything of the wonder and surprise which rewarded the discoverers and designers of their alphabet? Most of us have never learned to ask the questions to which our alphabet is an answer. And having never looked at it as being the solution of an analytic and technological problem, most of us, its users, never ask, *how adequate* a solution it is. And yet, such questions are obviously nothing less than a concern with the technological foundations of our society and civilization. And they happen to be of special urgency for readers and writers of English.

## Part II

English orthography, as we all know, has long ceased to make proper use of the advantages of alphabetic writing. This is of course not due to any deep irrational strain in the English character. As in the case of most irrational institutions, there is an historical explanation. When, about 500 years ago, English spelling became conventionally fixed in more or less its present shape, the spoken language was yet to undergo extensive changes. As a result of these changes, the same letter would come to represent a number of different sounds (e.g. the letter 'a' in *same*, *fat*, *call*, *fast*), or indeed no sound at all (as the 'silent letters' in *know* or *wrestle*). But since at that time reading and writing was only the privilege of certain leisured classes, the inconsistency of English

spelling was not felt to be any special disadvantage. On the contrary, its anecdotal archaic flavour was sufficiently appreciated to discourage ideas of reform. It was enjoyable to discover in one's script some fossils of an earlier age. Also, to be able to spell correctly came to be a welcome sign of 'class,' and of more than average education. Inconsistency, however, if not removed, continues to breed further inconsistency. An esoteric concern with etymologies and pseudo-etymologies, rather than any regard for an efficient script, went on moulding English spelling conventions for centuries. It was only after the arrival of general education that the drawbacks of the archaic script were felt to be serious. Not every reader and writer of English could now be expected to know French and Latin; and there would be few, even among the educated, to appreciate that exquisite game of computing English spelling from a historical knowledge of three languages.

It should be admitted that present English orthography is not without interest, that it even has some advantages. The 'irregular' spelling of thousands of loan-words and technical terms is close to the spelling of similar words in other European languages - much closer than a phonetic English spelling would be. A Frenchman or German, who cannot understand a single sentence of spoken English, may yet find it fairly easy to grasp the substance of an English scientific text by silent reading. He would find it more difficult if the script were faithful to that English speech which he cannot follow. Even for the English user, the phonetically deviant orthography provides some useful non-phonetic signals. For example, there is a certain advantage in marking the English plural always by *s* (tho the phonetic value is either /s/ or /z/, or marking the English preterite always by *d* (instead of writing for it in phonetically faithful fashion, sometimes /d/ and sometimes /t/). Again, there is some sense in distinguishing the phonetically identical final vowels /ə/ of 'polar,' 'author,' 'baker,' so as to relate them to 'polarity,' 'authority' and 'bakery,' respectively. [1] It is important to remember in this connection that a *writing system*, even of the alphabetic sort, is never simply a phonetic transcription. Some of its deviations from a phonetic script - such as those just mentioned-are well motivated even from a purely linguistic point of view. [2]

However, even if we do not subscribe to any wholesale condemnation of English orthography, or to the idea that a perfect phonetic script would be best for English, it still seems impossible to deny that, on the whole, English-speaking communities are paying a heavy price for their alphabetic traditions. Their school children have to waste a great deal of time learning an unnecessarily difficult technique of reading and writing; and there is continual waste of time and of material resources in writing and printing superfluous letters. These are serious drawbacks, and not only for the English-speaking communities. For, in the same way, the use of English as a second language is being obstructed in all parts of the world.

It is on account of these social consequences that English spelling traditions have come under attack from many quarters - from teachers, writers, and politicians no less than students of language: from teachers, who feel in duty bound to voice the pains of their spelling infants; from writers, reflecting on the inefficiency of their tools; and from politicians, concerned about the educational level of their fellow-citizens, or about obstacles to the international use of English. Dr. Follick, teacher and politician, has been as eloquent as any of these, in denouncing the inefficiency of English spelling. The book he completed before his death under the title '*The Case for Spelling Reform*,' bears two inscriptions: 'To the Schoolchildren of Britain - a Consistent Alphabet,' and: 'To the Nations of the World - an International Language.' In his last years, Dr. Follick was inclined to think that the evaluation of alternative techniques of writing was primarily a task for linguistic studies (or, as he would say, for 'comparative philology'). In this, he was probably right. 'Primarily', however, must not be interpreted to mean 'exclusively.' It is important to realize that efficiency of communication is a social and psychological as well as a linguistic problem.

Linguistics provides the alphabet-maker with his principal tool - phonological analysis. But just as the engineer, who derives essential insights from physics, will yet not be able to decide on this basis alone what machines to build, so will the designer of alphabetic conventions find it impossible to decide, purely on linguistic grounds, what alphabet would be best in a given situation.

The problems of an English spelling-reform would have been solved long ago, if they were purely linguistic in character. It is not very difficult to devise a consistent alphabet (tho it is not quite so easy as amateurs tend to think); and *there is no shortage of such alphabets*. But it is extremely difficult to devise one that has any chance of prevailing *without causing more harm than good*.

Techniques of writing and printing are a very special kind of technological equipment. To replace them is not nearly as easy as to replace some other sort of machinery. In order to oust, say, the steam engine, it was enough to have constructed a machine which could do the job more efficiently. The scrapping of the old engines and of the plants producing them, and the re-training of a number of engineers and workers, must cause some harm and pain; but the harm will soon be healed, and the pain forgotten. The changes, on the other hand, which are called for by a new method of writing, are far more radical. A book lives much longer than any steam-engine; and every citizen has been trained as a reader and writer, while only a few are experts in steam-engineering. The institution of English spelling is entrenched in countless private and public libraries, in thousands of schools and offices, in the special skills of many thousands of teachers, and of millions of people all over the world. Moreover, the particular Roman alphabet we use is clearly related to hundreds of similar alphabets, currently employed for the representation of other languages. In a technique of writing we are dealing with a ubiquitous kind of technological equipment: it is nothing less than the principal medium of a modern civilization, a constant link with our contemporaries as well as our ancestors.

The problem of spelling-reform cannot, therefore, be approached merely by asking whether we can devise a linguistically more adequate technique of writing. We certainly can. The question is also: Is it worth while? As soon as we ask this question, the linguistically most adequate solutions - 'best' alphabets - appear immediately to be impractical. We need not go so far as to exclude them for all time. Possibly, some day in the distant future our economic and technical resources will permit a linguistically perfect spelling reform. Perhaps, some day, we shall be able and prepared to reprint the English texts in all libraries, private and public, all over the world. At present, however, a *perfect* convention for writing English needs only to be placed into the context of its prospective use, in order to be immediately rejected. This is why proposals for a spelling-reform cannot be judged by purely linguistic criteria. Having his 'perfect' constructions rejected, the linguist will be asked to try again, and to come back with proposals within the limits of what is practicable.

Social conditions will then control the very construction of a revised script. The reformer will not be able to ward off such 'extraneous' considerations by any mere strategy of skilful campaigning. For the campaign itself, to be successful, asks for compromise. This becomes immediately clear, when we consider, *how* any proposed new script might come to be *adopted*, how it might issue in reform.

Most spelling reformers agree that reform would have to be gradual. It would have to be carefully phased over a period of a few generations. What is true of every linguistic change - that the new must *co-exist* with the old before it prevails, would also be true of a reform of spelling-conventions. Even a reform by decree would have to simulate the gradual process of natural linguistic change. There seems to be only one effective way of ensuring at least a temporary co-existence of new spelling-conventions with the old - namely, by teaching both in schools. This is why the campaign reported by Sir James Pitman - in the first lecture of this volume (pp. 14-49), and in greater detail, by Dr. Follick in his book - is of crucial interest. A Minister of Education had given permission for precisely such an experiment in co-existence; and it is being carried out with apparently increasing momentum to the present day.

There might have been some uncertainty, at first. Would a second alphabet be an additional burden for the children at school? Might it not confuse them? Indeed, such fears would have been well-founded, had the new script been linguistically perfect. But nothing of the sort has been attempted. The new alphabetic system which is now being taught in some primary schools is in

fact a compromise with the old. And such a system has proved to be no burden at all. It has been shown - and this is, from the point of view of spelling-reform, the main contribution of Sir James Pitman's current experiments - that intrusion of a more consistent script of this sort will do no harm; there is even reason to believe that some such script could be of immediate use: it can make for an easier introduction to the traditional orthography, i.e. serve as an 'initial teaching alphabet.'

The first stage, then, in a reform of English spelling, could be almost painless. The initial co-existence of two alphabetic conventions can be cooperative rather than competitive, and yield immediate rewards in lightening the burden of learning to read and write, even with the given archaic tools. Indeed, nothing would be lost if the two conventions were to be kept side by side indefinitely - though, in that case, the ultimate greater gain of a reformed script would be forsaken.

Let us assume, then, that this would be the strategy of a spelling-reform - its progress to be channelled painlessly through its use as a transition-alphabet! It is clear that such a plan imposes severe restrictions on the reform itself. If the proposed new conventions are to be capable of serving as a first stage for acquiring the old, then any more extravagant novelty must be excluded. The Shaw alphabet would have no chance of being accepted as an 'initial teaching alphabet' because it offers no bridge or transition to traditional orthography.

How remarkable it is, then, that the only systematic script, so far, that has actually entered our schools as a transition alphabet - namely, Sir James Pitman's *i.t.a.* - does not claim to be a suitable candidate for spelling reform! Indeed, Sir James does not think that reform of English spelling should come by way of an initial teaching alphabet. In his opinion, a systematic script which is suitable for initial instruction in traditional orthography would 'thereby' be 'made less suitable for that other purpose.' - Now, it may well be true of *i.t.a.* that it would not be the best alphabet to serve both purposes. But the reason why Sir James considers the two functions to be incompatible is not to be found so much in the demands he makes on a transition-script as in the demands he makes on a spelling reform. This, he holds, should be on the lines of Bernard Shaw's proposals for a non-Roman alphabet, i.e. an alphabet totally different from our present techniques of writing. [3] Sir James's argument falls as soon as we abandon the idea of an uncompromising thoroughgoing reform. The auxiliary purpose of an initial teaching alphabet and the ultimate purpose of spelling reform are immediately compatible if we accept the general approach of Dr. Follick or Dr. Wijk or the Simplified Spelling Society who aim, all of them, at a reform 'with least disturbance' and, therefore, in the medium of the Roman script. Such a limited reform would permit precisely the kind of gradual transition and temporary co-existence which, through experiments with *i.t.a.*, has been proved to be educationally acceptable. For, it is *the same continuity with tradition* that has to be preserved, on the one hand, if a revised alphabet is to serve as an easy introduction to the old, and, on the other, if it is to take over *from* the old without too much disturbance.

Of course, a viable compromise is more difficult to devise than a utopian new beginning. If proposals for a spelling reform are to be judged by phonological criteria alone, then some English script on the lines of the *international Phonetic Alphabet* (IPA), or even the *Shaw Alphabet* would probably have been accepted long ago. If we stipulate that the new script should be produced by subjecting some standard form of English speech to a strictly phonemic analysis, then no controversial issue remains except the choice of suitable letter-shapes. This, as Mr. MacCarthy has shown, [4] is not a linguistic problem, but a complex of social, psychological, aesthetic and technological questions. Whatever the decision we should reach here, it would not interfere with the basic analysis itself, nor could it alter its findings. We should merely be asking how to *represent* the results of a given analysis.

The situation is radically different, if we regard a consistent phonetic script as altogether too deviant from the present orthography to serve the purposes of either primary school-teaching or reform, and prefer to seek a compromise of 'least disturbance.' Then - and this does not seem to have been sufficiently realized - all kinds of social and psychological considerations must be

brought in to influence the basic analysis itself, or to modify its results. The very criteria then by which we shall produce and judge a script, *are no longer capable of consistent application*: the whole task becomes a problem of *balancing conflicting claims*. Hence, the difficulty of consistently applying 'guiding principles' such as those formulated by the Simplified Spelling Society. Mr. MacCarthy [5] has shown in fact how, in satisfying any of these principles, we are bound to contravene others. This issue must be faced squarely; or arguments for spelling reform will, as has happened so often, present themselves as just a welter of contradictions. Instead of pretending to some kind of deductive consistency, when we are in fact constantly and tacitly shifting our ground, we shall have to bring such shifts into the open, and acknowledge that our task is not to deduce a solution from first principles, but is the very different one of trying to attain a *state of balance*, precisely, on shifting ground.

It is from this point of view that Dr. Wijk's proposals [6] will be found to be especially interesting. At every step, the phonetician or linguist is called upon to decide how much he may reasonably concede to sociological, psychological, and pedagogical considerations. *Some* concessions are bound to be made. This is no longer the comparatively easy task of deducing solutions from general principles, but the highly controversial task of judging every single revision on its merits, and adjudicating upon conflicting claims. Nevertheless, we are not reduced to unreasoned intuitive decisions. On the contrary: rival claims must be clearly stated and the limits of compromise be accurately defined.

Problems of 'spelling reform' demand a great deal of further study; and some later volumes in this series will be devoted to an investigation of them. The present volume may serve as a useful introduction: the problems to be dealt with emerge naturally from reviewing some of the more important English alphabets so far proposed. The following chapters are, in effect, such a review.

Sir James Pitman's chapter presents the system of English spelling which he designed as an Initial Teaching Alphabet - '*i.t.a.*' A comparison with Dr. Follick's alphabet leads him to examine how different social and educational aims will determine the design of different scripts.

Mr. Peter MacCarthy (of the Dept. of Phonetics in the Univ. of Leeds) discusses some important technical alternatives, among which any spelling reform of English would have to choose; and he explains the principles which were adopted in the design of the two very different reform proposals - the Simplified Spelling Society's 'New Spelling,' and the 'Bernard Shaw Alphabet.'

Dr. Axel Wijk (of the Univ. of Stockholm) presents a system of 'Regularized English,' which may be described as a proposal for minimal reform and maximal continuity with T.O.

- [1] It is remarkable that Sir James Pitman accepts the phonetically deviant representations of /ə/ (*Learning to Read*, p. 19), while rejecting plural -s and preterite -d.
- [2] Cf. Josef Vachek, *Some remarks on writing and phonetic transcription* (in 'Readings in Linguistics, ii', Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966).
- [3] I. J. Pitman, *Learning to Read* (journal of the Royal Society of Arts, Feb. 1961, p. 27).
- [4] See his chapter on the Bernard Shaw alphabet (pp. 105-115).
- [5] See: Chp. 4, *New Spelling with Old Letters*, pp. 89-104.
- [6] See: Chp. 3, *Regularized English*, pp. 50-88. Of the systems presented in this volume, Dr. Wijk's seems to be less widely known than the others. In a recent publication, (*Studies in Spelling*, Univ. of London Press, 1961), Dr. W. Boyd called for precisely the kind of minimal reform which had been worked out by Dr. Wijk in his '*Regularized English.*'

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §18.5 pp246-248 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1971 pp11-13 in the printed version]*

## **5. A Glance Toward Norway, by Helen Bonnema\***

\*Temple Buell College, Denver, Colo.

The three tasks of the spelling reformer are to:

- (1) determine the need for change,
- (2) devise a perfected spelling system,
- (3) gain adoption of the new system.

The tasks are made easier when one studies the orthographic experience of other times and nations. The following two articles give incidents from the history of Norway, and impressions on how reading is taught there. In "Linguistic Changes in Norway" the reformer may see the difficulties encountered by those who try to bring about change, and in "Beginning Reading in Norway" a need for revising English spelling.

### **I. Linguistic Changes in Norway.**

The language spoken in Norway is closely akin to Swedish and Danish. Its history from the third century onwards is interestingly told by Alf Sommerfelt of the Department of Cultural Relations, Oslo, Norway, 1968, publication.

Some excerpts from his account give an indication of the way in which orthographic changes have developed.

In their literary activity during the 16th century, the Norwegians took as models the writings of the early Danish Lutheran clerics. Altho it was Danish, their written language contained some Norwegian forms and expressions which were used for things and conditions found in Norway only. This literary language was used mostly on official occasions. The spoken language was split up into a great number of dialects. The common townspeople spoke the old town vernacular of a purely Norwegian type. Alongside this there appeared a middle-class language, the speech of the town bourgeoisie.

In the 18th century a more uniform Norwegian appeared, based on the middle-class language of the towns in south-eastern Norway and spoken by the upper classes of the towns, especially in the southeast and by the civil-servant class. This language is clearly a mixture of spoken Norwegian and Danish literary forms.

Soon after the severance of the Dano-Norwegian union there was a reaction against the Danish influence. The so-called Norwegianizing of the written language was led by the pedagog Knud Knudson (1812-1895), who was untiringly engaged in proposing orthographic changes based on the spoken language. He exercised a strong influence on Ibsen and Bjornson (Nobel prize, 1903) who both followed most of his orthographic rules.

Another language reformer, however, Aasen (1813-1896) believed that no satisfactory result could be achieved by merely correcting the Danish orthography according to Norwegian pronunciation. Himself of peasant extraction, he eagerly studied the various Norwegian dialects, and on the basis of these he showed that it was possible to construct a written language which would be wholly Norwegian. Aasen's language has been named *Nynorsk* (New Norse).

Thus, about the middle of the 19th century there arose what is known as the "language conflict," one side fighting for the introduction of the language of Aasen, the other taking written Dano-Norwegian, called *Bokmal* (book language).

Between these two parties has been waged a struggle, at times a bitter one, which is not yet concluded. The struggle is not only a linguistic one but bears a marked social character. The *Nynorsk* being nearer to the western dialects than the *Bokmal*, the former has gained a firm footing in West Norway. In the towns the *Nynorsk* is supported by people from the country districts, and all over Norway the class of elementary school teachers has been an important element in the struggle as ardent supporters of *Nynorsk*. Since 1885 both *Bokmal* and *Nynorsk* have been officially recognized on an equal footing. In the schools the pupils learn to read both languages, while the local school boards have to determine which is to be the chief language of each school and to be used in written exercises. In the upper sections of the secondary schools, the pupils have to learn to write both forms, but there, also, one of the two must be selected as the chief language. In the schools, in 1965-65, 79.5% of the pupils used *Bokmal*, while 20.5% used *Nynorsk* as their main language.

Many years had to pass before the Norwegian features of speech were given expression in the recognized spelling. In 1907 the voiceless consonants *p*, *t*, and *k*, were introduced to accord with the spoken language. Ten years later more steps were made in conforming spelling to Norwegian sounds rather than the former old Danish. These changes occurred in *Bokmal*. At the same time alterations were made in *Nynorsk* whereby many words which had been pronounced alike in the two written languages were given the same form in spelling. Since then there has been a movement in favor of bringing the two languages still closer to one another, with the ultimate object of a complete fusion, by adapting the grammar and word forms of *Nynorsk* to the East-Norway dialects and by ousting the last Danish forms from *Bokmal*.

In 1934 the government appointed a committee of scholars, teachers and authors who were to work out new orthographic and grammatical rules for both languages. The recommendation of the committee was published in 1936. The following year the Storting (parliament) declared, by a vote, that the orthographic rules of the two languages were to follow the main principles laid down in the recommendation. After revision by a second committee in 1938, the new orthography was introduced into public administration in 1939. The written forms of the two languages were made still closer to one another. Diphthongs were introduced into a great number of words in *Bokmal* in order to make them identical with the *Nynorsk* words. The grammar of *Bokmal* also underwent considerable changes. On the other hand, word forms and the grammar of *Nynorsk* were altered in order to make them correspond to the forms of the East Norway dialects.

The changes have caused some confusion in Norwegian writing. The reform of 1917 was met by strong opposition from many of the supporters of *Bokmal*. The latest reform brought even greater resistance from the partisans of *Nynorsk*. During the German occupation, the Quisling

administration introduced a certain number of orthographic changes which were abolished at the Liberation in May, 1945.

The confusion caused by the different orthographic changes and the many alternative optional forms have had serious effects in the schools. A movement of protest against the use of such a great number of the "radical" optional forms in the school primers has been organized and has received strong support in the principal towns. In order to elaborate a more fixed standard for the schools, the government appointed in Dec. 1951 a permanent linguistic commission (*Norsk Spraknemnd*) consisting of 30 experts in linguistics, school work, literary and journalistic activities, and broadcasting, with 15 for each language.

Many of the adherents of *Bokmal* have been strongly suspicious of all government action, and when a majority of the Norwegian Authors' Association chose representatives to serve on the commission, the minority left the association and formed their own. The seceding authors brought a case against the Authors' Association, first before the town court of Oslo and afterwards before the Supreme Court, arguing that the election of representatives to the commission ran counter to the statutes of the association. They lost in both instances. In 1966 the two branches of the organization were again united after a slight change in the rules for selecting representatives on the commission.

The fixed standard to be used in the schools, elaborated by the permanent linguistic commission, was published in 1958. It was nicknamed *Samnorsk* (Common Norwegian), and is violently criticized by some associations supporting *Bokmal*, but it was authorized by the Ministry of Education when the Storting had an opportunity of discussing it in 1958.

In 1964 a committee of nine members was appointed to study the language situation in Norway and to reduce the conflicts between the different language groups. The committee's report was completed in 1966. The government hopes that closer cooperation with less friction will be achieved in the future.

*The above information was obtained from Georg Krane, counselor, Press and Cultural Affairs of the Royal Norwegian Embassy, and The Norway Year Book 1967.*

## **II. Beginning Reading in Norway.**

An interview with Prof. Berit Lindley, native of Norway, foreign language professor at Temple Buell College, wife of Charles B. Lindley, Colorado State Representative. Helen Bonnema taped this conversation a short time ago when Mrs. Lindley returned from her annual visit with relatives in Norway.

*Question: As you know, teachers of reading in the United States are troubled that so many children don't learn to read in primary grades, and have to continue with these lessons during their elementary years. Even in junior and senior high school some are given lessons in remedial reading. Will you comment on your impressions of the learning of reading in Norway?*

Answer: When I was there during the past few weeks, I discussed this with a number of teachers and with parents whose children are currently in the first grade. The public schools do not start with kindergarten, and so the children normally begin school when they are seven years old. That's

when they learn to read. From what I have heard, it doesn't seem too difficult for the average pupil, because the sounds of words are pronounced just the way the letters are named when you say them individually. There is usually just one pronunciation for each letter. Similar sounds, of course, change a little depending upon the position of the letter in a word, but generally, they pronounce each word according to each letter and this is the same regardless of which word you come up against. Some of my friends, and also a few teachers with whom I talked, said that normally a child who starts first grade will learn to read in *about three weeks*.

*Q: What can they read?*

A: Well, not everything within three weeks but within a year they are expected to read the newspaper and all types of material.

*Q: How does a teacher start?*

A: I remembered how it was when I learned to read, but when I described this to one of my friends who is one of the young, leading persons in public education in Oslo, she said, "Oh, that is no longer the way we learn to read. We now use every possible way, so we use a combination of word recognition and also sound out each letter."

I guess you call it phonics, I'm really not that familiar with it. They also use the more traditional methods, but she said, "We try to combine every single one we know in order to teach the child to read as quickly as possible!" Obviously it is quite successful.

*Q: Is your friend a first-grade teacher?*

A: She is the principal in one of the newest schools. I used to work with her in the scout movement, and she is really a very fascinating woman. She has a tremendous amount of drive, and a great concern for education. I guess she is really one of the pioneers. I asked her if she thought that the fact of the Norwegian society being so homogeneous had any bearing on it, because when we are speaking of public schools in the United States, we are also talking about the melting pot, and the service which the schools render the country in forming a whole by having all of the different kinds of students in one class. This to her was a completely surprising question because she hadn't thought about it. She said, "My particular school is kind of heterogeneous too." I asked, "In what way?" She answered, "Some of the children come from the big city, some from the country, and some from the smaller towns. The very thing we are working on is to get them worked into one uniform group." But she didn't think that had any bearing on their reading.

*Q: Do you think that they are homogeneous?*

A: Yes. I know a few people who have talked about that and wondered if the fact that the society is so similar might have some bearing on the children's success because they don't have to cope with all the differences and adjust to them. All that they are working on is the reading.

*Q: Nor do they have to teach the meanings of words, as we do in the inner-city?*

A: No, and another thing which I think people tend to forget is that English is such a rich language. You have such a tremendous number of words of similar meanings -- so many synonyms. In

Norwegian our language is so much poorer. It's adequate, but if you look in the dictionary, you may find one Norwegian word and six English words.

Another thing I have found very surprising is that in the United States the average person seems to have a certain amount of difficulty in spelling and has to check in the dictionary.

*Q: Oh, everyone does -- even the college professor.*

A: Right. Because you have such an enormous number of words. But I have found that if you have learned to read a foreign language -- for instance, I first learned Norwegian, then I learned to read German, and *then* I learned to read English, but that was the most difficult because your rules of pronunciation are practically impossible, even tho we don't learn it by rule. It is largely a matter of memory. But I had already learned the technique of reading, and for me the difficulty that confronts the six-year-old first learning didn't exist. I have noticed this in the teaching of English in the Norwegian schools. The average pupil learns to read and to pronounce English words correctly without difficulty, and I think it is because they can depend upon the technique they have learned already so they can concentrate on the new thing.

*Q: That's the argument that is back of systems like the Initial Teaching Alphabet which was first introduced in Great Britain. They figure, teach the child a system that is regular, and then when he knows the techniques of reading, he can better tackle the irregularities of spelling.*

A: It is very difficult to spell. I can see this myself. I have a daughter who is six and a half who is in the process of learning to read and I hadn't even imagined the difficulties they are up against. I wish that she had learned Norwegian first, because I can see now when she is reading English texts she can pick up a Norwegian book and pronounce more of the words there because she depends upon the pronunciation she already knows from speaking Norwegian. There is no doubt but that English is tremendously difficult. Just think of:

I have *seen* him.

She made a *scene*.

or you are talking about a *key*, a *sea*, or to *see*. To me, they should be spelled the same way instead of /ey/, /ea/, and /ee/.

*Q: Right. In Norway, they do encounter some need for special work to help children of low intelligence, don't they?*

A: Surely, this is true. I really never saw this myself, and I haven't been in close touch with the students in elementary or secondary schools for the past ten years, but no doubt there are children of low ability who have difficulty in reading. I remember a case where someone had said, "This person cannot possibly learn to read," and when this person became 17 or even later, he hadn't been given an education. They used the excuse that the person didn't have the ability. But they found later on that he *did* have the ability, and they sued the government for it. I've never seen the outcome. (end)

[Spelling Reform Anthology §18.6 p248 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1965 p16 in the printed version]

## 6. Verbs, (by one perturbed)

A verb's the worst thing in the world  
For me to learn aright  
I study till I have it all,  
I think, all fast and tight.

But when the teacher calls on me,  
And I stand up to recite,  
I can't make any sense of it,  
And never get it right.

You try give the parts of verbs  
And say *see*, *saw* and *seen*.  
But when you give the parts of *be*,  
You can't say *be*, *baw*, *been*.

If Johnny gives the parts of *go*,  
And says *go*, *went* and *gone*,  
It doesn't help a bit with *grow*.  
You can't say *grow*, *grent*, *grown*.

The parts of *take* you're very sure  
Are *take*, *took*, *taken*.  
Yet *bake* seems very wrong, somehow,  
As *bake* and *book* and *bacon*.

Now *do*, *did*, *done*, sounds very well  
And so do *eat*, *ate*, *eaten*,  
But *moo*, *mid*, *mun*, is very queer  
And so is *cheat*, *chate*, *cheaten*.

It's worse than partial payments,  
You never get it right,  
And then the fellows laugh at you  
When it's your turn to recite.

If ever I a grammar make,  
There shall be some sense to it.  
And if *bit* and *bite* are proper,  
So shall these be *fight* and *fit*.

from the *Desk Drawer Anthology's* Port of Missing Authors (authors who couldn't be found)