

# Spelling Progress Bulletin June, 1961

Dedicated to finding the causes of difficulties in learning reading and spelling.

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## 1. Late News

In May the California State Senate passed a resolution asking the President and Congress to support legislation for a National Spelling Commission and a U.S. Official Dictionary in reformed spelling. Since then the Governors of several States have written to Homer W. Wood, Editor of the Porterville Evening Recorder, expressing their approval and support of this Bill. Among the more enthusiastic supporters are: Gov. William Quinn of Hawaii, Gov. John Volpe of Massachusetts, Gov. Grant Sawyer of Nevada, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller of New York, Gov. Wesley Powell of New Hampshire, Gov. Ross R. Burnett of Mississippi. Earlier this year the Board of Directors of the California Newspaper Assoc. adopted a resolution favoring the National Spelling Commission which Mr. Wood has long advocated. The California Press Assoc. and the Tulare Bar Assoc. have also endorsed the Bill now pending in Congress.

The California Parents for Better Education, Mrs. Pat Brown, Chairman, have moved into their new headquarters and will hold open house for their friends from July 10 to 14th. They are located in Los Angeles, Calif.

## A Motion Picture Review

"The Alphabet Conspiracy", a one hour 16 mm motion picture in Technicolor, produced by Jack L. Warner, has been sponsored by the Bell Telephone Co. This excellent film, equal in quality to 35 mm theater productions, is both amusingly entertaining and educational. It features Alice in Wonderland, whose two companions, the Mad Hatter and Jabberwocky, try to destroy words and abolish them as being unnecessary.

It is refreshing to see such a film that is devoid of advertising. Recommended for College Freshmen and High School classes.

### **Coming Attractions**

The next issue of the Bulletin will have some of the following articles:-.

1. News about the experimental teaching projects,
2. The Psychology of Learning to Read,
3. Juvenile Delinquency and Education,
4. Frederik Fernald's How Our Spelling Damages the Mind,
5. How Phonetic is English Spelling?,
6. Homonyms, Homophones, Homographs, & Hetrophones — the Deceitful Words in English,
7. Eyes that See Not,
8. From the Caribbean.

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## **2. WHAT ABOUT THE SCHWA? by Faith Merriman Daltry.**

The word "Schwa" has a German spelling but we pronounce it with an English W. Originally, it was a mere dot between the consonants in ancient Semitic writings to show where vowels were to be interspersed. Today it is represented in print by the apostrophe in Yiddish words like B'nai B'rith, Sons of the Covenant. In the International Phonetic Alphabet it is represented by an inverted lower-case E, which is familiar to many students and teachers who have never heard of the German name. Its use came about naturally because the I.P.A. was first constructed by Paul Passy, who adopted this symbol for the final e-mute of such French words as *porte*, *table*, *lettre* and the pronouns: *je*, *te*, *le*, *me*, etc., as well as within other words. Later, Daniel Jones in "An English Pronouncing Dictionary" used this symbol followed by : to represent the strong form of the R-colored vowel (as in her, sir, fur, word), making *hers* rhyme with *Chartreuse*, or singly to represent an obscured vowel as terminal in manna, including the R in *manner*, as pronounced in Southern British speech, or with an R added in *mannerism*.

Mr. Charles C. Fries, the noted head of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan uses the IPA Schwa indiscriminately for strong or weak R-colored vowel sounds, for any other obscured vowels, and for short U in *but*. Thus he misses all the advantages that can be gained from limiting its use to unstressed syllables as for differentiating *discus* and *discuss*, and *such* and *search* (So. British pronunciation).

Henry L. Mencken in his final volume on the American Language gives a discussion of "A-by-itself", as the indefinite article and also as used in *ago*, *about*, *sofa*, and *tete-a-tete*, etc., the letter A seemingly being the only representation that has been widely accepted for a neutralized vowel sound until recently by most of our public speakers and teachers. Some persons, in efforts to reform our spelling, have even tried to limit the use of A (by itself) to this one use out of five (?). I wonder how would they ever write: "Amanda had a bad attack of asthma."?

Dr. Frank Laubach, the "Apostle of Literacy", uses the short U for the obscure vowels in introducing new words to illiterates. Yet it does not work out in transcriptions of words like: *apart*, *apraise*, *anon*, (*upart*, *upraise*, *unon*), and is likely to cause eye-strain for such words as *among*, *unadulterable* (*umung*, *unudulturuble*), as well as greatly decreasing their distinguishability. Moreover, used terminally as in *to the sofa* (tu thu sofu) it suggests the oo-pronunciation of U, as in the standard spelling *flu*, *gnu*, *zebu*, *Hindu*.

If the chief value of this schwa for us is that it can replace any neutralized vowel, as in the unstressed second syllable of *granary*, *enemy*, *trinity*, *colony*, *luxury*, or even the *ou* and *au* of *enormous* and *restaurant*, it is obvious that its written form should appear neutral, vowel-like, different and yet insignificant, if possible. These examples point out the need of a special symbol for this sound. The loop of a lower case-a might be an appropriate one, the half-moon of a filed-down cent-sign being another possibility. The latter has the advantage of being on the same typewriter key with which resembles a capital A and could serve well in recording such words as: *America*, *Arabia*, *Alas!*, etc. The asterisk could also be used as a temporary substitute. While these configurations might serve equally well, if a key is to be added to the typewriter, it should be the IPA symbol, inverted e,ø. The apostrophe and the asterisk are needed for their regular uses and are inconveniently located above other symbols so as to require the shift key whenever used.

Perhaps the greatest value of the use of the neutralized vowels in our speech, is that they set off the stressed syllables in a word or the important word in a sentence, giving it rhythm, quite as dull colors set off bright ones in the making of a design. We must realize, however, that the same word may have a different pronunciation according to its position in a sentence. Prepositions are stressed in "*of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people," or an article in "*The Bible* is *the* book". A consonant is often interpolated when a terminal obscured vowel sound comes before an initial vowel, as when *vanilla* is pronounced *vaniller* before ice cream. Thus we use *an* instead of *a* before a word beginning with a vowel or an initial H in an unstressed-syllable (an apple, an heroic deed), and thus we pronounce the like *thee*, and *to* like *too* (*thee* apple, *thee* heroic deed, *too* eat, *too* her). But before the glide, however spelt (youth, use, ewe, Europe) the schwa serves for *a*, *the*, *to*. So it does when preceding such words as: wonder, one once.

This brings us to the more complicated problem of the Y-glide after different consonants. Short-I, never stressed before a schwa (*mania*, *serial*, *dubious*, *galleon*) is often shortened to Y, especially following L or N (*million*, *minion*, *Julia*, *junior*) when its pronunciation is identical with that of unstressed long U (as in: *soluble*, *tenure*, *querulous*, *nebula*), thus *failure* rhymes with *regalia*, in Southern British Received Pronunciation. But when the Y-glide comes after S, Z, T, or D in an unstressed syllable, it is absorbed and disappears in the process of palatalization (gliding the tongue down from the roof of the mouth). Then S is pronounced SH (*fissure*, *mission*), Z becomes ZH (*azure*, *vision*), T adds SH to become CH (*nature*, *question*), and D adds ZH to become J (*verdure*, *soldier*). Our great lexicographer Noah Webster first heard these sounds in London some 150 years ago and was horrified by their slovenliness, but they are now generally accepted and recorded in all our dictionaries. S is also pronounced SH before the strong forms of U (*sure*, *sugar*, *sumac*), likewise for terminal SIA as in *dispepsia*, *Russia*, *Asia*, and *Persia*, tho the two latter words are commonly pronounced with ZH in General American, and Russia is sometimes spoken with a clear S followed by the glide.

Because it is also difficult to pronounce the glide even in strong syllables after these consonants, it is usually omitted from long U so that *Ruth* and *Lucy* are pronounced like *Rooth* and *Loocy*, etc., tho a few careful speakers still use a very short I initially to the vowels in words like *duke*, *Tudor*, *news*, *prunes*. Yet the glide is never omitted after the consonantal sounds of the words: *butte*, *cube*, *few*, *hew*, *Kew*, *mew*, *pew*, *view*, *whew*, or of the unstressed forms in *bubonic*, *futility*, *humidity*, *incubus*, *regular*, *emulate*, *impudent*.

Unfortunately, ministers and other public speakers, when they slow down to emphasize certain points or give quotations, still use a strong E in the final unstressed syllable of words such as: *witness*, *departed*, *commandment*, *greatest*, *broken*, giving an effect that is no clearer for the listener, but only formal, if not artificial. Choristers similarly striving to pronounce an O in the suffix *tion* (as in *nation*, *action*) use the strong form as in *rayon*, instead of that as in *mason*, thus making another formal, unnatural pronunciation. Actually, the schwa may often be omitted before final L, M, N, as in: *batl*, *botm*, *butn*, or within such words as: *factli*, *sudnli*, *crumbling*, *col'mbine*. In this connection it should also be mentioned that the short I is clearer than an obscured vowel for affixes like those in: *witness*, *oldest*, *departed*, *menace*, *knowledge* (*witnis*, *oldist*, *dipartid*, *menis*, *nolij*). The schwa may replace a short I when two or more occur in successive syllables, as in the second syllable of *Mississippi*, *indivisibility*, *infinite*, etc.

The wide sources of our words and their polyglot spellings explain the numerous homonyms in our language which many people consider essential to our culture, even when some other words have dozens of meanings. Some of the homonyms have arbitrarily differentiated terminals, certain words have suffixes with different spellings but identical pronunciations, such as: *past* and *passed*. Then we have others with identical spellings but different functions and pronunciations. Many simple homonyms can be retained in a practical phonic system (*cent*, *sent*; *fir*, *fur*; *hall*, *haul*; *arc*, *ark*). Others may shed their differences when written in concise form (*mantl*, *medl*, *metl*, *musl*) quite as do the suffixes (*able*, *ible*; *ary*, *ery*, *ory*; *ally*, *elly*, *ily*; etc.) when the schwa is used. Then, of equal value is the reverse process, by which nouns and verbs with common spellings, which are now differentiated in pronunciation but not in spelling, can be rendered distinct (such as *address*, *conduct* *object*, *protest*, *record*).

All of these changes are most significant for the foreign student, who struggles to pronounce distinctly each letter in a word he reads, and they worry our spelling teachers, who, in their efforts to train children how to spell, sometimes cultivate a false pronunciation of words in order to justify as well as to fix the varied spellings in their minds. Remember the pronunciation of "Been" at the turn of the century (*bean*), which came about solely as a justification of the spelling.

Whatever the value of the IPA as a means of recording and comparing the sounds in all the various languages of Europe, its greatest contribution to English speech was that of revealing the frequent occurrence of obscured vowel sounds in the rapid conversation of even the most cultivated people. Whether the rising generation may welcome any spelling reform along phonic lines or not, we know that there is a smoother flow, a better rhythm and more naturalness than ever before in the speech that is being taught today, and we hope that never again will our students be trained to pronounce each word as a separate identity to the detriment of the effect and effectiveness of a whole sentence.

Mrs. Faith Merriman Daltry, B.A. Vassar '15, M.A. Columbia T.C. '17 is the author of a book:  
Sound Spelling or PRAC.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p4 in the printed version]

### 3. HOW YOU SAY IT, POR FAVOR? by Helen Bowyer.

Two of my señoritas from the National School of Arts and Crafts are with me on the roof of my Mexican "house of guests", with the great lovely valley of Mexico ringing the horizon around us. They are dreaming of Nueva York next year and a continuance of their studies in some fabled Institute there, so they are supplementing my classroom course in English with private lessons from me. They would be doing not too badly with the 250 jumbled spellings in our 40 basic speech sounds, if only our completed words would give some indication of what syllable they wanted stressed. I have done the best with such rules as we have, but —

Pilar (reading aloud): So the *geologist* —

I (interrupting): — *Geologist*, chica. Accent on the second syllable.

Pilar: Bueno, señorita. So the *geologist* scrutinized —

Luz (breaking in): *Scrutinized*, mujer. First syllable stress.

Pilar: Gracias, amiga. But (appealing to me), don't we say "continued?"

I: Can you explain, Lucita?

Luz: *Scrutinized* is like *memorize*, *criticize*, *emphasize* —

Pilar: So? Yes, I remember now. So the *geologist* scrutinized the landscape around him. To the right towered the blue *mountains* —

I: *Mountains*, hijita.

Pilar: Verdad? But in class today, we said "maintains".

I: Yes, I know, dear. But —

Pilar: Oh, sure. Perdoneme, señorita. Let's see --- towered the blue mountains. On his left yawned a *precipice*? (she looked askingly).

I: (slowly) No —

Pilar: Is it *precipice*?

I: (shaking a sympathetic head) — Lucita?

Luz: *Precipice*, perhaps. No?

I: No. You again, Pilar.

Pilar: Then it has to be *precipice*, does it not?

I: Right. Now you read, Lucita.

Luz: yawned a precipice. What, he wondered, had become of those pros — is it *prospectors*?

I: Is it, Pilar?

Pilar: (impishly fatalistic): Could be, señorita. Or *prospectors*, or *prospectors*. How is a poor mejicana to know?

Or, all too frequently, a poor americana. Only that morning I had to look up *exculpate*. What is there in that succession of syllables to tell you which one to hit the hardest. And there ought to be something. I have other uses for my time than looking up the stress of words whose Spanish cognates leave no room for doubt.

True, the problem is a little more complex in English than in Spanish, but it could be handled just as efficiently. The schwa, the little upside-down e (ə) of the phoneticists could do it almost by itself. Few of our plurisyllable words have more than one distinctly articulated vowel. Analyse even the four-syllable "acknowledgement" and what do you get? One clearly sounded short-o, and three obscure sounds much like those in "uh-huh". My typewriter has no key for the schwa, so let me substitute the sign \*. Then acknowledgement reads: \*knowl\*dgm\*nt, (or in phonemic spelling: \*knol\*jm\*nt.). My bright young señoritas and señoritos here (and whether bright or not), could easily take this "sixth short vowel" of ours in their stride, rejoicingly so! The rule would simply be: "Where the Schwa is, the stress isn't". And that, in most words, would leave only one place where it could be.

Why can't we do at least that much for the hundreds of thousands of Spanish-Americans struggling to learn our lingo? Don't you think they wonder why English should be so much more difficult than their easy Spanish? They'd still have enough to do, dear gallant young things, to fight their way through the difficult jungle of its spelling.

(From the diary of a 'profesora de inglés' in the schools of Mexico City).

**Helen Bowyer** is a retired school teacher, whose articles have appeared in the Phi Delta Kappan, California Teachers Journal, Word Study, and other magazines.

*[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p5 in the printed version]*

#### **4. Some Thoughts on the Best Method of Teaching Reading, by Newell W. Tune**

Obviously, the best method of teaching reading is going to be an opinionated report even if it factually portrays the results of experimental teaching projects. Probably everyone who has been involved in such teaching has come to realize that no one specific method of teaching the reading of English (with its heterogeneous spellings) can be successfully taught if it excludes all other means of teaching reading, particularly when you consider the different kinds of intellects to be found in the heterogeneous classes of our schools. Each method has some particular purpose that was intended to be accomplished by that particular method of instruction. Each succeeds to a degree when applied in the proper manner best suited to that particular purpose.

For example, the phonic method works best on words that are phonetic in their spelling and with pupils whose natural sense of logical reasoning has not been destroyed by such disappointing examples as "should-shoulder". In using this method, the teacher has to avoid the presentation of such incongruous pairs until the pupil can learn them and the exceptions to the phonetic analogies, by dint of memory and frequent repetition.

The use of picture examples co-related with the initial sounds of words, is practical only with such words as can be illustrated (some nouns), and which have no silent or misleading initial letters. It is the best way of starting reading instruction on young children because the initial sound of a word is four times as easily recognized as the terminal sound and 2–3 times as easily recognized as internal sounds. (Huey: Psychology & Pedagogy of Reading). It uses the phonic principle of sounding and uses analogy to transfer that knowledge from one word to another word with the same beginning. Its use breaks down with unphonetic letters like c, g, p, x, as well as many of our vowels. Hence again, care must be used in selecting, the examples for its use. Even so, confusion, doubt, and loss of confidence occur when the pupil is faced with a new word that does not follow the system.

Direct phonics is different from the above methods in that after a supply of sight words is learned, the sound values of the letters are taught directly to the pupils as a means of explaining the difference between the names of the letters and their sounds.

Intrinsic phonics is often claimed to be a phonic method and the same as the method of direct phonics, but it is not. The child is given sufficient examples until he catches on to the fact that each letter is supposed to have a sound of its own. (or maybe two or three). It is effective on less than half of the pupils in a class, generally those with vivid imaginations, good speech sounding, and the gift of logical analysis. All too often this gift or natural instinct has already been so thoroughly suppressed to the extent of nearly being destroyed either by lack of use or by our frustrating anomalies. To expect that all of the pupils in a class can absorb intrinsic phonics, is as foolish as to expect that all pupils in a gym class can successfully negotiate the high hurdles. All minds do not think in the same manner.

The "Look and say" or whole word method, is really the "look and guess" method. It has been the major standby method for a generation, yet it has failed miserably in producing satisfactory readers because those using it did not realize its limitations — its effectiveness for one purpose and ineffectiveness for several other purposes. It is recognized as the method best suited for increasing the speed of reading of words that a child has already had presented to him in the spelling class or in previous reading lessons. It should be reserved solely for this purpose. When used without phonics or to the subordination of phonics, it leaves pupils in a state of perpetually guessing at words, without even trying to fit sounds to them. Hence such words as "convert—convent" are confused and the student misses the meaning of the whole sentence.

The spelling tests and spelling bees are steps that are needed to give sufficient repetition in order to fix strongly in the children's minds those exceptions to the phonic rules and the erratic spelling demons that have been consistently plaguing pupils for generations. The spirit of competition helps to relieve the monotony of learning by repetition. Unfortunately, the poor get poorer and the good get better (why not gooder?). The poorest are those first to be eliminated, and the better ones get the most practise and boost to their confidence. There seems to be no way of avoiding this tedious repetition in learning spelling so long as our English spelling retains its disturbing anomalies. Yet Cormen tells us that beyond a certain amount of this tedious work, it is wasted effort and a definite handicap because it is so boring that it destroys the pupils interest in his work. Can anyone tell us how much time would be saved if this tedious, boring, interest-destroying method could be nearly eliminated as it is in the schoolrooms of Italy and Czecho-Slovakia?

[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p6 in the printed version]

## 5. The Best Method of Teaching Children to Read and Write, by Ralph D. Owen, Ph.D.

In 1942 the Simplified Spelling Society of Great Britain published a pamphlet entitled: "The Best Method of Teaching Children to Read and Write". It comprised reports on the experiments in sixteen schools, six in Scotland and ten in England. Typical of all is that of the Head-mistress of the Honeywell Road School, Battersea, London:

"Plenty of blackboard exercises on familiar words always spelt as pronounced will prepare the children for the use of the Preliminary Reader "Jinglz and Storiz in Simplified Speling". Children making use of these books make remarkably rapid progress very happily, and happiness is certainly essential, especially in the early stages of learning to read, because they are never confused by various sounds being used for the same letter, nor by the use of various letters to represent the same sound. Having perfect confidence in the symbols, the children *soon discover* their own power of building new words *without* the help of the teacher. They delight in exercising this power, because they are *never disappointed by being wrong*, and for the same reason they are *never afraid* to attempt pronounce an unfamiliar word.

"Two classes in my school (average age, five years and eight months) began learning to read on the Simplified Spelling Plan. At the end of the ninth month these classes had mastered the "Furst and Second Reederz" in Simplified Spelling.

"In all my experience of school work, I have *never* seen little children *so keen* on any lesson, not, as far as I could judge, because they were different from other children, nor because they wished to excel but simply because they *thoroly enjoyed* discovering new words for themselves.

"The Transition Stage, i.e., the passing over from the Simplified Spelling to the orthodox spelling. At this stage my teachers and I expected to meet with difficulties. But we considered that the children, being nine months older and having learnt to concentrate their thoughts to a certain extent, to handle their books properly, and to read regular words — common to both methods — would be much better fitted to grapple with the inconsistencies of our language, than they were, when they began school life. We were agreeably surprised at the way in which the children grasped the changes. The majority took no notice of slight alterations, hesitated at others, but of course, were completely nonplussed by some of the anomalies

"At the end of two years the classes referred to above were tested by an impartial and experienced judge. The results obtained in spelling and the mechanical art of reading proved that these children (average age seven years and eight months) were *considerably in advance of their age* in those two

subjects, and that they could *read better* and *spell better* than classes of children of the *same age*, in the *same school*, instructed by the *same teachers* under similar conditions — but taught entirely on the *usual methods*.

"The teachers of the classes and I had convincing evidence that learning to read the Simplified Spelling Plan was far the happier experience for the little child beginning its school career, and that children taught on Simplified Spelling Method, being able to read intelligently *nine months earlier* than those trained on orthodox lines lines, had extra time for silent reading, and their use of the classroom library showed that the power to read created a love for reading even in young minds. This nine months advance becomes for a two year advantage by the time the children are in the sixth grade, and continues to widen the gap from then on.

Ralph Dornfeld Owen is a retired Professor of Education, Teachers College, Temple University, a member of Phi Delta Kappa, and President of the Simpler Spelling Association.

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*[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p6 in the printed version]*

### **The go-gebtor**

A merchant addressing a debtor  
Remarked in the course of his lebtor  
    That he chose to suppose  
    A man knose what he ose;  
And the sooner he pays it the bebtor.

### **Notice to she-ers**

Be sure when you're coasting on skis  
To avoid running into the tris,  
    For it never is wise  
    To scratch out your ise  
Or to let your poor nose or tose fris.

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*[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p7 in the printed version]*

## **6. A Letter from the Rotary Club of Brisbane, Australia, sent by Dr. L. I. J. Nye.**

The Board of the Rotary Club of Brisbane, Australia, believing that the need for a WORLD LANGUAGE is of fundamental importance, appointed a committee to consider the subject. It consisted of the State Director of Education, two professors of Queensland University, a physician, a lawyer, and three business men. Their conclusion was that a reformed English has the greatest potential for universal use.

They found that about 700 artificial languages had been created, none of which had any prospect of acceptance, and that it was more advantageous for non-english speakers to learn English because it is already so widely understood and has a storehouse of knowledge unequalled in any other language.

They found that ESPERANTO, in spite of the zeal of its supporters, had made little progress, not only because of general apathy but also because of its shortcomings. For instance:

1. It neglects Eastern languages, all its components being Western.
2. Its letters are imperfectly related to its phonemes.
3. Its circumflexed consonants are a cumbersome attempt to reconcile pronunciation with unphonetic conventional spelling.
4. It claims to use five vowels but in actual speech eight are used.
5. Its grammatical terms are confusing and out of date.
6. All nouns end in O. This leads to many absurdities.
7. Making prepositions govern the nominative is contrary to the experience of hundreds of millions of people.
8. The use of "la" for the definite article is irritating to speakers of Romance languages. A definite article is unnecessary.
9. Its verb system lacks continuous tenses and is alien to western ideas.
10. It uses illogical French idioms.

INTERLINGUA is a misnomer, as it is purely Occidental. This is singularly short-sighted at a time when every effort should be made to bring East and West together. It was created by a "research" group in America, where it has received most of its support, but it neglects phonetics and claims to be based on a recognized European pronunciation. We claim there is no such thing.

A knowledge of English is essential for everyone who wishes to be well educated. It has the greatest variety and extent of knowledge and offers by far the most comprehensive background. It is the one most widely used in commerce, science, diplomacy, travel and radio communication, and is taught in nearly all secondary schools throughout the world.

It is imperfect however, because of its unphonetic spelling and its needlessly complicated grammar. Hence it is difficult even for English speaking children to learn. This perverts their logical thinking and is largely responsible for the many semi-literates.

Under another name, reformed English would probably have been acceptable in those countries where, for political reasons, people are prejudiced against every language but their own. It is of interest to us that though Indonesia was under Dutch rule for over 300 years, today most educated Indonesians speak English and everywhere there is shown a desire to learn English in preference to any other second language.

The Rotary Club of Brisbane therefore appeals to UNESCO to establish a commission to develop reformed English as the WORLD LANGUAGE, confident that it will bring the goal of inter-personal communication between all educated people with ideals, and make a substantial contribution toward the ideal of living together in kindliness, neighbourliness, friendship and peace.

(This is an edited copy of a letter to UNESCO from the Rotary Club of Brisbane Australia, 6th May, 1960.

## 7. A Foreigner Looks at English Spelling, by Lewis H. Boyle

This nation, in keen competition with the communist world, is making tremendous and exceedingly costly efforts to win the understanding and confidence of many foreign peoples. In order to succeed in that aim, it is very desirable that many foreigners should master the English language and find it attractive.

It is not so hard for them to learn to speak English correctly and to acquire a large vocabulary in it, mainly because of the simplicity of the grammar. Our words, even verbs, have so few inflectional suffixes, generally short, simple and regular, that they may soon be mastered in all their forms; whereas when one learns the root of a word in some European tongues, notably French, ones troubles have just begun. It is said that grammar of Russian also is horrendous, and the compounding of words in German makes it somewhat ponderous at times.

English has a prodigious vocabulary of words, and it is as easy to learn many of them as it is to learn a few foreign words with their many inflectional forms. Because of the absence of innumerable inflectional suffixes, we have very many words of but one or two syllables, making spoken English admirable for persons of little learning, and thus highly suitable as the language of trade and travel, as well as of diplomacy, science and engineering.

It is generally agreed that people should learn to read and write English, and they are largely taught to speak it by more or less reading the numerous billboards, advertizing, labels on equipment and other American and English products. But written English is frequently very difficult to decipher because of its very erratic spelling. That feature alone makes reading far more troublesome for the foreigner than for the native who is more familiar with the words and idioms presented.

Suppose that a foreign student meets this sentence. "they are behind the eight ball." In the word *they* none of the letters taken singly have their usual significance. In the *the* and *eight* only one letter does so, and in *are*, the e is misleading. The native child probably used all of those words before he entered kindergarten, so is familiar with the slang expression. If he encounters a new word in a sentence which he has not already read or is not familiar, he should be able to determine its meaning from the context, if he can pronounce it. The foreigner may have none of these advantages, and then that cogent sentence very aptly depicts his predicament. Consequently, he is not likely to be happy about trying to learn that sort of thing.

I write from bitter experience. I sailed down to Rio at the age of three months, and returned from Brazil five years later, having learned to speak Portuguese, but not English. That being long before the advent of regressive" education in this country, I was supplied by my mother with letter blocks, and books with pictures of objects and actions, with the words in capital letters. With little help, I learned to read and to print English words like FAT, HEN, PIG, DOG, and RUN, which were spelled sensibly. If all English words were like that, I could not only have learned to speak the language more easily, but also to read and write it.

At that age a normal child has an insatiable curiosity and desire to learn. His hearing and memory are at its best, and he has certain powers which enable him to learn words much more readily than later in life. He tries hard because he wants to understand and to know the reason why. But if there is no rhyme nor reason, and everything is incongruous and confusing, the eager and tender mind is hurt; the child becomes disheartened, if not rebellious. Either that or he crawls into his shell, convinced he is too stupid to learn.

A foreigner has great difficulty in deciphering a word like EIGHT, even if he has heard it before. He must learn to read such words as mental pictures, studied one by one, just the same as the Chinese learn their "chicken scratches". But the latter has the advantage of having but one symbol or picture for the same word, while the student of English, after learning the very complicated symbol EIGHT, in upper case letters, will be confronted with an equally difficult one in *eight* (in lower case letters), and will have more trouble in other styles of type and in handwriting. If capitals were abolished and the spelling was made phonetic, then he would need merely to learn the 40 sounds of English speech and their corresponding characters, substituting character for sound, rather than puzzling over every word that he has already learned to speak but not to write. Unfortunately, this is not the case. He must attack every new word with fear and trepidation, because he cannot depend upon his experience with other words to guide him.

In that excruciating manner even native Americans are taught to spell only about 4,000 words in elementary school, which is less than the Chinese are supposed to learn.

There are 36,000 words in a 35¢ dictionary, and even it lacks words like minuend and subtrahend that the pupil should know in elementary arithmetic. With our spelling, the elementary schools cannot hope to teach all the words that a high school freshman should know. There the native student is in the same sort of trouble that the foreigner is, for he is ignorant of many of the words.

While the words of learning are usually spelled better than our short ones, they too, fail to indicate the sounds properly, and those sounds have a way of changing in a bewildering fashion, as when words are augmented: mi'nus, min'u-end" ; add'i-tive, a-ddi'tion; di-vide' div'i-dend".

In most languages using the Roman alphabet, various accent and diacritical marks are used in printing to indicate sounds that are not what one would expect. The spelling of English is so complicated that it would be impractical to do that, for some of our letters may indicate ten or more different sounds. It is also impractical to regularize our present system of spelling by eliminating the exceptions to the rules, and also the least frequently used variants. We really need a complete reform of our spelling, and in order to do it best, we need changes and additions to our alphabet.

The governments of Portugal and Brazil during this century jointly decreed changes in the spelling of Portuguese; and the government of Turkey made a complete change in its alphabet, going from Arabic letters to a phonetic system of Roman letters. Russia, too, in 1918 after the war, made changes in its alphabet in order to make it more nearly phonetic. Norway, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, and even Germany, have by official government action made changes in their alphabets within our memories. During the nineteenth century, before the expansion of great publishing firms and big business, private citizens in America changed the spelling of a hundred or more words; but that was just a drop in the bucket", and the government has done nothing to face up to its responsibility to correct the obvious need for spelling reform.

Now, just what would any intelligent foreigner naturally think of our so highly vaunted "free enterprise" in that respect? What is free or enterprising about continuing to submit to the worst spelling known to man, when all about you the "backward" nations have the sense and the courage to make the changes they need to improve their already superior alphabets?

[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 p9 in the printed version]

## 8. THESE ENGLISH WORDS OF OURS, by Helen Bowyer

They're an enterprising lot, out for all the variant spellings of their syllables for which they can find analogies in a standard dictionary. Still, they've passed up a golden opportunity, as the following jingle goes a little way to show.

### TAWL TALES FROM OALD TRENCHES.

But I one-der, my dear Kernal,  
That you dont publish the jolonel  
That you wrote in the infirnal  
Days of World War One,  
With shot and shell alighting  
On the page that you were rye-ting  
And a rat or two abighting  
At your pen.

You myt make a lot of dough  
From yure royalties and sew  
Could peh up awl yue oh  
Around thease parts  
And ewer credit, now at zero  
Would zoom from heer to Clear Row  
And ewe'd bee again the herough  
Of aul hearts.

Soe at it, migh dere Cournel  
Get busy on that gernal  
That yew roat in the infolonet  
Days of Were-lid Wore Won,  
With schott and shell a-lye-ting  
On the peige that yooh were weighting  
And a rat or tew a-buy-ting  
At yoor pen.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Readers out to go one better with such transmogrifications are be-sought (beesawt?) to:

1. Check their dictionary for the analogy, and
2. Keep the meaning guessable.  
(It takes a Shaw to get away with *ghoti* for *fish*.)

Cash prizes up to a penny each will be awarded each variant spelling demonstratively better than those perpetrated here.

*[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 pp10–12 in the printed version]*

## **9. SURVEYS OF TEACHER OPINION, by Mrs. Mary Johnson.**

*Who has achieved nation-wide fame with her campaign on behalf of more Phonetics being introduced into current methods of teaching reading.*

This is a Report of an enquiry into an educational problem, conducted by 12 Winnipeg mothers who are independent of any financial or professional commitments. As the consumers of education (among us we have 34 children) we are primarily concerned with the *practical results* obtained by current methods of teaching reading. The wide range of test scores included in our Report gives the public a glimpse of the magnitude and gravity of the problem, and also shows that children *can* learn to spell and read in the primary grades.

We know that business problems are sometimes solved by impartial surveys of company employees, who are asked to suggest improvement in the production methods. It seemed natural to us to assume that a similar approach would be used by school administrators to evaluate teacher opinion on controversial questions. We have been shocked to discover that the valuable judgement of our experienced elementary teachers has been passed over by educational authorities in Canada, and the United States (with two notable exceptions), while the dogma of educational theorists has been accepted almost without question.

*Many Reading Experts have financial interests in the theories they expound and are no longer actively teaching reading!* The unbiased and practical views of our teachers deserve at least equal respect and consideration by the administrators of our public school systems.

We began our world-wide enquiry in the hope of strengthening our plea for increased, articulated phonic training for Manitoba's school children. Now we are releasing the results of our investigations in order to assist parents and teachers who are struggling to raise the standards of reading instruction in other areas. Newspapers and magazines can help by printing our little test of 26 words so that their readers will be able to test children at home and at school and form their own opinions.

The necessity for our independent and realistic enquiry is pointed up by Glenn McCracken in *The Right To Learn*, when he says of the reading problem: "What has happened, is that enormous sums of money and large numbers of people have become enmeshed in an unfortunate mass situation which, no one so far has had the mental muscle to clear away... However hard it may be to put one's finger on the precise villain in this drama, it is frighteningly easy to point out, the victim. The unfortunate victim is your child."

### **A LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

Early in the Spring of 1959 we sent the following letter to almost 200 newspapers all over the world:

"When parents in Manitoba explain that their children cannot read print at first sight and can only re-cite from the school readers, they are told that the sight method of teaching reading (with incidental phonics) is used all over the world. Many of us here are curious to know whether parents and teachers in . . . (name of state, province or city) . . . are as dissatisfied with the results of these methods as we are in Manitoba. We hope that those interested in this problem will write to . . ."

Within a few weeks we received 301 replies to our enquiry from eight English-speaking countries.

### WHO WROTE?

In every country from which we had replies, the biggest response to our enquiry came from *parents*. They expressed every degree of dissatisfaction — from mild distrust of modern methods of teaching reading, to outright condemnation of the sight method as a Communist plot designed to undermine the Western world. A *sprinkling of letters* was received from parents whose children were reading well under the sight system, and who saw no need for a change.

The largest proportion of *teachers* who wrote to us about the reading problem were English and they expressed in no uncertain terms their concern for the decline of reading standards in England. The largest group of teachers from whom we heard was Canadian. They, too, were deeply concerned and indignant when writing about the methods of teaching reading which had been forced upon them.

We were surprised to find that letters from American *teachers* were almost *outnumbered* by those from businessmen, *Doctors, Dentists, Sunday School teachers* and librarians, all of whom were dealing with the end product of the school system and were shocked by the inability of American schoolchildren to read.

### THEY SAID!

Dissatisfaction with reading results appears to be much more widespread in the United States than in other countries — 60% of our U. S. correspondents took the problem well beyond their own family and described the failure of the children of their friends and neighbors. The intensity and frequency of American criticism of the failure of public schools to teach children to read makes us feel that the problem in the United States has reached epidemic proportions. The number of letters received from Great Britain was remarkably small — only 17. However, more than half of these letters described conditions as serious as those in the United States.

From South Africa, we learn that the purely phonetic Afrikaan language is now taught by sight. This is interesting in view of the fact that proponents of the sight method often claim that the English language must be memorized by sight because it is "not phonetic."

Although the response from South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, was very light — a mere 15 letters — it was enough to indicate to us that the sight method, with its attendant woes, has blighted education in these countries, too.

Canadian writers were comparatively mild in complaints many dealt solely with the personal difficulties of individual families and less than half of our Canadian correspondents took the problem past their own family and said that the problem was a general one.

We looked for signs that phonics were once more beginning to receive the stress they require. There was little indication of this upswing in Canada, while 11% of American writers mentioned this trend, with obvious relief. Heaviest U.S. mail on this point was from Missouri and Oregon.

## WHAT IS WRONG?

In giving their reasons for dissatisfaction with reading instruction, Canadians were the most specific, blaming the children's troubles on inadequate phonic instruction, and stating that the children could read fluently within a basic sight vocabulary but were lost when trying to read fresh material.

Americans had more diverse explanations for the failure of their children to learn to read. Comparatively fewer Americans stated that phonic instruction was ineffective, or protested that children were unable to read independently. Instead, they dealt with other factors which received little mention from correspondents in other countries: automatic promotion is enabled a child to graduate from high school whether he could read or not; parents were vigorously discouraged from helping their children with reading at home; educational troubles were the result of a soft, luxury society; many denounced the philosophy of Progressive education.

8% of our American writers accused the Communists of either instigating the sight method or of working to maintain it. (It is interesting to note that children in Russian public schools are taught to read by a phonic system, with preliminary sight words. They are expected to read print orally *at first sight* at the end of grade one — and that means print with an unrestricted vocabulary.)

In each country from which we received mail, an almost equal proportion of writers complained that the alphabet was not being taught any more. Citizens in many walks of life pointed out that this handicapped children in their attempts to use dictionaries, phone books and references of all kinds. Several American businessmen even staged that filing clerks who knew the alphabet were at a premium!

## TESTING FOR PHONIC KNOWLEDGE

Every letter we received was answered personally by a member of our group. In order to provide some background, the article FIRST OF THE THREE R'S was mailed out to everyone who had written to us about the reading problem. We soon began to receive requests from embattled parents and teachers in the United States for help in testing children for a working knowledge of letter sounds.

In response to *these requests we devised a phonic/ sight word test*. We suggested that it be dictated, by regular classroom teachers, to the *entire Grade III enrolment* at each school participating in our survey. As many schools segregate children of varying abilities into A B, C, and D classes at each grade level, we felt that it was essential to test *all* of these classes in order to obtain a complete picture of results.

Our Phonic/sight-word Test consists of 26 phonetically simple words. The 13 words in the first half of our test are not usually taught as sight words. Children therefore have to apply their knowledge of letter sounds in order to spell these words. Children who can do so correctly would doubtless be able to read these and other simple words with equal accuracy. It is recognized by most reading experts that *good spellers are rarely poor readers*.

The second half of our P/s Test consists of 13 sight words which rhyme with the unfamiliar words in the first section of the test, making it possible to compare the children's spelling of known and unknown words.

## TEST RESULTS

A total of 1,934 children wrote our test in Canada, United States and England. Regular classroom teachers dictated the test in 23 schools, and two Albuquerque mothers independently tested 30 children who were attending regular meetings of 2 local youth organizations.

*62 classes were tested altogether* in Grade I to VI, more than half of these classes being at the Grade III. Below is shown the average score made by these classes. It should be noted that while 3 out of 5 Canadian schools are using a sight method series of readers, they reinforce this with daily work on articulated phonics. 8 out of 12 American schools tested use the same series, but without phonic reinforcement. We understand that a variety of methods are used in the 5 English schools tested, but details of instruction are not available.

Grade three level	# of schools	# children tested	Average age	% error made Phonics words	on test sight words
Canada	5	252	9	24%	7%
United States	12	374	9	43% of	18%
England	5	145	8	49%	33%

### WHY THIS DEPENDENCE ON SIGHT WORDS?

We would like to make it *very plain* that we do not blame the classroom teacher for the obvious lack of training demonstrated by the poor spellers in our survey. As quotes from our mail bear out, the teacher frequently has little choice of method and does her best within the restrictions imposed upon her. Students at Teacher Training Colleges are usually trained in only one method of teaching reading — the sight method, with incidental phonics. In the classroom, well-intentioned supervisors and inspectors often insist that teachers rigidly adhere to the day-by-day Guidebook pedagogy which accompanies every modern reading program.

## TEACHER OPINION ON READING METHODS AND RESULTS

In 1959, with the help of American collaborators, *we wrote to 50 organizations* whose influence over the education of children on this continent is incalculable. We asked them all the same question: "Have you conducted a survey to evaluate teacher opinion of current reading programs and their results?" We have replies from most of these organizations on file and have followed up every possible lead, but at the time of writing we have learned of only *2 constructive, impersonal surveys of teacher opinion on methods of teaching reading*, which *have been conducted on this continent*.

Here are details of the answers from organizations, with an outline of their educational responsibilities:

*In 9 out of the 10 Canadian Provinces, Curriculum Committees* are appointed to study and recommend text-books. In most Provinces, authorization of texts for use in the public schools can be made only by the Minister of Education, and if any school district wishes to deviate from the program, permission must be secured from the Dept. of Education. In Manitoba, a teacher using an unauthorized text is *liable to a fine of \$10.00* (Sec.287, Chapt. 215, Manitoba Pub. Schools Act).

*They said:* 7 out of 9 Curriculum Branches answered our query with a categorical "No, we have not surveyed the teachers for their opinion." The remaining Curriculum Directors sidestepped our question by sending us literature which had nothing to do with a survey of teacher opinion. The 9th Curriculum Branch mailed us 5 publications, one of which was "But Johnny CAN Read."

#### *Five Canadians Publishers of Reading Programs*

Publishers of the widest-selling reading text in Canada provide in-service training (usually by visiting American 'reading consultants') for teachers right across Canada. In one year alone, this company sponsored 19 reading seminars for primary teachers in Manitoba (Dept 1 of Ed. Report, 1956-57) and company 'consultants' give periodic lectures to student teachers at the Manitoba, Teachers' College.

*They said:* The leading publishing company frankly admitted that it had not conducted a survey of teacher opinion, adding that it relied upon "*the official activities of Departments of Education*"! Two other publishers also stated that they had never surveyed teachers for their opinion.

### **THE SOLUTION?**

We have tried to show that a problem does indeed exist in the realm of reading instruction, and that it exists on an alarming scale: We have tried to isolate and identify the problem by the simple, practical testing of a cross-section of schoolchildren. The enquiries we have made among leading educational organizations and publishers of textbooks have lead us to believe that the low standards of the reading instruction exist today not because of the teachers, but because *their practical experience and commonsense have been disregarded* throughout the English-speaking world.

Retired teacher Beatrice Nathan deplored this educational waste in 1956 when she wrote in TALES OF A TEACHER, "Through the years, I thought that I had learned a good deal about the theory and practice of public instruction. Yet neither I nor any other teacher of my acquaintance in the city system had ever been consulted, so far as I knew, about school policies or their execution . . . A good teacher, from the administrator's point of view, was one who knew his place and stayed in it.

"Teachers are not know-it-alls. The best of them have their deficiencies. But their aggregate wisdom ought to be a prime asset of every school department. It is a vast reservoir which could be used to water the parched fields of education-land. Alas, it remains untapped."

The solution to the reading problem, and possibly to many other educational ills, may be found by educators and school board members who give teachers a chance to express their opinions anonymously. Only on unsigned, formal questionnaires can they be expected to state view, which may be in direct conflict with those of their superiors.

We cannot afford to let the present stalemate of impractical theory, frustrated teachers, and non-reading children continue any longer. For the sake of children everywhere, the deadlock must be broken.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF SURVEYS**

Due to the scarcity of surveys of teacher opinion, the results of the *only two known surveys* — conducted in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and St. James, Manitoba — take an enormous significance. In both cases, primary teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the incidental phonic program of the Curriculum Foundation series and showed preference for 'a more direct and systematic program of phonics, to be taught in conjunction with a basic sight vocabulary.

*The Saskatoon Survey* was conducted in 1957 by Dr. A.F. Deverell of the University of Saskatchewan. In an article appearing in the Saskatchewan Teacher's Journal for September, 1957, Dr. Deverell writes:

"The writer is of the opinion that, after ten years of operation of a new program, serious and thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of the program as it works out in the classroom should be made. The urgency of Evaluation has been passed by the seeming frequency with which teachers (and parents) express doubt concerning the place given to phonics in current instructional methods."

After analyzing the responses from 126 primary teachers (106 of whom were using the Curriculum Foundation Series), Dr. Deverell comments: "There was a fairly insistent demand for a 'better organized approach' to phonics, characterized by statements to the effect that the present phonics program is 'too indefinite', 'poorly arranged', 'too scattered', 'hidden in other materials', 'too apt to be missed by the teacher, and thus by the pupil', or that 'the program lacks continuity' and lacks sufficient practice exercises and seat work activities'.

*The St. James Manitoba Survey* by the Supt. of Schools Mr. R.T.F. Thompson, distributed questionnaires to 86 primary teachers in 1956, inviting comment on the reading program (C.F.Series) and suggestions for the improvement of reading instruction. In his Report on Reading Methods of Mar. 12, 1958, Mr. Thompson wrote:

"The phonics element in the authorized program appears to be too little and somewhat too late. The teachers generally recommend a phonics system paralleling the present reading program, but providing at least for:

- a) The actual sounding of phonetic elements, where necessary, rather than limiting the pupil to 'sensing' the sound;
- b) earlier introduction of vowel sounds, particularly the short vowels;
- c) the authorization of a phonics handbook and possibly also of a pupil phonics workbook which would harmonize with the present readers".

From this sincere evaluation of teacher opinion, & from the personal visit by Mr. Thompson to the phonic taught schools of Bedford Park, Illinois, came the reinforced phonic program which St. James schools now enjoy.

Mrs. Mary Johnson is Chairman Winnipeg Parents Com. Winnipeg . Man, Canada.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §14.1 pp205–207 in the printed version*]

## Section 14

### Spelling and Commerce, Marketing

This section delved into the spellings devised by commercial interests, which shows that such new spellings are always coined according to sensible phonetic principles.

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1961 pp13–15 in the printed version*]

#### **10. This Pore Ol' Mixed-up Alphabet — It Can't Help Johnny Learn to Read,**

**by Jerrilyn Black and Ellen C. Henderson, former Editor of SPEECH MAGAZINE,  
and author of "You Can Teach a Child that Reading Can Be Fun,"  
and "Reading and Speaking Techniques."**

This bewildering jumble of sounds and letters we call our alphabet is so mixed-up that it can't even spell its own name without confusion. The word "alphabet" does not come from the Alps Mountains, and has nothing to do with habits. If the alphabet was truthful in meaning what it said, "alphabet" would become "alfabet," and then maybe Johnny *could* learn to read by sounding out words.

As it is, however, an alphabet is an inefficient, clumsy, public servant. You probably have noticed that children soon learn to speak without much difficulty by using sounds. However, when they begin to spell and read, they need to use the alphabet, which is a visual, not an auditory tool. This is where the trouble begins. Through the use of our mixed-up alphabet, many of the spoken sounds become distorted into visual monstrosities.

Johnny stumbled one day, while trying to read one of these word-freaks, on the word: *would*. When he looked for help he was urged to do the impossible. "Sound it out!" his father said. Though "reading by sound" is practical when writing represents spoken sounds accurately, the way our alphabet behaves makes this task very difficult. What sound shall Johnny attach to the letters *ou*?

as in *sound*    as in *country*    as in *you*  
as in *course*    as in *would*    as in *cough*  
as in *soul*    as in *journal*    as in *ouija-board*

Johnny found he couldn't sound out the word. He had to learn it by sight, with the aid of the teacher. By leaving the *l* silent and selecting a comparable vowel sound, he was soon reading the words: *should* and *could*.

Then he turned the page. He saw the familiar group of letters in a new word, *shoulder*. As his face lit up in recognition, he triumphantly "sounded out" the word. He said "shooder," as in *should*. Problems, perplexing problems! The two words appear to be almost alike. Yet in *should* you omit the sound of *l* and in *shoulder*, you speak it. How is one to know? There are no rules that are reliable. This inconsistent use of the alphabet is again illustrated by these pairs of similarly constructed words in which the *l* is spoken in one and silent in the other:

colon-colonel	palmetto-palm	helm-balm	fold-folks
almanac-almond	salamander-salmon	salver-salve	coln-Lincoln
calmative-calm	Balkan-balk	soldier-solder	coulee-could

Even worse, the problem is not solved even if you could find out how to use this letter *I*, for there is, still the puzzle of the vowel sound. How can one apply sounding-out techniques to the following words, which have in common the letters *oul* but not the same sound?

could, boulder, boulevard, foul, ghoul.

This baffling experience is not unusual. Every time Johnny turns a page in a magazine, he is confronted with similar difficulties. It is unfortunate that our spelling has few logical and consistent arrangements that allow the formulation and use of rules. If there were not too many of them, they could be a big help in learning to spell. And it would be easier to learn two dozen rules than to learn individually to spell two thousand words as the Chinese have to do.

One trouble with our alphabet is that too many sounds are heaped together in one letter. For example, the letter *a* carries a whole wardrobe. It can make two or three quick changes within the same word. If you were learning to read, and these words were not familiar to you, how could you tell which sound the *a* happens to be wearing?

adoration	agate	animal	baggage	canary	caraway
character	cravat	dare	drama	fallacy	fallacious
flagrant	harass	image	lava	patriarch	what

Another trouble is that too many letters have similar sounds, for you will find several letters having the same sounds. Some of the load the letter *a* carries is excess baggage. The sound of *u* in *upon*, *circus*, and *lettuce*, is also found in *canary*, *caraway*, *animal*, *lava*. It is present also as *o* in *tomato*, *e* in *secretary*, and *i* in *pencil*. It is known as the schwa vowel. If this sound were to have but one letter to represent it, learning to read and spell would be greatly simplified. As it is now, Johnny must waste time memorizing and then remembering which way the sound must be written. Is it *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, or *u*?

The vowels of the alphabet must work overtime, because there are only 6 (including y) to represent all 18 of the vowel sounds.

In sympathy, some of the consonants are working double or triple shifts, most of which would not be necessary if the vowels behaved themselves. Even tho duplication is not needed, some *e* letters are stealing the sounds of neighboring letters of the alphabet. The letter *s* is an example. If it wanted to be honest, it could stay home and work full time taking care of its own sound. Words carrying this sound occur often in our language, such as:

bus, folks, asparagus, so, this, sister, plus, purse, sits, sassy.

Instead, the letter *s* meddles in the affairs of others. It takes the sound of *sh* in *sure*, *sugar*, and of *zh* in *division*. However, it is most notorious for the way it confiscates the sound rightfully belonging to the letter *z*. Have you realized how often this occurs? Take these:

boys, as, choose, does, please, physical, these, easy, wise, misery, reserve, Tuesday, says, ruse, reason, was, scissors, use.

While its back was turned, other letters have been stealing the sound of *s*. The *x* uses it in words like *extra, fix, axis*. The *z* uses it in *Zwieback* (swi-bak). The *c* takes control of the sound of *s* in *cell, fence*, and *receive*. Even the silent letter *p* goes along for a free ride in *psychology, pseudo*, while the letter *c* slips itself in as a silent partner in *scene, scion, scimitar, scissors*, while in *science, c* commits two crimes, and then grabs a big share of the sounds belonging to *k*, as in *come, cook, picnic* and *bacon*.

Many letters have helped themselves to the sound of the letter *k*. Notice how many different ones and how common in occurrence they are:

ache, accuse, character, beckon, epoch, welcome, queer, khaki, wax, school, corner, chord, orchid, black, darken, unique, axiom, accident.

If the unruly letters of the alphabet would return the stolen property they have acquired, much of the confusing double-talk of the present alphabet could be eliminated. In thousands of words there would then be only one sound for each letter, an easy, logical and rewarding means to learn reading and spelling.

Often beginning spellers are more logical in their writing than is the system. What is more sensible than this sentence, written by a sixth grade boy?

"I went with my frend to the wrong wrifle wrange."

In our speech, we actually say *frend*, rather than *fri-end*: and if wrong is not spelled *rong*, why shouldn't rifle and range just as logically be spelled with a *w*? At least this boy was more consistent than we are, and whereas our present alphabet is not used consistently.

One famous word-family has long caused trouble for readers and spellers. This is the *ough* family: bough, cough, dough, enough, through, slough, and hiccough.

Bough could logically be spelled *bow*, as it sometimes is.

Cough might as well be written *coff*; if not why is coffee not written coughee?

Dough could easily be *foe*, because Poe is not Pough.

Enough could be written *enuff*, or else rebuff should be rebough.

Through could be *throo* as found in room, which is not spelled roughm.

Slough is either *sluff* or *sloo*, depending on which you would mean.

Hiccough is sometimes seen as *hiccup*.

And though and thought should be written as *tho* and *thaut*.

As a matter of fact, the use of the alphabet was constantly undergoing changes. At one time *old* was spelled *olde*, *when* was spelled *whan*, and *pierced* was *perced*. Such reform by natural evolution is a slow, grinding process and appears to have come to a halt. Formal reforms on the other hand, often lack universality of support. Moreover, each planned reform may involve different methods of unmixing the alphabet.

The need to have a universal, logical, and systematic use of the alphabet by weeding-out parasitic, dead, or duplicating letters has long been recognized. How it is best to obtain such a reform has long been the problem and the stumbling block. Legislative action may be the answer. It appears to be the only way to get any action. In fact, a bill was presented to Congress in 1957 and reintroduced in 1961 by Harlan Hagen (California). The Bill provides the appointment of a National Spelling Commission to establish the simplified spelling of words, and to publish an Official U. S. Dictionary with all words in both the new and old spelling. As soon as practicable this reformed spelling would become the Official United States Government Spelling, and its use required by Government employees in their official correspondence and in all printed matter issued by the Government. While there would be no direct pressure on anyone else to actively employ it, the simplified spelling system of this Official Dictionary would reach the public through income tax forms, postal orders and receipts, the Congressional Record, pamphlets of various federal agencies, commissions, courts, news releases, and various other ways. Newspapers releasing these news reports would use the new spellings in order to make a quotation or verbatim report. From here on, surely it would be but a step to its acceptance and adoption by the state governments and the public as well.

Now that there was a need to teach this simplified spelling, the schools would jump at the chance. For no one seeking a government job could qualify unless he knew the new spelling. Private industry would have long before recognized the value of such phonetic spelling. Indeed, some of them are away ahead of us. Just take a walk thru your nearest supermarket and see how many products you can find with phonetic spelling! You will probably see:

Acro, Antrol, Apl-butter, Apl-jel, Bif, Bizmac, Bug-geta, Cocomalt, Drano, Dreft, Duz, Ever-fresh, E-Z-Creme, Flit, foto, Frenz, Fulvita, Go-Go-Mobile, Gro-Master, Handi-pak, Donut, Jello, Jiffy-Jell, Karo, Kid-E-Skool, Kip, Kix, Kodak, Korn Krispies, Klek, Kreml, Krispy-Kake-Kones, Kwik-Snax, Lux, Mum, Nu-life, Odor-O-No, Par, Pard, Penit, Pepto-Bizmul, Prem, Prest-O-lite, Presto-lite, Pro-Tek-Sorb, Punch-N'-Gro, Rex, Rins, Roi-Tan, Saran, Skat, Spam, Staf, Sun-Kist, Surf, Swel, Thermos, Tiz, Tod-l, Trig, Vel, Wel-Bilt. Look up patent #282,294, (Preshus), and #535,314, (Klass). Almost all of these preceding names are patented. Why? Because private industry recognizes the value of such phonetically spelled names, because they cannot be mispronounced.

When the time comes that our written language can be made to approach more closely our spoken sounds, then Americans will be able to "sound out" written words. This will give pupils the confidence they need in attacking new words. It will stimulate the pupils use of logical reasoning instead of suppressing it and causing confusion, embarrassment, frustration. Spelling will come naturally, easily, in English-speaking countries as it has for generations in Italy, Spain, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and other countries whose alphabets more consistently represent the sounds of their speech. Much time now used in learning to read and spell can then be used more efficiently in creative and scientific use of the language. Our alphabet can then become an efficient helper rather than a hindrance to two of the basic 3 R's.

## 11. An Interesting Letter.

miss helen bowyer,  
los angeles, calif.

dir mis bowyer:

. just tu sho yu what i meen, this iz ritten in stabilized inglisch orthografy.

. i am konvinst that our idiotik orthografy iz the kulprit in our "kriminal" ejukashun, with regorrtd tu reeding. . even the mentally retorrded beginer notisez that "a" and "A" orr not the same letter, and luez konfidens in eny techer or parent hu trize tu tel him thay orr the same. . then he gets sulen and diskurajd, — quiting skule at the furst opurtunity.

. oltho our alfabet iz insufishent for truly fonetik spelling, it iz quite sufishent for a majur impruvment, — bi mirly stabilizing the yuse ov the letterz we du hav. . the fakt that eche ov the voulz haz tu basik sounds (long and short) iznt purtikeulurly konfeuzing. . the konfeuzhun storrt when thay orr aloud tu tresspass upon wunanutherz territory. . the spelling "w-i-n-d" never kozez eny trubl in spite ov its tu pronunsiashunz, ! and it mite be kunsiderd fonetik ethur way! . the final silent! "-e" jenurally indikates a long voul in the last silabl, and a dubl konsonant jenurally indikates a preseding short voul.

. eny sujestshun i mite ofer for aproching the "pourz-that-be" tu make them realize the tru siriusness ov the sitchuashun, wood be baste on the fakt that our dikshuneryz du not diktate our orthografy, — but mirly rekord that which iz in komun yuse. . in short, eny chanje in spelling kumz thru "komun yusaje" bi the laymen, — or yusaje ov the more kulchural 50%, i shood say. . and the very fakt that the dikshuneryz rekord this apruvd pronunsiashun and spelling, opurates tu make it, tu sum extent, the kreator ov our yusaje, rathur than thru ofishal dekree from the "hi-ups". . thus the best we kan hope for iz ofishal akseptans ov the chanjez inishiated bi the laymen (inkluding students).

. inazmuch az students, the wurld over, orr "demonstrating" on behaf ov varius reformz, i wunder just whot wood hapen if student bodyz wur tu just refeuze tu bou tu tradishun in the felde ov spelling, bi leving out eny — and — ol silent letterz that hav no bareing on pronunsiashun, and making the natchural substitushunz which orr beyond chalenj.

. i wunder whot wood reely hapen if primery techurz wur tu teche fonetik spelling thru the medium ov "silens givz konsent", — bi just "faleing tu notis" the unorthodox, but fonetik, spellings yuzed bi ther peupilz. . and/or even ignoring kritisizm for such progressiv tolerans. . in sum way i am inklined tu beleve that most parents wood not only "go along" with the fonetik spellings, but even kum tu the techer'z reskeu in kase hur job wur thretend.

. just wunder if a number ov techurz kood be perswaded tu not only "over-look" the nachurnal spellings, but even openly enkuraje simplifide spellings, — until kold "on the karpet" bi ther supiriurz and thretend with dismisl. . this wood "storrt the bol roleing" for jenural diskushun bi laymen and primery techurz, on the wun hand and the ejukashunal "brass" on the uthur.

? koodnt paul coates be perswaded to questshun techurz, hu orr thretend with dismisl, on hiz t-v program? . frankly i beleve the publik wood poot the "pourz-that-be" on the defens, and without eny defens for tradishunal spelling.

. it kood be that student strikes, suported bi techur tolurens wood forse the ishu intu the open, and giv us "radikulz" a chans tu be hurd. . tu meny ov our leedurz take the posishun that thay hav bin ordaned tu surv az gorrdiun anjel over our orthografy. . most poilsy-makurz in the felde ov ejukashun hav never survd az primery techurz, and hav long sins forgotun ther trilez and tribeulashunz az beginerz, having "buturd ther bred" bi making a hoby ov masturing tradishunal irregeularitz, and perpetchuating konfeuzhun, thay orr shukt at any thot ov ther life's wurk tosst intu the waste-basket.

. howevers the "fule-prufe" way we kan ol help tu bring about more sane orthografy iz tu "praktis whot we prech", in pursonal notashunz (wher our jobz orr not in jepurdy) bi just skiping silent letturz, — bi yuzing the most nirly fonetik ov eny sireze ov homonimz, and bi making substitushunz which orr beyond lojikl chalenj — but being karefool not tu distort the maneuskript beyond fluent rekognishun.

. in konsiduring spelling reform we shood ber in minde that haf a lofe izbettur than no bred at ol, and that sum-timez the propozed kure wood be wurs than the kurent malady. . thus we must chuze betwene impraktikal purfekshun and praktikal impurfekshun. . the revised maneuskript must be rezonably reedabl, without speshul study, or jon publik wil veto it.

. thanx for lisening,  
**leo g. davis**, santa paula, calif.