

## Chapter 2

### CUT SPELLING: FORM AND CONTENT

#### 1 ON FIRST APPROACHING CS

##### 1.1 CS is easy to read

With three simple exceptions (the substitutions discussed in [Chapter 4](#)), CS uses only letters already found in the TO spelling of words. This has an important consequence: for readers familiar with TO, CS is easy to read from the start, as nearly all its spellings are recognizably similar to TO, and the majority indeed are unchanged. For such readers, the first impression of text in CS is more of TO studded with misprints than of a totally new orthography. While reformed spellings with substituted letters can give the impression of gross errors, spellings with occasional letters omitted are more likely to appear as small slips: compare the blatantly wrong-looking *\*receev* with the subtly simplified CS *receve*. A repeated observation has been that CS approximates more closely to the “essential form” of English words than TO does.

It is nevertheless undeniable that CS, like any change to the familiar appearance of things, does at first produce a certain ‘alienation effect’, whose severity varies from one reader to another. With some it is minimal, even pleasing, the effect being that of “streamlining”; but some initial reactions are less positive: one new reader described CS as appearing like “a shorn lamb” (the general shape is familiar, but the specific nudity shocks), and the term “mutilated” has been used more than once. However, with growing familiarity this “shock of the new” subsides, especially when the advantages of new forms are increasingly recognized. With a little practice readers quickly become used to CS, existing reading skills reassert themselves, and text in CS can be scanned fluently just as in TO, with only very occasional distraction from unusual forms. Readers have repeatedly remarked that in due course they have ceased even particularly to notice whether a text is written in CS or TO. And indeed, there is no sharp dividing line between CS and TO, and the two systems are in important ways compatible with each other (see §1.5–1.9 below).

CS has been found to create rather greater difficulties for non-native speakers, especially learners. If they are unsure of the identity and pronunciation of a word, they may not immediately be able to relate a CS

form to its TO equivalent; for instance the CS form *nyt* may not bring to mind TO *knight*, even if the more common *night* can be guessed at. In particular, when non-native speakers encounter an unknown form in CS, it is not always obvious whether it is an unchanged TO spelling which can be looked up in an ordinary dictionary, or whether it is a new CS form that needs to be related to a TO equivalent, which itself may or may not be known to the learner. Native speakers can, in fact, experience the same difficulty with words outside the range of their everyday vocabulary.

Two main lessons may be drawn from these experiences. One is a discovery noted by several readers of CS: because letters redundant to the representation of pronunciation are removed, text in CS comes much closer to the sound of words than does TO, and if a CS form appears puzzling at first glance, sounding out the spelling often reveals, to the reader's astonished delight, a perfectly familiar word. One non-native speaker, who was quite nonplussed on encountering CS, began reading his first text aloud, and instantly found that the meaning fell quite naturally into place; he commented that the experience gave him the feeling that CS embodied the "true essence" of the English language better than TO did.

The other main lesson is that, if any reformed spellings are to be introduced, greater attention needs to be given to the psychology of the learning and adaptation process than has been hitherto realized. Even a system such as CS, which is eminently readable from a basis of proficiency in TO, will not be without its problems. Research is therefore needed into the preparation which readers of different kinds — native and non-native speakers, young and old, highly and not so highly educated — may require to help them get to grips with new kinds of text.

## 1.2 Degrees of strangeness

The different patterns of letter cutting in CS create spellings with varying degrees of strangeness. In words of several syllables, such as CS *abbreviate*, *miraculus*, *benefitng*, the cuts may be scarcely noticed in fluent reading, indeed such forms often occur as misspellings and misprints in TO already.

Elsewhere, especially in shorter words such as TO *debt*, *gnaw*, *kneel*, the CS forms *det*, *naw*, *neel* represent the sound of the word quite unambiguously by standard TO symbol-sound correspondences, but the loss of a prominent letter from the familiar image of a word is at first disturbing.

Less familiar, though usually also less disturbing because these cuts mostly occur near the ends of words, are the strings of letters produced by

**Rule 2** (especially omission of unstressed vowel letters before L, M, N, R). Here spelling patterns arise that are rarely or never found in TO, as in the endings of CS *chapl, madm, fashn, propr* for TO *chapel, madam, fashion, proper*, not to mention the even longer consonant strings of forms like *covmnt, dommnt, consmnt, permnt, contnt*. These endings are central to the CS system and are used so often and so consistently that readers rapidly come to terms with them. Some words combine this Rule 2 cut with further cuts, producing such forms as CS *sycolojiel* (which also replaces G by J) for TO *psychological*, but here enough of the TO form is retained for recognition to be quite easy.

Hardest to recognize are those few words which lose several of their most prominent letters. Perhaps the most drastically curtailed are CS *y, no, onr, sudonm, werr* for TO *eye, know, honour, pseudonym, wearer*, but such extreme amputation is rare.

The few letters that are actually substituted in CS (F as in *tuf, fotograf*, J as in *jinjr, juj*, Y as in *sy, syt, syn, replyd*) may at first disturb the learner more than the loss of redundant letters, and that is why CS (unlike most previous spelling reform proposals) restricts substitution to just these three straightforward patterns. The benefits are considerable in terms of predictability and economy for both readers and writers, and since (unlike many other possible letter substitutions such as are discussed in [Chapter 6](#)) they entail virtually no complications, it is thought worth including them in CS. They also have the advantage that in some cases the basic cutting rules can then be applied with fewer exceptions than would otherwise be possible (eg, the -ED in TO *alleged* could not take its normal Rule 2 cut to -D unless the G were also changed to J, giving final CS *alejD*). The most striking advantage of the letter substitutions is perhaps that they enable that ultimate eccentricity of TO, the GH digraph, to be consigned to the historical dictionary, as the proper museum for such orthographic relics.

### 1.3 Homophones and homographs

Homophones (or heterographs, ie, different spellings for different meanings that have the same pronunciation, eg, *flour/flower, peace/piece*) and homographs (or heterophones, ie, different pronunciations for different meanings that have the same spelling, eg, *does* from *to do* and from *a doe*; and *tear* from *to tear* and *a teardrop*) are widespread features of TO which cause great confusion. CS goes some way towards resolving this confusion, but does not tackle the problem systematically.

Homophones differently spelt in TO only merge in CS if they differ by redundant letters. Therefore *vain/vane/vein*, which have no redundant letters, remain distinct in CS. Least disturbing of the merged homophones are those where each form is cut to create an entirely new spelling, as when TO *peace/piece* merge as CS *pece*. Some notable difficulties of TO are removed in this manner, as when the pairs *principal/principle*, *stationary/stationery* merge as CS *principl*, *stationry*. A little over 100 such sets of homophones are so merged by CS, as listed in [Chapter 6](#), §2.3.7 (2).

Slightly more disturbing are cases where a longer homophone loses redundant letters and thereby adopts the TO form with a shorter spelling; for instance TO *plaiice* adopts the form *place* in CS. Here there is some risk of an inexperienced reader of CS mistaking the meaning, but the context will normally make the meaning clear, as it does in speech: CS *I ordrd place for dinr* and *I reservd a place for dinr* are not likely to be confused. Some mergers of very common words may be disorienting at first, as when TO *hour*, *know*, *knot* become CS *our*, *no*, *not*, although the context (eg *two ours*, *no one nos*, *to tie a not*) again normally ensures there is no misunderstanding. Over 100 such sets of TO homophones are merged by CS too, as listed in [Chapter 6](#), §2.3.7 (3).

CS also often disambiguates TO homographs/heterophones. For instance the verb *it dos* is distinguished from the noun *two does*; the adjective *live* from the verb *to liv*; the verb *to present* from the noun and adjective *presnt*; *to ro a boat* from *a defnng row*; and *tear* as in *teardrop* from *ter* in the sense of *rip*.

#### 1.4 Writing CS

Whereas reading CS is mostly an easy, largely passive task for literate adults, beginning to write CS requires active effort and is initially a slow, deliberate process. Some users start by writing a text in TO, and then deleting the redundant letters; but although this represents useful study of the nature of redundancy, it is not recommended as a procedure for learning to write CS. Alphabetic writing is a multisensory activity, involving auditory recall of the sounds of words, co-ordination of muscular control of the hand, and visual scrutiny of the script as it appears on the paper or screen. The skilled writer's memory of the correct spelling of words resides in each of these senses, hearing, touch and sight. Mastering a new writing system requires the correct sequence of letters to be imprinted on the brain's control mechanism for all three senses, ready for simultaneous recall.

At least that is the theory. Unfortunately, writers in English have in

varying degrees failed to capitalize on the miraculous simplicity with which the alphabet is designed to allow these senses to be co-ordinated. From their earliest acquisition of literacy skills, English speakers have faced conflicting messages from their visual and auditory senses, inasmuch as the sight of the letters needed to spell a word all too often contradicts the sound of the word stored in their memory. Consequently, native speakers of English are mostly not used to relying on auditory recall as a guide to how they should write. Yet achieving automaticity in writing CS depends to a high degree on developing the phonic skills of alphabetic ear-eye co-ordination. For this reason, we may confidently predict that children receiving systematic initial literacy training in CS would take to it far more readily both than they now take to TO and than adults mostly now take to writing CS.

To master CS, adults need to concentrate on developing such phonic skills, rather than trying to remember what words look like in CS. It may be tentatively suggested that adult learners should deliberately start writing in CS very slowly indeed, considering as they go each letter in the TO form of a word, and omitting it if, by the rules of CS, it appears redundant. Having written the word hopefully without its redundant letters, they need to ask whether the new spelling represents the pronunciation of the word more clearly than the TO form did. [Part II](#) of this Handbook (*‘th systm demnstrated’*) is designed to teach the necessary techniques for this process.

Although slow to begin with, writing CS soon becomes faster, and the greater convenience of the more logical, economical CS forms then comes to be appreciated. Writing common words like *ar*, *hav* without final E (CS [Rule 1](#)) soon becomes second nature. The regular L, M, N, R endings produced by [Rule 2](#) are reassuringly predictable by comparison with the confusing TO variants; for instance, while the French-derived -ANT and Latin-derived -ENT endings of TO *assistant*, *consistent*, *non-existent*, *persistent*, *resistant* have to be learnt individually, the regular -NT endings of CS allow of no uncertainty in writing *asistnt*, *consistnt*, *non-existnt*, *persistnt*, *resistnt*. Similarly, the simplification of most doubled consonants (CS Rule 3) removes a major source of confusion, as when TO *innocuous/inoculate*, *commit/omit*, *embarrass/harass* resolve their differences in CS and align as *inocuus/inoculate*, *comit/omit*, *embaras/haras*.

This is perhaps an appropriate point to try and clarify, with regard to CS, a widespread misapprehension about TO. In recent decades it has been commonly asserted that, however irregular the spelling of the base forms of words may be in English, they are “morphophonemically stable”, which is to

say that, whatever suffixes are attached to base forms, their spellings remain unchanged (this assertion is often used as an argument against reforming TO). Yet the briefest of investigations into how base forms and affixes actually relate in TO is enough to refute this notion: how can we describe in terms amenable to the learner what happens to the final E of the base word *hinge* in its inflected forms *hinged*, *hinges*, *hinging*? or to the TT of *permitted*, *permitting* in *permit*, *permits* (and for that matter *permissible*)? Such variations find no support in the spoken language, and in CS they just melt away, with *hij*, *hijd*, *hijng*, *hijns*, and *permit*, *permitd*, *permitng*, *permits* (as well as *permisbl* — where the switch of T to S merely reflects spoken usage). CS, in other words, introduces morphophonemic stability where it was lacking in TO; but, as explained in §2.6 below, CS also removes morphemic stability where it is not matched by phonemic stability.

### 1.5 If in doubt, don't cut out

The compatibility of TO and CS, which ensures the reader can easily recognize words, also helps the writer. Adult learners of CS sometimes hesitate whether to omit a letter or not, and in that case they can apply a simple rule of thumb: ‘*if in doubt, don't cut out*’. It is safer to keep the familiar TO form than to risk making the wrong cuts, which would result in a spelling that no longer represented the pronunciation. For example, although CS cuts TO *accommodate* to *acomodate*, writers could, if in doubt, use the intermediate forms *accomodate*, *acommodate*: these forms are immediately recognizable and cannot be mispronounced, so little harm is done. (Of course, [Rule 3](#), which normally prohibits consonant doubling, is so easy to apply that few learners are likely to hesitate over *acomodate* anyway.) On the other hand, although the final ‘magic’ -E in *accommodate* is silent, it must not be cut, as *\*acomodat* would appear to rhyme with *habitat*. If adult learners sound out the words letter by letter and syllable by syllable as they write them, they should recognize that 1) the final syllable of *\*acomodat* would have the sound of *at*, 2) that we have in TO *accommodate* a case of ‘magic E’, as explained repeatedly and at length below, and as also seen in the word *date* which cannot be cut to CS *\*dat*, but 3), even in the event of uncertainty over those principles, it would be safer to leave the final E intact, by the rule ‘*if in doubt, don't cut out*’.

### 1.6 Flexibility needed for transitional period

This flexibility of leaving redundant letters in place if the justification for their cut is not clearcut, is not only useful to writers at times of uncertainty. It is an essential feature of the status of CS as, at this stage, a tentative general concept for spelling reform, rather than a definitive system. Some suggested CS forms which arise from strict application of the CS rules, are inevitably controversial, and until such time as CS forms (or some of them) might be adopted as standard spellings, it is important that users feel free not to make cuts which they think excessive. English spelling in the past has always been the product of a consensus, and it must be expected that it will be modernized, in some sense, by consensus in the future. The flexibility of CS is a feature that is also intended to encourage consensus.

It is furthermore inevitable that, if written English were modernized by removing redundant letters, they would disappear gradually, remaining in existing texts which continue in circulation, while being increasingly dropped from new texts. All readers would be accustomed to both old and new styles of writing, since they would coexist, overlap and intermingle in daily life. The choice between TO and CS forms must initially be flexible because for a long transitional period (perhaps a generation) many older writers would prefer to retain TO while younger ones adopted CS, and some publications would prefer traditional forms, while others moved quickly over to the new, simpler spellings. Individual writers would inevitably sometimes mix TO and CS, whether through inattention, or through failure fully to grasp the differences between the two systems. All these kinds of variation are inevitable, and should not be seen as a problem, since the new CS forms are designed to be compatible with TO. And if such variation suggests confusion, it must be remembered that confusion is one of the essential characteristics of TO, with all its alternative, uncertain and ambiguous forms, in addition to the innumerable misspellings it is responsible for.

At the same time, one might speculate that, given such alternatives as TO *accommodate* and CS *acomodate*, most writers would quite soon decide to use the shorter, less confusing CS forms exclusively. A survey carried out in 1995 showed, incidentally, that 68% of respondents believed that *accommodation* was spelt with fewer letters in TO already. In terms of social psychology, the natural tendency to omit redundant letters is here seen in full flood.

### 1.7 Full CS cuts nevertheless preferable

For all the permissive and flexible spirit that would characterize the CS reform for adults, they would nevertheless be encouraged to aim for the fully cut forms as given in the CS dictionary, because even those that learners may initially find disturbing constitute part of the coherence and consistency of the CS system. Even if learners have initial doubts in some cases, they will soon notice patterns and regularities in them, and begin to appreciate that these forms accurately represent normal, everyday pronunciation — the essential criterion for good spelling. Furthermore, the consistent use of CS forms would itself be a sign of ‘educated’ writing (ie, of understanding the rules), just as the ‘correct’ use of TO is today (although TO has no rules to speak of).

However necessary and desirable a flexible approach to the use of CS and TO forms may be, unthinking flexibility may result in inconsistencies. For instance, since cutting all the redundant letters from TO *honour* produces CS *onr*, one of the most radically ‘mutilated’ CS forms, the unwary learner may be tempted to keep one or more of its redundant letters. But while there would be no harm in writing *onor* or the present American form *honor*, the patterns of CS mean that keeping just the -UR from the -OUR ending should be avoided: not merely would *\*(h)onur* conflict with the present American form, but in CS the ending -UR is the final syllable of words like TO *picture* (CS *pictur*). The average learner could hardly be expected to take such details into account, and would therefore be better advised either to make no cuts at all in *hono(u)r*, or else to use the full CS form, *onr*, as given in the CS dictionary.

Learners should also beware of applying CS [Rule 3](#) (simplifying doubled consonants) to a word without also applying [Rule 2](#) (omitting unstressed vowel letters before L, M, N, R). For instance, as explained in Chapter 3, *written* is cut to *ritten* by [Rule 1](#), *ritten* is then further cut to *rittn* by Rule 2, and *rittn* is finally cut to standard CS *ritn* by Rule 3. But Rule 3 must not be applied without Rule 2, as this would produce the unacceptable form *\*riten*, suggesting the pronunciation of *righten*. Likewise, TO *dinner* can be cut to CS *dinr*, or by Rule 2 to the intermediate *dinnr*, but not to *\*diner*, which is a different word that remains uncut from TO.

Similarly, in the case of *often*, *soften* and *fasten*, *christen*, the T cannot be removed by Rule 1, unless the E is also removed by Rule 2. Otherwise the form *\*ofen* would parallel *open* with its long O, and *\*fasen* would parallel CS *hasen* with its long A.

### 1.8 Avoiding ambiguity, ensuring compatibility

Occasionally a letter is redundant to the representation of the sound of a word, but cutting it produces a form identical with another word which has a different pronunciation. To prevent ambiguity, CS may then keep the redundant letter, and the word is marked with a following asterisk in the dictionary to show that the CS rules have not been applied in the normal way. This problem occurs most strikingly with a few monosyllables ending in O: *toe\**, *tow\** cannot be cut to *to* since the differently pronounced preposition *to* is unchanged in CS; similarly *doe\**, *doh\**, *dough\** cannot be cut to the differently pronounced *do*, and *shoe\**, *hoe\** must be kept distinct from CS *sho*, *ho* (TO *show*, *who*). In the same way, certain types of word containing doubled consonants cannot be cut (compare *holly\*/holy*, *comma\*/coma*, *vellum\*/velum*); patterns where doubled consonants are preserved are discussed in detail in Chapter 3, under [Rule 3](#).

In some other cases the danger of ambiguity is slight, and the cut may still be made. CS thus cuts *tongue* to *tong*, whose plural then merges with TO *tongs* (some speakers pronounce TO *tongs/tongues* alike anyway). Slightly different is the TO/CS ambiguity of *add*: there is no direct merger when TO *added* is cut to CS *add*, since in CS the latter becomes *ad*; but readers coming straight from TO may initially stumble over a CS sentence such as *further ingredients ar add to th mixtur*, although the context will clarify the sense after a moment's reflection. The reduction of *could* to *cud* is felt to be justified by the extremely common pattern established with parallel *shud*, *wud* for three particularly troublesome TO forms, and by the relative rarity of TO *cud*.

Such decisions as to when mergers of heterophones are permitted in CS must however be open to debate, and will ultimately be arbitrary.

### 1.9 Coming to terms with shorter CS forms

Some learners find certain CS spellings disturbing at first, but come to accept them when they understand the reasoning behind them. A common case is the apparent removal of a syllable that in the learner's perception is pronounced. When TO *opera* appears as CS *opra*, learners sometimes object that the E is sounded (as indeed it may be in very careful speech); but one must then ask whether pronunciation by the CS spelling sounds wrong. Since *opera* is normally pronounced to rhyme with *copra*, the form *opra* represents the pronunciation quite adequately. Furthermore, the form *opera* is itself actually misleading, as it might be mispronounced to rhyme with *caldera* or *riviera*, or it might be misspelt *\*opara* by analogy with *Ankara* (just as *separate* is often misspelt *\*seperate*). It is therefore better to write *opra*, as even such an initially strange-looking CS form will, especially to a child or

foreigner, in fact be less misleading than the familiar TO form. Provided they adequately represent the way a word is commonly spoken, shorter spellings are preferable to longer ones, because they are simpler to learn, quicker to write, and less likely to be misspelt.

CS thus generally prefers the spelling that represents the most concise articulation of a word. This criterion enables choices to be made between different pronunciations in different accents. CS therefore recommends the shorter form *fertl*, representing the American rather than the British pronunciation which would require the TO form *fertile*; and conversely, CS recommends the shorter forms *ceremny*, *secretry*, representing British pronunciation, where American would perhaps prefer the TO forms *ceremony*, *secretary*. A similar balance is struck with Scottish pronunciations: such CS forms as *mor*, *wensday* may inadequately represent Scottish pronunciation, but the reduction of TO *thought* to CS *thot* reflects Scottish rhyming of *thought/hot*. The same reasoning allows CS to take *w* as representing *WH* as well as *w*.

Learners often initially jib at the strangeness of some very common CS forms. For instance, although the *w* in TO *who*, *whom*, *whose* is clearly redundant, the CS forms *ho*, *hom*, *hos* at first look disturbingly strange (the ‘shorn lamb’ syndrome). The omission of initial letters is always particularly disturbing (and would require a major shift of dictionary position), and writers may decide they wish to keep such letters. They will however naturally also want to spell consistently, and not sometimes to write *who* and sometimes *ho*, so they are advised take a decision of principle to omit all redundant initial letters, or none. This Handbook recommends that silent initial letters always be cut, as they so flagrantly breach the essential alphabetic principle of transparent sound-symbol correspondence.

### **1.10 Different needs of adults, beginners, professionals**

Adults learning CS might eventually wish to convert entirely from TO to CS, but hitherto they have merely wished to use CS for limited purposes, as a second writing system that is more convenient than TO, or just to explore a simplified spelling system. After some practice, writing CS is found easier than TO, since it is faster and poses fewer problems, and some adults therefore worry that they might forget how to write TO. This concern is natural, but experience so far suggests that an adult proficient in TO does not forget it, as the skill has become automatic and can therefore be recalled when required (like other skills, such as swimming or cycling). However, to minimize any risk of confusion, it is helpful for writers who want to retain

the ability to use both systems, to remind themselves explicitly each time they start to write, “Now I am going to use TO, not CS”, or vice versa.

Adult learners, whatever their purpose in learning CS, are in a quite different position from beginners acquiring their first knowledge of written English through CS, whether these would be native-speaking children in school, or students of English as a foreign language. Adults have TO as their starting point, and in the first instance they need to learn not so much the CS forms themselves as which TO letters to cut out. As they can use their discretion whether to write CS, or TO, or intermediate forms, they always have at least one spelling for each word available.

Learners acquiring their initial literacy skills on the other hand would have no prior knowledge of TO, and would learn the regularities of CS directly without considering the TO-CS cutting rules at all. Since the sound-symbol correspondences of CS are far more predictable than in TO, a solid basis in phonics would be a natural starting point, particular attention being given to the role of syllabic consonants (especially syllabic L, M, N, R), which are so much more important in CS than in TO. Initial learners would from the outset be given clear instructions as to the correct CS forms, and not be offered alternatives such as *honour/honor/onor/onr*, *opera/opra*, or *who/ho*. They would be taught the most regular, economical CS forms as standard, and would prefer them both because they are easier to use, and because teachers would present CS as modern and logical, where TO is antiquated and inconsistent. To such beginners, forms like *honour*, *opera*, *who* would seem as strange as the old forms *bytte*, *phantastic*, *shew* for *bit*, *fantastic*, *show* appear today to generations reared on TO. Such spellings as *honour*, *opera*, *who* would be curious, even grotesque, archaic forms found in old texts or used by older people.

The question of how professional producers of text such as printers, publishers, journalists and secretaries might convert to CS is a complex issue which cannot be examined in detail here. It must however be assumed that the transition would be a gradual, partly voluntary (though orderly) process extending over a number of years and initiated as a policy-decision by their employing organizations, with appropriate training provided.

## 2 THE LETTERS AND THEIR SOUNDS

### 2.1 The function of letters

The letters of the alphabet were invented to represent the sounds of which words are composed. If, as in some languages, each letter usually stands for the same sound, and each sound is usually written with the same letter, learning to read and write correctly is not difficult. The Roman alphabet, however, makes such simplicity hard to achieve in English, as it has too few letters to give a unique, unambiguous representation to each of the forty or more sounds of the language. Furthermore, English has scarcely even tried to use the letters to represent sounds consistently for nearly 1,000 years, and countless words today contain letters that conflict with pronunciation, some suggesting the wrong sound, and some standing for no sound at all. Consequently, learning to read and write English is uniquely difficult, and many people never properly master it. Mistakes involving redundant letters are especially frequent (poor spellers sometimes use CS forms when trying to write TO), and by cutting these letters out, CS is acting ergonomically, reinforcing the natural human tendency to use the alphabet as best suits our psychological processes and as it was designed to be used: to spell the sounds of words.

### 2.2 Standard sound-values of letters in English

There is a wide, if often tacit, consensus as to which sounds most letters theoretically represent in English, and, conversely, how most sounds are theoretically spelt. CS accepts these assumptions, and does not normally cut letters out when they are so used. One consequence of the shortage of letters in the alphabet, however, is that some letters, especially vowel letters, are used for more than one sound in English, indeed often for several sounds. Although this is a fundamental problem of English spelling, CS has to accept many of the resulting multiple (and frequently irregular) correspondences: it does not for instance attempt to ‘correct’ the spelling of the word *English* by writing *\*Inlish*. At the same time, there are some advantages for CS in these ambiguous correspondences, because they can cover a range of pronunciations in different accents; thus the fact that for the Scots *cot: caught* may be pronounced alike helps to justify cutting TO *thought* to CS *thot*, and the fact that some accents rhyme *bear/there/her* helps justify cutting TO *bear/there/their* to CS *ber/ther*.

When letters stand for a sound or sounds as listed below, they are not redundant and not normally cut in CS (though doubled consonants are normally written single).

**2.2.1 Consonants**

The following are basic standard values:

<b>B</b> as in <i>be</i>	<b>D</b> as in <i>do</i>	<b>F</b> as in <i>fee</i>	<b>H</b> as in <i>he</i>
<b>J</b> as in <i>jay</i>	<b>K</b> as in <i>key</i>	<b>L</b> as in <i>low</i>	<b>M</b> as in <i>me</i>
<b>N</b> as in <i>no</i>	<b>P</b> as in <i>pay</i>	<b>R</b> as in <i>ray</i>	<b>T</b> as in <i>to</i>

**V** as in *view*.

The following consonants involve complications:

**C** normally either as in *call* or as in *cell*, but sometimes with the value of SH, as in *ocean, special, ancient, suspicion*. CS accepts all three values as standard, unless an alternative spelling with K or S is available.

**G** as in *go*, but in TO G also often represents the sound of J as in *gem*; CS removes this ambiguity by substituting J as recommended in Chapter 4, and writing *jem*. It would then be appropriate to rename the letter G as *gee* (with a hard /g/), in place of its present name *jee*.

**Q** as in *quit* stands for the sound /k/, although that sound is more often spelt with K and/or C. CS accepts Q as a standard spelling, unless an alternative with C or K is available.

**S** stands for the voiceless consonant in *so*; but it is also often voiced as /z/, as in *owes*; this is a very common value between vowels, in plural endings, and in verb inflections. CS accepts both values for single S, but only accepts the voiceless value for SS.

**W** (also called a semi-vowel) as in *we* and *why*. Some accents distinguish W, WH, voicing the former but giving the latter a voiceless, aspirated pronunciation. The digraph WH has no place in CS, which simplifies the spelling by writing just W for both TO patterns (*we, wy*).

**X** is sometimes voiceless, as /ks/, as in *ox*, and sometimes voiced, as /gz/ as in *exact*; CS accepts both values for X.

**Y** as in *yes*; when it has this value, Y is also called a semi-vowel. For other values of Y, see under §2.2.2 *Vowels* below.

**Z** as in *zoo*, although that consonant sound is more often written S.

**2.2.2 Vowels**

All vowel letters have several standard values, and CS normally keeps them when they are required to show the values seen in the following words:

<b>A</b> as in <i>at, baby, all, are, calm</i>	<b>E</b> as in <i>egg, me, her</i>
<b>I</b> as in <i>it, kind, sir</i>	<b>O</b> as in <i>on, no, or</i>

**U** has up to 5 values in some accents, as in *but, put, truth, unit, fur*

**Y** has two values as a vowel, as in *pity, reply*, in addition to its value as the consonant or semi-vowel in *yes*.

### 2.3 Letters in combination (digraphs)

Another result of the shortage of alphabetic symbols for the sounds of English is that letters are often combined as ‘digraphs’ or occasionally as ‘trigraphs’ to represent certain sounds, especially those for which there is no single letter. Several of these combinations are taken as standard and kept in CS.

#### 2.3.1 Consonant digraphs

There are a few consonant sounds which no single letter can represent; many of them are spelt with a consonant letter followed by H:

CH as in *chew*

SH as in *she*

TH as the initial sound in *this* (voiced) and *thin* (voiceless)

NG as the final sound in *long*, and medially, with the G sounded separately, as in *longer*

(ZH) This consonant has no standard spelling: in *rouge* it is spelt GE, in *Jacques J*, in *vision SI*, in *equation TI*, in *seizure ZU*, and in Russian names we find the digraph ZH (*Brezhnev*). CS accepts all these spellings for ZH.

(CS would also accept DG as in *bridge* as a standard digraph value, if the G > J substitution rule described in Chapter 4 did not apply. With this substitution, CS writes *brij*.)

#### 2.3.2 Vowel digraphs

Since there are about as many vowel sounds in English as consonant sounds (round about 20), but only six letters to represent them (A, E, I, O, U, Y), many vowel digraphs are used, some for more than one sound. Furthermore, while most consonant sounds have only one standard spelling, some vowel sounds have several. The most important which are normally retained in CS are the following:

AE, AI, AY, EI, EY for the vowel in *Gael*, *vain*, *way*, *vein*, *they*

AU, AW for the vowel in *taut*, *law*

EA, EE, EI, IE for the long E vowel as in *meat*, *meet*, *deceit*, *field*

IE for the long I vowel as in *tie*, except that, as explained in [Chapter 4](#), the -IED in the endings of verbs such as *simplified* becomes -YD (*simplifyd*). The letters -IGH usually have this value in TO, but Chapter 4 also explains how CS removes GH entirely, replacing this -IGH by Y (TO *night*, CS *nyt*).

OA as in *boat*

OI, OY as in *join*, *joy*

OO, EW as in *shoot*, *soot*, *chew*    OU, OW as in *cloud*, *cow*.

‘**Magic**’ E digraphs for the long values of A, E, I, O, U are split by a consonant letter (or occasionally two) between the long vowel and the final, silent, so-called ‘magic’ E, as in *late, eve, wine, pole, flute, waste, title, scruple*. Although silent, the final E is an essential part of these split digraphs, and therefore not redundant and not normally cut in CS (except sometimes when TO indicates the long value of the vowel twice—see §2.4 below). This non-redundant silent E can also occur medially (eg, before suffixes as in *later, solely*), and is not cut then either. However ‘magic’ E is not required in CS to indicate preceding long Y, since in CS Y by itself is as far as possible given the long value which it has in TO *my, hygiene* etc; TO *style, type* can therefore be cut to CS *styl, typ*, aligning these words with their E-less derivatives *stylistic, typography* etc (see Chapter 3, §E.1.2.6, and Chapter 4, §5 for further details).

#### 2.4 Simplifying doubled spellings for long E

As noted above, long vowels are sometimes doubly indicated in TO, with both a digraph and a following ‘magic’ E, as in *praise, loathe, loaves, hooves*. In these circumstances CS retains whichever vowel letter best aligns the word with wider spelling regularities, and cuts the other vowel letter (giving *prase, lothe, loavs, hoovs*). Long E, for which TO uses a confusing variety of spellings, as in *lease/geese/fleece, Chinese/please/cheese/freeze/ seize, eve/leave/sleeve/receive/believe*, is particularly prone to such double indication, and in all these cases, CS regularizes with ‘magic’ E: *lese, gese, flece, plese, chese, freze, seze, leve, sleve, receve, beleve* (see Chapter 3, Rule 1, for details). On the other hand, when an L follows the consonant, Rule 2 is normally applied, so that *beadle, beetle, eagle, easel, feeble, needle, steeple, weasel, weevil* are regularized as CS *beadl, beetl, eagl, easl, feebl, needl, steep, weasl, weevl*; in this way four spelling variations are reduced to just two, whereas if the ‘magic’ E were kept, three variations would remain. The unique TO form *people* remains unique, though less outrageously aberrant, as CS *peple*.

#### 2.5 Keeping non-standard sound-values of letters

Many words use letters with sound-values other than the standard equivalences listed in §2.2, 2.3, 2.4 above. For instance, A in *any* is usually heard as short E; C in *cello* as CH; D in *guessed* as T (as in its homophone, *guest*); E in *pretty* as I; F in *of* as V; O in *mother* as U; SSI in *passion* and TI in *ration* as SH; U in *busy* as I. Though their sound-values are aberrant, these

letters are needed because they do represent sounds, and the rules of CS do not allow them to be changed: despite the aberrant U, CS cannot cut *busy* to *bsy*.

## 2.6 Morphemic variation

A feature of CS which has aroused some controversy is its differentiation of some morphemes. For instance, it has been objected that CS should not cut the *o* in TO *symbol* (CS *symbl*) because of the *o* in *symbolic*, and *principal* should not be merged with *principle* (CS *principl* for both words) because it can be related to *principality*. However, as already observed in the case of inflections under §1.4 above, TO itself often flouts this principle of morphemic stability, as in the variant vowel spellings of *speak/speech*, *high/height*, *enjoin/injunction*, and in the variant endings of *nobility/noble* (not *\*nobil*) and *comparative/comparison* (not *\*comparason*). CS gives higher priority to the alphabetic principle, that spellings should represent pronunciation, than to any principle (such as enunciated by Noam Chomsky) of inviolability of morphemes. In other words, morphemes are better not preserved in spelling if they are not heard in pronunciation, ie, each word should be spelt according to its own pronunciation, and not according to the pronunciation of a different word, however closely related the latter may be. Despite the stressed *o* in *symbolic*, CS therefore writes *symbl*, whose final syllable can be neither misspelt nor mispronounced; nor can the -*BOL* of TO *symbol* then be confused with the -*BAL* of TO *cymbal*, since that is cut in parallel fashion to *cymb*l.

## 2.7 Alternative TO spellings

One of the curiosities of TO is that, although it prescribes rigid (if often illogical) spellings for the majority of words, a large number have acceptable alternative forms (eg, *gaol/jail*, *organise/organize*, *yogurt/yoghourt*). Many of these alternatives offer a choice between a simpler, more predictable spelling, and one that is less so. An improvement, quite independent of CS, that could with very little disturbance be made to English spelling would be firmly to recommend the simpler, more regular of the alternative forms as the only approved ‘correct’ spelling. Such a decision would in many cases have the advantage of removing discrepancies between American and British spelling conventions (eg, British *favour*, whose spelling now misleadingly parallels its non-rhyme *devour*, could be cut to the American form *favor*, as is in fact required by CS). Chapter 3 notes numerous TO alternatives, and states a preference for whichever is the simpler and more regular, independently

of whether such a preference is also called for by the cutting rules (eg *jail* is preferred to *gaol*). Similarly, the CS dictionary specifies many American forms (eg *skeptic* for British *sceptic*) without further comment.

### 3 LEARNING PROCESSES

#### 3.1 Three categories: rules and exercises

To master CS, the adult learner has to appreciate which letters found in the TO spelling of a word are not needed to show how it is pronounced. The three main categories of redundant letter (as listed in [Chapter 1](#)) are:

- 1 those unconnected with pronunciation (like B in *debt*)
- 2 certain unstressed vowels

(like the last vowel letter in *principal/principle* or *adapter/adaptor*)

- 3 doubled consonants (like the CC, MM in *accommodate*).

Their removal produces the CS forms *dout*, *principl*, *adaptr*, *acomodate*. The cutting rules for each category are set out respectively in Sections [1](#), [2](#) and [3](#) of Chapter 3, and [Part II](#) of the Handbook provides structured exercises for recognizing redundant letters category by category.

#### 3.2 Identifying short vowels

Central to the phonology of English are the half dozen so-called short vowels (the exact number depending on accent), as in *pat*, *pet*, *pit*, *pot*, *put/putt*. Apart from some ambiguity over U, these sounds are easy to recognize, easy to spell, and, if TO spells them with redundant letters, these are easy to cut: the A is clearly redundant in *head*, as are the E in *hearth*, I in *friend*, O in *leopard*, and U in *build*. However, because the O in words like *come*, *done*, *love* has an aberrant value (being pronounced like a short U), some learners do not immediately realize that it nevertheless represents a short vowel, as opposed to the long O in *home*, *tone*, *drove*, *move* with their final ‘magic’ E (although in *move* the O also has an aberrant sound value, being pronounced like a long U). The non-‘magic’ E is thus redundant after the short vowel in *come*, *done*, *love* (CS *com*, *don*, *lov*), but not after the long vowels in *home*, *tone*, *move*, etc.

#### 3.3 ‘Magic’ long vowel indicators beside E

Learners soon recognize most redundant letters, but to begin with they sometimes assume that every silent letter must be redundant. Some silent letters, however, are needed because they indicate how another letter is pronounced, often a preceding long vowel. As seen in §2.3 above, the ‘magic’ E in *wine* is silent, but it is not redundant because it distinguishes the

long I of *wine* from the short I of *win*. However, it is not only final E which can have this ‘magic’ effect of showing that a preceding vowel is long: the B in *climb*, *comb*, *tomb* also does so, telling us these words do not rhyme with *him* or *from*; and this B is therefore not redundant. The same is true of the C in *indict* and the I in some -ING inflections: TO *hopping*, with its short vowel, is cut to CS *hopng*; TO *soaping* with its long O is similarly cut to *soapng* since the long O is indicated by the OA digraph; but *hoping* must keep its I, as it has the ‘magic’ function of showing that the preceding O is long, so distinguishing *hopng/hoping*.

### 3.4 Matching against shorter TO forms

A useful way to identify redundant letters is often to compare rhyming words. If some have extra letters, these are likely to be redundant. For instance, since *beauty* rhymes with *duty*, CS can write *buty*; and since *frontier* rhymes with *souvenir*, CS can write *frontir*. Simpler TO spellings of rhyming words are given in brackets in Chapter 3 when they offer a model for the CS form. Similarly, when American and British spellings differ, one (usually the American) may be shorter and therefore also offers a model for CS; CS thus prefers American *ax*, *traveling*, *worshiped* (final CS *ax*, *travlng*, *worshipd*) to British *axe*, *travelling*, *worshipped*, but British *fulfil*, *skilful* to American *fulfill*, *skillful*.

### 3.5 Too much to learn?

Faced with the many cutting patterns listed in this Handbook, some adult learners may feel CS is too complicated to learn. However, they should not be discouraged, as mastering CS is rather a matter of learning to think critically about TO than of learning large numbers of rules or patterns. What adult learners are actually doing when they first try out CS is not so much applying laboriously memorized rules and patterns, as simply using their knowledge of TO and asking themselves, “Which letters are redundant according to the three cutting rules?”. The technique is not so much one of learning new spellings as of learning how to pare down familiar old ones.

Another reason for not worrying about the apparent complexity of CS is its flexibility and its compatibility with TO. This means that anyone writing CS who only cuts out some of the redundant letters from the TO forms of words will normally still be writing perfectly comprehensible English — indeed readers unfamiliar with CS will find such intermediate spellings less strange than full CS cuts. (But see §1.8 above for inadmissible intermediate forms.) Failure to cut out all possible redundant letters should therefore not

normally be regarded negatively, as making ‘mistakes’ in using CS. Instead, the omission of each redundant letter should be thought of positively, as a small victory over the absurdities of TO. Every redundant letter cut out is one more weed removed from the overgrown garden that written English has degenerated into over the centuries.

Furthermore, the apparent complexity of the cutting patterns described in this Handbook is in a very real sense illusory: not merely can the cutting patterns be defined in terms of just three basically simple rules, but their apparent complexity is a reflection of the complexity of TO rather than of CS. When CS reduces the ten variant endings of *burglar*, *teacher*, *amateur*, *Cheshire*, *doctor*, *valour*, *centre*, *murmur*, *injure*, *martyr* to a uniform R (giving *burglr*, *teachr*, *amatr*, *Cheshr*, *doctr*, *valr*, *centr*, *murm*, *injr*, *martr*), the Handbook lists the ten endings separately for the sake of completeness, but the learner trying to write CS only has to remember the invariant R.

These remarks are intended to reassure adults already to some degree proficient in TO. Above all, however, learners should remember the major positive advantages that CS offers them, as explained in Chapter 1: its economy and freedom from many of the greatest traps of TO.

### **3.6 How difficult would CS be for initial learners?**

While some experience has already been gained of how adult learners tackle CS, no comparable experience is yet available for initial learners, whether children with no previous literacy skills or foreign learners with no prior knowledge of English. In the absence of experimental evidence, any remarks about how initial learners might cope with CS must to that extent be conjectural.

For initial learners facing written English for the first time, the task of mastering CS would be quite different from that faced by adult learners. Initial learners would not have to learn how to cut TO, but merely how to master CS as a new writing system, and the hurdles they would face must be assessed by comparison with the hurdles presented by TO. CS is necessarily much easier than TO, because it is essentially just TO simplified by removal of many of the latter’s most troublesome features. What initial learners would have to do would be to internalize the more regular symbol-sound and sound-symbol correspondences of CS, along with those ambiguities and irregularities which CS retains from TO because they do not involve redundant letters.

A possible difficulty, suggested by some teachers, concerns the new strings of consonant letters that arise in CS. Even in TO many children in the

first stages of literacy acquisition find consonant strings like the STR- and -NGTHS in *strengths* hard to analyze, and it is then asked, how they would manage with such extreme instances as CS *implmntng*, with its eight successive consonants. It must firstly be remembered that CS also reduces consonant strings (GH disappears altogether for instance), as when TO *eight, chronic, consumption* become CS *eit, cronic, consumption*. Secondly, literacy teaching would be able to exploit phonic techniques in CS far more effectively than is possible in TO and teachers would therefore be able to rehearse the sounding-out of such strings with their pupils. In the extreme case of a word like CS *implmntng* (which only older learners would be likely to encounter anyway), the technique would involve morphemic as well as phonic analysis. Learners would be shown from an early stage how certain common affixes can be attached to and removed from words, and they would immediately see that the final -NG of *implmntng* can be separated from its base, and that the base itself has the common ending -MNT. Particular practice would be needed in sounding out the many syllabic L, M, N, R spellings, which are such a feature of CS but are rather rare in TO. Because most of the new consonant strings of CS result from the removal of confusing vowel letters, it is anticipated that the regular patterning even of words like *implmntng* would be easier to master than the equivalent TO forms.

### 3.7 Assessing backwards compatibility

The question of how easily initial learners of CS would be able to read TO (the question of ‘backwards compatibility’) must also be considered, though here again the answer is partly conjectural. In general, TO would be seen as a grotesque historical relic, whose forms appear much as the spelling of 16th century English does to today’s adults educated in TO. By and large today’s adults can still decipher 16th century English with its many additional letters and various letter substitutions, but without practice they may initially hesitate over certain forms, such as *certeinellie, sauadge, vncouered* for modern *certainly, savage, uncovered*. A new generation of learners schooled in CS should still be able to decipher the TO forms of most words (TO *receipt, hypothetical, accommodate* would be no problem to readers who had learnt CS *receit, hypotheticl, acomodate*). They might, however, hesitate or need some guidance over GH words, for instance, or words which lost an initial letter in CS: if they had learnt the CS forms *hyt, nolej*, how easily would they recognize TO *height, knowledge*? Such problem cases would however be few, and could be specially learnt and practised.

Backwards compatibility is a most important feature of the relationship between CS and TO: no spelling reform can risk a situation where a generation of new, reformed spellers cannot easily read what older people write, or what earlier texts say. Most previous English spelling reform proposals appear not to have considered this point.