

Spelling Progress Bulletin December, 1961

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

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Editor and General Manager,
Newell W. Tune,
5848 Alcove Ave.
No. Hollywood, Calif.

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Coming Attractions

The next issue of the Spelling Progress Bulletin will have some of the following articles:

- Report on experimental teaching of reading projects.
- Homophones, Homographs, Heterographs — the Deceitful Words of English.
- Juvenile Delinquency and Reading Ability — What Relationship exists?
- Eyes That See Not.
- The Feasibility and Means of Reforming our Spelling.

1. Two most interesting books.

Page 52 and 54 of the Nov. 17, 1961 issue of Time Magazine were devoted to "What Ivan Reads" — a most interesting editorial and review of two books that every educator should put on the "Must Read" list:

"What Ivan Knows that Johnny Doesn't" (Random House; \$3.95) by Arther S Trace, Jr. of Cleveland's John Carroll Univ. — and

"Tomorrow's Illiterates" (Little, Brown; \$3.95), edited by English Professor Charles C. Walcutt of New York City's Queens College and sponsored by the Council for Basic Education.

Having no space to go into details here, we just urge you to be sure and read them. Both of these books are important contributions to understanding the causes of many of our reading difficulties.

2. The Disintegration of Our School System, by Watson Washburn.

The author is a distinguished New York attorney who was graduated summa cum laude from Harvard in 1914. He was a member of the victorious U.S. Davis Cup tennis teams of 1920–21.

Much has been said lately about integration in our schools. There is no doubt that this has become a major problem since the revolutionary decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* on May 17, 1954, which reversed the contrary rule of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, upon which since 1896 the segregated school systems of our Southern states had been developed with ever-increasing improvement, until they were suddenly confronted with the shocking impact of the Supreme Court's about-face.

However, while "integration" has become an explosive and dangerous problem in the South, it does not compare in evil consequences with the countrywide "disintegration" of our educational system which has been going on largely unnoticed for the past 30 years, until its awful results have finally attracted public attention — let us hope, before it is too late.

The most striking example of this disintegration, as well as the simplest and easiest to understand, is in the teaching of reading — the very first of the Three Rs. Catastrophe here followed slowly but surely the *abandonment of the* alphabet as the foundation of reading instruction, and the substitution of configuration. This method, called "look and say", requires children to memorize the appearance of whole words, regardless of the individual letters which compose them, whereas the alphabetic method requires only the memorization of the 26 letters of our alphabet in their conventional order, plus the learning of the sounds which these letters represent — considerably more than 26 sounds — for some letters, particularly the vowels, represent more than one sound, but of course infinitely less than the number of separate words. The alphabetical method of relating the alphabet to sounds is often referred to as "phonics."

The advantages of the alphabetical over the whole word system are so overwhelming that it is incredible that the latter should have been imposed upon most of the country's public schools, and adopted by many private or independent ones; but this is obviously another case where we took things for granted for so long that we forgot how important they were and that they must be fought for to be preserved.

The alphabet was invented over 3000 years ago, and in due course adopted by all the leading nations of Western civilization, beginning with Greece. In the intellectual field, the discovery was universally considered as a milestone, like that of fire in anthropology, or the wheel in mechanics.

The addition which the alphabet brought to the human mind was not limited to the simplification of reading, enormous as this contribution was. The intellectual stimulation and training involved in building single-syllable words from the letters and then poly-syllables, gave children a fine start toward mathematics and logic. Also, complete familiarity with the order of the letters (which can be memorized by the ordinary child of four in a few hours) permitted children to use freely and efficiently for the rest of their lives indexes, catalogs and works of reference of all kinds (including in this age the telephone book) which are very slow and frustrating implements to employ for those who have been denied this fundamental training. Further, since the alphabet is the same in English, as in other Western languages, the study of these languages is greatly helped by a thoro grounding in our own alphabet.

After this marvelous invention was adapted by the Greeks to enlarge so magnificently their linguistic and intellectual horizons, it became a common place attitude to look down on the benighted savages who resorted to picture-writing of one kind or another, and also to pity the nations whose considerable progress in civilization had been stunted by the lack of an alphabet, such as the Egyptians with their hieroglyphics, and the Chinese with their tens of thousands of separate characters which called for the ability and patience of a Mandarin to assimilate. But *even the primitive picture writing of the American Indians*, or other native tribes, or the much more intricate and sophisticated Chinese characters, are *vastly superior pedagogically to the configurationism of our top professional educationists*. For the picture-writings used by these people have *some resemblance* to the meanings signified; among the primitives the likeness may be obvious, like the figure of a cat or a boat; in Chinese, the conventionalized character may be much more obscure, but to the expert scholar it has a number of stimulating associations. In vivid contrast, the shape of our alphabetized words has no relevance whatever to the meaning. Even the most avantgarde painter would hardly use the configuration of letters "cat" to depict a cat, just as conversely, unfortunate children who have been subjected to this modern perversity are likely to read "boat" as "ship".

This educationist madness therefore is much more of a backward step than merely to the year of 1500 B.C., before the alphabet. It is more irrational than the caveman or apeman who never would have imagined such a self-defeating attempt to try to teach a child to run before he has learned to walk. In fact, it has no point of reference in the whole of normal history, and seems suitable only for psychiatry study.

Some conturists advance as an excuse for their peculiar theory, the fact that a mature reader can devour pages of print at a speed incompatible with the "sounding out" of each letter in every word. From this simple truism they solemnly draw the illogical conclusion that such a reader must be identifying the words only by their outlines, and further that if this is true (a false assumption) the way to become a fast reader is to begin by memorizing the outlines. It is hard to take such a suggestion seriously.

The fact is that the alphabetically trained reader has always readily acquired the facility of fast reading; this is so because with constant practice the marvelous brain mechanism steadily speeds up until soon reading becomes automatic and subconscious. The brain reads each letter far faster than conscious thought could imagine. This is a common phenomenon with all skills. In fact, it is essential to be an expert in any activity. The golfer who thought about every little motion while hitting the ball would never break a hundred. But the champion's brain does all this work for him automatically.

This crazy scheme (the whole word method) was introduced with such little fanfare into our educational system that it largely escaped public notice until its baneful effects finally forced the issue into the open. *The increasing number of unfortunate pupils who had later to take special remedial training courses attracted the attention of their parents*. So did the fact that the usual reading defects disclosed were evidently connected with the configurational method of instruction, and that the standard remedy was the alphabet.

Cure was much slower than prevention, for these older children had to unlearn all their bad reading habits at an age when their minds had lost some of the elasticity of childhood. The question naturally arose why, if the alphabet (or "phonics") was the best or only way to teach these retarded children to read, it was not also the rational way to teach all children in the first place, thus avoiding altogether the painful expedient of the "remedial" classes.

One of the by-products of contour-reading is the disappearance of good handwriting and correct spelling. The accuracy required to write the letters clearly and to spell properly is wholly foreign to configurationism.

Another unwholesome excretion of configurationism is the reading matter which the unfortunate pupils are forced to swallow. Since the number of word shapes which primary children can memorize in a year is limited to two or three hundred and since without knowledge of the alphabet they are helpless if confronted with a new word, the texts given them for intellectual fodder have to be tailored to this Procrustean measure. The result resembles the repetitious drooling of hopeless senility. Naturally, no one with an ounce of literary ability or creative imagination would dream of writing such inhibited nonsense. It is no wonder that many young pupils are nauseated, and never recover the taste for reading which familiarity with Lewis Carroll or Hans Christian Andersen might have developed in them.

When the awful truth dawned on the American people and Rudolph Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* became a best seller in 1955, the reaction of the angry educationists was two-fold.

First, they made bitter personal attacks on the author, and any others who had the temerity to support his views, as "enemies of public schools", "reactionary ignoramus", — in fact, the usual complimentary epithets bestowed by the apostles of academic freedom on those whose views on any subject differ from theirs. This was similar to the attempts they made more recently to endorse a school boycott against the largest national weeklies for publishing criticisms of so-called progressive education.

But the case for picture-reading was so pitifully weak that even the well-entrenched bureaucrats of the National Education Association felt it wise to establish a second line of defense by their "Committee for the Defense of Democracy Through Education". This was to deny that the alphabet had been relegated to obscurity, and to assert on the contrary that the New Teaching had merely embellished the old-fashioned A-B-C system with some modern improvements, of which picture reading was only one. The whole was thus described in "Phonics and the ABC's — 1956", an official publication, of the New York State Education Department: "*accurate and careful listening, correct and clear pronunciation, a constantly increasing sight word vocabulary, picture and context clues, general configuration of words, and the composition of the word*. These skills should be used along with phonics, sometimes one, sometimes another, being the best aid to the recognition of a particular word".

This secondary defense was just as absurd as the direct counter-offensive. For it should be obvious even to a mind of the elementary grade that the alphabetic mode of expression is wholly incompatible with primitive pictography. This is like harnessing a horse to a jet plane. The Teachers' College men were as far off base with this alleged eclecticism or middle-of-the-road theory as an arithmetic instructor caught teaching that two and two make five, who offered to compromise on four and a half. Actually, the established hierarchy never gave the alphabet a chance, in the *first years of school when the pupils' minds are malleable*.

We may thank our lucky stars that our educationists have so far allowed children to learn to talk, in the old-fashioned way, at home with their families. Learning to talk from a scratch start, as babies must, is obviously far more difficult than learning to read after mastering oral communication. Just what particular form of new nonsense our configurationists would invent to bedevil the babies with, is hard to imagine, but the wrecks they have left behind in the reading field justifies the most pessimistic prophecies. For one thing, we may be reasonably sure that they would apply the concept of "reading readiness" to speaking.

If a boy of five is slow in reading, common sense would seem to recommend special effort and longer hours to bring him up to average but the current dogma calls for abandonment of all reading instruction for an indefinite period, until "readiness" mysteriously arrives.

By analogy, babies backward in conversation would be discouraged from further babbling till their teacher could discern the necessary growth of the requisite 'skill' in their little brains. This might prolong the period of dumbness for a good many years, but children so early grounded by their own experience in "progressive" technique would probably still be dumb enough when grown up to get a diploma from Teachers' College and carry on the good work from generation to generation.

The inertia of the bureaucrats in charge of the public school system of most states, and the intolerance of the despots of the National Education Association, make the task of abolishing from the top even such an absurdity as configurationism almost insurmountable. *These people doubtless fear that confession of such a gross error would hamper their master plan for securing control of billions of dollars of new Federal money for spreading their peculiar pedagogical theories.*

It may seem strange, in view of the shocking perversions of proper methods of instruction so consistently practised by the highest educationist authorities for more than a score of years, how so many American youths are still able to read tolerably well. The great majority have mastered this accomplishment by the time they enter college, and only a small percentage then require remedial tutoring.

The reason for this is that numbers of parents, defying the warnings of the educationists, have taught their children to read in the normal way; and so have countless teachers, who from the practical experience with youngsters which the Teachers' College pundits lack, have learned picture-reading leads to a comic-strip mentality and either a remedial reading class or a reformatory.

Contour-reading alone has set back the education of American children in public schools by at least two years on the average, according to the experienced authors — one a remedial reading teacher and the other a professor of English — of the recent book: *Reading: Chaos and Cure*. It has permanently crippled the minds of millions. But while this is the clearest and most demonstrable mis-step of so-called "progressive" education, it also typifies similar perversions in almost every branch of public education, the poisonous effects of which have seeped into many college programs as well. The over-all picture is one of reducing the American people to a dull uniform of ignorant conformity, instead of educating them to be intelligent, independent-thinking, freedom-loving individuals.

The apparent impossibility of persuading the educationist bosses to correct their contour-reading aberration highlights the folly of trying to change their other more complex educational fallacies. The reform of these pernicious practices must evidently begin at grass-roots level. Fortunately, the public schools are still largely controlled locally, and a few active and well-informed crusaders in a community can soon accomplish wonders. The rank and file of teachers, who are a fine group of citizens, will often be found sympathetic with reform, tho afraid to express their feelings openly for fear of reprisals by their intolerant superiors.

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Editor's Note: *We refer the reader to Dr. Ernest Horn's article [Item 6] in the [Oct. issue of the S.P.B.](#) to show the very limited extent to which phonics can be applied successfully to our English spelling. Also notice how different the teaching methods are in the language of the Caribbean countries as told by Helen Bowyer in *From the Caribbean*. She cites conditions under which Horn's arguments could show successful teaching. Finally, Dr. Helen Bonnema shows us in her article on "Kindergarten Reading Instruction Experiment" how easy it would be to solve this dilemma, by reducing our spelling to a condition when logical reasoning would be able to be applied successfully, and learning made so much easier.*

Reprinted from HUMAN EVENTS, Mar 24, 1961, Vol. XVIII, No. 12.
410 First St, SE Washington 3 D.C.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p3 in the printed version]

I Say There Old Chappy! sent in by Faith M. Daltry

A gentleman named John Fitz-john
Was a kindly and affable don
 Till his pampered young son
 Ran up bills one by one
And the don ordered him to be gone.

A sexton was told by a fool
If he'd carefully follow the rule
 That the bell he should toll
 For each new-released soul
He'd protect its dead corpse from a ghoul.

A dutiful mother was loath
To cripple her son in his growth,
 When he wouldn't take broth
 And poured it out on the cloth.
Should she spank him or starve him or both?

A young man in the medical corps
As he bore his bride in at the door,
 Explained he was poor,
 But he felt very sure
That he soon would be earning much more.

Editor's note: *Did you ever notice how the spelling sometimes interferes with the rhyming pronunciation?*

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

3. What's the Matter With Our Schools? An editorial in The SUN, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, Sept. 10, 1960

We wouldn't have believed it if we hadn't seen it — and then we could hardly credit our eyes. But the local gentleman who posed the question had undeniable proof that there is something wrong with our educational system that should be of concern to all parents. He feels — and we can't help agreeing with him — that there is something wrong when students who have qualified for entry into grades 5 & 6, with averages of B-plus to A-minus can't spell their own names correctly. Out of 5 samples, two students misspelled one of their christian names, and three others incorrectly spelled words making up their addresses. One of them couldn't spell 'Saskatchewan'.

"It isn't the kids, because every one of these boys is smart; so it must either be the teachers or the prescribed methods of teaching" he opined. He was curious to know what other parents thought about it, or whether he was alone in being interested in the matter.

The gentleman was quite vociferous and felt that, with so many frills in the present day curriculum, the fundamentals of education are being sloughed over. He made no bones about it that he believed teachers should put more stress on such simple things as writing, spelling, etc., and less on extra-curricular subjects. "When kids can't write and spell, there's something wrong someplace!"

Suspicious curiosity drove the local gentleman to gather the evidence. Wondering if his own son were in a class by himself in respect to spelling, he prepared sample cards and asked each of the 5 boys who next visited his home to write his full name and address, including the city and province. The results he got have already been enumerated.

"Now I know there's something the matter with our schools," he told The Sun when he presented the evidence he had collected.

A few days later the following answer was received by The Sun.

The Sun's Letter-Box

Local Educator Talks Phonetic Spelling

Dear Sir:

Your recent editorial "What's the matter with our schools" prompts me to make a few observations.

A local gentleman is quoted as saying, "when kids can't write and spell there's something wrong some place!" I heartily agree.

And in my opinion the some-thing that is wrong is not in the children nor in the schools. It is in the way we spell our words in English.

Everyone knows that there are oddities in spelling such as, eight, psalm and phlegm. But a closer study shows that even such words as, one, was and why are not pronounced as they are spelled.

In fact, only about 20 percent of our words are spelled phonetically.

This is one reason children are first taught to read by words and not by sounds.

Pupils with exceptionally good memories can learn to spell without too much difficulty, but they do so by memory more than by reason. Those not so blessed become confused and frustrated, and subconsciously come to believe that, since there is no logical system to spelling, they will just have to do the best they can and let it go at that.

I don't mind admitting that during the writing of this letter I have consulted the dictionary to double check the spelling of one or two words.

Each word was spelled in the accepted form followed by another spelling to indicate the pronunciation. Why not spell it phonetically in the first place?

Many people are aware of the need for spelling reform and are working diligently to accomplish it. A Canadian of Hamilton, Ontario has written a book on the subject.

The British Simplified Spelling Society has several worthwhile publications and has members in many English speaking countries: one of its members sponsored a spelling reform bill in the House of Commons which came within a few votes of passing.

This year it has permission of the minister of education to carry out a simplified spelling experiment involving 1,200 children. Many readers will recall hearing about the recent G. B. Shaw world wide competition for a phonetic alphabet.

In USA, a Congressional committee is working on spelling reform. An Australian doctor is taking up this work in his homeland.

The BC Teachers Federation has a spelling reform committee and our STF and Home and School Association are interested. The Canadian conference on education is studying the matter.

The department of education will take appropriate action when there is sufficient demand. The writer has correspondence on file to substantiate these statements.

To refer again to your editorial, I would like the vociferous gentleman you mentioned to know that simpler spelling would make it possible for all normal pupils (and adults) to be good spellers and readers, give them more time for mathematics, science, literature and social studies, and save the taxpayer a great deal of money.

Formal lessons in spelling and reading would be unnecessary after grade three or four and progress in all other subjects would be accelerated because reading would be so much easier.

K. G. ABERDEEN.

Editor's Note: Mr. Aberdeen is principal of Elmwood school in the City.

The Sun, Sept 15, 1960

Handwritten note: The newspaper staff changed my paragraphing. KGA.

[*Spelling Reform Anthology §4.7 pp72,73 in the printed version*]
[*Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 pp5,6 in the printed version*]

4. Adventures with the Turkish Alfabe, by Gertrude Hildreth, Ph.D.*

*Dr. Gertrude Hildreth is a retired Professor of Education at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and the author of *Learning the Three R's* and many articles in the educational journals.

A pleasant surprize on my arrival in Turkey for a year's stay in the fall of 1959, was to find the Turkish language spelled phonetically with our familiar ABC's. Within a short while I was able to read and write a few words, especially those most frequently seen or used: *telefon, polis, otobüs, restoran*. My *adres* was the *Teras Otel* — (the terrace was on the roof in the new style). Fortunately, there was a *kwafür* just across the *sose* (avenue), so that getting a shampoo was not difficult (just say these words in French), and — below — was a convenient *terzi* (tailor shop); but the *eczane* (drug store) was further down the *stet* (street). These words illustrate the simplified spelling of the loan words and others — with a phonetically regular system which is found consistently throughout the Turkish vocabulary.

The old Turkish system of writing and printing up until 1928 was in Arabic with its 612 script-like symbols. At that time Turkey had a literacy of only 9% of the population. In 1940, after only 8 years of the new phonetic alphabet, the literacy had been raised to 22%. (There was a transition period of 3yr 4mths). Today, it is nearer 60%.

The modern Turkish *alfabe* (alphabet) consists of 29 symbols — the Latin ABC's with "q" and "x" omitted, the addition of an undotted i (ı) and diacritical marks for other letters to provide for the entire array of sounds, using one symbol for each sound almost exclusively. Since "c" is not needed for either "soft" or "hard c", as in "city" and "can", this letter has been assigned to the sound of "j" as in "jail". The letter "j" was assigned in the French manner to the sound of "zh" as in *measure*. The *sh* and *ch* phonograms are represented by "s" and "c" with cedilla (ş, ç) There are also a "u" and an "o" with dieresis (ü, ö) for the sounds in the French words "jus" and "oeuf".

There was time, before my *universite* classes began, to visit beginning classes in the public schools, where I had an opportunity to see the ease with which 7-year-old beginners learned to read, write and spell their mother tongue with this simplified spelling system.

Each child was supplied with an *Alfabe*, a small ABC book and primer of some 60 pages, a bag of hard white beans, a note book, pencils and crayons. With this equipment, costing about 30¢, most of the youngsters made rapid progress. Learning the sounds of all the letters in all positions in the words of a common oral vocabulary was a simple process of conditioned learning. The beans are used for forming words and short sentences copied from the board, a card, or book, preliminary to writing.

By mid-year, when I made return visits, the more mature children were making independent use of a flock of easy little story books the teacher had piled on each table. They tackled the new words by sounding right through them. Occasionally, a pupil might stumble on a letter, but usually pupils had no difficulty with words they could pronounce and of which they knew the meaning. To guard against mere word calling and to insure meaningful reading in early practice, the children's comprehension was checked through oral questions on the story and by comprehension exercises of many types.

How about the Turkish children's reading vocabulary? Altho Turkish children, after a year in school, can sound out just about any Turkish word, long or short, if they have been properly

instructed (as in any good school), they cannot be expected to have a large "word bank" of words easily recognized at sight, because this is a process of growth and development of linguistic experience, and long continued reading practice. In these early years the reading vocabulary cannot run very much ahead of the child's oral spoken vocabulary — the words they use and understand that relate to everyday experience. The great advantage of the phonetic alphabet for the Turkish children is that they can so readily help themselves with new or forgotten words without having to wait for the teacher to tell them the words.

Attractive little picture-story books published under the supervision of the Ministry of Education are to be had for a few cents each in any corner shop where the children run in to make their selections, much as ours do for comic books. A frequent sight is a young school boy standing in the street eagerly scanning the news sheet for sports news, the outcome of the latest *futbol maçı*. There are excellent well-patronized libraries exclusively for children in convenient locations.

One day I visited a *Kız Okul* — girl's high school (the Turkish word for school, less commonly used, is *mektep*), where I observed a class studying *İngilizce*. Later on, I was invited to visit a *Lise*, and a *Kolej*. During vacation, I made a trip to Ankara, taking the *tren* from the *istasyon* across the "*Bosfor*".

These experiences set me to thinking more seriously than before about the advantages of simplified, consistently phonetic spelling for any language. If it can be done for Turkish, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, Yiddish, why not also for English? News of the George Bernard Shaw new alphabet contest appearing in the newspapers at about that time, also stimulated my thinking about a new English alphabet. One evening, after *şiş*, *kebab* and *pilav* at the neighboring *lokanta*, by starting with our present ABC system as a basis, and borrowing some ideas from the Turkish alphabet and inventing several new symbols to relieve our confused vowel system, I devised a new phonetic alphabet to correct the faults of our present system.

It should be noted that certain criteria must be observed in devising a new alphabet:

1. The new alphabet must faithfully represent all the basic sounds of English speech, with a minimum number of symbols.
2. The letter-sound relationship must be consistent, with each sound invariably represented by one and only one symbol.
3. The new alphabet should be compatible in style and appearance with the old so far as possible, to permit easy translation from the old to new style print and vice versa.
4. The capital letters should in all cases be identical with lower case except for enlargement of size. This saves the need to learn two letter styles for the same alphabet.
5. The symbol system should have maximum simplicity; letters that are clear and distinctive, not easily confused with each other, for ease of legibility.
6. The new letter styles should be equally convenient for writing. It should be possible for all letters to be written in a plain style with only natural joinings, in contrast to our present cursive script writing which employs letter styles quite different from plain printed forms.

A system modeled on this simplified plan would save time and space, and be much easier for school beginners, adult illiterates and foreigners to learn. It would also speed the day when talk, clearly enunciated, could be electronically recorded and reproduced in readable form, without the intermediate step of written dictation. The production of a simplified English spelling system is a project worthy of thorough going scientific research.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 pp6-8 in the printed version]

5. A Preface to the Augmented Roman Alphabet.

The Augmented Roman Alphabet is not, as might be supposed, a system of spelling reform. It is primarily intended as a teaching instrument only to be discarded when the transition from words spelt in A. R. to reading in conventional spelling is accomplished with facility and confidence. This requires a knowledge of the relationship between the sounds and the various ways they are expressed in conventional spelling. When these are all learned, the water-wings are no longer needed and the pupil can swim in the sea of our variant spelling with confidence. Just remember that the digraphic Sh in A. R. = shine, machine, ocean, nation, fuchsia, delicious, sure, axiom, crescendo, conscience, tension, passion.

Of course, it is possible that clever minds will find other uses for the A. R. alphabet. It could be used as a satisfactory dictionary key to indicate pronunciation. It could also be used in a manner alike to italics, to call attention to some particular pronunciation. And by properly defining all the characters, it could be used as a system of reformed spelling. But then, there are so many hundreds of such substitutive symbol systems of reformed spelling that have been proposed that it would have to take its place in the line-up with all the others to determine which is the best system of reform.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 pp7,8 in the printed version]

ARTICLE REPRINTED FROM
THE TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
Friday July 21, 1961

6. THE AUGMENTED ROMAN ALPHABET EXPERIMENT IN SYSTEMATIZED SPELLING

By John Downing, Research Officer, University of London Institute of Education

The launching of the Augmented Roman Alphabet as a medium for the teaching of reading under the joint auspices of the University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research marks a return to an approach based on the proposition that a major cause of reading failure is the unsystematic spelling of English. The technique consists in providing infant beginners with books printed in a phonemically regular and limited alphabet with consistent spellings until the child can read fluently, when a gradual transfer is made to reading and writing with the traditional alphabet and spelling.

If traditional English spelling is used for children's books at the early learning stage it seems likely that the effectiveness of either of the two major approaches to the teaching of reading may be reduced. Despite her own efforts to avoid confusion, when using "Look-and-Say" methods, the teacher is bedevilled by the fact that most books present children not with one single visual pattern for the one meaning of a word but with several often quite different patterns, e.g., AND, and, And, and, &, etc., thus losing the opportunity for increased repetition of just one specific pattern for one particular meaning and permitting uncertainty to arise through so much variability.

The difficulties which the traditional spelling of English may produce for "phonic" teaching seem more obvious. If the child is looking for a systematic solution to the problem he is faced with in deciphering the meaning of the symbols within printed words and searches for such a relationship between the spelling and his life-long past auditory experience, the spelling of English seems likely

to lead him astray in two ways. First, the spellings often suggest a relationship which does not in fact exist, for example, the words "bone", "gone", "done", and "one", contain no indication that in each case the single group of letters "o.n.e." represents four quite different phonemes. This aspect of the phonic problem arises from the fact that one letter may represent several different significant speech sounds.

The second way in which the child learning by the phonic approach may be misled by traditional spelling is through its false implication of dis-relationship. For example, the common phoneme in "hoe", "though", "oh", "show", "yolk", "sew", is spelt differently in each case, and these differences seem likely to convey wrongly to the phonic learner that these words have no auditory relationship to each other.

These visual and auditory inconsistencies thus have appeared to many teachers to represent an unnecessary barrier to the complete success of either "Look-and-Say" or "Phonic" methods of teaching young beginners to read. If only this variability and irregularity did not occur in our spelling the skill of reading would be so much easier for infants to acquire, they have felt, but without a reform of spelling it seemed that teachers would have to resign themselves to this peculiarity of the symbolic representation of the English language.

However, it has occurred to some teachers that permanent reform was not relevant and that a temporary reform for the infants' school only could be used so that the skill of reading could be built up unhampered by the vagaries of English spelling. They felt that reading consisted basically in deciphering a code, and that skill in this could best be developed by starting off the young beginner on a simple systematic code, and then, when he could do this rapidly and confidently, he should move on to the more complex code used in our traditional spelling.

This technique of grading the difficulty of the code has been tried several times in the past 120 years or so, and each attempt has produced reports of astonishing success.

An early alphabet used for this purpose was "fonotypy". It was devised by Sir Isaac Pitman and A. J. Ellis, and experiments began in the United States in 1844. The first large experiment with fonotypy took place in 10 schools in Waltham, Massachusetts, between 1852 and 1860. Fonotypy was used for the beginning stages of learning to read, followed by a transition to traditional spelling. This two-stage method has set the pattern for all subsequent researchers.

The results of the Waltham experiment are given in a report of a committee of the American Philosophical Society in 1899, which says of fonotypy:

"We tested it thoroughly for six or seven years in the town of Waltham, Massachusetts, which then had about eight hundred children in the public schools. The effect upon the school life of the town was very marked. The saving of time in teaching the children to read and to spell enabled us to introduce exercises for the eye and the hand thus cultivating habits of observation, skill in drawing and writing, geometrical ability. The fonetic print corrected the brogue of the Irish children and the Yankee dialect of the American in a surprising manner. An improvement in the moral and intellectual tone of the schools was also noticeable, arising certainly in part from reform giving the children interesting reading instead of such absurd falsehoods as that of saying that 'sea', 'you', 'pea' spells 'cup'.

"Fears were expressed that this method should injure the pupils' spelling. In order to test the question, I took pains to procure, several times, lists of words which had actually been used in Boston, Roxbury, and other places with the percentage of failures on each list. Springing these lists, without warning, upon classes of the same grade in Waltham, we always found our percentage of errors very much smaller than in other towns, sometimes I think only one-third as large. We also questioned each pupil in our high-school as to the amount of time which he or she had devoted in his or her whole school life to fonotypy and phonography. Comparing these

times with the percentage of errors in spelling, by the same scholars, we found that those who had read the most fonotypy made the fewest mistakes."

A similar scheme on a larger scale was tried in the schools of St. Louis between 1866 and 1886. A different alphabet was used but it adhered to the rule established in fonotypy that one character must stand for only phoneme and the two-stage pattern was followed again. An official circular of the U.S. Bureau of Education claimed that the systematized spelling produced outstanding success, one to two and a half years being saved in the time needed for learning to read, and the children "took more pleasure in reading books and newspapers at home". A further test of this alphabet was conducted in Boston and Sir Charles Reed reported at the 1876 Philadelphia International Exhibition that it resulted in a saving of half the time usually needed for learning to read, two years' work having been cut to only one.

The technique of delaying the introduction of the special difficulties of English spelling until fluency and confidence in reading has been developed through a simpler, more systematic alphabet and spelling does not appear to have been tried in Britain until the twentieth century. In 1914, Miss McCallum an infants' teacher at Cowdenbeath, used an alphabet very similar to the International Phonetic one for the children's first year at school. An important advantage she saw in this method was that it enabled her to choose words for reading and writing lessons purely on the basis of the children's vocabulary. The artificial selection of "phonic" words for reading and the artificial rejection of words difficult to spell was no longer necessary. At the end of one year with her phonetic alphabet an observer reported that "the children can read any matter presented to them in phonetic symbols, and can write the same to dictation".

After a year on Miss McCallum's phonetic scheme the children transferred to the traditional alphabet and the end result was that "the reading was much more fluent, natural and intelligent than is commonly found in an Infants School".

The spelling used in an experiment in 15 other British schools between 1915 and 1924 was different in an important way from that used at the Cowdenbeath school. Miss McCallum's alphabet was quite different from the conventional one, whereas these 15 schools used spelling carefully related to the traditional alphabet. This was done to aid the transition from the beginners' simple systematic spelling to the complexities of traditional orthography, although in fact all of the research reports discussed in this article claimed that children had no difficulty at the transition stage although many teachers had anticipated it. Each of the 15 schools using the "nue spelling" made an individual report on their results, but there was general agreement on the method's success in speeding up the process of learning to read, teachers' and inspectors' estimates of the time saved ranging from six months to two years.

These early experiments were conducted in the days before the need for objective controlled experiment in education was widely realized, but although they were insufficiently controlled and lacked for the most part really objective tests, the unanimity of their reports and the high level of success claimed for this technique of systematizing the alphabet for beginners indicates that the research into the Augmented Roman Alphabet (A.R.) under conditions of more rigorous scientific testing should provide critical evidence on the value of this technique and at the same time should provide a more accurate estimate of the role of English spelling in children's difficulties in learning to read, for the three problems which are said to be caused by traditional orthography have been removed or substantially reduced in A.R.

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7. How Phonetic is Our English Spelling?, by Newell W. Tune.

Undoubtedly, you have seen references in various magazine articles to the effect that English spelling is 85% phonetic, or some such figure — while in another article you read that English is an unphonetic language, or that it is so unphonetic that it is not worth while to try to teach spelling by means of phonics. Certainly, it appears that these conflicting statements cannot both be true. Hence, the difference in opinion must be due to how the phoneticness of English words is measured, or how the words to which the test is applied, are selected. It should easily be apparent that such a test was not applied to all the words in the dictionary, as the monumental task of applying any such test to the 80,000 or more words in the average college dictionary would frighten anyone from making such a test. Dolch says there are 600,000 words in the unabridged dictionary. (Better Speech, 1942, quoting from the G. & C. Merriam Co.'s statement.)

Dr. Ernest Horn says, in "Phonetics and Spelling", [S.P.B., Oct. 1961](#), "More than a sixth of the 10,000 words most frequently written contain double letters. And "If one includes letters not pronounced in digraphs, as in *please* and *boat*, and double letters where only one is pronounced, all but 4 letters of the alphabet (j, q, v, and x) are silent in some words." Gertrude Hildreth says in "Learning the Three R's, 1936-47, "In spelling, as in reading, phonics aids in the classification of words where classification is possible. As compared to other languages, this occurs less often in English, but often enough to justify some phonics instruction." "Spelling contests flourish in English-speaking countries where spelling, because of phonetic irregularities, is something with which to conjure." "English spelling is largely non-phonetic in character." Quoting Robert Bridges in "A Tract on the Present State of English Pronunciation", 1913, "The chief difficulty lies in the impossibility of representing sounds in the ordinary English spelling; because our spellings have no phonetic rules, and our alphabet is consequently ambiguous and scientifically useless." Thos. G. Foran says. "A. I. Gates calls attention to the tendency of children to spell unknown words phonetically. This causes many errors because of the unphonetic nature of many English words." "Ordinarily, spelling rules have little value due to a lack of conformity to the rules by our English spelling." Leta S. Hollingsworth says in "The Psychology of Special Disability in Spelling, 1918, "We believe that the unphonetic character of English spelling renders impossible the use of a scale for the measurement of spelling ability in just the same sense that a scale for the measurement of arithmetic can be used." "English spelling must be learned by the formation of hundreds of specific bonds of memory and cannot be learned by the formation of a few bonds or rules as in most other studies." Oliver P. Cornman says in "Spelling in the Elementary School", "Since nearly half of all spelling errors are due to confusion and the unphonetic nature of English spelling, a properly developed spelling reform would not only eliminate half of the causes of spelling errors, but would psychologically be a tremendous help in establishing the pupils self-confidence.

James E. Mendenhall says in "An Analysis of Spelling Errors", 1930, "Although English spelling is far from being perfect, it is not altogether unphonetic. Certain letter combinations are used consistently in a phonetic manner." Edward Wm. Dolch said in "Problems in Reading", 1948, "Unfortunately, many of the common words of the English language are largely non-phonetic. The solution to the conflict between sounding-out and non-phonetic words is, first to defer sounding as long as possible. The second practical solution is to use sounding, not so much for working out complete words, as for checking guess in context. It works with non-phonetic words also, because except for a few words like *know* and *pneumonia*, a word is generally partly phonetic, especially at the beginning. "On page 340 he says: "They say that, going by syllables, English is 85% phonetic, but the other 15% of syllables which are not phonetic are very important, and are the ones that give the trouble." In Duker & Nally: "The Truth About Your Child's Reading", page 144, "Dr. Flesch makes the statement that research studies show that 87% of the English language is phonetic. We would like to see such a study. Linguists themselves are unable to agree on what constitutes a phonetic word. For the English language, which does not lend itself to pronunciation by phonetic rules, such rules would have to be extended indefinitely to cover an infinite variety of exceptions." Dr. Rudolf Flesch in "Why Johnny Can't Read", says on page 12, "I quote from page 297 of "Reading and the Educative Process" by Dr. Paul Witty of Northwestern Univ. 'English is essentially an unphonetic language as it is now pronounced.' But the reading "experts" have created

so much confusion that it is necessary to refute this nonsense. Well then: *All* alphabetic systems are phonetic (in their nature); the two words mean the same thing. The only trouble is that English is a little more irregular than other languages. How much more has been established by 3 or 4 independent researchers. They all came up with the same figure ' About 13% of all English words are partly irregular in their spelling. The other 87% follow fixed rules. Even the 13% are not unphonetic as Dr. Witty calls it, but usually contain just one irregularly spelled vowel; *done* is spelled "dun", *one* is pronounced "wun", and so on. So our English system spelling is of course phonetic, but has a few more exceptions to the rules than other languages. To quote Gates again, in "New Methods in Primary Reading", 1928, pg 34, "Several studies have shown that, in a particular use of the term, English words are largely phonetic. Burbank found that there are in the English language approximately 3,381 monosyllables, 86.9% of which are phonetic. He also found out that of the 3,405 syllables in the poly syllabic words of the Jones Spelling List for the Primary Grades, approximately the same % (86.5 to be exact) are phonetic. More recently, Osburn's study of the first 2,500 words in the Thorndike List showed that all but 186 are phonetic. The argument based on these facts is as follows: "As a matter of fact, out of every 7 syllables, 6 are like "dun" and only one is like "done". An overwhelming majority of the words and syllables in English are phonetic. Because each word in 7 is unphonetic, shall we ignore the 85% that are phonetic. Apparently, there is sufficient evidence that the figures cited above are accurate. But by what yardstick is this phoneticness measured? There are two schools of thought as to what constitutes a phonetic representation of a sound. The fundamentalists and spelling reformers insist that a letter (or symbol) is phonetic only if it solely represents one particular sound and there is no other letter or symbol also representing that sound. Their rule is: One symbol equals one sound — and each sound has only one symbol. Some of the researchers take a more lenient viewpoint. They say that a letter or symbol is reasonably phonetic if it usually represents only one sound, but that there can be a few exceptions to the rule. Also there can be other symbols representing the same sound if they also usually represent only that one sound. They would say that the letters: b, d, f, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, qu, r, t, v, w, y, z, are phonetic, if you dont count the places where they are silent, or combinations with other letters that represent other sounds. They would consider the vowel digraph "oa" as phonetic, since it usually is sounded as long-o (except when there is a syllable break between the o and a, as in monoacetate). But, actually, "oa" is pronounced in 4 ways as in: broad, oar, cupboard, cocoa. The 3 other pronunciations (than long-o) are found in only a few words.

Ina C. Sartorius, in "Generalizations in Spelling", 1931, lists all 2, 3, (and a few 4) letter combinations that occur in English spelling in the 4,065 words listed from the combined lists of Ayers-Buckingham, Horn Basic Vocab, Thorndike, and 7 well-known spellers. So few of these letter combinations have only one sound that of the 382 different letter combinations, she found only 43 having only one sound, or 11.3%. The worst offender, (a) has 23 different sounds. Such consonant clusters generally considered phonetic as "bl" was found to have 10 different pronunciations. (pg 20). Ea was found to have 12 different sounds. An interesting conclusion was drawn from table IV, that the 139 digraphs have a total of 870 pronunciations, or each digraph has an average of six different pronunciations. Hence, we still dont know how phonetic English spelling is because we dont know with certainty the measuring stick used to determine phoneticness.

There is also the matter of the number of words tested. Most of these tests were run on lists of less than 3000 words (Sartorius used 4,065). These were generally the most frequently used words in elementary school. The figure for 10,000 different or 80,000 words in the dictionary might be changed considerably, since compound words are generally more inclined to be phonetic in their structure than the commoner and shorter words.

There is another point of view. Will the percentage of unphonetic words in running text, say in the newspapers, be slightly or considerable from the percentages given for words, say on the Sartorius lists? We would appreciate someone's giving us a clear-cut definition of exactly how the phoneticness of English words should be measured and compiled. Then we can start to find out exactly what we mean when we ask: How Phonetic is English Spelling?

8. The Measurement of the Phoneticness of our Spelling, by S. S. Eustace, Lecturer on the Augmented Roman Alphabet.

Being the substance of an address entitled "The Measurement of Spelling Regularity" given before the Simplified Spelling Society at Pitman House, London, June 26, 1959.

It would be useful if we could define the irregularity, or lack of phoneticness of the traditional English spelling in numerical terms. We should then be able to compare it easily with reformed spellings and foreign languages.

For the traditional spelling of English, this is extremely difficult. For instance, it is not possible simply to analyse the way each letter is pronounced or each sound spelt, because the learner does not work from a simple rule of thumb but very often must use the context as a guide; if asked to spell [pɪk] (pick), and assuming he is not acquainted with the word, a learner would probably spell the [k] sound *ck* on the analogy of similar monosyllables which he did know, such as *lick*, *rock*; but if asked to spell [juːˈdʒɛnɪk] (eugenic) he might well suspect that it belonged to a large class of words ending in *-ic* and accordingly spell the [k] with *-ic*. The extreme case would be a class of words containing a given sound in a similar phonetic context such that the sound is spelt one way in half the class and another way in the other half; then we cannot say which way is "regular".

An attempt to provide such a numerical index has been made by Dr. Lee, [1]. To establish the relative regularity of different spellings, he took the commoner ways of spelling a sound and multiplied them by their frequency in context according to Dr. Godfrey, Dewey's tables of word frequency, [2]. For instance, he found that [ɑ:] was spelt

<i>a</i>	as	in <i>after</i>	572	times
<i>ar</i>	as	in <i>army</i>	547	times
<i>are</i>		in <i>are</i>	542	times
<i>al</i>	as	in <i>half</i>	58	times
<i>ear</i>	as	in <i>heart</i>	18	times

The different spellings were given numbers corresponding to their rank order of frequency *a*...1, *ar*...2, *are*...3, *al*...4, *ear*...5.

These numbers were taken to be a numerical index of spelling regularity. The spelling regularity of any word was derived from a sequence of these numbers: *address* was 2-4-1-1-3, since *a* is the second most frequent spelling of [ə], *dd* the fourth spelling of [d] and so on. The figures in each word sequence were then totaled and divided by the number of sounds in the word: for *address* 2 plus 4 plus 1 plus 1 Plus 3 = 11, divided by 5 [əddrɛs] = 2.5, which is taken as the index writingwise, [3] of the spelling irregularity of [əddrɛs] *address*. Some account was taken of position in the word and a count was made of common word-beginnings and endings. These provided a secondary set of figures, which were however said to be less "valid" than the primary ones because of the subjective element.

It should be noted that Dr. Lee's method embodies an error of principle. In assessing reading difficulty, he needed an index of irregularity readingwise [4]. But his method, if it measured anything, measured irregularity writingwise, a very different thing.

Even if it were valid (which it is not, the method still contains the unwarranted assumption that in choosing between alternative spellings for a sound, the learner (!) multiplies each alternative by its

frequency in context. Except perhaps for the six-odd commonest words in Dr. Dewey's list there is no reason to think this happens; (if it did, it would imply that the frequency of any word was known to the speaker by instinct and Dr. Dewey's work would have been unnecessary). Hence, there is every reason to think it doesn't happen. As it works out, Dr. Lee's method leads him into absurdity: *back* is held to be less regular(!) than *both*, *hope* than *do*, *does* than *gone*, *side* than *once*, etc. The absurdities are so numerous as to make the figures meaningless

This investigation has been described at length so as to give an idea of the traps and snares which await the investigator. I now propose a method by which these difficulties can be overcome, and which if not reliable, is at least valid.

I reckon that the irregularity of a word is directly related to the number of plausible different ways of reading and writing it.

250 words were taken at random from a middle-sized dictionary, Prof. Daniel Jones, "English Pronouncing Dictionary", as representing not much more than the vocabulary of an educated person. Speaking for myself, the list contained about 12 words entirely unknown to me, besides a number of others of which I was not sure.

For the readingwise aspect, I wrote beside each word the number of possible pronunciations which the spelling could represent, out of context, to an imaginary subject who was a well-educated speaker of the British dialect, and who knew thoroughly the relationship between sound and traditional-spelling in English, but who happened to be unfamiliar with the word in question. For example:

<i>outrage</i>	`aʊtrɛɪdʒ, `aʊtrɪdʒ	`utrɛɪdʒ,		
	`utrɪdʒ,	aʊ`trɛɪdʒ,	u`trɛɪdʒ,	6 / 0.167
<i>overture</i>	`oʊvətʃə,	oʊ`vətʃə		2 / 0.500
<i>oviform</i>	`oʊvɪfɔm	`ɒvɪfɔm		2 / 0.500
<i>palatable</i>	`pælətəbl	pə`lætəbl	pə`leɪtəbl	3 / 0.333
<i>parachute</i>	`pærətʃut	`pɛərətʃut		2 / 0.000
<i>passible</i>	`pæsɪbl	`pɑsɪbl		2 / 0.500
<i>pear</i>	`piə			1 / 0.000
<i>pension</i>	`pɛnʃən			1 / 1.000

Explanation: For *outrage*, I reckon there are 6 possible pronunciations, including the correct one. The subject's chance of getting the right pronunciation is 1 in 6, or 0.167. For *parachute* I reckon that no uninformed person would read *ch* as [ʃ], so regard the *ch* as wholly irregular. Of the two possible pronunciations, both are wrong and the subject's chance of getting the right sound is 0.000. Likewise with *pear*. For *pension*, I assume the subject knows other words in *-nsion* like *comprehension*, *tension*, *expansion*. On this analogy the only possible pronunciation is the right one and the subject's chance of getting it is 1,000, (certainty).

I dealt with the writingwise aspect in exactly the same way, for example:

[`aʊtrɛɪdʒ]	outrage, outraige, owtrage, owtraige	4 / 0.250
[`oʊvətʃə]	overture, ovature, oaverture, oavature	4 / 0.250
[`oʊvɪfɔm]	oviform (obviously Latin-derived, so no <i>oa</i>)	1 / 1.000
[`pælətəbl]	palatabla, palertable, pallatable, pallertable	4 / 0.250
[`pærəʃut]	parashute, parrashoot, parrershute, and 5 others, but never a <i>ch</i>	8 / 0.000
[`pæsɪbl]	passible, pacible, pascible	3 / 0.333

[`pɛə]	pare, pair (Each word was assumed to be one particular word, not any one of several differently spelt homophones)	2 / 0.000
[`pɛnʃən]	pension, pensian, pention, pentian, penshen, penshan, penshon	7 / 0.143

The figures in the right-hand column were added up and divided by 250 (the number of words on the list). The resulting figure was taken to be the average probability of inferring the right sound from the spelling or vice versa, for any English word.

Then the list was translated as near as I could into Russian, French, German, my own reformed spelling of English [5], and the system of the Simplified Spelling Society, (the same as that of the S. S Board), and the process was repeated for the traditional spelling of English. The following figures were obtained, which I suggest correspond in some degree with the logical factor, (but not the shape-memory factor) involved in learning to read and write:

Readingwise		Writingwise	
I.P.A.	1.000	I.P.A.	1.000
English, my spelling	1.000	English, my spelling	0.84
French	0.92	Simplified Spelling Soc.	0.71
German	0.90	German	0.62
Simplified Spelling Soc.	0.76	Russian	0.57
Russian	0.76	French	0.44
English, traditional sp	0.61	English, trad. spelling,	0.35
Chinese, est.	0.00	Chinese, est.	0.00

Note. In my spelling, the irregularity is mostly in respect of "r" after a vowel, which I write but do not pronounce.

— in Russian readingwise, it is mostly in respect of the position of the stress. I am grateful to Mrs. V. A. Traill, a native Russian-speaker, for her opinion as to what alternative stresses were plausible.

— in Russian writingwise, it is mostly in respect of a single phoneme, unstressed [a], which is spelt *o* or *a*.

— homophonous inflections were disregarded: thus in French *denté*, (e) (s), (*dentate*), were all taken as correct.

— Chinese is included to illustrate the extreme case where every word has an entirely separate symbol. But there is, I believe, a small phonetic element even in Chinese.

— I have not distinguished between

1. unspellable sounds, e.g. English [ʃ] as in *good*, or German [ks] / [xz] both spelt *chs*,
2. very unusual spellings, e.g. *ph* for [f]
3. grossly irregular spellings, e.g. *who* for [hu].

For the reformed spellings and for foreign languages, the method was fairly straight-forward and reliable. But with English traditional spelling, it was far harder to say what alternatives were plausible. Would anyone really spell *outrage* as *owtraige*? It is difficult to say, and another judge would probably disagree; and if [ˈʊvɪfɔm] why not [ˈʊvətʃə]? The only answer is that it is how I felt at the time.

The fact is that to a certain extent the letters in the traditional spelling are not used as alphabetic

characters. In some cases they are not even intended to represent sounds, but are used more like numerals without reference to their usual phonetic values: for instance, it is not alphabetic if *viz* is pronounced "namely". It is to this extent irrelevant to measure traditional spelling on a scale designed for purely alphabetic writing. But I consider the scale useful as a means of judging the phonetic accuracy of different spelling reform schemes. (Phonetic accuracy is not the only quality we look for, but it is the most important).

As the readers may wish to know what the 250 words are, they are included below. It would be interesting if someone were to repeat the investigation with the same words, so as to enable us to gauge the *importance of the subjective factor*. I shall be glad to give details of the assumptions I made. Here are the words:

abide, accountant, adjuration, affront, alabaster, alleviate, ambages, analyst, anomaly, aphonic, aquiline, aristotelian, ashlar, asunder, auscultate, babble, balmy, barrel, beard, belay, beseem, billycock, blaze, bodkin, bosom, braggart, bridoon, bryony, burner, cadet, camp, carabineer, casement, cavern, chair, cheat, chirrup, ciliary, claw, coach, cobble, coke, commandment, composition, confer, conservative, contract (verb), coping, coryphaeus, covenant, crept, crone, cruise, current, daisy, daw, decoct, delay, dentate (adj.), desolate (adj.), dialectic, dingy (boat), discourteous, displease, dive, donate, dowry, dross, dunlin, eastern, egoistic, ellipse, emperor, enharmonic, epact, erode, eugenic, exceed, expansibility, extirpate, fairy, fathom, favourite, feral, fill, flabby, floriferous, forage, fortitude, freeze, fulfil, gait, gasconnade, geodesic, ginseng, gnarl, gorilla, grassy, grind, gully, hair, handsome, hasty, hazard, heather, hepatic, hie, hock, hooves, however, hustings, ichneumon, imbecile, impound, incline (verb), indestructibility, inextricable, innate, insure, interposition, invulnerability, isinglass, japan, jocosity, jonquil, just, key, knead, lad, larrikin, learn, loper, lift, listen, loggerhead, low, lycopodium, mage, malt, margin, maternity, mediate, merit, milch, mischievous, mohair, moor, mow, mutter, naze, news, nondescript, nuptial, obtrude, ogle, omlet, opera, ormolu, outrage, overture, oviform, palatable, parachute, passible, pear, pension, peregrine, pernicious, pharisaism, pick, pistol, plinth, polysyllabic, postpone, precipitous, preterite, productive, propound, psychic, purulency, quassia, racoon, rather, reclaim, reeve, rejuvenate, repercussion, restoration, rhapsodic, roam, rostrum, rust, salubrious, saucer, scimitar, seamstress, sell, session, sheet, shrimp, simultaneous, slap, smoke, solder, souvenir, spirea, squeal, stamen, stamina, stay, stipulation, strangle, suable, suffix, supervision, swift, tablet, tart, temper, text, thill, ticket, tocsin, totality, transfix, trey, truancy, tuxedo, ultramarine, uncial, underneath, ungainly, union, unravel, untoward, unwieldy, utmost, vavasour, vestry, vista, wobble, warfare, weal, whack, whoever, wipe, wore, yacht, zest, zoo.

Ref:

[1] W.R. Lee: "Is the Irregularity With Which English is Spelt an Important cause of Reading Difficulty?", London Institute of Education, 1957.

[2] Godfrey Dewey: "Relative Frequency of English Speech Sounds", Harvard, 1923.

[3] "writingwise" = "to do with inferring the right spelling of a word from its sounds".

[4] "readingwise" = "to do with inferring the right sound of a word from its spelling".

[5] Except for (!) as a mark of emphasis, no example of my spelling appears in this article. The phonetic characters are, of course, a variety of the International Phonetic Association Alphabet, which though using more letters than usual is well known to educators.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p13 in the printed version]

In the [October 1961 issue of the S.P.B.](#) it was erroneously reported that Mr. S. S. Eustace was the inventor of the Augmented Roman Alphabet, when the inventor is Sir James Pitman. Mr. Eustace invented the reversed 'z' used in this alphabet and assisted Sir James Pitman in drawing the characters in their present shapes.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p14,15 in the printed version]

9. The Phoneticness of the Russian Alphabet, by Victor Crassnoff.

The present day Russian Alphabet is an outgrowth of the original Cyrillic alphabet. Developed in the 9th century, the early Cyrillic consisted of 43 letters. During its long life of 800 and some years, the Cyrillic had undergone some changes. Four of the letters were dropped from its since the sounds represented by them could be equally as well portrayed by other letters or combinations of other letters in the same alphabet, so that at the time of its revision in the beginning of the 18th century by Tsar Peter the Great, it consisted of 39 letters.

The revision of the Cyrillic into the Russian Alphabet consisted mainly of the change of the script from vertical script, which in handwriting could only be handprinted, to the slanted cursive script, and the introduction of a separate design for printed letters. However, there were also some orthographic changes, the most important of which was the addition to the alphabet of a letter й representing the semi-vowel sound of the 'y' in 'boy'. In Russian there are altogether 20 syllable forming vowel sounds, 10 of which are the vowels themselves and 10 diphthongs formed by each of the vowels with the above described semi-vowel sound of 'y' in 'boy'. By providing a letter for this semi-vowel in the alphabet, it became possible to portray uniformly the sound of the diphthongs, as shown below:

vowels	а	э	ы	о	у	я	е	и	ё	ю
as in	ah	et	it	ot	foot	ya	yet	ee	awe	you
diphthongs	ай	эй	ый	ой	уй	яй	ей	ий	ёй	юй
Eng. equiv.	eye	āy	yiy	oy	ooey	yoo	āee	eeya	yoi	yooy

The other orthographic change was the omission from the alphabet of three more letters for the same reason as before.

The Russian Alphabet, as it was now called, was made up of 37 letters which fully and accurately covered the entire phonemic range of the oral language. It's only fault was — each covered it too fully — for in bowing to the fetish of worship of the written word, it carried over from the Cyrillic the practice of multiple letter representation of some of the phonemes, so that it had 3 letters for the sound of 'long-e', 2 letters for the sound corresponding to the English 'ye' in the 'yet', and 2 letters for the sound of 'f'.

Because of the clear-cut relation of the letters to the phonemic sounds represented by them, the new Russian Alphabet constituted an excellent reading key, but as a phonetic writing key it failed to

supply the clear-cut identification of the written symbol of the phonemes for which there were more than one letter in the alphabet, namely, the sounds of 'long-e', 'ye' and 'f'.

Yet it was not as bad as it would seem. One of the letters for the sound 'f' and one of the letters for the sound 'long-e' were soon discarded in literary writing; the use of one of the two remaining letters for the long sound of 'long-e' was governed by the rule that it should be so written in front of any vowel. That left just 2 letters for the sound 'ye' the use of which did not follow any rule so the spelling of words containing the sound had to be memorized.

The language reform of October 10, 1918 had abolished the practice of multiple letter representation of phonemes 'long-e', 'ye' and 'f' by retaining in the alphabet only one letter for each.

The other thing this reform did — it abolished the use of a mute letter 'the hard sign' at the end of words. However, this letter remained in the alphabet for use in the middle of words as a sign of division. Most of the consonants in Russian have a hard and soft sound. To indicate this there are two mute letters in the alphabet: 'the hard sign' ъ and 'the soft sign' ь, one to indicate that the preceding consonant is pronounced hard, the other that it is pronounced soft. It stands to reason that one of these conditions could be equally as well indicated by the absence of any sign, as long as a sign is used to indicate the other. Simple as it is, this readjustment had resulted in elimination of 6% of the letters from the text, with the resultant saving in time, materials and space running into millions of dollars. This is an example that gives credence to Shaw's estimate that the use of fossil written forms costs Britain alone each year the price of a fleet of battleships.

The Russian Alphabet, as it is now, contains 33 letters, two of which are the mutes while the others are each portraying a separate sharply defined phonemic sound.

The Russian Literary Language is based on the grammatical concept of writing, since the role of the portrayal of sound with alphabet letters is reserved in it for the accurate portrayal of the sound of the grammatical components — the prefix, the stem, the suffix, the ending — rather than the resultant combination, the word itself. It is the same concept that compels us to spell 'missed' with 'd' instead of 't' and compels us to spell the root part alike in 'departed' and 'departure', even tho the 't' in the latter word has been changed so that it is now pronounced as 'ch'.

In a highly inflected Russian language the 'prefix-stem-ending rule', at times, produces some hard-to-pronounce environmental combinations which are resolved in the spoken word by mispronouncing or eliding some of the sounds of the letters composing the written word, so that the Russian language, in spite of its phonetic alphabet, still has some strange spelling, but it is a different kind of spelling — justified by the grammatical rules and easily discernible on the basis of them.

Russian children begin school at the age of seven, where the teaching of reading, writing and grammar is confined to the first seven years. It takes that length of time to teach the average student to read with a vocabulary of 10,000 words and to write without using a dictionary.

Dictionaries, as we know them, serve the dual purpose of the deciphering key of the otherwise unreadable writing, and that of the lexicon. The Russian reader has no need of a deciphering key, for the writing or printing he reads is directly decipherable into sounds by means of the phonetic alphabet. Neither does the Russian writer need it, for the sound of the language he speaks is directly

convertible into writing from the basis of the alphabet and grammar. The Russian's need of a lexicon is not as great as ours because their vocabulary building potentiality is greatly enhanced by their ability to read even the unknown word into its sound and to make out the meaning of it from context. This makes their written vocabulary equal in quantity to their spoken vocabulary, something we never accomplish in an entire lifetime. In the fifteen years of schooling in Russia, the writer had never seen a Russian lexicon, altho they were available in university libraries. Since the revolution, however, because of the rapid build-up of the language with English words, that is, their corrupted phonetic equivalent, the lexicon has a much wider use in Russia, and there are some excellent and very complete editions that are now available.

The method of teaching reading in Russian schools can best be described as "The Progressive Syllable Reading" in which the pupil names the letters composing the syllables and progressively strings the syllables into the word-sounds, as for instance:

b-a-r — bar, b-a — ba, barba, r-a — ra, barbara.

In teaching reading, the pupil is taught in the slow deliberate reading process, which is to pronounce every letter in the form of the sound for which it stands in the alphabet, both in the syllables and the complete word. The pupil is taught to do this even with the hard to pronounce words, as this helps the learner to memorize the spelling of these stilted forms. Later, of course, after confidence is reached, in rapid reading the pupil will pronounce these words in the sound form of the spoken language.

Since the writing of Russian Literary Language is the product of grammar and alphabet, a thoro knowledge of grammar is needed for the pursuit of this art. The practical teaching of this combination in schools is in the classroom dictations which are carried on thru the entire period of the first seven years of schooling.

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Victor N. Crassnoff is a retired Petroleum Engineer, residing at 38 Ramona Place, Godfrey, Illinois.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p15 in the printed version]

10. Werse Verse, by Bennett Cerf.

The wind was rough
And cold and blough.
She kept her hands within her mough.
It chilled her through,
Her nose turned blough,
And still the squal the faster flough —

And yet, although
There was no snough,
The weather was a cruel fough.
It made her cough,
Please do not scough,
She coughed until her hat blough ough.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p16 in the printed version]

11. The Best Means of Representing the "TH" Sounds, by Newell W. Tune

Since it is agreed upon by makers of phonetic spelling systems or new phonetic alphabets, that there needs to be some means of distinguishing between the voiced and unvoiced sounds now indicated by the letters "th", let us explore the proposed methods of representation and try to see if we can select the most appropriate or best means.

To begin with, we have two divisions in the methods of representation:

1. those systems which use the 26 (or 23 useful) Roman letters, and,
2. those which substitute new symbols for the sounds not now represented by single letters. For the sake of simplicity, let us confine this short work to staying within the Roman letters.

Next, we should decide which of the two sounds is the most important and should be represented by the letters "th". In Dr. Dewey's: *Relativ Frequency of English Speech Sounds*, it shows that the voiced sound, as in "these", occurs with 3.50% frequency, as compared with the unvoiced sound, as in "thin", with only 0.38%, or nine times as often. Since one of our objectives is to make no more changes in our spelling than is necessary, it seems logical to use the symbol "th" for the voiced sound rather than to change it to "dh" as has been suggested so often in the past. Many persons have objected to the use of "dh" on the grounds that it would make too many words, including the most frequent word "the", look unnecessarily strange. Another objection is that it suggests a foreign dialect that teachers want to avoid.

If it is now agreed that it would be better to find a new digraphic symbol for the unvoiced "th", we can begin by examining possible letter combinations. The following are suggested for this sound: tth, fh — are there any more likely candidates? Probably not, as an examination of the voice chart and the consonant symbols does not turn up any likely candidates. Grace Barnes lists "f" as the counterpart of unvoiced "th", and "v" as the counterpart of voiced "th". While the use of the symbol "fh" might seem strange at first, it would be no stranger looking than would "dh" to a person who had never seen it used before. Also, it would be more likely to nearly convey the intended sound than would "dh" for its intended sound. The symbol "tth", while looking more nearly like conventional spelling, would require an extra letter. There might be some words in which its use might bring complications, while the "fh" being unused before, would be unlikely to bring complications.

What do you think would be the best symbol? We are still open to suggestions.

Forsooth, tthin tthanx for yor tthesis on lengtth and widtth.

forsoofh, fhin fhanx for yor fthesis on lengfh and widfh.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §13.4 pp185,196 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p16 (7 deadly sins only) in the printed version]

12. The Seven Deadly Sins of Spelling Reformers, by Newell W. Tune.

1. Thinking you are the only one to have solved the problem of reforming our spelling.
2. Writing a book on spelling reform without getting a thoro knowledge of speech sounds as exemplified in the dictionary, and reading sufficient of the many books already written on the subject.
3. Thinking that your system of reform is the best, and in fact, the only one worth considering.
4. Using discarded Roman letters for new sound values totally unrelated to their conventional use.
5. Combining two recognizedly different sound values to be represented by one symbol, such as: then-thin, full-fool, baron-bar, all-olive.
6. Dividing the sound values into smaller segments than we conventionally use as units of sound values, as "dzh" for "j", "tsh" for "ch", "ey" for long-a, "iy" for long-e.
7. Trying to devise a phonetic alphabet as strange and unlike conventional spelling as possible.

Ten booby traps for spelling reformers, by Leo G. Davis

1. Dwelling at length on current irregularity, instead of future stability.
2. Dreaming of impossible perfection instead of practicality.
3. Worrying about minority pronunciations. (We can't serve two masters.)
4. Inventing new letters or using present letters in unorthodox manner.
5. Making every possible change, instead of just the necessary ones.
6. Worrying about consonant digraphs. (They never confuse anyone.)
7. Trying to neutralise or remit the unstressed vowels. (They are there even in hurried speech.)
8. Using a digraph to indicate a diphthong. (UE for the e-u and y-u phonemes.)
9. Offering different spellings for homonyms (contrary to fonetik simplicity).
10. Suggesting that adults change their personal spelling habits. (They won't.)

Some delinquencies of spelling reformers, by Fred Wingfield

1. Conceit regarding one's own skeme; prejudice agenst or no time for examination of other proposed reforms.
2. Failure to acquaint oneself with the science of fonetiks.
3. Hamstringing one's system by the requirement of new alfabet symbols.
4. In the fonetik skemes, lack of conformity to the rule: For each grapheme, one and only one phoneme.
5. Failure to comprehend that *all* the letters of the Roman alfabet are urgently needed.
6. Twisting the pronunciation to fit the system, instead of making the system conform to the pronunciation (e.g., the word "America").
7. Making skemes that require more letters that are used in conventional orthography, or whose letter economy is void.
8. Failure to realise a reconstruction of English spelling unavoidably must make a change in appearance; a "phonetic" system will inevitably "look strange". (Its about as logical to think one can go swimming without wetting the feet, as to believe that to read spelling which is honestly "phonetic" should not cause a drastic change in its appearance.

Transliterated Mottos in Simplified Spelling

Yoo kant undoo with a fyoo kind wurdz thə rongz purpətraeted oevur thə yeeرز.

Nun ar soe bliend az thoeز hoo doent wont too see.

It taeks an inteləjənt purson too əpreesheeəet thə intəlekchooəl rietingz ov uthurz.

13. all — or nothing — for johnny, by samuel c. seegay.

almost every day in almost any periodical that you pick up, you will find an article that presents some disturbing facts about the problem of teaching johnny to read. in the course of the presentations, there are usually a number of comparisons of the inconsistencies of the english orthography as opposed as opposed to the orthography of other languages with more phonetic systems of transcription.

the frequent recurrence of crisp and striking examples of the inconsistencies that besprinkle these articles should and do arouse the ire of even the casual reader. but the alert veteran in this field is fully aware that only the surface has been scratched; that the entire gamut of arbitrary and confusing denotations has never yet been fully covered in any single work. even your present author, in a collection of mss that has reached the mature age of a quarter of a century and which lists 565 spellings, with our 26 letters for the 39 sounds in our language, is still adding more and more of them with the passing of time.

this is a most deplorable commentary on the treachery of the english orthography, the basic subject matter and tool involved with the teaching and learning of reading and writing; a function of absolute necessity in this highly enlightened age; a function that should be as simple and on a par with learning to speak — which usually is no problem at all. the youngest child, even prior to its enrolment in any formal training, has already learned to speak sufficiently well to make known its needs and to respond to any of its obligations. reading and writing is merely the child of hearing and speaking. there is no reason why they should not come as naturally and easily with a system of denotation and transcription so sensible that it is a true and exact mirror of speech itself. that should be the ideal and the goal of the spelling reformer.

but what do we have to work with? do you know that it is almost impossible to compose a simple sentence with as few as five or six words in which every letter stands for its basic sound? "take these six words for example". the letter a is used for long-a in take and short-a in example; the e of take, the second e of these, and the second e of example have no sounds at all; the t of these does not have the sound of t; the first e of these is a long-e, while the first e of example is a short-e; the s of these and the s in words are pronounced z but the s in six is s; the x in six is ks and the x in example is gz; and the o in words is pronounced short-u 'while the o in for is neither long nor short-o but a somewhat different sound not represented in a complete rendition of every one of our alphabetic characters! this adds up to a total of 13 misrepresentations in a mere 26-letter sentence. is it any wonder that we have slow readers, and poor readers, and non-readers; is it any wonder that after 12 or even 16 years of schooling so many johnnys are compelled to turn to elaborate reading laboratories for remedial reading?

'why isn't reform accomplished?

the martinet insists that the endless mental gymnastics essential for the mastery of traditional orthography is a factor in the development of mental prowess. he is sadly mistaken, for immemorially the best spellers are not necessarily the best minds — and nearly every gigantic mind is much too preoccupied with more essential matters than to wrangle and tangle with the conglomeration of rules and the galaxy of exceptions to these very rules to conquer this mess of

potage. actually, there is no such thing as a perfect speller (of english). the final contestant, the victor, in every spelling bee would eventually meet his doom were the contest continued. can you accurately spell and pronounce every word in your vocabulary? would an author, an educator, an erudite specialist in any field of endeavor dare to write for publication without a dictionary at his side, and without an editor and a proofreader for a prop?

the pedagog insists that there is a sacred heritage in the preservation of the established forms, and that it is heresy to attempt to tamper or alter the status quo. he is bedimmed, befogged and bewildered by his own blinders, and should be reminded that no dire consequences ensued from the transition of chaucerian to elizabethan, nor in the transition from elizabethan to modern english. as a matter of fact and history, both of these changes are happily recognized as advancements of a most beneficial nature, and constitute the most valid precedents.

the etymologist contends that a worthwhile acquisition and use of any word entails a thorough knowledge of its derivation and its history of changes in form and meaning; when actually the only practical purpose in learning and using a new word is its present form and meaning. surely etymology is and always will be the most typical of all esoteric pursuits, an intellectual luxury. besides, it should not matter to the scholar if one more is added to a study that has already amassed a multitude of forms. with his face buried in ancient and archaic books, the etymologist is quite unaware that if there had never been any changes made in the word he is disinterring, he never would have started this fascinating game; he defeats his own avocational pursuits by resisting the very course of the evolution of his sport. but it does not matter if the new form is easier to learn and to use and is much more practical today.

the steward of the exchequer exclaims that any tampering with our mode of transcription will require financing of a burdensome and prohibitive nature, and that it will make our vast and valuable libraries of literature obsolete. this is far removed from the real situation. actually it will be entirely harmless and will not cost one extra penny of expense. naturally, the process, although it can be introduced practically overnight, will take a considerable period of time for its complete consummation. during this hiatus, the current literature will receive its accustomed usage. do you destroy your books in english when you set out to learn some foreign language? the new books will arrive in due time to supplant the old ones according to the law of supply and demand.

there is one more enemy of a practical revision of the english language! hold your breath as you learn about this one — for he is no more or less than the spelling reformer himself! you may or may not be aware of the vast number of schemes that have been concocted for the reform of the english alphabet and orthography, but those of you who have perused some of these plans are, and justifiably so, completely disgusted with their muddled proposals. wild-eyed, crack-pot reformers have emaciated our symbols, tossed our characters around helter-skelter, compiled arbitrary melanges of denotations without rhyme or reason. the same authoritarian motivation that has held our children in abysmal bondage to traditional transcription, that has confined and imprisoned the freedom of thought of the bulk of our phoneticians and philologists, has also bound the unphilosophical coterie of spelling reformers who fear to tread away from the rutted path. it is quite understandable then that spelling reform cannot possibly make any progress, until and unless there is some basic scientific and philosophic foundation underlying it.

but in haste, we must inform you that all is not lost; that the revision of our alphabet and orthography is still a consumation devoutly to be desired; that its possibility is not hopeless; that sooner or later it can and will be accomplished satisfactorily. in the recent shaw contest for a proposed english alphabet, a total of 450 entries were submitted from every corner of the globe. a preponderance of the entries were sent in by foreigners, outside of albion, by speakers of many languages far remote from anglo-saxon . this points out the fact that many persons recognize that there is a crying need for reform of english spelling throughout the world that revision is destined and inevitable. the immense technical and scientific progress of this century will not much longer tolerate its procrastination; imminently the urgency of electronic transcription will mandate its immediate adoption.

what are the requisites for a satisfactory system?

1. we need a newer and much more readily recognizable set of symbols that will eliminate the possibility of misinterpretation; or lacking so radical a change, we must utilize our present roman characters to their best advantage, never failing to remember that each speech sound must be indicated by one and only one denotation.
2. we need a new philosophy of phonetics and orthography to dispel the false and harmful fetishes attached to a reverence of the traditional archaic concepts.
3. we need a scientific foundation for the letters of our alphabet, and their sound denotations based on an exact conformance with the actual physiological articulatory principles of speech to make reading and writing the mirror of speech.
4. we need exactly 39 (in this author's opinion) symbols to represent the sounds of speech according to the analysis of a group of experts selected for this particular purpose — a national spelling commission.
5. we need to make the government realize its responsibility in educating our children by giving them a firm and basic foundation in reading. this can best be done by using the authority of the government to establish a revised system of spelling.
6. we need the government to establish a precedent by using this revised spelling — not by ordering its use by the public.

surely, a sensible, practical means of reforming our spelling can be devised at a cost of less than one atomic bomb or one battleship. an aroused public and a sincere congress can do it easily.

14. A Report on the Amidon School, by Helen Bowyer.

Congratulations to Dr. Carl F. Hansen, Superintendent of Schools in the District of Columbia. There, in the nation's capital in September, 1960, he opened a new elementary school building whose entire program was to be based on the tenets of the Council For Basic Education. Among the gripping sentences in which he phrased those tenets were. "The surest protection of liberty is the liberal mind. The greatest enemy of freedom is the undeveloped intellect . . . I intend the Amidon type program to be the means to individual liberty within the context of a responsible social order . . . by developing to the highest level the intellectual potential of each pupil through the centering of instruction on the basic subjects.

What are these basic subjects? In equally trenchant style he answers: "The use of the mind to govern action requires competence in language, which is the basic tool for thinking. The number system, which . . . is a method of interpreting, judging and communicating thought about the world in which we live should also be included as a device for the exploitation of intelligence. Although language and numbers are the basic tools for intelligent behavior, art and music may . . . also contribute to understanding and rational interpretation and communication. Hence, they too, must have a place in the curriculum . . . Intelligence is also manifested in non-verbal ways, such as in the use of tools, the care of livestock, the operation of railroad dispatch boards. The mind can support ordered, logical and selected behavior in ways not requiring verbalization. But the most universal and significant tools for intelligent action are language and numbers, and hence these must have primary attention in the school program."

So much for the philosophy of Dr. Hansen's project. What of the milieu in which he proposed to set it going? "Most encouraging," he reports, "was the response of parents to the invitation to apply for the enrollment of their children in the school. Almost 41% of the Amidon's pupils came from public housing and military reservations within its own geographical boundaries. The remaining 59% (267 pupils at the opening date) came from 110 public and private schools *in and out of* the United States. Once enrolled, few children were transferred . . . so that a large waiting list of applicants was maintained. By December of the first year, 801 applications for admission had been received.

The pupils were heterogeneous in background and abilities. Racially, they were 70% negro, just slightly under the ratio for the city as a whole.

The enrollment for the six grades totaled 353. As each was divided into 2 classes, the teacher load was relatively small, ranging from 33 down to 27. This seems to be the only obvious advantage the Amidon youngsters had over their grademates in the rest of the country as a whole.

Invaluable, it seems to me, is Dr. Hansen's clean-cut separation of the *what* and *how* of the teacher's job. Each teacher was to have a curriculum chart which would "define the specific items to be taught, but not include methodology . . . A teacher will use such a content guide, if one is available. She wants to know what she is responsible for teaching in her grade. She would like to know what the teachers *before* and *ahead* of her are responsible for teaching. She needs to have information about the continuity, the repetition, the flow of content, grade by grade. She ought to be able to tell from the curriculum chart where she introduces an item for the first time and where she reteaches it for mastery and for progression to a higher level of difficulty. At this point she doesn't *need to be told how to teach.*"

What teacher with a spark of creativity in her but owes Dr. Hansen a *Viva* for this liberating pronouncement. And what numbers of the over-swollen ranks of supervisors and other non-teaching personnel now cluttering up our schools, might it not send back to the fundamental job of teaching children themselves, instead of imposing their stereotyped methods on the living know-how of the classroom teacher. And how it might sweep from our sagging library shelves, those books and books on HOW TO TEACH this n' that, by Ed. P's conspicuously short on year after year experience in putting over the difficulties of: *roll, knoll, goal, whole, soul, bowl, stole*, on whole classes of primary children — and the map of the United States on the fourth or fifth graders — and $1\frac{1}{3} = 4/3 = 133\%$ on the sixth.

Along with the curriculum chart for the teacher, must go equally definite textbooks for each grade. But where to find such texts on a level with the children's potential as this school hoped to bring it out? Where, especially, in the field of the social sciences — specifically in the United States geography, world geography, and United States history it intended to teach. "The style of writing," Dr. Hansen found "was mainly narrative, in an obvious effort to sugar-coat the content, and the subject matter appeared to be scant and uninvigorating . . . Until textbooks become more like textbooks and less like featherweight literature, the subject-matter emphasis of the Amidon plan will be difficult to realize in full.

But, in spite of this drawback, and others inherent in the newness of the project, Dr. Hansen had reason to be gratified by the reaction of almost everyone immediately involved. In response to a questionnaire, parents reported that their young "were enthusiastic about the school and seemed well adjusted to the rigorous demands of the program." Typical written comments were:

"My child's mental and emotional attitude toward school is excellent."

"My son loves school. He never had a challenge before coming to Amidon."

The difference in the attitude of my children towards school this year, as compared to previous years, is dramatic. Their progress, especially in reading, has made the long trip to and from school worth while."

"I have noticed many favorable changes. Among these are an obvious all-over mental growth, the desire to acquire knowledge, the importance of retaining knowledge, the personal responsibility to seek facts and the establishment of good study habits."

It might be an objection that the parents here quoted were too intelligent to be representative of the school as a whole. But the fact that all but 3 of the children not leaving the city or finishing 6th grade, signed up for the coming year, may be taken to indicate that there was precious little misgiving among the in-district parents, and enough active satisfaction among the out-district ones to compensate for the trouble and expense of transporting their young to the Amidon.

In demanding textbooks of subject-content up to the potential understanding of each grade, Dr. Hansen realized that this demanded reading skill beyond what the "look-and-say" method was giving in most of his other D. C. schools. Even when modified by that "intrinsic Phonics" with which, of late years, its proponents had grudgingly sprinkled it. He believed that the transmutation of symbol back into sound (however silent and all but automatic practice could make that operation), was step Number One to the comprehension of the printed word, the sentence, and then the page, so he took a vigorous swing back to "all-out" phonics.

I say *back*, because not even with a powerful glass can I see any essential difference between the system he instituted (Phonovisual) and the one on which I grew up and taught in my teacher training days of many years ago. It leaves teacher and child still up against those 251 jumbled spelling units (letters or unitary combinations thereof) in place of the 40 streamlined set which

meets all the needs of our 40 basic speech sounds. It still leaves them confronted with the teaching and learning of: does, dozen, cousin, rosin — board, bored, floored, gourd, horde, sword, adored, chord, word — one, done, gone, under, wonder, ponder, squander — two, you, blue, flew, through, shoe, — when every scrap of inborn reason in them — not too long brain-washed away — cries out for the consistency, the predictability of: duz, duzn, kuzn, rozn — bord, flord, gord, hord, sord, adord, kord, wurd — wun, dun, gaun, under, wunder, ponder, skwonder — too, yoo, bloo, floo, shoo, throo.

Yet, on the principle that "half a loaf — or even a slice or two — is better than no bread," I congratulate the young Amidoners on even the small break their Phonovisual gives them in their struggle with a reading problem which has no shadow of excuse for existing at all. And which could be resolved with relatively less trouble and expense than confronted Turkey when, over 30 years ago, she streamlined her archaic spelling, taking in her stride as well, the switch from her difficult Arabic letters to our easier Roman ones.

"Back to phonics" cannot give our Johnny and Jill anything near the magic liaison of sound and sign which blesses Abdul and Fatima but it can restore to them such broken measure of it as their grandparents knew. The basic sound of "a" wont work in "what, yacht, was, many" but it will with "whack, wax, yak, man." Single "o" wont transmute into the vowels of "both, brother, most, "but it will into those of "cloth, bother, lost." "Ch" may frequently sound as in "school, chauffer", but more often it is pronounced as in church. "G" not only assumes the 3 sounds it has in "singer, linger, ginger", but it also assumes such confusing roles in "gnaw, sign, deign, get, gem, give, gin." Still, one can be certain of it in the constantly recurring final syllable "ing".

Anyway, since no method of teaching reading could be worse than the "whole-word", the Amidon's swing back to phonics was bound to produce some improvement. And the standardized tests administered towards the close of the year, bore out this expectation to a greater or lesser extent.

Here is Dr. Hansen's summary of the results. "Except for the slow 3rd grade and the 4th grade, there is a consistent pattern of superiority of achievement in all subjects field tested, with the best scores being made on the whole in Word Discrimination, Reading and Spelling in the primary grades, and in Reading, Spelling, Total Language, and Language Study Skills in the intermediate grades. In comparison with the national group scores at the first, middle and third quartile, 78% of the Amidon scores excelled the national scores, 6% equalled them and 18% fell below.

Of course, it might be asked how much of this gratifying showing might be fairly claimed by the 110 other schools, public and private, in which the majority of the children had passed from one to five years. And how much should be credited to the background of out-district homes, education-conscious enough to recognize the promise of the Amidon. But, let that go. We spelling reformers are all for basic education, as against the shilly-shally of most of our schools, and strong for all-out phonics as against "look-and-say", if all-out phonics is the most we can get now.

What worries us is that slow 3rd grade, of which, Dr. Hansen writes "Different forms of the test were given to the two third grades, for the reason that one class entered the Amidon severely retarded in reading and the other was grouped as normal in achievement at the opening of school. "At the end of the year, this latter group exceeded the national norm at all points of comparison, as of course it should. The national norm is computed from all 3rd grades, whose showing is usually lowered by at least a few retardees.

These slow pupils would be around 8 or 9 years old when they entered the school and presumably they tested above low moronic. At the end of the year they would be 9 or 10 and would have had a full year of phonic in reading under exceptionally good auspices. One gets the impression that the test given them was simpler than that given their "regular" grademates, yet in reading, spelling and word knowledge, they fell below the national norms from .2 to .8 grade. Says their Superintendent: "Only in word discrimination at the first and third quartile did this third grade equal the national norm. This suggests that with the use of Phonovisual charts, this class was beginning to increase its word attack power, and the retardation which caused the special grouping, was being reduced.

Perhaps . . . But to the spelling reformer it suggests something much more promising. It suggests that instead of being confronted for the fifth semester with mind-numbing inconsistencies of the many anomalies of our spelling, these poor little retardees should have had their confidence bolstered by the logical, consistent, regularity of a one-sound = one syllableliaison of World English or any equally efficient phonemic notation. That very same September which saw them slated for another year's losing battle with spelling "az iz", saw 40 moppets enter a Denver kindergarten from which they graduated in June, reading at sight almost anything in World English not too far beyond their 5 to 6 year old understanding.

Also, September, 1961 saw a thousand English moppets starting a program of equal promise and delight under the auspices of London University's Institute of Education.

Toward the end of their year, some of these little Denverites were making the transition to conventional spelling on their own. It may be that with 3 years of retardation, humiliation, resentment behind these young Amidoners might not reach that stage so early or so spontaneously, but an added semester or two of systematic work at it should find most of them ready for the grade their age indicated.

It would make little difference if even quite a few of the class falls below average I.Q. There are no physically normal 9 and 10 year olds, bright enough to match dominos, who cant learn to match the 40 speech sounds of their mother tongue with the one and only basic spelling unit authorized to transcribe each. Or to transmute a sentence, a paragraph, a page, of these spelling units back into their sounds. Not only have we the evidence of phonemic Russia, Finland, Czecho-Slovakia, Turkey, Italy, and the Spanish world for this assertion — we have that of various authentic experiments in England and the United States.

So we suggest to Dr. Hansen that if this slow class is still below norm, that he switch from phonics to straight phonemics with them. Let him transliterate his regular 3rd and 4th grade textbooks into the World English of last year's Denver kindergarten or even the A. R. of the London Univ. project. Let him add to them a liberal succession of the children's books they are most likely to enjoy reading by themselves. And please, *please* do write this Bulletin what eventuates in six months or so.

Of course, what we'd like to see him do, as well, is to send a couple of his most competent and open-minded primary teachers to study the London Univ. project at first hand.

We hope that even before the end of its projected 3 years, it will banish conventional spelling from the primary grades of the whole English-speaking world. It wouldn't surprise us a bit if Dr. Hansen's were among the very first to so banish it.

15. The Problem of Reforming Our Spelling, by Newell W. Tune.

Many people seem to think that the reason the English-speaking people have not reformed their spelling is because a satisfactory method of reform has not been devised. However, this can hardly be true, for when one reads many of the books on the problem, literally hundreds of methods of reforming our spelling have been found to have been proposed. If they were all listed and counted, there would probably be over a thousand different systems. Surely amongst so many solutions there will be found one that is satisfactory?

But all of these many books were concerned solely with the academic solution to the problem, that of devising the best method of spelling to represent the spoken English language. Almost all of them ignore the most important aspect of the problem — how this reformed system of spelling shall be put into use. They are all trying to put the cart before the horse. They seem to think that if a perfect system is devised and agreed upon by the educators of this country, it then can be adopted and put into effect. They do not seem to know that this was done in 1880, when the American Philological Society agreed upon the changes to be made in our spelling. They petitioned Congress to adopt this system. When the Congressmen looked at it, they decided that the country was not ready for such a change. This result should prove quite clearly that the academic solution to the problem and the legislative solution to the problem are separable and should be independent. It should also prove that no academic solution to the problem, no matter how well devised and agreed upon by our educators, can ever be put into effect until and unless the legislative solution to the problem is first devised and put into effect.

No one person, organization, or group has any authority to make any changes in our spelling, unless it is the government. No one has any means of putting them into effect but our government. And no one among the hundreds of societies, newspapers, and educator's groups has ever succeeded in establishing the changed spelling of more than a few words. Hence, no important or worthwhile change in spelling will ever be established unless it is backed by the government as the official government spelling. Since Congress is the part of the government to institute all laws, and since it would require a law to make such a change "official", it behooves us not to waste our energies solving the academic problem, when it is the legislative problem that is stalemating the attempts at spelling reform.

Legislators must be convinced not only that spelling reform is desirable, practical and is badly needed, but also that the public and our educators are ready and willing to accept some drastic changes in our spelling needed to make it consistently regular and to conform to a set of rules. Unless and until we can convince the public and the educators of the many benefits of a reformed spelling, we cannot hope to convince our Congressmen that the public and the educators will back us in demanding the necessary changes in spelling so as to make spelling and reading as regular and easy to teach as our mathematical tables.

There is a Bill (HR 2476) now pending in Congress, introduced by Hon. Harlan Hagen, which intends to establish a National Spelling Commission, which will have the authority to reform our spelling and publish a dictionary in the new spelling for the use of government employees in their official duties — correspondence, reports, and news-releases. No one else will be required to use the new spelling, but it is hoped that the precedent established by the government will be accepted and adopted gradually by the newspapers, magazines and taught in the schools, once it becomes the official spelling. We must now put the horse before the cart, by organizing all of our efforts to demand that Congress pass this Bill to solve the legislative problem first. Whether or not Congress ever acts on this Bill, will depend upon the forceful united efforts of every frustrated parent and dissatisfied reading teacher in demanding action on Bill HR 2476. It all depends on YOU.

Do not expect Johnny to do it for you!

The Spirit of '76. 200 years ago our forefathers protested against paying a tax on tea. They were not content merely to express their dissatisfaction. They did something —

They stopped using tea. Some used a brew of native herbs, some used stronger substitutes. They did not agree what the substitute should be, but they stopped using tea. They did not criticize each other for the particular substitute used.

Today many Americans grumble about the irrational, hard-to-learn spelling which a dead hand imposed upon them and 'vested interests' defend as a mark of distinction — a sign of being 'educated'! Most Americans grumble but meekly conform.

What has become of the spirit of '76?

Ralph D. Owen.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §3.3 pp55,34 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 pp23–24 in the printed version]

16. Results of the Questionnaire on Spelling Reform, by Newell W. Tune, Chairman of the Research Committee on Spelling Reform.

The Research Committee on Spelling Reform announces the results of the questionnaire which was sent out to 500 heads of English and Education Departments in colleges, teachers and students of phonetics, as well as to 200 laymen. This information was gathered to help the Education Committee of the House of Representatives (Congress) in establishing a National Spelling Commission. 106 replies were returned, which we are told constitutes a good percentage of returns. Replies were received from the United States and eight foreign countries.

The answers to the first question show that 94% of those replying are in favor of some kind of spelling reform. But what of those 6% who object to changing our spelling? One educator says: "Ours is a living language — let it grow naturally." (But does she let her lawn and shrubbery grow naturally without any help or restraint? Does she plant seed in a garden and leave them alone to grow naturally? If Luther Burbank had had this philosophy, where do you think we would be today?) Another head of an English Department said; "Give it up - its been tried so many times before". But since then the Metric system has been adopted in England and will be soon in the U.S.A. Another teacher said, "We don't want the Government telling us how we have to spell." (But no one else has any authority to make any changes in our spelling — and where in this large world has any reform of spelling been achieved except through government action? Dictionary makers disclaim authority and say they list only such spellings as are in common usage.) However Bill HR 2476 makes the use of the new spellings mandatory *only* on Government employees, and even then only in the official reports, documents and correspondence. The government will only establish a precedent which it hopes will be followed.

The rest of the questionnaire deals with the manner in which the reformed spelling should be introduced and the desirable extent of the changes. The 2nd question — which factors are the most important to be used in deciding the kind of reformed spelling to be adopted? showed that they considered the importance of these factors to be in this order: First, Phonetic Perfection. A close second, Simplicity, and a poor third — Ease of Writing. The other answers were so closely grouped that it was not practical to find any appreciable difference between 'Economy of Space,' 'Nearness to Present Usage', and 'Compatibility with Writing and Printing Machines.'

The answers to the third question indicate that most educators and students prefer (by 74%) that a perfected system of reformed spelling be selected, and after an educational period of several years, be adopted as a complete system, compared with 26% who preferred a gradual change.

The fourth question answers not only confirm this by 3 to 1, but also favor a phonetically perfected system (73%), in preference to making as little change in our present spelling as is deemed necessary (27%).

The fifth question, as to whether the new system should be based upon economy of space (45%) or as little disturbing of our present spelling as possible (55%), was not very conclusive. It is interesting to note that persons in foreign countries tended to favor economy of space, while those in the United States usually did not consider that of any particular importance.

The sixth question showed that Frequency of Use (25%) was far less important than Logical Reasoning in selecting the proper symbols to represent each sound. Men tended to give preference to logic, while women were more evenly divided on this question.

The seventh question showed emphatically that most persons preferred that our spelling be based upon a complete set of rules governing the sounds for all letters and words (90%) as compared with the individual treatment of words, syllables and suffixes (10%).

The eighth question was answered equally one-sidedly, 92% preferring spelling changes that also included having only one pronunciation for each consonant, in preference to a spelling reform that only omitted the unnecessary silent letters (8%).

The ninth question, which asked if the vowel sounds should be represented in a phonetic manner by means of digraphs, was answered yes by 76% and no by 24%. Some persons answered this question "no" because they felt that additional letters should be added to our alphabet rather than using two letters to indicate one vowel sound (for the long vowels) while using single letters for the short vowel sounds.

The tenth question, as to whether the changes should involve adding new letters to our present Roman alphabet, was very closely divided, 45% favoring additional letters to 55% preferring no new letters.

The eleventh question, asking whether the spelling changes should be made to conform to the International Phonetic Assoc.'s pronunciation assigned to the letters of the Roman alphabet or be based upon the most predominant American dialect, which is generally considered to be Mid-Western American speech, was so evenly divided that the results need not be considered. Quite a few of the educators wisely skipped this question. The I.P.A. is generally known to give most of the Roman letters our normal pronunciation. Only to four letters does it give pronunciations that we do not usually use. It is generally known that the letter "e" and the letter "i" are given the Continental pronunciation, with "e" as in *fête*, *bête noir*, and "i" as in *machine*, *marine*, *chlorine*. But few persons seem to know that two consonants are given pronunciations that they never have in English. *J* is given the typical French pronunciation as our "z" in "*azure*", while *y* is given the French pronunciation of "u" in "*une, pur*", or the German pronunciation of "ü" in "*übur, für*", or a slight consonantal "y" sound preceding it. This latter sound is unknown to English-speakers unless they have learned a foreign language that has such a sound. Hence, it is unthinkable that English or American people would ever consent to adopting such pronunciations to the letters *j* and *y*. The Continental pronunciation to "e" occurs in only one word of the 100 words using this sound found in the rhyming dictionary. The Continental pronunciation of "i" occurs a little more frequently — 7

words out of 42 in the rhyming dictionary. But this is only a 16% frequency of occurrence. Should we change 84% of our words using this sound just to conform with the Continental pronunciation?

The twelfth question asked if the ease of writing the script letters should be considered as a necessary proviso of any new alphabet letters to be considered, and 78% answered in the affirmative.

The thirteenth question was whether a means of indicating the location of the stress or accent should be included in the system of spelling reform. While quite a few omitted answers to this question, there was a slight majority against it, (53%), among the laymen, and the reverse among the educators of whom 55% thought it necessary. Some of those who remarked about the accent thought it was unnecessary if the spelling was completely phonetic, even tho there would be some cases of ambiguity as there are now. Two suggested that a new symbol for the schwa would almost eliminate the need for accent marks. Others thought that such accent marks could be used for teaching but would unnecessarily complicate our spelling, whereas our goal should be to have greater simplicity and regularity in our spelling. Q.E.D.

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1961 p24 in the printed version*]

17. The Outcry of Professor Ann T. Quarian

against all this impious meddling with the orthography of our sacred mother tongue.

When Adam listed all the words
With which he named the beasts and birds,
Did he spell them *hors* and *donki*,
Elefant, *jiraf* and *munki*?

Not if Holy Writ be true,
Not if Paul and Peter knew.

Where in Gospel or Epistle
Does it drop the *t* of *thistle*
The *b* of *lamb*, the *k* of *knaves*
Or turn our fathers in their graves
With *hoo* and *doo* and *yoo*?

Helen Bowyer