Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970

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

"A closed mind gathers no knowledge; an open mind is the key to progress."

Publisht quarterly,
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter.
Subscription $3.00 a year.
Volume X No. 3.
Fall, 1970

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ANNOUNCEMENT

In this issue, we are trying a temporary change in policy which we think should benefit most of our readers. We present herewith a M.S. thesis that we feel is of sufficient social and educational importance to be presented in its entirety. As it is too long for one issue, it will be divided in half and presented in two issues. The thesis was entitled,
A study of Selected Systems of Augmented Alphabets and Simplified Spellings and their application to the teaching of reading, 1850 to 1965. Authored by Betty Allen Iles, M.S. (Ed.), Lamar State College of Technology, Beaumont, Texas, 1965. We have shortened the title as it appears below.
We earnestly commend this comprehensive dissertation to all our readers.

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List of Figures

The next issue of the *Spelling Progress Bulletin* will give the rest of this thesis, which consists of discussions and data of various experimental teaching projects using some kind of an alphabet or simplified spelling system as an initial teaching medium. This will include the balance of the 18 tables in the thesis and the appendices.

Coming attractions

Voice recognition and response systems
A study of rules used in teaching spelling
Wurld Inglish as an initial teaching medium
Poliev and aims of the British Simplified Spelling Society
Further discussion on: How one assimilates knowledge.in learning to read
The Talking Typewriter used in teaching reading

Bartlett's Worthy Quotes:

H. G. Wells: More and more human history is becoming a race between education and catastrophy.

N.W. Tune: The right way to teach is the most effective way.

Ambrose Bierce: Woman would be more attractive if one could fall into her arms without falling into her hands.

N. W. Tune: Spelling is learning all the inconsistencies English wouldn't have if it was written fonetically.

Red Skelton: It's better to be late at the pearly gates than to arrive in hell ahead of time.

Somatha Jitters: Reading – a guessing game in which the winners stay in school and the losers drop out.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp2,3 in the printed version]

1. Simplified Spelling, Phonetic Alphabets, and their application to the teaching of reading, by Betty Lou Allen Iles, M. S. (Ed.), 1965

ABSTRACT

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the history of attempts to simplify spelling and augment the alphabet of the English language as a means of simplifying reading instruction, and to compare the results of several of these attempts. One alphabet in particular, Pitman's Initial Teaching Alphabet, was covered extensively.

Methods

The investigation was begun with a thorough search of available materials on past alphabet and spelling reform attempts, then there was correspondence with persons outstanding in the field of reading instruction and alphabet and spelling reform. Last, a year of teaching with i/t/a in the classroom gave practical experience and an opportunity to study an initial teaching alphabet at first hand.

Findings

From this study it was found that:

(1) For a number of years many educators believed that part of the difficulties of beginning reading could be traced to the irregularity in English spelling and an inefficient alphabet.

(2) Although phonics came closer to being effective as a means of word attack than any other single method, it was too difficult for many readers, especially with a spelling only partly phonetic.

(3) The lack of a desire to compromise on the part of some of the earlier reformers prevented the success of several of the attempts at reform.

(4) Augmented alphabets that have been used under controlled conditions have proved to be efficient media for teaching first grade children to read with a high rate of speed and comprehension in a shorter time than with our traditional orthography.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank the members of her committee for their assistence and suggestions during the writing of this thesis, particularly, Dr. Thomas Salter, who was always willing to listen, advise, or sympathise when the situation demanded it. She would like to express her gratitude for the very kind help of Dr. Helen Bonnema of Colorado Womens College (now Temple Buell College) and Newell Tune of North Hollywood, Calif., who supplied much material and suggested many sources of information at the beginning of the study. Likewise, she would like to thank Miss Maxine Johnstone, research librarian at Lamar State College.

2. CHAPTER I

The Problem and Definition of Terms Used

Throughout the history of the written English language, particularly as education came to be regarded as the right of every child, teachers faced a certain number of pupils who did not learn to read. Almost as soon as English spelling became standardised, if indeed that term could be used, teachers became aware of the inconsistent, illogical, and unphonetic spellings encountered in reading. At the time of this writing there was still criticism of the state of English spelling and disagreement as to how these inconsistencies should be handled. Many methods of reading instruction had evolved, ranging from the so-called "phonetic" method, with its many rules and exceptions to the rules, to the complete disregard of the structure of the word (as in the "whole word" or "whole sentence" methods).

While the whole word method or other "sight" methods had enjoyed great popularity in teaching beginning- children to read, many educators felt that, in effect, they were just delaying for a later time a task that the phonetic method attacked at the beginning. Eventually, to be truely an independent reader, the child had to learn to decode the new words he encountered; that is, he had to be able to get meaning from an unfamiliar group of symbols. He could not continue to depend upon picture clues or context clues to solve the puzzle of what the new words said, nor could he always have someone there to tell him any word he could not pronounce; the high school or college instructor did not have the time to help his students memorize long vocabulary lists in order that they might read the assignments in biology, calculus or literature.

Recognizing that the child had to be taught to attack new words independently, the teacher always came face to face with the same questions: how should beginning readers be taught to attack these new words; how many rules of phonics were really rules, and were consistent enough that those words that followed the rule were not outnumbered by the exceptions; what happened to the slow learner who often became so involved in the process of "sounding out" words that he got no meaning nor satisfaction from books and reading?

I. The Problem

Statement of the problem. This study was undertaken to point out that there had long been a belief that children needed a more consistent and reliable method of attacking new words encountered in the reading task, to give a brief history of efforts to simplify the spelling of the English language or augment the existing alphabet, and to investigate in detail one alphabet in particular: Pitman's Initial Teaching Alphabet, or i.t.a.

It was also hoped that the investigation would point out the value of i.t.a. as a tool in teaching beginning reading. Specifically, it was hoped that this study would answer the following questions:

l. Could an augmented alphabet simplify the learning task for the first grade child to such an extent that its temporary substitution for the traditional alphabet could be justified?
2. Could the transition from an initial teaching medium to the traditional alphabet be accomplished easily and completely without confusion on the part of the child?
3. Would learning to read by this method add to the child's enjoyment of books and reading?
4. Could children being taught i.t.a. make the transition to traditional orthography within their first year in school?
5. What would be the long range effects on spelling?
6. What effects, if any, would the initial teaching medium have on independent reading and writing?
7. What difference in Pitman's alphabet caused it to be more readily accepted by educators and the public in general than were the previously developed alphabets?

8. How well suited was i.t.a. to the special cases: the child from the disadvantaged background, the culturally deprived, the socially immature, the very young child?
9. What was the prognosis for initial teaching mediums (& i.t.a. in particular) as aids to reading instruction?

Method of procedure. The initial task involved location of information pertinent to the chosen subject. First, information having to do with past attempts to reform spelling and to augment or reform the alphabet had to be located. The local libraries, that of Lamar State College of Technology and Tyrell Public Library, both in Beaumont, Texas, were searched for such information. Several college and city libraries within convenient driving distances were also used. Books, periodicals, encyclopedias, bulletins, and reports dealing with education in general, the history of education, reading instruction, spelling and alphabet reforms, phonics linguistics, and primary education were surveyed. *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* were consulted, as well as the *Education Index.* Several inter-library loans were arranged. In several cases it was necessary to purchase recently printed books.

Next, there was correspondence with a large number of persons who had done, or were doing, studies or experiments with children that involved using one of several augmented alphabets. There was also correspondence with the inventors or developers of several alphabets, and with leaders in the various spelling reform movements, asking their assistance in obtaining information about past and present attempts at reform. Also consulted were authorities on reading in general at several of the nation's leading colleges. These persons were, for the most part, very cooperative, each reply suggesting several other sources of information, often suggesting recently published books, or books soon to be published, on the subject.

As the collection of materials grew, it was found necessary to arrange it chronologically into two topics: (1) spelling reforms and efforts at simplification, and (2) alphabet reforms and augmentations. The latter had to be further divided into reforms in general and augmentations or simplifications intended to be used in the initial stages of reading instruction.

Finally, a careful study was made of materials dealing with specific initial teaching mediums, both past and present. Of particular interest were materials available at the time the study was being done for use in beginning reading instruction. Two reading series for first grade Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer's *Early-to-Read* series and the *Downing Readers,* and their manuals, were studied intensively, as well as approximately fifty library or trade books in Pitman's augmented alphabet.

Value of the Study. While preliminary investigation was being done in order to locate information on the chosen subject, it was found that although there were many references to these early attempts at reform in this area, most were very brief and sketchy; seldom was anything discussed in depth. Where one book went into some detail concerning one method or movement, it often ignored others or barely referred to them. Nowhere could be found any detailed chronologically arranged record of experiments and studies on the subject of spelling and alphabet reform. It was hoped that careful research could produce a volume outlining the history of initial teaching mediums and spelling reforms as they pertained to reading instruction, the comparative successes or failures of the various attempts, and probable causes for either.

It was believed that by answering the questions already formulated, answers might be found to questions encountered by other teachers. It was felt that the study might help to resolve the question of whether or not the spelling and sounding inconsistencies were, in large part, a cause of reading failure and whether removing that cause could, to some appreciable degree, make the task of learning to read easier.

II Definition of Terms

Initial Teaching Alphabet, or i.t.a., refers in this paper to the 44 symbol alphabet developed by Sir James Pitman, first used in British schools, but being tested in many U.S. schools at the time this study was done. It is, as the name implies, an alphabet for teaching children to read and not an attempt to reform the existing alphabet or the system of English spelling.

Initial Teaching Medium, as used in this paper, means any augmented, diacritically marked, or simplified alphabet used at the beginning stage of reading in order to give the child a more consistent method of word attack.

Traditional orthography, sometimes written *t.o.* or T.O., refers to materials printed in the regular 26 character Roman alphabet of English, French, Spanish, and most other western languages.

Augmented alphabet refers to an alphabet having new symbols in addition to the traditional 26 Roman letters, designed to regularize or simplify sounding out words or spelling them. One such alphabet used in this study was the before-mentioned alphabet of Pitman; another was Bonnema's system called "Dictionary Key."

Simplified spelling usually refers to a system in which all sounds are still represented by symbols of the traditional alphabet. These unnecessary letters, generally q, x, and c, are omitted, and any one sound is consistently written the same way. *Kwite* could be substituted for *quite,* for example, and other illogical spellings would be eliminated.

Alphabet reform may mean an entirely new set of sound symbols or additions to the existing alphabet, such as i.t.a. Its advocates often waged campaigns to influence public opinion toward substituting this type of orthography in all printed and written matter.

Eclectic, when used to refer to a method of teaching reading, means a system of instruction wherein the teacher incorporates the various features of several methods in her teaching, employing several approaches to each learning task, particularly in taking care of individual differences within the class.

Immature, when used in reference to a child in this paper, means any child who, according to the test scores and teacher judgement, has not reached the stage of development that will allow him, with an average amount of readiness training, to go into the regular reading program. Specifically, in the account of the class experience in i.t.a., it refers to those children who scored at the bottom of the first grade enrollment on the Metropolitan Readiness Test.

Phoneme refers to any one of the sounds necessary to produce speech, of which there are approximately 40 in the English language. An alphabet whose letters regularly represent only a single sound per symbol is said to be *phonemic.*

Grapheme refers to a symbol that is used to stand for a given sound (or sounds) in written communication.

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3. Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Comparatively little had been written concerning the use of augmented alphabets or simplified spellings as aids in beginning reading instruction. Although these had long been subjects for discussion and argument, very few studies had been reported which concern the employment of either of these media in connection with reading instruction. There were records of spelling reform movements which began before the twentieth century. These reformation movements were of a continuous nature, rather like one long campaign, each generation furnishing new recruits to take up the fallen banner. The history of alphabet reforms was not quite the same; each generation had brought its reformers, but usually each one jealously hugged his own brain-child, seldom willing to admit to the merits of an alphabet proposed by anyone else. As the materials directly concerned with the history of these movements as they affected reading instruction were scarce, a brief summary of some of those writings on related subjects will be given.

Literature on the alphabet: origin and evolution

In the preface to a volume on orthography published in 1569, John Hart wrote of how an originally phonetic alphabet had been corrupted until the letters no longer could be depended upon to give the clues that they should to the reader. He lamented the difficulty in reading, saying:

> ... To the understanding whereof, is first necessary the knowledge of letters, and where most of the people do best know them, there is most prosperitie and best assurance. To which ende is this treatise, for the profite of the multitude, and that by opening the windowe whereby is light given to descerne betvixt perfection and Barbariousness, so as every reasonable human beings universally... may be a perfite judge howe everye language ought to be written. Which is uppon the consideration of the severall voices of the speech, and the use of their several mrkes for them which we cal letters. But in the moderne and present manner of writing... there is such confusion and disorder as it may be accounted rather a kinde of ciphering or such a darke kinde of writing, as the best wit that ever had bene could. . . by the only gift of reason, attaine to the ready and perfite reading thereof without a long and tedious labour, for that is unfit and wrong shapen for the proportion of the voice. [1] (sic.)

He described the reception he expected his book to receive, based on his belief that people were prone to laugh at or frown upon any attempt to change the alphabet, phonetically regular, with lengthy explanations written in his alphabet that he urged the reader to attempt in order to prove its simplicity. Compared to the Old English type the book was printed in, and the author's uncertainty about the proper way a word was to be spelled, the "new" writing was indeed easy. [2]

Nearly two and a half centuries later, Thomas Astle outlined a history of writing, from hieroglyphic to the modern alphabet. While a major portion of the word was concerned with types of print, scripts, and alphabets as examples of art, the first four chapters had more to do with the meaning of the various types of symbols that have been used throughout history to record men's thoughts and

actions. He gave accounts of the origin of several alphabets and differing number of letters certain languages found necessary for written communication. [3]

He wrote of how the alphabet had developed from the original "Curiologic Hieroglyfic", which consisted of pictures (e.g. a bow and a hand, and a shield and hand to signify battle), through "Tropical Hieroglyphic" which was a contraction of sorts that represented the omnicient God by an eye superimposed on a cloud, to the "Symbolic Hieroglyphic" that used the Bull Apis to stand for Osiris [4]

Continuing, he said that as society became more sophisticated, more complicated, the number of symbols grew; the more primitive the culture remained, the fewer symbols it demanded. Eventually, arbitrary symbols had to be added. When man finally lighted on the idea of representing sounds rather than words, he greatly simplified the task of reading, as well as writing. Astle illustrated by pointing out that with the 24 useful letters (no q, no x) in the alphabet, 620,448,401,733,239,434,360,000 combinations were possible. The advantages over picture writing were quite evident. He quoted Sheridan, a grammarian and dictionary author of his time, as saying that the English alphabet "is ill calculated for the notation of the English tongue, as there are many sounds for which there are no letters or marks; and there ought to be nine more letters or characters to make a complete alphabet in which every simple sound ought to have a mark peculiar to itself." [5]

Later, Roger Brown, also writing about the development of alphabets, differentiated between the two types of early writing as first, pictograms, which have semantic rather than phonetic value; they can be easily read because they represent *things,* and second, ideograms, which symbolize the abstract; e.g., haste, life, dead., and soul. He described the manner in which the originally phonetic alphabet had suffered a "falling away" from its beginnings, causing spelling difficulties that did not exist in languages where alphabets were consistently phonetic, such as Italian, Spanish, or Swedish. He pointed out that only in English speaking countries could enthusiasm be built up for spelling bees; spelling inconsistencies require "athletes of literacy who must train to be proficient." [6]

I. Phonetic Spelling and Spelling Reform

Reg. Dean, in speaking of the effects of unphonetic spelling as it pertained to reading instruction wrote:

> With a purely phonetic system of spelling a child may begin to learn to read as soon as he wants to, whether he is three years old or six. Of course, to some extent it depends on his intelligence but there is danger in teaching ordinary spelling to a child at too early an age. Whilst with phonetic spelling, whatever he learns is good for all times; with ordinary spelling the letters are contradictory in almost every other word and tend to give him a feeling of "frustration." [7]

He continued, discussing spelling as a school subject:

> ... But in any case, spelling lessons have to be continued throughout the school life of the child, no matter how long it may be. Most children leave school without acquiring the habit in

> respect to many common words and once they have left school, freed from the drudgery of repetition and revision, most of what they have so laboriously committed to memory quickly evaporates and they are obliged to rely, if the need arises, on a common sense spelling for which they have received no training. [8]

He discussed the advantages of a phonetic alphabet as an aid in beginning reading, stating, "Hitherto the ideal phonetic alphabet has not existed but a very near approach has been available in some systems of simplified spelling, perhaps not quite phonetic, but at least always consistent." [9]

Wm. Reed criticized the insistence on holding on to an antiquated system of spelling, almost entirely that of Dr. Johnson's dictionary of 1755. He believed that spelling should have changed to keep up with pronunciation in the ensuing two centuries. "Letters are symbols representing the sounds of actual speech and there should be consistency in their use," he argued. "If road signs meant different things at one place from what they meant further along the road, there would not only be confusion, but very shortly an outcry from the road users:' [10] In pointing out the advantages of reformed spelling, he noted:

> There are two aspects of reading – word recognition and comprehension. Spelling affects both of them. In languages which have fairly consistent spelling, word recognition gives little trouble; but with the present unsatisfactory spelling of English, the process takes many years to master. By using more consistent spelling conventions, we could greatly reduce the amount of time and effort spent on word recognition, and so could devote much more to comprehension. [11]

He also emphasized his belief that the existing system of spelling; greatly affected die child's ability to write independently. The child's creativity was hampered by a constant need to be told how to spell a word or to consult the dictionary; he often gave up in disgust and resorted to the safe "one-word-answer." Reed also believed that speech and pronunciation should be improved so that the child would be able to attack new words confidently, rather than mumbling some unidentifiable noise to disguise his inability to pronounce them. [12]

In a paper read before the British International Historical Congress in 1913, Bradley spoke of the relationship between the spoken word and written language. He refuted some of the reformer's statements about the lack of logic in many of the spellings of English. He gave sensible explanations for some of our spelling traditions and criticized others. He defended many practices encountered in materials that were to be read by educated readers, but pointed out the difficulties for the uneducated listener or the beginning reader:

> The preceding discussion has entirely ignored one consideration that is of utmost importance. There is no doubt that those unphonetic features of our spelling, which have their practical value for the educated adult, do add enormously to the difficulty of learning to read and write. The waste of time in education caused by the wont of consistent relation between the written and the spoken word is a serious evil, which urgently calls for a remedy. After all, it is in the

> interest of the *learner,* not that of the person who has mastered all the difficulties, that has the first claim to consideration. [13]

Wm. Russell, in pointing out how much simpler the grammar of English was in contrast to other languages (e.g., French:), said that in spite of this great advantage, its inconsistency between pronunciation and spelling was an obvious and serious fault. He blamed the commercial dictionary makers for perpetuating irregularities, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies. "Year after year," he wrote, "school children vie in contests to discover who can spell wrong most correctly." His pamphlet outlined a gradual change to phonetic spelling, a more systematic spelling and a phonemic orthography all three to be begun simultaneously. [14]

Dewey, in a booklet entitled *English Heterography or How We Spel,* filled 60-odd pages with tables illustrating the various spellings of the 41 sounds generally thought to comprise the spoken English language, as well as its varying pronunciations of common spellings – over 525 ways of spelling the 41 sounds and an average of more than 12 spellings per sound, and an average of two accepted pronunciations for each of the spellings. One purpose of the pamphlet, according to its author, was as an aid in the preparation of teaching materials for the teacher who used an initial teaching alphabet, later making transition to traditional orthography. [15]

A brief history of spelling reform, from John Hart to the 19th century, was given by Paine. [16] He pointed out that, while Hart, Cheke, Gill, and Bishop Wilkins were intent upon a reform of spelling, or a revamping of the alphabet, other persons were, in order to illustrate their degree of "classical erudition," undoing their influence by changing spellings to indicate derivations, or supposed derivations, of English words. In their enthusiasm, said Paine, they gave credit to Greece or Rome for words of entirely different origin, Old English, perhaps, or Old French. He illustrated by showing how a supposed relation between *sovereign* and *Reign* caused the first to be spelled with a *g,* although in fact the first word came from the Low Latin *superanus* and the second, from Latin *regnare.* He traced the influences of Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster, Alexander Ellis, as well as Max Müller, and Jacob Grimm. [16]

He also pointed out, as did Brown, that in the schools of many countries having a more phonetic alphabet there were no spelling books because there was no need of them. He said that two of the eight years spent in the "grades" were required to gain an imperfect and uncertain skill in spelling the English language. It was his opinion that almost all of the time spent on spelling could have been saved if the alphabet had been altered or the spelling regularized. [17]

II. The Teaching of Reading

Chas. C. Fries gave an account of the progress of reading instruction with a particular emphasis on the phonic aspect of reading. He followed reading methods from the alphabet method, through the early phonetic method, the whole word method, the return to the phonetic method, and so-on to the time this study was done.

In speaking of how children learn language, he made an interesting observation:

> The child learns to hear and to pronounce with speed and precision the contrastive features of the units in the sequence used to identify and separate the word patterns. But his speed and precision are achieved also in part, by learning to ignore the phonetic features that are not structurally significant for his particular language. Thus the automatic habits through which we manipulate our native language signals have also developed blind spots for contrastive language features outside the structural system of our own particular language. [18]

Similarly, in a history of American textbooks, John A. Nietz showed how the schools gradually abandoned the books and practices of English schools in favor of Webster and Bingham, and later McGuffey, Cyr, and Baldwin. He criticized early textbooks as having too little information for the teacher as to methods to use, aids to employ, questions to ask, notes, indexes, etc. He said that early educators and authors were not conscious of the learning processes and saw no reasons to include such aids in the texts and manuals. [19]

Theodore L. Harris described the so-called "dual meaning-discrimination" approach to reading in which phonetic relationships were taught and learned:

> Indeed – the development of any broadly applicable meaningful relationship or generalization requires that the necessary discriminations be clearly identified and their presense noted in many different situations. In the dual meaning-discrimination approach, this principle is followed in teaching the specific sight-sound relationships of vowels, consonants, and specific spellings, as well as in developing the more comprehensive phonetic generalizations relating to the classes of sounds. Through this approach the child learns... to perceive words as differentiated wholes. He is encouraged to look for and find critical likenesses and differences in a carefully selected group of phonetically related words... is given help in establishing the habit of active scrutiny of word wholes and parts, in a search for their sound and meaning equivalents. [20]

He gave three instructional principles of this approach that he believed should be explicitly followed: (1) control the phonetic complexity of the wads that are first presented to the pupil, (2) teach the child to employ contextual meaning as a check on the accuracy of his word attack, and (3) control the rate of introduction of new principles and generalizations so the child is able to assimilate one before the next is presented. [21]

In another article on the phonetic approach, Daniels and Diack made a rather unconventional statement when they said that in teaching children to read, one is not teaching meanings of words, but of letters.

> ... It is argued that we are teaching the child what particular words look like in print, but words look as they do in print because of the letters in them. [22]

They oppose those who have insisted that the word or the sentence is the smallest unit of meaning, saying that the letter is a written instruction to say (or think) a particular sound, the order of the letters in the word showing the order in which the sounds are to be said (or thought). This of course

would excluse phonetically irregular words. They gave statistics and tables to illustrate that their approach gave significantly better results, showing that even mispronunciations and misspellings among the phonetically trained children were more logical than those of the whole word method children; the misspelled words were readable phonetically, the pronunciation errors not the "wrong noise" type. **[23]**

In a doctoral dissertation for Stanford Univ., Sam Leaton Sebesta outlined an experiment in which the investigator devised an artificial orthography, using symbols reproduceable on a standard typewriter. He kept his alphabet as close as possible to traditional orthography, at the same time supplying one grapheme for each phoneme. All materials to be used in the experiment were reproduced in the new orthography. The children spent their last 15 lessons of the year on transition. No significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups except in the case of boys and unfamiliar words: the experimental boys scored significantly higher than the control boys. **[24]**

A few years immediately before and directly after 1960, there was a sudden awakening of the interest in new methods of reading instruction, many of them having to do with attacking new words from a structural-phonetic approach. Results of several experiments and studies in this area, particularly phonetic alphabets, appeared during this period. Since several of these have been intensively treated in later chapters of this paper, little has been said in this chapter concerning any one specifically.

As was indicated previously, most of the authorities cited in this chapter have dealt with one specific area, and not with spelling or alphabet reform in general, or with its relationship to reading instruction except to a very superficial degree. None of these authors has produced a complete or relatively complete history of the attempts of educators and educated men to simplify the task of learning to read for the young, so that they might escape the struggles and pitfalls that each generation has encountered since the written symbol ceased to be an infallible clue to the sound and meaning of the word.

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4. Chapter III

History of Methods of Teaching Beginning Reading

Nothing is known of how the first child was taught to read, or when. As long as "writing" consisted of simple pictures, learning to read was simple, perhaps even unnecessary, since the pictures told their story and all the reader needed to understand was that the symbol represented the larger object, animal, or action. Somewhere in history, because man desired a more economical means of communication, or because his mind became more sophisticated and he wanted to record ideas as well as actions, a more complicated, flexible type of orthography developed, and with the invention of the first alphabet, its inventor (Greek legend said Cadmus) became the first reading teacher. In order that his alphabet might have any value as a means of communication, someone else had to be able to decipher the symbols he recorded.

The first teacher left no record as to which method he used, though the proud developer of the first alphabet must certainly have used a *single symbol* beginning, rather than the whole word or whole sentence approach. Until he had explained the phonetic significance of each of the small, strange scratches on the clay tablet, surely the clusters of scratches had no meaning to others.

As man's knowledge grew and the amount of recorded information increased, the popularity as well as the necessity of reading also increased. The ratio of one pupil to one teacher became uneconomical and schools were born. With the birth of schools came the development of "methods." Up until that time the teacher probably used the approach that worked with his students, but when he had as many as 10, 12, or perhaps 30 pupils, he had to work out a system that could be employed with a group of students with some degree of success. The time given to each student was greatly reduced from that available in the one-to-one situation. Some means had to be developed whereby the instructor could work with all the children or a portion of the class, with the result that a reasonable percentage succeeded in learning to read.

In the history of education several methods of teaching reading have stood out, each one enjoying its time of discovery, period of growing popularity, decline, and finally complete or almost complete abandonment in favor of a more popular, modern, or "scientific" method. Three methods that enjoyed rather prolonged periods of popularity have herein been considered: the alphabet method, the phonetic method, and the look-and-say, or whole word method.

The Alphabet Method

In the early schools in the American colonies, the alphabet method for learning to read was almost universally employed; that is, the child was taught first to recognize all the different letters of the alphabet, and until he knew the letters he did no reading. Countless hours of dull drill preceeded learning to read words. Nila Banton Smith, in *Reading Instruction for Today's Children,* described a reading lesson that supposedly took place around 1830:

> "Come and read," says the teacher to the little flaxen headed creature of doubtful gender, for the child is in petticoats and sits on the female side as close as possible to its guardian sister. But then those coarser features, tanned complexion, and close-clipped hair, with other minutiae of aspect are somewhat contradictory of feminine dress. "Come and read." It is the first time that he-or-she was ever inside a school-house and in the presence of a school-ma'am, according to the recollection; and the order is heard with shrinking timidity. But the

> sister whispers an encouraging word and helps "tot" down from the seat, who creeps out into the aisle, and hesitates along down to the teacher, biting his fingers, or scratching his head.
>
> "What is your name, dear?" "Tholomon Icherthon," lisps the now discovered he in a choken voice scarce above a whisper. "Put your hands down by your side, Solomon, and make a bow." He obeys, if a short and hasty jerk of the head is a bow.
>
> The alphabetical page of the speller is presented and he is asked, "What's that?" But he cannot tell. He is but two years and half old, and has been sent to school to relieve his mother from trouble, rather than to learn. No one at home has yet shown or named a letter for him. He has never had even that celebrated character, round o, pointed out to his notice. It was an older beginner, most probably, who being asked a similar question about the first letter of the alphabet, replied, "I know him by sight, but can' call him by name." But our namesake of the wise man, does not know the gentleman even by sight, nor any of his 25 companions.
>
> Solomon Richardson has at length said A, B, C, for the first time in his life. He has *read.* "That's a nice boy; make another bow and go back to your seat." He gives another jerk of the head and whirls on his heel and trots back to his seat, meeting the congratulatory smile of his sister with a satisfied grin, which, if put into language would be, "There, I've read – han't I." **[1]**

Once the reading task was begun, the child continued to spell out the words before saying them: "tee-aich-eye-ess, this; em-aye-en, man..:' He did not sound out the words, as in the later phonetic method, but was expected to get the clue to the sound of the letter from its name. Already men interested in teaching reading were criticizing this approach, insisting that children were confused by the disparity between the name of the letter and its sound. **[2]**

Books for children were few; often the child's only reading matter was a hornbook or battledore. The first was a wooden rectangle with a handle at the bottom. Lesson sheets were pasted on one or both sides and the edges were bound with brass strips which held in place the thin layers of horn that protected the printed page. Later, about 1740, heavy cardboard was substituted for the wood and the horn covering eliminated. By modern standards the hornbook or battledore was very dull and lacking in mental stimulation, since there were no attractive colored illustrations to arouse the child's interest. It often contained only the alphabet, a list of syllables, sometimes the "Lord's Prayer" or other religious or moral sayings for the child to commit to memory. What few books the child had to read were intended to instill the fear of God rather than the joy of reading, to enlighten rather than entertain. Those who advocated the use of the very popular *New England Primer,* first published by Benjamin Harris in 1690 claimed, "It taught millions to read and not one to sin." **[3]**

In reality, at the time textbooks for teaching reading were introduced, there were no "readers" as such; the child was expected to learn to read from a speller. The speller was the first book he was given. In this book were lists of words he was expected to learn to spell and read. Later, after mastering this book, he was given books containing stories, poems, and speeches, most of which were to be read aloud.

The alphabet method, borrowed from the English schools, continued in use in the Colonial schools until shortly after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the ensuing conflict between England and her rebellious colonies. Gradually this method gave way to what was alleged to be a more "scientific" approach to the teaching of reading, the phonetic method.

The Phonetic Method

One of the earliest mentions of phonics in connection with learning to read was made by John Hart in 1551 in a book entitled, *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of Our English Tongue.* Later, in 1570, he published another book, *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for all Unlearned, Whereby They May Bee Taught to Read English, In a Short Time, With Pleasure,* in which he commented on the differences between the names of the letters and their "powers." He proposed a phonic method whereby the student was taught to combine the "offices" of the letters, contrary to the practice of saying the names of the letters, then the word, in the alphabetic method. Nearly a century later, in 1634, Charles Butler advocated phonics as a means of simplifying the task of learning to read. Apparently, these two men had very little effect on the thinking of teachers in their times; the alphabet method still continued as the favored method. [4]

It was only after the Revolution in this country and the subsequent outcry among patriotic educators and parents against the continued use of English textbooks that the phonetic method began to be looked on with a favorable eye. The patriots, criticizing the formerly used books as inappropriate for the education of future American citizens, felt that under the circumstances, different reading matter should be offered to their children. A schoolmaster, Noah Webster, prepared the first reading textbook to be written by a citizen of the new nation. The *Speller,* as Webster titled his book, introduced phonics, not only as an aid to learning to read, but also as a means of bringing about a more uniform pronunciation of words. In the foreword he wrote:

> To diffuse a uniformity and purity of language in America, to destroy the provincial prejudices that originate in triffling differences of dialect and produce reciprocal ridicule – to promote the interest of literature and harmony of the United States – is the most ardent wish of the Author; and it is his highest ambition to deserve the approbation and encouragement of his countrymen. [5]

With Webster's books children still used the alphabet as a place to begin, but no longer did they spell out the words; they learned the sounds of letters and the different combinations of the letters. A revised version of this book, bound in cardboard and covered in blue paper, gained such popularity that its sales supported Webster and his family during the 20 years he was involved in writing his dictionary. In 30 years the *Blue Back Speller* sold something close to 10,000,000 copies. At first its main purpose was to unify language, but eventually its primary function became that of helping children master the necessary tools to attack unfamiliar words while reading and thereby gaining reading independence. [6]

Once the phonetic method of teaching reading gained approval, it was never totally discarded during any period in this nation's history. At times it was shoved aside by other methods, but every generation or so its advocates brought it forward and it had a rebirth as "the way" to teach. Between 1890 and 1920 three series, the Ward readers, the Beacon readers, and the Gordon readers, each stressing an organized system of phonics, were the most widely used texts in American schools; also popular during those years was Rebecca Pollard's "Synthetic Method." [7] At the beginning of the first grade the child began to memorize the sounds of the letters and the combinations. New words were "sounded out". After this period of intense popularity, phonics lost favor to an emphasis on silent reading, being blamed by many persons for all the reading problems of that and past generations.

Despite this abandonment of the phonic approach and the substitution of more "scientific" practices during the mid-thirties and early forties, educators found that there were still a great many children who were not learning to read. The reading specialists decided to have another look at phonics.

Experiments and studies were conducted, and the resulting evidence showed that phonics was effective and that children did learn to read by this method. [8] Once again emphasis was placed on phonics; a few schools at a time began to use it again. Those teachers who had secretly been incorporating into their lessons this method came out in the open, smug in the knowledge that they had known that it would work all the time. In the few years preceding this study most first grade children were being introduced to phonics either incidentally, in combination with the sight word method, or as a separate subject.

It is possible that the to-teach-or-not-to-teach phonics controversy was brought to a state of intense heat by one particular book more than any other: Rudolph Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read.* Dr. Flesch, not a public school teacher, but a man trained in law, became incensed over the discovery that his 12 year old nephew was classified as a retarded reader, and took it upon himself not only to teach his nephew to read but also to arouse all parents to arms against professional teachers who, in his opinion, were deliberately cheating their children out of a decent education. In the preface to his book, he stated that he believed "the teaching of reading is too important to be left to the educators." [9] Though many of his points were well taken and his criticisms justified, his rabble-rousing style was very offensive to members of the teaching profession, including many who already advocated the phonic approach to reading. Many statements in the book appeared to be deliberately misleading, but its author had accomplished his purpose. His book became an immediate best-seller and stayed at the top of the list for many months. It was felt that it likely had a direct bearing on the increasing number of schools incorporating one of the phonics series in their curriculum. At the time of his writing, there were several very carefully planned series and systems for teaching phonics to children, most of them beginning first grade level, but Flesch chose to ignore that fact.

The immediate result of the parental outcry was a marshalling of forces among the teaching profession, first to defend what Flesch called "this preparatory guessing game," [10] better known as the sight method, at the time, according to him, the most widely used beginning reading approach. After tempers cooled somewhat – perhaps because the parents continued to insist, and phonics supporters in the profession became more outspoken – some of those who had previously denied the value of phonics in beginning reading instruction began to have second thoughts on the subject. Several new books and revised editions of older books appeared, the authors of which were willing to concede that there was worth in phonics, particularly as a means of attacking new words. Dr. Geo. D. Spache, writing in *Toward Better Reading,* said:

> Despite all the bitterness engendered by the conflict between professional educators and professional critics, there were some desirable outcomes of the differences of opinion. Schools and reading specialists were forced to re-examine their methods more closely and to justify them more closely to the parents and taxpayers. Research in the values of the various methods of teaching reading was stimulated... Teachers and other school personel became more alert to the reading problems among their pupils while parents learned more about the reading program with its degree of success. [11]

In speaking of why phonics was taught, Spache continued:

> Phonics helps the reader pronounce an unknown word, recall its auditory image, and thus perhaps remember its meaning. If he is able to pronounce a printed word by the use of phonics, the retention of the word is also strengthened....

> Phonics is a distinct aid to word recognition among beginning readers because it promotes simultaneous analysis of the word by hearing it, by recognizing it auditorily and by contextual analysis. **[12]**

The more recently developed methods of phonics instruction were more than systematic memorization of rules that the early scholars were subjected to. The modern school made use of a reading program that incorporated in it the principles of phonics, as well as other means of word recognition, such as context clues, configurational clues, and the acquisition of a sight vocabulary to add variety and enrichment for the beginning reader.

The Whole Word, or Look-and-Say, Method

Although it had probably been used previously by many persons to teach reading informally, the term "whole word method" did not appear until about the middle of the 19th century. Admirers of Pestalozzi who had visited European schools came back enthusiastically relating how the children were learning to read through the practice of having the new words presented with an illustrating picture, either the object named or a representation of the implied action. To these men it seemed to make more sense than starting with the A, B, C's. They began to write and make speeches about the new method upon their return. New readers based on the new approach began to appear. Nila Banton Smith gave this account of John Russel Webb's "discovery" of the method, taken from his primer published in 1846:

> On an early summer morning of 1846, a young man, barely 21 years of age, was reading a newspaper in the sitting-room of his boarding house. He was the teacher of the village school.
>
> From early boyhood he had been regarded as "odd." He did not do, he did not think, as boys of his age generally did. Often he was reproved for finding fault with what others considered "well enough." He would reply: "If we could see no defect, we would make no improvement." Many were the little devices to save labor and give better results, seen on the home farm.
>
> While awaiting breakfast, as already mentioned, a little girl, four or five years old, climbed into his lap as she had often climbed before. Her mother was in the kitchen preparing breakfast; her father, in the yard milking the cow.
>
> The teacher laid down his paper and began to talk to the child. The father was mentioned, what he was doing, and the cow was talked about. Just then his eye caught the word cow, on the paper he had laid down. He took it up and pointed out the word to the child, again calling attention to the cow and to the word as the name of the animal her papa was milking. Soon she looked up into the teacher's face; her eyes kindled with intelligence; she caught the paper, jumped out of his lap and ran to her mother, exclaiming as she ran: "I know what it means; I know what it means. It is a cow, just like what papa is milking!" and she pointed out the word to her mother.
>
> Many a boy and many a man before Newton had seen an apple fall. It may be that many a teacher had done just what this teacher did; but into him the circumstances had flashed an idea. He at once began to experiment, not only with the little four-year-old girl, but with the beginners in the school. The lessons were prepared in the evening, and in the morning printed on the blackboard, and he, himself, taught them to the children with the most marked – the most wonderful success. There were no unpleasant tones, no drawlings. On the contrary, the children read in pleasant natural tones, giving the emphasis and inflections of the playground.

> From time to time these lessons were printed and formed pages or hand cards. The children became very much interested in reading them. They read them in and out of school. They read them anywhere-everywhere one would listen. They took their cards with them to the table – to bed, as little girls sometimes do their dolls.
>
> At first all the parents were very much pleased. But, alas! There was trouble ahead. It was soon discovered that the children could not spell the words – that they did not even know the names of the letters! Some of the parents "waited on the teacher," and left him with unpleasant memories. Others had faith "That the teacher knows what he is doing." There was a good deal of talking, and what "the teacher" was doing became noised abroad. **[13]**

Webb's word came to the attention of the teacher's institute, held in the neighboring town of Waterton, N. Y., and became the center of attention there. Before the meeting adjourned, it had passed a resolution supporting his method, and the young author had arranged with a publisher to have his first book printed. **[14]** Dr. Smith pointed out that other men had advocated this method, though Webb continued to receive the most credit for its conception.

Very soon the word method gained acceptance and was widely adopted. It continued to be the most commonly used method until nearly the end of the 19th century, when educators became concerned with its failure to teach some, if not many, of the children to read. Phonics became "the" method again and the word method was generally abandoned for a while. Non-readers in the higher grades were said to be the results of learning to read by the sight method in the first grade rather than learning to attack new words independently.

Every generation or so, to the middle of the 20th century, the word method alternated with the phonic method as the preferred way to teach, although as this study was being done most basal reading series included some of both in teaching first grade pupils to read. The whole word method was, however, receiving the greater emphasis.

In the word, or sight method, the word was presented as a whole, usually in context, but often in isolation, then used orally; written while the children watched, located in a sentence, read from the board or the book, with the whole page and the whole selection finally being read. *Repetition* was a major factor in this learning situation. At first, no attention was given to the individual letters or their sounds, though the teacher talked about a "long" word, or a "short" one, or words that "stick up" in the middle or "stick down" at the end. Later, attention was called to the fact that *Flip* and *Father* began alike, though the teacher may or not have told the children the name of the letter. In the word method, any phonics taught *was taught incidentally* and no real drill on phonetic principles was included.

In writing of the popularity of the word method in *Words and Things,* Brown said:

> Finally, the look-and-say method seemed better suited than phonetic drill to a new philosophy of education that held it more important for children to be happy and wise than for them to be well stocked with every kind of information. The ability to spell out words is not the most important aim in training in reading. What we need is more adults who seek out high quality reading matter. It seemed to many teachers that phonetic drill would cause children to develop an enduring distaste for reading. Stopping to spell out letters would slow them down break the line of thought, leave them bored and inexpert. **[15]**

The use of the word method was criticized for several failures and short-comings, particularly when it was employed exclusively. Not only did Flesch, but also many others spoke of instruction in "guessing." Frederick Nelson, formerly an editor of *Saturday Evening Post,* in *New Perspectives in Reading Instruction,* asked:

> Isn't it possible that children have trouble with reading because they have never learned that *A* stands for the first sound in apple, or indeed that there is any reason why the letters in a word are arranged in a particular order and have any relation to how a word is pronounced? **[16]**

He continued by pointing out that the boy who reads, "My father was in a battle," as "My father was in a war," is considered to be a better reader than the one who reads it "My father was in a bottle." He contended that the first boy, by looking at the accompanying picture, did some *good guessing,* while the boy who missed only one vowel is the one who was *really reading.* He also criticized the practice of treating each word as if it were a pictograph and concentrating on finding the clue to its identification from context rather than looking at the alphabetic make-up of the word. **[17]**

In another essay from the same book, entitled "Why Roman Johnny Could Read," Clarence A. Forbes said:

> American children, reared on the whole-word method of reading, find it unnatural to look closely at the elements of a word and thereby get it right; instead they give it a hasty look, followed by a nasty look, make a wild stab at it and thereby get it wrong. Our elementary schools teach pupils to read by guessing; then our high schools try to teach pupils to read Latin with complete accuracy. **[18]**

In *Toward Better Reading,* Geo. D. Spache gave as a limitation of the look-and-say approach the fact that placing primary emphasis on how the word looked put the child with visual deficiencies at too great a disadvantage. He suggested that the child who became very proficient at reading with only this type of instruction did so by making his own comparisons among words and arriving at generalizations independently. He also believed there was some justification in calling this method the "look-and-guess" approach. He voiced the fear that method then in use placed little faith in the child's ability to recognize words or their meanings from the use of contextural, pictorial, or phonetic clues. **[19]**

II. Some Modern Approaches to Phonics Instruction

As stated earlier, phonics instruction generally fell into one of three main types: (1) incidentally taught phonics, such as is taught in the eclectic method of reading instruction, (2) the type of phonics that Bloomfield developed, that is, teaching the letter combinations that occur frequently in the language, and (3) single letter phonics of the type found in the books of Hay-Wingo and the Economy series. Of the first, little more will be said other than what the name implies. The elements of phonics were supposedly introduced when the children indicated a need. The teacher was given no real plan of presentation, no phonics text, her judgement being the factor deciding what and when. The children were expected to deduce that the letter *d,* for instance, indicated the initial sound in: *Don's dog did dig in the dirt,* by comparing such similarly starting words.

The Linguistic Approach

Though there were others of this type, Bloomfield's became the best known. He based his approach on the idea that reading is merely vocal responses to printed words. Robert Pooley, in the Introduction to *Let's Read,* agreed:

> There is an essential and pedagogically sound relationship between the look of words and the sound of words. Learning to read involves more than identifying the word by eye alone the letter patterns which make up a printed word. The sounds of words are equally important to the identification of meaning and consequent growth in reading vocabulary. Dr. Flesch was on valid ground in pointing out the significance of sound in the process of deriving meaning from the printed symbols. [20]

Bloomfield's initial step for the child was learning the alphabet and left-to-right progression on the page. Then he was introduced to a short (three letter) word in isolation, was taught to read it and others with the same vowel and final consonant (i.e., rhyming words). Gradually he was introduced to all the "short" vowel sounds in the same manner. As his reading vocabulary increased, known words were combined to make sentences, at first simple, then increasingly more complex. This method included 245 lessons, equivalent to the first three years of school, in which all the other vowel sounds were gradually introduced, including the exceptions, and the short words and syllables were combined to make longer words? [21]

Pooley listed four characteristics of Bloomfield's system that he thought proved its values:

1. A system in which every step is not a learning of isolated words, but enlargement of the power to identify words from patterns of letters.

2. A system of reading which combines the resources of eye and ear in units of sight and sound as basic elements of learning.

3. A system in which the translation of letters into sounds and sounds into meanings becomes increasingly automatic.

4. A system, therefore, which cumulatively builds up the child's independence and competence, providing him with the tools to tackle unknown words by a process of sight-sound-meaning which grows more effective as it is used. [22]

Bloomfield did not call his system a phonetic approach because his generalizations, he said, were "built-in," automatic, as opposed to the reasoned associations built up between the symbol and the sound in the conventional single-letter phonics.

Single-letter Phonics

In this type of phonics instruction the child was taught the letters and their sounds, one at a time. In the first book of the *Economy* series, *Tag,* the child was introduced first to five "long" vowel sounds, next to the five "short" vowels, then the sounds of the consonants. Blends, digraphs, and diphthongs were introduced in the next two books, as well as the effects of certain consonants on vowels and the rules of syllabication. [23]

A slightly different approach to phonics instruction was developed in the mid-thirties and introduced in 1944 in an experimental school. Called the Phonovisual Method, it was developed by Lucille Schoolfield and Josephine Timberlake. In it the consonants were introduced first, since the developers found that most words begin with consonants. Its authors were insistent that it *not* be taught incidentally, but that the Phonovisual Method be included as a separate subject, then applied to the basal-reading program. It was not felt necessary to develop special Phonovisual readers. The advocates of the Phonovisual approach had confidence that, used with a regular reading series, their method developed the child's skills in reading, spelling, and speech. [24]

III Summary

Although other methods, such as the sentence method, the silent reading approach, and the synthetic approach enjoyed brief periods of popularity, the three previously discussed methods – the alphabetic, phonetic, and whole word methods – have been most widely used in the teaching of beginning reading. The alphabet method was based on the false assumption that spelling out the word, that is, saying the names of the letters in the order in which they occurred in the word, would suggest to the child the meaning of the group of symbols. This means of word attack was not logical, since the name of the letter and its sound were seldom the same.

The phonetic method enjoyed limited approval along with other methods. In most cases it was dropped when the pupils developed painstakingly slow reading habits. It was never entirely abandoned – always in use in some parts of the country.

The third method discussed, the word or sight method, required that the children be taught as if each word were a pictograph, that the letters comprising the word should be entirely ignored, that the child should be taught to associate the whole word with its meaning(like the Chinese). Roger Brown, in *Words and Things,* wrote:

The *names* of letters in the English alphabet are never the same as the *sounds* most commonly associated with them, and furthermore, for most letters there is more than one common sound value. **The English alphabet is so inconsistent in its phonetic values that it might be a good idea to teach the system as if it were not phonetic at all.** [25]

Irregular spellings notwithstanding, words are made up of the letters of the Roman alphabet and there is some relationship between how most words are spelled and how they are pronounced. There are times when the meaning of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, is impossible to obtain unless the reader has some more exact means than memory, context or configuration to guide him in attacking a new word. For instance, as Spache pointed out:

> Many words have extremely similar gross shapes, as: *cloud, clout, clank, clash, cloak, clerk, click, clink,* and so forth. Context clues may help in the discrimination but, to illustrate, several of the words could be used in this sentence, "Then he heard the sound of a ..... in the dark:' In such a situation the exact word can only be distinguished by a sounding approach. [26]

Originally the symbols in the alphabet each stood for a definite sound. Through time, pronunciation changed faster than spellings, but there was a consistency that allowed the rules of phonics to be applied with relative success. There were, though, many rules and exceptions to the rules. There were various ways that almost any word of over five letters could be spelled. Some of these were due to assimilating into our vocabulary foreign words unchanged in spelling and pronunciation. The foreign spellings were incompatible with the English spelling system. Additionally, expecting all children to learn to read by the conventional phonetic approach failed to take into consideration the difference in ability, background, and interests, and also the greater number of phonetic principles that the young child had to keep in mind when he approached the reading task. Granted that the adult first learning to read might have been aided greatly by knowing these rules, they constituted a heavy burden on the shoulders of a six-or-seven year old already faced with the many problems of adjusting to school life. Many children of average or better intelligence did, through a carefully developed and systematically presented phonics series, learn to read well, and to apply the rules of phonics with efficiency. They seemed to assimilate with little difficulty the somewhat complicated

rules and be able to apply them to many new words. On the other hand, there were many other children who, though presented the materials in the same manner by the same well-trained, enthusiastic teacher, became so hopelessly confused that the time spent in phonics class was almost a total loss, often more of a hindrance than a help, actually making reading more difficult. The spelling irregularities, the varying values of vowels, the complications of blends, diphthongs, and digraphs seemed too numerous for these children to organize and remember well enough to be of any value in unlocking difficult or unfamiliar words.

The advocates of spelling and alphabet reforms have long been aware of the difficulties imposed on the child learning to read English. Since the time of John Hart (1569), writers, educators, and statesmen periodically donned armor and joined forces to do battle against old methods, the inefficient alphabet, and the irregularity of English spelling. For the most part, their valiant efforts ended in failure.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp11–26 in the printed version]

5. Chapter IV

Early Attempts at Supplementing the Alphabet as an Aid to Learning to Read; Spelling Reform, ditto

Although this study mainly was concerned with those alphabet and spelling reforms that had been attempted since the beginning of American education, and more specifically, those occurring after the middle of the 19th century, to have ignored those movements that began earlier would have been an injustice to those wise men who first raised their voices against the state to which the means of written communication had deteriorated. Mixed with their desire that every man might learn to read was their alarm over the difficulty imposed by the lack of any real system in the spelling, any regularity in pronunciation. Also, without some background information about the early efforts of such men as Hart, Cheke, Smith, Johnson, and others, some later references might have been obscure and confusing.

I. Attempts at Reform Prior to 1850

John Hart

One of the earliest attempts to reform the alphabet began with the publication of a book by John Hart in 1569. Previously, in 1551, he had written a book in which he criticized the spelling and writing of the language. Then, in his *Orthographie,* in which he "deplores the difficulties of learning to read a spelling in which the same letter stands for entirely different sounds and same-sounding words have different writings," he outlined an alphabet that he felt certain would eliminate all the difficulties of learning to read. In speaking of the student using his alphabet he said:

> So soon as he were able to learne reasonably and perfectly to know and name, the number of figures or members of the bodie and substance of our voice and speech, and so observing the new or strange order hereafter written, the learned man may instruct any natural English reasonable creature, to read English, in one quarter of the time that ever any other hath heretofore bene taught to reade, by any former manner. And in what lesse time and how much more easie and readie, it will be for the writer or Printer, Reader and hearer, I will not write, but leave it to the judgement of the Reader, of the sayd following treatise, and to the experience it selfe as occasion shall serve. [1]

Hart believed that his alphabet would save one fourth to one third of the paper necessary to print anything in the traditional alphabet, since repetitions as well as silent letters were eliminated. He pointed out that there were 4 ways that language might be (and had been, in English) corrupted:
1) by limitation, too few letters;
2) by superfluity, silent letters, double letters;
3) by ursurpation of one letter for another, and last,
4) by misplacing and disordering the letters, the *ble* syllable, for example. [2]

He added several symbols to the existing alphabet, some of which resembled those used in much later reform attempts. In place of the double *o* of *too,* a new symbol, ω. He submitted substitutes for the digraph *th*, ϑ, and ꝺ, and for *ch*, Ꞔ, for the repetisymbols *c* and *k*, ꝁ, and added diacritics to the vowels to indicate their various sounds. *Used* was written *iuzd; my, méi; which, huiG.* Another interesting innovation was the use of word signs: *di* for *half,* ꝑ for *for,* ꝫ for *by,* and & for *and.*[3]
[3]

The latter half of Hart's book was a primer, providing the reader of the book practice in the new orthography. It was not intended for use by children, but by adult readers, as the subject matter was at adult level, continuing the very learned discussion begun in the first half of the book on spoken language, mechanics of sound production and the necessity for the symbols to indicate exactly the sounds to be produced. [4]

During the same century as Hart wrote, and the next, several other reformed alphabets appeared. Sir John Cheke (1557), and Sir Thomas Smith (1568), who were at different times secretaries of state to King Edward VI, wrote urging spelling and alphabet reform. Smith suggested a 37 character alphabet, as did Bullokar in 1580 and Wilkins in 1633. Charles Butler (1634) proposed a consistently phonetic alphabet. [5] These men and others called attention to the confusion and difficulties imposed on the reader by the lack of regularity in English spelling.

Samuel Johnson.

In 1775 Dr. Johnson published a dictionary that has affected spelling up to the present day. Up to the time of its compilation, English spelling had been very unsettled, as evidenced by almost any manuscript of the time. Often within one manuscript a single word may have been spelled two or three different ways, even by "scholars." William Shakespeare seemed in doubts as to the correct way to spell his own name, spelling it variously: Shakspere, Shackspere, Shakespeare, and Shaksper. [6]

Into this sea of uncertainty waded Johnson, determined to do something to still the turmoil. He did. In some cases real progress was made; in others he simply compounded the errors already existing. A man of letters who leaned toward the classics, he preferred spellings that indicated Greek or Latin origins, whether they were or not so derived. Also he was inconsistent – he did not always follow through on spellings of words that were similar. Henry Gallup Paine later credited Johnson with blocking progress in spelling reform. He wrote:

At a time when English spelling was still unsettled, when etimology was largely based on guesswork, and English filology was in its infancy, his literary reputation gave to his dictionary. . . an "authority" far beyond that which it – or, indeed, any dictionary compiled at that time could possibly merit.

Thru whim or indolence he approved in certain instances spellings that were inconsistent with those he adopted for other words of the same general class. Thus, while retaining the Latin *p* in *receipt,* he left it cut of *deceit;* he speld (sic) *deign* one way, and *disdain* another; he speld *uphill* but *downhil, muckhill* but *dunghil, instill* but *distil, inthrall* but *disinthral* . . . . In other instances his carelessness permitted him to deviate in the text from the spellings given in the vocabulary. [7]

In spite of its imperfections, the dictionary was accepted as "authoritative" and "correct," and the efforts of later, more qualified scholars did little to eliminate, as Paine put it,

> a vast number of unhistorical, illogical, and unscientific forms. Words that have greatly altered in pronunciation since Johnson's day continue to be speld as he speld them; and the change and growth of air flexible language has failed to be recorded by an orthography that owes much of its inflexibility to his influence. [8]

Benjamin Franklin.

One of the first citizens of the new world to protest against the spelling of his language was Dr. Ben Franklin. He published an essay entitled, "A Scheme for a new Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling" (1768) and later compiled a dictionary based on his system. He had begun to have the types cast so that the book might be printed but abandoned it because of his advanced age. Franklin wrote of his alphabet: (see figure 3)

> As to those who do not spell well … their present spelling is only bad, because contrary to the present bad rules; under the new rules it would be good. [10]

In the same letter, he wrote:

> Whatever the difficulties and inconveniences are now, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter; and *some time or other it must be done,* or our writing will become the same as with the Chinese, as to the difficulty of learning and using it; and it would already have been such if we had continued Saxon spelling and writing used by our forefathers, [11]

Franklin's spellings in some ways resembled those of Hart, the *w* sound being represented by the diphthongs, *ui*, *uo, ua,* etc, depending on the vowel immediately following, the long *u* sound by iu (iuziŋ). He used many new symbols: to represent the voiced *th* sound; *ii* to represent the long *e* sound. His alphabet was phonetically regular, each spelling always pronounced the same way. The sound *ur,* which was variously spelled: *ur* as in fur, *er* as in fern, *ir* as in bird, was regularly written ụr, ụ taking the place of the conventional modified short *u* sound. He also used a symbol somewhat like the I.P.A. symbol for *ng.* A strange symbol, looking like a blended *o* and *a,* was used in any place where the schwa sound was employed, such as in unaccented syllables or in *of* or *or.* He, like Hart, eliminated double consonants and silent letters. A comparison of a paragraph written in both conventional alphabet and Franklin's proposed system showed a saving of 31 letters, taking 292 to write it in the former, 261 in the latter, a saving of one letter out of every eleven. [12]

Noah Webster.

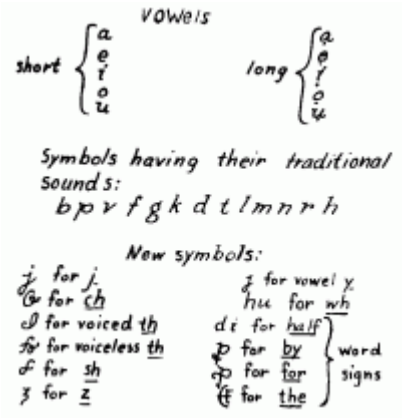
Franklin's interest in the English language led to a correspondence between him and Noah Webster, a man who succeeded in publishing a dictionary of his own and thereby gaining immortality. Webster, who earned a reputation as a man of letters while a very young man by writing the *Speller,* experimented with spelling reform. In 1789 he first published an essay on the subject, "The Reforming of Spelling." He aroused the ire of the traditionalists by introducing in his dictionary simpler spellings for several classes of words, spellings that were eventually accepted by Americans, marking the difference between many American and British spellings. [13]

References

1. John Hart, *Orthographie,* 1569. p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 14.
3. **Figure 1** shows Hart's alphabet with its additions and explanations. It will be noted that *w* and *y* were eliminated, since Hart believed them to be unnecessary, the digraphs *ui*, *io*, and *iu* being more accurate representations of the sounds, as illustrated with the following sentence: "ui uil reid bei ionder uel huer e uat uas uel ner takn bie e iuing hound." Words beginning with the *wh* digraph were written *hu*: as *huat, huen, huer.* Also, a diacritic, what he called a prick, was used below the conventional vowel signs to denote "longness." Vowels not so marked were taken to be short.
4. Ibid., pp. 44-67 of film.
5. Henry Gallup Paine, *Handbook of Simplified Spelling,* 1920, p.5
6. G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare, the Complete Works.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1948. pp. 8, 15.
7. Paine, op. cit., p. 7.
8. Ibid., p. 8.
9. M. Harrison, op. cit, p. 7.
10. Ibid, p. 14.
11. Ibid, op. cit, p. 15
12. Newell W. Tune, "How Does One Learn to Read?" *Spelling Progress Bulletin, IV,* 1, Mar. 1964, p. 10.
13. Paine, loc. cit.

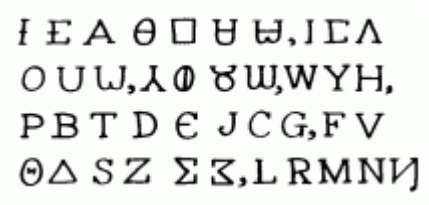
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p13 in the printed version]

FIGURE 1. HART'S ALPHABET DESIGNED TO MAKE SPELLING MORE REGULAR AND READING SIMPLIFIED.



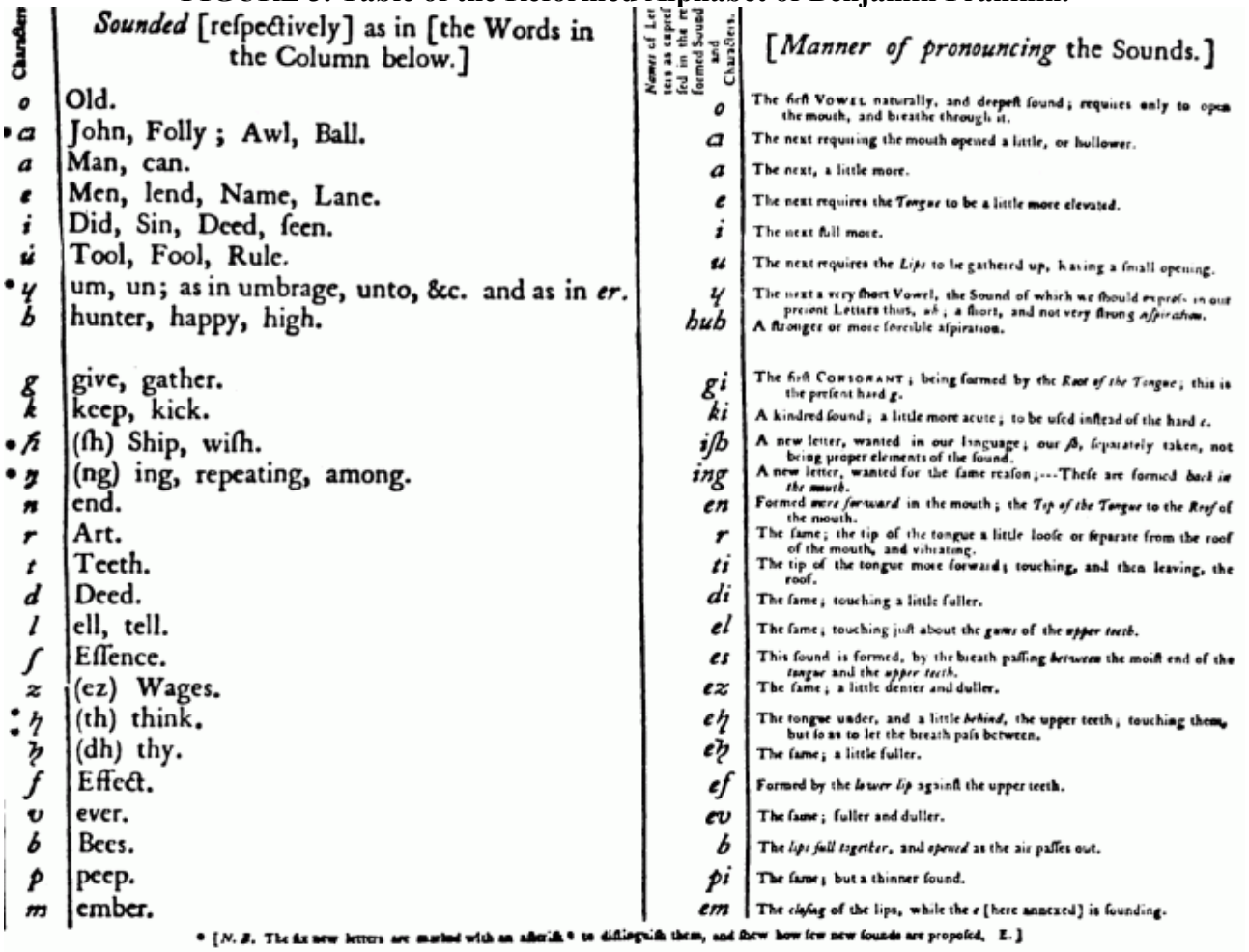
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p13 in the printed version]

FIGURE 2. THE FIRST "PITMAN ALPHABET" DEVELOPED I. PITMAN AND A. J. ELLIS. (1844)



[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p14 in the printed version]

FIGURE 3. Table of the Reformed Alphabet of Benjamin Franklin.



Characters	*Sounded* [respectively] as in [the Words in the Column below.]
o	Old.
•a	John, Folly ; Awl, Ball.
a	Man, can.
e	Men, lend, Name, Lane.
i	Did, Sin, Deed, ſeen.
u	Tool, Fool, Rule.
•ų	um, un; as in umbrage, unto, &c. and as in *er*.
h	hunter, happy, high.
g	give, gather.
k	keep, kick.
•ſh	(ſh) Ship, wiſh.
•ŋ	(ng) ing, repeating, among.
n	end.
r	Art.
t	Teeth.
d	Deed.
l	ell, tell.
ſ	Eſſence.
z	(ez) Wages.
•ɳ	(th) think.
ð	(dh) thy.
f	Effect.
v	ever.
b	Bees.
p	peep.
m	ember.

Names of Letters as capeſſed in the reformed Sound and Characters.	[*Manner of pronouncing* the Sounds.]
o	The firſt VOWEL naturally, and deepeſt ſound; requires only to open the mouth, and breathe through it.
a	The next requiring the mouth opened a little, or hollower.
a	The next, a little more.
e	The next requires the *Tongue* to be a little more elevated.
i	The next ſtill more.
u	The next requires the *Lips* to be gathered up, having a ſmall opening.
ų	The next a very ſhort Vowel, the Sound of which we ſhould expreſs in our preſent Letters thus, *uh*; a ſhort, and not very ſtrong *aſpiration*.
huh	A ſtronger or more ſenſible aſpiration.
gi	The firſt CONSONANT; being formed by the *Root of the Tongue*; this is the preſent hard *g*.
ki	A kindred ſound; a little more acute; to be uſed inſtead of the hard *c*.
iſh	A new letter, wanted in our language; our *ſh*, ſeparately taken, not being proper elements of the ſound.
ing	A new letter, wanted for the ſame reaſon;---Theſe are formed *back in the mouth*.
en	Formed *more forward* in the mouth; the *Tip of the Tongue* to the *Roof* of the mouth.
r	The ſame; the tip of the tongue a little looſe or ſeparate from the roof of the mouth, and vibrating.
ti	The tip of the tongue more forward; touching, and then leaving, the roof.
di	The ſame; touching a little fuller.
el	The ſame; touching juſt about the *gums* of the *upper teeth*.
es	This ſound is formed, by the breath paſſing *between* the moiſt end of the *tongue* and the *upper teeth*.
ez	The ſame; a little denter and duller.
eh	The tongue under, and a little *behind*, the upper teeth; touching them, but ſo as to let the breath paſs between.
eh	The ſame; a little fuller.
ef	Formed by the *lower lip* againſt the upper teeth.
ev	The ſame; fuller and duller.
b	The *lips full together*, and *opened* as the air paſſes out.
pi	The ſame; but a thinner ſound.
em	The *cloſing* of the lips, while the *e* [here annexed] is ſounding.

• [*N. B.* The ſix new letters are marked with an aſterik • to diſtinguiſh them, and ſhew how few new ſounds are propoſed. E.]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp15–19 in the printed version]

II. Later Reforms: Middle 19th Century to 1965

Isaac Pitman.

In 1826, two years before Webster's dictionary was published, a thirteen year old English boy left school to become a counting-house clerk. He was the son of a man greatly interested in a system of public education. After working as a clerk in the business that belonged to his father, young Isaac Pitman, then 19, was sent to a teacher training school. The director of the school, pleased with his pupil, asked the father if he did not have others at home of the same sort. He did, and later sent two more sons and three daughters to Borough Road Training College. **[14]**

At a very early age, Isaac became interested in systems of shorthand, but was dissatisfied with the existing methods, of which there were several. They were mostly abbreviations representing the consonants in the words recorded, but were not accurate nor speedy enough to please him. In 1837, he developed a phonetic shorthand which he called "stenographer's sound-hand. **[15]** In the same year he opened a private school and added his own short-hand system to the curriculum. At about the same time he began a correspondence school, giving tuition-free instruction through the mails. He began lecturing on the subject, explaining his system to the audiences. His brother, Benn, writing many years later, said that where they taught one paying student, they taught five tuition-free.

By 1842, Isaac began publishing a periodical on the subject of short-hand with a first issue of 1000 copies. Benn, as well as several other members of the family, joined his staff as a lecturer. At this time they began to advocate the use of the system, not only as an efficient and speedy method of writing, but also as a means of shortening and simplifying the task of learning to read for school beginners They also began a campaign for a reform of English spelling. **[16]**

During this period (1843) Pitman became associated with Alexander John Ellis. This young man was an enthusiastic scholar, interested in mathematics, music and philology. He too was engaged in the development of a phonetic alphabet. His alphabet was not limited to the recording of English speech, but contained some symbols for sounds not heard in that language; he intended that the orthography should be usable in any language. He was one of the first serious phoneticians, writing several books on the subject. He and Pitman worked on a phonetic print for the English language which was first published in *Phonotypic Journal* in 1844. Unlike most reformed alphabets, it was made up entirely of capital letters, the lower case letters being merely small versions of the upper case (**see figure 2**). For five months during 1849, Ellis published the *Phonetic News* printed entirely in reformed spelling and print. It was a financial failure and went out of print. A subsequent fire destroyed the type.

In the meantime, Pitman had disbanded his school so that he might devote all of his time to writing and publishing papers and books on his shorthand, and spelling and alphabet reform. This did not mean that his alphabet ceased to be used in the schools. His philanthropy continued; A. J. Ellis wrote of an experiment at the "Pauper Schools" at a town near Manchester called Swinton, in classes for illiterates in English houses of correction, and other schools for adults. One in Manchester consisted of persons ranging in age from the mid-'teens to the mid-forties. Harrison quoted one report that told how, after only nine lessons, 11 students were reading materials printed in the new alphabet, were beginning to make the transition to the traditionally printed materials, and were reading parts of the Bible. All were able to read in traditional print at the end of the 18th lesson. Benn Pitman taught 50 persons to read in one month at the school in Swinton, while another brother, Henry, teaching a class of 30 in a Liverpool workhouse, in a few lessons had taught them to read. In one experiment, it was found that poor children with meager backgrounds could learn to

read at a swifter rate with Phonotypy than the children from good homes could be taught with the traditional orthography. It also was found that the experiment had the secondary effect of improving the speech of the underprivileged children. [17]

These are only a few of the examples of Pitman's preoccupation with the idea that all children should be educated. Many were the classes in the "ragged schools" that were taught by Pitman's disciples, and in almost every case the results were excellent, the time saved in instruction considerable. The experiments were not limited to the British Isles either, but spread to the United States.

"Fonotypy" was used in a large school experiment between 1852 and 1860 in Massachusetts. The ten schools in Waltham were involved. The children were taught to read with the Pitman phonetic alphabet. After gaining fluency in the initial medium, they were taught to read in the conventional spellings. A committee of the American Philosophical Society published the results of the experiments in 1899:

> We tested it thoroughly for six or seven years in the town of Waltham, Mass. which then had about 800 children in the public schools. The effect upon the schools of the town was marked. The saving of time in teaching the children to read and to spell enabled us to introduce exercises for the eye and hand, thus cultivating habits of observation, skill in drawing and writing, and geometric ability. The fonetic print corrected the brogue of the Irish children and the Yankee accent of the American children in a surprising manner. An improvement in the moral and intellectual tone of the schools was also noticeable, arising certainly in part from 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 (new) method should injure the pupil's 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 percentages 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 much smaller than in the 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 has 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. [18]

In all, Pitman developed five different alphabets. He was very critical of himself, never satisfied with less than perfection. Harrison wrote of him:

In his constant seeking for improvement Isaac Pitman several times changed letters in his Phonotype Alphabet (and his shorthand). These changes often caused friction. The harshest criticism that has been leveled against him, apart from the fact that he drove those who worked for him as hard as he drove himself, was unyieldingness where his spelling was concerned. He would listen graciously and pleasantly to every argument and then serenely go his own way. He had many arguments with the councils, his advisory bodies, and with his great helpers like A. J. Ellis. Benn Pitman believes that his brother's "mania for change and improvement … did more to check the spread of Phonetic Reform, stop practical teaching, and dampen the ardour of those friendly to orthographic consistence, than all other causes combined." Despite such possible repercusions of his never-ceasing search for perfection. Isaac Pitman's own altruism and wholehearted enthusiasm prevailed over difficulties and his friends continued in his support. [19]

Pitman continued to be interested in spelling reform and alphabet reform to the end of his life. During the last decade of the 19th century he began publishing *The Speler.* It was printed in phonetic spelling that used a brev over short vowels, had no double letters, and no *c*. In the magazine he advocated further reforms, brought about in two stages: first,

1) rejecting *c, g,* and *x*;
2) eliminating double letters;
3) adopting *aa* to stand for the vowel heard in *alms, ai* for the sound in *make, ee* as in *reed, au as* in *taut*, *oa* as in *boat, oo* as in *boot;*
4) differentiating between the two sounds of *th* by inserting an apostrophe-like mark preceding the voiceless digraph as in *think;*
5) eliminating *sion, tion* spellings, substituting instead a new digraph, *zh,* at the beginning of such syllables;
6) at the end of unaccented syllables, using a single letter for a long vowel sound for the sake of brevity.

The second stage of reform that he advocated was one calling for the use of new symbols, these having both upper and lower case, as follows:
Ç and ç for *ch*, Ħ and ħ for the *th* in *thin,* Ξ and ζ for the *th* in *the*, Σ and ∫ for *sh,* Ж and ʒ for *zh,* and Ŋ and ŋ for ng, **[20]** [*These are not the correct characters, but the originals are too faint to read.]*

In the January 1895 issue of *The Speler,* (in simplified spelling) Pitman outlined the first stage of his plan for spelling reform:

> The English langwej kontainz 36 soundz, and the alfabet kontainz onli 23 yusful leterz; c, q, and x being duplikaits ov uther leterz; c ov k and s, q ov k, and x ov ks or kz. Eech ov thesz 36 soundz iz variusli represented in from 2 to 30 wayz; and the 26 leterz, singli or komniend, reprezent the 36 soundz in 300 wayz. The rezult iz, the konfiuzhon ov English or'thografi. Shud not this grait eevil and impediment to ediukashon be remoovd? Ai; but haaf mezhurz wil not sufies. We must ad 13 niu leterz to the alfabet, and yuz everi leter konsistentli; a sein for a sound. Lerning to reed and spel wil then be chanjd from a toil to a plezhur. This paragraf kontainz ail the soundz ov the niu alfabet. **[21]**

In the February issue of the same year, he included a new alphabet proposed by a man named Larisun, who suggested the addition of 15 new symbols (**see figure 4**). The June issue included a resolution passed at a teachers conference:

> That in the opinion ov this konferens, it iz dezirabl, in the interests ov Edukashon, that the Edukashon Department shud instituit an inkweri intu the speling difikultiz ov skoolz with a viu to the simplifikashon ov the speling ov the wurdz ov the English langwei. **[22]**

Pitman commented that as early as 1879, 130 schools of England, including those in London, Liverpool, and Birmingham had asked the Department of Education to enquire into the spelling difficulties of the language and consider reforms. He quoted Gladstone by saying, "I onestly kan say I kanot konseev how it is that a forener lerns how to pronouns English when yu rekolekt the total absens ov tool, method, sistem..." In the same issue he reprinted an essay by Max Miller, another prominent filologist, writing in *Echo:*

> The kwestion that wil hav to be anserd sooner or later iz this:- kan this unsistematic sistem ov speling be aloud to go on for ever? Iz everi English Cheild, az kompaird with uther children, to be mulked ov tu or 'three yeerz ov hiz leif in order to lern it? Ar the loer klases to go 'thru skool without lerning to reed and reit thair oan langwej intelijentli? And iz the kuntri to pay

> milionz everi yeer for this uter failur ov nashonal ediukashon? … Everi 'thing the piupilz hav to lern iz irashonal; wun rool kontradikts the uther, and eech staitment haz to be aksepted simpli on au'thoriti and with a kompleet disregard ov aul thoaz rashonal instinks which lei dormant in the cheild; and aut to be awaikend by everi keind ov hel'thi ekserseizing . . . I no ther ar personz hu kan defend eni'thing, and hold that it iz diu tu this veri disiplin that the English karacter iz whot it iz; that it retainz respect for au'thoriti; that it duz not rekweir a rezon for everi'thing; and that what iz inkonseevabel iz, therefor, imposibel. Even English or'thodoksi haz been traist bak to that hiden skair, becauz a cheild akustomd to beleev that t-h-o-u-g-h iz *tbo,* and t-h-r-o-u-g-h iz *thru* wud afterwerdz beleev eni'thing. [23]

Another issue contained a reprint from the *New York Times,* written by the American phonetist, Alexander Melville Bell, Unlike Pitman, Muller and others, he was opposed to gradual reform. He said, "The chief difficulty is, to introduce change of any kind; and therefore, I think a single radical change should be aimed at which would settle orthography once for all." [24] He thought the most important change to be made was the addition of new letters to furnish one symbol for every sound; the other changes would be minor and simple. He suggested that selected experts submit a complete scheme, and that this be put into effect as a whole. He wrote:

> I do not approve of such piecemeal alterations as have been recently suggested – alterations which unsettle practice without settling principles. Our language is incomparably simple and clear in its structure, and only needs a vehicle of similar clearness and simplicity for its diffusion. [25]

Isaac Pitman died in 1897, still an alert man at 84, who faced death as he faced life, leaving this message, "To those who ask how Isaac Pitman passed away say, 'Peacefully, with no more concern than in passing from one room into another to take up further employment.'" One of his biographers wrote:

> Some day, and possibly sooner than anticipated, the reform of our orthography will become a practical question. When that time arrives the lifelong labours of Isaac Pitman in that direction will not have been in vain. [26]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p17]

FIGURE 4."LARISUN'S FONOTIPI", PROPOSED IN 1895

Symbol	as in	Symbol	as in
a	cat	ŋ	ring
a	cape	o	go
b	big	ɵ	not
c	kite	p	pet
ch	chip	r	red
d	dog	s	see
e	bed	sh	she
ɛ	beat	t	to
f	fat	ʊ	nut
g	good	u	cute
h	hat	ɯ	boot
i	like	v	vine
ɨ	lid	w	we
j	jug	hw	what
l	let	y	yet
m	me	z	zoo
n	no	ɑ	fall

Benn Pitman.

A younger brother to Isaac Pitman, Benn, after teaching in the school at Wotton-under Edge, lecturing and teaching over a wide area under his brother's auspices, moved to America and settled in Cincinatti. [27] He continued to work in the area of alphabet reform, writing and publishing several books on the subject and a biography of Isaac telling a lot about his life struggles. [28] He developed an alphabet of his own. While the idea of reform did not originate with the younger brother, once he became dedicated to the cause, he became almost as avid a disciple as Isaac. In the preface of one of his books, *A Solution of the Alphabetic Problem,* he stated:

What then, could be urged with more reason, than a plea for simple justice to the millions of children of the English speaking races – who, if they are to become intelligent citizens, *must* acquire a knowledge of our represented language – that they should be furnished with a Complete Alphabet, where letters represent unvarying sounds, just as figures and notes of music always represent the same power? He should also be relieved from the puzzling, customary habits of *naming* letters, instead of giving them their true sounds, calling letters for example *double-you, wye, aich, tee-aich,* etc., historical names that do not explain, but rather conceal the true power that the letters stand for, which alone should reach the ear of the child. [29]

In discussing the spelling and pronouncing inconsistencies as they related to the young child, he wrote:

> The perversity of English spelling and its failure to indicate pronunciation are not realized by the average teacher or parent for they judge from a habit, acquired by ten, twenty or more years of familiarity. To the child each word, when first encountered, is a puzzle. How shall a given collection of letters be *pronounced?* How shall a given word be spelled? He has been taught, for example, to call *o* owe; and if the letter occurs in the next line in the word *to,* he finds it is no longer *o* but *oo*, and he is told to call it *too.* In subsequent lines he may come to *son, soft, woman, women,* and the child finds that the first instruction can not be relied upon to pronounce *any word* in which the letter occurs. A like uncertainty attends the reading of every other vowel. [29]

He quoted Ellis's *Plea for Phonetic Spelling,* saying that "the 26 letters of the alphabet are used with 658 different significations. . . the forty sounds of the language, which should be represented by forty letters. . are really represented in 615 different ways." [30] In the same book, Benn Pitman gave seven rules for phonetic spellings. [31]

1. Let each of the consonant signs represent the one sound for which it is now most commonly employed.
2. Use consonant digraphs according to the same rule.
3. Dispense with the useless duplicates *c, q, x.*
4. Use the vowel signs for their *most usual* powers.
5. Dispense with the dot over i and j, and use this distinct and unobtrusive sign as a diacritic mark, to indicate the Long Vowels . . .
6. The three remaining simple vowels, as heard in *alms, Paul,* and *pool*, for which letters are not provided in the present alphabet, may be represented by the digraphs *aa, au,* and *oo*.
7. The diphthongs heard in *coil* and *cowl* are suggestively represented by *oi* and *ow*. [31]

He called attention to the fact that this scheme provided for all 39 of the sounds of the English language, while making no change in the traditional alphabet other than eliminating the useless letters and adding the *dot* to indicate the long vowel.

Unlike his brother, Isaac, Ellis, and Bell, he advocated, not a sudden crashing reform but a gradual process taking years to complete, as follows:

1) A gradual simplifying of the modern lawless spelling, begun by Dr. Noah Webster 3/4 of a century ago. He advised dropping the useless and misleading *u*, in such words as *honour, labour,* etc., and instead of *cheque, plough,* etc., to print and write *check, plow*; advice that has generally been accepted by the entire nation. A further simplification is now being wisely financed by Mr. Andrew Carnegie, who has established a board of able specialists, who thru the press, advise simplifying the spelling of about 250 more frequently recurring words, such as *stopt, dropt, tho,* etc, in plaice of *stopped, dropped,* and *though.* This reasonable change was endorsed and recommended by President Roosevelt and has already been adopted by many schools, colleges, and printed periodicals, in spite of an absurd interference on the part of the political congress.

2) By adopting in elementary school books, A Phonetic use of the letters of the Roman Alphabet, by which all the time-wasting absurdities of the usual orthography me avoided, and the acquirement of reading and pronunciation made pleasant and easy. A scientific use of the present familiar letters . . . makes so light a change in the general appearance of the printed page, that a child who has gained a familiarity with the new method will be able, with a little guessing, to read the ordinary print. **[32]**

Unlike Isaac Pitman, Benn was to join the group who advocated spelling reform. When the Pitman alphabet did not come into general use, Benn continued to work toward some practical solution to the problem that existed. Not so Isaac. Benn, and later Maurice Harrison, wrote of Isaac's inability to compromise, to accept less than perfection. Paine also believed that this was the principle reason why Isaac Pitman's alphabet never really got past the experimental stage. He believed that Pitman's followers became confused by his continuous revisions and modifications. He gave this as the cause of the dissolving of the association between Pitman and Ellis; his apparent uncertainties about his alphabet caused uncertainty in the minds of his followers in both England and America, influencing them to their own modifications to the alphabet or to abandon the practice altogether. **[33]**

While the older brother continued to work in England, Benn Pitman wrote his small volumes in Cincinatti, apparently publishing them himself; since none of those studied carried the name of a publishing firm, only "Benn Pitman, Cincinatti." Besides the previously mentioned volume, he published several others, noteworthy among them being *A Child's First Primer,* (1855), *The First Phonetic Reader,* (1855, the text used in the Waltham experiment), and *A Plea for Alphabetic Reform,* published in 1905.

The Primer was a small book of only 145 pages, the first 56 consisting of lists of syllables made up of the letters of Pitman's alphabet, each page concentrating on one sound, such as short *a* in combination with various consonants. The section of the book that contained the material to be read by the child (78 pages) contained short rhymes, one to a page usually, each teaching a short moral lesson. The book contained black and white illustrations, precise and geometric, examples of draftmanship that seemed unlikely to be appreciated by the six-year old child. The sentiment of the verse was also very adult, with no continuity and no story. The final section of 11 pages was a

treatise on alphabetic inconsistencies, an explanation of the system used in the book, the alphabet, and a short discussion of how sounds are produced by the human organs of speech. [34]

The last mentioned book, printed a half century later, repeated some of his earlier arguments, as well as several new ones. One particular statement illustrated his belief in the time-saving factor inherent in the reformed system of spelling:

If it costs 2 dollars a week to feed and clothe the average child, and if two years are wasted by each of the 19 million children who attend school, it means that this nation loses more than five million dollars a day by the use of its antiquated alphabet and grotesque spelling. [35]

He also wrote, "It is time that the hesitating, time-wasting perplexities of children over their spelling and reading should cease; phonetic spelling will save all their time and tears. [36]

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21. Ibid.
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33. Paine, op. cit., p. 11.
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35. ??
36. Ibid., p21.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp19–21 in the printed version]

Later Reforms: Middle 19th Century to 1965 [contd]

American Experiments.

Besides the experiment carried out in the schools of Waltham, several other school systems throughout the United States conducted experiments using one or the other of the phonetic alphabets. At the time that William T. Harris was Superintendent of Schools of St. Louis, a similar experiment was tried there (1866), using a "Pronouncing Orthography," developed by Dr. Edwin Leigh. Leigh did not change the spelling of the words but used a special form of each letter to indicate its pronunciation. Silent letters, for example, were printed in a hair line type. **[37]** In 1867, Harris and the school board of St. Louis recommended that Leigh's method be incorporated in all the primary schools of that city. After Harris became United States Commissioner of Education, his Bureau published a pamphlet reporting that "from 18 to 24 months could be saved in learning to read through systematic spelling" and for the first time we hear of attendant gains in the development of personal factors, such as love of books. **[38]**

Also in St. Louis, in 1868, another experiment was conducted, this time employing materials printed in Simplified Spelling. The board reported that "a given standard of good reading can always be reached in about half the time . . .", and later, in 1870, "Each year increases our admiration of the work. Gain in time – quite one half – distinct articulation, and better spelling represent the undoubted advantages." **[38]**

The following year the Illinois Board of Education reported, "Pupils are found in their second year of schooling who have read many books. They learn to read so quickly and with comparatively so little effort, that reading is a pleasure, which could not be said under the old system." The primary schools of Washington University had many children finishing the customary three years work in two years, and meeting difficulties making the transition to the regular orthography. In Iowa, a study showed how children averaging six years of age had learned to read in five months what had taken an older group(average eight years) to learn in 15 months, the first using a special phonetic orthography, the second, the traditional type. The same type results were reported from Boston and New York. **[39]**

Mrs. Eliza B. Burnz, of New York, says in regard to her experience in Nashville, soon after the Civil War: "The phonetic teaching in the Fisk School, as elsewhere, proved all cavil that with phonetic books as much could be accomplished in four months in teaching to read, as by a year with the common method. And, moreover, it showed that there is no difficulty experienced by children in passing from the phonetic to ordinary printed books. After going thru the phonetic primer and First and Second Reader, the children passed at once into the Second Reader in common print, and from the Phonetic Gospel into the common New Testament." Successful experiments in common schools are on record in sufficient numbers to prove the practicability of the method. **[40]**

Mark Twain and Spelling Reform.

Not only was Benn Pitman drawn into the spelling reform movement set in motion in America, and financed by Andrew Carnegie, but so too was that great humorist, Samuel L. Clemens. He made speeches urging reform, and, though they were light, frivolous-seeming and funny, they pointed out the incongruities and inefficiencies of the system. He poked fun at the traditionalists who stubbornly held on to the familiar way of spelling. In a speech at the annual dinner of the Associated Press in 1906, he urged the members of this large body to accept the suggested changes, saying, "If the Associated Press will adopt and use our simplified forms, and thus spread them to the ends of the earth . . . our difficulties are at an end." He continued by saying:

. . . And so I beg you, I beseech you – oh, I implore you to spell them in our simplified forms. Do this daily, constantly, persistently for three months – only three months – it is all I ask. The infallible results? – victory, victory all down the line. For by that time all eyes here and above will have become adjusted to the change and in love with it, and the present clumsy and ragged forms will be grotesque to the eye and revolting to the soul. And we shall be rid of phthisis and phthisic, and pneumonia and pneumatics, and diphtheria and pterodactyl, and all those other insane words which no man addicted to simple Christian life can try to spell and not lose some of the bloom of his piety in the demoralizing attempt. Do not doubt it. We are chameleons, and our partialities and prejudices change place with an easy and blessed facility, and we are soon wonted to the change and happy with it. **[41]**

In speaking of the traditionalists, he said, "There are 82 millions of us people that use this orthography, and it ought to be simplified in our behalf, but it is kept in its present condition to satisfy one million people who like to have their literature in the old form." He seemed to think there was a type of snobbery that cherished the difficulty of attaining an education imposed by the "old" spelling:

> People say it is the spelling of Chaucer and Spencer and Shakespeare and a lot of other people who do not know how to spell anyway, and it has been transmitted to us and we preserve it and wish to preserve it because of its hallowed associations.
>
> Now I don't see that there is any real argument about that. If that argument is good, then it would be a good argument not to banish flies and the cockroaches from hospitals because they have been there so long that the patients have got used to them and they feel a tenderness for them on account of the association. **[42]**

In another speech he gently lampooned Carnegie for "attacking orthography at the wrong end." He meant that Carnegie "meant well" but accused him of treating the symptoms and not the ailment. He said:

. . . He ought to have gone to work on the alphabet. There's not a vowel in it with a definite value, and not a consonant that you can hitch anything to. Look at the *h's* distributed all around. There's *gherkin.* What are you going to do with the *h* in that? What the devil's the use of *h* in *gherkin* I'd like to know. It's one thing I admire the English for! They just don't mind anything about them at all.

But look at the *pneumatics* and the *pneumonias* and all the rest of them. A real reform would settle them for once and all, and wind up by giving us an alphabet that we wouldn't have to spell with at all. Why, there isn't a man who doesn't have to throw out about 1500 words when he writes letters because he can't spell them. It's like trying to do a St. Vitus's dance with a wooden leg. **[43]**

He continued in the speech by pointing out that asking a person what a combination of letters spells often puts him in a position of asking the meaning of the word before he can tell the pronunciation. He cited several examples: *bow* and *bow, sow* and sow, *read* and *read,* etc. He ended the speech in a humorous note, urging Mr. Carnegie to concentrate on alphabet reform:

> It is a poor alphabet. I appoint Mr. Carnegie to get after it, and leave simplified spelling alone. Simplified spelling brought about sunspots, the San Francisco earthquake, and the recent business depression, which we never would have had if spelling had been left all alone. **[44]**

The Simplified Spelling Board.

In reference to the state of affairs, as far as the reform movement was concerned, at the beginning of the 20th century, Harrison wrote, "Sir Isaac Pitman was dead and the Spelling Reform Association moribund. [45] In the United States, Roosevelt was no longer president; his lists of suggested spellings carried weight no longer and were gradually forgotten, but, altho the public had apparently lost interest, the scholars had not. In 1906, in New York, the Simplified Spelling Board was incorporated. It drew its members (limited to 50) from the American Philological Assoc., the Philological Soc.of London, the Spelling Reform Assoc, the Modern Language Assoc. of America, the National Education Assoc., the American Assoc. for the Advancement of Science, as well as other well known scholars and men of letters. [46] The organization was extremely fortunate to obtain, with the help of Dr. Melvil Dewey, formerly of the Spelling Reform Assoc., and Director of the State Library of New York, the financial support of Mr. Andrew Carnegie, who agreed to underwrite all the propaganda for the campaign. [47]

The Board, though its membership was limited to half a hundred, felt it was advisable to have the benefit of many opinions of educated persons, so a large number of scholars and educators were invited to act as an Advisory Council. Its requirements for membership were the same as those for membership on the Board:

> A belief in the principles and in the immediate practice of simplified spelling in some degree, and a recognized status and influence as educator, scholar, writer or man of affairs. It is representative of all parts of the country and all faces of educated opinion favorable to the general idea that English spelling can be and ought to be improved. [48]

The Council had a much larger membership than the Board, approximately 250 individuals.

Paine gave as the main aim of the Simplified Spelling Board, the intent to arouse interest in English spelling and to call attention to its "chaotic condition," believing that, when people were made aware of the imperfections in the system, they would be determined to make those necessary alterations with the aid of a well organized and informed group. He wrote:

> The simplification of spelling is not an unconscious process, inevitable without human effort. Every changed spelling now in general use . . . was once the overt act of a single writer who was followed at first by a small minority. If there is to be a substantial improvement in the future, somebody must be willing to point the way, to set the example, to propose the next step in advance.
>
> This responsibility the Board has undertaken in the interest of the coming generations . . . it claims the right to be credited with some knowledge of the English language of the history of English orthography, and of the difficulties to be overcome in simplifying it. It believes that these difficulties can best be met and overcome under the leadership of an association organized for the purpose in order that every simplification proposed shall have behind it a sufficient weight of educated opinion to commend its acceptance by the public. [49]

The Simplified Spelling Board desired not to be thought of as a "Radical or Revolutionary" organization wishing sudden and violent changes, but rather, as one desiring a gradual and progressive reform, getting rid of needless exceptions and enforcing the existing rules in order that the language have more regularity where spelling is concerned. It adopted four principles on which all its recommendations were based:

1. When current usage offers a choice of spellings, to adopt the shortest and simplest. Examples: blest, not blessed; catalog, not catalogue; center, not centre, etc.
2. Whenever practicable, to omit silent letters. Example: activ, not active; anser, not answer; bluf, not bluff, etc.
3. To follow the simpler rather than the more complex of existing analogies. Example: aker, not acre; buro, not bureau; enuf, not enough, etc.
4. Keeping in view that the logical goal of the movement is the eventual restoration of English spelling to the fonetic basis from which in the course of centuries and their various causes it has widely departed, to propose no changes that are inconsistent with that idea. **[50]**

Almost as soon as it was organized, the Board began its campaign, starting first with its list of 300 commonly used words. Each one had two or more accepted spellings; the simpler spelling was suggested as the best one and persons receiving the list were asked to sign a card agreeing to use, as far as possible, the simpler forms. The response was very gratifying, New York's school board, the Modern Language Assoc., the National Education Assoc. and many state teacher's associations, as well as many widely read periodicals and newspapers, among them *Literary Digest, Current Literature,* the *Chicago Tribune,* recommended the 300 spellings.

Two years after the formation of the American group, the English counterpart, the Simplified Spelling Society, was organized. They also were fortunate in obtaining the support of Carnegie (minutes of the early meetings mention several contributions in the amount of 1,000 pounds). The membership of both groups had several names in common besides Carnegie: Walter William Skeat, Henry Bradley, William Archer, Thomas Lounsbury. **[51]**

The American group began publishing, in 1909, the *Simplified Spelling Bulletin,* while in England, the Society stated putting out a monthly magazine, the *Pioneer of Simplified Spelling.* The two publications served as vehicles for discussions of the reform movement, and for reporting news concerning its progress. Their supporters believed that they were instrumental in influencing faculties of colleges and universities, public school administrators and teachers, and commercial firms to adopt the original list, as well as later lists. **[52]**

Though basically, and for the most part, the aims of the two organizations were identical, the principles differed somewhat. From the Simplified Spelling Society's book, *New Spelling:*

> Firstly, they agreed not to introduce new letters or diacritics, that is, marks which modify the sound of ordinary letters "as even the dotting of is and the crossing of is interrupt the quick flow of the pen."
>
> Their next "basic principle" requires that no combination of letters not already in use in ordinary English should be used; presumably on the assumption that people would have less objection to familiar combinations. **[53]**

Reg. Deans suggested that this was an absurd idea, because there was a precedent for almost any combination: "eye, aisle, guide, height, receive, people, quay **. . .** He said that their adopted combinations: ae, ee, ie, oe, ue, for the long vowel sounds, were not the most familiar. He also called attention to the sounds in these combinations, pointing out that they could not be "sounded" to produce the phoneme they stood for. The *e* used in combination with the other vowels to stand for the long sound became itself a diacritic and thus just as obtrusive as dotting *i*'s and crossing *t*'s.* Deans discussed other phonetic errors that the British Society was retaining for no reason, as far as he could see. It was a case, he believed, of "too many cooks spoiling the broth: **[54]**

(**Editor's note**: Deans did not use logic in his reasoning. The examples he gave are not the commoner spellings of those sounds and are not fonetic by any system. Using the *e* as a modifier to the vowel letter is merely a means of interning the silent terminal *e* (often, but not usually, indicating that the previous vowel is long) so as to follow the letter it is supposed to modify. While these vowel digrafs are not, in some cases, the commonest spellings of each long vowel sound, together they make an easily remembered system – hence easily taught. Their use does not violate the principle of "no diacritics;" nor does it interrupt the quick and easy flow of the pen. Finally, it makes for the long vowels, an easily remembered mnemonic: *Mae, see thie toe Tuesday noon*.

*For a discussion of this subject, see S.P.B. v. III, n. 1, Mar. 1963, p. 20.)

On the other hand, according to Deans, the Americans were unable to agree on anything. They made no attempt to get phonetic accuracy, retained too many of the faults of the existing system of spelling. "Unless," he wrote, "we agree on a complete and scientific solution of the problem, there will be an unlimited number of contending opinions, each one as valid as any other." **[55]**

In 1911, an international conference was held, with delegates from the Society and from the Board attending, these being chosen for their "filologic competence." Another conference was planned for 1914, but the unrest preceding the First World War prevented its convening. **[56]**

By 1913, the Simplified Spelling Board had issued four lists of recommended spellings in all, and, after the fourth list, resolved to issue no more for the time being, but instead to concentrate efforts toward wider acceptance of these lists. They hoped to influence, in particular, the outstanding educational institutions. A questionnaire was sent to all the leading white universities and colleges in America during 1916 with the following results: 72% of those institutions answering recognized and accepted recommendations of the Board; 25% agreed to use those spellings in official correspondence and publications; only 18% opposed the recommendations. About the same time, the National Education Assoc. adopted the "t" ending to replace the "ed" in words where the suffix was pronounced that way. This affected 900 words, in addition to the 12 Words adopted in 1898, and those simpler spellings (300 words) that the organization endorsed in 1907. **[57]**

The Board became aware of a need for a handbook that outlined the aims and objectives of the organization, set out and explained the rules of spelling, pointed up the rules that were to receive the greatest emphasis at that time, and included a list of words in common use in the simpler spelling. The Handbook appeared in three stages: Part I, "English Spelling and the Movement to Improve It," appeared in April, 1919; Part II, "The Case for Simplified Spelling," was ready in July of that year; and Part III, "Rules and Dictionary List," which became available the following October. **[58]**

In the years between 1906 and 1920, the Board was very active, perhaps due to the generous support of Carnegie, who made contributions of more than a quarter of a million dollars to its campaign. The strength of the campaign, according to one writer, "Lay in its moderation." He did not, like Deans, consider this a weakness. He wrote:

> . . Its weakness was that maintaining the line of demarkation between the simplified and the unsimplified forms, made it troublesome to apply in practice, and its very moderation meant that its actual contribution to reducing the economic wastes inherent in writing, printing, and teaching conventional English spelling, was insignificant. **[59]**

After the early twenties the intense interest in spelling reform began to fade, although in 1922 the Board published a "fonetic key alphabet." The Spelling Reform Assoc. published another in 1928. The latter alphabet (**see fig. 5**) was subsequently adopted by a joint committee formed by a merger of the two groups. **[60]** The alphabet had 42 symbols. The lower case letters were printed in normal

line, while capitals, of the same size and shape, were printed in bold line type. In typewritten or hand-written materials, letters to be capitalized were preceded by a capsign, an asterisk. This alphabet had several excellent characteristics when compared to others that had preceded it, or for that matter, many that were developed since. For example, the new symbols were compatible with the traditional 26. Their shapes were in harmony; a word containing a new symbol or two did not look too alien, as did some others. Several interesting signs were included: å for the conventional "long i" sound as is heard in *aisle* and *by*; a word sign, ↑ə, for *the;* a modified *c* for the *ch* sound, ċ. Also developed with the alphabet was a "disjoined" longhand and a script – the Association recommending the former over the latter, citing as an advantage its close resemblance to the print, particularly important in the teaching. **[61]**

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46. Paine. op. cit, p. 15.
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55. Ibid, p. 61-66.
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57. Ibid., p. 26.
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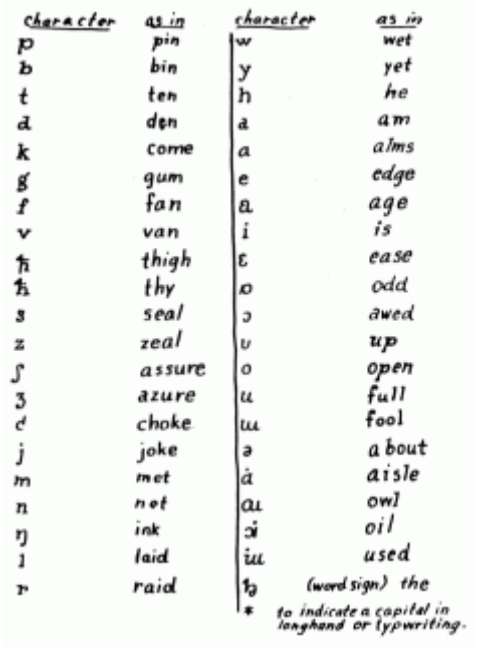
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p22 in the printed version]

FIGURE 5. SPELLING REFORM ASSOCIATION PHONETIC ALPHABET (1928)



character	as in	character	as in
p	pin	w	wet
b	bin	y	yet
t	ten	h	he
d	den	a	am
k	come	ɑ	alms
g	gum	e	edge
f	fan	ā	age
v	van	i	is
ŧ	thigh	ē	ease
ŧ̄	thy	o	odd
s	seal	ō	awed
z	zeal	u	up
ʃ	assure	ō	open
ʒ	azure	ū	full
c	choke	ū	fool
j	joke	ə	about
m	met	ə̄	aisle
n	net	au	owl
ŋ	ink	ȯi	oil
l	laid	iu	used
r	raid	ŧə	(word sign) the
		*	to indicate a capital in longhand or typewriting.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 pp19–26 in the printed version]

Later Reforms: Middle 19th Century to 1965 [contd]

G. B. Shaw and the alphabet.

The years between the late twenties and 1960 saw only slight progress toward spelling or alphabet reform, altho those who most ardently supported the cause of simplicity and regularity continued to write, lecture and lobby, and here and there throughout the English-speaking countries isolated studies and experiments were being conducted. Some impetus was given by the disclosure of the contents of G. B. Shaw's will. Early in Shaw's writing career he became impressed with the inefficiency of the alphabet, and with the absence of any real fixed sound value system in the alphabet. He believed that the existing alphabet was beyond repair, that to attempt to augment or regularize it was futile. He left the money in his will to that person, or those persons, who developed a scientifically designed, easy to learn, space-saving alphabet. Abraham Tauber wrote:

> Shaw seized upon every occasion to promote alphabet reform. And each statement became a cumulative summary of the case. G.B.S. pointed out that only a recognition of the economic follies of this present spelling "can move Cabinets to sit up and take notice." G.B.S. referred to himself as "the only true phonetician, economist and man of letters who realizes how much money there is in a British alphabet with one graphic and easily written symbol without even crosses or dots". **[62]**

The alphabet, designed by Kingsley Read, which won the prize, contained 40 symbols and 8 compounds or ligatures (for the vowel-r tripthongs), was entirely new, not a modification of the Roman alphabet, as had been most of the others. Dr. Peter McCarthy gave six advantages of the winning alphabet:

1. Learning to spell English becomes quite a simple process, and takes a fraction of the time now required.

2. Written English occupies one third less space (for the same size letter), leading to a saving of paper, ink, wages (for e.g. printers and typists), transport and storage costs (for e.g. all books and newspapers), that must amount to billions of dollars annually. (Compared to this saving, any transitional costs on, for example, new printing fonts and typewriters, would be insignificant.)

3. If the new design were adopted – as it could easily be to other languages (some of which have imperfect or involved systems of writing), world literacy would be furthered.

4. One intrinsic defect of the roman alphabet *per se* cannot be overcome by *rearranging* the roman letters, namely that there are too few letters, 26, for writing most languages on a "one sound = one symbol" basis. Shavian has over 40 to start with, and several more would undoubtedly be added for other languages as the need arose.

5. Another defect which would not be eradicated even by *adding* to the number of 'roman' letters is the traditional use of 'capitals,' practically all of which have shapes different from the corresponding 'small' letters, and the use of different forms again in handwriting, as opposed to print or type. Shavian uses unchanged shapes thruout.

6. Objections are often raised to interferring or 'tampering' with our ordinary spelling on the grounds that 'phonetic' spellings (e.g. enuf, luv, wot) look illiterate, dialectal, comic, or obscene (because of various associations) or that our traditional orthography is somehow 'sacred,' or that the derivation of words is revealed or can somehow be studied by looking at their current spellings. We all know what a half-truth is involved in this last statement but the point is that *none* of the above objections can be made to an alphabet which starts with no associations of any kind, quite apart from its own positive merits. Our traditional roman spellings remain intact, for all to study who wish, and for people to use as long as they are not convinced of the pointlessness of so doing. This might take several generations (roman numerals linger on even now, for special purposes, but are no longer used for doing sums!); on the other hand, it might not. **[63]**

During these same 20 or 30 years educators were also interested in the alphabet and economy, particularly economy of time. Reading teachers felt that too much time was being spent in learning to read. Under the various methods of instruction, it was taking from one to three years to teach most children the basic skills – in some instances, much longer. This was the time when the phonetic approach to reading instruction was again coming to the fore, but even this was not effective in all cases. Many experienced persons wished for a one symbol-one sound alphabet, feeling that this would be the best solution to the phonics problem. They, like the Pitmans, felt that it need be only an initial teaching medium, to be abandoned after the child gained confidence in his ability to read and the maturity to handle the rules of our system of spelling and pronunciation. The child could then make the transition to traditional orthography.

Zachrisson's Alphabet.

In 1930, classes were begun in Uppsala, Sweden, using a new teaching medium developed by Prof. R. E. Zachrisson as a tool in teaching English, called *Anglia.* The first trial lessons were attended by educators and phoneticians. All spellings were regularized. The following is an example:

> My system ofrs a numbr ov lodgical and consistent, thoe not aulwiz nue, spelings ov evry English sound. For this very reezn sum ov its formz may apeer strandge to the jineral reeder, but with the exeption ov a fue diegrafs . . . Anglic has fue spelings that ar not met with in manuescripts ov urly literery wurks or in the aensient correspondens ov roialty and noebelmen. Thus to giv oenly a fue illustrations, King Henry VIII repeetedly rote *won* for one. . . . and his dautr Queen Elizabeth went for such spelinqs as *stauke* for *stalk* and *clark, hart,* for *clerk, heart.* **[64]**

The classes proved to be reasonably successful, and the professor was invited to be part of an international conference in London in 1930. There, on the advice of the English and American representatives, he made several simple alterations in his system. [65]

Nue Spelling.

Zachrisson's new system closely approximated the "Nue Speling" of the Simplified Spelling Soc. published in 1940. This system was used during and immediately after the Second World War to produce several books for children, books designed to teach children to read. One very popular one, *Dhe Litl Red Hen,* published by Heffner & Sons, London, was written by Maurice Harrison, author of several adult books dealing with the new spelling and related subjects. He wrote a manual to be used with readers and storybooks written in the Nue Speling, also *The Use of Simplified Spelling in Teaching Infants to Read and Write.* [66] A sentence from the first-mentioned book, one widely used in teaching reading, had the Little Red Hen saying, "Huu wil help to miks mie flour and to maek sum bred? [67]

In 1942, the Headmistress of Honneywell Road School, Battersea, London, reported on an experiment in which she had participated:

> Plenty of blackboard exercises on familiar words always spelt as pronounced will prepare the children for the use of the Preliminary Reader, *Jinglz and Storiz in Simplified Speling.* Children making use of these books make remarkably rapid progress very happily, and happiness is certainly essential, especially in the early stages of learning to read, because they are never confused by various sounds being used for the same letter, nor by the use of various letters to represent the same sound, Having perfect confidence in the symbols, the children *soon discover* their own power of building new words *without* the help of the teacher. They delight in exercising this power, because they are *never disappointed by being wrong,* and for the same reason they are *never afraid* to attempt to pronounce an unfamiliar word. . . . .
>
> In all my experience of school work, I have *never* seen little children so keen on any lesson, not, so far as I could judge, because they were different from other children, nor because they wished to excell, but simply because they *thoroly enjoyed* discovering new words for themselves.
>
> The Transition stage, i.e., the passing over from Simplified Spelling to the orthodox spelling. At this state my teachers and I expected to meet with difficulties. . . We were agreeably surprised at the way in which the children grasped the changes. The majority took no notice of slight alterations, hesitated at others, but of course, were completely nonplussed by some of the anomalies.
>
> At the end of two years the classes referred to above were tested by an impartial and experienced judge. The results obtained in spelling and the mechanical art of read proved that these children (average age 7 years and 8 months) *were considerably in advance of their age* in those two subjects, and that they could *read better and spell better* than classes of children of the *same age,* in the *same school,* instructed by the *same teachers* under similar conditions, but taught entirely on the *usual methods.*
>
> The teachers of the classes and I had convincing evidence that learning to read on the Simplified Spelling Plan was far the happier experience for the little child beginning its school career, and that children taught on the Simplified Spelling Method, being able to read intelligently *nine months earlier* than those trained on orthodox lines, had extra time for silent

reading, and their use of the classroom library showed that the power to read created a love for reading even in young minds. [68]

This was only the first of several successful experiments that were tried in the years after the war. Some involved systems of reformed spelling while others used special alphabets. A system employing both simplified spellings and a special alphabet was tried in an experiment in Denver, Colorado.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p24 in the printed version]

FIGURE 6. PHONETIC ALPHABET DEVELOPED BY HELEN BONEMMA FOR PRE-READING INSTRUCTION IN KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE.


THE ALFABET AS YÜZD IN "CHILDREN'Z SHORTHAND"
"DIKSHƏNARY KĒ"

ā dā (day) a dab ah bah au lau (law)
b big
(c = s or k) ch chip
d dot
ē mē e met
f for
g get
h hat
ī Ī i it
j jug
k kit kw kwik (quick)
l lamp
m man
n net ng ring nk pink
ō ōld o not ou bou (bough) oi toil
p pig
(qu = kw)
r run
s sit sh ship
t tap th thin then
ū glū (glue) yū myūt (mute) u nut uu puut (put)
v van
w win wh when
(x = ks or gs)
y yes
z zip zh mirahzh (mirage)
ə mountən

Writing by Sound.

In Sept. 1960, at Edgewater School in Denver, a teaching experiment began. The Principal of the school, Dr. Helen Bonnema, began a study using two groups of children, one pre-kindergarten, the other kindergarten. These very young children were to be introduced to reading instruction using a modified form of the World English Alphabet. Their progress was to be compared with another group of children beginning reading at the conventional age of six years plus. Dr. Bonnema's children were taught to write and read with a medium she had developed called the "Dictionary Key" alphabet. Her method employed a system of phonetic spellings as well as diacritically marked long vowels to differentiate between them and the short ones. She also included the inverted e, ə, or schwa, which was used in place of the conventional spellings in unaccented syllables, such as the *a* in *about,* the *i* in *easily,* the *o* in *gallop.* Other than the schwa, no augmentations were employed. Her complete alphabet consisted of 29 symbols (5 with macron) and 14 digraphs. No discrimination was made between the th-sounds in *thin* and *then.* (**see figure 6**).

In the experimental class, the child was first taught to write using the Dictionary Key way of indicating sound. The child was instructed very carefully to listen and recognize sounds and to distinguish between the different sounds of speech, then to write down the symbols that represented those sounds. He then reversed the process and read back what he had written. Dr. Bonnema explained her approach:

> It starts with the spoken language as the child knows it. The six-year-old has a vocabulary of about 2000 words. The problem is to show how to put these spoken words on paper so that he can be taught to communicate by writing as well as talking. He can and will be shown how to write any word he uses and understands. When he tells what he sees on television using such difficult words as *astronomer, scientist, fantastic, enormous, allergic, temperature,* he is given a means for writing them.
>
> When he reads back what he has written, he can easily see that reading is the ability to hear the words which his marks on the paper are saying. He soon finds he can put letters on paper which stand for any word he speaks, and then can read those words correctly, the meaning of which he does not know. **[69]**

Rather than affecting spelling adversely, Dr. Bonnema believed that the child would be made far more conscious of the sounds contained in a word and the various symbols necessary to record these sounds, and thereby become a better speller. In the transition stage, the children were taught the conventional ways of spelling words: *Kum* was written *come, sed* was written *said, ges* was written *guess.* The child, according to Bonnema, had gained sufficient skill and confidence in his ability to read before he was forced to face the confusing maze of contradictions and exceptions to the rules that he invariably faced in the traditional phonetic approach.

In a report published at the end of the first year's study, Dr. Bonnema stated that the kindergarten children reached many of the goals that were expected of children in the first grade program. Some of those attained were:

1. Understanding that speech sounds are indicated on paper by letter symbols.
2. Learned the regular symbols and sounds of 18 of the 21 consonants of the English alphabet.
3. The regular symbols for vowel sounds.
4. The written form of many common words which are most often used. There are many words which are the same in both the Key and conventional systems.
5. Clear enunciation when reading aloud.
6. To pronounce unaided words he has never seen before.
7. To write new words without the help of the teacher.
8. To express himself freely by writing original sentences.
9. To be enthusiastic and confident when he reads and writes.
10. To concentrate on printed material and to handle a book properly. **[71]**

Dr. Bonnema closed her report by saying that the teachers, principal, and parents felt that the project was worthy as a preparation for conventional reading. **[72]** In March of the 1960/61 school year, the Director of Elementary Education of Denver County announced that the larger experiment had been approved and that the Dictionary Key method of initial reading instruction would be tested over a 3 year period. At the time of this writing, the final results of the study were not yet available. Dr. Bonnema subsequently moved to a position at Colorado Womens' College and, despite her confidence in the worth of her system, had become an enthusiastic supporter of another system for initial reading instruction, Pitman's i.t.a. To an enquiry as to her reasons for abandoning her own system, she replied:

> I have decided that more good will come from promoting I.T.A. at this time than from confusing the public by diverting attention to other reform systems. Thousands of dollars from foundation funds, research grants, and other sources are being poured into publication of i.t.a. books.

> If we are ever to persuade the public of the usefulness of such a system, now is the time. We should cooperate in promoting the use of i.t.a. Its success may open the way for even better systems. [73]

Bonnema, like many others in the field of education who are particularly interested in reading instruction, have hopes that at least a partial solution to some of the reading difficulties of children has been found.

(end of chapter 4. To be continued in next issue.)

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63. Peter McCarthy, "The G.B. Shaw Contest Alphabet," *S.P.B*. v. II, n. 4, Dec. 1962, p. 6.
64. 119. Harrison, op, cit. p. 73.
65. Ibid. p. 74.
66. Ibid. p. 75.
67. Ibid., Plate II, (original spelling retained).
68. Ralph D. Owen, "The Best Method of Teaching Children to Read and Write, *Spelling Prog. Bull.* v. 1, n. 2, June, 1961, p. 6.
69. Helen Bonnema, "Writing by Sound, a New Method of Teaching Reading," *Spelling Prog. Bull.* v. 1, # Mar. 1961, p. 9-10.
70. Ibid.
71. H. Bonnema, "A Report on Kindergarten Pre-reading Instruction at Edgewater School, Colorado during 1960-61., p. 1.
72. Ibid., p. 4.
73. Bonnema, in personal correspondence with the writer, Sept. 11, 1964.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1970 p26 in the printed version]

FIGURE 7. PITMAN'S ALPHABET NUMBER 4, (JAN., 1847)

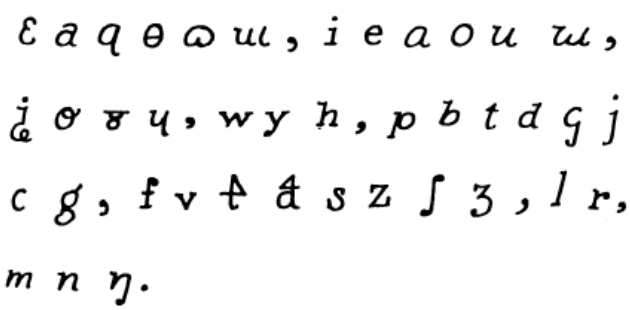

FIGURE 8. JAMES PITMAN'S INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET