

# **NEW SPELLING**

BEING PROPOSALS FOR  
SIMPLIFYING THE SPELLING OF ENGLISH  
WITHOUT THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW LETTERS

BY

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AND

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*SIXTH EDITION*

Revised by Professor Daniel Jones and Professor Harold Orton

Foreword by Professor Gilbert Murray

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Orthographiam, id est formam rationemque scribendi a grammaticis inatitutam non adeo custodit: ac videtur eorum sequi potius opinionem qui perinde scribendum ac loquamur existiment. Suetonius, de Vita Augusti.

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## **FOREWORD**

**(TO THE FIFTH EDITION, 1940)**

The first and second editions of the Proposals were printed for private circulation among the members of the Simplified Spelling Society. The fourth edition was a reprint of the third. In its present edition the book has been completely revised and in part rewritten; and it is now for the first time made available to the general public.

During the later years of his life Sir George Hunter devoted a great deal of his attention to the cause of Spelling Reform, appointing a personal secretary, Mr. T. R. Barber, to look after this side of his work. During this period the work of the Simplified Spelling Society was carried out almost exclusively by Sir George and Mr. Barber, who were tireless in their efforts to win public support for the reform. It is impossible to speak too highly of the valuable work done by Sir George and by Mr. Barber, upon whom, in large measure, rested the responsibility of carrying out the work.

Upon the death of Sir George Hunter in 1937 Mr. Barber, who had kept in constant touch with the members of the Simplified Spelling Society's committee, called the committee together in London; and the work of the Society was immediately resumed. The committee decided that its first task should be to produce a new edition of the Proposals, and in this it was encouraged by the offer of Mr. I. J. Pitman, the grandson of Sir Isaac Pitman—one of the early fathers in the cause of Spelling Reform—to be responsible for the publication. Mr. Ripman, the surviving author of the original editions,

placed his work unreservedly in the hands of the committee; and a sub-committee was appointed to supervise the preparation of the new edition. This sub-committee was composed of the following—

Professor Lloyd James,  
 Professor Daniel Jones,  
 Mr. Harold Orton,  
 Mr. I. J. Pitman,  
 Mr. Walter Ripman,

with myself as Chairman and Mr. Barber as Secretary. Mr. Peter Hadley, of Sir Isaac Pitman &- Sons, Ltd., was mainly responsible for seeing the work through the Press.

As the work of revision proceeded it became increasingly evident that much of it would need rewriting in the light of recent developments and experience; this work was entrusted to Mr. Harold Orton, of the University of Sheffield, and I am glad to express my appreciation of his contribution to our labours.

GILBERT MURRAY

OXFORD

*May, 1940*

#### PREFACE

(TO THE SIXTH EDITION, 1948)

This edition is in the main a reprint of the Fifth Edition of 1940. A certain number of necessary corrections and emendations have, however, been made (especially on pp. 41, 47, 52, 55-57, 59, 65, in Chapter III and in Appendices 1, 11, IV, VI and VII), and some additional illustrative examples have been inserted in various places.

D.J.  
 H.O.

*January, 1948*

## PREFACE

(TO THE FIFTH EDITION) 1940)

Since the First Edition of this book appeared thirty years ago, much has happened in the world. The first Great War is fading into history, leaving the burden of its consequences to be borne by a generation which hardly remembers it. And among its casualties is to be reckoned the Simplified Spelling Society, that ardent band of scholar-reformers who laboured to achieve an end which they believed to be for the general good: they, like hosts of others, abandoned their cause for the greater claim of their country, and the Simplified Spelling Society sank into obscurity. Since then many of its stalwart champions, who bore the burden during the heat of the day, have died, among them Skeat, Furnivall, Lord Bryce, Andrew Carnegie, Walter Leaf, Sir James Murray, Charles E. Grandgent, Thomas Lounsbury, and Sir George Hunter, the veteran ship-builder, who in the latter years of his life kept the cause alive with his zeal, and indeed with his money. But a cause supported by so much earnestness and depth of conviction cannot die; and whatever was to be said for Simplified Spelling a quarter of a century ago, there is more to be said for it to-day. Our language is not only the mother tongue of millions scattered all over the globe, but it is rapidly becoming the second language of millions of others. It is no longer the prerogative of those who live in the narrow confines of these islands, as it was in the days when the general principles of its orthography were laid down. It has become, possibly to an extent that even we fail to estimate, the language of the world, and one of the main instruments in human relations. This, however

much it may give us cause for elation, should also give us pause: for a language which spreads beyond the confines of its birthplace is always in danger of losing its entity. To-day, however, when the spoken word is radiated throughout the whole world; when communication depends upon oral rather than upon written language; when telephone lines and wireless beams make speech with the furthestmost parts a matter of daily experience; there is hope that English will not follow the way of Chinese and Latin, great cultural languages which split into mutually unintelligible dialects. To us, brought up in the birthplace of our language, its history and its traditions are amongst our most cherished treasures. The idiosyncrasies of its spelling are as dear to us as are our ancient landmarks and national monuments. Its visual appearance is almost sacred, for there is hardly a feature of it that is not rich in history. If its sound had withstood the passage of time as stubbornly as its appearance, all would now be well: we should speak as we write, and write as we speak. But alas! sound is sound, and sight is sight.

To expect the hundreds of millions of English speakers, present and to come, in all parts of the world, to be burdened indefinitely with our traditional English spelling is to expect too much. Moreover, if we can give them a visual English that is more in accord with the spoken language than the present orthography, we shall have gone a long way towards removing one, at least, of the causes that lead to disintegration. A rational phonetic spelling will do much to steady our language in the perilous seas upon which it has embarked, for, in these days of universal literacy, the visual language exercises a remarkable influence on the spoken language. It is the one constant standard, common throughout the world: the more

phonetic it is, the more uniform will pronunciation tend to be. When men first began to write, they wrote as they spoke; now they tend to speak as they write—and we cannot blame them.

And so it comes about that there now appears, after a lapse of thirty years, despite the outbreak of another war, the present edition of a remarkable pamphlet, first printed in 1910. It takes up once again the cause of Simplified Spelling, and -presents to a new generation the linguistic considerations that are involved in a scientific approach to the problem.

Scores of schemes of simplified spelling have been invented: how many of the inventors have studied the facts of the problem as minutely as the authors of this booklet I should not care to estimate. But now that the facts are available, there is no excuse for future inventors to rush in. This booklet is the Spelling Reformer's Vade-Mecum; it is one of the most remarkable statistical investigations into' English spelling ever undertaken, and must be reckoned with by all those interested in the subject.

The suggestions put forward in this booklet are to be regarded as suggestions merely, and not as *ex cathedra* pronouncements. Those who put them forward are ardent champions of our language, sincere in their reverence of its ancient monuments and its historical traditions, and anxious not only for the preservation of its past, but for the welfare of its future.

They humbly suggest that the time has come for those who love our English language to consider whether zeal for the past may not now be tempered with anxiety for the future.

A. LLOYD JAMES





## CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD TO THE FIFTH EDITION	3
PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION	4
PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION	5
INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER I	
CONSONANT SOUNDS	19
Consonants not requiring change-Consonants requiring change-Digraphs-Double Consonant Letters-Mute Consonant Letters-Summary of Suggested Spellings of Consonant Sounds	
CHAPTER II	
VOWEL SOUNDS	40
Short Vowels-Long Vowels and Diphthongs-Mute Vowels-Summary of Suggested Spellings of Vowel Sounds-Vowels in Unstressed Positions	
THE NEW SPELLING IN BRIEF	
(1) ARRANGED ON A PHONETIC BASIS	67
(2) ARRANGED ON AN ALPHABETIC BASIS	68
CHAPTER III	
THE EFFECT OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES ON WORD FORMATION	69
Prefixes-Endings-Changes in the Stem	
CHAPTER IV	
THE EFFECT OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES ON THE RULES OF ACCIDENCE.	77
Inflection of Nouns and Verbs-Plurals in <i>-en</i> and Irregular Plurals-Adjectives-Adverbs-Verb: form in <i>-ing</i> -Verb: formation of past tense and of past participle of weak verbs-Verb: formation of past tense and of past participle of strong verbs	

	PAGE
CHAPTER V	
WORDS NOW DIFFERING IN SPELLING TO WHICH THE PROPOSED CHANGES WOULD GIVE THE SAME FORM	83
CHAPTER VI	
THE SPELLING OF COMPOUND WORDS	86
CHAPTER VII	
THE SPELLING OF PROPER NAMES	88
CHAPTER VIII	
FOREIGN WORDS	91
CHAPTER IX	
SPECIMEN OF NEW SPELLING	92
APPENDIX I: DIGRAPHS	99
APPENDIX II: WORD-SIGNS	101
APPENDIX III: THE SPELLING OF THE VOWELS IN <i>New, Food, Good</i>	103
APPENDIX IV: <i>i</i> FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER VOWEL	105
APPENDIX V: USE OF THE DIRERESIS.	109
APPENDIX VI: CONTRACTIONS, APOSTROPHE	110
APPENDIX VII: WORDS SPELT WITH <i>or</i>	111
APPENDIX VIII: PLACE NAMES IN NEW SPELLING	115
APPENDIX IX: FURTHER STATISTICAL DATA	119
APPENDIX X: THE SYSTEM OF THE S.S.A.	128
INDEX	129

## INTRODUCTION

The following suggestions for a systematic simplification of English spelling proceed on the assumption that no simplification can be of much practical value which is *not* systematic-which does not reduce the existing chaos to something like order. The utilitarian aim being economy of the time and labour of learners (whether children or foreigners) by the substitution of uniformity for confusion, the value of any simplification must be assessed according to both the economy it is able to effect and the measure of its consistency. If the probable average saving were only a few days, or even a few weeks, it is doubtful whether it would repay the trouble and disturbance of change. Slight simplifications are no doubt useful as a beginning, but cannot be an end. The practical and ultimate problem is to arrive at such a system as shall mean a substantial and unmistakable gain to the learner by rendering the teaching of reading a reasonable process, and diminishing by, say, a year the average time devoted to spelling. All authorities agree that this ought to be possible.

On the other hand, the best of systems would be useless which had no chance of establishing itself in popular usage. Many such systems exist already. We are not aware, however, of any previous proposals for systematic simplification which do not involve far more numerous and startling departures from current usage than those suggested in this book.

The rules and exceptions of the system here suggested can be set forth in a single page of type (see p. 67). The

rules, of course, consist simply in the statement that such and such sounds are represented by such and such letters or combinations of letters. The exceptions form a very limited number of easily-remembered departures from strict rule, due to motives to be presently explained.

We are quite aware that our suggestions are at many points open to criticism, and possibly to amendment. We may not always have chosen the most convenient symbol for a given sound; while a proposed exception may prove to be injudicious or unnecessary. But we are thoroughly convinced that no *less* systematic simplification would effect the necessary economy of time and labour. In other words, our concessions to current usage go as far as it is possible to go without creating difficulties, inconsistencies, embarrassments, and imposing arbitrary burdens on the learner's memory. Some of our individual suggestions may be mistaken, but we do not believe that they err on the side of radicalism. On the contrary, we think it not improbable that, if this or a similar system should come into use, more than one of our concessions to conservatism would in practice soon be abandoned. And it may here be noted that, even if the exceptions maintained their ground in common use, an intelligent teacher or examiner would never give a child a bad mark for ignoring a conventional abbreviation and writing a form in full. He would reserve his censure for spellings which showed either a bad ear or a faulty pronunciation.

The following principles underlie the suggested scheme of New Spelling-

(i) Not to attempt the introduction of any new character.

(ii) To introduce no new diacritics. All detached marks are troublesome in writing; even the dotting of *i*'s and the

crossing of *t*'s interrupt the even movement of the pen. The occasional use of the diæresis is justifiable, but it is employed as sparingly as possible.

(iii) To avoid, as far as possible, combinations of letters which are not already in use or more or less familiar. The exceptions which we have found to be unavoidable are the digraphs *dh* (see p. 29), *zh* (see p- 32), *aa* (see pp. 45, 46), *ae* (see p. 54), and *uu* (see pp. 51, 52).

(iv) To make each symbol (letter or digraph) as far as possible *self-sufficient*, so that its significance should not depend on any other letter; as when, in the current spelling, a doubled consonant shortens, or a final *e* (following a consonant) lengthens, a preceding vowel.

(v) To economize in the use of letters wherever it seems possible without ambiguity or inconsistency. As will be discussed later, the common argument that simplification would save quantities of material (in paper, printing ink, etc.) is not entirely applicable unless a new alphabet providing a single symbol for each sound is adopted. So long as digraphs have to be employed, the economy cannot be very great.

(vi) To depart as little as possible from the current spelling, appropriating, where possible, to each sound the symbol now most commonly used to represent it. We have thus been able to retain unaltered an immense number of words, and, in a still larger number, to suggest only a slight Alteration. This "principle of least disturbance" needs no apology. It is important in two aspects: not only to make the change as easy as possible for a generation which has learnt the old spelling, but to enable the new generations to read old books with the least possible trouble. The difficulty would, in fact, be trifling.

(vii) To make allowance for existing divergences of pronunciation. If, say, Southern English alone had been

considered, the process of simplification could have been largely extended. In order, however, to appeal to speakers of English generally, certain features have been retained which, while familiar to the Southern English speaker, represent distinctions of pronunciation not found in his speech. Thus many Southern English speakers make no distinction between *w* and *wh*, or between *or* (before consonant) and *au*. Similarly the signs *-nch*, *-nj* (for *-nge*) have been adopted for words like *lunch* and *change*, although in Southern English *nsh*, *nzh* would often represent the sounds more accurately.

It will be noticed that although the sound of a word will inevitably suggest the spelling to one who has learnt the symbols here proposed, there are here and there cases where the spelling does not suggest the exact sound. In this respect the proposed spelling occasionally falls short of an absolutely phonetic spelling; but the fact that not every nicety of pronunciation is distinguished by the spelling is of little importance, and there are strong reasons in favour of using the signs in the way indicated in the following pages. Thus one cannot without introducing new letters distinguish between the *a*'s in the final syllables of *breakfast* and *bombast*; and there are good reasons for writing an *e* in the last syllable of *object*, although in southern pronunciation the sound is not the same as that in *insect*. Again, many common words (forms of *to be* and *to have*, pronouns, prepositions.) have what is known as "strong and weak forms," according as they are emphasized or not; the vowel of *was* is not the same in "Yes, I *wás* there" as in "I was *thére*." This difference is not shown in the proposed spelling. Differences in quantity are also often associated with the presence of a final consonant; thus *bead* has a longer vowel than *beat*, *bed* a longer vowel than *bet*. Several other cases might be

adduced in which the proposed spelling falls short of the accuracy that would be demanded by a strictly phonetic analysis. It may indeed be described as phonetic spelling drawing its signs from those in current use and tempered by reason and expediency.

The essential thing is that any one who knows the pronunciation of a word should be able to spell it; in this the current orthography fails hopelessly. To the foreigner and even to the native Englishman it would doubtless be very welcome if the spelling in every case suggested the exact sound; but though it is desirable to render it easy for the foreigner to learn our language, it is our own people we have to think of first; and even the foreign learner will find that the proposed spelling leaves very few stumbling-blocks in his way. A dictionary of the new orthography has been prepared. It indicates the spellings that have been adopted for official use by the Society. Individual members need not, however, regard them as obligatory. Each is at liberty to spell as he pleases. Where variants are admissible, he will presumably prefer to use the one that appears to indicate his own pronunciation best.

The compromises embodied in our scheme are adopted, not with a view to conciliating prejudice, but because reason suggests that the gap between the old spelling and the new should be made as small as possible *without sacrifice of simplicity and consistency*. Actually they minimize the difficulty which those educated in the new system would find in reading literature printed in the old irregular system. **In none of our compromises is the convenience of the coming generation sacrificed to the habits of the adult generation of to-day.** This we conceive to be the fundamental condition' of a truly simplified spelling.

Though we may not succeed in conciliating prejudice, we believe that even the most prejudiced person can be induced to lay aside his prejudices for a moment and bring into play the reason which lurks somewhere behind them. Now, it is important that what we have to put before him in such a moment of provisionally suspended judgment should appeal to his reason *directly, strongly, and clearly*. This can be done only by a scheme which (1) can be quickly understood and memorized, and (2) professes to be final, so far as this is possible. We believe that every additional rule, and every suggestion of a manifestly temporary and transitional character, would weaken the appeal to reason without sensibly diminishing the shock to prejudice.

Our experience of discussing the scheme, not, indeed, with the general public, but with teachers and others who have given some thought to the subject, leads us to feel hopeful of its acceptance by many of those whose interest in the question is practical; and it is through educationists that the change must ultimately come. We have so often been met by complaints of the manifest lack of finality in previous proposals, that we cannot but doubt the policy of promulgating any scheme which, while it *approaches* finality, clearly stops short of it in several important particulars.

No special difficulty need arise in introducing the new orthography into our primary schools. A beginning might be made with the lowest class or classes; and the children concerned would continue to use it throughout their school career. Under the auspices of the Simplified Spelling Society several successful experiments with New Spelling have already been made in schools, and others are projected. See the Society's Pamphlet No. 7, "The Best Method of Teaching Children to



Read and Write: Reports of Experiments Conducted in Sixteen Schools.”

*Note.*

Before any conclusion could be arrived at, it was necessary to classify the present spellings. The results are given in the analytic lists. A number following a specimen word or group of letters implies that there are so many words in which the particular spelling in question occurs. Where one or two words are given with no number after them, the implication is that they are the only words of that type.

In arriving at the numbers here supplied, no attention was paid to rare words, to foreign words, or to proper names; and compounds of the same word (e.g. *conclude*, *include*, *preclude*) were counted only once. There can be no absolute definition of a “rare word,” and now and then words have been counted or not counted (as being “not rare” or “rare”) where other reformers might have discriminated differently: but it is believed that such cases are relatively few in number, and do not impair the general trustworthiness of the statistics.

The abbreviations N.S., O.S. are used, when convenient, to denote the new spelling and the old (present-day) spelling.