

# Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

## §3. Viewpoints on Spelling Reform

This section is devoted to giving quotations of opinions of well-known or famous authors on the subject of spelling reform.

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1974 p13 in the printed version*]

### 1. Viewpoints I, by Emmett Albert Betts\*

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This VIEWPOINTS column is written for one chief purpose: to direct attention to crucial problems in the development of a system of writing from inter-disciplinary points of view. This purpose is based on the premise that scholars in linguistics, orthography, psychology, pedagogy, and cognate disciplines need to be recruited to achieve the spelling reform that will command respect and the support from academia.

One of the critical dichotomies is the emphasis on reformed spelling per se by one group and the view by another group that spelling is only one facet of orthography. It is this writer's opinion that this dilemma may be resolved by inter-disciplinary approaches to the development of a spelling system for beginners in reading. At the same time, the ultimate goal of general spelling reform is kept at least within peripheral view.

Dr. Robert A. Hall, Jr., an internationally recognised linguist, recommends a phonemic approach to spelling reform:

"If we are to 'start from the bottom,' our first concern must be to analyse the sounds with which humans speak. Clearly it will not do, for several reasons, to begin our analysis simply with the letters used in our conventional spelling. The 26 letters of the Roman alphabet are by no means sufficient to represent even all the sounds of the English language, to say nothing of all those which the human vocal apparatus is able to produce. Furthermore, the use which our conventional spelling makes of these 26 letters is, in many instances, inconsistent and capricious, so that we could not base any rational or accurate analysis on them, either in alphabetical order or in any other. How, for example, would we go about analyzing "the sound of the letter c," when it is used in so many different values (as in *carrot*, *cent*, *indict*, etc.) and when the sounds for which it stands are also represented by other letters, as in *karat* and *scenf*? The result could only be a hopeless hodgepodge. (Hall, Robert A. Jr. *Introductory Linguistics*, New York: Chilton Books, 1964, p.36.)

Dr. Robert F. Biehler, a reputable educational psychologist, has made a significant beginning in alerting psychologists to the need for action:

"The English language developed with no thought of the problems of generalisation or negative transfer. The unsuspecting child is forced to deal with all kinds of inconsistencies. For example, a first-grader learns how to write / and then discovers it is wrong to use / for eye or aye. Because English is not spelt phonetically, the regular alphabet causes many problems for children learning to read. (There are 22 different ways the sound of / is spelled in different words.) (Biehler, Robert F. *Psychology Applied to Teaching*. Atlanta: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974, p.368.)

In brief, at least one linguist recognises the need "to start from the bottom" - with the phonemes to be represented by spellings. And educational psychologists who have concerned themselves primarily with learning are being reminded to begin serious efforts to evaluate the medium (spelling) - one of the *whats* of learning.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology* § 3.1 pp40-41 in the printed version]

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## **Viewpoints II, by Emmett Albert Betts, Ph.D., L.L.D.\***

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This Viewpoints column is written to call attention to the diversity of opinions regarding spelling reform, to some of the basic issues of spelling reform, and to experimental studies of spelling and related factors.

In fruitful discussions of spelling reform, there is a need to distinguish between two types of reform: an initial learning medium for beginners in reading, and all-out spelling reform for permanent use. During the 1960's, Sir James Pitman introduced an opening wedge to spelling reform via his Augmented Roman Alphabet, later called Initial Teaching Alphabet, or simply i.t.a. As a result of introducing this concept, the reading establishment is gradually becoming sensitive or allergic, as the case may be, to the need for at least a reformed spelling for beginners in reading.

Spelling reform even for beginners in reading is an anathema to many political leaders in the reading establishment. But in fact, our growing correspondence indicates that pressure against the establishment is developing at the grassroots - in the classroom. This pressure from "below," where the action really is, gives impetus to spelling reform and is to be encouraged.

In 1969, George Riemer, a professional free-lance writer and protagonist of Pitman's i.t.a., endorsed i.t.a. altho "it isn't perfect":

"i.t.a. is a compromise of logic and realism, for its solution is a limited-time alphabet reform for the sake of beginning learners. It balances the sound-symbol relationship by fixing temporary extensions to our traditional alphabet. The result is a consistent, logical spelling. i.t.a. uses no symbols which don't carry their own sound - no silent letters. It requires seventeen spellings for all vowel phonic facts. And that, i.t.a. isn't perfect. Some inconsistency has been built into it to help the child be ready for his transition to the regular alphabet." (Riemer, George. *How They Murdered the Second "R"*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., p.81.)

In 1961, the eminent educational psychologist (and psycholinguist) John B. Carroll stated the relationship between the "confusing" English alphabet and reading disabilities:

"Like most languages of the world (the exceptions are chiefly the Oriental languages, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), English has an alphabetic writing system. The letters (or clusters of letters) in a word, read from left to right, show a rather high degree of correspondence with the

sounds of the spoken word. The correspondence is not as exact as it could be; indeed, there are few if any languages where the discrepancies between written symbols and the corresponding sounds are as many and as confusing as they are in English. This characteristic of English orthography is probably a contributing factor to the rather large amount of difficulty in the learning of reading that has been experienced in all English-speaking countries. Although the evidence is none too clear because of the many extraneous social, educational, religious, and other factors that may also be present, there is a possibility that incidence of reading disability is correlated with the complexity of orthographic system in a language . . ." (Carroll, John B. Chapter 13, "Research on Reading and It's Teaching," *Educational Psychology and Educational Research*. Harvard University, Sept., 1961. (unpublished draft.), p.13-16.

In short, Dr. Carroll has certainly endorsed a revised initial learning medium as well as spelling reform.

In 1957, Dr. Ernest Horn who was eminent in elementary education, summarised a life-time of crucial investigations of spelling and *learning* to spell:

"When the evidence, on both the consistency and the irregularities of English spelling, is critically and realistically assessed, little justification is found for the claim that pupils can arrive deductively at the spelling of most words they can pronounce." (Horn, Ernest. "Phonetics and Spelling," *Elementary School Journal*, v. LVII, (May, 1957) pp.424-32.)

From the first two editions of *Viewpoints*, it appears that educators, psychologists, linguists, and journalists make the need for spelling reform "crystal clear." At this juncture, there is need for scholars in these and cognate disciplines to pool their energies in one gigantic interdisciplinary effort which cannot be denied by the reading establishment.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology* § 3.1 pp41-42 in the printed version]

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### **Viewpoints III, by Emmett Albert Betts, Ph.D.\***

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This *Viewpoints* deals with theoretical discussions of the relationship between speech and writing. It focuses attention on the differences between informal speech used in everyday conversations and formal speech used especially in scholarly discussion groups. It also focuses on the differences between informal writing as in letters and formal writing as in textbooks and speeches. At the same time, issues are raised relevant to the spelling of homonyms, homographic heterophones, homographic homophones and the relationship between orthography and spellings. Also raised are questions regarding morphemic, prosodic, and other features of language (speech) to be represented orthographically. In short, it serves to point out the complexity as well as the complications of spelling reform.

In discussions of spelling reform, the terms *phonetics*, *phonemics* and *phonics*, are used with abandon by some authors. This misuse of terms only adds to the confusion of educators who make final decisions, especially regarding i.t.m. (initial teaching medium). (See Betts, "Confusion of terms" *The Reading Teacher*, XXVI, No. 5, Feb. 1973).

Two terms often used interchangeably are *spelling* and *orthography*. The latter embraces representations based on theoretical frameworks of grammar - traditional, structural or

transformational-generative (non-phonemic features of orthography). In short, the English writing system includes more features than the alphabet; e.g., punctuation and grammatical (morphemic and syntactic). Orthography has been defined as that "phase of linguistic study which treats of spelling." Robertson and Cassidy, *The Development of Modern English*, Prentice-Hall, Inc. (1954). In short the two terms have been used for the same referent.

For a long time, scholars have continued a debate over the relationship of language (speech) and writing. Briefly, there are two schools of thought:

1. The autonomists, or functionalists, who maintain
  - a. Written language is essentially distinct from spoken language.
  - b. Writing and speaking are co-equal in the symbolization of ideas.
  - c. Phonetic transcription is spellings belonging to the spoken norm.
  - d. Writing represents different levels of language structure - phoneme, morphophoneme and morpheme - beyond that of theoretical phonology.
  - e. Spelling-pronunciations are examples of the written norm in structure interfering with the spoken norm in structure.
2. The correlationists who maintain
  - a. Writing is correlated and is dependent on speech.
  - b. Writing is a representation of speech, although it is neither adequate nor accurate.
  - c. Writing represents language as it is spoken - its phonetic substance includes levels of linguistic structure.

The autonomist's position is championed by Joseph Vachek (*Written Language: general problems and problems of English*, Mouton, The Hague, 1973). The correlationist protagonist, among others, is Robert A. Hall, Jr. (Review of Joseph Vachek book, *Reviewed in Language*, Vol. 51, No. 2, June, 1975, pp. 461-465)

H. J. Uihall challenges the notion that speech is primary and writing is secondary; instead, he says they "simply coexist." He continues: "From the graphic manifestation of a language we can distill, then, in the same way as from phonic manifestation, an inventory of forms, defined by their mutual functions, which might equally well be represented phonically or in any other convenient way, and of which we know that in the combinations which we have registered they are sufficient to express the language satisfactorily." (In Hamp et al, *Readings in Linguistics*, Univ. Chicago Press, 1966).

On the other hand, some grammarians tend to emphasize morphological and syntactical bases as well as the phonological basis of spelling. Robert Hall, Jr., for example, points out:

". . . English orthography is not, as often thought, wholly irregular and haphazard; there is a gradation in fit between sound and spelling. A very large number of words are spelled quite regularly, and another large number are only semi-irregular, in that these irregularities fall in patterned sets; only a small percentage of our words show irregularities in their spelling." (*Introductory Linguistics*, Chilton Co., 1964, p.227).

Psycholinguist Norman N. Markel cautions that writing does not mirror speech: "A frequent oversight on the part of both laymen and scientists studying language behavior is the fact that the sound system (phonemic structure) of language is not necessarily isomorphic to the writing system (orthography) of that language." (*Psycholinguistics*, the Dorsey Press, 1969, p.75).

Undoubtedly, most alphabeteers assume a desirable relationship between sounds and spellings (phoneme-grapheme relationships). This viewpoint appears to be shared somewhat by Godfrey Dewey, Sir James Pitman, Axel Wijk, and others. Of course, Wijk is to the far right of most spelling

reformers, emphasising the regularity of conventional spelling and producing a *Regularized English*, (Almqvist & Wicksell, Stockholm, 1959) to retain almost 90% of conventional spellings.

Many phoneticians tend to share the concept of regularity of spellings to represent speech sounds. The late Charles Kenneth Thomas commented, for example: "When we speak of the invention of the alphabet, we mean that this stage in the visual representation of ideas had arrived, and that writing had shifted from an ideographic to a phonetic basis." (p.8). Thomas despaired of achieving spelling reform: "Systems of simplified spelling come and go, and the phonetician generally finds them haphazard and inadequate." (p.10). (*Phonetics of American English*, the Ronald Press, 1958).

For a long time phoneticians have been acutely aware of disparity in spellings. Ralph R. Leutenegger is one witness to the fact: "The wide divergence between the sounds and the spellings of our language has caused innumerable problems and called attention to the need for a system of symbols by which the sounds of our language and others can be recorded." (*Sounds of American English*, Scott, Foresman & Co., 1963, p.3).

Kantner and West cogently summarized phoneticians' view of spelling as: "English is a fabulous museum of linguistic fossils. . ." (*Phonetics*, Harper & Brothers, 1960, p.238).

Phoneticians invented the I.P.A.(International Phonetic Alphabet) to record many of the fine characteristics of speech. But I.P.A. requires considerable *professional* training for its effective use. More recently phonemecists have grouped speech sounds, reducing the number of symbols. Most dictionaries for use in public schools are phonemically based; perhaps the best example is *Webster's Elementary Dictionary* (G. & C. Merriam Co.), 1956 and later editions.

H. A. Gleason, a linguist, cautions against the simplistic notion that "Reading written material and transcribing speech are . . . simply changing the physical form. . . . If this close parallelism between spoken and written English in certain features is remembered, this notion of translation gives a much better understanding of these processes. For one thing it will focus attention on the structural signals of the two systems." (*Linguistics and English Grammar*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965, p.110).

Carol Chomsky has discussed "Reading, Writing, Phonology" (*Harvard Educational Review*, Vol 40, No. 2, May, 1970) in terms of the non-phonetic aspects of English spelling; that is, in terms of lexical spelling ("meaning-bearing items in the language") and its correspondence to conventional orthography. She states the implications of this view:

"The first, it implies that what the mature reader seeks and recognizes when he reads is not what are commonly called grapheme-phoneme correspondences, but rather the correspondence of written symbol to the abstract lexical spelling of words. Letters represent segments in lexical spelling, not sounds. It is the phonological rule system of the language, which the reader commands, that relates the lexical segment to sounds in a systematic fashion.

Stated somewhat differently, the mature reader does not proceed on the assumption that the orthography is phonetically valid, but rather interprets the written symbols according to lexical spellings. His task is facilitated by the fact that the orthography closely corresponds to this lexical representation as would be required if the English spelling system were phonetically based. What he needs to identify are the lexical items, the meaning-bearing items, and these are readily accessible to him from the lexical based orthography."

In his review, Hall (op. cit.) agrees with Vachek's challenge of the Carol and Noam Chomsky view on quoting: "Clearly as a piece of apology for present-day English spelling, the argumentation adduced by Chomsky and Halle is hardly convincing." (See Chomsky and Halle, *The Sound Pattern of English*, Harper & Row, 1968).

In *The Structure of English Orthography*, (Mouton, The Hague, 1970), Richard L. Venezky presents his view regarding spelling reform:

"A rational approach to spelling reform must recognise the various phonological, morphological and syntactic or patterns in the current orthography, and must increase the regularity of the existing patterns or the range of one group of patterns at the expense of others. To base spelling reform on the argument that orthography should by nature in the phonemic, morphemic, or anything else is both unrealistic and unsupportable."

In fact, Venezky claims: "Spelling units are not related directly to sound, but to an intermediate (morphophonemic) level first, and then to sound." (*Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 3, 1967, p. 84).

Of special note is educator Venezky's challenge of a strictly phonemic (not phonetic) spelling reform as being unrealistic and unsupportable. For this reason, he asserts that morphological and syntactical patterns merit consideration.

In conclusion, there appears to be more than one way to consider the relationship between speech and writing. But the fact remains that beginners in reading are confused too often by our one-dimensional spelling conventions which presents them with an inordinate high percentage of irregularly spelt words. A superficial inspection of the list of commonest words - used in beginning reading materials - reveals a distressing number of words which defy spelling pronunciations. Consider the three commonest words which account for 10% of running words in all writing, including pre-primers and adult writing: *I, and, the*. Or, the 10 commonest words: *the, and, of, to, I, a, in, that, you, for*. Irregularities in the spelling of these commonest words are very real hazards in the attempts of beginners to master the "silent" language. This appears to be a truism because the 43 commonest words constitute 50% of the words used in writing by child or adult; 300 commonest words, 75%; 1000 commonest words, 90%.

Another implication of the above data is the need for alphabeteers to cross-check their proposed spellings of these commonest words.

In general, at least three types of spelling reform have been proposed:

1. A silent language (natural writing *system*) that mirrors more nearly be phonemics (not the phonetics!) of speech.
2. An artificial language rather than a living language, such as Esperanto, Interlingua, Ido, Occidental, and others.
3. A system of writing essentially distinct in nature from a "spoken language"; that is, apart from phonemic structure.

This third approach might have some appeal to communication engineers who are confounded by irregularities in spellings and letter forms.

It is important to note that the Metric System has gained worldwide support for several reasons. One of these is that it has been scientifically determined and tested. Hence, the Metric System is not analogous to any unvalidated spelling proposal made to date. (More on this in succeeding *View Points*).

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## **Viewpoints IV: On Spelling Reform, by Emmett Albert Betts, Ph.D., LL.D.\***

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An officer of the National Education Association (U.S.A.) telephoned this writer regarding the desirability of sending a delegate to the First International Conference sponsored by the Simplified Spelling Society at the College of All Saints, London, in August, 1975. Inquiries regarding research on spelling reform, especially on an i.l.m. received by the International Reading Association are referred to this writer. Finally, the International Reading Association is sponsoring a two-hour debate on "Spelling and Phonics" at the annual convention in Anaheim, Calif., on Tuesday, May 11, 1976.

That there is a rapidly developing interest in spelling reform by the reading establishment cannot be gainsaid. The immediate need, then, is the support of this sincere concern for respectable information on both the status quo and planned *experimental research* to validate a broad spectrum of *opinions* on this crucial concept. But a profusion of confusion reigns supreme, based on spelling-lore. To spotlight basic issues, to underwrite interdisciplinary experimental research via suggested projects for "hungry" graduate students, to assess the pragmatic implications requires strong, enlightened leadership - unhampered by the sponsorship of any one extant i.l.m. or spelling reform proposal.

Opinions regarding the *need* for spelling reform are many and varied:

"The Roman alphabet is probably the best among historically developed devices for recording sounds. But it is far from perfect."

Mario Pei. *The Story of Language*, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1949, p. 92.

"Standard English obliges the foreigner to learn at least 10,000 words before he can feel at home with a newspaper. The irrational spelling of these words imposes a grievous burden even on those whose natural language is English; that the Eastern learner should be expected to master it is grotesque. As the great philologist, Grimm, observed: 'Were it not for a whimsical, antiquated orthography, the universality of English would be still more evident.'"

C. K. Ogden. *The System of Basic English*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934, p. 13.

"*Teaching the child to write is complicated by the nature of English spelling* -- Let us take the simpler of two situations. The first stage -- teaching the child to represent by letters on paper what he says -- is greatly complicated, in English, by the fact that there is no general one-to-one correspondence between the sounds which the child already carefully distinguishes and the conventional choice of letters with which they are represented. We do not, unfortunately, write as we speak. 'Spelling' takes up a considerable proportion of our time during far too many years of elementary school. Some of us never learn to spell. Some of us go so far as to make a virtue out of necessity."

Norman A. McQuown in Harold B. Allen (Editor). *Readings in Applied English Linguistics*, Appleton-Century Crofts, 1964, p. 353.

"The graphics of English are ever a problem, because I am sure that it is only in Cloud-Cuckoo Land that we could find another system of writing so irregularly and inadequately representing the stream of speech, and so whimsically segmenting it."

Donald J. Lloyd in Harold B. Allen (Editor). *Readings in Applied English Linguistics*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1958, p. 339.

"Not all languages are so irregular as to require pronunciation keys in dictionaries. For the pronunciation key is merely a device for giving regular and consistent directions to say the sounds of words."

Archibald A. Hill in Harold B. Allen (Editor). *op cit*, p. 378.

"As phonemic orthography is unified system, in which all elements are related, it is not only more easily learned but also more readily retained, so that the chances of relapse into illiteracy are minimal."

"If the spelling of a language is phonemic, the distinction between literacy and functional literacy no longer necessarily exists. The extreme difficulty of English spelling, and not the demands of technological society, explains the high standard adopted for functional literacy in the United States."

Joseph A. Perry, Jr., "Phonemics and Literacy" in *Literacy Discussion. Linguistics and Literacy*, Vol. III, UNESCO June 1972, p. 192.

"The trouble with modern English spelling is that it does not spell modern English. It does not even approximately spell modern English. What it does spell is the English of the Late Middle English period around 1470 A.D. Ironically enough, it represents the pronunciation of that period with such accuracy that a student of the English language can tell from the spelling of today exactly how words were uttered in the London area of England during the late fifteenth century."

Harold Whitehall. *Structural Essentials of English*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956, p. 134.

"For four hundred years thoughtful students have been longing for a phonemic spelling of English, a system in which each sound has its own peculiar spelling, in which each letter represents just one sound. But during that period our spelling has been growing worse, if possible, in the accumulation of duplications, owing to the fact that, while the system of Middle English sound representation has been largely retained, from time to time other methods of spelling certain sounds have been tried out, which have given such additional spellings as *ie* in *chief*, and foreign words have been introduced with a great number of exotic spellings, such as *ue* in *dialogue*."

Arthur G. Kennedy. *Current English*, Ginn & Co., 1935, P. 589.

"In a previous connection, also, it was brought out that three fourths of the difficulties that we meet in spelling are due to the peculiar characteristics of the English language, the unphonetic spelling of words. This fact has suggested to some students of the problem the need for a radical spelling reform. But this is the hope of a dreamer rather than the expectation of the practical educator. English spelling reform has been going on for hundreds of years, and at several periods in the near past it has been somewhat accelerated by organized efforts in this direction; but the changes that have been effected have failed to free the English language from its traditional shackles. The chances are that this will not be accomplished for many years to come, and too much should not be expected from the movement in the way of immediate relief. Yet spelling reform is gradually coming about, and the teacher, as one of the largest beneficiaries, should do all in her power to further the movement."

Willard F. Tidyman. *The Teaching of Spelling*, World Book Co., 1924, pp. 131-132.



"The real nature of writing in its relation to language is so obvious on a moment's reflection, that it might seem strange that so much misunderstanding could arise about it. Probably the confusion is due to two things: the nature of our English spelling system, and the age at which we start to learn it. People whose languages have a simple, relatively accurate conventional spelling, like Italian, Hungarian, or Finnish, are not confused as to the relation of writing and speech, are often surprised at the misunderstanding that spellers of English show. But our traditional orthography for English is quite far removed from the reality of speech, and our letters certainly do not stand in a wholly one-to-one relationship with the phonemes of our speech. It takes considerable effort and many years (as we all know!) to completely master our English conventional spelling; and once we have learned it, it represents a considerable investment. Nobody likes to give up the fruits of any investment, and the more costly it is, the less we want to discard it; and so it is with the spelling of English. Once we have learned it, we have a strong emotional attachment to it, just because we have had considerable difficulty with it and have been forced to put in so much time and effort on learning it."

Robert A. Hall, Jr. "Our English Spelling System" in Leonard Dean and Kenneth Wilson (Editors). *Essays on Language and Usage*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1963, p. 238.

"The chief aim, of course, is literacy. Although our writing is alphabetic, it contains so many deviations from the alphabetic principle as to present a real problem, whose solution has been indefinitely postponed by our educators' ignorance of the relation of writing to speech. Nothing could be more discouraging than to read our 'educationalists' ' treatises on methods of teaching children to read."

Leonard Bloomfield. *Language*, Henry Holt & Co., 1933, p. 500.

"The object of spelling is twofold: (1) to make language serve as a means of communication both in print and in .writing, (2) to show or at least give an idea of how the words are to be pronounced." "For these purposes an ideal spelling ought to be simple, easy, and phonetic, i.e., it ought to represent as accurately as possible by means of letters or symbols the sounds of the spoken language. The more phonetic a spelling is, the better it will serve its purpose. The present English spelling is antiquated, inconsistent, and illogical." (p. 17)

"It has been said that no Englishman or American can spell with certainty an English word he has not seen written, or feel certain about the pronunciation of an English word he has only seen written and never heard spoken" (18)

R. E. Zachrisson. *ANGLIC, An International Language, with a Survey of English Spelling Reform*, W. Heffner & Sons, (Cambridge, England), 1932, p. 17-18.

"The connexion between letters and their sounds, and the spelling with the pronunciation, is a confused heap of uncertainties, which sets at defiance all rules and order, and laughs at common sense. Each of our simple sounds is represented by more letters than one, and several of them are attached to each letter. Letters are sometimes used to represent no sound at all, while a compound sound is denoted by a single letter. We have several simple sounds, to represent which we have no single letters at all, but have to do it by a combination of other letters, whose proper sounds have little or no affinity with it whatever. This being the case with our letters, our words, of course, partake of the some confusion by not being spelled as they ought to be. A great many of them have more letters than are needful to represent their sounds, neither are they in many instances placed in the order they are sounded. And, as if to make the discordancy complete, some words are spelled according to their meaning and not their sounds, while others are sounded according to their sense and not according as they are spelled. All things put together form a mountain of difficulties for the learner, because he can seldom be certain how any word is sounded from the manner in which it is spelled, but has to apply to some other source for information."

James Bradshaw. *A Scheme for Making the English Language the International Language for the World*, E. T. Brain & Co, (London), 1847, pp. 34-36.

"English is far from the ideal writing system, as anyone with spelling difficulties is well aware. In fact, English does not contain a single instance of a two-way, one-to-one correspondence - letter to sound to letter. Small wonder. Our language has thirteen vowel phonemes and twenty-four consonant phonemes - thirty-seven in all. And to represent these thirty-seven, it has only twenty-six letters, of which three are superfluous."

Norman C. Stageberg. *An Introductory English Grammar*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965, p. 35.

"Even our rigid but woefully illogical and inconsistent system of English orthography is largely the work of one man, Dr. Samuel Johnson; and recent efforts at a simplification of spelling have, in spite of much ridicule, made noteworthy progress."

E. H. Sturtevant. *Linguistic Change*, G. E. Stechert & Co, 1942, p. 176.

"The case for some simplification of English spelling is commonly put on educational grounds. The existing spelling with its confusions and inconsistencies imposes an obvious burden on pupils and teachers throughout the English-using world, and requires the expenditure of time and energy which could be better spent in meeting the increasing educational demands of a changing civilization. But the bad effects are not confined to childhood and youth; they are social as much as cultural."

H. J. L. Robbie (Convener). *Studies in Spelling*, Univ. of London Press, 1961, p. 184.

". . . what is the cure? It is to reform our spelling by making it more phonetic. Simple enough to say, but not so simple to get it done! Very few subjects arouse more fury than this question of spelling reform, especially among people who are ignorant of the historical background. But we must have reform unless we are prepared to accept the eventual alternative -- that in time all our written words will become logograms which have broken their phonetic connection with the spoken words. If that came about, it would be as hard to learn to spell in English as it is in Chinese. Undoubtedly we shall prefer to reform."

Alfred C. Moorhouse. *The Triumph of the Alphabet: A History of Writing*, Henry Schuman, 1953, p. 175.

"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 flavor 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, rather than any regard for an efficient script, went on molding 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."

Wm. Haas. *Alphabets for English*, University Press, Manchester, England, 1969, p. 5.

The proliferation of opinions regarding "phonemic" spelling reform has only fueled the *opinions* of scholars regarding evangelical reformers:

"A detailed and exhaustive study of the relationship of the English writing system to the English language would itself occupy a fair-sized book. No complete study of this sort has yet been made. When it is, it may lead us to far-reaching revisions of our ways of teaching reading and writing, and perhaps to rational and thoroughly considered reforms in the system itself. As it is, suggested reforms in spelling and other aspects of the writing system are usually based on impressionistic or superficial knowledge, and their advocates have often been non-linguists like the librarian Melvil Dewey and the dramatist George Bernard Shaw."

W. Nelson Francis. *The Structure of American English*, The Ronald Press, 1958, p. 450.

"The spelling of English is, as Henry Bradley has insisted, not merely a matter of indicating the proper pronunciation of words. Because written words stand for ideas, in silent reading most older readers are able to gain the ideas directly from the printed page without taking the intermediate step of pronouncing the words. For this reason any generally accepted spelling becomes important and cannot be lightly tampered with. Even such conventions of spelling as the generally approved word endings and the avoidance of certain uses of some letters become important when regarded as a part of the business of silent reading. It seems, then, that the reformer might do well to refrain from violating the more general conventions until he has remedied the more troublesome inconsistencies."

Arthur G. Kennedy. *Current English*, Ginn & Co, 1935, pp. 602-603.

"In time English spelling will probably be reformed. The gap between speech and writing will eventually become too great for the educational system to cope with. But when it is reformed, it will have to be frozen again. We won't all be able to write as we speak. We shall all have to write the some way, however we speak."

Paul Roberts. *Understanding English*, Harper & Brothers, 1958, p. 97.

"The twentieth century reformers have in general presented an even more distorted picture of the orthography than their predecessors."

Richard L. Venezky. *The Structure of English Orthography*, Mouton, 1970, p.32.

"The crying need for a reform of English spelling and the enormous benefits for the English-speaking peoples as well as for mankind in general that a solution of the problem would entail, have caused large numbers of scholars and laymen to devote energetic efforts to the working out of proposals for a satisfactory new system of orthography. Such attempts were started as early as Shakespeare's time.

"Nothing came of those attempts, however, very largely because the proposals made were of too radical a nature, involving the introduction of many new characters or of numerous diacritic marks, but partly also because they were not always based on a sufficiently thorough and accurate analysis of the sound system of the language."

Axel Wijk. *Rules of Pronunciation for the English Language*, Oxford Univ. Press (London), 1966, p.145-146.

"There have been of course, from time to time, groups of people who were much concerned with the efforts to tidy up our system of spelling. They do not seem to perceive that the 'muddle' of our

language goes for deeper than our conventional manner of writing it. Its curiosities of spelling can all be explained. Many of them, to be sure, have come through ignorance or confusion or careless corruption of speech. No small number are the result of tinkering by other people who wish to revamp the system. If they could only come to it open-mindedly, these apostles of 'simplification' might do well to read Samuel Johnson's section on spelling in the preface to his Dictionary, published in 1755.

Louis Foley. "Shall the world learn new letters?", *The Journal of Education*, Dec. 1945, p.307.

This is the section referred to by Louis Foley:

"There have been many schemes offered for the emendation and settlement of our orthography, which, like that of other nations, being formed by chance, or according to the fancy of the earliest writers in rude ages, was at first very various and uncertain, and is yet sufficiently irregular. Of these reformers some have endeavoured to accomodate orthography better to the pronunciation, without considering that this is to measure by a shadow, to take that for a model or standard which is changing while we apply it. Others, less absurdly indeed, but with equal unliklihood of success have endeavoured to proportion the number of letters to that of sounds, that every sound might have its own character, and every character a single sound. Such would be the orthography of a new language to be formed by a synod of grammarians upon principles of science. But who can hope to prevail on nations to change their practice, and make all their old books useless? or what advantage would a new orthography procure equivalent to the confusion and perplexity of such an alteration?"

Samuel Johnson. *A Dictionary of the English Language*, (2v) Preface, 1755, pg.7.

"We have seen how long ago and how very early in the history of our language men curious as to spelling began to contrive modes of phonetic orthography, and how continuous such efforts have been to the present day. Now, however, there is a phonetic-spelling 'movement.' The slender succession of individual reformers through centuries is suddenly in one generation developed into a bond of agitators, somewhat numerous, and in some instances highly distinguished, who clamor for a change. . . There are spelling-reform associations, and verily they have 'transactions,' and, faith, they print 'em; not always, however, very intelligibly to the general eye and mind. There are writers who publish in magazines each his little project for changing at a word, and by low or by general consent - sort of intellectual mass-meeting - the outward and visible form of a language which is the product of many centuries of well-rooted growth."

Richard Grant White. *Every-Day English*, Houghton, Mifflin Co, 1880, pp.204-205.

"A revolution in English spelling is unnecessary, and is not called for by the mass of the intelligent English-speaking and English-reading people, and is practically impossible. Any attempt to introduce phonetic spelling into literature on an extended scale would only result in anarchy, confusion, and disaster, which would be temporary, indeed, but grave and deplorable."

Richard Grant White. *op cit*, p. 260.

"The intention of the written word, the end whereto it is a mean, is by aid of signs agreed on beforehand, to represent to the eye with as much accuracy as possible the spoken word. This intention, however, it never fulfills completely. There is always a chasm between these two and much continually going forward in a language to render this chasm ever wider and wider. Short as man's spoken word often falls of his unspoken, that is, his thoughts, his written word falls often as short of his spoken. Several causes contribute to this. In the first place, the marks of imperfection and infirmity cleave to writing, as to every other invention of man. It fares with most alphabets as with our own. They have superflous letters - letters, that is, which they do not want, because others already represent their sound; thus 'q' in English is perfectly useless; 'c', 'k' and 's' have only two

sounds among them. They have dubious letters, such, that is, assay nothing certain about the sounds they stand for, because more than one sound is represented by them, our own 'a' for example. They are deficient in letters, that is, the language has elementary sounds, such as our own 'th', which have no corresponding letters appropriated to them, and can only be represented by combinations of letters. This then, being, as one called it long ago, 'an appendix to the curse of Babel,' is one reason of the imperfect reproduction of the spoken word by the written.

Under the operation of these causes a chasm between the written and spoken word will not only exist, but will have the tendency to grow ever of a wider reach. This tendency indeed will be partially traversed by approximations which from time to time will by silent consent be made of the written word to the spoken; absolutely superfluous letters will be got rid of; as the final 'k' in 'civic,' 'politic,' and such words. . . Still, notwithstanding these partial readjustments of the relations between the two, the anomalies will be infinite; there will be a multitude of written letters which have ceased to be sounded letters; words not a few will exist in one shape on our lips, and in quite another in our books. Sometimes, as in such proper names as 'Beauchamp,' 'Belvoir,' 'Cholmondeley,' 'Cockburn,' 'Harwich' 'Marjoribanks,' even the pretence of an agreement between the written word and the spoken will have been abandoned.

It is inevitable that the question should arise - Shall these anomalies be meddled with; shall the attempt be made to remove them, and to bring writing and speech into harmony and consent which never indeed in actual fact at any period of the language existed, but which yet may be regarded as the object of written speech, as the idea which, however imperfectly realized, has, in the reduction of spoken sounds to written, floated before the minds of men? If the attempt is to be made, it is clear that it can only be made in one way. There is not the alternative here, that either Mahomet shall go to the mountain, or the mountain to Mahomet. The spoken word is the mountain; it will not stir; it will resist all attempts to move it. Conscious of superior rights, that existed from the first, that it is, so to say, the elder brother, it will never consent to become different from what it has been, that so it may more closely conform and comply with the written word. . . but what if they could be induced to write 'woud' and 'shoud,' because they so pronounce; and to adopt the same course whenever a discrepancy exists between the word as spoken, and as written? Might not the gulf between the two be in this way made to disappear?

In what has been just said we have the explanation of that which in the history of almost all literatures has repeated itself more than once, namely, the endeavor to introduce phonetic spelling. It has certain plausibilities to rest on; it appeals to the unquestioned fact that the written word was intended to picture to the eye what the spoken word sounded in the ear. For all this I believe that it would be ampossible to introduce it, and, even if possible, that it would be undesirable, and this for two reasons: the first being that the losses consequent upon its introduction would for exceed the gains, even supposing those gains as large as the advocates of the scheme promise; the second, that these promised gains would in themselves be only partially realized, if at all.

I believe it to be impossible. It is clear that such a scheme must begin with the reconstruction of the alphabet. The first thing that the phonographers had perceived is the necessity for the creation of a vast number of new signs, the poverty of all existing alphabets, at any rate of our own, not yielding a several sign for all of the several sounds of the language. Sciolists or scholars may sit down in their studies, and devise these new letters, and prove that we need them, and that the introduction of them would be a manifest gain, and this may be all very true; but if they imagine that they can persuade a people to adopt them, they know little of the extent to which its alphabet is entwined with the whole innermost life of a people. One may freely own that most present alphabets are redundant here, are deficient there; our English is as greatly at fault as any, perhaps is the most

faulty of all, and with that we have chiefly to do. Unquestionably it has more letters than one to express one and the some sounds; while it has only one letter to express two or three sounds; it has sounds which are only capable of being expressed at all by awkward and roundabout expedients. Yet at the some time we must accept the fact, as we accept any other which is out of our power to change - with regret indeed, but with a perfect acquiescence; . . . A people will no more quit their alphabet than they will quit their language; they will no more consent to modify the one at a command from without than the other. Centuries may bring about and sanction the introduction of a new one, or the dropping of an old. But to imagine that it is possible suddenly to introduce a group of ten new letters, as these reformers suggested - that they might as feasibly propose that the English language should form its comparatives and superlatives on some entirely new scheme, say in Greek fashion, or that we should agree to set up a dual; or that our substantives should return to their Anglo-Saxon declensions. Languages are not made, they grow; and alphabets are something more than mere mechanical devices, the conscious work of men's art. A very moderate acquaintance with the external laws which regulate human speech, and of the limits within which deliberate action upon it is possible, should bring home to us the hopelessness of the attempt to add to our alphabet ten entirely novel signs."

Archbishop Richard C. Trench. *English, past and present*, Humbolt Pub. Co, New York, 1855, pp.136-139.

". . . all the systems of phonetic writing and marking, often most carefully worked out from the philological and logical points of view, have been conspicuously lacking in revision from the psychological and pedagogical sides. Psychology and pedagogy have now advanced far enough to make such revision quite possible and practicable, and this is now one of the many important problems awaiting solution at the hands of our newly established psycho-educational departments."

Edmund Burke Huey. *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, The MacMillan Co., 1928, p.358.

"Writing can also be considered as something that needs reforming. Idealists claim that if the rules of English spelling were to be simplified, children could learn to spell and read more easily. Some suppose, indeed, that if the rules of English grammar were to be simplified, or if an artificial language with simplified rules were to be created or propagated, then all men would share common experiences linguistically in the cause of some form of moral brotherhood. Thus far the work of the reformers has succeeded only in multiplying the number of proposals for reform. Yet one must admire all efforts to replace anecdotal laws with rational ones, including the efforts of the reformers."

Herbert Lander. *Language and Culture*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1966, p.9.

"There would be little reason to link spelling reform with the international language, were it not that a large proportion, perhaps a majority, of the proponents of phonetic spelling either assert or imply that English, once it were phonetically spelled, would display its other charms to such an advantage that the world could no longer resist it. This attitude is in part wishful thinking, and is definitely connected with the frame of mind described elsewhere. ('How wonderful it would be if we had a language for the entire world, and how much more wonderful if that language were our own!') "

Mario Pei. *One Language for the World*, The Devin-Adair Co., 1961, p.113.

"Pronunciation, and the proper way of representing it in spelling, and the ways in which it has been represented at various periods - these are subjects which demand long and severe study before one has the right even to state facts."

Thomas R. Lounsbury. *English Spelling and Spelling Reform*, Harper & Brothers, 1908, p. 57.

"It is evident from the facts that the desire to make the spelling conform as far as possible to the pronunciation - the one object for which spelling was devised - is far from being confined to the men of the English-speaking race. Even when it cannot succeed in its main object, it aims to bring about uniformity by sweeping away the anomalous. The movement for spelling reform now going on with us is, therefore, no isolated undertaking. It is simply part of a world-wide movement in the interests of law and order. On this subject the intellectual conscience of the users of speech among all thoroughly enlightened nations has now been distinctly awakened. The only peculiarity about English is that the need of such an awakening is for more pressing than in other tongues, and the difficulty of discovering the right track to follow is far greater."

Thomas R. Lounsbury. *op cit*, p. 48.

"The complexities of English spelling cannot be accounted for completely on the assumption that the system is phonemic with the irregularities of the sort listed under (2) and (3). It is necessary to assume that the system is partly phonemic and partly morphemic. To show this, consider the three written words 'so,' 'sew,' and 'sow.' The differences of spelling correlate with nothing at all in the phonemic system of the language, since the three words are pronounced identically. But the three words are different morphemes. The child learning to spell English can keep these spellings straight only by remembering which spelling correlates with which morpheme."

Charles F. Hockett. *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, The MacMillan Co, 1958, p.542.

". . . simple grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences are not only unproductive for the prediction of sound from spelling, but also are in conflict with the underlying system of the orthography. If the function of the teaching of reading is to establish productive habits which relate to the underlying patterns of the orthography rather than to impart instruction on statistical correlations, then both morphology and syntax must be considered in the development of reading materials."

Ruth H. Weir and Richard L. Venezky, "Spelling-to-Sound Patterns" in Kenneth S. Goodman (Editor). *The Psycholinguistic Nature of the Reading Process*, Wayne State Univ. Press, 1968, p.198.

'Tis said that fish will be the last to discover water. Likewise, most writers of textbooks on the teaching of reading appear to be the last ones to discover orthography and the myriad ways its roadblocks are very real to the beginner in reading. Most of these authors preach the mythology of phonics without the slightest consideration of the odds against the application of so-called phonic rules. Orthography is foreign to too many in the reading establishment, but reality is beginning to dawn on some.

Critical theoretical considerations, however, need to be resolved:

1. Spellings need to be phonemically based.
2. Spellings need to reveal both pronunciation and etymology (morphemics).
3. The writing system needs to be independent of language (speech).

These issues have been discussed in VIEWPOINTS III and have received honorable and dishonorable mention on the above questions. But future VIEWPOINTS will attempt to make explicit the positions which reflect different backgrounds in phonemics, morphology, orthography, and psycholinguistics. The major dilemma, of course, is the separation of fact from fiction and *opinions* from verifiable statements.

## 2. Can Youx Say Sault? by Mickey Porter

The English language, as those of us who speak it know, is ridiculously easy, and mastering it is no trick at all.

Our spelling is standardized, our pronunciation is standardized, and anybody with enough linguistic savvy to know that he "threw" a ball is likewise aware that it "snew" last night.

Not long ago I was in Sault Sainte Marie, Mich., and became interested in the pronunciation of the first word - it's SOO, of course, - and furthermore, I wondered what a Sault might be.

Possibly I'm the last person to find this out, but at any rate, I did learn that the St. Mary River had unnavigable rapids; the Old French word for rapids was sault, pronounced soo; so the early French settlers named the town after the rapids of the river.

Now the general area is known as the Soo.

But the worst of it is that this intelligence prompted me to produce the following orthoepical, orthographical, paronomastical poem:

You'd have to say he was at fault  
If some poor boob should call it Salt,  
All unaware 'twas proper to  
Pronounce it like the Indian, Sioux.  
But how is anyone to know  
The dopey French pronounce it so?  
In English, if we'd spell the word  
The way it is properly heard,  
We'd know exactly what to do-

We'd spell it	so as in to
Or sue as in rue	Or su as in gnu
Or sieu as in lieu	Or soup as in coup
Or soo as in woo	Or sew as in hew
Or seue as in queue	Or soe as in shoe
Or swo as in two	Or suoe as in moue
Or sough as in slough	Or soux as in roux
Or sous as in rendezvous	Or sout as in ragout
Or sou as in you.	

See, it's trioux - English is the simplest language in the world.

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[*Spelling Reform Anthology §3.3 pp48-54 in the printed version*]

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1976 pp13-18,1 in the printed version*]

### 3. Viewpoints V.: on Spelling Reform, by Newell W. Tune

This, the fifth presentation of quotations from books on spelling reform, is offered as a sort of essay on the need for, value of, and hopes for an earnest effort at improving the relationship between letters in written word and the corresponding sounds of the spoken word. In each case, the author quoted had much more to say on the subject, but what has been selected is that which is the most pertinent, expressive and appropriate, and which stands by itself as a completed sequence of thoughts. Naturally such editing leaves some lack of continuity which did not occur in the original, but all too often today's reader cannot take the time to wade thru a hundred pages to get the germ of the idea which occurs, probably, on a page or two.

"Written communication is made possible by a language's orthography: the process of representing speech sounds in graphemes. This sound symbol process is a two-way circuit. Thus, the writer may translate his speech and/or thoughts into written symbols, and then read back to himself his transcription of the words spoken or the ideas in mind.

This sound-to-symbol and symbol-to-sound 'human circuit' does not necessarily imply a perfect one-to-one relationship; in the process of refining any communications code, there must necessarily be losses as well as gains. The longer the period of time during which a written language develops, the more likely there are to emerge certain inconsistencies between the meaningful sounds of the language (phonemes) and their graphic representations (graphemes).

Our American-English language is the product of historical development: speech habits change, resulting in adding a phoneme to a word here, dropping a phoneme from a word there, and slightly modifying a phoneme in other words. The original spelling grapheme representation of the sounds (as earlier spoken) tends to persist even though the oral pattern changes, thus contributing a measure of inconsistency between our oral and our written language.

American-English is also the product of many borrowings from other languages in which the sound-to-letter system is different. In the process of adopting these foreign words, we often change the pronunciation and thereby lessen the consistency of spelling-to-sound originally present. But with all the changes in speech patterns and all the borrowings, American-English retains its alphabetical principle, a high percentage of the phonemes we utter in speaking are represented regularly by specific graphemes in our writing. It is a primary task of the speller to master the principles of our American-English system of writing. Just as the computer specialists must learn the machine language's capabilities and limitations, so also must the speller learn the capabilities and limitations of the written form of our communications system. It is the school's task to develop proficiency in encoding and decoding these graphic signals of our language."

Paul R. Hanna, Richard E. Hodges. "Spelling and Communications Theory," *Elementary English*, May, 1963.

"Proposals for a world language seem to be as old as civilization itself. The story of the Tower of Babel was probably popular long before Genesis was written. But most people have missed the purpose of the story. It was not intended to explain how language chaos began, but to emphasise that the chief obstacle to human progress and well being is difference in language. But even in those far off days people realised that without complete understanding cooperation was impossible.

But all natural languages are chaotic instruments. Built up by so many different peoples who always took the line of least resistance, with frequent borrowings from strangers, distorted by the slovenly, embroidered by the snobbish, misspelled, miswritten and misprinted, it is really amazing that there should be so much order as there is in many of them.

The task of bringing order out of chaos has been attempted by a great many tidy minded people. Having perhaps discovered the advantage of a methodically arranged library, they sought to do something similar with language. Ideas were classified, grouped and graded and to each was assigned letters or numbers in the hope of producing a new, strictly logical and almost mechanical means of communication. And having spent hours, if not years, at the task nothing happened. Their work was curious, perhaps even amusing to lookers on, but profitless. It could neither be sold or exchanged. It relieved nobody's troubles. Indeed its use would have imposed a considerable burden on the user. Hence, it failed. But at least, these pioneers stimulated others to attack the problem in a different direction.

Not only was language inventing the pastime of obscure amateurs, it attracted men who had made a name for themselves in other fields of learning - historians, mathematicians and philosophers; perhaps not so much as a means of communication as a scientific analysis of the flow of ideas.

Of course these reformers were regarded as cranks. Yet such great men as Descartes, Bishop Wilkins, Liebnitz and many others thought the experiment worth while - and we who respond to the same urge may take comfort from the thought that we are in such distinguished company.

The most important survivor, though, not necessarily the fittest, was Esperanto, the creation of Dr. Zamenhof, . . . which after much hard work succeeded in gaining a fair degree of popularity. That is to say, the name of Esperanto was known by every student - just as they knew the language of China. As for learning it, only a very small number of enthusiasts bothered to do that, and this was not because Esperanto proved to be unsatisfactory or difficult but because it is contrary to the nature of human beings to learn anything unless they are obliged or unless it offers them a definite advantage, usually in the shape of higher salaries or better business. Esperanto did neither.

This is an important point. It is for this reason that Esperanto, and indeed every other voluntary but unprofitable movement, has been a failure.

Reg Deans, *Universal language and Simplified Spelling*. (1954), Midlands Press, Leeds, England. pp.3-12.

In treating of the best manner of acquiring the orthography of our tongue, we ought first to ascertain the nature of its difficulties. We shall then be better prepared to decide what is remediable, and to devise the remedy.

I need not occupy any time to prove that the ability to spell with uniform correctness, is a rare possession amongst our people. It has not unfrequently been suggested that intelligence in the people is so necessary for the preservation of a Republican government, that no person should be allowed to vote who could not both read and write. If, however, the suggestion means that no persons should be allowed to vote but such as could write without failures in spelling, I tremble at the almost universal disfranchisement.

This almost universal illiteracy, in regard to spelling, seems to me to have two sources: - one, the inherent difficulty of the language itself, - the other, the manner in which, and the instruments by

which, orthography is commonly taught. It is, indeed, contended by some that the whole, or substantially the whole of our bad spelling, results from the untowardness and absurdity of the methods used in teaching. These objectors against present modes affirm that bad spelling is not a necessity, nor a thing of spontaneous growth, but a product wrought out laborously, and at a great expense of money and tribulation of spirit.

The spelling-book should have especial reference to the ease of the pupil, - to his facility in learning to spell and read. The pupil should not first be mistaught and then untaught, in order to be retaught, with the chance that the last two processes will never be performed. The native love of consistency or congruity in a child should not be obliterated or outraged by a perpetual succession of contradictions. He should be taught correctly at first, and then whatever new things are taught should be affiliated, as far as possible, to what is already known. . . .

After having repeated these letters and particles thousands of times, where the same sound is uniformly given to the same letter or combinations of letters, where each of the principle letters, in the rapidity of its changes from one sound to another, outdoes ventriloquism - where the first five vowels to which respectively he has been accustomed to give the same alphabetic sound, assume 29 different sounds, so that according to the doctrine of chances, it will happen only once in five or six times that he be correct, if he sounds them as he was taught; - where the 26 letters, and the some combinations of two or three of them assume hundreds of different sounds, without any clue by which to follow them as they glide from one to another; . . .

If it is a fact, as I believe observations will prove it to be, that false orthography is generally resolvable into an effort to use those letters whose alphabetic sound would come nearest to the sound of the word, then surely it is a very instructive fact. It shows that there has not been enough subsequent labor to enable the bad speller to unlearn what he was erroneously taught. . . Thus the knowledge of the *sounds* of the letters in the alphabet becomes an obstacle to the right pronunciation of words; and the more perfect the knowledge the greater the obstacle. The reward to the child for having thoroughly mastered his letters is, to have his knowledge of them cut up in detail, by a series of contradictions, just as fast as he brings it forward. . . In this way the child's previous knowledge of the alphabetic sounds of the letters misleads, four times in five; if he recollects them right, he will call them wrong, and be rebuffed; the more thoroughly he has learned and the more correct are his applications of the previous knowledge, the more infallibly he goes wrong.

Who has not seen the hapless child, when first carried from the alphabet into short words, after he finds that none of the letters with which he thought he was so well acquainted, will now answer their own names; but that all balk and tantalize him, and chatter in his face with unknown sounds, - who has not seen him gaze up in bewilderment into the teacher's face, with such a piteous and imploring look as would almost make statuary weep?

To elucidate the question, in what manner a spelling-book should be constructed to teach orthography merely, it is necessary to recur again, for a moment, to the structure of our language. This is so anomalous that no general rules can be devised, which correct spelling will not violate more times than it will obey. If we have rules, there must be almost as many rules as words, which belies the very definition of a rule. If our orthography, then, cannot be learned by rule, it must be learned by rote; for to learn and to remember the spelling of each word, as an individual, would be on almost interminable, if not an impossible process.

Horace Mann, "On Spelling Books," (190-?), pp2-30.

"It may be useful, however, to quote testimonials of a few practical men in order to show that this system of spelling (English) has really become one of the greatest national misfortunes swallowing up millions of money every year and blighting all attempts at national education.

I mean the misery endured by millions of children at school who might learn in one year, and with real advantage to themselves, what they now require four or five years to learn, and seldom succeed in learning after all."

Max Mueller, quoted in: Kyril Evans, *A Phonetic Alphabet for the English Language*, Griffin & Richmond Co, Hamilton, Ont. Canada, 1957, p.12.

". . . that I should explain why I, though by profession an etymologist, was not frightened by the spectre of phonetic spelling, while such high authorities as Archbishop Trench and Dean Alford had declared that phonetic spelling would necessarily destroy the historical and etymological character of the English language.

. . . the older I grow, the more I feel convinced that nothing vexes people so much, and hardens them in their unbelief and in their dogged resistance to reforms, as undeniable facts and unanswerable arguments. Reforms are carried by Time, and what generally prevails in the end, are not logical deductions, but some haphazard and frequently irrational motives. . . I myself, however, am not a practical reformer; least of all in a matter which concerns Englishmen only - namely, the spelling of the English language. I should much rather, therefore, have left the fight to others, content with being merely a looker on.

What I wish most strongly to impress on my readers is that I do not write as an advocate. I am not an agitator for phonetic reform in England. My interest in the matter is, and always has been, purely theoretical and scientific. Spelling and the reform of spelling are problems which concern every student of the science of language. In every written language the problem of reforming its antiquated spelling must sooner or later arise; and we must form some clear notion whether anything can be done to remove or alleviate a complaint inherent in the very life of language. If my friends tell me that the idea of a reform of spelling is entirely Quixotic, that it is a mere waste of time to try to influence a whole nation to surrender its historical orthography and to write phonetically, I bow to their superior wisdom as men of the world. But as I am not a man of the world, but rather an observer of the world, my interest in the subject, my convictions as to what is right and wrong, remain just the same.

I have expressed my belief that the time will come when not only the various alphabets and systems of spelling, but many of the languages themselves which are now spoken in Europe, to say nothing of the rest of the world, will have to be improved away from the face of the earth and abolished. Knowing that nothing arouses the ire of a Welshman or a Gael so much as to assert the expediency, nay, the necessity of suppressing the teaching of their languages at school, it seems madness to hint that it would be a blessing to every child born in Holland, in Portugal, or in Denmark - nay, in Sweden and even in Russia - if, instead of learning a language which is for life a barrier between them and the rest of mankind, they were at once to learn one of the great historical languages which confer intellectual and social fellowship with the whole world. If, as a first step in the right direction, foreign languages only, namely, English, French, German, Italian (or possibly Spanish), were taught at school, the saving of time - and what is more precious than time? - would be infinitely greater than what has been (!) effected by railway and telegraph. But I do not think that no name in any of the doomed languages would be too strong to stigmatize such a folly. We should be told that a Japanese only could conceive such an idea; that for a people deliberately to give up its language would be a thing never heard of before; that a nation would cease to be a nation if it changed its language; that it would, in fact, commit 'the hapless dispatch, a la Japonaise.' And this may be true, but I hold that language is

ment az an instrument ov komunikashon, and that in the strugel for life, the most efishent instrument ov komunikashon must sertenli kari the day, az long az natural selekshon, or az we formerli kould it, rezon, rools the wurd." (the ! is mine, Ed.)

Max Muller, *Max Muller on Spelling*, April, 1876, *Fortnightly Review*, Reprinted by Isaac Pitman, Bath, Eng. 1876.

"Neither the Anglo-Saxon orthography nor the Old French was distinguished for its regularity. But when the two were thrown together, the result was a mass of confusion and anomaly hardly paralled, except, perhaps, in the spelling of the native Irish. The present system retains much of this chaotic character. It is, perhaps, too firmly fixed for extensive changes, such as alone could effect a material improvement. But it is not creditable to the English name, nor accordant with the practical spirit of the English people. With a multitude of signs for the same sound, and a multitude of sounds for the some sound, it poorly fulfills the original and proper office of orthography, to indicate pronunciation; nor does it better fulfill the improper office, which some would assert for it, for a guide to etymology. It imposes a needless burden on the native learner. To a foreigner it seriously aggravates the difficulty of acquiring the language, and thus restricts the influence of English on the mind of the world."

*Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*. (quoted in: Kyril Evans, *A Phonetic Alphabet*, op. cit, (1957), p.11.

"The fact remains that our spelling is more than irrational - it is inhuman, and forms the bane not merely of foreigners, but of our younger generations, compelled to devote interminable hours to learn a system which is the soul and essence of anarchy. It is hardly surprising that one of America's leading linguists suggests that we stop teaching spelling altogether for a few years, at the end of which time a new system based on the sounds of the spoken language will have perforce evolved."

Mario Pei, in Kyril Evans, *op. cit.*, p.12.

"Since English seems likely to occupy an increasingly prominent place in international communication, it is worth pausing to inquire into its qualifications for so important a mission. We may assume without argument that it shares with the other highly developed languages of Europe the ability to express the multiplicity of ideas and the refinement of thought that demand expression in our modern civilization. The question is rather one of simplicity. How readily can it be learned by the foreigner? Does it possess characteristics of vocabulary and grammar that render it easy or difficult of acquirement? To attain a completely objective view of one's own language is no simple matter. It is so easy to assume that what we have in infancy acquired without sensible difficulty will seem equally simple to those attempting to learn it in maturity. What virtues can we honestly attribute to English and what shortcomings must we recognize as handicaps to be acknowledged and, where possible, overcome.

Prominent among the assets of the English language must be considered the mixed character of its vocabulary. English is classified as a Teutonic language. That is to say, it belongs to a group of languages to which German, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian also belong. It shares with these languages similar grammatical structure and many common words. On the other hand, more than half of its vocabulary is derived from Latin. . . All of this means that English presents a somewhat familiar appearance to any one who speaks either a Germanic or a Romance language. There are parts of the language he feels he does not have to learn, or learns with little effort.

A second asset which English possesses to a pre-eminent degree is inflectional simplicity. The evolution of language, at least within the historical period, is a story of progressive simplification. The further back we go in the study of the languages to which English is most closely allied, the more complex we find them. Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, for example, as classical languages of early date, have inflections of the noun, the adjective, the verb, and to some extent the pronoun that are no longer found in Russian or French or German. In this process of simplification English has gone further than any other language in Europe. The complicated agreements that make German difficult for the foreigner are absent from English. However compensated for, such a reduction of inflections can hardly be considered anything but an advantage.

In the third place, English enjoys an exceptional advantage over all other major European languages in having adopted natural in place of grammatical gender. In studying other European languages, the student labors under the heavy burden of memorizing, along with the meaning of every noun, its gender. . . . In the English language all this was stripped away during the Middle English period, and today the gender of every noun in the dictionary is known instantly. Gender in English is determined by meaning.

The three features just described are undoubtedly of great advantage in facilitating the acquisition by foreigners. On the other hand, a serious criticism of English by those attempting to master it is the chaotic character of our spelling and the frequent lack of correlation between spelling and pronunciation. Writing is merely a mechanical means of recording speech. And theoretically the most adequate system of spelling is that which best combines simplicity with consistency. In alphabetic writing an ideal system would be one in which the same sound was regularly represented by the same character and a given character always represented the same sound. None of the European languages fully attains this ideal, although many of them, such as Italian, German or Finnish, come far nearer to it than English.

We are concerned here only with the fact that one cannot tell how to spell an English word by its pronunciation or how to pronounce it by its spelling. The English-speaking child undoubtedly wastes much valuable time during the early years of his education in learning to spell his own language, and to the foreigner our spelling is appallingly difficult. To be sure, it is not without its defenders. There are those who lay stress on the useful way in which the spelling of an English word often (sometimes!) indicates its etymology. Again, a distinguished French scholar has urged that since we have preserved in thousands of borrowed words the spelling which those words have in their original language, the foreigner is thereby enabled more easily to recognize the word. And it has been further suggested that the very looseness of our orthography makes less noticeable in the written language the dialectal differences that would be revealed if the various parts of the English-speaking world attempted a more phonetic notation on the basis of their local pronunciation. But in spite of these considerations, each of which is open to serious criticism, it seems as though some improvement might be effected without sacrificing completely the advantages claimed. That such improvement has often been felt to be desirable is evident from the number of occasions on which attempts at reform have been made. It remains to be seen whether the extension of English (in commerce, diplomacy, and scientific fields) in the future will some day compel us to consider the reform of our spelling from an impersonal and, indeed, international point of view. For the present, at least, we do not seem to be ready for simplified spelling. Albert C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language, 2nd Edition*, 1957, Alporton-Century-Crofts, New York. pp.8-14.

The subject of the difficulties for a reader in ascertaining the pronunciation of any new and

unfamiliar word in English has been the concern of many writers. Here are a few:

"So difficult is it to become thoroughly versed in either of these branches of learning (pronunciation and spelling) that an English dictionary is probably quite as often consulted to ascertain the pronunciation or the spelling of a word as to learn its meaning." (preface iii)

Soule & Wheeler, *Manual of English Pronunciation & Spelling*, Lee & Shepard, Boston, 1861, 467 pp.

The contents show 65 rules for spelling, 16 classes of words liable to be misspelled, 36 classes of words liable to be mispronounced, and 52 rules for determining the location of accents.

"First. Establishing a Standard of Pronunciation.

English as it is and as it should be are two quite different things. That no effective system for teaching absolutely correct pronunciation and enunciation has been generally used is self-evident from anything like a careful observation among the students of our various institutions of learning.

As we listen to the different pronunciations taught in various localities, and hear the different interpretations given to the diacritical marks of the dictionary, we feel that something more is needed to enable us to establish a standard of native pronunciation. Visible speech, symbolizing the positions of the organs as they mold the sounds, does not admit of misinterpretation."

Charles W. Kidder. *An Outline of Vocal Physiology and Bell's Visible Speech*, pub. by the author Emerson College of Oratory, Boston, 1896, p.14.

"The chief difficulty lies in the impossibility of representing sounds in our ordinary English spelling; because our spellings have no phonetic rule, and our alphabet is consequently ambiguous and scientifically useless. It is therefore necessary to use some symbols; but the general reader will not, and - owing to the defects of our general education - most often cannot master the significance of speech-symbols, nor follow any argument which employs them. And although he would admit the desirability of the letters having some fixed correspondence with sounds, yet he likes to think that ours in a manner share the pride of English liberty, and he would consider it almost an impertinence to enquire too narrowly into their behavior. He has moreover a suspicion of all fine distinctions, and a prejudice against anything which threatens the comfort of an accustomed convention. He gets on, so he thinks, amazingly well as he is, and does not wish to be disturbed or have new paths opened to him.

Robert Bridges (Poet Laureate). *A Tract on the State of English Pronunciation*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, Eng. 1913, p.A1.

"The main argument of the essay is as follows;

(a) That the present state of English pronunciation is critical; and that the conversational speech of Southern England is fixing a degraded form.

(b) that it is probable that for educational purposes some form of phonetic spelling will soon be introduced into our primary schools.

(c) That these two things taken together constitute a serious danger, because there are evident signs that the method of the New Phonetic is to stereotype the degraded conversational forms. The result of that would be a needless and complete artificial break between our modern English and all older literary forms of it; and this no reasonable person can desire."

Robert Bridges, *op. cit.* p. A3.

Robert Bridges was worrying needlessly about something that should not happen. The government (or the educational authorities) can use whatever standard of pronunciation they want in teaching. Consequently, if they want to upgrade the speaking habits of pupils, using a phonetic teaching

form would be the most likely way to achieve it after a time. Also this was written 2 generations ago - before the advent of radio with its examples of pronunciation along a more desirable dialectic form.

"The continuing argument of the Essay is as follows: Is English pronunciation at the present time on the road to ruin? and if so, can anything be done to save it? . . .(p. 9)

There is one remedy, and one remedy only, and that is that, *at least for educational purposes*, if for no other, we should spell as we wish to pronounce; and then our school boards would have the children taught to pronounce words as they are spelt, which is at present impossible. The spelling must of course be fixed at a standard very different from Mr. Jones'; that is, we must fix it as we judge words *should be pronounced*, and not as we foresee they are *coming to be pronounced* in the normal process of degradation. If we took this step, we should not only prevent further decay, but could actually restore sounds that our phoneticians assume are irretrievably lost. If, for instance, our recognized phonetic spelling spelt *pronounce* with *pro*, and *affection* with *af*, then the *o* and the *a* would be saved. If left to the phoneticians and the Fates they will soon be gone for ever.

Some persons will not readily believe that such a stealthy natural process as phonetic decay in speech can be stayed by so simple a machinery as correct spelling and primary education can contrive. But this is a *doctrinaire* notion. The *litera scripta* has an enormous power; and compulsory education is a modern engine that is still waiting for its tasks.

The reason why our books so little affect our speech is exactly because they are out of relation with it. So long as words are spelt independently of their pronunciation, it is plain that their spelling cannot be appealed to (for their sound). Indeed the appeal, when it is made, often leads to bogus pronunciations, which are altogether the worst form of mispronunciation; and this is another danger of our present spelling, and though small in quantity, yet an actual evil of a horrible kind and not to be disregarded among the arguments for reform."

Robert Bridges, *op. cit.*, pp.14-15.

"The Obstacle to spelling reform is this: It is necessary to have some new symbols, and there is a real inconvenience in extending the alphabet. An easement of this difficulty appears in the fact that some of our present letters are phonetically useless, and if they were discarded from the lower case to make room for the new symbols, we should not need to increase very greatly the present number of letters for the purposes of simplified spelling. But on the other hand we cannot discard our phonetic duplicates, the scientifically unnecessary letters, without intolerably disfiguring the spelling of a great many words. It seems to me that the most prejudices can best be overcome by gradual steps and that simplified spelling is a fair field for experiment. If we were really free agents and might spell as we choose for a few years, then I think we should soon evolve something satisfactory.

If all editors and publishers, or even a moderate proportion of them were to agree to omit the final e in all spellings where it was both useless and misleading, and to print for instance, *hav, giv, liv, infinitiv, lov*, instead of the present *have, give, live, infinitive, love*, everyone would be accustomed to it in a week or ten days, and would regard the old spellings as wrong, and ugly. The success of such a first step would remove the prejudice against all innovation, and would clear the way for other reforms."

Robert Bridges, *op. cit.*, pp.

"The present fixed spelling of English is largely a product of the first half of the 17th century. During these 50 years writers and printers, and probably the printers more than the writers, were gradually



reducing to uniformity the varied orthography of the 16th century, which in so many words left ample scope for a choice between different forms according to the habits, tastes, or learning of author, scribe or printer. With the printer the tendency towards uniformity had no doubt in some degree a physical reason; with continuous practice it became more and more natural for the compositor's hand to go to the some compartments of his case in setting up the some words, instead of hesitating between two or three alternates.

That English spelling, being finally settled in this manner, and representing three types not fully (and in many instances not at all) assimilated to each other, abounds in anomalies and irregularities needs no demonstration. Every spelling reformer has no difficulty in adducing copious examples to support his contention that some change towards a more regular system is absolutely necessary.

Wm. A. Craigie. S.P.E. Tract No. LIX, *Some Anomalies of Spelling*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, Eng. 1942, p.Aa2.

"Although the total number of words included in this survey is considerable, it will on examination be evident that the reduction of all the anomalies to a consistent spelling would not materially alter the appearance of any ordinary printed page. Many of the changes could also be made without introducing any confusion or presenting real difficulties to readers, however much the new spellings might be distasteful to them. Such forms as *det*, *dout*, *lern*, *dremt*, *preest*, etc. could not be misunderstood, and would soon become familiar and appear as natural as *debt*, *doubt*, etc. Such changes have frequently been made in various languages, as they were in the earlier stages of English, without finding any difficulty in meeting with public acceptance.

The question of the possibility or advantage of change becomes more difficult when the normalized spelling would reduce to a common form those homophones which at present are differentiated and on that account or immediately recognizable. There can be no doubt that the reduction of these two to a common form would frequently prevent a prominent identification of the written or printed word. If the postal *mail* were respelled as *male*, the meaning of 'male-carriers' might well be in doubt in certain contexts, . . . This problem of course, applies to all homophones with distinctive spellings, whether these have etymological justification or not. They form one of the features of English vocabulary which have to be taken seriously into account before it can be decided whether the present orthography, with a standing of some three centuries, can be usefully modified or replaced by one on a more phonetic basis."

Wm. A. Craigie, *op. cit.* p.331.

Wm. Craigie apparently never realized that a phonetic spelling would also differentiate between homographs which are now confusing, in exchange for obscuring the meaning of homophones. While there are 1/3 homophones than homographs, the exchange would be more advantageous than disadvantageous. Certainly we now use the homophones that are homographs in such a manner that the context makes meaning clear just as we always carefully use words with multiple meanings, some of which have as many as 100 different meanings. Yet we do not feel a need to have different spellings for such words as: spring, fill, bay, cut, frame, free, hang, high, joint, lay, light, line, matter, pass, pipe, pit, and hundreds of other such words.

"English people have the useful habit of reducing long words to a single syllable, like: prop(eller), gym(nasium), (omni)bus, mac(intosh), and the shorter words are just as easily understood. But that would be impossible with an Esperanto or German type language. An ideal language would have no long words. English makes the nearest approach to this ideal. On the average 70% of our words have one syllable, 25%, two, 4%, three, and 1% more than three.

"There are two sorts of English: the commonly spoken and the rarely spoken literary. The former when well and carefully spoken is quite as simple as any artificial language and is sufficient to express all ordinary needs and need not be inferior to 'literary' English even when written. Simple, homely English is not a difficult language. Pronunciation is easy and definite; grammar and syntax is not difficult and its vocabulary though extensive is shared by most European languages. Of course it has many defects because it has grown naturally. But surely the time has for us to correct its irregularities and to eliminate its worst defects.

Undoubtedly its greatest defect is its spelling which has been left so far behind by pronunciation change as to be a source of ridicule and a great obstacle to the intellectual progress of the English-speaking people. With very little alteration a greatly improved language could be devised.

The simplification of English spelling is not a difficult matter, yet it is not so easy that it can be done - if it is to be done well - without a good deal of careful study. Most of the advocates of simplified spelling - even the 'experts' - disagree about the ways words should be spelt or even about the letters that are to be used. Hence it is unlikely that any system will be satisfactory to everyone. But is disagreement inevitable, at least among reasonable people? Disagreement means that equally good reasons can be found for at least two solutions of any problem and the acceptance of either depends on personal preference. Later we shall find why, apart from obstinacy, inventors of spelling systems do disagree.

It is widely supposed that a system of reformed spelling that alters the appearance of nearly every word, will create insuperable difficulties. Yet similar changes have been successfully made in other countries - Holland, Norway, Turkey, Russia; all with considerable benefit, and in spite of a lot of opposition from ignorant and unreasonable people. After many years of discussion a committee appointed by the Dutch and Belgium governments produced a scheme of spelling reform for the Dutch and Flemish languages based largely on enunciation.

It was officially sanctioned by both governments in 1946 and has since proved satisfactory, thus disproving the arguments that spelling reform cannot be applied to a living language. English would no doubt need for more drastic changes than most of those that have been successfully transformed. But we should not evade the task for that reason. Fortunately nearly everyone believes in simplified spelling for when writing an unfamiliar word we invariably spell it the common sense way - if we dare! . . . .

Most people will agree that mental effort can be just as tiring as work - a good deal more so if you are not used to it. Hence, these mental gymnastics (spelling) must contribute to our fatigue. Often we have to stop when we are writing to debate within ourselves the 'correct' spelling of certain words . . . Everyone knows that these interruptions prevent us from concentrating on our task. But a system of writing in which there are no alternative symbols, in which every symbol can represent only one sound, will eliminate all uncertainties.

Learning to read and spell must be very easy because you and I can do it - without much trouble. But let us not assume that everyone has been equally fortunate. Regardless of intelligence, the task occupies a large part of children's education and is far from complete even when they leave school. Indeed it is a burden to most people all their lives. Because it is one of the most complex skills that man has developed, it requires a high degree of intelligence. But it is not an art to which reason can be properly applied. It is necessary to repeat some absurd incantation after nearly every word. We must spell it till we have learned it thoroughly. It is only by frequent repetition and constant practice that we can maintain this habit. If our vocations are such that we have frequent

opportunities for doing so, we may easily forget our initial difficulties and assume that the burden on children's minds is unimportant. Let us see if it is.

According to "Reading Ability" (published by His Majesty's Stationery Office): 'In some secondary modern and mixed schools, less than 1% of 15 year old pupils are superior readers and over 50% are backward. Only 3% read as well as the average grammar school pupil.'

Such children are about to leave school and for the majority of them their formal education is finished. Most of them will remain semi-literate all their lives.

Many otherwise intelligent children acquire feelings of inferiority and disappointment as a result of their early attempts to read. Sometimes they are annoyed by the innocent amusement or ridicule their mispronunciation arouse. Having learnt to say a word like 'love' they apply common sense to 'move' only to find themselves wrong. Before long they have learned to expect a trap that will advertise their inferiority in every word. Once this progress begins, they associate reading with unpleasantness and naturally seek to avoid it. They may even carry over their feeling of inferiority to other subjects.

It is a very serious matter for children who fail to develop reading ability. A quick accurate reader possesses a key which opens to him fast stretches of knowledge whilst the poor reader reads so slowly that he has not time to read much and reads so inaccurately that he is little better off than when he began. He appears to be mentally retarded though when freed from pedantic control often shows a good deal of initiative and ability to directions were reading is of no importance. Can we blame children if at their most impressive age, they turn to occupations that require no intelligence. 'What! Read a book? Not likely; we're playing football!' . . . The majority of poor readers, because they find it difficult to mingle with educated people, are to a large extent, cut off from cultural activities. Some psychologists claim to have traced delinquency and crime, by way of dislike of school and then truancy, to early reading difficulties. Dr. Follick estimated that 65% of adolescent delinquency was due to illiteracy.

Frequent complaints are made by employers of young people who have just left school, that they are unable to spell correctly. Often their mistakes show no resemblance to the sound either.

'A recent Army education officer's report says that 18% of National Servicemen of the Pioneer Corps are illiterate, between 20 and 25% have only the reading ability of a child of 12, and 80% are educationally backward. It should provide food for thought.' (Yorkshire Evening News)  
Reg Deans, *Universal Language & Simplified Spelling*, 1954 Midland Press, Leeds. pp. 24-30.

"No one questions the value of correct spelling. It is standard equipment that everyone needs for successful participation in daily life. Accuracy in written expression has decided prestige value. Individuals have failed to obtain or hold positions because of lapses in spelling. . The bugbear of uncertain, inaccurate spelling can affect one's whole career. The individual who tries to excuse himself with 'Spelling is one of those little things I never did learn,' or 'I can't spell, but then they say spelling is correlated with intelligence - morons spell well sometimes,' gets little sympathy from his friends. Correct spelling enables the reader to progress through written material more readily and understandingly. It creates a favorable impression on the reader.

To feel self-assured without having to refer to a dictionary every time one writes a note, letter, or order, and without having to experiment on scratch paper to reassure oneself that the word looks right, is a social asset, indeed. The ability to spell correctly automatically allows the writer to

concentrate on thought and good form in composition.

The perfect speller is rare because no person in his lifetime can have enough experience with every word in the English language to spell each one correctly. Common observation indicates that the spelling maximum for the typical literate person stops beyond the spelling 'demons' and rarely reaches the loftier heights of polysyllable words derived from Latin or Greek origins. The country's annual spelling contests are carried on by the remnant of 'scholastics' who regard spelling a diversion on its own account. Spelling contests flourish in English-speaking countries where spelling, because of phonetic irregularities, is something with which to conjecture.

In spelling, the word forms must be recalled from memory well enough to reproduce them without any external cues, whereas in reading, the task is to recognize the printed symbols and to recall their meaning.

The spelling errors of bright and duller children are very different, as Carroll's study indicated. The bright tend to generalize more, to apply their previous learning to new words, to spell phonetically and more rationally; the slower learners tend to jumble up the spelling haphazardly. Bright children are more likely to derive spelling of new words from others already known, whereas dull children have a much less systematic approach in attacking new words. Brighter children make better use of rules. The more capable and intelligent person frequently has more writing, hence more spelling to do.

English spelling is entirely arbitrary. It frequently follows no systematic patterns. Efforts to simplify our irrational English spelling have met with scant success. A number of words, such as 'theater' and 'theatre,' are spelled in two different ways. Furthermore, English spelling is largely non-phonetic in character. Observe the many ways in which the element pronounced as 'shun' may be spelled correctly. Hence, to a certain degree, errors are inherent in the words themselves. These spelling oddities contribute to the numerous 'demons' that require intensive practice, sometimes quite out of proportion to the importance of the words either in ordinary written or spoken composition. Written English need not necessarily be spelled correctly to be comprehensible. Writing can be effective, even forceful, and still be incorrectly spelled.

As in reading, the non-phonetic character of English spelling creates a problem in the school. . . .  
Phonic rules help little in spelling the demons: 'yacht,' 'design,' or 'tongue.' Only close observation and good auditory and visual memory for the succession of letters in these words help the learner.  
. . .

Certain groups of words are spelled in such a way that they can be classified under a rule. Occasionally, one or more words violate the rule and cause spelling errors. A bright child often makes such errors because he is trying to rationalize illogical spelling usage. Silent letters also cause trouble. About one half of all errors are due to the omission of silent letters.

English spelling reform is a slow process. Many systems simplifying spelling have been proposed, but never universally or even widely adopted. Melvil Dewey's scheme had some adherents, and one magazine adopted the system. In this scheme, silent final 'e' was dropped and 'f' substituted for 'ph' and 'gh' in 'ough.'

Some simplification comes about naturally (by the way of courageous dictionary publisher like Noah Webster), such as 'publick', 'critick,' 'politick' and 'musick' within the last 100 years have lost their final 'k.' Yet Britain still clings to: *colour, glamour, honour, humour, labour, mould, vigour*, - not being influenced by the 'Americanisms.'

The illogical absurdities and freakish difficulties in our word structure will no doubt persist for generations to come. No one can expect radical changes in spelling to be affected quickly, even though they are highly desirable in many instances. So long as this is true, school children will invariably experience difficulty in learning to spell.

Spelling tends to be taught in many schools as an academic discipline rather than as a practical tool for writing. This tendency is shown both in the methods of teaching employed and in the word lists assigned for study. Memorization of isolated words arranged in vertical lists is the usual method of practice - a time consuming feat which usurps the time that children need for spelling practice while writing for some real learning purpose. Too often children are prevented from doing content writing until they 'know how to spell,' with the result that the most valuable time for learning opportunities are lost. Children have too little use both in and out of school for the school-taught spelling.

Without constant application, spelling remains a school-taught trick, or mental feat, rather than a useful tool. When the pupils finally do come to writing something, the formal spelling practice they have received has little 'carryover.' This gap between formal spelling lessons and the children's practical spelling needs in writing leaves the pupil by the end of the elementary-school period ill-prepared to write legible English. A group of pupils who filled out requisitions for supplies, made so many spelling errors that their orders could not be interpreted; and the practical business man is still looking for a clerk who can spell.

It may be argued that children will not develop their writing vocabulary if they are taught to spell only the words they are inclined (need) to use. The answer is that we must be concerned first of all with children's practical needs in writing; literary growth and development is another matter to be considered after this first objective is attained. The fact that it is often not attained with formal spelling lessons re-emphasizes the need for practical results in spelling first of all.

Children are no longer expected to memorize the spelling of some 4000 words - a nearly impossible feat for the average pupil - by the end of the eighth grade. Some children may finish the sixth grade with no more than 1000 memorized word spellings, and slow learners with no more than 500 to 700 correct word spellings."

Gertrude Hildreth. *Learning the Three R's*, (2nd edition), Education Publishers, 1947. pp.479-499.

"A man, it may be argued, has a right to spell as he chooses, and to express his thoughts when he has any, as best he can; while, when he suffers from a dearth of those rare articles, he has still more reason to rejoice in liberty of choice in respect to the language he selects to cover his poverty of thought. Hence there are doubtless good and sufficient reasons for every specimen of '*English as she is wrote*,' which is the object of this little book to rescue from oblivion, and which have, one and all, been written with the sober conviction, upon the part of the writers, that they conveyed the meaning they desired."

Anon. (Mark Twain?). '*English as she is wrote*,' D. Appleton, 1897, Prefatory. A companion to: *English as she is taught*, Mark Twain. 1887.

## Comments on *Viewpoints on Spelling Reform*. Newell P. Tune

Editor, *10 Second Reviews*,  
*Reading Horizons*,  
Reading Center & Clinic,  
Western Michigan Univ.,  
Kalamazoo, MI.  
(SR-1, 2 used)

Dear Friend:

Your conclusion in your *10 Second Review*, in your Summer issue, on Dr. Betts' article, "Viewpoints IV: On Spelling Reform in our magazine of Spring 1976, is *not* the conclusion to Betts' article. The intent of his article was to present *both* sides of the controversy and to start a discussion (pro and con) on the merits of the subject. You must have mis-interpreted the conclusion because you yourself were not in favor of reform. Betts' conclusion only stated that the differing opinions held by the writers quoted were different because of the differing backgrounds of those quoted. Please read it again.

Surely you can see that the practicality of any reform will depend to a large extent on *its* extent - and again this will bring varying opinions.

A thoroughgoing alphabetic reform which introduced all the additional new letters needed (about 18 or 19) to make a one-for-one alphabet may be considered impractical by many people. Certainly it would cause widespread disruption of our present style of writing as well as the need for new typefaces, typewriters, etc. Therefore, it would be unacceptable to most of the public.

However, a minimal (and gradual) type of reform such as is being suggested in Australia, has captured the enthusiasm of the teachers to such an extent that at their convention last Jan. they passed a resolution endorsing the teaching of SR-1 in the schools. Even the use of SR-2, SR-3 or SR-4 would cause so little disruption of our present spelling that the general public would probably tolerate it good-naturedly.

As you may have noticed, this is written in one kind of minimal reform. This goes beyond SR-1 in that it also eliminates the unnecessary silent terminal e when it wrongly indicates that the previous vowel is long, as in *hav*. This type of reform was discussed in our Spring 1970 issue, which should be in your files. Although these two features would change the spelling of almost 2000 different words (and it was used here), it shows that these words do not occur so frequently in running text as to present any disruption of the reading habits of literate adults. Did it do yours? Therefore, I ask you, don't you think that a spelling reform to this extent is practical?

Yours sincerely

[Spelling Reform Anthology §3.4 pp55,34 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 pp23-24 in the printed version]

#### **4. Results of the Questionnaire on Spelling Reform, by Newell W. Tune, Chairman of the Research Committee on Spelling Reform.,**

The Research Committee on Spelling Reform announces the results of the questionnaire which was sent out to 500 heads of English and Education Departments in colleges, teachers and students of phonetics, as well as to 200 laymen. This information was gathered to help the Education Committee of the House of Representatives (Congress) in establishing a National Spelling Commission. 106 replies were returned, which we are told constitutes a good percentage of returns. Replies were received from the United States and eight foreign countries.

**The answers to the first question** show that 94% of those replying are in favor of some kind of spelling reform. But what of those 6% who object to changing our spelling? One educator says: "Ours is a living language -- let it grow naturally." (But does she let her lawn and shrubbery grow naturally without any help or restraint? Does she plant seed in a garden and leave them alone to grow naturally? If Luther Burbank had had this philosophy, where do you think we would be today?) Another head of an English Department said; "Give it up - its been tried so many times before". But since then the Metric system has been adopted in England and will be soon in the U.S.A. Another teacher said, "We don't want the Government telling us how we have to spell." (But no one else has any authority to make any changes in our spelling - and where in this large world has any reform of spelling been achieved except through government action? Dictionary makers disclaim authority and say they list only such spellings as are in common usage.) However Bill HR 2476 makes the use of the new spellings mandatory *only* on Government employees, and even then only in the official reports, documents and correspondence. The government will only establish a precedent which it hopes will be followed.

The rest of the questionnaire deals with the manner in which the reformed spelling should be introduced and the desirable extent of the changes. **The 2nd question** – which factors are the most important to be used in deciding the kind of reformed spelling to be adopted?, showed that they considered the importance of these factors to be in this order: First, Phonetic Perfection. A close second, Simplicity, and a poor third - Ease of Writing. The other answers were so closely grouped that it was not practical to find any appreciable difference between 'Economy of Space,' 'Nearness to Present Usage', and 'Compatibility with Writing and Printing Machines.'

**The answers to the third question** indicate that most educators and students prefer (by 74%) that a perfected system of reformed spelling be selected, and after an educational period of several years, be adopted as a complete system, compared with 26% who preferred a gradual change.

**The fourth question** answers not only confirm this by 3 to 1, but also favor a phonetically perfected system (73%), in preference to making as little change in our present spelling as is deemed necessary (27%).

**The fifth question**, as to whether the new system should be based upon economy of space (45%) or as little disturbing of our present spelling as possible (55%), was not very conclusive. It is interesting to note that persons in foreign countries tended to favor economy of space, while those in the United States usually did not consider that of any particular importance.

**The sixth question** showed that Frequency of Use (25%) was far less important than Logical Reasoning in selecting the proper symbols to represent each sound. Men tended to give

preference to logic, while women were more evenly divided on this question.

**The seventh question** showed emphatically that most persons preferred that our spelling be based upon a complete set of rules governing the sounds for all letters and words (90%) as compared with the individual treatment of words, syllables and suffixes (10%).

**The eighth question** was answered equally one-sidedly, 92% preferring spelling changes that also included having only one pronunciation for each consonant, in preference to a spelling reform that only omitted the unnecessary silent letters(8%).

**The ninth question**, which asked if the vowel sounds should be represented in a phonetic manner by means of digraphs, was answered yes by 76% and no by 24%. Some persons answered this question "no" because they felt that additional letters should be added to our alphabet rather than using two letters to indicate one vowel sound (for the long vowels) while using single letters for the short vowel sounds.

**The tenth question**, as to whether the changes should involve adding new letters to our present Roman alphabet, was very closely divided, 45% favoring additional letters to 55% preferring no new letters.

**The eleventh question**, asking whether the spelling changes should be made to conform to the International Phonetic Assoc.'s pronunciation assigned to the letters of the Roman alphabet or be based upon the most predominant American dialect, which is generally considered to be Mid-Western American speech, was so evenly divided that the results need not be considered. Quite a few of the educators wisely skipped this question. The I.P.A. is generally known to give most of the Roman letters our normal pronunciation. Only to four letters does it give pronunciations that we do not usually use. It is generally known that the letter "e" and the letter "i" are given the Continental pronunciation, with "e" as in *fête, bête noir*, and "i" as in *machine, marine, chlorine*. But few persons seem to know that two consonants are given pronunciations that they never have in English. *J* is given the typical French pronunciation as our "z" in "*azure*", while *y* is given the French pronunciation of "u" in "*une, pur*", or the German pronunciation of "ü" in "*übur, für*", or a slight consonantal "y" sound preceding it. This latter sound is unknown to English-speakers unless they have learned a foreign language that has such a sound. Hence, it is unthinkable that English or American people would ever consent to adopting such pronunciations to the letters *j* and *y*. The Continental pronunciation to "e" occurs in only one word of the 100 words using this sound found in the rhyming dictionary. The Continental pronunciation of "i" occurs a little more frequently - 7 words out of 42 in the rhyming dictionary. But this is only a 16% frequency of occurrence. Should we change 84% of our words using this sound just to conform with the Continental pronunciation?

**The twelfth question** asked if the ease of writing the script letters should be considered as a necessary proviso of any new alphabet letters to be considered, and 78% answered in the affirmative.

**The thirteenth question** was whether a means of indicating the location of the stress or accent should be included in the system of spelling reform. While quite a few omitted answers to this question, there was a slight majority against it, (53%), among the laymen, and the reverse among the educators of whom 55% thought it necessary. Some of those who remarked about the accent thought it was unnecessary if the spelling was completely phonetic, even tho there would be some cases of ambiguity as there are now. Two suggested that a new symbol for the schwa would almost eliminate the need for accent marks. Others thought that such accent marks could be used for teaching but would unnecessarily complicate our spelling, whereas our goal should be to have greater simplicity and regularity in our spelling. Q.E.D.