

Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

§7. Ways of implementing Spelling Reform

Since it is equally as important to find out how simplified spelling may or should be put into use, this section is devoted to such planning.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.1 pp109-111 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1980 pp10-12 in the printed version]

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

1. How to Implement Spelling Reform, by Valerie Yule

Spelling reformers must consider the needs, attitudes, and abilities of the people who are to use reformed spelling. A theoretically perfect phonemic spelling might prove impractical for general and technological use even if public resistance to its introduction were overcome.

This paper looks at aspects of 'the psychology of spelling' - practical criteria to consider in designing a more efficient orthography and planning its introduction, with techniques of consumer education and marketing.

Most of the ideas in this paper are not my own - they have come from many colleagues in spelling reform - Kingsley Read, William Reed, Sir James Pitman, Axel Wijk, Newell Tune, Helen Bisgard, Arnold Rupert, Reg. Deans, Vic Paulsen, Harry Lindgren - and none of them may agree with all of it. It also brings in concepts from my own discipline of psychology and its concern for human communication.

The time for spelling reform is now riper than it has been for hundreds of years. The old snob arguments are ridiculed and empty, while the mass illiteracy problem is increasingly serious. The audiovisual media which threaten to supplant print have their own advantages but cannot supply the dimension that reading and writing contribute to civilisation. The sacred cow of English spelling stands wobbling while all around the rest of the world is changing dramatically, faster and faster, and nowhere faster than in the field of communications. How can the drive for change, efficiency, economy, and logic be directed to spelling - this vital tool, - or idol?

How can the remaining impediments to spelling reform be tackled? The old arguments keep reappearing despite their continuing refutation, and reappear dressed in new words too, so that it would be worth while to devise one-page sheets that could be patiently, silently, handed out

whenever someone glibly recites "Homophones!" or "Etymology" or "Dialects" or "Our English Heritage!" or "the beauty of funny spelling!" or "Chomsky!" or "Multi-Systematic Information Processing!" or "Finance!" or "Impossible!"

The basic argument behind these excuses is the vested interests against change of those who have learnt present spelling and imagine anything new would be just as tortuous as their original learning experiences. As people become less cultured, they either hang on to English spelling as the empty shell of their culture, or 'couldn't care less' for either maintenance or improvement of spelling. Yet the varying motives that impede reform could also in varying degrees be turned to its support, and the insights and techniques even if not the money, of commercial marketing can be directed towards the changing public's attitudes.

Public rejection of spelling reform has been helped by the public image for which spelling reformers have been responsible - a multitude of schemes which almost completely change the appearance of 'the word as we know it,' some seeming almost perverse in their determination to use the familiar in contrary ways. The immediate 'Ugh!' reaction prevents any further enquiry or attention. While the neat new script of i.t.a. probably attracted as well as repelled support, its special type has prevented i.t.a. spelling from percolating into the word beyond school.

Spelling reform can only be achieved by looking at what is practicable, not at dogmatic idealism about what would be perfect; arguments must deal in evidence rather than in opinion. Public participation is crucial for reform - unless we become so generally illiterate that literacy has to be brought in again like a new thing in the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire, or we are so socially disrupted that a dictatorship takes over, or big business discovers a spelling technology for its machines that will save millions. The latter is quite possible, in which case a sweeping change in the whole orthography could occur irrespective of human needs. Certainly no change in the alphabet itself has a chance unless it meets the needs of international electronic technology, and all spelling reformers interested in this area should develop communications expertise and the right contacts.

The need for facts and evidence

I think Harry Lindgren is right in saying, "Let's get on with Spelling Reform 1, short e spelt e as in *bet*, and not get bogged down with excuses for research." But while we are getting on with it, concurrently we should be finding out facts and promoting experiments to ensure that the next steps are not based on armchair philosophising so that time is wasted on doctrinaire argument or in finding out too late that what is ideal in theory is bugged in practice.

It has been assumed that an essential criterion for English spelling reform is accurate sound-symbol correspondence. Experiments in initial teaching media prove that this makes English easier to learn to read and to write. But what makes one system any better than another system? You can invent yourself in an afternoon a script that would be easier to learn to read and write than present spelling, e.g., Tolkien's Middle Earth script, which teenagers pick up quickly for their private communication. But what is a basis for comparison?

We need to find the reformed spelling that is the 'best fit' for a number of possibly competing requirements. We need re-analysis of the vast volumes on spelling research which have mostly focused on the problems of 'bad spellers' rather than the problems of 'bad spelling.' We should devise and publicise a list of 'research on spelling that needs to be done' not only in laboratories but in schools and the market-place, by teachers and the general public as well as by linguists, psychologists and educators. Every dogmatic statement by every expert needs to be tested, not quoted. To make English spelling an effective tool for human beings to use, we need to collate the evidence on the essential requirements for the following:

1. Easily mastered by the present literate population, and presented so well that they quickly discover how easy and beneficial it is. Without this, nothing can happen. This includes immediate 'face validity' and comprehension, rapid development of superior reading fluency, and easy stages to learn to write if necessary.
2. Easy to learn to read and write (not identical demands) by learners who are bright, dull, handicapped, adult failures, second language learners (agen, not identical demands).
3. Useful for modern technology - for machines, their human operators and human users, easy, efficient and economical for machine-processing, typing, and handwriting.
4. Easy and cheap to get started, "saving millions and costing next to nothing," and demonstrably saving millions.
5. For the present at least, resembling present spelling as sufficiently closely, to keep books currently in print accessible as Medieval English in the future, with its greater changes.
6. A composite standard English spelling that crosses dialects, and enables children and foreigners to pronounce the new vocabulary learnt thru reading. Action research can teach and can change attitudes and provide feedback for further change, in the very process of testing and experimentation on how and what changes can be made.

Psychological research on human abilities may prove more relevant than linguistic research. The human capacity to switch set is a crucial area to resolve arguments about spelling transition - whether co-existing alternatives would confuse, about homographs in context, and dialectal variations in vowel representation, and the possibility of 'bi-literate' books in learning, and spelling conventions that can represent a common 'speech' across wide dialectal variations. We already know how we adapt without conscious effort to reading regardless of typeface, handwriting or letter-case, and how practised spelling reformers can switch from their own to conventional spelling, reading both with equal ease, and how children and adults can switch the languages they speak according to the situation.

We need to be well-informed on the 'natural trends' of spelling today, as shown in common spelling mistakes, experiments in free choice of spelling, and commercial and technological trends. Can this 'organic' change be accelerated constructively? (See Appendix I for some of the questions that require answers from practically-oriented research.)

I would like to see the proposals of spelling reformers set out in a standard form for easier comparability and investigation (See the previous paper, SPB Fall 1980 p.8).

Some ideas that have been popular with individual reformers may fail on the practicability account, however ingenious. It would be better to develop 'better' new letters than to divert existing letters to other strange purposes, which would make it fiendishly impossible even for scholars to read old books. Schemes start off handicapped if they require new keyboards or complicate writing and typing, and diacritics, etc. need research about what happens to visual scanning fluency.

Experience shows that you cannot assume that a thoroly reformed system adopted in schools will spread to the community around them as the children grow up. The children have to adapt to the world of print around them, not vice versa.

Stages in spelling reform

We are left with the example of other countries that have successfully reformed their spelling in stages. In the previous paper I describe the stages of a possible scheme and how it could operate from two directions - learning with a basically phonemic initial learning spelling in schools, and a first stage of reform that could be begun by anyone, everyone, anywhere at any time, consistently or more likely, inconsistently, causing no more disruption to the appearance of print than the usual misprints in your favorite daily newspaper. I have taken Harry Lindgren's SR-1 as the starting point: spell short e with *æ* as in *bet* - because it is a reform that has already made a start, it operates as a logical principle, not a slippery list; it acclimatizes the public gently to the idea of change as a good thing and how easily it could operate, and it is likely to be a part of almost any eventual full reform. Even if it were not, switching the single spelling e would be easier with the cleaning up of the present tangle of *ai, ea, ei, ie, oe, e, ay*, and *eu, ue*.

My own hypothesis is that it is likely that learners will prove to have different needs than fluent users, as occurs in all fields of skill, from flying and motor-racing to sewing, and Learner Spelling will need to include steps that can be omitted and elided for greater fluency in skilled reading and writing.

Stages of spelling reform (e.g., the 4 stages I suggest) will inevitably be adopted unevenly thru the community, as even the government-sponsored switch to metrication has to percolate, with some areas changing faster than others and the few intransigents who will never take to it. For every group there are different incentives for change as well as resistance, and this is the encouraging thing to guide present action in attitude-changing and starting actual change. These stages could be:

1. Good for you if you can get the support of politicians, big business, millionaires, publishers and public figures who can promote Stage 1 as house-rules on a large scale, and promote research and initial learning media.
2. Educators who do not actually teach children (or are such superb teachers it doesn't matter what they teach) are often vested interests against change, just as the horse trade opposed motorcars. Teachers who are nearer the nits and grits, faced with educationally disadvantaged children or even their own spelling or teaching problems, commonly sigh for rescue in a hopeless sort of way. If they could be shown how to teach the underlying structure of English, so that they and the children could distinguish it from the dead wood and brambles, both teachers and children will become aware of how easy spelling reform could be, and *how spelling* could be changed. (Most adults today have had present spelling conditioned into them, without understanding it, and have an unspoken fear, "Don't touch it, it might explode.") There would be the spin-off and incentive too, that children would be more confident in successful criticising of conventional spelling. "That word is sensible, that word is silly, but I'm not silly," is far better than so many children's present hopelessness, "I can't understand it, so I must be silly."

3. Marketing spelling reform to the public

On initial presentation of an innovation, habit strength operates against it, but the more people are able to actually try it out, i.e., act positively, the more chance that negative habit strength is reduced and alien feelings change to personal identification, particularly if a band-wagon effect can develop.

Other aims of marketing are to strengthen the mental reach and change the set idea that there is only one proper way to spell, while the freedom of choice prevents the trigger-reaction to any schemes with 'compulsion' whatever the public good may be. Public and expert contribution of ideas could be valuable when spelling reform is a fashionable subject for public discussion, play and even private experiment, instead of a sacred cow, paper tiger or tabu too horrible to touch.

'Bugs' in proposals can be weeded out. 'Democratic' spelling reform could become a painless fait accompli, that could be tidied up and ratified on an official basis or an improved system then introduced to a now more open-minded public.

Some marketing proposals

a. Promote *books* for libraries, e.g., Godfrey Dewey, Pitman & St. John, Harry Lindgren. Light-hearted books of 'Spelling Games' and Penguin-type books for the general on the Psychology of Spelling, and Spelling and Society, are also desirable. A set of one-page Answers to Everything. A set of research topics for investigation, for tertiary institutions and students seeking useful topics.

b. *Articles* across as wide a spectrum of the media as possible, inviting public participation and comment-stimulating, amusing and informative, e.g.:

"Permissive spelling, how far would you go?"

"Your child and That Spelling"

"Your spellingscope".

"Shocking or Fascinating? Try your hand at spelling reform."

"Britain's Industrial Fossil." "Do you remember . . . ? Readers recall spelling incidents in their childhood.

"How YOU can help in bringing about spelling reform."

c. *TV documentary on Spelling*. Includes colorful history, scenes of past and present teaching, audience participation in demonstration of some of the astonishing facts about how we read and spell, a procession of current reading-teaching equipment, interviews with boffins, children, social workers, remedial readers, adult illiterates, delinquents, in flash-scenes from all over the country.

d. *Panel games* for radio and TV. A weekly five minutes on radio could also *follow the progress* of children and foreners learning to read conventional spelling and a consistent spelling.

e. *Radio playlets*, comic and satirical, in which one character speaks exactly what he reads, e.g., "Onky upon a timmy," "The miggrant whoe spelt likky an angle," "The miggrant's traggedye,"

f. *Word games* and other party games, including ways to use spelling reform in games already on the market, e.g., Scrabl; A book of Party and Family Games.

g. *Pop lyrics* for pop groups, e.g., "Break the Spell," "As difficult as ABC," "Reading turns you on." Comic verses, e.g., "I get my kicks when I try to spell."

h. *Cartoons and catchy cards* for sale.

i. *Materials, gifts, gajets and gimiks* for Christmas, birthdays and Spelling Day. An angle for "the person who has everything." New items appear to keep up interest. Souvenirs of Spelling Reform. A Spelender Calender. Magic Spell wrapping paper, Weirdo writing kits, T-shirts, badges, stickers, spelling kits, the conservation and energy-saving angle, contributions to Small Planet and Responsible Living groups. A mascot doll, a logo for spelling reform with a catchy title, how-to-do-it pocket cards, posters and friezes, desk-stuff.

j. *Stamps and stickers* for correspondence, letterheds, envelopes, etc.

k. Try to get *bi-literate reading books* on trial, and 'spelling cribs' for learners' reading books. Trial runs of modified spelling for social services information, regulations, parent education, etc. for semi-literate groups.

l. *Support by word and action* every sign you see of improved spelling, e.g., SR-1 in journals, more sensible spelling in ads, trademarks, work-manuals, etc. Whatever your profession, encourage your trade journal and local media to try SR-1 (with or without publicity, to see if anyone notices/objects). Write letters to newspapers. Be a lobbyist. Encourage organizations working for related issues, e.g., Better English, International Communication, etc. to make their English and communication better still. Bring spelling and spelling reform as a live issue into professional journals and conferences. Keep a supply of relevant literature yourself so you are 'always prepared,' with a handy publicity package and background facts. Keep your eyes open, in personal observation and personal experiments, and contribute your own findings to your spelling reform group records.

m. Obtain *sponsorship* for whatever you can.

n. *Spelling Day*, September 30. The idea of Australian Dr. Doug. Everingham, M.H.R., former Labor Government Minister for Health (sic) was for SR-1 Day, so that every year there can be another wave of publicity and promotion, with the ideas already suggested. Press releases can be sent out and notices put up on the lines of "Appendix 2."

(The ideas in this paper follow from previous articles in *Spelling Progress Bulletin*:
"Some causes of illiteracy and recommendations for action," v. xv, n. 4, 3-10, 1975.
"Spelling reform: arguments pro and con," v. xvi, n. 1, 11- 20, 1976.
"Let us be practical about spelling reform," v. xix, n. 1, 7-9, 1979.

The third article contains some further essential detail not included here.)

Appendix 3: *Some recommendations for research*

So many researchers take trivial topics that at least we could publicise needed ones - experiments, surveys, questionnaires, observational analyses, for every relevant discipline in universities, teachers' colleges, etc. Background courses on orthographies at secondary level can enlighten Anglo-Saxons on what the rest of the world can do, and how it is done. Surveys can put ideas into the heads of participants, and make them think, if they did not before. (One such questionnaire by Barrie Smith appears in *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, v. xvi, n. 1, 19, 1976.)

The field is not just for linguists and reading academics, but requires working with communications engineers, teachers, publishers, psychologists, media boffins, learners, foreners.

What actual value in *using* spelling are semantic, morphemic, syntactic, lexical, etc. factors, above and beyond phonemic correspondences? Should English spelling be reformed to make at least consistent the benefits that linguistic supporters claim are reasons to maintain it as it is?

How many of the complex factors in 'the reading process' would be superfluous in a reliable, predictable spelling system? Are these factors those which most handicap poor learners at present? Are we handicapping the already handicapped for the sake of the verbally proficient who need additional help least?

How efficient a spelling would the trends of 'natural spelling change' develop anyway if custom slackened so that dictionaries caught up with current practices? Are people just a bit mystical about 'organic language change' when they call upon 'instinctive forces' rather than rational endeavour?

(And see the complementary paper preceding this which puts forward specific details which require more objective evaluation than personal judgements, e.g., re: accuracy of phonemic representation, usefulness of phonics in conventional spelling, the value of economy of space, etc.)

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.2 pp112,113 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1975 pp15,16 in the printed version]

2. How to Pass a Bill (thru the Legislature), by John Ligtenberg*

* General Counsel, American Federation of Teachers.

Reprinted from *The American Teacher*, Feb. 1955, pp 9-10,20.

Essential Procedures for Successful Education Legislation

The most important law making body in the daily lives of the people is the state legislature. Because it deals with private and local affairs and the intimate details of family, social and business life, the state legislature is far more important to most of us than the national Congress.

For anyone interested in legislative work in the field of education and teacher's welfare, nothing is more important than to know how such a legislature operates. The legislature must be understood as a social institution that acts not only within a frame of constitutions, statutes and rules, but also according to many unwritten customs and practices. It is influenced in a direct and immediate sense by the many organized and unorganized community groups within the state, the political climate of the community, and the party system itself.

The procedures in each state vary in accordance with local customs, laws and constitutions. In their broad outline they operate in much the same way but the details vary greatly. It is often an understanding of the details that makes the difference between successful operation of a legislative program and failure.

A knowledge of the state constitution, the statutes adopted by the legislature to guide the process of making laws, and the rules adopted by each house of the legislature for the conduct of its affairs should be understood by the legislative representative of the teachers organization.

In practical effect it is even more necessary to understand the various party and intra-party alignments. The pressure groups that operate in the lobbies and corridors, the committee chairman and other officers of the legislature all play a vital part.

Support Necessary

No bill should ever be submitted to the legislature *unless some support is first obtained for it*. This support may be of several different kinds. In the case of legislation desired by a teachers' union, it may be necessary to decide whether other teachers' organizations would favor it. If so, it may be a question whether their support should be sought beforehand or whether they should be left alone to determine their attitude at a later date.

In most such instances the support of the labor organizations affiliated with the teachers' union should also be secured. If there are other groups in the community whose attitude toward the teaching force and the issues involved in the proposed legislation is favorable, their support should be sought also. That usually means that both branches of organized labor can be counted upon. Other groups such as P.T.A., women's clubs, civic organizations in general, taxpayer's organizations and chambers of commerce may have a common interest, or they may be opposed.

An example may be helpful:

A number of years ago a board of education in a large city felt that the state aid it was receiving was inadequate. Under its leadership a civic advisory committee was formed. To this committee were invited representatives of the A. F. of L., the C.I.O., all of the teacher's organizations in the school system, P.T.A., women's clubs, League of Women Voters, Association of Commerce, manufacturers association and others. By this means a meeting of the minds of a full cross section of the professional, business and educational life of the community was achieved. We need hardly add that a large measure of success was gained in the face of a state administration reluctant to increase taxes for educational purposes.

Support on such a broad scale can hardly ever be hoped for, but it is advisable to work on as broad a scale as possible.

Drafting the Bill:

The bill embodying the proposed measure should be drawn and studied by an attorney for the union who has an understanding of the processes of legislation. It should be considered very carefully to meet possible objections from whatever source and to see that it does not contain language which could backfire.

This means that the bill must be considered in the framework of existing legislation. Possible constitutional objections must be overcome or avoided. If the proposed bill conflicts with existing legislation, such conflicts must be removed or the bill so drawn as to repeal or amend the conflicting provisions.

It is necessary to consider against this background whether the bill will accomplish the purpose intended. The law books are full of decisions by reviewing courts holding that acts of the legislature did not mean what its sponsors thought it did, or holding them unconstitutional for any of a variety of reasons. Often these objections could have been met in advance if the law-writer had been knowledgeable of existing conditions.

When the bill is in satisfactory shape it must be placed in the form required by that particular legislature, with proper headings and introductions. It is very important that the title conform to local requirements. Many times laws have been held unconstitutional simply because the title was defective.

Importance of Sponsors:

Since no bill can actually be introduced in the legislature by anyone except a member of that body, it is necessary to secure the support of at least one member of the legislature before it is filed. In selecting a sponsoring member of the legislature, it is usually highly desirable to obtain the support of one belonging to the dominant party.

Sometimes it is desirable that a bill be introduced by more than one member and not infrequently there are a large number of sponsors from both of the major parties. These members are then known as the sponsors of the bill. This is done in various ways but usually by having the legislator endorse his name on the bill. It is then introduced in the legislature by one of the sponsors. Not infrequently it is desirable to have identical bills introduced in both houses.

From this point on the precise details of how a bill is handled will vary widely from one state to another. It is possible, however, to discuss the process in broad out-lines with the understanding always that there is no substitute for local knowledge.

After Introduction:

When a bill has been introduced, it is usually read by title only, given a number and ordered printed. It also is usually referred to a committee at this stage. A bill of great importance may sometimes be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Committee Hearings:

At this point the committee plays a most important part in its future progress. One or more committee hearings will be held. The sponsoring legislator will usually acquaint the committee with its merits.

Other legislators may express their views and the persons interested in the bill and representatives of organizations may be heard. Usually those who wish to appear ask the chairman for that privilege. Citizens may also speak to committee members and members of the legislature in person or by mail, giving their opinions and urging support.

This is the point where the active support of the bill by the supporters you have marshalled becomes extremely important. Representatives of the various groups will appear before the committee and give reasons for wishing to have the bill enacted. Individual members of the committee may be contacted and the matter discussed with them.

Any amendments to the bill may also be considered and acted upon. The committee will then report the bill to the house. Usually the report will take one of the following forms:

- 1) *That the bill pass;*
- 2) *That the bill do not pass;*
- 3) *That the bill pass as amended,*
- 4) *That the committee may prepare and offer a substitute bill;*
- 5) *No recommendation.*

It is important that persons interested keep contact with committee chairmen or members to see that the bill is considered by the committee as early in the session as possible so as to get it back on the legislative calendar.

The bill then goes back to the particular house of the legislature in which it is filed. Usually when it is reported out of the committee it will go to the house for second and third readings and passage. This may vary from state to state.

Procedures on the Floor:

Usually the first reading is a routine matter when the bill is read by title only. On second reading the various amendments proposed by the committee are considered as well as any amendments offered from the floor. These are accepted or rejected by a majority of a quorum. A bill may be killed at this stage in various ways, often by a motion to amend the bill by striking out the enacting clause.

If the bill survives, it is again printed with all amendments and advanced to the third reading.

Usually the third reading is the final reading and adoption or defeat is by a majority vote on roll call.

After a bill has successfully passed one house of the legislature, it goes to the other house and is there processed in much the same way. If the second house passes the bill with amendments it will go back to the house of its origin for concurrence. If there are serious differences, a committee may be appointed from each house to confer on the bill in the hope of reaching an agreement. A bill must pass both houses in exactly the same form in order to become law.

Readers who are unfamiliar with the process of legislation may exclaim at this point that the legislators really seem to have very little to do with it; that the lobbyists and pressure groups carry the ball for the bill. However, when we consider the broad aspects of the right of petition guaranteed by the constitution, we see that these groups are merely exercising that right. In the last analysis the legislators exercise their own judgement but in most instances they act only when they find that a large body of people favor action.

Action by the Governor:

The bill must then be sent to the governor of the state who may sign it, allow it to become law without his signature, or veto it. Usually if the veto is received before the adjournment of the legislature, the legislature has an opportunity to override the veto.

This points up the fact that it is frequently advisable to have contact with the governor of the state to secure his support of the bill. If the matter is of great importance, it may be advisable to secure his support in advance. In any event, it is wise to let him know of your interest in the legislation and your desire that it be approved.

It will be observed that the right of petition is exercised right up to the final stage, and that the problems of the supporters of the legislation are never ended until the bill has passed the executive hurdle. Even there the process does not end, for executive action may be necessary to put its provisions into effect. In other cases, vigilance may be necessary to see that the administrative officers charged with enforcement do their duty. That may finally bring you around to the judicial department where court action is instituted to enforce the provisions of the law or to secure a constructive determination of its provisions.

Experienced Leadership Necessary:

In this particular field there is no substitute for experience. The teachers' union in every state ought to have at least one person whose continuing duty it is to represent the interests of the group in legislation. Such person cannot become an expert in one term. If he shows promise he should be kept on the job.

Eventually he will come to understand his duties thoroughly and the legislators will come to know him and to respect his judgment. In that process they will also come to understand and sympathize with the objectives of those he represents.

Editors' note: While this article was intended for securing legislation at the state level, it is equally valid for most of its provisions at the national level.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.3 p113 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin October 1962 p9 in the printed version]

3. How to Utilize a Reformed Spelling by Robert West.

The University of Wisconsin
Department of Speech
Madison, Wisc.

Pfc. William Russell,
Lawson Hospital,
Atlanta, Georgia.
Jan. 2, 1946

Dear Mr. Russell:

Thanks for showing me your manuscript. I have never known a time when so many people were working on the idea of spelling reform; and the interesting thing is that more of the reformers are very intelligent in their suggestions. We do not lack for schemes for reforming our spelling. What we lack is a scheme for *selling* one of them, and only one (it does not make much difference which one), to the public. Its the old, old story about putting salt on the bird's tail. First you have to catch the bird.

I think you should work on the departments and bureaus of public instruction of the U.S.A., and of the several states. Sell them on a *method of changing our spelling*, not on a specific system of spelling. After the method has sold, then the specific changes can be decided easily.

If you propose a good, definite plan for bringing about the reform, I shall be glad to endorse it.

Sincerely yours,

Robert West, Speech Pathology,

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.4 pp114 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1972 pp1,13 in the printed version]

4. A Bill to establish a National Spelling Commission

The Hon. Harlan Hagen, Member of Congress from Tulare, Calif. introduced Bill HR 2165 in Congress in 1960 at the request of Homer W. Wood, Editor of the Porterville, Calif. Evening Recorder. It was referred to the sub-Committee on Education, but no action was taken.

An Appeal

to all concerned parents, teachers and others who are disappointed in trying to teach effectively in our unreliable spelling. Please ask your congressman or representative in Parliament to introduce the following Bill to start the ball rolling for a simplification of English spelling:

A BILL

To establish a National Spelling Commission to reform the spelling of English words, to publish the United States Official Dictionary, and for other related purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

CREATION OF THE NATIONAL SPELLING COMMISSION

Section 1. There is hereby created a National Spelling Commission (herein this act referred to as the "Commission").

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 2. The Commission shall be composed of five members appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 3. The Chairman of the Commission shall be designated by the President at the time of appointment.

QUORUM

Sect. 4. Three members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum. A vacancy in the Commission shall not affect its powers but shall be filled in the same manner that the original appointment was made.

REMUNERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 5. each member of the Commission shall receive compensation of \$75. per diem and shall be reimbursed as provided in the Travel Expense Act of 1949, as amended, for travel, subsistence, and other necessary expenses incurred in the performance of duties vested in the Commission.

STAFF OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 6. The Commission shall have the power to appoint and fix the compensation of an executive director and a staff in accordance with the provisions of the Classification Act of 1949.

DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 7.

(a) The Commission shall undertake a study to establish rules for the simplified phonetic, or other reformed spelling of words in the English language.

(b) (1) The Commission shall, in conference with representatives of Great Britain and other English speaking countries, reach an agreement on two possible systems of reformed spelling of English words, each with varying degrees of change from our present spelling.

(b) (2) The Commission shall submit the two possible systems of reformed spelling to the Congress of the United States for its final selection of the best system of reformed spelling.

(c) The Commission shall devise a plan for putting the reformed spelling into official use, which plan shall take into consideration plans for the implementation of the official reformed spelling by Great Britain and other English speaking countries.

(d) (1) After selection by the Congress of the United States of the most feasible system of reformed spelling, the Commission shall prepare and edit a dictionary which shall be known as the United States Official Dictionary (hereafter in this Act referred to as the "dictionary.").

(d) (2) The dictionary shall have entries for words in the English language which are in common usage in the United States.

(d) (3) The words in the dictionary shall be spelled in accordance with the rules of spelling established by the Commission pursuant to subsection (b) (2) of this section, and for every word of entry there shall be indicated an approved pronunciation.

(d) (4) The Government Printing Office shall publish as many copies of the dictionary as the Commission deems appropriate.

SPELLING OF WORDS IN PAPERS, DOCUMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES

Sect. 8. Any word printed, typewritten, or otherwise reproduced for the United States or by officers or employees of the United States in performance of their official duties after 30 days after the publication of the dictionary shall conform to the spelling of such word in the dictionary.

DICTIONARY COPYRIGHT

Sect. 9. The Commission shall investigate the desirability of obtaining a copyright for the dictionary when it is completed and the establishment of charges for its reproduction by private enterprise.

TERMINATION OF THE COMMISSION

Sect. 10. The Commission shall cease to exist sixty days after the publication of the first edition of the dictionary by the Government Printing Office.

(enlarged copies of this Bill are available from the Editor)

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.5 pp115-118 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1978 pp11-14 in the printed version]

5. The Key to Better Education, by Brenda M. Johns*

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The Aim

To make the written and spoken forms of this important tool of communication, the English language, more accessible to-

- (1) the 25% to 30% of our population classed as *backward readers*,
- (2) the 500,000,000 or so *hungry people* of the world who may really need it to gain the assistance needed to develop their countries,
- (3) the 500,000,000 or so *extra people* who are expected to swell the world population in the next 35 years,
- (4) the other peoples of *Europe* with whom we must develop closer ties, Common Market or no,
- (5) to save 1½ to 2 years in the education of all children,
- (6) to give a *better foundation* for all subsequent learning.

It will probably be desirable for our brighter children to use some of the time saved for learning foreign languages, including Russian, German, French and perhaps even Mandarin. Many will need to use these in the course of their work and travel., For the others, even a mere smattering of a foreign language could be a valuable, stirring, and subtle adjunct to the influences of geography, history, current affairs, sociology, religion, etc., giving a more intimate insight into the lives of other people.

The Advantages which we may confidentially expect:

- (1) A child or foreign student knowing the sounds of the alphabet will be able to write any word he can properly pronounce and will be able to read (pronounce) any word he sees written.
- (2) His reading and writing will reach the standard of his speech vocabulary in a minimum of time.
- (3) He will then be able to read independently getting a good idea of pronunciation of new words which he has never heard.
- (4) The quantity and fluency of his reading will enable him to better appreciate sentence patterns. As one cannot do this when listening to the spoken word, he will be able to look back over difficult sentences and ponder over the grammatical links which embody the links in meaning.

Later, with much experience reading the works of many authors, he will begin to appreciate the innuendoes and the interplay of the words and phrases with the subtle emotional implications which cannot be obtained from a dictionary or learnt by grammatical study.

- (5) He will have access to all the knowledge he wants and needs and not be dependent on the whims of a syllabus designed by someone who, however well-meaning, cannot possibly have insight into his unique inheritance of bents and foibles, or the play that his experiences have on these, or the multitudinous variety of interrelated personality-circumstance situations through which he may live in the future. Not only will he be able to look for the knowledge or entertainment that he wants; an unexpected, unlooked-for phrase may jump from the page and occupy his thoughts for an entire day, cause an inspiration, or even influence the whole course of his emotional, philosophical, or practical life.

The advanced student, wishing to study the Traditional Orthography (pre-spelling-reform) books, will be able to do so with very little extra effort and help. His experience of sentence pattern, vocabulary, and idiom, and his knowledge of the letters, seasoned with a pinch of logic, will see him through as with a following wind if he is just tipped off about the changes that have been made.

The Situation Now, in

(1) The World

UNESCO is favoring Esperanto as a first international language as opposed to English, owing solely to the difficulties of English spelling. This in spite of the already wide-spread use and understanding of English, and the availability of *more teachers of English* than of any other language. (However, many teachers in foreign countries do not have good pronunciation of English, consequently their teaching is faulty and the results deplorable. A stabilized alphabet with proper pronunciation assigned to each letter and rules for their use will greatly help teachers to know at least their local English dialect).

This deplorable retrogressive step will take time to implement but could be reversed if the English people themselves would modernize their ideas and fling off the chains with which they are strangling themselves 'Themselves,' yes, for there is no authority, no law which attempts to enslave us to our present spelling. The prefaces to dictionaries by their compilers are openly critical of our present spelling. They admit freely to differences of opinion as to what is the best or the most popular spelling. They recognize also that they are partly out of date before they are even published. It is laughable for anyone to say "This word is being used wrongly nowadays. It should mean so-and-so; because it says so in the dictionary." (date of publication 19?) Dictionaries soon get out of date. Their compilers do not attempt to pretend that a word necessarily means what it meant a few years ago, or what it meant to a Greek in the good old, old, old days. Indeed, they seem to delight in the fact that the language is alive, and changing.

Nor do they give, in most dictionaries, the spellings of Greek sources in the Greek alphabet! And even 'Alphabet' was more like (tho not actually, of course!!) more like 'Alephbeth' in the days of the Phoenicians.

Another mistaken notion that acts as a chain is that we normally read Shakespeare and Chaucer in the original spellings. Normally we do not. But if you are genuinely interested in this sort of thing, why not go back to the Anglo-Saxon? You'll find books in your County Research Library which will enable you to do this, even if we take one more big step sensibly forward in the right direction to make English a better "medium of exchange and bond of union," as H. W. Fowler called it in his Acknowledgements in the preface to Complete Oxford Dictionary.

(2) England

Most small children come to school eager to learn. They are very suggestible and work very diligently. But the task of learning to read and spell, the very necessary means of access to knowledge, is probably more *difficult to master* than any other they will have to learn up to the age of fifteen. How important it is! How frustrating to those who fail! Many people are barred from knowledge that they want, not from any inability to understand it, simply because they have no access to it because they cannot read adequately, i. e. master the anomalies of English spelling.

Nowadays, it is not claimed that even intelligence tests such as those of the 11+ exams eliminate cultural background and attainment - this, again, largely means reading ability and reading

experience.

Very early in their school lives, a largely unnecessary divergence takes place between those children who quickly improve their reading up to the standard of their speech vocabulary and those who lag behind. Many never reach this standard

This divergence is a frustrating experience. It is a prime and note-worthy cause of the educational rifts about which there is so much controversy.

I do not suggest that we could all, ever, have equal skills. But this reading skill depends as much on the simplicity of the system to be learnt as on the qualities of the learner, and it is a skill fundamentally essential to all one's educational advancement, one's contribution to the community, one's social prestige, and one's personality.

It is little wonder that the confidence of backward readers tends to deteriorate as they go on (progress?) through the school, in spite of the teacher's efforts to discover morale-building tasks they can do for the class, and their own efforts to be class-room window-openers or wags. Nor is it surprising that our prisons hold a rather higher proportion of backward readers than the average.

Frequently it is suggested that deterioration in morale sets in among senior pupils as a result of their 'failure' to pass the 11+ exams. This may be so for a few children whose parents have misjudged their children's ability and have made too much of the need to pass. These are the 'borderline' children. On the whole, however, I think that this tendency to blame the 11+ is a very unfortunate red-herring. Even these brighter children are affected by the general attitude of their class. General despondency cannot be blamed on the 11+ failure as most of the children had not expected to pass, and indeed, had not hoped to, knowing that dedication to homework would be demanded of them. Much of the despondency is, I believe, due to illiteracy.

For the primary school stages, there is a plentiful supply of carefully graded reading material and of copiously illustrated general knowledge books. Only the most incompetent readers fail to glean some information from these. In the secondary stage, however when the vocabulary should be expanding rapidly with so many subjects being studied, reading lessons are drastically fewer; any pupils still dependent on word-shapes (look-say), cannot even check that they have heard a word aright, never mind learn its spelling, on seeing it. Moreover, the language of some pupils is so undeveloped that they do not understand an eighth of what is said to them.

The Transition to New Spelling

The Simplified Spelling Society was founded by 'a group of eminent British scholars,' to quote from its enrolment prospectus form, as long ago as 1908. I think its slow progress is due to the modesty of its suggestions. To anyone not very interested in spelling, the new forms probably look rather like spelling mistakes, particularly if the writer has tried to introduce some of the less startling spellings into his writing gradually.

That will not do. A reform needs to be introduced far more dramatically and everyone must know what is taking place and why it is necessary.

To appreciate the easiness of the new spelling, people must have the opportunity to use it as much as they do the old. How can they if they cannot read it in their newspapers and dare not write it to addresses where the new spelling may not be known. Again, it should be apparent the need is for

widespread dramatic introduction so that even those who disapprove will at least know what the new spelling is like, and what is happening.

Consequently, the chief propagating agent must be the press - newspapers, magazines and books. Besides using the system they could print educational sections to tide schools over the period of shortage of books in the new spelling for the infants and juniors. Older children would continue to read their old books, tho writing the new spelling.

The greater demand for books, there being a larger reading public, both here and abroad, might absorb a few of our out-of-work citizens. The books would be paid for by those who read them.

In schools, the expense would not be very great. There is already a great turnover in school text-books, and modern methods of teaching would require modernized books. The older children who are already using the old books would go on using them, even using up those at present in the warehouses. They would continue to read both systems but would gradually develop more proficiency in writing in only the new, unless their need for research in the old books showed a need for practice in the old spelling.

For young children, new books would be needed as soon as possible, but many infants' books are very thin and do not last long anyway. They should be thin and small so that a child can read a book in a short time and have a sense of accomplishment. The new books would give greater incentive to learn because they would be easier and read more rapidly.

Stages of the Introduction thru the Press

The change will never be accepted unless the vast majority of a significant population can write the system fairly confidently in about two weeks. They have other interests and cannot be expected to apply themselves wholeheartedly for any longer. They will fall back on the old familiar system unless it is swept aside swiftly by an overwhelming tide of change.

The introduction would need about six stages, for example: Stage I: one or two major vowel changes; Stage II: several minor consonant or suffix changes; Stages III & IV: the other easy vowel and consonant changes; Stages V and VI: the remaining more difficult changes.

Newspapers would publish (1) a summary of the new system; (2) an explanation of the need for change and the advantages of simpler spelling; (3) examples and other encouragements for readers to practice *writing* in the new spelling (This is vital); and (4) columns or articles in the various stages.

Each section should be headed with a key showing which changes occur in it. During the fortnight, the proportions using the earlier stages would be decreased and those using the later stages increased. Careful assessment would be made of the amount needed in each stage to give enough practice to make mastery easy and yet to give the maximum in the intermediate stages because of the importance of word shape and speed.

In publishing, articles should not be split into parts on separate pages with different stages of spelling.

Timing of the Introduction thru the Press

The time taken for the stages suggested would depend on reader's reactions and how many of the

ideas the public would readily accept.

There is, however, *a minimum time* during which it would not be fair to judge the effectiveness of assimilation of the system. I suggest readers' letters should not be given too much credence during this time and that the public should be asked to hold their horses till they had had some practice and then send in cards with collected, signatures using separate squares for signatures for and against.

There is also *a maximum time* for the transition. In the early stages people will still rely on their old word image to help them get used to the changes so far. But in later stages some of the word shapes will be so different that the reader will have to learn to use phonetics to decipher new word shapes - until such time as they have become accustomed to seeing the new word shapes. For the new word shapes to be learnt quickly, they need to be settled as soon as possible, not staggered. A dictionary in the new spelling should be made available at the onset. And a book of instruction for teaching the new spelling should be available right from the start. People should be encouraged to see how easy the words are to read if tackled phonetically. The schools will soon find this out. Progress in learning to read in the new phonetic spelling system should be compared with rate of progress of pupils learning to read in our chaotic T.O. No doubt some of the University of London's experimental teaching of reading projects will give the evidence needed to prove the increased speed and accuracy of pupils reading in a phonetic system.

Some Points that may be Worrying You

(1) *People who speak differently will spell differently.* Will this really matter? It will not matter if the writing is in a dialect which, when spoken, is readily understood by the readers for whom the writing is intended.

Publishers would probably want to change unusual spellings to the more common ones - more common locally or more common internationally - as judgement indicates.

Deviations, both personal and local, will tend gradually to fade out. The mass media of radio and T-V are already having an effect on local dialects. With a closer relationship between sounds and spellings, people will become more aware of their deviations. It is a known fact that a child's first attempt is to try to spell phonetically and to expect to find words written phonetically. Children and foreigners learning to read at the same time as they are extending their speech vocabularies, will be most likely to say words as the spellings indicate, rather than according to some local or family deviation.

(2) *Phonetic spelling will be difficult.* If you haven't yet tried this out on a large scale, you haven't found out that this fear is unjustified.

(3) *Phonetic deviations* - slightly different ways of making sounds within one phoneme family of sounds will not show at all in the spellings. Simplified spelling ought to be based upon broad phonemic grouping so as to keep to a minimum vowel symbols and sounds. In this respect, dialect will not affect spelling, nor spelling, dialect.

(4) *Spelling reform may cause distress.* But simplified spelling is intended to make spelling and reading simpler, not to cause distress. It is not intended to be precisely phonetic, but it must be a good guide to pronunciation; nor is it intended to be permanently and universally fixed - changes may be made as experience shows possible weak points.

(5) *Homophones*, words spelt the same because pronounced the same, but of different meaning, will be more common than before. Will this matter? If words of this sort that we already have do not seem to cause much trouble in our speech, then they should cause no trouble in print where the reader can go back and review the context to be sure of the meaning. As we must already try to avoid such ambiguity in our speech, however, it will be a good thing to have spelling which will help to make us aware of these dangers. We have more time to think, when we are writing, and this gives us two opportunities: the first, to avoid trouble there and then: the second, to store up a mental note to avoid the same trouble in our speech - e.g. the words 'accept' and 'except' could easily be confused over the telephone or at a booking-office.

How about the present homographs: minit, minute, bo, bau? These will be spelt differently because pronounced differently. Clearer enunciation and better phrasing will be aided and abetted by the new spelling.

(6) *A word may be spelt differently in different contexts*, e.g. 'and' or 'nd', 'thi', 'the', 'thee'. It will not matter if someone prefers to keep always to the same form; but the different forms may well be found to be useful in indicating the emphasis in the sentence.

When the first of the new dictionaries (truly dealing with diction) begin to be compiled, it will probably have become clear whether different forms should be encouraged or discouraged.

(7) *Dictionary compilers will have a tremendous task!* However, machines to scan for a particular spelling and count the number of times it occurs and then do similarly for a 'rival' spelling, will probably be available. In any case, dictionaries will probably not need to be consulted so often, for they will be required mainly for meanings rather than for spellings which is probably not so at present. The new dictionaries will have both the phonetic spelling and meaning of words. Probably some will be available arranged like foreign language dictionaries, so one can find the old spelling knowing only the pronunciation of English words.

(8) *The new spelling obscures some word associations* in which the words were formerly spelt similarly but pronounced differently, e.g.:

| | | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-------|
| machine | masheen | know | no |
| mechanic | mekanik | knew | nu |
| mechanism | mekanizm | knowledge | nolij |

But, from my observations of children's spelling, I do not think these associations are of much use to us - except perhaps in helping older and brighter students to spell these difficult words! We know the meanings and uses of these words long before we ever learn to spell them. The meanings and derivations help us with the spellings; the spellings do not help us with the meanings.

(9) *Derivations will be lost.* These are not going to be lost, as there will be even more space than at present available for them in dictionaries, owing to the fact that the words themselves and their explanations will take up less space in the new spelling, and it will not be necessary to show the pronunciation, except to mark the stressed syllable. Even now, derivations are not readily discernable in the spelling of a majority of words. So what is to be lost? Some derivations will however, be obscured, e.g. 'ante' and 'anti' will be spelt the same because we do not distinguish them in our speech.

Altho many of us find the history of the language and derivations very interesting, I submit that the usefulness of them is much over-rated. I believe that almost invariably we learn the words from their contexts and only rarely does a dictionary definition and still less a derivation really help us. Biology? Yes, probably. Geography? Yes, perhaps. Topics? Hardly. Topography? Hm! Well, I doubt it. "Over' is a comparative form of the root in the second syllable of 'above'." Well, now! So it is! But one can get along very well without knowing that fact. Nevertheless, let me repeat, derivations will still be available for those who wish to search thru the dictionary. Moreover, we are providing those who are genuinely interested in the history of the language with even more history to study! So why should they complain?

(10) *The value of words will be destroyed*. This is a misleading accusation. It was partially discussed under homonyms. The meanings of spoken words cannot be destroyed - and the simplification of spelling cannot adversely affect ordinary words other than homophones.

Our language is reputed to be very rich in useful words. Indeed, it is so; but more than that, it is cluttered. The dictionaries are cluttered with words which have been put there because some famous writers used them once each in some famous writings. I think we are over-zealous in preserving these slender nooses with the past. Clinging to links with what should be dead, we are partly dead to the *present*. Surely our lives are short enuff! It is an insult to the people and wonderful things around us NOW, to be preoccupied by the useless relics of the past. Studying the mistakes of the past is only of value to us in the future so far as they help us to live better in the present.

Our daily language also is cluttered with clichés. We all disentomb the Dodo occasionally. This one which I thought had died a lingering death in my vocabulary, was resurrected and laid a golden egg: I teasingly accused a Chinese Malayan friend of 'shooting a line', for he had told me that he had been junior Badminton Champion of Malaya. He understood exactly: "I'm sorry, in a way, if you don't believe me; but, in a way, I'm flattered too, because you would not accuse me of "shooting a lion(!!) if you did not think it was something worth bragging about." - which just goes to show, doesn't it? In speech and spelling as in other matters, what you lose on the swings you may more than compensate for in the roundabouts. There are limitless permutations of words available to us and if some few of the familiar combinations are rendered ambiguous or otherwise useless by modern spellings, man's inventiveness and ingenuity will rise to the occasion with a freshness which will be welcome.

The more direct relation between spelling and speech will make us better acquainted with words and they will seem more personal and less formal, which in itself will stimulate us to more vigorous, more honest writing. We shall write more nearly as we speak and not cloak our words in formalities. We shall speak more nearly as we write, always practising the same language, tho allowing; as we would in speech, for the style used for different purposes, e.g. conversation, lecture, worship, and for the register used between people appropriate to their social relationship. We should use different forms not just because we are writing; only to suit the subject matter and the readers whom we expect our words to reach.

We shall have more time in schools for foreign languages and shall enrich our speech by borrowing from them.

Four Rules or Attitudes

1. Spell each word as you would normally say it in careful deliberate speech, unless you know your pronunciation needs correcting and intend to make an effort to correct it. Your accent will be consistent thruout your work and people will soon adjust to it. If necessary, put an identification description at the head, e.g. "Mid-Western American." This must identify your speech dialect, not your place of birth or present home.

Chaos will come if people (during the transition years particularly) begin to spell words according to other people's speech instead of their own, as they will fail to learn the right sound-symbol matching. If they pick up some words from one author and others from another, and then concoct yet more words of their own, their words will be a mixture of several accents and perhaps unreadable. Those who must learn their words from other people must learn all of them from the same dialect. They should choose the most widely accepted speech of the people with whom they associate - one which is easily understood by most English speakers.

2. Spelling should not be regarded as fixed and holy. It should be allowed to evolve according to universal changes in pronunciation.

3. Don't be pedantic; tolerate the writer's spelling just as you do his speech.

4. Give yourself sufficient time to be accustomed to the new spelling. Practice makes perfection. You will find it easier than you expect.

Editor's comments: While the editor thinks the above article is an excellent idea or plan for the utilization of spelling reform (and one of the very few proposed by spelling reformers - most of whom are only interested in self-aggrandizement), it is incomplete in at least three respects: motivation, authority, and enforcement.

While it touches on motivation to a slight degree, we have had these arguments presented to us for nearly a century - to no avail. Authority is the subject really over-looked. No one of the public has the authority nor wants to start such a project without the backing of the governments of the English-speaking peoples involved. The Chicago Tribune tried for 30 years to introduce and actually used some 30 words in simplified spelling. Colonel McCormick finally gave up and went back to the old spellings when the schools would not follow him.

Enforcement of a system of spelling would be distasteful to most of the English-speaking public. But if the English-speaking governments empowered representatives to an international commission to seek agreements on a means of simplifying our spelling and putting it into use, it could be done. At first, the governments would publish a dictionary in the new spelling, and then after a waiting period of one year for publicity and learning it, if they started using it in all government reports, news releases, Post Office materials, the newspapers would have to quickly follow. So would the schools, because there would be motivation. There would be a great demand for stenographers trained in the new spelling, and this would make obsolete those who did not know the new spelling. By this time it would be well on its way to acceptance at home and then shortly afterward abroad.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.6 pp118,122 in the printed version]

[Not in Spelling Progress Bulletin in the printed version]

6. Notes on Implementation of Spelling Reform, by a committee of the Canadian Linguistic Association

1. The problems of implementing a reformed spelling are great, so much so that some of them have already been listed as positive arguments against spelling reform. The basic fact to be faced in implementing this reform is that the change envisioned is not the sort that will come about of itself with time, but one that must be imposed (or at least approved) by authority from the government. Consequently, the problem evolves itself into one of winning enough support from the general public that the various legislative bodies are compelled to bring about the desired reform.
2. It is not part of this report to go into the question of how to create this volume of public opinion in favour of spelling reform except to say that the task is essentially one for the individual and that the process must be the slow one of winning over individuals won by one. Obviously the more public discussion of the question by means of lectures, debates, and newspaper correspondence and so on that can be stimulated the better.
3. The bringing about of this kind of reform is further complicated by the fact that the English language is not confined to Canada, and that while it might be possible to change the spelling system in Canada alone, without regard to other countries, it would be unrealistic to do so.
4. Advocates of spelling reform usually think of reform coming about by means of legislation and the system coming into effect all at once. However there are other ways and one is a gradual introduction of the system over many years, a few spellings at a time. This was the programme of the Simplified Spelling Board. The strength of this method is the difficulty of maintaining a line of demarcation between simplified and unsimplified spellings. It may therefore be very difficult to apply in practice. A further weakness is that for many years its contribution to reducing the time spent in learning to read would be negligible.
5. Another approach is possible and that is to proceed via the Augmented Roman Alphabet by Pitman which has been put forward as a teaching medium for both children and illiterate adults. Although it is not intended to be a means of reforming spelling, perhaps after it has been in use for some years in schools, the advantages of retaining it later and later into the school programme and printing more and more advanced work in it will be appreciated until one day a generation completes all the school work in it. It will in this way become an alternative spelling system by the side of the current system and perhaps eventually even supersede it.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.7pp119-122 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1975 pp13-16 in the printed version]

7. Spelling and Parliament, by William J. Reed*

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A paper presented at the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society, at College of All Saints, London.

In Britain we are a parliamentary democracy. We vote at stated intervals to elect a House of Commons of 635 members. From these, the leader of the largest political party is called upon by the Sovereign to choose a Cabinet and form a Government. This Government is the Executive and is the body which has the power and the authority to make all decisions concerning the welfare of the nation.

It is widely believed by many of those who are well qualified to judge that our spelling conventions are at present unsatisfactory and that they should be improved. There is no authority which can improve them except the authority of Parliament. No individual or group of individuals can make any effective changes except through Parliament.

Our present spelling is thought by some to be 'traditional' and will hereinafter be designated 'traditional orthography' or T.O.

It may be objected to what was said in the second paragraph that T.O. itself was not brought about by any Act of Parliament and the objection is reasonable. What we call T.O. was brought about by printers and, to a lesser extent, by writers during the latter part of the 17th century. It was unsatisfactory even then, though not as unsatisfactory then as it has become since. It has become more unsatisfactory because, during the intervening three centuries, it has changed very little, while the language which it is supposed to represent has changed very much. This unsatisfactory spelling has continued to be accepted by the nation because of important reasons, including the following:

- (1) Many millions of copies of the Authorised Version of the Bible have been printed and read in something like our present T.O.
- (2) Shakespeare's plays also have been printed and read, not in Shakespeare's spelling but in T.O.
- (3) This spelling, with its disadvantages and imperfections, was accorded the imprimature of the formidable Samuel Johnson when he published his Dictionary in 1755 and when he wrote in his preface: "*I have attempted few alterations, and among those few, perhaps the greatest part is from modern to ancient practice.*" He recommended that people "*should not disturb upon narrow views or for minute propriety the orthography of their fathers.*" By this he probably meant that they should not attempt to change 17th century spelling to match the great changes that had taken place in the language. So 17th century spelling was fastened even more securely on our language.

A second objection might be that thoroughgoing spelling and alphabet reform were introduced in Turkey, 1928, by the efforts of one man, namely Kemel Ataturk; but the circumstances were quite different because Turkey at that time was not a parliamentary democracy such as we are now. A third possible objection is that important changes were made in American spelling by Noah Webster; but his Elementary Spelling Book of 1783 is said to have sold more than 100 million copies and to have had the approval of no less a person than Benjamin Franklin. Webster's

American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828, was quickly accepted as the standard for spelling and subsequent editions maintained this authority. It is difficult to see how that sort of change could be brought about in contemporary Britain by any one man or by any small group of men, however eminent.

When compulsory schooling was introduced by Parliament a century ago, the principal concern of the authority might well have been to give children a good education in their native language and literature: more consistent spelling might have been agreed on and introduced. The attention of the authorities was, however, distracted by other considerations which seemed at that time to be even more urgent. Social and industrial changes were affecting villages and, even more, towns. Families with children were uprooted. Many authorities found that their foremost task was not to provide children with a good education but to get them off the streets. As the historian, G. M. Young, wrote: "*In 1870 the essential was to get the children somehow into some sort of school . . . In Birmingham, forty out of every hundred children were running loose in the streets, while in Manchester the figure was as high as 50 out of every hundred.*" [1] Chambers' Encyclopaedia, Vol. 4, page 800, 1973, states that in the eighteen sixties, 2 million children [1] were not attending school: that would have been about 40%. Well might Young say that the essential was to get the children, somehow, into some sort of school.

Children had to be accommodated somewhere while their fathers, and often their mothers too, were hard at work, and they had to be kept occupied for otherwise they would tend to become listless, mischievous and perhaps destructive. 'Education' was a wonderful ideal but the authorities seemed to be chiefly interested in making compulsory the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) and thus in making children spend their time and energy struggling with out-of-date and unsuitable spelling units, and with out-of-date and unreasonable units of measurement.

The passing of the R.E. Forster Act of 1870 did not mark a sudden break with the past (at the time, my own school log book did not mention it). Lowe's Revised Code of 1862 had required that all children should be instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic according to a clearly defined syllabus issued by a central authority and that all girls should be instructed in plain needlework. School experiments with reformed alphabet shapes or with reform spelling were not expressly forbidden and it is possible that some bold teachers did try such experiments. We know that Isaac Pitman's Phonotypy had been tried in schools 30 years earlier, in 1832; and there was the testimony of the great Alexander Ellis who wrote regarding "*the importance of employing a phonetic alphabet as a desirable, nay, necessary instrument in national education in that it furnished the only means by which reading, spelling and writing could become general among the great body of English people.*" [2]

For hundreds of years, and certainly since the latter part of the 16th century, it had been realised by many of those who had most carefully studied the matter that what we call T.O. is subject to serious objections whether considered from the standpoint of etymology, phonology or, most important of all, teaching. It is the teaching aspects of the matter which has led Parliament, as representing the nation, to consider what reforms are needed and how much reforms might be implemented.

The Simplified Spelling Society had been founded in 1908 by a group of scholars under the chairmanship of Professor Walter Skeat. Some few years later, during the time when Professor Gilbert Murray was president, when Sir George Hunter was Chairman, when William Archer was Secretary and Walter Ripman was Treasurer, a Petition to the Prime Minister was organized by the Society with the aim of directing Parliament's attention to the evidence relating to the need for spelling reform. Responsibility for the Petition and for much of the actual work involved in interviewing people who were prominent in administration and in scholarship were accepted by Sir

George himself and by his personal secretary, Mr. Thomas B. Barber. Mr. Barber was Secretary also of the Simplified Spelling Society and remained Secretary for many years afterwards and until his retirement in 1954.

By July, 1923, there was an impressive list of signatures in support of the Petition. There were names of 15,000 people who were representatives of scholars, writers, administrators and men and women who were prominent in public life and affairs. The list represented, probably, hundreds of thousands of such people inasmuch as, in many cases, the president and secretary signed on behalf of all the members of a society following a resolution passed at a general meeting. The covering letter was signed by forty people '*whose eminence in Scholarship, Science, Letters and Affairs is widely recognised*' as Sir George Hunter commented.

During the next few years, and until shortly before 1933, the teaching staffs and the administrative staffs of universities were generally in favour of asking the government to appoint a representative committee of eminent scholars who should be asked to consider the case for spelling reforms and the means by which such reforms might most conveniently be carried out. 800 of these eminent scholars signed the Petition. [3](#) It must be remembered in this connexion that the number of universities, and consequently of university staffs, was then smaller than it is now after the great expansion of recent times. So 800 really is a notable figure.

In the Univ. of Birmingham, signatures included those of Sir Charles Grant Robertson, the Vice-Chancellor, C. W. Valentine, the Prof. of Education and of 20 other professors, 19 Lecturers and 4 Readers. In the Univ. of Cambridge, those who signed included Dr. P. Giles, the Master of Emmanuel College, Sir J. J. Thomson, the Master of Trinity College, Dr A. C. Seward, the Master of Downing College, Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, the Prof. of English Literature, Dr. Emery Barnes, the Prof. of Divinity, Dr G. G. Coulton, the famous historian of the middle ages, together with 37 other Professors and Lecturers.

In the Univ. of Oxford, those who signed included W. D. Ross, the Provost of Oriel College, C. H. Sampson, the Principal of Brasenose College, Dr. A. H. Sayce, who was later Prof. of Assyriology, Sir M. E. Sadler, the Master of University College; Prof. Gilbert Murray, who was Regius Prof. of Greek and who succeeded Walter Skeat as President of the Simplified Spelling Society in 1912 and who supervised its policies until his death in 1957; Dr. R. R. Marrett, Rector of Exeter College, Dr. Reg. W. Macan, late Master of University College and an authoritative advocate of spelling reform; Prof. H. C. Wyld, Merton Prof. of English Language and Literature and Editor of the Universal Dictionary of the English Language; F. M. Powicke, Regius Prof. of Modern History; Percy Simpson, Fellow of Oriel College, an authority with A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, E. Maunde Thompson, J. Dover Wilson and R. W. Chambers (O.U.P. 1923) on Shakespeare's spelling in the Sir Thomas More play (fragment) and in Venus & Adonis and Lucrece, which are the only examples we have of how Shakespeare himself actually spelt words: Edmund Blunden, former Prof. of English Literature in the Imperial Univ. of Tokyo, Dr. M. W. Keatinge, Reader in Education and D. H. MacGregor, Prof. of Political Economy: along with 24 other eminent scholars.

In the Univ. of London, there were: Lascelles Abercrombie, the Prof. of English Literature (David Abercrombie, his son, was for some years Chairman of the Simplified Spelling Society, during the time when I was Honorary Secretary); A. Lloyd James, who was later Prof. of Phonetics (he did much of the work involved in producing the fifth edition of *New Spelling* 1940, and wrote the Preface which appears on pages 5 to 7); Sir T. Percy Nunn, Director of the Institute of Education, Sir Cyril Burt, F.B.A., Prof. of Philosophy, together with 40 other distinguished scholars.

In the Univ. of Manchester, those who signed included the Professors of English Language, English Literature, and almost all of the other departments of the University.

There were many signatures from the Universities of Aberdeen, Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh (58 names), Glasgow (41 names), Liverpool (Vice-Chancellor, 25 Professors and 12 others), Reading (Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 11 Professors and 20 Lecturers), St Andrew's (Vice-Chancellor and 38 others), Sheffield (Sir Henry Hadow, formerly Vice-Chancellor and 16 others), Univ. of Wales (the Principal, 16 Professors and 28 Lecturers), from Univ. of Nottingham there were 16 names.

There were also the names of 125 Members of Parliament, 22 Bishops, including William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, 49 publishers, including Edward Arnold, Jonathan Cape, W. & R. Chambers, 8 authors, including H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley, Julian Huxley and Sir Norman Angell.

There was support also from many educational associations, including the National Union of Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters, the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutes, and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Thus supported and encouraged by the widespread approval of the universities' teaching and administrative staffs, by teachers, writers and publishers, Sir George Hunter in July, 1923 met some of the Simplified Spelling Society's committee and interviewed Sir Charles Trevelyan, who was then President of the Board of Education. He stated the Board's official position thus: "*While difficulties of the present system (of spelling) were admitted, he felt that the appointment of the Commission or Committee could not be expected to result in any scientific solution unless the supporters of Spelling Reform were able as a preliminary to decide upon an agreed and definite scheme.*" Lord Irwin later (in 1933) quoted and agreed with this point of view.

Rebuffed by the Board of Education because he had not brought an agreed and definite scheme, Sir George Hunter asked the Society's Committee to reconsider and possibly revise the earlier proposals which had been formulated by William Archer and Walter Ripman. After renewed consideration, the proposers and supporters of English Spelling Reform met on May 3rd, 1933, and unanimously agreed to approve and submit for the proposed Committee's consideration the scheme (*New Spelling*) approved by the Simplified Spelling Society. Sir George Hunter's covering letter included the following sentence: "*The scheme has been used in a number of elementary schools with benefit to the children; it does not require any new letters or any additions to the printers' fonts of type . . . It is not expected that our spelling can be immediately changed by any arbitrary decree but it is believed that any improvements recommended by the Committee will be voluntarily and gradually adopted.*" This meeting, on 3rd May, was attended by Sir George Hunter, Chairman, and by: Mr. A. Lloyd James, Reader in Phonetics at London Univ., Mr. Walter Ripman, Chief Inspector of Schools for London Univ., Prof. W. Emery Barnes, Prof. Daniel Jones, Sir E. Dennison Ross, Mr. A. E. Henshall, ex-President of the National Union of Teachers, Wm. Barkley, Journalist, Oswald Lewis, M.P., W. G. Pearson, M.P., Mr. Gray Jones, representing the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters, Mr. Gordon and Mr. T. R. Barber, Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Society.

Even after this, Lord Irwin wrote on June 30, 1933, saying that the Government could not agree to the appointment by the Government of a Committee "... *because its official character would give people the impression that legislation might be possible in the future. There is no justification for the board to go even this far...*" Lord Irwin declined to appoint a committee and declined to receive a deputation. The scholarship that had produced several versions of *New Spelling* and all the work that had resulted in the collection of 15,000 signatures of prominent people were rendered of no avail because of what must have seemed to Sir George very much like obstinacy on the part of Lord Irwin and his advisers. Sir George was defeated. He died in 1937 and left a large legacy to enable the Society to continue the work for spelling reform which had meant so much to him. Here

again, he suffered another defeat. All moneys used for educational purposes are 'charitable' and therefore exempt from paying income tax. The amazing truth is that the Society's income from the Hunter bequest was declared to be *not* for educational purposes. The money was, therefore, subject to income tax and the Society has lost many thousands of pounds because of this decision.

On 11th March, 1949, Dr. Mont Follick, M.P. for Loughborough, presented his Private Member's Spelling Reform Bill to the House of Commons. Part 1 of the Bill asked for the establishment of a committee to produce a scheme for the simplified and consistent spelling of English. Part 2 required that reformed spelling should be used first in schools, later in government publications and later still should be used generally. The Minister of Education at that time was Rt. Hon. George Tomlinson and he was deeply concerned about the welfare of children. He cautiously expressed the opinion, however, that advocates of reform should secure some reasonable measure of public support and that later there should be an official inquiry into spelling.

On the Second Reading, 11th March, 1949, the Bill was debated for five hours and lost by only three votes, the official figures being 84:87. This was a remarkable achievement by Mont Follick and for spelling reformers. Clearly, even better things were within reach. [\[4\]](#)

In the autumn of 1952, Mont Follick was again successful in the ballot for Private Members' Bills, being drawn No. 5. He again brought in a Bill concerned with spelling reform. It required the Government to institute research into methods of improving the low standard of reading and to investigate, among other things, the use of consistent spelling, even though there might later be a transition to Queen Anne's spelling (T.O.). On Second Reading, 27.2.53, the Bill was carried by 65 votes to 53 after a debate which is reported in 82 columns of Hansard (2425-2507). Mr Ralph Morley, M.P. for Itchen, had said: "*As a class teacher for nearly fifty years, I know it is our ridiculous and illogical spelling which is the chief handicap in teaching children to read.*" I myself have had more than fifty years experience of teaching and agree with what Mr. Morley said. [\[5\]](#)

After Second Reading, the Bill went to Committee where it was again approved in spite of government opposition.

On 7th May, Dr. Follick rose in the House "*To ask the Minister of Education if she will state her policy towards proposals by a competent research organisation to investigate possible improvements in the teaching of reading by means of a system of simplified spelling.*" Miss Florence Horsbrugh replied: "*Any such organisation could rely on my interest and goodwill for their proposals designed to investigate possible improvements in this field of education. There would be no extra grant and the organization concerned would have to secure the willing cooperation of the I.e.a., teachers and parents.*"

The sponsors of the Bill realised that it might still meet powerful opposition and that it might be rejected in the Lords. They agreed to withdraw the Bill, being well pleased with the Minister's assurance that there would be approval for properly controlled research into how the use of simplified spelling would affect the processes of learning to read.

John Downing was appointed to administer the tests to the i.t.a. groups, also to the control groups. The i.t.a. experiments were started in September 1961. After only a few weeks it was clear that children could learn to read in the fairly consistent i.t.a. much more quickly and much better than the control groups could learn to read T.O. It seemed also that reading skill acquired with consistent i.t.a. could be transferred later to reading matter printed in T.O. Subsequent tests confirmed this. The most important result of the i.t.a. research was to prove that T.O. *is* a handicap to children when they are learning to read. What happened after the transition was interesting but it did not affect the really important conclusion quoted in the last sentence. These experiments, and

later ones, were a consequence of the Follick-Pitman success in the House of Commons, 27 February, 1953, and the Minister's subsequent assurance that there would be approval of, though no government grant for, experiments with simplified spelling in the teaching of reading.

It seems that Mont Follick was more concerned with spelling reform than he was with teaching children to read T.O. It was only with reluctance that he agreed to the withdrawal of his 1953 Bill and he later seems to have regretted having done so. He was a true spelling reformer and remained so until his death, 10.12.1958. His Will required that his fortune should be used to found and endow a professor's chair of Comparative Philology "*in which spelling reform (not merely the teaching of reading) should form a principal part.*" Dr. Mont Follick had been the founder and was the Proprietor of the Regent School of Languages. His estate was large. After considerable delay, the money was accepted by the Univ. of Manchester and William Haas was appointed the first Mont Follick Professor. This decision was the crucial decision which must decide to what extent the benefactor's aims are likely to be fulfilled. All this may reasonably and fairly be said to follow from the House of Commons' verdict on 27th February, 1953.

During recent years, two Departmental Committees have considered language teaching and, especially, the teaching of reading. Lady Plowden was Chairman of the first. Detailed evidence was submitted by the Simplified Spelling Society but this did not appear in the report, although the name and school of the Honorary Secretary did appear. During 1970 and 1971, useful correspondence passed between the Society and the Departmental Inspector for English, Mr. E. Wilkinson. I met Mr. Wilkinson on 15 November, 1971, and we discussed the Society's Resolution to the Minister. We did not disagree on any of the items included in this Resolution, and we discussed what further progress might be made, such as experiments with *New Spelling* under the auspices of a university. The unexpected and unexplained departures of our President and Chairman from the Annual General Meeting made it difficult for the Society to make further progress at the time with the Departmental Inspector. The final sentence of the Resolution was: "*Members of this Society . . . urge the government to institute an inquiry into the educational, financial and international advantages likely to result from modernizing our out-of-date spelling conventions.*"

Another Government Committee was appointed in 1971. There were 19 members and Sir Alan Bullock was appointed Chairman. During 1972 and '73, several of us wrote on behalf of the Simplified Spelling Society and expressed regret because the Society had not been invited to give oral and written evidence. Mr. S. S. Eustace was at that time Hon. Sec. of the Society and wrote several times. Mr. R. Arnold was Sec. of the Bullock Com. and early in 1971, he wrote saying that the Society's representatives would be able to give oral evidence to the Bullock Com. We were invited also to send an agreed 'submission.' Of the dates offered, the first one, Jan. 23rd, was chosen by the Society's Committee at its meeting on Jan. 12th. There was not adequate time in which to prepare an agreed 'submission' but four of us (Messrs. Eustace, Gibbs, O'Halloran and Reed) met in Elizabeth House on Jan. 23rd. We met a Bullock Committee (not the full Committee) under the chairmanship of Prof. J. E. Merritt. Prof. Merritt is, incidentally, a member of the Simplified Spelling Society.

That meeting with the members of the official Bullock Committee was important and promising. Mr. O'Halloran, who has since been elected Honorary Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Society, made a particularly good impression on the Bullock Committee and has since had important correspondence and interviews with some of its members. Progress towards improvement in our spelling conventions will have to be the result of recommendations by a Departmental Committee appointed by, and reporting back to, Parliament.

References

[1] G. M. Young, *The Victorian Age*, Penguin, p. 116.

[2] Benn Pitman, *Life and Labours of Isaac Pitman, 1902*, quoted by Harrison in, *Instant Reading*, Pitman, 1964, p. 30-34.

[3] *The Case for the Improvement of Spelling*, Simplified Spelling Society, 1933, pp. 16-32.

[4] Hansard, 11 March, 1949.

[5] Hansard, 27 February, 1953.

SIMPLIFIED SPELLING SOCIETY

Founded in 1908 by Professor W.W. Skeat, Lit.D., LL.D., D.C.L., Ph.D.

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TEXT OF RESOLUTION
to The Secretary of State,
Department of Education and Science

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"Whereas many great authorities on English have deplored the inconsistency of its spelling and have advocated reform;

And whereas no reasonable case against spelling reform has ever been made by any considerable scholar;

And whereas experiments in Britain, America and elsewhere have proved our spelling to be wasteful of time and effort;

And whereas a number of other nations have in recent times reformed their spelling conventions with great benefit to themselves and to other users of their languages;

And whereas English is now being learnt as a second language by a large proportion of the human race and is the most widely used international language;

Members of this Society, feeling that it is now incumbent upon native speakers of English to remove unnecessary difficulties in the learning and use of the language, whether by students approaching it as a second language or by English-speaking and other children learning to read it and write it, urged the Government to institute an inquiry into the educational, financial and international advantages likely to result from modernizing our out-of-date spelling conventions."

Passed by subsequent Gen. Meeting, Dec. 12, 1970.

William Reed, Hon. Secretary.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.8 pp123-125 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 pp2-4 in the printed version]

8. Could Adoption of the Metric System Serve as a Model for Spelling Reform? by Lottie Hirsch

About 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson proposed that Congress adopt the Metric system. By 1868, Public Law 90-472 legalized the use of the Metric system in the U.S.A. But it did not supplant the cumbersome English system. How, after innumerable frustrating efforts, was this finally achieved?

An attempt will be made to:

1. Review the history of the Metric system (now referred to as m.s.).
2. Compare the nature of the problems of metrification to those of spelling reform.
3. Suggest some strategies for spelling reform based on Metric success.

History

Starting with the administration of George Washington, the United States Congress has been asked to consider the adoption of the m.s. Thomas Jefferson, at that time, submitted a proposal to extend the decimal system, used in coins, to weights and measures.

Meanwhile, in 1783, in England, James Watt urged its adoption. France finally adopted the m.s. in 1795, but it did not go fully into effect till 1840s. [\[1\]](#) In 1928 farmers in Europe still were using customary measures, but industry and commerce no longer did. [\[2\]](#)

In 1821, John Quincy Adams tried to persuade Congress to adopt m.s. And in 1863, following the report by the National Academy of Science, use of m.s., alongside the customary measures, became legal. At that time the postal system used it to weigh its foreign mail. In 1876, U.S. coinage went metric, and in 1878, the U.S. Navy Medical Corps used Metric. By 1889 the U.S. received the *Metric Measurement Standard* (from France), from which henceforth all U.S. customary measures were derived. In 1896, Representative Dennis Hurley of Brooklyn introduced a metric bill to the House that passed. Subsequently, opponents forced it to back into committee, where it died. [\[3\]](#)

Similarly in 1897, Britain almost went Metric.

In the U.S., between 1896 and 1907, many attempts to introduce metric measures into Congress were made. They all required that the U.S. Government adopt them first, and the rest of the country would follow after. In 1900 utility companies began using m.s. [\[4\]](#)

By then, all European industrial nations, with the exception of Britain and Russia, had adopted m.s. Britain held out because of the cost of conversion and re-education. [\[5\]](#)

In 1901 the Bureau of Standards was created. Very many organizations and individuals then favored conversion, as documented by the World Metric Standardization Council in 1922. [\[6\]](#) During World War 1, when the U.S. Army discovered that the shells it supplied to the French did not fit their guns, it went increasingly Metric. Pharmaceutical and optometric companies followed. So did film companies with their 35 mm film, and airlines with their 44 and 66 lb. baggage limit (20 and 30 kg. respectively). [\[7\]](#) During the depression only weak attempts at metrification were made.

In 1950, Britain tried to go metric, but British commerce and industry were opposed because the United States and the British Commonwealth, its trading partners, had not yet gone Metric. Then

India went Metric in 1950.

Sputnik, in 1957, gave conversion a new impetus. In 1960, the U.S. participated in the SI (système internationale d'unités) Conference in Paris. That same year, the Department of Commerce announced it wanted an in-depth study leading to the m.s. But Congress decided the subject should first be considered by the legislative branch, which finally did so. But it took 8 more years, as discussed below.

In Britain, the proportion of their metric trading partners had increased. By 1965, 85% of the world's population had gone metric, and more than one half of the world's GNP was being produced in countries using the m.s. Public opinion in Britain became pro-metric. Industry took the initiative. The Federation of British Industries (roughly equivalent to our NAM) informed the government that the majority of firms favored adoption. In 1965, Britain adopted the m.s. A governmental agency, the Metrification Board was formed, whose purpose it was to guide, stimulate and encourage metrification. The government felt that education and promotion were needed. To that end, \$3 million was devoted to TV, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and a 24 page pamphlet was distributed to every household (20 million).

Various groups were expected to do their part. For instance, unions were responsible for their members, publishers of textbooks had to help. The government left the initiative in conversion to industry. The construction industry led the way. In education, regional and national examinations required Metric knowledge. [\[8\]](#)

Meanwhile, in the U.S. in 1965, the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), in its study, suggested that there seems to be an inevitability about the m.s., and that costs would be less than expected if conversion were spread over many years. [\[9\]](#)

Abroad, "standard based" agreements, such as quality assurance and product certification schemes were being prepared by Metric nations that threatened to leave the U.S. out in the cold. Being on customary measures created the danger of a non-tariff barrier against our exports. And a slight drop in exports could have meant an unfavorable balance of trade. [\[10\]](#)

In the U.S., the idea of going Metric gained momentum. In 1965, the Senate passed legislation to direct the Secretary of Commerce to conduct a three-year study "to appraise the desirability, practicality and cost of a general conversion to use of the Metric system. . . in the U.S." \$500,000 was provided for the first year of the study; the total expected cost was to be \$ 2.5 million. The study was divided into three major sections:

- a) comparison of weights and measures in engineering, manufacturing, commerce, scientific areas and education,
- b) cooperation with other government agencies,
- c) cooperation with foreign governments. [\[11\]](#)

The House amended this legislation in committee, but it never reached the floor.

Finally, in 1968, the Metric Study Bill was signed into law by President Johnson. The study was to be conducted by the Bureau of Standards, an agency of the Department of Commerce. Public Law 90-472 authorized the Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans, to:

- 1) conduct a study on the impact of worldwide use of m.s. on the U.S.
- 2) determine the desirability of increased use of m.s. in the U.S.
- 3) study the feasibility of retaining customary measures in engineering.
- 4) estimate the costs and benefits for international trade, the military, commerce, manufacturing, scientific areas and education.

Many groups participated in this Metric study: 4000 companies, 53 federal agencies, hundreds of educators, and 1400 families. Others were weights and measures groups, small businesses, trade associations, consumer education groups, state and local government, farmers, federal and civilian agencies, Pentagon, professional societies, industries, labor unions, educators, international trade associations, advertising, publishing, law, medicine, public health, finance, insurance, transportation, highway, communications. All were asked opinions and estimates of costs and benefits. The choices and wording of questions were cleared by panels of special interest groups, convened by the Office of Management and Budget in a sample of 1400 families analyzed by the SRI, they found that the more they knew about m.s., the more they favored it. [12] A clear consensus, emerging from the study, was that 10 years should be devoted to the changeover. By then, the nation should be predominantly, if not exclusively, Metric.

Meanwhile, NASA directed that measured values be expressed in SI. [13] Science, medicine, pharmaceuticals and ball-bearings had gone Metric, and it was believed that if new setbacks in the U.S. international trade were to be avoided, the U.S. had to go Metric. [14] By then, multinational corporations, many of whom were U.S. owned, produced \$450 billions worth of goods and services, which was then half the U.S. GNP. [15]

In 1971, the three-year study, headed by lawyer D.V. Simone, was published, entitled, "A Metric America, A Decision Whose Time Has Come." As a result, the House of Representatives considered establishing a National Conversion Board. Proponents considered subsidies for workers and businesses that were faced with retooling costs. There was to be a two-step transition:

- 1) soft phase: engineering labels, road signs, measuring tools (length, weight and temperature), and a
- 2) hard phase: redesigning products to Metric measurements. [16]

Then, when Ford went Metric in 1973, Leo J. Bednarczyk, manager of Borg Warner Corp, a major supplier of transmission and brake components, commented: "The auto makers represent such a major part of our economy, that when they say 'Go Metric,' that's what will happen." Multinational integration of the auto industry, pushed by auto makers to switch to Metric, became inevitable. Adopting a system used by the rest of the world offered a chance for big savings, through worldwide standardization of parts. Shift to Metric reduced inventories for auto makers. The auto industry's move towards Metric made congressional action on transition almost superfluous. [17]

The House of Representatives tried to pass a "voluntary" 10 year conversion limit because of the urgency of doing something about the unfavorable U.S. balance of trade. By then 90% of the world had gone Metric. [18] Now, although the Metric system has not been fully accepted in the US, it is well on its way.

Why did it finally succeed after 200 years of floundering? Was it Sputnik and the competition with Russia that created the initial pressures? After Britain and its Commonwealth had adopted it, the U.S. really didn't have much choice any more if it wanted to remain in the world market. Was it the profit motive that gave the U.S. its secondary, mighty push towards metrification? Both in Britain and the US, the major initiative came from commerce and industry. The fear of losing out in an increasingly competitive market motivated industry to suggest Metric to the government.

Comparison with Spelling Reform

About 1350, in Chaucer's day spelling was phonetic, but ever since pronunciation and spelling have drifted apart. This was caused by the infiltration of foreign words into English and the great "vowel shift," the printing of dictionaries and the 1611 Bible, (since the word of God could not be

changed, not even the spelling could). [19]

Until 1870, the beginning of public education in England, spelling reform had been deemed unnecessary, because education, up to then, had been for the elite only. Soon thereafter, the first efforts for spelling reform were under-way. Cost of simplification has always been one of its obstacles - just as it had been in Metric conversion. In 1978 Metric conversion, including tool and product changes was estimated at \$52 billions. [20] The cost of spelling conversion would be a lot less since it would mainly mean an effort at re-education, printing and distribution, and translation problems. Competition and the profit motive gave Metric its impetus. How could the lesson be applied to spelling reform? Presently, English is widely used as the language of commerce. Would that automatically remain the same? Would its position be improved or lessened? No other widely used language has an irregular spelling like English. The Japanese have simplifying their spelling. [21] Suppose that Japanese or Russian should threaten to become the world language of the future, what would the loss in trade and prestige to America be then? It is proposed that by the year 2000, of the estimated 14 million engineers, only 2 million will be American, 2 million Russian, and the other 10 million Chinese, Indian, Japanese and African. [22]

To summarize the nature of the problems in both metrification and spelling reform, a table follows:

A Comparison

Metric

clear goal
agreement among proponents
very many years of effort
problem involves whole population of English speaking countries
successful pattern of:
1) groundswell
2) legislation
3) support and co-operation by executive branch
Britain, more dependent on world trade, takes lead
Initiative by industry
Stimulus through competition with Sputnik

Spelling

unclear goal
disagreement among proponents
many years of effort
same
pattern could be followed
Will US, with its many multi-national corporations, take the lead?
How can we get industry to take the initiative?
Stimulus through competition with third world?

Strategy for Spelling Reform

First and foremost, an agreement has to be made, by those who favor spelling reform, on the kind of system to be adopted. (Could we take advantage of the computer revolution, and compromise by horning in on the translation of speech to print?)

Secondly, the imagination of the English speaking public will have to be aroused, so that many of them feel that there is something to be gained from spelling reform, and there is an urgent need for it.

Thirdly, business has to be convinced that profits and savings could be made by adopting spelling reform.

A few sample arguments follow: A whole year of schooling (maybe 2) could easily be eliminated if teachers did not have to spend so much time on spelling and teaching of decoding in reading.

Children could start school at age 7, as they do in Sweden (Sweden only has 9 years of compulsory education, as do Germany and Japan) and much heartbreak could be avoided caused by frustrating attempts to teach reading to the immature. More money could be saved by abolishing the then unnecessary special reading teachers and programs, not to mention the enormous waste that now is created by our masses of illiterates or semi-illiterates. Jails are filled with dropouts, first from school, then from society. In 1977, 21 million Americans could not fill out an employment application. [23] Many children are accused of having dyslexia, yet childhood dyslexia is uncommon in Japan. [24]

Once the public and business are convinced of the advantages of spelling reform, government could coordinate the effort. A mini-dictionary (pamphlet) would have to go to each household, or person. Textbooks would have to be reprinted, and a time for the conversion period would have to be recommended.

Altho these are major tasks, spelling reform is not a hopeless proposition. The obstacles to Metric were no less formidable than those for spelling reform.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.9 p125 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1970 p19 in the printed version]

(In SPB, these items were the last part of the Readability article which is on p241 of the anthology.)

9. AN ENGLISH PHONEMIC READER

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

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

| umbrella moeralz, bie Alpha of the Plow, frum Pebbles on the Shore; in World English. | Umbrella Morals, by Alpha of the Plough, from: Pebbles on the Shore, in Traditional Orthography. |
|--|---|
| but ie leev him tuu 'iz unriechus komueningz. hee'z wun ov thoez peepl hoo hav what ie mae kaul an umbrella konshuns. yoo noe the sort ov person ie meen. hee'd never puut 'iz hand in anuther'z pokit, or forj a chek, or rob a til - not eeven if 'ee had the chans. but hee'l swap umbrelaz, or forget tuu riturn a buuk, or taek a riez out ov the raelwae kompani. in fakt hee'z a ththoroeli onest man hoo alouz hiz onesti the beni - fit ov the dout. | But I leave him to 'is unrighteous communings. He's one of those people who have what I may call an umbrella conscience. You know the sort of person I mean. He'd never put 'is hand in another's pocket, or forge a check, or rob a till - not even if 'e had the chance. But he'l swap umbrellas, or forget to return a book, or take a rize out of the railway company. In fact he's a thoroughly honest man who allows his honesty the benefit of the doubt. |
| p'raps hee taeks yuur umbrella at random frum the barber'z stand. hee noe hee kant get a wurs than 'iz oen; hee mae get a beter. hee duznt luuk at it veri kloesli until hee'z wel on 'iz wae. then, "deer me! ie'v taekun the rong umbrella, "hee sez, with an aer ov surpriez, for hee lieks reeli tuu feel that hee'z maed a mistaek. "ie, wel, it's noe ues goeing bak nou," hee'd bigun. "and ie'v left him mien!" | P'raps he takes your umbrella at random from the barber's stand. He knows he can't get a worse than 'is own; he may get a better. He doesn't look at it very closely until he's well on 'is way. Then, "Dear me! I've taken the wrong umbrella, he says, with an air of surprize, for he likes to feel that he's made a mistake. "I, well, it's no use going back now," he'd begun. "And I've left him mine! |
| it's thus that wee plae hied-n-seek withh our konshuns. | It's thus that we play hide-n-seek with our conscience. |

Transcribe the example in your system here: