

Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

§6. Which way to go in Spelling Reform

This section presents various ideas for the kind and extent of reform, from the most modest to the more extreme and suggests criteria for deciding on reform.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.1 pp86,87 in the printed version]

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1. A Practical Approach to Spelling Reform by Walter F. Cook *

* Phoenix, Az..

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute some new ideas for implementation of a spelling reform. As a businessman running a small computer company, I am undoubtedly in a very small minority among a group of educators. Yet I have been irritated by the difficulty of English spelling and have been interested in spelling reform for many years. I had actually started an independent development of a set of rationalized rules for spelling reform before I became aware of the large amount of work done by this group and other groups.

As a person with a considerably different background, I believe I can provide a measure of some of the types of responses that may be encountered when these "radical" ideas emerge and are presented to the general public.

The real thrust of much of the work done in the name of spelling reform has actually been the introduction of simpler methods of teaching reading to school children. There is a large overlap in the areas of ease of spelling in that if words were spelled rationally, it would be much easier to learn to pronounce them. However, there is a difference between reading and spelling. When you consider the population that must be "sold" on spelling reform, it will be the adults and not the school children that must be sold. In fact there is some danger in starting the reform with children since the reformed spelling may become labeled as "children's spelling" and not proper for adult

communication. The person who is going to have to be sold on the reformed spelling undoubtedly has a speaking and reading vocabulary much larger than his spelling vocabulary. His real problem is to accurately spell the words he already can pronounce and read. Once this is accepted as the primary problem to be solved, it may be possible to simplify the spelling reform problem and ease the acceptance by the public. The specific point to be made is that if selling "rationalized spelling" is the primary goal, the basic criteria must be that each easily identifiable phoneme must be consistently spelled the same. Note that the requirement was not made that each sound be spelled *differently*. This is a reading requirement. Clearly, it is aesthetically more logical to require a truly reversible, unique mapping of phonemes and graphemes and, in general, this should be the objective. However, in practice making this an absolute objective will make the spelling reform more difficult to sell. It may actually produce spelling problems for those sounds that the general public may not recognize as different. As an example (not necessarily as a proposal), the WES distinction between "th" and "thh" is required from the *learning reader's* standpoint but possibly not from the standpoint of the *spelling writer*. From a practical acceptance standpoint, the compromise of combining these two phonemes into one grapheme would probably enhance the acceptance of the rationalized spelling. [1] A similar situation may exist for the "er" and "ur" phonemes in WES.

The primary point in the preceding discussion is to emphasize that *rationalized spelling* must be the primary focus of a spelling reform effort and that possibly certain minor compromises in ease of reading could be made to improve the acceptance of the rationalized spelling. These compromises would certainly not seriously detract from the ease of learning to read. In any case, these significant reading benefits accrue *only* if the rationalized spelling is accepted by the general public.

A separate point that seems absolutely obvious to me is that any rationalized spelling must be designed to utilize the existing English letters in a manner that is similar in general style to current usage. Asking the general public to make spelling changes will cause more than enough disruption and controversy. Requirements such as the introduction of strange new characters, the necessity of throwing out old typewriters, and retraining typists would unconditionally and absolutely doom any effort to introduce a reformed spelling.

If a rationalized spelling plan is to be accepted by the public, it must provide the following features:

1. *Rational and Logical*. It must remove most of the inconsistencies and replace them with a set of simple, relatively uniform spelling rules.
2. *Easy to Learn*. The public, who is accepting this plan, has already learned (presumably) existing spellings. They are being asked to learn or at least recognize many new spellings of words. So it must be easy!
3. *No Mechanical Disruption*. The introduction of new characters is not acceptable.
4. *Transition*. No attempt should be made to define the rationalized spelling as "correct" and the old spelling as "incorrect". The public is the customer. They should be given a rationalized alternative spelling and they can switch as they desire. It will be much easier to learn to recognize new forms of words than to learn to write new words. For an extended period of time, it will be possible for the public to *read the new* and to *write the old*. Any pressure for the use of rationalized spelling should be directed toward dictionaries, style manuals, newspapers, and government agencies.
5. *Standardization*. There is a period of time during which study and change are desirable. After that time, stability of a well-accepted rationalized spelling is a primary requirement. Lack of

consensus or significant change among the experts will certainly prevent acceptance by the public. Also, if there are multiple proposals from different spelling groups, there will be confusion and no acceptance. There must not be several different ways to spell common words.

6. *Minimize Change.* Considering the state of the English spelling, significant change is certainly necessary. However, within the above objectives, deference should be given to current spelling forms. A program that is designed to introduce groups of new words periodically will cause continual turmoil and will undoubtedly be stopped after the second or third phase. Introduction of a set of spelling rules with the resulting new alternate spelling word forms means the public can make transition at their own pace.

An implementation plan could include the following major phases :

1. Study commission to select a good plan of rationalized spelling.
2. Academic review of commission recommendations.
3. Expedited review of results by publishers, editors, and other "experts."
4. Published rationalized spelling rules.
5. Fund raising activity via direct contributions and government grants.
6. Publish comprehensive cross reference dictionary with old-to-rationalized and rationalized-to-old spelling lists.
7. Promote acceptance into existing dictionaries and style manuals the rationalized spelling of words as an acceptably correct, alternate spelling.
8. Media public relations campaign.
9. Promote the introduction in the state and federal legislatures of resolutions approving the rationalized spelling.

Clearly each succeeding step will depend upon the results of the preceding steps. As such, the first step is the most crucial. The study commission must be a relatively small group. It must effectively represent the input of the interested parties in the academic community who have been contributing in this field. The group must have a very well defined scope and charter, and a reasonable but challenging time limit for completion of Phase 1 (possibly 9-12 months). It appears that much of this work has been done and that the primary effort will be to adopt or make minor modifications to existing proposals. Of course there must be an active chairperson who is dedicated in time and belief to the commission's objectives. The chairperson and the commission must be able to make the effective compromises that undoubtedly will be required to achieve an end result. In the end, the group must be able to convince succeeding levels of critics that the results are the best set of compromises that have a reasonable chance of being adopted.

If I read the history of English spelling reform correctly, it is over 200 years old with very little to demonstrate in the way of tangible results. The mood of the people appears to be reasonably receptive to progressive change. Certainly many fundamental social and technical changes have occurred in the last two decades. Rationalized spelling reform, effectively presented, could easily fit into this environment. As with any other movement: leadership, organization, and well directed effort are the essential ingredients that produce results.

[1] For the general public, but not for the teachers.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.2pp87-89 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1979 pp7-9 in the printed version]

2. Let Us be Practical about Spelling Reform, by Valerie Yule*

* SR-1 used. Valerie Yule c/o Prof. George Yule,

* c/o Kings College, Univ. of Aberdeen, Scotland.

As a psychologist, I am concerned that any realistic spelling reform must take into account the human beings who are expected to accept it, learn it, and use it.

Any architect can design a dream-house - but it may be very difficult to build or to live in.

The ideal spelling reform must have more than the criterion of theoretical perfection (such as one sound, one symbol); it must be easy for both humans and machines to recognize and write.

The present experience of metrication in Australia shows the difference between theoretical perfection and practical needs. The older generation are sneaking back the old imperial measures, while the young are buying everything prepackaged and not even trying to compare values. Although weights and measures can now be taught to 7-year-olds in two lessons, the oldies' criticism is the unreflective "I can't understand it" - but the real barriers are practical ones - that 'metric' needs units as handy as ounces, feet and acres, that 3-4 digit measures are hard to remember, and the number system really needs to be based on 12 not 10.

The examples of spelling reform in other countries also show that it must be either imposed by a totalitarian regime, or on a practically illiterate country - or else proceed in steps that are reasonably acceptable to those already literate (as in Malaysia and the Netherlands).

It is possible, of course, that the proportion of the semi-literate in Anglo-Saxon countries may continue to increase to the point that only the elite may continue to read T.O., the rest getting by on symbols (as in road signs and many skill-manuals), and with the limitations of television to transmit culture and maintain an informed and thinking democracy, we may retrogress. *Then* a reformed spelling might be brought in, like another language in multi-lingual public notices, because for the majority it would be supplanting nothing.

My recommendations for reform are therefore based on observations of human behavior, rather than on faultless fonetics.

1. Taking every means possible to open the public mind to recognition that spelling reform is desirable, necessary, and feasible. This includes using the gimmicks and gadgets as in commercial advertising campaigns: funny and interesting games, books and cards, car-stickers, envelope stamps, Sept. 1 as Sensible Spelling Day the world over, newspaper and magazine publicity through articles and letters.

2. Encouraging everyone to use more sensible spelling whenever they feel like it, and whenever they can risk doing so, e.g. in letters, books, posters, articles, even if they are still cautious in business affairs. This will inevitably be casual and inconsistent at first, but it helps to make readers acclimatised to easier ways of spelling.

This could even result in popular acceptance of more consistent spellings in the same way that

popular acceptance of language changes occurs, or even of clothes fashions that on first introduction appear ridiculous to the very people who will soon be wearing them and liking it. This 'reformation by default' could then be tidied up and ratified on an official basis, or an improved system introduced to a more open-minded community than we have now.

The period of experiment will be valuable to reveal errors and prevent 'bugs' such as those now apparent in the metric system, so theoretically perfect.

Steps in 'individual initiative' spelling reform.

The *first step* to be encouraged is: *Spell the short 'e' sound with 'e' as in bet.* This is not necessarily the best place to start, but the big argument for it is that this reform *has already begun.* Spelling Reform 1, Australian Harry Lindgren's SR-1, already appears in newspapers, magazines, books and correspondence, and has received approval at teacher's conferences. It is a neat and tidy change, and could well take on, just as *MS* and changes adapted to computer technology are entering the written language.

Second. A further step that can also be taken now is a recommendation to bad spellers as well as spelling reformers: **When in doubt, cut it out.** (*When in doubt, cut it out.*) (eliminate the unnecessary silent letters). This is handy to use and also acustoms the reader to the look of neatness and economy of letters in spelling. Just as the embellishments of present spelling were encouraged by the extravagant elegance of the elitist aristocrats of the 18th century, so streamlined spelling is more appropriate for the efficiency-minded management of the twentieth, - however much the remaining elite may shrink from Kwik-Bix, Hi-ways, and Kidi-Sox. The less-than-1% of the population who want to be continually reminded of the etymology of words can just carry a history book around with them; for most of us, some lessons in 6th grade will suffice.

Third. Substitute more sensible consonants when necessary (such as *f* for *ph*).

These three steps can be taken by individuals and groups without overall direction. Reason, rather than rote memory, should be used to spell.

The *Fourth* step will require some expert consensus - reducing our riot of vowel spelling patterns to less than twenty, to match our less than twenty vowel and diphthong sounds. This is where an international agreement is needed for a 'standard' representation, since it is here that 'do as you please' spelling would hinder communications. It is at this stage too, that orthographic changes may be more sweeping: to remove digraphs, etc.

The Next Generation

Spelling reformers are apt to think that if their reform were taught in schools, it would automatically become public usage as the children grew up. This is a fallacy. Children do not transfer anything they learn in school *unless it is also already a part of the culture out of school.*

A better educational groundwork for spelling reform is to teach the present spelling, which they will need for the real world outside school, in such a way that not only will they learn that spelling more easily (otherwise teachers will not adopt the method), but so that children and teachers become really aware of the *consistencies* of English spelling, and of its *inconsistencies*, and *how it could be tidied up.*

The worst bugbear reformers have to expel is the public belief that a reformed spelling would be as hard to learn as the present one.

At present school children are either not taught spelling at all, in the hope that they will 'pick it up', or they are taught with games, and alphabetical or historical or 'spelling patterns' lists - congenial to

the clerkly-minded, particularly girls, but repellent to those, particularly boys, who do not have filing cabinets in their minds. The recommendation is therefore to provide a visible spatial organization for all spelling that is learnt - a visible filing cabinet, which uses all possible modalities to help learners remember present spelling patterns, *under headings which can be the basis of sound-symbol classifications in a revised orthography*. I have been experimenting with the Spell-well Chart, which uses color, pictures, auditory rhythm, auditory rhyme and pattern, visual spatial organization and word patterns, formal class lessons, games, and spelling 'cribs' to read books unassisted, for the cumulative learning of spelling at increasing levels of difficulty.

The basic outline is:

<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>black cat</i>	<i>red head</i>	<i>pink pig</i>	<i>orange orange</i>	<i>umber umbrella</i>
<i>a-e</i>	<i>e-e</i>	<i>i-e</i>	<i>o-e</i>	<i>u-e</i>
<i>grey gate</i>	<i>green bean</i>	<i>white light</i>	<i>gold stove</i>	<i>blue you</i>
<i>ar/ah</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>air</i>	<i>or/aw</i>	
<i>dark car</i>	<i>purple turtle</i>	<i>fair hair</i>	<i>fawn lawn</i>	
<i>ow</i>	<i>oy</i>	<i>oo</i>	<i>oo</i>	
<i>brown cow</i>	<i>toy boy</i>	<i>blue moon</i>	<i>look! a blue book</i>	
	<i>(multi-colored)</i>			

u-e and *oo* are the same color blue, being basically the same vowel sound.

The chart is introduced first to little children as a color-naming chart, and then as the first words are learnt, they are located on the chart, and the chart builds up.

When almost all vowel spelling patterns are finally located on the chart, the Australian version looks like this:

<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>bad</i>	<i>bed</i>	<i>bid</i>	<i>body</i>	<i>bud</i>
<i>have</i>	<i>dead</i>	<i>give</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>son</i>
<i>plait</i>	<i>many</i>	<i>pretty</i>	<i>gone</i>	<i>come</i>
<i>salmon</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>busy</i>	<i>because</i>	<i>country</i>
<i>guarantee</i>	<i>bury</i>	<i>women</i>	<i>cough</i>	<i>does</i>
<i>meringue</i>	<i>edge</i>	<i>build</i>	<i>knowledge</i>	<i>blood</i>
<i>harangue</i>	<i>friend</i>	<i>sieve</i>	<i>yacht</i>	<i>couple</i>
	<i>debt</i>	<i>rhythm</i>	<i>laurel</i>	<i>judge</i>
	<i>leopard</i>	<i>breeches</i>	<i>honor</i>	<i>tough</i>
	<i>guess</i>	<i>victuals</i>	<i>John</i>	
	<i>phlegm</i>			
	<i>Wednesday</i>			
<i>a-e</i>	<i>e-e</i>	<i>i-e</i>	<i>o-e</i>	<i>u-e</i>
<i>cake</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>cue</i>
<i>rain</i>	<i>see</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>bone</i>	<i>few</i>
<i>say</i>	<i>key</i>	<i>wild</i>	<i>boat</i>	<i>cube</i>
<i>baby</i>	<i>teach</i>	<i>lie</i>	<i>know</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>they</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>dye</i>	<i>soul</i>	<i>view</i>
<i>raise</i>	<i>leave</i>	<i>sigh</i>	<i>toe</i>	<i>juice</i>
<i>reign</i>	<i>these</i>	<i>buy</i>	<i>though</i>	<i>suit</i>
<i>straight</i>	<i>either</i>	<i>height</i>	<i>yolk</i>	<i>ewe</i>
<i>eight</i>	<i>receive</i>	<i>island</i>	<i>brooch</i>	<i>beauty</i>

<i>veil</i>	<i>believe</i>	<i>sign</i>	<i>ghost</i>	<i>feud</i>
<i>fete</i>	<i>belief</i>	<i>diamond</i>	<i>depot</i>	<i>humor</i>
<i>great</i>	<i>sleeve</i>	<i>eye</i>	<i>owe</i>	<i>impugn</i>
<i>ballet</i>	<i>league</i>	<i>choir</i>	<i>rogue</i>	<i>fugue</i>
<i>matinee</i>	<i>vehicle</i>		<i>sew</i>	<i>deuce</i>
<i>boquet</i>	<i>marine</i>		<i>mauve</i>	
<i>dahlia</i>				
<i>champagne</i>				

<i>ar/ah</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>air</i>	<i>or/aw</i>	.
<i>bark</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>hair</i>	<i>for</i>	
<i>ask</i>	<i>sir</i>	<i>bear</i>	<i>jaw</i>	
<i>last</i>	<i>fur</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>caught</i>	
<i>half</i>	<i>word</i>	<i>mayor</i>	<i>ought</i>	
<i>are</i>	<i>worse</i>	<i>their</i>	<i>bore</i>	
<i>laugh</i>	<i>journey</i>	<i>care</i>	<i>saucer</i>	
<i>aunt</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>parents</i>	<i>almost</i>	
<i>guard</i>	<i>earth</i>	<i>aeroplane</i>	<i>chalk</i>	
<i>bazaar</i>	<i>circle</i>	<i>fair</i>	<i>war</i>	
<i>sergeant</i>	<i>nurse</i>	<i>tear</i>	<i>board</i>	
<i>heart</i>	<i>answer</i>	<i>prayer</i>	<i>court</i>	
<i>gauge</i>	<i>myrrh</i>	<i>pear</i>	<i>course</i>	
<i>gaol</i>			<i>sword</i>	

<i>ow</i>	<i>oy</i>	<i>oo</i>	<i>oo</i>	<i>oo</i>
<i>cow</i>	<i>boy</i>	<i>boot</i>	<i>soup</i>	<i>book</i>
<i>our</i>	<i>boil</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>route</i>	<i>cook</i>
<i>power</i>	<i>noise</i>	<i>true</i>	<i>through</i>	<i>hook</i>
<i>down</i>	<i>buoy</i>	<i>crew</i>	<i>fruit</i>	<i>put</i>
<i>bough</i>	<i>quoit</i>	<i>shoe</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>would</i>
<i>house</i>	<i>gargoyle</i>	<i>move</i>	<i>bruise</i>	<i>woman</i>
<i>sauerkraut</i>		<i>loose</i>	<i>rule</i>	<i>worsted</i>
		<i>soup</i>	<i>manoeuvre</i>	
		<i>route</i>	<i>truly</i>	
		<i>through</i>	<i>rheumatism</i>	

I would be interested in hearing from international correspondents how much this chart would vary internationally, in view of the excuse of those opposed to spelling reform that intercontinental dialectal differences are too great for sound-symbol spelling to be feasible.

Faced with this list, all children, most teachers, and many others agree that present English spelling is a classic example of the stupidity or subservience of the English-speaking people, and that the dilettantes who delight in its oddities at the expense of all learners are responsible for more misery than the Romans who castrated boys for the sake of their sweet singing.

The chart also alerts its users to how spelling can be made more consistent, and gives them more flexibility of eye to be able to accept spelling changes. When cribs based on the chart are inserted in books for individual reading, we are already on the way to translations into Consistent Spelling, since the crib avoids the problems of diacritical markings or phonetic symbols often used to indicate pronunciation.

Research:

How would the ordinary person like to spell?

A story about the 'beautiful daughter of a great magician', full of awful English spelling, was published in the daily press, inviting readers to rewrite it as they would like to spell it. It was also dictated to schoolchildren, in a Latin square design, to see how they would write it when aiming for conventional accuracy, and how they would prefer it if given a free hand. The findings came from 380 newspaper respondents, and 100 Australian school children. Scientists, engineers and workers in communications tended to be very economical, leaving out unstressed sounds, rather than bothering with schwa renderings. The younger the child, the more economical he too tended to be, not only omitting unstressed sounds, but using short vowels for long and short alike - yet rarely affecting the reader's comprehension. Many adults and some children invented dozens of different new systems, with all sorts of devices to get exact renderings. In the schools test, the better spellers in present English were best able to use the sounds of words to help them spell as they liked; the middle group of spellers used vision only and usually could not abandon the inconsistencies even when given a free hand; the worst spellers were so bogged down by their horrible experiences that they could not work out how a sensible spelling could go either.

Further tests with schoolchildren and immigrants presented them with versions of the 'Beautiful Princess' according to different reform systems, the translations being supplied by the systems' promoters. It would be invidious at present to discuss the comparisons in detail, but it did suggest that any reform to be acceptable at present could not change the rendering of more than one phoneme in ten - a sort of Zipf's law - or readers would object to the strange appearance, and writers would be reluctant to try it in ordinary usage, and even occasionally and experimentally. More radical change needs to wait on a public eye that is more accustomed to flexibility through the initial changes.

Other protocols were also collected from Zambia and the Solomon Islands, and the overall conclusions were that 'free-choice' spelling differences between individuals were far greater than, and included, all the differences between nationalities, so that international differences in pronunciation need not prevent acceptance of an international English spelling.

A reformed spelling should also be based on the reproduction of formal speech, or the spoken language may become increasingly slurred, as more and more people become uncertain of a common pronunciation. In Australia, many immigrants and children are quite unsure of the real word until they have it tied down in print. (sunnerine? sundarine? sumnerdine? subbarin? submarine?)

Further research should look at how much adult practice is required to write in different systems to reach an error rate of under 5%; how much practice is required to become as proficient as in present reading and writing; who becomes confused by knowledge of two different ways to spell - and why; and what scheme is easiest both to read and write - since many can only help in one way. We will appreciate hearing from anyone with experience of this sort.

Conclusion

At present, individuals and groups should do what they can in promoting more consistent spellings themselves, with a hierarchy of possible steps, taken according to circumstances: diaries, letters, books, businesses, souvenirs gifts, etc. We need amusing gifts and gadgets that people would like to buy for fun. The bogey of homophones is not as dangerous as some people think. Our writing is already full of homographs and we use context to determine the meaning when words have several meanings. But when there are problems, the solution in a living language is to turn to alternative

words. (There are 9 homographs in this paragraph. - any confusions?)

As I am an educational psychologist, my attention is always on the people who do the spelling and the writing rather than on orthography as a theoretically perfect system. So I think there must be compromises between how people speak and how they think they speak - which is very often different. Economical graphemes need to cover a wide band of sound variations rather than aim at a precision which will leave spelling difficult for learners with poor auditory discrimination, as well as making international disagreements more acute. For example, in the case of those who drop their *r*'s in Received Standard (Southern British) speech, the *r* should be indicated as they think they are saying *r* altho they are saying schwa.

If those who disagree with me will offer their arguments, I will listen.

Ways to change to mor sensibl spelling

1. *Practis sensibl spelling.* Begin to use the three first-steps. Use the Instant Spelling Gyd for a standard sensibl system. Hed your own correspondens with 'sensibl spelling stickers' from the Spelling Kit, so that readers will cotton on to what you ar doing. At first you will be inconsistent, sometimes changing one word and forgetting another. But this hardly matters. Try to be consistent and soon you will find you prefer the faster, stream-lined spelling that has no booby-traps.
2. *Firms, organizations, individuals:* Name new products, new processes, new places, in sensibl spelling to make communication mor efishent and economical.
3. *Internationalists:* The English languaj woud be the international languaj of the world if its spelling wer not so difficult. It is hard for developing cuntries to use English for education becaus it is so unreliabl. Use sensibl spelling in books for foren ferners.
4. *Sosial reformers.* Literasy is a national problem. Just becaus you can read and write, do not forget that English spelling is an additional stumbling blok for the unfortunate, an extra barrier to opportunity in life.
5. *Teachers:* Use sensibl spelling to teach your students corect English pronunciation. Corect their stupid mistakes, but tell them when their spelling is sensibl according to standard pronunsiation.
6. *Students:* It is in your hands to remov the afflixion of generations of yung children. Sensibl spelling is essential to educational reform programs.
7. *Conservativs:* Keep what is sensibl in our spelling; but chanj what needs reform. In this way, we will not looz contact with the past, not burden the future.
8. *Trend setters:* English spelling is an anacronism. You ar not afraid of the unfamiliar. Bring it up to date with the chanjing times.
9. *Bad spellers:* Now is your chans, and excuse, to spell sensibly. Talk your teacher into letting you do it.
10. *Scrabl-players:* Enywun with a Scrabl-instinct, who likes word-games, can practis and enjoy spelling sensibly.
11. *Encuraj the press* to streamline their spelling too, by showing your apresiation of eny atempt they make to do so.

(This is a ruff draft of an idea that needs more planning and rewriting. V Yule.)

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.3 pp90-92 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1975 pp2-4 in the printed version]

3. Some Principles Governing any Intended Improvement of the Visible Language of English, by Sir James Pitman, K.B.E.*

* London, England.

Visible Language:- While being of course visible, does it need to be regarded as a "writing system" as the linguists would have it, or ought it not rather to be regarded as a *reading* system?

Chinese writing is clearly visible and clearly a reading system, *not* a writing system. It is read in a number of different Chinese sub-languages, not in only one.

Thus visible language does not need to be phonetic to be read. It has no need for, and is actually the worst for, attempting in the words of the great Max Muller:

"To express in writing those endless shades of pronunciation which may be of the greatest interest to the student of acoustics, or phonetics, as applied to the study of living dialects, but which for practical purposes, must be entirely ignored. The writing was never intended to photograph spoken languages: it was meant to indicate, not to paint, sounds. . . Language deals in broad colours, and writing ought to follow the example of language, which, though it allows an endless variety of pronunciation, restricts itself for its own purpose, for the purpose of expressing thought in all its modification, to a very limited number of typical vowels and consonants. Out of the large number of vowel sounds, for instance, which have been catalogued from the various English dialects, those only can be recognised as constituent elements of the language which in, and by, their difference from each other convey a difference of meaning."

After all it is only in pronouncing dictionaries that the expression "a writing system" which "paints sounds" is at all appropriate and then it needs to confine itself to only one particular dialect - and even then to the version of that dialect which the compiler subjectively determines.

From Alexander Melville Bell's *Visible Speech* in 1867 to modern Spelling reformers, the false trail of seeking a writing system - one for proceeding from phonemes to graphemes based on phonetics - has misled apparently all to the delusion that it is the writer (and the speaker) instead of the reader (and the listener) who is dominant in effective communication. It is rather the reader and the listener who must dominate if the writer and the speaker are to be effective. It is thus the writer's obligation to write words which will be intelligible to the reader, and to write legibly if he is writing by hand. The insignificant importance of particular phonemes in any listening (or reading) system was well pointed out by Bernard Shaw in Clause 36 of his will. He died in 1950.

"I desire my Trustees to bear in mind that the Proposed British Alphabet does not pretend to be exhaustive as it contains only 16 vowels whereas by infinitesimal movement of the tongue countless different vowels can be produced, all of them in use among speakers of English who utter the same vowels no oftener than they make the same finger prints. Nevertheless they can understand one another's speech and writing sufficiently to converse and correspond: for

instance, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, has no difficulty in understanding a graduate of Oxford University when one says that "the sun rohze" and the other "the san rahooze" nor are either of them puzzled when a peasant calls his childhood his "chawldid." For a university graduate calls my country "Awlind".

It is thus the diaphonic rather than the phonetic principle which needs to be accepted by all who seek to improve the design of any form of our visible language, seeing that variety, not standardisation in the visible language is the rule, and that to force standardisation is not only impossible but also apparently unnecessary.

Too often we forget to what extent, over centuries of evolution, changes within the traditional orthography (T.O.) by new designs (not all improvements) have already come to be accepted and adopted in general use. Possibly a clear exposition of the point may best be made by the following accepted variations:

BAG, Bag, *Bag*, bag, *bag*, bag, bag, Bag, Bag

of which the capitals are 2000 years, the lowercase 1100 and the cursive 200 years old.

We also forget that during that long period augmentations have been designed. (*Notes on the Development of Latin Script*, by Stanley Morrison, Cambridge University Press. Privately circulated, 1949.) For instance, the *i* has been elongated and twisted to the left in its descender to furnish the needed character *j*, and the digraph *vv* has been joined together to form the monograph *w*. The words *Revvng* and *Brewng* have thus become more easy to discriminate in reading.

Experience in the spread of the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) is as an initial learning medium (I.L.M.), (not be it emphasised as a replacement of T.O. once reading skill has been obtained) has shown that the tendency to reject change has occurred not so much in the introduction of new monographic forms for the diagraphs, but rather in new spellings. For instance the use of joined *fh* in *bi^fhop* and the retention of *sh* in *mishap* arises no animosity and is recognised as a positive and acceptable augmentation. It is rather in the respelling of such words as *wuns*, *aut*, *hø*, etc that the hackles arise. They seem to arise no less quickly and prickly even against those who suggest *aut* and *hoo* or *huu*. *Wuns* in particular seems to cause total and immediate rejection by many - even when that spelling is suggested as no more than for a temporary use as an I.L.M.

The designer needs to accept that the existing reading habituation is of the reader must be borne in mind and that while the designer has no wider latitude to introduce changes than has until recently been allowed, there are still severely limiting restraints on the degree of departure from what is familiar. It will be to court rejection to depart from T.O. in too many respects notwithstanding that what is proposed is functionally effective and ought to be but is not acceptable to those with already established reading habits. After all these are the customers, and supposedly "customers are always right."

Thus the diaphonic principle and consideration for the habituated preferences of existing readers

are the two gateposts through which all would-be designers of the improvement must pass. An attempt along any other route is doomed to failure.

The diaphonic principle and acceptance of the fact that the purpose desired is to improve reading and not writing deserves deeper study. Experience with i.t.a. has shown how wide is the latitude which the designer enjoys and how great is the adaptability of the human brain in receiving a wide variety of forms, not only the visible and the audible but also even the tactile. (An i.t.a. Braille has proved to be immediately and fluently readable by a skilled Braille reader.) It would seem that augmentations, increasing the number of characters which may be used as monographs in place of their corresponding digraphs, will excite no antipathy and may indeed be welcomed. There seems no justification however for the supposition that a reform of *spelling* (in addition to a reformed alphabet) would make reading any easier for those illiterate adults. Moreover the likelihood is that a move to reform the spellings of T.O. the visible lingua franca of the English-speaking world, would not only make reading more difficult but also greatly reduced the facility of communication.

Homophones are bad communication. Visible language is therefore all the better whenever homophones happen to have been heterographically spelled. Indeed there is a stronger case for changing the spelling of the barking of a dog to *barrk* and for leaving alone *bark* for the covering of the tree and *barque* for the ship than for making three homographs and no heterograph. At least anyone "barrking up the wrong tree" would then know what meaning had been intended. In the visible language, the beginning of a sentence with either *there*, *their* or *they're* makes clear the expectable line of meaning in each case; to change all three to a common homograph would merely introduce dubeity without, so experience of the transition from i.t.a. to T.O. has shown, advantage in reading - so immediately does the learner recognise at the transition the meaning of what has been symbolised.

The transitioning learner in the medium of i.t.a. has no difficulty either in accepting *has* for *haz* or even *was* for *woz* when reading in context or *enough* for *enuf*. What the reader looks to have are forms which will sufficiently trigger off meaning in his brain. After all, centuries of practice have proved that *has*, *was* and *enough* etc. do very well what is required of them. It is the question of familiarity which seems very easily acquired remembering that the purpose of the visible language is not, as Max Muller so rightly pointed out, "to photograph spoken languages."

On first hearing (and on hearing proper names where context cannot help), the variations from one dialect to another present a degree of difficulty, but only temporarily, until familiarity has been developed, to those who normally listen to, and hear only that dialect; the variations of that dialect constitute the essence of easiest communication: indeed the more 'whiskers' the dialect has [\[1\]](#) the better. The variation of *ough* in lieu of *uf* becomes a familiar variant and possibly contributes to ease of reading by reason of the highly discriminating 'whiskers' of the letters *g* and *h*. At any rate there is no published evidence that the variety in T.O. makes the difficulty in reading among those who are skilled readers and I am prepared to give any researcher the nine pronunciations of *ough* in

'the rough¹-coated, dough²-faced ploughman³ strolled thoughtfully⁴ through⁵ the streets of Peterborough⁶ with a cough⁷ and a hiccough⁸ on the way to the lough⁹,

so that he may prove if he can, that those words would be more easily read were they to have 'photographed' the nine different sounds.

The delusion that the alphabet is (or could even be) the writing system instead of a reading system based on sound is the more unfortunate in that a writing system cannot, as will be shown, applied to a general English-speaking world-wide convention for writing, if practical considerations are taken into account.

It is true that many people mis-spell and would like to spell correctly without going through the grind of learning the orthographic spelling. However, because pronunciations vary in so very many common words - even *has*, *are*, *was*, etc. (and very many less common:- compare the *ent*'s in *continental* and *continent*) have their strong and weak forms) - that a spelling cannot be standard if it is to be based on pronunciation because there is no stable as well as no standard pronunciation. Indeed there is a very great variety instead. There is thus the dilemma that either the writer will need to learn the "standard" variant pronunciation which some authority (God bless him!) will have determined to be the one correct pronunciation for all speakers in the many English speaking centres, and so the one correct spelling, or else the visible language will find being built in its midst a very large Tower of Babel with variants of the visible language diverging greatly from the visual *lingua franca* which T.O. has hitherto so successfully been.

The costs of communication have already been greatly increased by the necessity which Andrew Carnegie and Theodore Roosevelt injudiciously introduced when they brought it about that books needed for the future to be printed by two spelling markets, instead of one, so that the new forms *center* and *honor* and the old forms *centre* and *honour* might not offend - and whoever thought it was sensible, even if making any change, to leave unchanged the stressed and most significant syllables *sent* and *on* at the beginning of those two words and to change instead the spelling of the unstressed and insignificant syllables at the end?

If we were to spell as we pronounce, special printings will be expected by the readers of the many variant "English-speaking" communities; certainly for all speakers of those dialects of English in which the variations in pronunciation cross the line of diaphonic tolerance and habituations. Such special printing may well need to become so general as virtually to price visible language out of circulation. At least our T.O. is virtually *lingua scripta franca* except for those books which sell in such quantity that local spellings are commercially marketable.

The words, the visible language, even more than the spoken word, has been the very framework of man's accumulation of knowledge and so of his progress. *Scripta manent but Verba volant*. Any approach to reform the visible language therefore needs to be very circumspect, and those concerned must realise that they will be operating in a field which is little understood and in which they are as yet very few guidelines, of which not a few lead in the wrong direction. It is to be hoped that what has here been provided may suggest directions of thought which could be helpful.

Improvement in the visible language in its handwritten form – being different from the printed or typewritten visual language is another matter altogether.

In theory, the principle of the totally new and more economical alphabet based not at all on the Roman Upper Case is alphabet is clearly sound. Seeing that we have assimilated for handwriting purposes the cursive alphabet (of which the sixth version of *BAG* is an illustration) and have thus

accepted a major change from and debasement of both the original upper case alphabet and its derivative the lower case, we ought to clearly to have gone the whole hog with a functional aim in view and to have departed even more in order to have achieved a faster and at the same time possibly even more legible handwriting. (Remember that Shaw regarded himself and all writers as manual labourers and wanted our pens to wait on our brains and no longer our brains to wait on our pens. By using Pitman's Shorthand he claimed to have written more plays, books, articles and several thousands more letters by reason of having escaped the limitations of the cumbersome characters which had been carved in stone in Rome 2000 years ago.)

His contest alphabet (see The Shaw Alphabet Edition of Androcles and the Lion. Penguin books, London, Eng., Baltimore, USA and Mitchum, Victoria, Australia) is however illegible without special study, though slowly decypherable after only four hours' study. Progress in a design for a functional handwriting alphabet along these lines will necessarily be slow and will probably occur only if there can be set aside Shaw's ascetic requirements and his rejection therefore of any alphabet which he would have said to be a "shorthand," and were a fresh start to be made and the designer given *carte blanche*. This in effect has been suggested in the terms of the will of the late Eugene Kelly which provided a Kelly Fund for the fostering of "Alphabet X" as soon as i.t.a. had become generally accepted as the I.L.M for learning English literacy and oracy. This in turn may take time but when it has occurred some designer will no doubt make available a hand-written alphabet which will be both more rapid and more effective than our cursive alphabet and will commend itself to general adoption - much as the new symbols, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc. came to augment, but not wholly to replace, the slower and less convenient i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi. Let us hope by the year MMDXXIV literate man may no longer communicate cumbrously in the present hand-written version of the visual English language.

[1] **Footnote:** Those British who make in speech no discrimination between *law* and *lore* and those Americans who made none between *cot* and *caught* or *bomb* and *balm* find reading easier by reason that a shared visible language makes the discrimination, which incidentally is more acceptable in the other spelling to the other reader.

Dear Sir James:

While I like your article in general, I'm afraid I cannot agree with all you say. Your paragraphs about homophones are not, in my opinion, valid. Surely you remember what Ben Franklin had to say on that subject? If you have a file of back issues of SPB, you will find a quote from Ben Franklin in our Spring, 1971 issue, page 7. And also in the separate monograph, "Homophones, Homographs, and Heterographs - the Deceitful Words of English.

You say it is desirable to have three spellings of "bark," and then why not six spellings of 'bay' - and a large number of different spellings of the 1000 or more words in English with multiple meanings, some with almost 100 different, as per the enclosed list. Surely this alone would show you that there is no real need of such multiple spellings for multiple meanings. The real reason why there are three spellings for: *there*, *their*, *they're*, is that they have both different meanings and different origins (besides being different parts of speech). If, when the language was first being set down into writing, there had been no differences in origin, and the writers were forced to use those spoken words carefully to avoid misleading the listener, then the three variations of spelling probably would not have developed and all would be spelt the same as we now spell: *bay*, *blow*,

cast, fall, spring, ring, light, make, round, square, etc. Writers use these heterographs because they are available. While they are useful, they are not really *necessary* or the spoken words would have been *spoken* differently so as to indicate the needed differences.

Also I think you are mixed up on your audience. It's like changing horses in mid-stream. The title indicates the article is for the spelling reformer - and who is he supposed to please?: the adult with the years of reading skills in our sign language - English, or the learner? Surely you don't expect to please the literate adult with any changes, no matter how small or few. It's only the semi-literate or literate - the foreigner or coming generations, who are expected to profit from a spelling reform. All we can do is to try to placate the literate adult with both a modest reform and a barrage of propaganda to make him think that the proposed reformed spelling will benefit him indirectly even tho it might take him a few minutes weeks to become accustomed to the new spelling forms - most of which will be so little altered that he will have no trouble guessing at the meaning even if he fails to slow down enuf to verbalise the spellings he sees. It is only when he feels the *need to write* in the new spelling that he will need some instruction or help - consultation with a W.E. Dictionary. My experience in typing Bonnema's father's diary indicates that this can be learned in three or four days if the desire is there. Motivation is what we need to supply.

On your page 3 you say, "on first hearing. . . the variations of one dialect from another present a degree of difficulty, but only temporarily until familiarization has been developed." This is equally true of phonetic spelling (W.E.). Hence, altho a reform with a simplified spelling might temporarily be a slight handicap to literate adults, it is probably much less of the handicap than most people realise, as my experience above seems to indicate.

The motivation to learn the new spelling will come if and when our governments will declare the new spelling to be the official spelling of English - to displace gradually our T.O. over a period of one or more years. Stenographers would be the first to feel the need to take a short one- or two-week course in the new spelling, as their jobs would depend upon knowing it. Soon after seeing articles in the newspapers in W.E. all readers would soon become accustomed to seeing it and to accepting it because by then they would know that it soon would be the official spelling. Like a snowball rolling downhill, it would pick up speed in size till everyone would realise that his livelihood would depend upon a facile knowledge of the new spelling.

Now we can only hope to make our legislative leaders realise how important this reform really is and how to put it into use.

Yours sincerely, Newell W. Tune

Why there has been failure to adopt a reform.

Exploring the possible reasons for failure to obtain more success in the serious consideration and adoption of some form of a simplified spelling of English.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.4 pp92,93 and repeated §20.1 pp265,266 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1970 p5,18]

4. The Real Problem of Spelling Reform, by Newell W. Tune

Probably every teacher knows that numerous attempts have been made to reform English spelling and make it more consistent and regular. Hence, it is not surprising that the latest attempt* should be viewed with scepticism and apathy by many. But just because all previous attempts failed is no reason why the latest attempt should also fail. "It is always darkest just before the dawn of a new day."

*Congressman Bob Mathias of Bakersfield introduced a Bill, at the request of Homer W. Wood, Publisher of the Porterville Evening Recorder, to establish a National Spelling Commission, with the power to select a system of simplified spelling and to publish a dictionary in the new spelling.

Most previous attempts at spelling reform (and bills in Congress to do this) failed because some particular system of reformed spelling was proposed to be adopted. After looking at the kind of reformed spelling that was proposed, Congressmen were usually reluctant to accept such radical proposals. Such skeletons should be kept in the closet where they will scare no-one. The present attempt wisely avoids this pitfall.

Most of these attempts were made nearly a century ago when the attitude of the public seemed to be "What was good enuf for my grandfather, is good enuf for me. However, that is certainly not the attitude of the public today. All around us we see the public has changed their point of view. They are ready and willing to accept any change that will be beneficial. Notice the complete change in our supermarkets since before the war. Self-service stores quickly supplanted the old type of inefficient stores. Frozen foods, prepackaged meats, cellophane wrappings and preformed plastic packages were readily accepted because of their obvious advantages. Television and drive-in theaters have changed out living habits. The new homes are vastly changed, both inside and out, from prewar homes.

So let us go back to the question as to whether the public would accept a reformed spelling. In a questionnaire sent out to 800 educators, those answering (140) were in favor of some kind of reformed spelling by a ratio of 95% to 5% who were opposed to any reformation. Strangely enuf, all of those who opposed spelling reform were either teaching in the conservative New England states or were educated there. All of these opponents expressed some fears - fears of the amount or extent of the reform, of the difficulty to put the changes into use, of the amount of re-education needed to use the new spelling, and of the disruption of a secretary's spelling habits. None of them considered that simplified spelling was necessary because they themselves had little or no trouble in learning to spell (eventually). Nor did any of them think that it took them too long to learn our

erratic spelling. (Time is of no importance in a child's life.)

It is also true that many educators did not return the questionnaires possibly because of apathy to the subject or because they felt it was an impossible task to convince congressmen of the need for and advantages of a simplified spelling. Before congressmen can be convinced of this need, the educators themselves must be convinced:

1. that a simplified spelling in general use would greatly simplify their task of teaching reading and spelling;
2. that it would greatly shorten the time needed to teach reading;
3. that it would greatly improve the quality of reading of our pupils;
4. that there *is* a need to improve this quality of reading and spelling of our pupils;
5. that there is some correlation between pupils misbehavior and difficulty in learning to read and spell; which frequently leads to frustration, dropouts from school, and delinquency;
6. that our present spelling is not sacred thing that is unchangeable.

The big question then, is how to get the public and the teachers to understand all these things. And then, to do something about it.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.5 pp93-96 in the printed version]
 [Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1979 pp14-16 in the printed version]

5. Acceptability of Proposed Spelling Reforms, by Kenneth H. Ives*

*Chicago, IL.

Diffusion studies on cultural innovations indicate that one major factor in the speed of adoption is the perceived acceptability of the various separable aspects of the innovations offered.

An earlier article, "Cultural Lag and Prematurity: The Case of English Spelling" (*Spelling Progress Bulletin*, Spr. 1979, pp17-18) concluded that the problems of adoption were a major unresearched area in the field of spelling reform. Since then a small preliminary study of reactions to a long list of possible revised spellings has been done. It asked for reactions graded from +3 to -3 on each one (see Questionnaire). One fourth of the respondents expressed neutrality (=0), a fifth marked all changes -3. Many of these were traditionalists, but one was a classicist - his watch has Roman numerals. The rest of the respondents scored mostly over the full range.

Based largely on these results, a first eight steps of "Progressiv Spelling" have been devised, from words which received favorable average ratings in this study. The first four steps, shown in Table 1, included only reformed spellings which are listed as alternates in most college dictionaries. The count of occurrences for the words listed comes from the Kucera and Francis (1967) study.

Table 1: Progressiv Spelling, Steps 1-4.

	:words:	occur in:	saving:	sample:
		1 million:	%:	rating:
PS1: altho, tho, thru, -out, thoro, thoroly	6	1,902	.045	+ 1.0
PS2: catalog, -er, -ing, dialog, prolog, synagog	6	@ 25	-	+ 1.1
PS3: canceled, diagraming, programed, -er, -ing, traveled, -er	7	@ 70	-	+ 0.3
PS4: burnt, dropt, fixt, mixt, spelt, stopt	6	407	.01	+ 0.3

Should a spelling reform proposal prescribe universal use of a particular rule, on one hand, or only a short list of common words which make progress toward more consistent following of a rule. This is an issue not yet much discussed or researched by spelling reformers.

Experience in Australia with Harry Lindgren's "SR-1" indicates that many users of English are not accustomed to using phonemic rules. They have some difficulty, and make some errors, in trying to apply a rule on spelling reform. They omit some words which fit the rules, and include some which do not quite fit. Likewise, publishers and proof-readers want a definite list, rather than a rule, so they can quickly check newer spellings for accuracy.

These considerations, and concern for economy of effort, have led to the plan, in Progressiv Spelling, of only changing at first the most common words affected by a phonemic rule. Users can be encouraged to extend the rule to less common words, but learners and proofreaders, who operate by rote rather than by rule, prefer to have a manageable, definite list. Short lists are easier to memorize, or keep handy for reference. Long lists, such as the 264 words affected by SR-1

(Lindgren 1969, p.123-4) are clumsy to use and impossible for most people to memorize.

Three criteria were used in developing these lists. One was to have at least the five most common words fitting the rule, to make a substantive list. The second was to include all applicable words occurring 100 or more times in 1 million words of varied reading matter. Third, controversial words are omitted at this stage. These may have varying pronunciations, or result in homographs.

The rule for PS1 is to drop "gh," now silent tho originally pronounced, and a silent "o" or "u" also. This catches up to a change in pronunciation explained by Noah Webster (1789, p. 391-2). These words were proposed and adopted by the National Education Assoc. in 1898. The shorter spellings are used about 1% of the time in printed work, as shown in the Kucera and Francis word counts.

NEA also included "catalog, prolog" and several related words in their 1898 list of 12 words. These have achieved usage in printed matter about a third of the time. They rest on a rule of pronouncing "g" at the end of a word stem as "hard g," even if followed by a suffix starting with "e" or "i". These vowels, under a Romance language rule, would change pronunciation to "soft g" or "j." In English, this Romance rule has exceptions, notably "get." Spelling reformers generally prefer eventually to change "soft g" to "j." But changing "soft g" to "j" was rated about -0.6 in the survey.

PS3 follows Noah Webster's rule against doubling a final single consonant (under some limited conditions!) before adding a suffix (Shoemaker 1936, p. 267-271; see also Webster, 18-06, 1970). This change has received about 80% acceptance in this country.

While the NEA adopted in 1906 "-t" endings, as in PS 4, for those "ed" endings coming after unvoiced and some syllabic consonants (l, n), acceptance has been spotty. "Builded" is now archaic, "burnt" is common, but the others are rare at present, not being found in the 1967 study. The original pronunciation of the "-ed" ending was as a separate syllable, now only heard when one wants to sound Shakespearian. Pronunciation rules for the "-ed" endings are found in Laubach (1965, p. 67-70).

Examination of other possible changes receiving noticeably favorable responses in the survey, but not found in dictionaries, indicated that another four steps could be assembled. These are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Progressiv Spellings, Steps 5-8.

		:words:	occur in: 1 million:	savings: %:	sample: :rating:
PS5:	appeard, calld, concernd, considerd, coverd, designd, determind, followd, happened, involv, livd, obtaind, opend, playd, receivd, remaind, returnd, seemd, servd, showd, turnd	21	3,382	.055	+ 0.3
PS6:	askt, developt, establisht, finisht, increast, lookt, publisht, reacht, slipt, stept, walkt, wisht, workt	13	1,953	.03	+ 0.2
PS7:	enuf, ruf, nabors, naborhood; foto, fotograf,	7	643	.02	+ 0.2
PS8:	fiscl, levl, norml, totl, locl	5	964	.015	+ 0.3

Edmund Spenser and John Milton used "-d" endings (Darbishire 1952, p. xi) as proposed in PS5. The rule for these is to drop the "e" after words ending in voiced consonants. The "e" is retained, and pronounced, after "d, t" word endings.

The rule for PS6 is to change "-ed" to "-t" after unvoiced consonants and some "syllabic l, n", as in PS4. Shakespeare used "wist" and other of these spellings. Two words were omitted from this list because of conflicts. "Learned" is often pronounced with a "d" sound in this country, and shortening "passed" results in a homograph.

Some "gh" endings have changed pronunciation from guttural to "f" sound. Hence respelling the two commonest of these as "enuf, ruf" starts PS7. Noah Webster proposed and used "nabor", dropping the "gh" and changing the initial vowel, but this did not catch on then. George Eastman popularized "f" for "ph" in "foto," and there still are "foto" shops in business as a result.

It was a surprise that shortening words ending in a "syllabic l" (Dewey 1970, p. 2) achieved a favorable re-action in this study. This is one case where unaccented schwa can apparently be dropt with popular approval, making PS8.

These 8 steps complete those phonemic improvements in spelling which were approved by a noticeable margin in the survey. Reactions to other proposed changes ranged from + 0.1 to - 1.4 ("wn" for "one").

In contrast to the positive ratings given the changes in PS1-8, the sample rated negatively some other proposals, in spite of their substantial savings to writers, or their popularity in spelling reform circles, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Other proposed reforms

:changes:	:words:	occur:	savings.	rating:
"th" for "the"	1	69,971	1.18	- 0.4
"ñ" for "the"	1	69,971	2.36	- 0-6
"n" for "and"	1	28,252	0.96	- 0.7
SR-1: agen, agenst, ded, deth, hed, insted, sed	7	4,213	0.1	- 0.5

SR-1 is "spelling reform, first step", popularized in Australia by Harry Lindgren (1969). Even if the "votes" of those who oppose any spelling reform are removed from the sample, this proposed change, using "e" for the sound of short "e" in some 264 words, received only about a zero rating, well below those of PS1-8. Thus it appears that its selection as a first step was not based on an adequate survey of acceptability of changes to non-reformers. Recent emphasis in Harry Lindgren's *Spelling Action* newsletter on encouraging the use of partially accepted reforms (such as PS1-4) indicates a broadening of outlook, and partial adoption of the "acceptability" criterion.

Use of new letters, "æ, ε" for "ae, ee" sounds, or "y" for "ie" sound as in "why, try, by" (if used in "hy, lyf, myt, syd, tym") scored - 1.1. Use of these three, plus "ñ" for the voiced "th" sound, would change about half the digraph usage in World English Spelling to single letters, making that variant of WES closer to the phonemic ideal of one letter per sound. These new letters could be fitted onto present typewriters which have two "changeable type" keys, by replacing "q" with "ε", and using Anglo-Saxon "cw" again instead of Norman French "qu". But clearly this is not acceptable as an early reform. ("æ, ε, ñ" letters are available for SCM and Sears elite "changeable type" keys at \$3 postpaid, from the author.)

What can we discern as the thinking of the sample members about reasons for acceptability of spelling reforms, from examination of their responses? Two bases for acceptability seem clear.

A first rule of acceptability seems to be that changes at the end of a word are more acceptable than those in the middle or at the beginning. This likely rests on the probability that word (and meaning) recognition is achieved by inspection of the root part (start and middle) of words, with variations in the ending modifying but not replacing the meaning.

The second rule of acceptability seems to rest on the fact that some proposed changes have been used by a minority of writers for many decades. Hence readers have seen them occasionally over the years. Thus changes in PS1-4 have 60 years or more of partial acceptance behind them. The first rule applies to PS 5, 6 and S. The second applies to "foto." While neither applies to "nabor," and it scored below the others (- 0.2), it was included to make a sizeable list for PS7, and because it also drops "gh."

From these findings, it would appear that a sound early strategy for spelling reformers would be to talk up the merits of moving toward something like World English Spelling, using it or i.t.a. as an initial teaching medium and as a later medium in schools, but urging adults to adopt some or all of PS1-4. This would help bring usage of some of these reforms from the present 1%, towards 51%.

Encouraging some people to use PS4-8 would build recognition and wider acceptance for them. Then these steps are more widely used, reactions to other changes should become more positive, and prejudice against "any" change become weaker. The possibilities and benefits of gradual changes, such as have been made in other languages (Dutch, Portuguese, for example) will have become more widely appreciated.

After progress has been made in the use of PS1-8, we should have more experience and understanding on the reasons for acceptability of various spelling reform proposals. Then we will be able to propose more wisely steps beyond PS8 which will be relatively acceptable.

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[*Spelling Reform Anthology §6.6 p95 in the printed version*]

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1979 p1 in the printed version*]

6. Reaction to Ives' 'Acceptability of Proposed Spelling Reforms', by Helen B. Bisgard, Ed. D.

In his discussion about the acceptability of spelling reforms, Ives limits himself to only one method for achieving reform - gradual change - and giving recommendations for the first eight steps.

A large number of people with whom I've talked during the last 40 years would agree with him that change should be gradual. When asked for their opinion on what procedure will succeed in reforming spelling, they express a preference for tackling first the extremely irregular forms.

This has long been considered the most practical approach. It was the decision of both the Philological Soc. of England and of the American Philological Assoc. in 1886 when they published lists of words based on 24 rules and of the Simplified Spelling Board in 1920 with its lists based on 28 rules.

Therefore, I am not surprised that Ives' respondents find "Progressive Spelling" acceptable. The number of his respondents is not given in the article, but regardless of whether it has little statistical significance, the results seem valid to me.

However, the very people who say they favor reform by gradual stages do not realize how impractical they themselves might find this procedure. Successors of the above mentioned Philological Societies and the Simpler Spelling Board abandoned the gradual approach. My personal experience in using Lindgren's Spelling Reform Step 1 may indicate a reason for the impracticability of instituting reform in successive stages.

I use SR-1 because it proclaims the need for spelling improvement and may do its bit toward influencing public opinion. However, I doubt that eventual reform will come about as the culmination of a series of SR steps. The general public will feel frustrated when trying to change certain habitual spellings during each stage of the progression. From first grade on, a writer has acquired his skill after years of learning small parts until the whole process became automatic. When he writes he composes his thoughts without being conscious of how his pen or typewriter spells. As the words flow, he pays no attention to their formation any more than he thinks about the pronunciation of each word when he talks. He concentrates entirely upon putting across his intended meaning.

When I wish to have SR-1 forms appear in the final copy of my writing, I go over the rough draft carefully, looking for syllables which have "short e" sounds. This requires extra effort which I am willing to exert because I hope that the SR spelling will attract attention to the need for simplification. However, the general public, trained to write in the traditional manner, has little impetus to make changes. People find that altering any techniques in the slightest manner disrupts the smooth functioning of a skill, whether it be bowling, driving a stick-shift car, or speaking French.

Learning an entirely *new* subject does have appeal, tho. We are in an age which adjusts to drastic changes such as space travel and computer operations. I believe that a new spelling system will eventually be accepted as a total system. The time should come when people will learn a code such as World English just as they master shorthand, atomic symbols, the Metric System, or Russian. At first they will think of it as a supplement to traditional orthography - a second system. But after a while, exposure to the better system, where words are spelt as sounded, will familiarize them with it so that with use it will become an easily acquired habit.

We cannot predict what force will persuade them of the necessity for adopting a new and better code. It may be political developments, or economic reasons. Think of the present orthographic changes in China. Are we more backward than they?

I hope to develop the subject further in future issues of *SPB*.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.7 pp97-99 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1970 pp2-4 in the printed version]

7. GBS and the ABC, by Barbara Smoker*

* London, England.

* Reprinted from *Modern Drama*, pp. 139-46, Sept. 1959.

George Bernard Shaw was essentially a craftsman. His own description of his job was "that of a master of language." One of many popular fallacies concerning him is that he was an original thinker. He was not. The original thinker gives his original thought - rarely more than one - to the rest of mankind, and bores them stiff with it. Shaw was teeming with ideas - other people's - and scattered them about with exuberant vitality.

What he did, as most clever people do, was to take ideas from this philosopher and that, from this economist and that, from this biologist and that, and select all the ideas that fitted in with his own general outlook, rejecting the rest. He himself never claimed that any of his ideas were original. Even when he was not sure where the ideas had come from in the first place, he was careful to admit his indebtedness to somebody. "What I say today," he wrote, "everybody will say tomorrow, though they will not remember who put into their heads. Indeed, they will be right; for I never remember who puts things into my head: it is the *Zeitgeist*."

Another time he described himself as "the mouthpiece of the Webbs" - the pioneers of British socialism, whose ideas he made his own and brought within the popular grasp. So, too, with ideas from Buffon, Lamarck, Butler, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Nietzsche, and Marx - but an exhaustive list, if possible to compile, would use up the rest of my space.

To deny that Shaw was an original thinker is not to belittle him or his contribution to civilisation. How many of us who drink from Shaw's bubbling decanter of ideas would ever go to the original sources for them? Or, if we did, would we find them digestible, let alone palatable?

Since Shaw's profession was that of a master craftsmen in the craft of putting ideas on paper, he was in all his other activities an amateur. Not amateurish, but a 'round' man, participating in many different fields for the love of the game, and, without attempting to specialise, acquiring a good general grasp of most of them. What this century is most in need of, perhaps, is the non-specialist with a wide range of interests and a keen mind capable of seizing on the many points in the great mass of knowledge accumulating around every subject. Shaw was such a man.

A writer has to write about something; and Shaw wrote about almost everything. After some years spent in writing essays, novels, short stories, a book about Ibsen, political pamphlets, book reviews, and critiques of painting and music, he began writing plays; and it is his plays, of course, that assured him of immortality, in spite of - or, perhaps, partly because of - the fact that they deal with the problems and controversies of the day when they were written. Shaw left sixty plays, of which the earliest were written before some of Pinero's and Oscar Wilde's and the latest after some of Peter Ustinov's and Arthur Miller's. He took the lid off slum landlordism, prostitution, the medical profession, and the Irish question; he denounced hypocritical respectability and romantic idealism; he preached socialism and sex equality; he expounded the philosophy of creative evolution; and he urged social reforms ranging from easier divorce to the foundation of a National Theatre. Few dramatists would have considered these themes promising material for their art, but Shaw wove them into some of the best plays ever written. So one amateur interest after another provided him with material for his plays, and one Shavian hobby-horse after another was ridden round the stages of the world's theatres.

One of Shaw's amateur interests was phonetics, and one of his hobby-horses was the introduction of a modern phonetic alphabet for English. But even Shaw found this subject a difficult one to dramatise. He set out to write *Pygmalion* as an advertisement for the science of phonetics, but it turned out as a Cinderella story about the transformation of the Cockney flower-girl into a duchess and thence into an independent woman, the phonetic theme being very subsidiary indeed to the human situation of the story, so that most of the actual propaganda had to be relegated to the play's preface.

Many people, therefore, knowing Shaw only through the theatre, had no idea how strongly he felt about the inadequacy of the ABC's until after his death, when the newspapers published the fact that he had left the bulk of his money for a new English alphabet. The general reaction then was either the whole thing was simply a posthumous joke of Shaw's, or else a bee that had got into his bonnet in his declining years. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we look at his writings as a whole, and particularly his letters to the press, which are perhaps the best hunting ground for Shaw's views on all subjects, we find a surprising number of letters, articles, and prefaces, devoted to the subject of spelling and alphabet reform, and spanning most of his long life.

In fact, Shaw's amateur interest in phonetics, spelling reform, shorthand systems, typography, and allied subjects, was first aroused as early as 1879, when he was only 23, by his friend James Lecky. It was through this friend that he got to know the eminent phonetician Henry Sweet - the original of Professor Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*, in whom Sweet's irascibility is as faithfully portrayed as his skill in applied phonetics.

Shaw, as a young man, also met the philologist Alexander Ellis, whom he later described as "a London patriarch, with impressive head always covered by a velvet skullcap, for which he would apologise to public meetings in a very courtly manner." Ellis had been steeped in alphabet and spelling reform since 1843, when he collaborated with Isaac Pitman (inventor of Pitman's Shorthand) in designing Phonotypy - an enlarged Latin Alphabet which Pitman considered more important than his shorthand. Thus, Ellis and Shaw spanned between them more than a century of attempts to reform English orthography. And before Ellis there was a long unbroken line of enthusiasts for spelling and alphabet reform, going right back to the 16th century and including such great names in other spheres as Sir John Cheke, John Milton, James Howell, Benjamin Franklin, Herbert Spencer, Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Robert Bridges, and Nicholas Murray Butler, to name only a few. So much for the popular fallacy that the idea of alphabet reform, if no other, originated with Shaw! The idea is one with firm roots, and not, as some newspapers have sneered, just "a tom-fool idea that only Shaw would put forward."

In fact, Shaw's contribution to the cause of alphabet reform was not invention but propaganda, plus the indirect publicity gained from association with his name, owing to his literary prestige and notoriety, plus his much publicised monetary bequest.

Among other popular fallacies about Shaw and the alphabet is the assumption that the Shaw percentage from the fabulous profits made by *My Fair Lady* (the musical based, appropriately enough, on Shaw's only play with a phonetic theme) are all available to finance an alphabetic revolution. Sadly, it is not so. First, Estate Duty took £524,000, and the Shaw estate did not get out of debt to the Estate Duty Offices till about the beginning of 1957. In fact it would probably still have been in debt had it not been for *My Fair Lady* coming to the rescue. Since the last of the Estate Duty was paid off, all royalties accruing to the estate until November, 1971 should certainly have gone to swell the alphabet trusts, if Shaw's wishes were carried out - except, of course, the Shaw would never have allowed *My Fair Lady* to be born in the first place; but that is another story. What many people have forgotten, however is the Chancery Court case of 1957 that set aside the Shaw alphabet trusts.

Under English Law, no one may make a bequest for an abstract cause - that is, without a personal

or organisational beneficiary - unless the object of the bequest is charitable. The reason for this is that a legal bequest must be legally enforceable, and must therefore have a beneficiary to take the executors of the estate to court if necessary. In the case of a charity, this function is fulfilled by the Attorney-General, who officially represents all British charities. But the legal definition of a charity depends, believe it or not, on the categories laid down in the Preamble to the Statute of Queen Elizabeth the First!

Two of the categories were possibilities for Shaw's alphabet trusts - education and Public Benefit. After six days of argument by learned gentleman in white wigs, it was decided by Mr. Justice Harman that the alphabet trusts could not come under either of these two categories of charity, and did not, therefore, constitute a charity, in the legal sense, at all. So they were invalid.

Every effort was made by Shavians to persuade the Attorney-General to appeal against this decision, but he refused to do so. There was no one else in a position to appeal on the charity issue, but on the very last day of the period allowed for appeal, the Public Trustee, as Shaw's executor, lodged an appeal on the issue that altho he could not be forced in law to administer the alphabet trusts, he should be allowed to do so.

Before this appeal was heard, a compromise settlement was reached out of court between the Public Trustee on the one hand and the three ultimate residuary legatees - the British Museum, The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and the National Gallery of Ireland - on the other, by which some of £8,300 was allocated from the estate to the alphabet project outlined in Shaw's will. This is a paltry sum in comparison with the total amount that can be expected to accrue to the estate before all the Shaw copyrights have expired. But even £8,300 is better than nothing.

Immediately after this settlement was reached, the Public Trustee announced a £500 prize competition for a suitable alphabet of at least 40 letters, enabling the English language to be written without indicating single sounds by more than one letter. Competitors were given a full year in which to design and polish their alphabets, the closing date of the competition being Jan. 1, 1959. More than 1000 applications for details were received, but as was to be expected, less than half of the applicants actually submitted entries. The total number of entries received was in the region of 450, and about 250 of them survived the first sifting, the rest being either based partly on the present alphabet, which was not allowed, all else containing too few or far too many symbols. It took several months to complete the examinations of all the entries.

It is not surprising that instead of nominating an outright winner, the judges did adopt an eclectic approach, choosing the best four entries of similar design, and inviting their designers to form a committee to produce a composite system embodying the best features of each. Provided the alphabets chosen were definitely similar to begin with, this method would probably produce a better alphabet than any of those actually submitted, and would thus better be able to fulfil Shaw's wishes, would have a better chance of becoming the alphabet of the future, and would better serve the people who may use it. In actuality, the four differed so much that Kingsley Read was finally instructed to make a few improvements to his alphabet and hence is responsible for the final design.

One popular fallacy is that Shaw designed an alphabet of his own and left money for its propagation. It is an indication of his modesty (a trait with which he is rarely credited) that he preferred to leave the phonetic analysis and selection of symbols to experts, though he had prepared a phonetic analysis for his printed postcard on the alphabet question - one of his famous printed postcards which enabled him to cope with his huge daily correspondence.

Another popular fallacy is that the court case concerning the alphabet trusts was part of Shaw's deliberate intention. It is true that he knew there was likely to be a court case, and he knew that

this would provide valuable publicity for the cause of alphabet reform, well worth the few thousand pounds of lawyers' costs involved. But there can be no doubt that Shaw also wanted the trusts to be upheld, and fully aware of the legal position as to abstract bequests, he did his utmost, before making his final will, to find a suitable beneficiary who would accept the task of launching a phonetic alphabet for English. Seven years before his death, he wrote a letter to all the Government departments, learned societies, colleges, committees, councils, guilds, trusts, and institutes, whose functions seemed even remotely relevant, offering them his money to propagate a new alphabet. But none of them would accept the job because of the conditions Shaw imposed, so there was nothing he could do but create a private trust *ad hoc*, and hope it would be accepted as a charity.

The most fallacious of all the popular fallacies about Shaw and the alphabet are, however, those concerning his ultimate aim. Some people think he wanted a mere spelling reform with the traditional letters. Others think he wanted an overnight switch from the old system to a new one, which would mean everyone's having to start learning to read and write all over again. What he actually wanted was a one-sound-one-letter alphabet comprised of simple shorthand-like signs, to be launched in *competition* with the existing alphabet, for use as an *alternative* system of writing, for use until one or the other proved to be the fitter to survive. In that way, the acquired visual memory of the existing adult generation would not be sacrificed, for only young children would have to learn both systems - and for them the easier phonetic system would actually be a helpful stepping-stone to the more difficult traditional one.

Shaw held that, far from having less chance of acceptance than mere simplified spelling, an entirely new alphabet was the only hope of orthographic reform. Tampering with the traditional spelling, apart from the confusion caused, would be up against the emotional hostility with which we all defend our habitual mental processes. An entirely new alphabet, on the other hand, could exist side-by-side with the old one, and gradually take over from it more and more, until after a century or two, when everyone living has grown up with both notations, the ABC becomes merely an academic subject - probably considered obsolete. That is how our numerical system was changed. Over a period of several centuries, the Arabic numerals (with a symbol for zero, making place value possible) gradually superseded the clumsy, inadequate Roman ones. (Just try doing a 'long division' with Roman numerals!) It took about 900 years for the English to go over to the Arabic numerals, for they had learnt the Roman numerals in childhood and would have found it too troublesome to change! But when the change was finally made, in the 15th century, it opened the door to mathematics and the machine age.

Tools and machines have been vastly improved in the last few generations, yet we have been using basically the same alphabet for 3,500 years! It was, admittedly, a wonderful advance on the logographic systems of writing that preceded it, but the science of phonetics has progressed since then. Moreover, the alphabet was originally designed for a particular Semitic language, long since dead, and has suffered in the process of adaptation from one language to another.

The Latin version of the alphabet was never really suitable for Latin, and is far less so for English. Whereas most modern European languages using a form of the Latin alphabet have about 30 distinct sounds (or, more technically, phonemes) to be represented by 21 to 27 letters, English has about 40 phonemes, and therefore has to pull and stretch its 26-letter alphabet (of which three letters - C, Q, and X - are completely wasted because their sounds are redundant) in all directions. Some of the letters are required to do duty for three or more sounds, and we also fall back on digraphs - i.e., pairs of letters for single sounds - such as *aw*, *oo*, *sh*, *th*, and *ng*. On top of all this, we spell our language with such careless abandon that it might be supposed that we had too many letters instead of too few!

Irrational spelling not only makes it harder for children to learn to read and spell, but it perverts the

natural tendency of children to perceive phonetic relationships in letters - a fact deplored by educational psychologists. It also leads to distortion of the spoken language, and is a brake on English becoming a universal second language for international communication.

Although most of the inconsistencies of the English spelling could be eliminated by mere spelling reform, it would require a reform of the alphabet itself to eliminate the digraphs. One only has to consider the two words *mishap* and *bishop* to realise that no more than partial reform could be effected. A thorough reform of spelling is not possible with a deficient alphabet.

Shaw hated the inefficiency of using silent letters and digraphs. "As to spelling the very frequent word *though* with six letters instead of two," he declares in an article written in 1944, "it is impossible to discuss it, as it is outside the range of common sanity."

Apart from the quantitative inadequacy of the ABC, there is plenty wrong with the letters themselves. They were not scientifically designed, but simply evolved from prehistoric pictographs, with modifications dictated by the writing tools used. And this haphazard evolution is all too apparent. There is no relation between the shapes of letters representing similar sounds: the *k* and hard *g* sounds, for instance, are similar, but the characters we use for them are very different. On the other hand, the capital forms of the vowel E and consonant F, though having nothing in common phonetically, are similar to look at.

The shapes of some of the letters are unnecessarily complex. This is bad enough in reading (it has been proved that reading is slowed down by the complexity of letters), but in writing by hand the number of strokes used for each letter is a major factor in the consumption of writing time. Even more time-wasting is the need to go back on words to dot *i*'s and cross *t*'s.

We have two series of letters - capital and small - to represent one and the same series of sounds, and the corresponding forms are mostly quite different. In fact, only 8 out of the 26 letters have the same shape in each series. Capital D is more like a small *b* unlike small *d*, which has the curve on the opposite side - an incongruity that gives trouble too many a child. Then the manuscript letters, both capital and small, are sometimes different again from their printed counterparts, and the printed letters may even differ in their Roman and italic forms. (Compare the shapes A, a, α.)

The order of the letters in the alphabet is arbitrary: one might at least expect the vowel letters to be grouped together at the beginning or the end. As for the names of the letters, some of them bear no resemblance to the sounds they represent. An adult introduced to the English ABC for the first time might suppose H to represent the *ch*-sound, U the *y*-sound, and Y the *w*-sound, while the name of W offers no clue to its sound at all. Benjamin Franklin wrote of the chambermaid who thought that *wife* was spelt YF!

Much more could be written about the drawbacks of the ABC, but perhaps the above will suffice to show that when Shaw, as a master craftsman with the written word and an amateur disciple of Henry Sweet in phonetics, left the bulk of his fortune for the propagation of a new alphabet, he was neither suffering from senility nor perpetuating a posthumous joke. History is certainly on the side of a new alphabet, whether the winner of the Shaw competition or some other system. And when Shaw's dream comes true - a dream shared by men of vision for nearly five centuries - who knows what miracles of human progress it may bring in its wake? The man who first dreamt up the zero of our numerical system did not foresee the standard of living we enjoy today, but his dream, his wise idea, made it possible. When letters are as honest and straightforward as numbers, wisdom may even catch up with science.

[*Spelling Reform ed Newell Tune t6.8pp99-101*]

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1980 pp.7-10*]

[Valerie Yule: see **Books, Journals, Newsletters, Media, Personal Views Anthology, Bulletins.**]

8. A Transitional Spelling Reformed for Adults and Learners - using 12 rules to regularise present English spelling, by Valerie Yule, Aberdeen, Scotland. (SR-1 used)

Introduction

Although everyone assumes that 'spelling reforms means phonetic spelling, other features may also need investigation to produce the 'best fit' orthography that can meet the sometimes conflicting requirements of learners, machines, and fluent users of English, of the educated elite and the 'educationally handicapped', of native speakers and second language learners, of the changing English language and of maintained continuity with past and present English spelling.

This paper presents the type of reform that might meet those conditions, although the final form would need to be based on empirical research, not armchair theory and informal observation. Its details are set out in a form that can be used to describe other proposals too, so that schemes can be more easily compared in their rationale and details such as sound-symbol representation.

A. A Summary of Proposals

A highly regular 'transition' spelling can be used easily by both learners and fluent readers of present English spelling.

Learners start with a sound-symbol correspondence 'Learners' Spelling' following the lines of world English Spelling, and then modify it with 12 rules and 12 sight-words as soon as the basic principles of reading are comprehended.

Current print can modify present spelling in four stages, which unmodified by the 12 rules and 12 sight words, would lead directly to Learners' Spelling. With them, 80% of running text can remain unchanged - but the problem spellings are cleared up. As it is a reform by stages, anyone can begin now, with Harry Lindgren's SR-1, (short e always spelt with the single e), and later features can be modified according to research and experience.

Electronic machines can be programmed to write and speak using the 12 rules and 12 exceptions.

More effective techniques to teach reading and writing are included as proposals in the full scheme, once present 'unreliable' spelling no longer complicates 'the reading process.'

B. Assumptions

i) Research rather than dogmatic assertion is needed about the optimum spelling for different needs - reading and writing, learners and fluent users, English-speakers and the foreign-born, machines, 'average people' and handicapped learners.

Details of the issues that need to be settled are given in the paper following this one: "How to implement spelling reform."

ii) Continuity with present spelling is essential.

iii) A perfect reform is humanly impossible. The question is not to reject reforms that are not perfect, but to work for one that will work, and that the public can accept.

iv) Spelling reformers will never be unanimous in agreement on the kind or extent of reform, and all

must be prepared to make some concessions from their own preferences.

C. *Specific proposals.*

Specific proposals can fit on one page, or, in example form, on a card for the pocket, as can be done with most major languages - except English, French and Chinese. The first two rules produce the phonemic-based *Lerners' Speling*:

1. *All consonants* have one sound each, broadly interpreted (e.g., no distinction between voiced and unvoiced *th*). Digrafs are: *ch, sh, th, wh, zh, ng, nk*.

2. *Vowels*:

a	e	i	o	u
ae	ee	ie	oe	ue
ar/aa	er	air	or/au	
ou	oi	uu	oo	

The next ten rules modify *Lerners' Speling* to produce *Transition Speling*. As the public gradually adjusts to the changes, these rules might be progressively dropped, starting from the last.

3. Standard formal speech is represented, as in dictionary pronunciation. Where there are regional differences, preference is for that closest to present spelling, e.g., *after, dog, remember, exampl*. Unclear vowels are written *e* or *er*, without distinction between stressed and unstressed schwa, unless there is a reason learners can be told, e.g., *metal-metalic, aebl-capabl*.

4. Represent diphthongs and triphthongs by digrafs only. Place in word affects pronunciation.

<i>ae-maelstrom</i>	<i>ea-real, iedea</i>	<i>ia-dial, India</i>	<i>oa-oasis</i>	<i>ua-dual</i>
<i>ai-dais, plaing</i>	<i>ei-deity, seing</i>	<i>ii-tiing</i>	<i>oi-oil, going</i>	<i>ui-gluing</i>
<i>ao-caos</i>	<i>eo-peon, radeo</i>	<i>io-iota, Ohio,</i>		<i>uo-duo</i>
	<i>eu-mueseum</i>	<i>iu-glorius</i>		

5. Medial and final vowels:

Long vowels. Within polysyllables spelt with single letters, e.g., *inovation*. *-e* construction in final syllables without consonant blend endings, e.g., *hope, hopes*, (but *biend, fiena1*).

Final vowels:

banana	--	hapy	--	--
way	me	hi-fi	no	nue
ar/a	er	air	or/saw	
cow		boy	thru	

A 'pocket card' setting out the vowel rules through examples could look like this:

banana	bet	pity	not	nut
saeling/sale/say	meeting/me	hieding/	noeting/	cute/cue
far/kraal/spa	her	hide/hi	note/no	
out/cow	boil/boy	air	taut/for/saw	
		muun/thru	took	

6. 12 *homonyms* shown to be confusable in real life are distinguished by spellings that are still arguably phonemic (legitimate), e.g., *too, tuw* (and sight-word *to*), *bi, biy, ther, thair, thay'r*.

7. 12 '*sight-words*' retained, with their related words: *to/ into/ towards/ together, of off, was what,*

who, put, -ful, I, you, -ion ending, one/ onse/ only. ?coud /shoud / woud?

8. *Double consonants.* *rr* if possible confusion with *er/ar/or*, e.g., *carrot, erring*. Other possible uses, e.g., for stress distinctions, e.g., *comitty-comity, desert-dessert*.

9. *Verb endings* standardised *d/ed*, e.g., *lifted, jumpd, crepd*.

10. *s* for sounds *s/z* and all plurals, except for initial *z* and words like *buz, fiz, jaz*. Voiceless final *ce* replaced by *se*, e.g., *danse, silense*, or *ss*, e.g., *class, silenss?*

11. *c* for sound *k* except to close word-roots, e.g., *clok, basking, provoke*.

12. *qu* and *gu* for sounds *kw* and *gw*.

b) *Four stages* for changing the printed word, and for adult users to change their written spelling, each at his own individual pace:

1. *Spelling reform one.* (the Australian Harry Lindgren's SR-1) Spell *e* for the short *e* sound, as in: *bet, ded, sed, frend, meny, bery, gess*.

2. "*When in doubt (dout), cut it out.*" Simply omit unnecessary silent letters: *gess, led*.

3. *Use sensible consonants*, e.g., *folograty, jeneral, enuf*. For transition Speling, modify with rules 8-12.

4. *Use a consistent vowel system.* Lerner Speling vowels modified by rules 3-5.

For minimum disruption of the present appearance of English spelling, add the special spellings listed in rules 6-7, and use rule 3 for the standard of speech.

D. Rationale.

How many rules are needed for a reformed spelling? Answers range from: "only one rule: one-sound-one-symbol," to Dr. Wijk's Regularized English, which accepts almost any English spelling if a rule can be found to cover it, since the major problem is the 500 odd maverick words for which no rules are possible.

"12-rule spelling" tries to reconcile the needs and abilities of learners and fluent readers. The key is "Easy to remember," hence the arbitrary limit, the systematic setting-out, and catchy slogans. A stage at a time for adults means minimal disruption of the appearance of English text, gradual acclimatisation of users, and reform that can begin concurrently with research.

a) *Rationale of specific proposals.*

1. "Diaphonic" broad-band rather than precise phonetic sound-symbol correspondence, to minimise learners' difficulties in sound-discrimination and problems with regional differences. Spelling as reasonable conventions to represent sounds - not "photographs."

2. *Vowels.* World English Spelling is the guide, except that unclear vowels are spelt with *e/er* rather than *u/ur* on the grounds that excess of the less familiar letters produces more affront in the present readers. *ue/uu/u* are the suggested pattern for *due/muun/tabu* rather than *ue/oo/oo*. To avoid the print disturbance of *puut* and *-ful* which 'look shocking', *put* and *-ful* are sight-words in Transition Speling.

3. Children and foreigners learning to read English are often baffled in pronunciation of words when they do not follow the usual principle of stress on the first syllable. Written material for learners can therefore use *underlining* or *italics* to show how to read words with irregular stress.

Learners will naturally *begin* to write according to how they speak, but material for them to read will be as close as possible to standard formal speech. They may have reading books with large print Lerner Spelling and small print Transitional, later reversed, but Lerner Spelling remains for rendering pronunciation.

Everyone comprehends standard speech on the media and on tapes, whatever their own dialect English, and so it will be easy for children to learn to spell it as they become accustomed to transition reading and learn the reliable rules of transition spelling.

4. *Diphthongs and triphthongs*. Any spelling reform will still leave a few odd words difficult to manage, but they are no reason for abandoning a partial reform. The best solution may be ellipsis of letters rather than excessive clumsiness, e.g., *poetry*, *co-operation*, *dieresis*, *medieval*.

5. *Modifications to the basic vowel pattern* seek to preserve as much as possible of the appearance of English text by using the most common patterns applying to different positions in words and following modern trends to economy. However, experiment is needed about the value of frequency as a guide to retention of spelling forms - and if frequency, what sort? Of letters, of blends, of rhyming forms, or position in words?

Since learners' difficulty is known to increase with length of words, experiments may show that learners as well as fluent readers identify polysyllabic words more easily if medial long vowels are spelt with single letters, e.g., *education* rather than *educaetion*.

A word-count might also show that Chomskian principles of representing 'lexical structure' operated as much or more often in transitional spelling as it does so haphazardly in present English spelling: e.g., *fli-flies-fliet*, *apli-aplies-apliense-aplication*, *ferosity-feroshus-feerse*, (*fly-flies-flight*, *apply-applies-appliance-application*, *ferocity-ferocious-fierce*). Note also the economy of paper, time, and memory.

"Magic e". The -e construction for long vowels is a clumsy strategy and troubles learners. It should be dropped as soon as adult readers can be acclimatised to an improvement that does not affect letter sequence.

6. *Homographs*. Should any homographs, future or existing now, be distinguished to prevent possible confusion? (e.g. *letter*, or *reader* - the person and the book). Most suppositious confusions never occur in practice, e.g., you *cannot* say, "The sun's rays meet," and you *don't* say, "The sons raise meat," altho you *could* say, "The engine has a tender behind." The odds are a hundred to one that you have not noticed the homographs already on this page as typewritten. Even excluding verb-noun pairs and the multiple distinctions made by a good dictionary, there are 35 of them, from *standard*, *speech*, *spell*, *rules*, *can*, *will*, to *present*, *distinguished*, *book*, *practice*, *page*, *type*, *even*, and only 18 of them are homophones threthend by reform, e.g., *their*, *so*, *be*, *for*, *to*, *no*, *all*, *by*.

7. *Sight-words*. A major barrier to spelling reform is that some very common and very irregular words would look very odd for a while. The interim solution is to leave a few 'sight-words' that occur very frequently in running text. An arbitrary number of 12 is easy to remember, and dull learners who at present cannot cope with 40 sight-words, let alone thousands, can confidently learn and remember merely 12. The *-ion* construction is included because it occurs continually in newspapers and textbooks, and is shared in similar forms by all modern languages with Western

links, particularly in the international realm of science. Learners can be shown how our *shn, schn, zhn* pronunciations of *-tion, -stion, -sion* endings are slurrings from a more precise enunciation.

9. Some *grammatical markers* are retained pending research on the actual value for fluent reading and learner-ease. The latter point could be clarified by analysis of i.t.a. children's spelling, since they have the options of *-t* and *-d* for participles and a reversed *z* which looks like *s* for plurals and verbs. And how do they transfer to present spelling on these?

10. Experiments may support the observation that child and foreign learners who initially pronounce all *s* spellings of *z* sound as voiceless actually sound no worse than Welsh. But there is evidence that adult readers are affronted by the greater use of the relatively unfamiliar *z* in spelling reforms, and it may be expedient while first obtaining regularity to generalise more familiar letters except where the rarer letters are normally expected.

The expedient of using *-se* to indicate final voiceless *s* except in plurals, to avoid frequent confusions such as *peace* and *peas*, is a clumsy interim measure to make the best of the current alternatives English readers accept at present - *impasse, glass, rinse, dance, coalesce*. What would be better?

11. In any complete spelling reform, *k* will almost certainly be a significant letter, and so must be retained. However, at present it can affront, like *z*, since *c* is more familiar, so the attempt is to provide the most simple rule possible to govern maximum occurrence in a familiar position. *K* should be used, instead of *c*, before *e* and *i*, when sounded as *k*.

12. In the interim, the present invariable rule of spelling the sounds *cw* and *gw* with *qu* and *gu* are retained to maintain the present appearance of print. However, anomalies like *queue, lacquer* and *guess* are changed, altho *cue, racer* and *gess* will appear as minor oddities while they are still unfamiliar.

Summary

This is a simple and economical reform, that requires popular support but not vast funds to be adopted gradually.

It maintains the basic appearance and continuity of English spelling while cutting out much of the unpredictability. The table below compares word changes in transliterated passages from:

- A. Running text from the introduction to *New Spelling*, in transition spelling.
- B. Running text from "the *worst* English spelling possible," collected in 'The story of the Beautiful Princess' (Appendix 1), i.e., maximum change needed.
- C. *New Spelling* introduction, excluding repeated words, in transition spelling.
- D. The same in Dr. Wijk's *Regularized English* (Wijk, p.324).
- E. Transition spelling, excluding repeated words, 'The Beautiful Princess.'
- F. The same for the first three paragraphs of the Gettysburg Address.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
No change except omission of surplus letters	83%	59%	81%	79%	46%	71%
Total words shortened (including changed)	20%	33%	22%	10%	41%	30%
Total words lengthened	2%	3%	3%	5%	3%	2%
Total words with letter changes	15%	42%	18%	21%	52%	28%
Total words completely retained	66%	46%	63%	72%	30%	54%

Conclusion?

Transition spelling is designed to be easily read and learnt from both directions, by those just beginning from an initial Lerner's Spelling and by already fluent readers. It seeks to be as close to present spelling as possible with as few rules as possible. Twelve rules plus 12 sight-words can achieve close similarity to the appearance of the printed word today while cutting out the brambles and dead wood that, world-wide, hinder literacy in the English language.

Reform can begin now, by everyone, with Lindgren's e for the short e sound, as in *bet*, concurrent with action research on the next steps.

The scheme is set out in a form that could be a useful structure for the presentation and comparison of all schemes for spelling improvement.

Acknowledgements:

This paper is the product of discussion and correspondence with many spelling reform colleagues, including those at the 1979 Conference, where Dr. John Beech, particularly, influenced my thinking.

Key background reading:

Chomsky, N. "Phonology and Reading" in Levin, H. and Williams, J.P. (Eds.) *Basic Studies on Reading*, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1970.

Chomsky, C. "Reading, Writing and Phonology" *Harvard Educational Review*, 1970, v. 40, pp. 287-310.

Lindgren, Harry, *Spelling Reform, a new Approach*. Alpha Books, Sydney, Australia, 1969.

Pitman, Sir James, and St. John, J. *Alphabets and Reading*, London: Pitman, 1969.

Wijk, Axel. *Regularized English*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959.

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Appendix 1

An example of Transition Spelling, showing an average degree of change in running text:

"The worst spelling possible," the story of the Beautiful Princess, is recommended for spelling reformers in fun or earnest, to see the maximum change that their reforms could produce. Here it is in transition spelling:

"Onse upon a time the buetiful dauter of a grate majition wanted more perls to put among her trezhers. 'Look thru the senter of the muun when it is blu,' sed her muther in anser to her question. 'Yu mite fiend yor hart's desier.' The prinsese lafd becos she douted these werds. Insted she used her imagination, muuud into the fotografy bisnese and took pictuers of the luuner sfere in culer. 'I perseve moest sertenly that it aulways aperes hoely white," she thaut. She aulso found that she coud ern enuf muny in ate munths to biy herself tuw luvly, huje, enormus nue juwels tuu."

[Spelling Reform, ed Newell Tune, t6.9pp102,103]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1967 pp13,14]

9. On devising a Minimal Change System of Simplified Spelling, by Frank T. Du Feu*

*Jersey, C.I., Eng.

Please read carefully the following 24 short sentences:

1. In a violent storm on Tuesday a trawler sank in the river near the jetty.
2. True, we can go together to the bird sanctuary in the park tomorrow morning.
3. The teacher flatly refused to accept the boy's reason for being late twice on the same day.
4. A weak depression west of Scotland is drifting east and filling slowly.
5. Richard declined the firm's annual gratuity on the grounds that he did not need it.
6. A conviction will certainly ruin the driver of the taxi involved in the accident.
7. It is unlikely that those plants will grow well in such a poor soil; indeed they may die.
8. That magnificent sideboard will fetch a big price at the auction sale here in June.
9. In compliance with the terms of the agreement the shopkeeper will get in a stock of our modern tools.
10. His eldest son is quite satisfied with his job in the Department of Agriculture.
11. The officer waited for the foe to get nearer before ordering his men to fire.
12. After eating his meal the customer began to argue with the waiter about the bill.
13. We saw that we had no choice but to reject the evidence from the boy's sister.
14. Care must be taken in the drafting of these special instructions to the surveyor.
15. Our club captain will be rowing in the Diamond Sculls at the Regatta for the second time.
16. They hope soon to solve the mystery of the derailment of the express train near Denver.
17. An independent candidate denounced the treaty in strong terms.
18. In gratitude for the safe return of their poodle the children sent a gift to the animal shelter.
19. As expected the destroyer will remain in the floating dock for about five weeks.
20. The man replied reluctantly to a few questions on the subject of his wife's extravagance.
21. Their policy of curtailing grants to County Councils for road maintenance is very unwise.
22. For a rock garden to succeed it must be constructed on a site that drains well.
23. Under the feudal system barons held lands in return for providing the king with men to support him.
24. The consequences of such a severe financial loss may be more far-reaching than we suppose.

It is hardly necessary to point out that these sentences are in T.O. But T.O. on its very best behavior. For *ar* is always pronounced as in *far*, *ea* as in *meal*, *ie* as in *die*, *oo* as in *soon*, *ou* as in *about*, *ow* as in *slowly*, *ch* as in *such*, *g* is never soft as in *gem*, *h* is never mute as in *hour*, and so on.

Indeed, they are also written in the author's Revised Spelling which does what every minimal-change system of simplified spelling should do. It makes the greatest possible use of the letters and digraphs of T.O. and respells those words only (about 30 out of 100) that do not conform to the phonetic pattern adumbrated by the words used in the sentences.

Unfortunately, two sounds have had to be left out of the sentences altogether. One is the vowel heard in the first and last words of the proverb *good wine needs no bush*, the other is the consonant heard at the beginning and at the ending of *thirtieth*.

The vowel is represented in Revised Spelling by *uo*, a digraph which is a compromise between *oo* and *u*; while the consonant is represented by *thh*, a spelling devised by Dr. Godfrey Dewey and which, though rather clumsy, three letters being needed for a simple consonant sound, has the merit that it leaves *th* for the much commoner sound heard in *the, that, this, other, with, etc.* and, incidentally, gives a very simple rule for forming the plural of a noun like *path*: replace the second *h* by *s*, thus, *pathh, paths*.

The devising of rules in accordance with which the thirty out of a hundred irregular words referred to above are to be respelt is, of course, the most difficult problem facing the minimal-change spelling reformer, because the best way to respell a word is not by any means always obvious. Spelling a sound with one particular digraph may cause repercussions in other words with this sound.

For example, because the digraph *ea* represents the sound in *meal* far more frequently than it represents any other sound, it will be retained for that particular sound in this minimal-change system of spelling reform. Moreover, the words in which *ea* is pronounced as in *leather* do not present much difficulty, because, in dropping the *a* we are nearly always restoring the Middle English spelling of the word and, incidentally, falling in line with Pitnan's i.t.a. and World English spelling.

But how are words like *break* and *great* to be respelt? Are we to replace *ea* by *ei, ae* or *ai*? In Revised Spelling we have preferred the first alternative because one of the words in this minority group, namely, *steak*, was spelt *steike* in Middle English and indeed, all the words in the group are spelt with *ei* in the International Phonetic Notation today.

We have now commented on five of the 45 principle respelling rules listed below: 11, 16, 17, 39 and 40.

A few words are needed to explain number 1. In a previous article in the *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, we argued that the *soft-c* must be retained in any minimal-change system of reform because so many additional words would have to be respelt if it were disallowed that the resulting system would not be minimal-change at all.

Other changes that are obviously needed are: the unnecessary silent letters in more than 100 words are omitted, as these seldom present any problem. *F* replaces *ph* and *gh* when so sounded. *K* and *sh* replace *ch* when it has these sounds.

The Principle Respelling Rules of Revised Spelling

1. race horce	-ce for -se	27. dog wotch	o for a
2. strawd yard	-d for -ed	28. hoary memoarial	oa(r) for o(r)
3. fair enuf	f for gh	29. oeld foes	oe for o
4. familiar alfabet	f for ph	30. troop moovements	oo for o
5. argumentativ gests	g for gu	31. soop spoon	oo for ou
6. onest effort	omitted h	32. quarterly report	or for at
7. jeneral subjects	j for g	33. county tdun	ou for ow
8. keen kemist	k for ch	34. own powltry	ow for ou
9 .shut parashute	sh for ch		
10. thiss is the address	-ss for -s	35. Dutch uven	u for o
11. thhick clothh	thh for th	36. yung hunter	u for ou
12. twenty pengwins	w for u	37. valued stuedent	ue for u
		38. Tuesday cruese	ue for ui
13. transvaal banaanas	aa for a	39. guod buokings	uo for oo
14. aepricot sundae	ae for a	40. shuogar output	uo for u
15. smaull fault	au for a	41. church wurker	ur for or
16. hevy swell	e for ea	42. turf jurnal	ur for our
17. greit vein	ei for ea		
18. seazd leader	ea for ei	43. handy recipy	-y for -e
19. obsolete submarene	e-e for i-e	44. smoky chimny	-y for -ey
20. reecent speech	ee for e	45. dyed nyelon	ye for y
21. unweeldy fleet	ee for ie		
22. uncertin ernings	er for ear		
23. expensiv muslin	i for i-e		
24. solid siv	i for ie		
25. tieny magpie	ie for i		
26. drie supplies	-ie for -y		

It should be noted that in all the above rules there is one original spelling using the letter or digraph as an example for the accompanying respelt word.

As in all things made by man, the proof of the pudding is the taste thereof. We hope you like the humorous poem which follows in the Revised Spelling.

The Penitent, by Frank T. Du Feu

Mie name is Hoity; too begin,
Lamented Toity wos mie twin.
We livd in Jersy. Our abode,
A haunted cottaje off the road
That stuod amung deserted graves
On barren land enclosed bie staves.
Our den had windows but no doar,
With just a not-hole in the floar
For uss too enter in and leave,
As stranjers we did not receive.
A blud-staind ax, a seecret chiart,
Sum shrunken heds; that leethal dart
The witch at Endor gave too Saul,
And buoks on majic lined the waul;
While with a spie-glass we cuod see
The screech-oul in the waulnut tree.

Our muther helpd with thiss and that.
She groomd the he-goat, fed the cat,
And lernt wun stormy afternoon
The art of drawing down the moon,
For when the thhirteen came our way,
She made them welcum for the day.
Respected as the majistrate,
Our faather wos a bit sedate,
But kiend and scruepulously fair;
He kept our brooms in guod repair,
Hetpd uss too gather lizards, snakes,
Toads, nietshade, poisond kittywakes,
And aulways joinnd uss with a will
In seeking teethh on Gallows Hill.

Wun Haloww-een, coeld, wet and wield,
We disinterd a still-born chield,
Rapt up its entrails in a clothh
And braut them back too make the brothh,
In which we puot, when on the boil,
Yew, garlic, puff-baulls, noxious soil,
And stirrd the mixture, when too thhick,
With Toity's faevorit blackthhorn stick;
Then as the cauldron hissd and steamd,
We mutterd curces and blasfemd,
Invoking aull the feends of Hell.
Resolvd too cast a poetent spell,
Mie sister, chaenjnd intoo a frog,
Wos promptly eaten bie a dog,
Hoose owner wept too no avail,
Dad gave her twenty munthhs in jail.

Convinced that witchcraft didn't pay,
With lives like Toity's ththrown away,
I left oeld Saetan in the lurch,
Too wurship wunce again in church,
And gave the Rector, plaged with gout,
Sum bottles too keep the eevil out;
Then, with a face-lift like the rich,
Yoo'd never think I'd been a witch;
Short-sieted peepel - on mie life!-
Mistake me for the verjer's wife.

[Spelling Reform, Anthology §6.10 p104 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1968 pp18,19 in the printed version]

10. Preface by Mario Pei, to the book by Abraham Tauber, Better English thru Simplified Spelling - a History of Spelling Reform, Philosophical Library, Fall, 1968

When I first came to America as a boy of seven, one of the very few good laughs I got out of my slightly unhappy situation as an immigrant schoolboy trying to learn the language of my adopted land was the way that language was handled in written form, and the antics both teachers and pupils had to go through to establish the necessary mental links between the spoken and the written thought-symbol.

I had already learned to read and write my native Italian. There the process is simple. You are taught the alphabet, then you are given sequences of spoken and written syllables: *a, e, i, o, u; ba, be, bi, bo, ba*; and so forth. True, there are a few confusing moments when you are taught to insert an *h* after *c, g* and *sc* if you want to represent a velar sound before front vowels, an *i* after the same consonant symbols if you want to represent a palatal sound before back vowels. Beyond that, your ear is a guide to your spelling; provided, that is, you are speaking standard Italian. If you are speaking a dialect, then the problem is one of learning what amounts to a different language from the one you speak at home. But even then, you emphatically do not "learn to spell." In fact, the word "spell" does not exist in the Italian vocabulary, which is a clue to the entire situation. At the most, you can say: "How do you write that word?"

Here in America, there are flash cards with written words that you were called upon to identify and pronounce, spoken words that you were asked to take down in correct spelling, spelling-bees in which whole rows of pupils went down as if mowed by machine-guns, wearisome lists of words whose spelling you had to memorize as part of your homework.

I quickly got to be the best speller in the class, by using the simple expedient of memorizing the written form of the word as it would be pronounced in Italian. There were some jaw-breaking combinations, like "catch" that had to be memorized as *katc*, and "enough" that came out as *eh-know-ugh*, but in the main the system worked, proving, presumably, the advantages of bilingualism.

The English spelling-pronunciation is one of the world's most awesome messes. No one can really estimate what it costs in the way of wasted school-time that could be more profitably used in mastering factual subjects instead of thousands upon thousands of arbitrary combinations that are inaccurate correlations between the spoken sounds and written words.

It is quite possible that the responsibility for this state of affairs rests with the spoken language or, better yet, with its speakers, who in past centuries distorted their originally clear vowels into a series of grunts, groans and wheezes, or, to be more charitable, into a host of bewildering diphthongs and bafflingly unclear glides. It is also possible that we are paying the penalty for rejecting the services of a language academy, that would proclaim one English variety to be the "standard" language and all variant forms to be "dialects," so that we would not have to stand for Appalachian mountaineer pronunciations being palmed off as official in supposedly serious works on phonetics and phonemics.

But all this is water over the dam. What has been done up to the present to remedy the situation? More important yet, what is being done, and what can be done?

This book gives us a history of the problem, and points out the attempted solutions, past and present. The author's sympathies evidently lie in the direction of some sort of reform. The spoken language is what it is, and little, if anything, can be done to change it, altho a good deal can and should be done in the way of teaching the speakers to speak it more clearly and intelligibly, and to avoid those dialectal and slang excesses which are deplored by even the most ardent advocates of the doctrine of usage.

The written language is something else again. There is not, to my knowledge, any spoken variety of English that runs much beyond 40 phonemes, all of which are represented by appropriate IPA symbols. To achieve phonetization of written English, we must first of all accept one spoken form (dialect, if you prefer) as the official standard, something which is going to be extremely difficult of achievement, English speakers being the sort of people they are. Next we have to apply to this spoken norm either the IPA symbols or their equivalents in terms of the standard alphabet (in the latter case, we may even have to use some digraphs). The resulting written form is going to look strange indeed to adult speakers raised in the current tradition, but it is going to work miracles for their descendents, in terms of quickly making them literate and keeping them that way, and in saving them untold time and labor which could be profitably expended on more factual fields of knowledge.

It is my personal feeling that anything short of complete phonetization is a mere waste of time. Of what avail to use a few simplified spellings like *nite* and *thru*, while leaving untouched all the real stumbling-blocks that are seldom mentioned (*proceed*, *precede* and *supersede*, *believe* and *receive*, *whether* and *weather* are only scattered samples)? To judge from the historical account presented in this book, there was as violent a storm of opposition over 40 words as there would be over the sort of radical reform I favor. But complete phonetization would have the merit of being 100% logical, integral, and scientifically based, so that it could be defended on proper grounds, instead of being apologetically offered to a skeptical and derisive audience. If carried through, it would leave no backlog, no residue of problems to be solved in the more or less distant future.

How and when this sort of solution (or, for that matter, the far less drastic and far less satisfactory partial solutions offered by others) will ever, if at all, come into being, I do not know. Languages in which drastic orthographic reforms have occurred are spoken by single countries, and these countries all seem to have been run by dictators at the time of reform. Languages spoken by two or more nations (like the Portuguese of Portugal and Brazil) not only barely skirt the problem of phonetization, but flounder about considerably by reason of lack of a unified directive. English is faced with two main divisions, British and American, plus a very large number of sub-dialects, and the countries that speak it are all, fortunately, democratically run. This definitely does not add up to the two main requirements for phonetizations, even of an incomplete variety: that one spoken dialect be selected and accepted as "standard"; and that to this dialect a symbol-for-sound system of writing be applied, with universal acceptance.

Pessimism, however, need not deter us from curiously examining the historical aspects of the problem and envisaging its possible solutions. And, that, after all, is all that this book attempts to enable us to do.

[Spelling Reform, Anthology §6.11 p105 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 p19 in the printed version]

11. Quo Vadis.

Dear Newell:

Kingsley Read

Accept my belated thanks for the Summer Number with the Reading University's Press handout as front page news. Nice of you. I'm happy to say the exhibition has been continued until October. Evidently with some interest. And here let me tell you that the *typography* of the Shaw Alphabet (in a setting of the Gettysburg Address) was the Reading University's interest. It excited their Typography Unit.

I have tried at least four times to suggest a program of action for your consideration. I have given it up - as too reasonable for an unreasoning world. You therefore have my sympathy.

Your own patience seems wearing thin. *Vide p. 11*, Ed. comment: "Apparently it is out of fashion to cut the Gordian Knot." And the apt (tho not universally true) space filler on p. 19: "Every creative act is a sudden cessation of stupidity." Good for you!

No doubt your readers and subscribers are about 98% teachers or educational authorities. They are steeped in tradition. They neither can nor really wish to do more than palliate bad spelling. They seem to want a minimum of "progress" and no full cure. I won't go so far as to say they would be out of work if spelling were automatic, variable from t.o. so long as it remained immediately intelligible to all English speakers, methodic enough to need no sustained teaching.

The truth is, few of your contributors have had the international correspondence to read and write phonemically that has come my way, serving to establish beyond possible doubt that we can communicate much more rapidly than we are accustomed to and with no chance of misunderstanding. Teachers are at bottom shaky believers in phonemic spelling. The will, the drive, is lacking for its success. Even i.t.a. (which is no cure) meets this disbelief or, worse, opposition by school staff. I have seen it and heard it volubly. *Faith is the prime essential.*

Meanwhile, there is from teachers and "researchers" (God save the Mark!) the sort of second- or third-hand repetition of difficulties, mostly obvious, which assume continuance of using 52 characters (smalls & CAPITALS) digraphically instead of 40 characters capable of true phonemic spelling. The assumption is the basis of one article after another, in one issue after another. And I beg you to consider your own SPB dedication - "to find the causes of difficulties in learning reading and spelling."

The one cause, and the one cure, is well established: Non-digraphic sound-spelling is the cure. Who doubts it?

No-one pretends that "sudden cessation of stupidity" is possible in spelling for public use. The breakdown will be gradual, and only less stupid. But it must *aim at* becoming mono-graphic, and not digraphic sound-spelling.

I have wondered whether the easiest and best first step is the elimination of the capital alphabet, using only a dotted 'name-sign (mr. 'newell 'w. 'tune) to distinguish proper names. The survival of capitals to begin sentences is no less ornamental than when they were fancy coloured letters in a manuscript. Capitals have no spelling function whatever.

When this is done, phonemic spelling can resort to a real and different sound value assigned to 17 or more former capitals. Men of belief in phonemic spelling can type, print, as well as write and read phonemically and intelligently. Practical spelling tests can be widespread, with consequent faith in results. You could print, first one page, later half of each issue, in such a 40-letter alphabet

so that readers could see how intelligible are spellings which do not agree with their own speech habits. Shakespeare, Bacon, Queen Elizabeth I and the Pilgrim Fathers only cared to be precisely understood. How a word was spelled was nothing to them. (This is not to recommend diverse spellings as a virtue in itself or even ultimately likely in the common words which are 90% of our writings).

Fortunately, a mixture of upper-with-lower-case lettering is so aesthetically abhorrent that a re-styling of the additional characters - or better still, of the whole alphabet to be simpler - would be demanded for any but experimental spelling. Then the aesthetics and economics of alphabet-making could be taken seriously.

This brings me back to your dedication to "*learning* reading and spelling" when 30 or 40 times as long is spent in *using* reading and spelling (writing). Like the teaching profession, your dedication thus barks up the wrong tree. Won't you consider rededication: "to spelling phonemically without digraphs"?

The most "closed mind" knows perfectly well what the radical cure is; the conveniently "open mind" dodges away from taking a stand or advising action.

Easy for me to talk. Nevertheless, think it over. I do appreciate your giving your readers an opportunity to air their pet peeves and to discuss the issues.

Most sincerely, *Kingsley Read*, Abbots Morton, Worcester, United Kingdom (Eng.)

My dear Kingsley:

Your thought-provoking letter deserves an equally thoughtful reply. While it is true the learner will be using for the rest of his life what should take only a short time to acquire if the learning is made easy, we must not forget about the adults who so arduously acquired a proficiency in reading our T.O. They would object strongly to being forced to go back to school to learn a new system (with many new letters) which would look like Greek to them. Therefore, nearness to T.O. is an important reason for advocating a digraphic system of simple spelling.

To establish a new Augmented Roman Alfabet, just look at all the obstacles that must be faced -- as shown by the *Folly of Alfabet Reform*, by Benedictus Arnold, 3rd. If you can answer all these objections satisfactorily, then I'll listen more carefully as to how you expect all our present adults to change so completely their long-established reading and writing habits. In Turkey, that was possible because of two important conditions: They had a dictator who railroaded the act thru the legislature, and the good argument presented against the old Arabic system, that because of its difficulty of learning, only 9% were literate. So the other 89% did not have to unlearn anything.

Conditions here are just the opposite. Adults, of whom there are about 97% literate, would not readily give up their facility in reading and writing to embrace (and spend considerable time learning and gaining facility in) a new alfabet -- which would help them very little.

To strive for such a goal is as insurmountable as establishing a colony on the moon -- and just about as likely of attainment. We must be practical and accept a digraphic system, like Wurd English, which, while not perfect, is a goal of possible attainment. A 42 or 43 character system could be used as the fonetic key in a new dictionary of simplified spelling. Its use in this manner could greatly familiarize our adults with a new mono-grafic alfabet, which perhaps might be used in general printing in some time in the future.

Our readers come from all walks of life. Some are only interested in minor improvements in learning to read -- some are alfabetees. We strive to give something to please all.

Cordially, *Newell*

[Spelling Reform, Anthology §6.12 pp105-108 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1975 pp14-16 in the printed version]

12. Which Way in Spelling Reform? **by Gertrude H. Hildreth, Ph.D.***

*Sea Cliff, N.Y.

The English spelling reform movement appears to be settling down to a choice between some form of augmented alphabet for school beginners, and a system of regularized spelling that requires no addition of new symbols to the standard 26. Both proposals need to be critically appraised before tentative dates are set for adoption of either scheme.

Initial or Transition Spelling Systems

Let's consider first: initial or transition systems to be phased out after a year or two in the primary grades. The obvious advantages of introducing beginners to literacy with a consistently spelled system having sufficient letters for approximate matching of one symbol to a sound have been demonstrated, but several limitations of the temporary or transition alphabets should be considered.

Preschool Experience with Standard ABC's and Printed Words

By the time the typical six-year-old enters the first year of compulsory education he has had considerable experience with print from playing with ABC blocks, toys, observing signs and labels, using ABC books, watching TV shows, play-copying of letters and words including his name. By school age about two-thirds of the 26 letters are recognized by typical beginners. In the meanwhile an augmented Roman alphabet has been no part of the child's culture. Now, upon entering a first grade class, where a beginner alphabet is taught as an introduction to reading and writing, the tots can make little use of their previous experience with print.

Shifting Over to Standard Print in the Primary Years

As a general principle, learning skills in any area involving a change-over in technique or system tends to be uneconomical of teaching time and learner effort. In the case of temporary training alphabets for learning to read and spell, the beginner must first shift from informal preschool impressions of language in print to the new scheme, then back again to standard print as he or she is acquainted with reading skills, usually during the second or third grade. Although children of normal learning capacity and language competency make the transition smoothly enough through the use of graded materials, the change involves establishing new perceptual habits at a critical stage in the learning process. The advantages of initial learning with simplified spelling are off-set by the complexities of the standard system, for example, inconsistencies in long vowel "i" spelling in *high, try, tie*. Slow learners and the language-limited are handicapped by ambiguous English spelling. Pupils who are scarcely ready for generalizing about word structure, for example, the past tense of *talk, walk*, and those who lack oral familiarity with the language of their books remain backward readers despite their initial experience with a simplified spelling system.

Tackling the Intermediate and Advanced Reading Vocabulary

Gains in reading speed and fluency above the primary level are dependent upon instant grasp of a substantial vocabulary met in sentence context, -- all the frequently used key words for sentence building, plus a wide array of nouns, adjectives, verb forms, and adverbs.

The vocabulary of print from the upper third grade upward consists of a myriad of words ranging from the simplest and most common to polysyllabic, infrequent items. Vocabulary difficulties arise from the difference in proportion between common and uncommon words, the inverse ratio between frequency of use and the number of words employed in printed context. For example, the universe of words such as *with, so, but, catch, does, take*, is infinitesimal in comparison with the number of infrequently used words such as *antimacassar, procrastination, chronological*.

Even when a youngster has caught on to the mechanics of the reading process and knows 2000 words at sight, he is still a long way from fluent silent reading with full comprehension because of "vocabulary load" in school books and juvenile literature. The primary vocabulary is only the tip of the iceberg. Watch out for the treacherous vocabulary of the intermediate years and on into high school.

A pupil who has reached fourth grade and beyond is expected to be able to help him/herself with new words, using a stock of the commonest letter sounds, frequently recurring syllables, knowledge of some prefixes and suffixes, to have instant recognition and discrimination of several thousand common sentence-building words at sight, and the ability to make inferences from context associations. But even the advanced student is handicapped at times in dealing with the rich vocabulary of the English language that is spelled ambiguously 50%, or more of the time.

It's true that any standard graded reader series for the primary years and even beyond meets the vocabulary problem by controlling the introduction of new words according to standard frequency counts, and repeating new words systematically throughout the text; but beyond the reader selections for each grade are subject texts for every subject area, each with its own specialized terms, plus all the good reading in a junior library collection and at home. *The American Heritage Word Frequency Book*, published in 1971, gives tabulation of all words in the most widely used school texts, Grades 3-9, a total of 86,741 different words.

Juvenile literature, despite some common sense control of vocabulary, contains an assortment of words not often heard or used by juveniles. For example, I found *invincible, campaign, circumstance, companion, laughter, yacht, prophesied, drudge, eloquence, appreciated*, in glancing at a few pages of a Newberry Prize winner. As for the range of words in general adult reading matter, you can test out the facts for yourself by making a random sampling of words from page to page in a comprehensive collegiate dictionary containing 150,000 entries.

A language with consistent spelling throughout the written vocabulary is a boon to the mature reader or writer, as anyone who has learned such a language is fully aware. What a tremendous advantage it would be for young people and adults as well, to have all the good books in English and favorite sections of the newspaper printed with a one symbol-one sound system.

Being able to pronounce a new word in print often recalls the meaning because of oral word associations already formed: *horizon, sympathetic, fragments*. The expert reader, child or adult, doesn't have to *pronounce through* every troublesome, unfamiliar word, but proceeds by the use of reduced or minimum cues: the fore-syllable, or initial letter combination may touch off the correct meaning in context. It's precisely with partial perception that a consistent spelling would be a boon to the older reader-in-a-hurry confronted with an unfamiliar word.

Ambiguous spelling causes confusion and slows down intake for the reader of only modest achievement, the semi-literate person who never completed school but gained the rudiments of literacy up to fourth grade level, as well as foreign-speaking adults eager to become literate in the

new tongue. All of these people will have a struggle pronouncing tangled words in print they seldom hear spoken or used in conversation.

The efficiency of regularized English spelling systems taught in the primary years, then discarded for standard print in reading and writing cannot be fully evaluated without comparing the achievement of adolescents and adults who were taught a change-over beginner alphabet and those who were not.

How About Learning to Spell?

Now we come to the spelling bugbear that plagues most literate English-speaking people throughout a lifetime of writing. Correct spelling is desirable because it eases the reading of written material, not because schools put a premium on correct spelling as the sign of an educated person or for supposed value in training habits of neatness and precision.

The question to be considered is the possible effects of a transition alphabet on lifelong spelling habits. Uncertainty over the spelling of English words, especially numerous tricky "demons," will continue to plague most persons, whether or not they were initially exposed to a phonetic alphabet in learning to read and spell.

The vocabulary used in writing expands rapidly during the school years, especially from the fourth grade onward, in keeping with growth in oral language usage. In a word count based on the expressive writing of elementary school children, Dr. Henry D. Rinsland reported a total of 25,632 words used at least once through the eighth grade, and nearly 15,000 words used at least three times. (*A Basic Vocabulary of Elementary School Children*, Macmillan, 1945). No doubt the inclusion of high school writing would have added another 4,000 words. Of all these words, scarcely 50% are consistently spelled in terms of sound-symbol matching, and quite a few are known as "spelling demons."

Spelling ability is different from the word recognition process in reading because it requires *recall* from memory of the letter series to be recorded, whereas reading depends upon *recognition* of words by wholes or parts in context. In spelling the writer creates the sentences as he writes. Since there is insufficient time in the school program to drill on all the words children need for writing, selected word lists are taught, (not over 4,000 through the eighth grade) in addition to word study, word structure, and a few spelling rules. Three to 400 words is about the limit for spelling lessons through the primary grades.

A persistent question about i.t.a. experiments here and abroad is how well i.t.a.-taught children can spell words in standard T.O. form after the transition. Research studies on the question have been summarized by Dr. Betty Allen Iles in the *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, Winter, 1974.

Most studies have concentrated on children in Grades One and Two immediately after the change-over. There is no convincing evidence that i.t.a.-trained children in the intermediate grades and beyond spell T.O. words better than other pupils in written expression. As for the period immediately following the transition stage, some studies show that i.t.a. children are significantly ahead of matched T.O. groups by a few words, other studies report no differences, and in some cases the significance of differences is not reported.

The tests used in virtually all studies consist of brief word lists ranging in grade level from first to eighth grade, requiring in some cases nothing more than recognition of correct words in a multiple choice test. The information needed for a valid appraisal is how well children can spell when they

write.

How can the fact that i.t.a. children in some classes spell T.O. words better than those in regular T.O. classes be explained? The answer may lie in two uncontrolled variables: methods of instruction, and a common T.O. environment for all the children. In experimental i.t.a. classes the children have been introduced to written expression right along with reading from the beginning. Learning to write is easy for beginners with the simpler i.t.a. code; in fact, some children may have learned to write as many as 200 words correctly by the time they transfer to T.O. By contrast, in typical T.O. classes, little is done with spelling before Grade Two in order to concentrate on reading; then when spelling study begins it consists of word drills in graded spelling books.

i.t.a. children who have writing activities from the outset in Grade One have gained confidence in their ability to write needed words independently, whereas T.O. pupils confined to spelling drills the second year are fearful of penalties for making mistakes.

Throughout all the research on spelling, no one so far as I know has mentioned the possibility that i.t.a. pupils may be assimilating T.O. spelling right along through their interest in outside print. Outside of reading and language lessons, the children are continually in a T.O. environment, associating with persons who do not know or use the i.t.a. code. Does T.O. spelling begin in some cases before the reading change-over? If so, that fact goes unmentioned.

Most of the i.t.a. studies have involved average or above average learners. There are few reports of outcomes with slow learners, language limited children, or older semi-literates with limited schooling. [\[1\]](#)

To sum up, there is no conclusive evidence that early experience with the i.t.a. code itself advances *spelling* skills at the change-over point or beyond in the great sea of English words.

One more observation: how unfortunate it is that children who have been introduced to i.t.a. cannot continue with it throughout a life-time. Schools in countries with more rational spelling than English don't have a subject called spelling with graded spelling books and workbooks, or champion "spell-down" contests.

Regularized Spelling Systems with No New Symbols

Many proposals have been made for regularizing English spelling using the standard 26 letter Roman alphabet without added letters or diacritic marks. World English Spelling (WES) is such a system offering one spelling for each English sound, one pronunciation for each spelling, and having 100% compatibility with the standard Roman alphabet. Augmentation of symbols for the vowel and consonant sounds is achieved solely through using two-letter combinations (digraphs) for sounds not represented by a single letter. Terminal "e" as a long vowel marker disappears; instead, the letter "e" following a vowel letter gives it the long sound with the "e" remaining silent. The letter "k" is used for the hard sound of c, and "s" always represents the soft sound, as in *cent*.

Unnecessary double letters are omitted, as in *shall* or *dress*. A four or five letter word in standard English consistently spelled with WES still has the same number of letters. By actual count, the first two lines of *linkon'z getizberg adres* comes to 93 letters in standard spelling, 89 in WES.

The adoption of WES would not only save pupils from having to learn 14 to 18 new letters to augment the 26 letter alphabet, but would save our present typewriters and printing type fonts from

extinction. WES has been recommended for preliminary training in reading and writing the English language as well as for lifetime use, but as a transition alphabet it has many of the shortcomings of any temporary alphabet.

World English Spelling looks plausible enough as a replacement for inconsistent standard English, but let's examine it more closely to see whether the saving in new letter forms and salvaging old typewriters is worth the price. The curse of standard English orthography is multiple spellings for a sound, especially the long vowels; and varied sounds for individual letters, for example, *a, f, e, g*. WES departs from the ideal of one-symbol one-sound matching, advocated by G. B. Shaw and other spelling and alphabet reformers. WES employs 22 digraphs and two 3-letter combinations, three of them new to English, representing individual sounds in words. Although these letter combinations are used regularly for the most part, unlike the hodgepodge of standard English orthography, they pose learning problems for young children because each letter of a combination also serves for other sounds throughout the vocabulary. Identifying pronunciation cues in printed words requires swift and accurate perception of boundaries of the phonemes. The problem of phoneme and syllable boundaries still exists in WES though to a lesser degree than in standard print. A persistent problem for beginners in word attack is recognizing these boundaries of phonemes and syllables, since all words have equally spaced letters, and letter combinations that compose sounds are not yet familiar to the learner. Young learners have a penchant for naming the separate letters of words and picking out letter combinations they recognize as small words, e.g. "father" as f-a-t-h-e-r, or *fat, at, the, her*, instead of scanning the words from left to right by sounds.

To meet the problem of words with letters occurring together that do not form a WES digraph, e.g. *sh* in *dishonor* or *ng* in *engage*, WES inserts a period between the two letters to indicate that the letters (and their sounds) are separate: *dis.honor, en.gage*. Although such words are relatively infrequent, the reader must be on the lookout for these minute signs and remember to insert the needed dots in writing or typing.

Which Way in Spelling Reform

Which alternative is most promising in the long run? -- a consistent beginner learning system for reading and writing English in standard form, a new system of regularized spelling using our 26-letter alphabet without the addition of new letter forms, or a new system for permanent adoption with sufficient augmentation of the Roman letters to achieve highly consistent matching of sounds and letters with one symbol to a given sound? In the latter case, there would be no double or treble letter combinations representing a sound, with a saving of printing and writing space estimated at one-fourth to one-fifth of standard English print. Still another possibility is an entirely new graphic alphabet for recording the English language comparable to the system of strokes and dashes originally devised for German, known as *Sprechspur*. Or the Shaw contest alphabet which is a compromise between a short-hand and a simplistic type style.

In making a decision, the welfare of future generations of readers and writers is the main consideration, not the convenience of today's literates who would be enabled to finish out their careers with standard English print. Is half a loaf better than none? Not in this case involving world-wide reform for years to come.

[1] Ed. Note: See Pitman & St. John, *Alphabets & Reading*, pp. 142, 192, 228-34.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §6.13 p108 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1971 p17 in the printed version]

13. Introspection or Retrospection, by Newell W. Tune

It is high time that each alfabeteer (spelling reformer to the uninitiated) indulge in introspection with honest thought and self-examination to see if his true purpose in designing a system of spelling reform was due to:

1. An altruistic desire to help future generations of children to learn how to read in an easier, quicker, better way, or
2. A selfish desire to acquire fame as the inventor, designer, or promulgator of the world's best-most nearly perfect system of spelling reform.

If he decides it is the former, he should now concentrate on the more difficult job of trying to find out how a new system of simplified spelling can be brought into use. How was it done in foreign countries which have modified their spelling? What is necessary to convince those in power of the need for, benefits of, and means of utilizing a better system of orthography? How must such a new system be put into use and what part of the government must start the ball arolling? Can it be done without being forced on us by the government? What private organizations have the respect, ability, and desire to accomplish this much needed reform?

Each of us will have different ideas on this question, but many paths are a better way to seeking our goal than reliance on only one or two.

If he is only interested in the second, he will refuse to accept advice on how to improve his brainchild (to the mother duck, her duckling is not ugly, but just perfect), nor accept any other solution to the academic problem of simplifying our spelling to be made by some official commission on spelling, but go merrily on his way tooting his own horn and not cooperating with others in the furtherance of a common goal (his is different) with the result that the goal will never be achieved and the movement for reform will not advance to its hoped for happy eventuality.

In union there is strength - divided we - must fail. Quo vadis?

Join the Simpler Spelling Association, Lake Placid Club, N.Y.,
or the Simplified Spelling Society, Broadstairs, Kent, England.
Here you will find dedicated men.