

Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971

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."

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1. Late News:

i.t.a Foundation announces new funds, and expanded program.

The i.t.a. Foundation has been awarded the income from an estate of over six million dollars left by Eugene Kelley, late President of Coca-Cola of Canada. The independent educational Foundation is based at Hofstra University, Hemstead, N.Y. It was established in 1965 to disseminate research findings about the 44-character Initial Teaching Alphabet developed by Sir James Pitman. The alphabet is used for 1 to 2 years in the early stages of learning to read English.

The new funds will permit an expanded information program about i.t.a., which was introduced to this country 8 years ago after a successful launching in Great Britain.

Dr. J. R. Block, Executive Director of the Foundation and Chairman of the Psychology Dept. at Hofstra Univ., says that detailed plans for the full program have not yet been fully worked out but include the following:

- a limited number of small grants to public school teachers, graduate students and university faculty members for specific research projects or pilot studies.
- a publications program to report research findings.
- demonstration projects, workshops and symposia designed to provide showcases for parents and educators to see i.t.a. in use and discuss its merits.
- a complete survey of U.S. and Canadian elementary schools to see where and how i.t.a. is being used.

Regarding research grants, Dr. Block said that he and the Foundation Board of Directors do not intend to sponsor any massive research projects. He cited almost 70 studies in the U.S. and Great Britain on the effectiveness of i.t.a. as compared with the traditional alphabet. These studies have cost over a million dollars and involved over 30,000 children. These, combined with the definitive independent British Schools Council report released last Fall, provide ample proof of i.t.a.'s effectiveness. The British study concluded, "It would appear that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn first to read in the Initial Teaching Alphabet."

Dr. Block said, "If the substantial evidence already in will not convince, then more evidence will not convince either." He added, "What we would like to see now is what a public school teacher or graduate student could discover if he had a few thousand dollars to look into a specific aspect of i.t.a. We don't know all we might about the best ways to use i.t.a. We do know that there is almost *no justification* to continue to teach reading with the conventional alphabet."

The survey of i.t.a. use is intended, Dr. Block says, to find out not only how widely i.t.a. is being used but also the various ways in which it is being used, such as in teaching pre-school children and adult illiterates, or children whose second language is English. It has been taught to almost a million children in this country and one out of five children in England are using it. "We also hope the survey will reveal why some schools refuse even to consider i.t.a., despite the evidence of its effectiveness," said Dr. Block.

2. Reading and Spelling – How are they Related? by Harvie Barnard

Some children can't read (non-readers), and many children *don't* read, are functionally non-readers and are just as handicapped as those unable to master the basic reading skills. Pupils in either category are seriously disadvantaged. They will drop behind their reading classmates, become confused, then frustrated, and will cease trying. They will then "fail," and when this happens these children become psychological problems of various types and to varying degrees are "difficult," non-teachable, noncommunicants (withdrawn), emotionally upset, and often troublemakers. In addition such unfortunates are highly disturbing to their teachers, the school administrators and usually to their parents. They rarely earn grades better than "D," and frequently become drop-outs, delinquent, or both. Because they cannot, or *do not* read, they cannot get jobs – or at least jobs that they can hold, and they become "kick-arounds" and eventually full-fledged public wards – in one kind of institution or another.

This is why reading is vital to success – not only in school – but in all phases of life, academically, socially, and practically. In fact, a reasonable degree of happiness in any area of existence is dependent upon acceptable communicative ability, and so far as learning is concerned, this means essentially the ability to read, and to read with a clear and reasonably complete comprehension of what is being read. This does not necessarily mean "speed" reading, but it *does* mean reading with *comprehension*.

Now, what is the connection between all this and spelling? The answer could be stretched out into a full-sized book, but I'll condense it into bare essentials (the book may come later).

In outline form, here is the connection:

1. Reading is an interpretation or "decoding" of symbols, letters, numerals, signs, and/or an almost infinite assortment of various combinations of these.
2. The reading process, when learned, is or becomes an almost fully automatic translation of these symbol combinations (words, sentences, paragraphs), into *visualizations* or mental images – like the "pictures" a person can "see" or imagine – as in "dreams." Such visualizations are often described as concepts, ideas, or imaginings. If the mental image is not formed at all, the "reading" is not really reading; it is simply word "looking," gazing, or very superficial scanning. It is not getting the full idea or understanding.
3. This visualization, or decoding, depends first upon recognition of the word, and *for the beginner*, a sounding – a relation of the physical form, shape, or impression of the word to a sound. In the beginning grades (primary), pictures or real objects are used so as to relate the symbol, word or writing to something tangible or real. Sounding the symbols, and relating each of them to something definite, cannot be by-passed in the learning process. Ideally, there should be *only one symbol to one sound*, and only one sound to each symbol. When there are more, or when there is an inconsistent relationship, the child has trouble, and trouble leads to confusion, frustration and failure, in that order – and often very quickly – which unless immediately remedied by an experienced, understanding, and resourceful teacher, can cause serious reading problems.
4. Since spelling is simply the arrangement of symbols into groups (words) which can be sounded (pronounced), and related to an image, the *spelling* of the word *determines its pronounce ability!* Therefore, if the child *cannot* say it, sound it, or *pronounce it identifiably*, he cannot relate it to any recognizable image and he cannot visualize the word he is trying to "read."

5. The fact is that there is a rather poor and often a very unsatisfactory relationship between symbols and their sounds in our "English" language. This is a result of our confused "system," or rather *lack* of system in our spelling. Many words are simply *not* spelt as they are sounded. In short, our spelling is *not* phonetic. Some letters have *many* different sounds. Others are put obtrusively into words and are not sounded at all. Some are "silent" in some places and are sharply accented in others. The inconsistency of many letters is absolutely appalling to anyone who gives thought and objective study to this problem. There is no necessity for all this confusion. However, there is much indifference and frequently total oversight on the part of the fortunate ones who have learned to decode and to visualize well. Only the teachers, and sometimes the parents, of the non-readers and functionally non-readers are acutely aware of the problem.

6. For example: the young learner has initially "learned" the alphabet (often at home prior to school), and knows the *names* of all the letters. He then is mildly surprized to learn that the names are *different* from the sounds, and the teacher is very careful to teach only the most usual or regular (dependably consistent) sounds to the child. In this process many words must be remembered solely on the basis of symbol combinations (the look-and-say process), because the sound of the word may bear little if any relation to its spelling. In other words, because the word is *not* phonetic, and the letters which compose it are not phonetic (have no dependable sound) a good memory for shapes is essential for reading many of our most common words. If, on the other hand, there was a reasonably consistent relationship between the spelling and the sound, the child *could* pronounce the word and thereby recognize it and identify it with a minimum of difficulty and eventually with great rapidity. He would not only get a *definite* visualization, but also a quick, almost instantaneous image or concept of what the word "means" or represents – which is the essence of what we so casually refer to as "Reading," which by now, I hope, you realize is not a simple process to "Teach."

7. If many people do not truly "read," let's put the fault where it lies, not on the teacher, not upon the parent (altho the parent's interest and enthusiasm can do wonders to sustain the teacher's efforts), but where it really belongs – on the anomalies of English spelling.

8. Many scholars, educators, prominent personalities and highly respected public figures have known these facts for a long time, actually for at least 200 years. To mention a few Americans who have seriously attempted to correct the matter, the list would include: Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Noah Webster, Theodore Roosevelt, Andrew Carnegie, Nicholas M. Butler, and among Englishmen: Robert Bridges, Isaac Pitman, George B. Shaw, Walter W. Skeat, Lord Beaverbrook, H. G. Wells, Wm. E. Gladstone, Arthur Balfour, Sir James Pitman, among others. Several genuine reform movements have been started and properly supported-the Simplified Spelling Board (1906) being one of the better known, which was making progress until interrupted by the advent of World War I in 1914.

9. Presently a sustained effort is being made in the USA by the Simpler Spelling Assoc. and in England by the Simplified Spelling Soc. to alert the public and parents and teachers to the need for spelling simplification in order to get at the root of the problem of difficulties in teaching how to read.

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The New York Times FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 1970

3. Dr. Frank C. Laubach, Crusader Against Illiteracy, Dead at 85 *Missionary Created Written Languages – Work Gave Rise to a World Movement*

SYRACUSE, June 11 (AP) Dr. Frank C. Laubach, a missionary who fought illiteracy around the world, died today; in a hospital here. He was 85 years old.

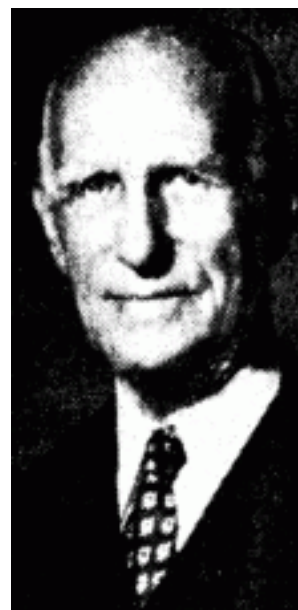
Taught 300 Tongues

"The ability to read is the key to the doors of the world, and through them, to a world of understanding, instead of fear, hate and superstition," Dr. Laubach said some years ago.

Impelled by that conviction, Dr. Laubach, from 1929 until his retirement a decade ago, traveled to more than 100 countries to develop literacy primers in more than 300 languages and dialects.

It has been estimated that Dr. Laubach was directly or indirectly responsible for perhaps 100 million people's learning to read. He was never smug about 20 million or more he noted:

"I haven't even kept up with the birth rate, and besides, about his accomplishments, who've learned to read have lapsed back into illiteracy for lack of reading materials."



**Dr. Frank C.
Laubach**
Blackstone. 1955

First a Social Worker

Frank Charles Laubach, who was born Sept. 2, 1884, in Benton, Pa., was the son of a dentist, John B. Laubach, and a schoolteacher, the former Harriet Derr. He studied at a seminary before enrolling at Princeton University, from which he received a bachelor's degree in 1909. He became a social worker at the Spring Street Community House in New York, and two years later enrolled at both Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. He received a master's degree in sociology from Columbia in 1911, a doctorate in sociology in 1913. He was ordained a Congregationalist minister in 1914.

A year later, Dr. Laubach and his wife, the former Effa Seely, a registered nurse from his hometown of Benton, whom he had married in 1912, left for the Philippines, where they were assigned general mission work. He wanted from the first to work among the savage Mohammedan Moro tribesmen on Mindanao Island, but his superiors told him the Moros would kill him, and assigned him work elsewhere.

First Mission a Failure

Dr. Laubach went to Mindanao alone in 1929, leaving his wife and son, Robert, in Manila. The Moros were at first implacably hostile to the would-be Christian proselytizer, undeviatingly loyal to their Moslem priests.

One day, he said, "My prayers were answered" in an "utterly humiliating" flash of truth, his discovery that he had not accepted the Moros' brown skins and he "needed to be color blind."

He immediately began to study the Koran, which pleased the Moro priests, and soon he was learning the Maranaw dialect, which had never been written. He found it a simple language, with only 16 sounds, which he transposed into 16 Roman letters. In six weeks he compiled 1300 Maranawan words, and started teaching the illiterate natives to read their own language. The experiment was enormously successful. In time, 70 per cent of the Moros could read.

Dr. Laubach's success became widely-known in the missionary world, and by 1935, when he was due a home leave, he was ready to return to the United States via Malaya, Singapore, Ceylon, India, Cairo, Palestine, Syria and Turkey, in each country teaching his literacy methods. By that time he had introduced pictures and the alphabet into the basic primers.

Supporting Unit Formed

Before the end of his furlough, the World Literacy Committee had been formed to support Dr. Laubach's further work. Before World War II, he taught tribesmen in Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia and other African nations to read their languages in periods of a few weeks. During the war he concentrated his efforts on Latin America, preparing charts and primers in Spanish, Portuguese and dozens of Indian dialects.

In India, Dr. Laubach conceived reading primers and charts in 19 of the most widely used dialects, and in time 20 Indian states adopted his lessons.

Giving literacy to those who never had it sometimes had its embarrassing moments for Dr. Laubach. On Mindanao, a Moro assassin thanked him by offering to kill anyone the missionary disliked. A Moro chief, in order to assure the success of Dr. Laubach's "each one teach one" technique, in which one former illiterate was expected to teach what he had learned to someone else, ordered the death penalty for anyone who did not comply. In one African country, Dr. Laubach learned that one native had walked 100 miles to get one of "Laubach's injections for ignorance."

Governments Copy Methods

As governments saw the results achieved by Dr. Laubach's missions, there arose a demand for him and his methods in secular educational systems. In 1950, World Literacy, Inc., was organized to serve nonreligious clients. Through it Dr. Laubach served as a consultant on adult literacy for the United States Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization, for the United States' Point Four program, 185 foreign missions, and more than 100 national provincial and municipal governments. World Literacy, which was operated as a philanthropy, organized teams of graphic artists, teachers, and linguists to accompany Dr. Laubach on trip to set up literacy programs.

In 1955 Dr. Laubach organized Laubach Literacy, Inc., a nonprofit organization now directed by his son, Dr. Robert Laubach of Syracuse.

Last Sept. 2, Dr. Laubach's 85th birthday, was declared; Frank C. Laubach Day in Syracuse. Telegrams of congratulations were sent to the retired missionary-educator by President Nixon and Governor Rockefeller.

Dr. Laubach leaves his wife and son.

And by Editor Tune

In addition to all these activities, Dr. Laubach was actively interested in spelling reform and usually answered letters sent to him about spelling or alphabet reform. This editor had several pleasant discussions with him on these subjects – usually just before he was to give a talk on World Literacy at some nearby church. He long ago realized that our spelling was the greatest obstacle to ease of learning to read in English and at different times devised fonetic spelling systems to ease the burden of learning to read. One of these was the subject of an article in the SPB for Spring, 1968, "A Phonetic Code Used in Hong Kong for Teaching English."

Dr. Laubach was also a Vice President and a member of the Executive Committee of the Simpler Spelling Association, Lake Placid Club, N.Y.

He is gone but not forgotten. His many friends and coworkers will continue his noble work so well advanced knowing he is with them in spirit. He was an inspiration to all who knew him, and many who didn't.

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4. The Law of the Letter, by Louis Foley*

*Babson College, Boston, Mass.

*Reprinted from *Word Study*, published by G & C Merriam Co, Springfield, Mass., Feb. 1964.

In recent years there have been many complaints, not only from college authorities but from business executives and people in other professions, about the "poor English" of so many of our youth, high school or even college graduates. The charge covers a multitude of sins, but chances are that most often what really sets it off is conspicuous misspelling. And this is quite understandable.

Any reader may feel the *effect* of illogical sentence structure, awkward word order, limited vocabulary, use of terms with distorted meanings, abuse of technical expressions, meaningless wordiness – all faults which prevent writing from being clear and forceful. These defects, however, will hardly be seen for exactly what they are unless a person stops to analyze the material, and that is a little too much trouble. What stands out immediately and unmistakably is the misspelled word. It distracts attention away from the thought to the mechanics of the written form. It immediately deflates the dignity of the writing, and seems to imply an unfavorable comment upon the intelligence and education of the writer.

Whether justly or not, most people seem to think of reliability in spelling as an obvious criterion of a person's degree of education, and a measure of his intellectual background. Such was the common view long before the written forms of words became as definitely settled as they are now in our age of standardization. An amusing instance occurs in Daniel Defoe's celebrated novel *Roxana*, published in 1724. Early in the narrative the Fortunate Mistress speaks at length about how her husband, the "eminent brewer" to whom her father had married her at the age of fifteen, was the worst possible sort of husband because he was an all around fool. Near the end of her long discussion of his many-sided "foolishness," almost as a sort of climax she says that "he was so far from understanding good English that he could not *spell* good English." So the inability to spell correctly was taken as a mark of extreme stupidity.

Not until a generation later did Samuel Johnson bring out his *Dictionary*, which settled – in most cases once for all – the spellings of many words which had previously fluctuated between different forms about equally acceptable. Naturally we may not always agree that Johnson's choice was wise, but it did largely decide the matter. The sixteenth-century scholarly vogue of adding "etymological letters" out of respect for ancient origins (sometimes wrongly guessed) still had some influence. No doubt that is why "sope" was renounced in favor of *soap*, whose "a" is a reminder of Latin *sapo*. The "l" inserted in *salmon* (from French *saumon*) as an allusion to Latin *salmo* has never been pronounced, and the "l" in *fault* (from French *faute*) had no effect on the sound of the word during the eighteenth century. Yet very few of the many pedantic tinkering with the forms of words have caused any real difficulty. Unrealistic as are some of the results they produced, rarely indeed are they subject to misspelling by even the least literate.

Nor is it particularly the "hard" technical or scientific words that cause the most trouble – words which most people learn to read easily enough but seldom have occasion to write. A person is more conscious of such words; he looks at them more carefully and verifies their spelling in the dictionary if he does need to use them. Most of the words which continue to be frequently misspelled, year after year, are words which have clear and definite reasons for their correct forms.

With all its faults, our allegedly forlorn English spelling is not nearly so "cockeyed" as it has so often been accused of being. There is no need to go into any elaborate theories of "phonics" to get at its principles. It does not lend itself to the sort of neatly "phonetic" arrangements which other languages can use, because it is not a neatly phonetic language. Compared to other tongues, English is very peculiar in its manner of *pronunciation*.

This is not merely a matter of betwixt-and-between sounds, not quite this and not quite that, with considerable tolerance of variations. It is not only the slurring of consonants and the often vague syllibication. The fundamental peculiarity of English is the overwhelming importance of *accented syllables* – at the expense of all others. The *system* of our spelling – for we do have a system – was long ago considerably adjusted to this phenomenon. Unawareness of that fact is the explanation of a large share of the misspellings which appear continually in students' papers.

In whole classes of words, doubling the final consonant of an accented syllable marks the quality (not the "length") of a preceding vowel. Thus is registered for instance the difference between *scraped* and *scrapped*, *hoping* and *hopping*, *sniping* and *snipping*, *griped* and *gripped*, and countless other pairs of superficial resemblance. *Fitted* requires two Ps, but not *benefited*, where the syllable *fit* is not accented; *shipping* takes two p's, but not *worshipping*. If *traveler* were spelled with two l's, it would suggest the accent of *propeller*. Denied one of its r's, *transferred* would fall into the class of *persevered* or *interfered*. The working of this principle is surely easy to see, and yet its violation accounts for what happens to many of the words most commonly misspelled.

Whatever "vowels" we think we have in unaccented syllables, in actual speech they tend to become simply "uh" or even drop out entirely. Consequently some of the worst errors in spelling are accurate enough from a merely "phonetic" point of view. Yet they justly bear the stamp of illiteracy, for they reveal ignorance of the real words and what they mean. One could scarcely commit a worse social blunder in writing than to confuse *accept* and *except* in answering an invitation, but the error continues to happen. As naturally spoken, the words are indistinguishable in sound, but they are poles apart in meaning. The very distinct verbs *affect* (to influence) and *effect* (to bring about, cause to be), which sound the same in ordinary speech, are frequently interchanged by people who seem to have no clear view of the distinction.

English pronunciation being irrevocably as it is, the *reason* for the spelling of a word is not and cannot be simply a "phonetic" reason. Nevertheless in the great majority of cases it is easy enough to explain. In the word *grammar*, for instance, which students frequently misspell, the second *a* might as well be any other "vowel," but *grammatical* or *grammarian* instantly shows why the *a* is there. *Supersede*, literally, "to sit above," has no connection with *cede*, but is related to *sedentary* and other members of the "sitting" group. *Consensus* has nothing to do with *census*, but is related to *sense*. The adjective *personal* is quite distinct from the noun *personnel*, a French military term which has come into wide use in this country since World War 1.

Two words which are frequently confused are *stationary* (not moving) and *stationery* (writing paper). Yet there is a reasonable distinction between them: *-ary* is characteristically an *adjective* ending, as in *ordinary*, *military*, *mercenary*, *fragmentary*, *monetary*, *sedentary*, and the like, whereas *-ery* is just as typically a *noun* ending, as in *machinery*, *cutlery*, *upholstery*, *mystery*, or *dysentery*.

To be sure, we have some words – a comparatively small number – whose seemingly illogical forms have to be acquired by sheer memory. Mostly they are words that never should have been spelled as they are. *Principle*, for instance, should have remained *Principe*, as it came into English from French. Yet even so, the noun need not be confused with *principal*, whose ending is characteristic of a large class of adjectives.

One might guess that no word has been oftener misspelled in business letters than *receive*. Presumably to head off this error, everyone who has ever gone to school seems to have been taught a "rule" about *e* and *i* with reference to *c* and *l*. The rule is wholly factitious and has nothing in particular to do with the ways of the English language. Moreover, its systematic inculcation does not appear to have had much effect on actual practice. Some of us prefer a more realistic approach. Surely it is not difficult to remember four verbs which are exceptional in precisely the same way: *receive*, *deceive*, *perceive*, and *conceive*. They are all formed on the same pattern; all came from French verbs, and all were similarly distorted in anglicization. They should not have any *i* in them at all. No doubt their *ei* originally had its characteristic value in English, as in *deign*, *eight*, *feign*, *freight*, *inveigh*, *neigh*, *neighbor*, *reign*, *rein*, *sleigh*, and the like, and they can still be heard pronounced with that sound in some dialects. (*Either* and *neither* were likewise spelled as they are to represent that sound, but became corrupted in pronunciation as has happened to *leisure* in the speech of many people.) At any rate, without any knowledge of their history, it is no great task to learn once for all those four exceptional verbs and be done with it!

A so-called error of spelling is often really much more than that. It may prove beyond doubt that the person habitually mispronounces the word in question, or that he lacks the feeling for the way a part of speech is regularly formed: "incidentally" or "pronunciation" demonstrates both of these tendencies. Confusion of *to* and *too*, or of *than* and *then*, is at the same time an error of pronunciation, grammar, and intrinsic meaning. Hesitation between *its* and *it's* or *there* and *their* betrays an unfamiliarity with the structure of our language. An error may show a misunderstanding of the nature of a whole phrase, as "once and awhile" for *once in a while*, "by enlarge" for *by and large*, or "would of" for *would have*. One does have to know idiomatic English in order to spell it correctly.

Always, of course, we have with us some irresponsible meddlers who like to play with forms of words according to their whim. To such we owe the self-conscious illiteracy of "nite." *Night* is in no way difficult for anyone, and was probably never unintentionally misspelled. It belongs in a familiar class with *fight*, *fright*, *flight*, *light*, *might*, *plight*, *sight*, *slight*, and others formed on an established pattern which everyone knows, whereas the artificially concocted form has far less analogy to justify it. This sort of thing, however, is not a matter of ignorance of proper spelling but merely pointless willfulness, not to be dignified by being taken seriously.

There is a basic fact about the matter of spelling which we might take as a great encouragement. It is the obvious truth that even the worst spellers write correctly far more words than they ever misspell. The average poor speller simply misspells a certain number of words, or certain *kinds* of words, because he just does not know them sufficiently well. Usually, if he looks into them, he will be able to see *why* their proper spelling is as it is. If he cares enough to make any reasonable effort at all, he has only to concentrate a little upon these comparatively few items, and his problem will be mainly solved.

5. Toward Mastery of Spelling, by Mary Johnson

Pity the poor speller! His problems are much more serious than the obvious one of not making a good impression. Far worse is his inability to communicate precisely on paper due to the fact that his misspelled words sometimes convey a meaning he did not intend. His writing also tends to be trite and immature because he avoids using words which he hasn't previously studied.

Psychologically, the poor speller is anxious, insecure, frustrated and tense because he knows that in spite of his strenuous efforts his writing will nevertheless be riddled with errors invisible to his undiscerning eye.

The poor speller's communication gap, his frustration and lack of self-confidence, can be traced to the unsystematic way he has been introduced to written English. His ear has not been trained to distinguish the speech sounds and their proper order in spoken words, and he has not learned how to build words on paper. Because he has never been sure of the relationship between spoken and written sounds, his eye has not learned to spot the irregularities and peculiarities in new words when he is reading. This lack of visual acuity means that he is often unable to recall the spelling of words he has read or written many times before.

It is this inadequate foundation which has produced poor spellers on an unprecedented scale. The problem today is not merely that of a few inept spellers who confuse "ie" with "ei" in words like "receive" – now we have such chronic and widespread misspelling that obtaining evidence of wholesale illiteracy is frighteningly easy.

As one example, these 15 words conform to common spelling patterns and contain the most basic English speech sounds:

bombard, scuffle, chide, groin, hex, Jove, rakish, refute, yowled, quell, twang, zither, whiff, stork, plucky [\[1\]](#)

In tests on over 2,000 American and Canadian junior and senior high school students, 1/3 of these simple words was misspelled – usually in a grotesque and unreadable manner.

In one Winnipeg survey, the word *groin* was misspelled by 108 out of 245 junior high students, with these 43 variations, none of which would have been written by a student who had a working knowledge of English phonics: [\[2\]](#)

growing, croine, grone, growng, greown, groane, gron, gronen, grind, growin, grome, roine, goen, groned, coran, grind, grond, croin, groeing, gorwing, gerone, groien, gowun, grong, guawen, growng, groinde, gron, gwoing, gorn, grine, groining, groune, grouien, grown, gorion, grane, groen, grioned, grion, groan, groun, groing.

Pinpointing the exact cause of the trouble is easiest at the primary level – where the effect of basic instruction (or lack of it) in spelling and reading is most obvious. Children who have been taught the separate letter sounds and how to use them to build words can spell both sections of this test equally well, averaging five errors in spelling the 26 words.

new words: jot, wax, hub, zip, cob, gap, vet, skid, fret, spun, dump, yelp, quilt.

known words: not, wag, cub, skip, Bob, tap, pet, did, frog, sun, jump, help, quits. [\[3\]](#)

Primary pupils who have *not* been taught functional word building misspell, on an average, 10 out of 13 new words and 5 out of 13 known words. The contrast between the spelling of known and new words is dramatically revealing. One third grade class in Denver, Colo., for example, made only two errors in spelling *not-know*, *nat*. When *jot* was dictated, 17 out of the class of 29 made these mistakes: jhot, jar, jote, juout, jit, junt, jaest, juht, jut, jont, jatele, gurt, juct, jouit, jaut, junt.

Teaching spelling effectively is simple – but not easy. The difficulty lies in the need for systematic, daily training: first, of the ear, teaching it to hear the difference between similar speech sounds and to identify them in words; next, ear and hand must learn to work together in associating spoken speech sounds with written letter symbols; and lastly, ear, hand and eye have to co-operate in studying the speech and spelling patterns of our language.

The effect of daily training, like that of daily nutrition, is cumulative and of enormous importance- but it does not show up in the first few days. Sometimes it takes weeks or months for this training to prove its worth. And unless a teacher is thoroughly educated herself in the sequencing of the necessary skills, and unless she has been convinced of the vital importance of this training, she does not persevere long enough or schedule it often enough to get results.

There is a long standing and urgent need for teacher training in this field by practical, experienced and successful primary teachers-instructors who can spell out for the novice the many little steps toward mastery of our wayward English spelling.

Spelling is important and it is worth teaching, not merely so that the student will make a good impression, but so that he can communicate his innermost thoughts and ideas with accuracy, ease and style.

(1) Johnson Test No. 2.

(2). Johnson, Mary, *Programmed Illiteracy in our Schools*, Clarity Books, Box 92, Sta. C, Winnipeg, Man. Canada, 1970.

(3). Johnson Test No. 3.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971 pp6,15 in the printed version]

6. Reasoning, Rhetoric and 'Rithmetic; – the Essential 3 R's, by William W. Murphy

If we want to retain our world leadership and remain a free country, we must surpass our competitors in developing leaders who are clear thinkers and convincing speakers. We are failing in this vital task because we frustrate our future leaders in their early formative years.

Johnny struggles to memorize the peculiar shapes of our inconsistent words. His reading primers restrict their vocabulary to the limited number of simple words he is considered able to master. His reading is laborious and inaccurate. Writing is difficult and distasteful. Johnny is retarded in all of his schooling because every subject must be presented to him at the trivial level dictated by his weakness in reading, writing and vocabulary. His speech is halting, unexpressive and boring. His natural sense of logical reasoning is dulled by the endless parade of inconsistent spellings which he is taught to accept. He becomes easy prey for those who would mislead him with unsound ideas that have a superficial plausibility.

Meanwhile, Ivan easily reads and writes every word he can speak. When he sees an unfamiliar word, he simply pronounces the sounds of its letters and he has spoken the word. When he writes, he simply shows on paper the symbols for the sounds he would utter when speaking. His reading and writing develop – as naturally and effortlessly as did his walking and talking. He has no need for spelling books and spelling lessons. Instead of memorizing word patterns, Ivan spends his time developing thought patterns. His texts on all subjects are his only reading primers. In those precious early years when learning comes so easily, Ivan is free to indulge his natural curiosity, expand his knowledge in all subjects, improve his vocabulary, and develop skill in expressing his ideas clearly and convincingly. He is spurred on by a rewarding sense of accomplishment, of growing up, taking his place with his elders, expressing his thoughts and having them accepted and respected.

Johnny will do the same when we allow him to read and write as Ivan does. Johnny could be doing this right now with many words which are spelled in the logical way that Ivan's words are spelled. Words like: *at, bat, cat, bed, fed, wed, admit, cabin, and credit*. Words that use each letter of our alphabet consistently for the one sound that it now represents most of the time. If all our words were spelled in this manner, Johnny would begin to read them as soon as he absorbed the alphabet from his building blocks and nursery rhymes. Without reading primers! Without reading lessons! Without remedial reading classes! Also, he would write them without spelling books, spelling lessons, and spelling bees!

Instead, we confuse young Johnny by forcing him to write illogical miscreations such as: *said, head, says, come, glove, rough, have* and *been*. Even he can see that these words should be written: *sed, bed, sez, cum, gluv, ruf, hav, and bin*. He can't escape a deep-seated resentment at being forced to memorize thousands of ridiculous monstrosities. Many of his school mates develop hostility toward the whole teaching system and become drop-outs, illiterates and juvenile delinquents. When Johnny submits to the system and buckles down to learn all that nonsense, he gives Ivan a two-year head start toward maturity.

We could make things a lot easier for Johnny just by allowing him to use the present alphabet in a logical, consistent manner. But to place him on even terms with Ivan we must give him a few extra letters to use for sounds that our present alphabet is unable to spell without resorting to confusing time-and-space-wasting digraphs. Ivan's alphabet has 33 useful letters while Johnny's only has 23 because 3 of the present 26 letters are redundant and can be eliminated. Johnny can get along nicely without overloading his typewriter with any more symbols than Ivan uses.

And now a word to us oldsters who are paying the taxes that finance Johnny's shameful ordeal. We have been thru the mill and we are quite proud of our hard-earned, albeit incomplete mastery of the difficulties of the present system of spelling. However, most of us are relieved that our part of the ordeal is over and would shudder at the very thought of reliving any part of it.

Rest assured that no one will need to conform with the new system unless he finds it desirable and convenient to do so. It will gradually become evident that there is enuf resemblance between the two systems so that the new spelling will be readable by all – a little slowly at first, but soon at a faster rate than is now possible. Most people will soon realize the advantages, when writing, of avoiding all wasted letters, and will find themselves quite comfortably depicting on paper just what they hear when they speak. And when they realize that in reformed spelling the printed word is a dependable guide to universally acceptable pronunciation, perhaps any minor deviations will blend into a more universally understandable whole.

But time is running out! We can no longer tolerate the academic stumbling blocks of Reading and 'Riting. They can and must become the naturally acquired accomplishments that follow Walking and Talking. Then we will be free to prepare our Johnnies for leadership in the worldwide battle of ideas and words by schooling them in the vital academic three R's of Reasoning, Rhetoric and 'Rithmetic.

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7. Initial Teaching Alphabet: Results after Six Years

JOHN DOWNING! University of London

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ie wos tækiŋ a wauk hen ie herd a loud clatter! ie ruŋht into the kitchen tɔ see wot wos the matter.	ŋær on the flor with the tee porig out wos a crackt teepot with a bræken spout.	“gɔd hevens! wot happend, mie pɔr miss teepot?” ŋee rœlld œver and murmurd, “the tee wos tɔ hot.”
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In June, 1960, the University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales announced that they were "initiating an investigation into the early stages of learning to read, when the matter to be read is printed in a special form alleged to be easy to learn and leading to a full reading skill" [\[1\]](#). This announcement marked the beginning of six years of study of the initial teaching alphabet. Five of those years were devoted to controlled scientific research with the initial teaching alphabet in British schools. All this work is reported in *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet* [\[2\]](#), published in London in December, 1967.

The completion of this research represents the culmination of four hundred years of proposals, trials, and controversies over systems similar to the initial teaching alphabet, and the report relates the results of the more modern scientific research to these earlier attempts as well as to relevant research and theory on the psychology of the reading process.

There are many problems in applying the methods of experimental psychology to the real-life issues of the schools. Difficulties of this kind that arose in the experiments on the initial teaching alphabet in Britain are discussed in two recent articles on research methodology [\[3, 4\]](#). This brief summary permits only a list of the matching variables used in the first experiment, which began in 1961:

1. Environmental variables: These include location (urban or rural), age range of school (two types: infants schools for pupils aged five to seven years, and schools for infants and juniors combined, that is, pupils aged five to eleven years), number of pupils in school, pupil-teacher ratio, amenities of the school building, minimum age of admission, and the social class of the neighborhood.
2. Individual student variables: These were intelligence (non-verbal and verbal), social class, age, and sex.
3. Treatment variables: These included the materials and methods of teaching. The eclectic "Janet and John" series was used. The text was presented in the initial teaching alphabet in the experimental classes and in the traditional orthography of English in the control classes. The Hawthorne effect was taken into account. For example, workshops were held for teachers in the control group as well as for teachers in the experimental group.

In 1963, a second experiment in the initial teaching alphabet began in Britain. This experiment controlled teacher competency in addition to the variables listed. Each teacher worked half her day

in the class that used the initial teaching alphabet and half in the class that used the traditional orthography. Both classes were in the same school.

In the first experiment, 158 classes were recruited originally, but the careful matching procedure reduced this number to 82 classes (41 used the initial teaching alphabet, and 41 traditional orthography).

The second experiment used 16 pairs of classes. One class in each pair was taught the initial teaching alphabet; the other, traditional orthography. Because 3 schools followed inadequate procedures in sharing teachers, their data had to be excluded from the analysis, and this reduced the number of pairs of classes to 13.

In both experiments, for the first one and a half years, pupils' learning when the i.t.a. was used was compared with pupils' learning when t.o. was used. Pupils who were taught the i.t.a. were tested in i.t.a. spelling. Pupils who were taught the t.o. were tested in t.o. The reading tests were parallel: the words and sentences in the i.t.a. were the same as those in the t.o.

The results of the first phase of the research were conclusive in both experiments. On every test the reading attainments of pupils who used the i.t.a. were very much superior to those who used t.o. Indeed, the difference was quite dramatic. For example, in the i.t.a. classes, pupils were able to read by the end of the first year on average more than twice as many words of English as children who used t.o.

In the second phase, the tests for the transfer of learning from i.t.a. to t.o. also were the same in both experiments.

From the middle of the second year, all the pupils taught in i.t.a. were tested in t.o., and their attainments were compared with the attainments in t.o. of the pupils who had learned only the traditional orthography from the beginning.

In both experiments, in the middle of the second year the pupils who had learned the i.t.a. were not able to read in t.o. as well as they could read in the i.t.a. which they had been learning. This was hardly surprising, but it is note-worthy that their reading attainments in t.o. were equal to those of the pupils who had been learning t.o. from the beginning of the experiment. Even more surprising were the later results of the first experiment: by the end of the third year, the pupils who had learned the i.t.a. had t.o. reading attainments that were significantly superior to those of the control group pupils who had used only t.o. The average pupil in the i.t.a. classes was five months ahead of his counterpart in the t.o. classes after three years of school.

However, the results for this second phase – the transition from the i.t.a. to t.o. – are not as clear as those for the first phase when attainments were measured in the same alphabet as the pupils were learning. One result of the first experiment has not been confirmed as yet by the second experiment. In the latter experiment, the pupils who had begun with the i.t.a. had attainments in reading t.o. that were equal to those of the pupils who had learned only the t.o. from the start. But the pupils who had begun with the i.t.a. did not show at the end of the third year the superiority that was found in the first experiment. There is some evidence that the teaching pace of the second experiment was slower; and therefore, the recovery from transition may come later. This second experiment has been extended for two more years to investigate this question.

The effects of the i.t.a. on free written composition were studied in small subsamples of children from i.t.a. and t.o. classes in Staffordshire, England. The written work of one week near the beginning of the third school year was analyzed. The schools were matched on the number of pupils and urban-rural location, and the pupils were matched on intelligence, sex, and social class.

It should be noted here that, in Britain, correct spelling and handwriting are not demanded in the first three years of school when t.o. is used. Thus, in this respect, the treatment of the group taught the i.t.a. was the same as the treatment of the group taught the t.o.

The results for this part of the experiment were clear. The compositions from the i.t.a. classes were superior on all measures used. The compositions of these classes were, on the average, 50% longer and used 45% more different words. This expansion of vocabulary was to an important degree due to the use of more advanced words. These results have been confirmed in a small study in Scotland [5], which also tested the quality of creative writing in the two alphabets. Independent judges consistently gave higher grades to the i.t.a. compositions, altho these had been re-written in t.o. to prevent the judges from knowing in which classes the compositions had been written.

Finally, the conventional English spelling attainments of all pupils in both experiments were tested. Only correct t.o. spellings were accepted. Correct i.t.a. spellings were treated as errors in all tests. It seems certain from these tests that the i.t.a. does *not cause poor spelling* in t.o. In both experiments, by the middle of the third year of school, the pupils in the i.t.a. classes had attainments in conventional English spelling that were equal to those of the pupils in the t.o. classes. In the first experiment, by mid-fourth year the pupils in the i.t.a. classes had significantly superior scores on standardized tests of conventional English spelling. But the second experiment did not show this finding, altho the follow-up study may at a later stage.

The two experiments confirm each other in one most important conclusion. The i.t.a. is definitely superior to the t.o. of English. The difference between the reading achievement of pupils taught by the i.t.a. and the reading achievement of pupils taught in t.o. is truly dramatic. For example, on both the Schonell Graded Word Reading Test [6] and the accuracy measure of the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability [7] the mean score for pupils taught the i.t.a. is more than double the mean score for pupils taught in t.o. In written composition, too, pupils taught the i.t.a. demonstrate every important superiority in breadth of vocabulary.

The unequivocal conclusion is that the traditional orthography of English is a seriously defective instrument for the early stages of reading and writing instruction. As long as this traditional orthography is used in the early years of schooling in English-speaking countries, children's learning of reading and writing is bound to be much less efficient than it can be with a simplified and regularized writing-system such as the i.t.a. Of this there can no longer be any doubt.

What action can be taken to remove this serious handicap on those who are learning to read and write in English? The results from the British research on the i.t.a. summarized here show quite clearly that three main courses of action are open to us:

1. More extensive adoption of the initial teaching alphabet.

The superiority of the i.t.a. in comparison with t.o. is so great that the continued use of the latter seems indefensible. However, educators need to be cautious in planning to replace t.o. with the i.t.a.

in their classrooms. The i.t.a. is only an alphabet – not a complete teaching method. It can be taught well or badly. Materials printed in the i.t.a. can use or abuse its advantages. Before adopting materials labeled "initial teaching alphabet," educators should study the materials carefully – even more carefully than usual, because the i.t.a. itself is still quite new and experimental, and materials printed in it must be even more so. The author of this article has described in other articles [\[8, 9, 10, 11\]](#) the important differences between various basal series in the i.t.a. on the market. These differences are particularly important for American schools.

While the i.t.a. is clearly superior to t.o. in the initial stages of learning, the research results are less clear with regard to the effectiveness of the i.t.a. in transfer to t.o.

At the transition stage, pupils taught the i.t.a. read textbooks printed in the t.o. less well than they read the *same text* printed in i.t.a., though usually their reading in the t.o. is not worse than the reading of pupils who have used only t.o. from the beginning. In the first experiment, the transition usually occurred in the second half of the second year of school. In the second experiment, the teachers seem to have delayed transition somewhat, so that it is not clear whether the result of the first experiment at the end of the third year of school will be confirmed. In that first experiment, the pupils who were taught the i.t.a. appeared to recover from a plateau effect in transition. By the end of the third year they had a lead of about five months in reading age in word recognition in t.o. over pupils taught in t.o. Altho this advantage seems to be important, the gain is not so dramatic as the gain found during the first two years, when the i.t.a. was the medium of instruction and testing. This may lead some educators to ask whether it is worthwhile to use the i.t.a. for the beginning stage. But to question the worth of the i.t.a. solely on this basis is to ignore several educational benefits to be derived from the dramatically improved achievements of pupils taught the i.t.a. while still working with that writing system. Because the i.t.a. clarifies the structure of English, the discovery approach to learning is facilitated, and children can express themselves more readily, more fluently, and more creatively in free written composition. Moreover, young boys and girls may develop a healthier self-image through the greater certainty of success derived from the simplicity and regularity of the i.t.a. Again, it must be added, these gains may result if the methods and the materials used in teaching the i.t.a. are planned to take advantage of the potential of the new writing-system in these respects.

In Britain, where the i.t.a. was introduced in 1961, it is spreading steadily as each school principal considers the results of the research and makes his own decision, as is usual in the British educational system. This growth in the use of the i.t.a. will create new needs. New tests in the i.t.a. will have to be standardized, and the norms for existing tests in the t.o. will have to be re-established as more and more children have prior experience in programs that use the i.t.a.

2. Research and development to improve the initial teaching alphabet

The results of British research also indicate that the writing-system of the i.t.a. must be improved. While research supports the general principle of simplifying and regularizing English orthography, this principle has yet to be applied in full. Many years of further research may be necessary. Some of the needed improvements have been indicated in a recent article [\[12\]](#). Birnie's linguistic analysis of the i.t.a. supports these proposals.

The need for further research to improve the i.t.a. is no excuse for postponing the adoption of this i.t.a. in its present form. The evidence on this point is conclusive. *The traditional orthography of English is seriously inadequate in comparison with the initial teaching alphabet.* Therefore, the

present i.t.a. should replace t.o. in printed materials for beginning reading until research has refined the form of the i.t.a.

3. *General and permanent correction of English orthography*

It is clear from the results of the British research on the i.t.a. that the only completely satisfactory solution to the problem of the writing-system of the defective traditional orthography is *permanent correction*. If pupils did not have to transfer to t.o., their dramatic superiority would probably continue into the later years of schooling. This is not a simple problem, and others besides teachers and young children would be affected by such a change. However, the British research report, recognizes that, although there may be some practical problems in changing English spelling, research should begin immediately to determine what these problems are and how they might be overcome if these defects in English orthography are to be corrected. **A study could be made of the difficulties found and how they were met in other countries when they were introduced to a more phonetic spelling.**

Benjamin Franklin's prediction at long last has been fully vindicated by the British research. He wrote:

"Whatever the difficulties of reforming our spelling now are, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter; and sometime or other it must be done, or else our writing will become the same with the Chinese as to the difficulty of learning and using it." [\[14\]](#)

Indeed, in comparison with Chinese, English may soon be in a far worse position, for China has begun to reform its writing system. Prime Minister Chou En-Lai's [\[15\]](#) pragmatic approach to opposition to the reform is an object lesson in determined progress toward the goal of a maximally effective writing-system for learning to read and write where universal functional literacy is recognized as the essential basis for a fully efficient technology. He states:

"An alphabet is a means of transcribing pronunciation. We make it serve us just as we make trains, steamships, automobiles and airplanes serve us. (And, from the point of origin, all these are imported.) It is also like using Arabic numerals for counting and calculating the Gregorian calendar of the Christian era for recording the year, kilometres for measuring distance, and kilograms for measuring weight. The adoption of the Latin alphabet will, therefore, not harm the patriotism of our people."

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971 p9 in the printed version*]

8. The Spelling Blues, by Earl Wilson (of N.Y. & Hollywood), from the Los Angeles Evening Herald.

The other night writing about Mimi Hines and her husband Phil Ford, I referred to him as "Phil Hines" and the next night, equally brilliant, I wrote Maureen O'Sullivan and it came out "O'Hara." I'm suffering from name fag!

How would you like to have to remember that Diahann Carroll spells it that ridiculous way, that it's Bil Baird, that you mustn't confuse Cy Howard, Cy Coleman and Cy Martin with Si Seadler and Sigh Also; and that Petula Clark doesn't have an *e* but P. J. Clarke does?

How can there be such people around lousing up my life as Garson Kanin, Elia Kazan and Alfred Kazin, not to mention Lainie Kazan and Norman Krasna? Now remember it's Jule Styne, the composer-producer, and Jules Stein the tycoon. Why don't we all get together some night and iron out our differences, or invite Wilson and drive him crazy reporting who's there? And Harold Willson.

Let's see! We'll have Jill Haworth and Rita Hayworth, Veronique Vendell, Veronica Lake, Bill Marks & Groucho Marx, Cilla Black & Celia Dolmatch, Wolf Mankowitz and Joe Mankiewicz and A.J. Mazurkiewicz, Inga Swenson, Inger Stevens, Ingrid Bergman, Ingmar Bergman, Ingemar Johansson, too. That ought to have him reeling before he's even had a drink!

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9. Something of What Reading Means, by Louis Foley*

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"The purpose of a writer," said Samuel Johnson, "is to be read." It follows then that those of us who are interested in writing as a means of communication may well pay some attention to what enters into the process of reading. We should be concerned with anything that can make it easier for the reader to get the message we are trying to give him.

A remarkable French book which deals comprehensively with the different aspects of reading is *La Lisibilité* by François Richaudeau, published in Paris by Denoel-Gontier in 1969. The title of this book immediately brings up a common problem in translation. Every serious student of language knows that very frequently the corresponding or supposedly equivalent words in different languages do not have quite the same meaning. While they may have considerable basic relationship, one may cover more or less ground than the other, and they do not come to the idea from the same angle of approach.

La Lisibilité is not satisfactorily translated by "readability." What the latter term suggests to us appears, for instance, in a review of the best-seller by Barbara Tuchman, *Stillwell and the American Experience in China*. The review is headed by the caption, "Writing readable history," and tells us in the first paragraph that the author "strives for readability." She believes that there should be "an element of suspense to keep a reader turning the pages." [\[1\]](#) So it is quite clear that, when we say a book is "readable," we mean that the writing is lively and interesting, not dull or "dry." In other words it is not at all boresome.

Now that is not what is meant by *lisibilité*. Neither is the meaning represented by "legibility," though that idea is completely included. A book printed in any of various languages which use our alphabet may be perfectly legible, but if we know only English we cannot read it. Assuming one's natural acquaintance with the language in question, however, *La Lisibilité* is a profound study of the various elements entering into communication from the printed page to the mind of the reader.

In the Middle Ages (as indeed much later), reading was thought of as reading *aloud*; it was by *hearing* the words that one understood. When writing moved continuously without punctuation or spaces between words, and with frequent abbreviations, reading had to be done mostly by professionals. With conditions as they were in those days, the rapid sweep of the modern silent reader would have been hardly conceivable.

Speech operates according to laws which have their roots far back in long-lost prehistoric ages. When writing finally came into existence, it was simply a means of preserving what was *said*. Naturally it was read aloud; reading was an imitation of the speaker whose words had been kept on a page of manuscript. Since then we have come a long way. The modern silent reader benefits from a really different method of communication. He is likely to read from three to six times faster. He can learn to read with real efficiency, reading selectively, hurdling redundancies and irrelevancies. Naturally the evolution of the process of reading has had far-reaching influence upon the way writing is done. A simple example of the change appears in the effect of repetition. Within a few seconds a speaker may repeat a word a number of times, in different tones, without attracting attention or seeming redundant, whereas in the neutral tone of print such repetition would be conspicuous and annoying to a silent reader. More or less like ordinary conversation, most of the writing of earlier centuries seems very loose and wordy compared to composition that would be called good writing nowadays.

Scientific investigation and experimentation have brought out some facts about the process of reading which may seem surprising. Outside of extreme cases, for instance, it appears that neither the sharpness of vision of the reader nor the size of type characters has much to do with speed of reading. There is a considerable part of the shape of any letter which is not necessary for it to be recognized. One "sees" the whole word, whether it is completely represented or not; some letters can be left out without making words unintelligible.

The word-by-word reader is acting as if words were equal units, when of course they are nothing of the sort. In any typical sentence, many words are determined by the structure of the language; they do not in themselves convey any original information. The rapid reader senses immediately the *pattern* of a clause or sentence as a whole, and recognizes the key words which carry the essential new meaning. He does not really *see* as individual items all the words that he "reads." As by instinct he makes a knowing selection. Since, as has been well said, "the whole page is true at the same time," it is understandable that a rapid reader is likely to grasp its message better than one who goes more slowly. The fact has been demonstrated by repeated experiments.

M. Richaudeau is convinced that the mere *length* of a sentence -a matter upon which Dr. Rudolph Flesch has much insisted - is not an important consideration. What counts for far more in ease of reading is *structure*. Given a coherent plan as a whole, with subordinate clauses clearly joined by proper connectives, a sentence can be very long and still be perfectly easy to read. If we took seriously Dr. Flesch's prescription of 17 words for a sentence, we should be limited to bare assertions of simple ideas. Such sentences are effective in their proper place, but are very limited in their scope.

A reader is continually guided by signs so well established that no one thinks of them unless they are badly used: capital letters at the beginning of sentences, spacing or indentation to indicate new paragraphs, punctuation to keep sentence-structure clear, italics for certain words, and hyphens to mark compounds. These are commonly quite distinct in grammar and meaning (as well as pronunciation) from the separate words of which they are composed; "to close up the gap" is entirely different from "a close-up photograph." A good arrangement for the page of a book is to have lines of 10 or 12 words each, spaced sufficiently to avoid mistakes in going from one line to another.

Experimentation has shown that characters in the type of Garamond can be read at considerably farther distance than those of the type of Didot. [2] It has been demonstrated that the eye follows a line of Garamond easily without obstacle, whereas with a line of Didot there is a tendency to make a sort of inspection, stopping on the characters instead of having one's mind entirely on the ideas! [2] The reason for this difference is not far to seek. Garamond puts the strength of letters in the parts of their forms which distinguish them from each other, while Didot puts their strength in the parts which they share in general. Once we see this point, we understand why Old English or Old Gothic type is hard to read.

Knowing how to read is not a simple affair. Naturally it presupposes easy familiarity with the language in which one is to read. And reading in a certain language may be a considerably different exercise from reading in any other. Every language that a person really knows in which he *thinks* comfortably with the true idiom-is a separate register of the mind, a world in which no one can enter without possessing that language.

Benjamin Lee Whorf, in his *Science and Linguistics*, brought out a profound truth about language which many people have been slow to realize: "The background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but rather

is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar. . . We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every beholder in the face. . . We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances *as* we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way-an agreement that holds true throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

'Language is not merely a more or less systematic inventory of the various items of experience. . . It is also a self-contained, creative, symbolic organization, which not only refers to experience acquired largely without its help, but actually defines experience for us by reason of its formal completeness. . . (Meanings) are not so much discovered in experience as imposed upon it. . .'

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expression, "the great *book* of Nature," M. Richaudeau points out, may be understood quite literally. Only slightly different was the term "the great book of the world," used by Rene Descartes, the first of the great philosophers of the era of Gutenberg. For the thinkers of that time, Nature was to be deciphered and explained in the same way as one reads a text, proceeding by lineal logic from cause to effect. This new method of studying the universe produced extraordinary results. In five centuries man and his environment have evolved more than during all the hundreds of previous centuries. The diffusion of reading matter made possible by the printing press has been an essential cause of the scientific and technological development, as well as the psychological and sociological evolution, of Western man. This is what printed pages have accomplished in the last 500 years.

[1] Francois Ambroise Didot, 1730-1804, French printer & designer

[2] Types with this same disturbance stressing the similar parts of letters rather than their differences are:
Amelia, Soutache, Fantail, Smoke, Davida Bold, Deutsch Black.

Reference:

1. *The Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 14, 1971.
2. Kenmick catalog, Los Angeles, Calif.



10. The History of Spelling Reform in Russia, by John E. Chappell, Jr.*

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In preparing ourselves for the inevitable, [\[1\]](#) though seemingly distant, achievement of spelling reform in the English language, it is wise to consider carefully the experience of other nations in rescuing their own languages from outdated systems. The foreign language which I have spent the most time studying, Russian, is particularly important in this regard because of the cultural competition connected with the so-called "Cold War" (which I would prefer to see termed "Peaceful Coexistence"). It is indeed true that students in Soviet Russia have a giant step on students in English-speaking countries, because they are not bogged down in their early years having to learn "spelling." Russian is not the most phonemically-spelt of all languages, and such things as orthographic dictionaries are indeed published there; but the inconsistencies are many times fewer in number than we face in English. If we are in a competition, peaceful or not, in which our survival as a civilization is at stake, then we are indeed fortunate that the Russians face handicaps in the way of environmental severity (which limits their agricultural production to a level far below ours, regardless of whatever "system" they use), of insufficient economic incentive, or whatever, that prevent them from catching up with us across the board economically and technologically; for if everything else were equal in our respective situations, there would be no doubt that their greater efficiency in education due to their more phonetic spelling would put them ahead of us in all manner of achievement.

But this is not primarily a paper on international politics. Let us proceed with a survey of just what the Russians have done to spell their language more efficiently. The story begins when they first began to use an alphabet, which was back in the late 10th century, when they accepted Christianity on the eastern, or Byzantine, model. The Church in Constantinople worked at certain disadvantages in comparison with Rome, in the matter of proselytizing among the heathen; so it developed a policy of approaching the potential converts in their own language, rather than in a foreign tongue such as Latin or Greek. (Over just such differences, the Western and Eastern churches were soon to break asunder, in 1054.) The giant figures in this movement of going to the people with the vernacular were two Macedonian Slavs named Cyril and Methodius, who around the year 860 had begun to proselytize successfully in "Moravia," which might have been named after the river in present day Czechoslovakia, but perhaps near another river Morava in Serbia instead. Being accomplished linguists, they developed a new alphabet, called the Glagolitic, to use in translating portions of scripture and liturgy into the Slavic vernacular. Ultimately their success inspired competition from Rome, with the result that Yugoslavia is now split into a Roman Catholic western half, using a Latin alphabet, and an Eastern Orthodox eastern half, using a Cyrillic alphabet; the main language of the country today, Serbo-Croatian, is split down the middle by these differences.

The "Cyrillic" alphabet, altho named after Cyril, was developed only long after his death by his successors in the Eastern Church. It is much less Asian-looking than the Glagolitic script, having deliberately been brought into closer harmony with Latin and Greek symbols, with a few letters taken from the Hebrew alphabet. Probably it was the Glagolitic alphabet that was used in Kievan Russia in the effort at conversion which finally achieved success about 988. It should be noted that the Slavic peoples were much closer then in time to their period of co-habitation and common language (which came to an end sometime late in the first half of the first millenium A.D.), so that differences in language between Macedonia, "Moravia", and Bulgaria on the one hand, and Russia on the other, were not nearly so great as today, and a common liturgy managed to serve all with little difficulty. Also there was no such thing as Ukrainian or White Russian at that time, all eastern Slavs speaking approximately the same language.

The language that was monumentalized in these early Christian texts came to be known as Old Church Slavonic (or Old Slavonic, or Old Bulgarian). Most of what was written in this language in medieval Russia was ecclesiastical in content, altho various chronicles and battle sagas, now important historical sources, now survive in later copies. Outside of this early Byzantine influence, little additional in the way of cultural enlightenment came to Russia during the next six centuries, as the Kievan state collapsed before the onslaughts of the Mongols early in the 13th century, and the entire country remained isolated and under Mongol influence until the 15th century.

Around the 16th century, when the first books were printed in Russia, they naturally were printed in Old Church Slavonic, altho the spoken language had undergone many changes, analogous to those between medieval and modern English, in the meantime. Old Church Slavonic is not entirely incomprehensible to the speaker of modern Russian, but it is definitely another language. So at first, as Russia emerged from Mongol domination, there was no adequate means of writing down the vernacular tongue. Of the few attempts made to remedy this deficiency in the 17th century, the pithy autobiography of the archpriest Avvakum, one of the finest of its genre, was the most important.

The most decisive steps to modernize the literary situation were taken during the rule of the great Westerner, Peter the Great (1689-1725). Then and throughout the 18th century a vernacular literary language was developed for secular purposes, involving the coining of new terms, the literary legitimization of vernacular words, and the establishment of literary models. The alphabet used for this purpose was the Cyrillic, but it was modified under Peter. The shapes of some of the letters were changed slightly to make them even more similar to the corresponding letters of the Latin alphabet. (Several Russian letters, including A, E, O, K, M, and T, have virtually the same value as their Latin equivalents; and several others, including B, C, H, P, X, and Y, look exactly like Latin letters but have different sounds, often corresponding to the sound-symbol system of Greek.) A few superfluous letters were abolished in this Petrine reform, but others remained, and several notable examples of unphonetic spelling persisted. So, at about the time Samuel Johnson was codifying English spelling in its presently unphonetic form, Russia was achieving its own sort of modest alphabetic reform. It was not a full-scale orthographic reform, but the inconsistencies which remained were considerably fewer in number than those in Johnsonian English.

As in England, Russian literary men pressed for further reform almost from the very time the new alphabetic and orthographic system was established. V. Trediakovsky in 1748 wrote an essay appealing for a more nearly phonetic spelling. In 1768, A. A. Barsov proposed that one of the three letters still in use for soft "i" be eliminated, and that the hard sign be eliminated at the ends of words, where it provided no information that could not equally well be provided by leaving it off.

Perhaps at this point it would be well to say a few words about the Russian vowel system, and the system of hard and soft consonants, which comprise perhaps its most unusual features from the point of view of an English speaker. Russian has ten basic vowels, composed of two sets of five vowels which differ from one another only in terms of "hardness" and "softness." The hard vowels have the values of the typically continental A, E, I, O, and U (as in father, mesa, machine, cord, and blue). The soft vowels have these same sounds, plus the indication that the preceding consonant must be "softened," or "palatalized." If there is no preceding consonant, a sound near to our hard "y" must precede the vowel; in fact, an approximate description of "palatalization" of a consonant would be to say that a hard "y" follows immediately after the consonant. Now with so many vowels to account for in the alphabet, one obviously does not want more vowels than necessary; but in Barsov's time there were 12 vowel symbols, 3 of them being superfluous, and one vowel phoneme (soft "o") having no single symbol at all.

Russian has both hard and soft signs, the soft sign indicating that a consonant has to be palatalized despite the absence of a following vowel, or once more in addition to any palatalization indicated by a following vowel. The hard sign indicates that the preceding consonant should not be palatalized regardless of what follows; but at the end of a word, where nothing follows, it obviously has no logical function. Yet it continued to be used at the ends of words for 150 years after Barsov's complaint, through all the Golden Age of Russian literature in the 19th century, and in fact even up to the present among some Russian emigres. About the only orthographic change that occurred during the 19th century was the gradual, unofficial abandonment of one of the three symbols for soft "i"; but still, two symbols remained for this task where one would have been enough.

The task of further orthographic reform occupied the attention of several commissions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An Academy of Sciences commission headed by Fortunatov and Shakhmatov presented a plan in 1904, which was modified and republished in 1912. By and large, this was the plan put into effect in 1917 the only really comprehensive spelling reform program in the history of the modern Russian language.

For a long time I had assumed that the Russian spelling reform was initiated by the dictatorial Bolshevik government; and this seemed to me, along with the several reforms (in the calendar, weights and measures, etc.) perpetrated by Napoleon, to be a sad indication of the comparative inefficiency and sluggishness of democracies. Perhaps we too are consigned by fate to wait until our democratic political system—already severely cramped by civic unconcern, political and military bossism, and bureaucratic conservatism—falls to a dictatorship, before we can experience the long-needed reform in our spelling. But recently, I am happy to report, I learned that the first governmental decrees to change the spelling issued not from the Bolsheviks but from the democratic provisional government of 1917. On May 17 and June 22, 1917, decrees were issued to schools directing them to adopt the new orthography. Unfortunately, the democratic government of Russia floundered in indecisiveness and misdirected policies of another nature, and after a few months of existence, it succumbed to a period of Civil War, and to the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, also recognizing the need for spelling reform, confirmed the earlier directives. On Dec. 23, 1917, they decreed the new orthography for use by government organizations. On Oct. 10, 1918, they ordered all state presses to use the new orthography. Private presses were free to make their own choice, but by the middle of the 1920's nearly all of them too had adopted the new orthography.

Only among Russian emigres, many of whom will do anything to demonstrate their opposition to the Bolsheviks, is the old orthography still used. Apparently it is not enough for these unhappy refugees to recognize that the reform was planned under tsarism and first implemented by the provisional government; it was the Bolshevik government which put it across, and so for them it has become tainted. (Incidentally, it is not very difficult for anyone trained in the new orthography to read books printed in the old one.) Similarly, the Russian Orthodox Church retains the outdated Julian calendar, now 13 days behind the modern Gregorian alternative, just because it was the Bolshevik government which belatedly made the change for Russia.

The principal features and shortcomings of the 1917-18 spelling reform were as follows: Four superfluous letters were omitted, including both extra symbols for soft "i," one of which had already virtually disappeared. The other omitted superfluous letters were a second symbol for soft "e," and a second symbol for "f." This leaves the Russian alphabet with 32 letters.

Several case endings and pronouns were respelled to become more consistent. One of these was the suffix `ago,' which today survives only in a few proper names like "Zhivago." In ordinary masculine genitive singular endings, "-ago" has become "ogo"; but the reform is incomplete because the "g" is, as it was before 1917, still pronounced like a "v." (It is still "g" in proper names.) This use of the "g" symbol for "v" is probably the most notable example of phonetic inconsistency left in present-

day Russian; but even this case is not fully inconsistent, in that the speaker knows from general rules just what occurrences of "g" need to be pronounced like "v."

Another problem not eliminated by the 1917-18 reform was the lack of a symbol for the soft "o." An umlaut, or two dots, is occasionally placed over the letter for soft "e" to indicate that it is being used for soft "o" instead; but most Russian texts do not make the distinction, leaving the non-native reader at some disadvantage. This affects our anglicization of certain words, such as "Khrushchev." Most of us have come to pronounce this name as if the last vowel were simply a short "e," as it would be if it were the soft "e" in Russian. But it is instead the soft "o," which indicates at the same time a stress on this syllable; the problem is that in Russian, there is no separate letter to distinguish this sound, and so many transliterators jumped to the conclusion that it was "e" rather than "o." Only a few well-versed commentators say the name as the Russians do: Khrushchhoff, with the "kh" indicating something between a "k" and an "h," the stressed "o" being similar to the "o" in "pot," and final "v" being altered to the unvoiced equivalent, as is usual. (This switch from voiced to unvoiced phoneme at the ends of words is another point not covered by the 1917-18 spelling reform; but again, these changes follow predictable patterns.)

Probably the most important change made by the 1917-18 reform was the elimination of the hard sign from the ends of words, where it served as nothing more than a space-wasting frill (like the silent terminal e at ends of our words where the previous vowel is short). Estimates of the amount of paper and ink saved by this change alone run in the neighborhood of 5%, not far from what might be achieved by a relatively modest reform of the much more tangled English orthography. The hard sign is now used only infrequently, and always in the middle of a word.

The other features of the 1917-18 reform were of minor significance, involving chiefly rules for using hard or soft vowels after certain sibilant consonants which leave the issue of palatization in doubt. These rules are still needlessly complex, and were not notably improved by the very minor further reforms made by the Russian Academy of Sciences during the 1950's. The academicians are alert to the possibility of still further spelling reforms, as evidenced by a number of articles appearing during the 1960's in the Russian scholarly literature.

Even now, as I have already stressed, Russian is spelled with much more phonetic consistency than is English, and Russians of all ages need to consult the dictionary for spelling purposes much less often than we do. Perhaps this is one of the most effective arguments to use in trying to convince our legislators that spelling reform is badly needed in the United States and in other English-speaking countries.

Bibliographical Note

Those who wish to read further on Russian spelling reform might begin with Dennis Ward, *The Russian Language Today; System and Anomaly*, 1965, Univ. of Chicago Phoenix paperback, \$2.25. Some of the material in the above essay is drawn directly from Ward's book, especially from pages 77-82. Also useful is R. G. A. deBray, *Guide to the Slavonic Languages*, London, J. M. Dent, 1951. . . frequently available in library reference sections. On early Russian literature, one should begin any investigation with D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, ed by F. S. Whitfield, New York, Knopf, 1949.

[1] Ben Franklin said: "In short, whatever the difficulties and inconveniences now are, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter, and sometime or other it must be done, or our writing will become the same as the Chinese as to the difficulty of learning and using it."

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971 pp14–16 in the printed version]

11. Book Review, by Helen Bonnema

Paul S. Anderson, *Linguistics in the Elementary School Classroom*. New York, The Macmillan Co. 1971, 430 pp. \$4.95

Here is a treasury for the spelling reformer.

Since spelling is a branch of linguistics, the reformer must know the place his work occupies in the entire linguistics field. He cannot work effectively without this knowledge. A pleasant way to instruct himself in the subject is by studying the interesting articles assembled in this book by Paul Anderson.

They explain in a fascinating way how a language works. "Whenever a sound has dropped from the lips of a human being. . . this science would study it." It delves into the way in which dialects develop, and how one of them becomes "standard" even tho it may not be superior to the others in regularity. It explains that language is man-made, changing as things happen to people. It shows how words gain their meanings; how speech is encoded and decoded into the accepted writing and reading system; how dictionaries are written, with their pronunciation keys, word definitions, usage examples; and how grammar is analyzed.

Coming from the pens of fifty or more scholars, these essays and theses present a variety of styles. Some are chiefly informative or instructive, but all are in some measure entertaining. Lincoln Barnett's *The Treasure of our Tongue* is full of chuckles. It explains some curious bi-lingual effects. In Nigeria, "a boy who finishes grade school is known as a *megotbuk*, a boy who graduates from college is a *bigbigbuk*, and the exceptional young man who has studied at Oxford and returns home trailing clouds of culture is a *bintojaguarfridgful* – a contraction for 'He has been to England and come home with a Jaguar and enough money to keep a refrigerator full of frozen foods.'"

Titles of articles intriguing to spelling reformers are:

Pronunciation changes in present-day English, R. C. Simonini.

Taking the Chilling Test, News Week.

The effect of environment on oral language developmen, Frank B. May.

Learn a lito English, Richard Levine.

Linguistic factors in early reading instruction, Gertrude Hildreth.

Psychological factors in word recognition, Fred J. Schonell.

Usefulness of phonic generalizations, Lou E. Burmeister.

New sounds for old letters, Jo Ann McCormack.

Spelling, word analysis, and phonics, Carl LeFevre.

Upsetting the alphabet cart, Louis Foley.

Where our grammar comes from, Karl W. Dykema.

For those who write for publication and wish to capture the interest of readers at a certain level, an easy-to-use chart by Edward Fry gives an estimate of difficulty. It appears in the chapter: "A Readability Formula that Saves Time." Following Fry's direction, this reviewer found that the articles in the book range in difficulty from 11th grade to college post-graduate.

A number of authors bemoan the spelling problem with statements such as this:

"The most excruciating difficulties encountered by the serious foreign student who wishes to learn to write English, involve neither grammar nor syntax but rather the chaotic lack of correlation between its spelling and pronunciation."

"Most Americans cannot spell correctly and for even the most cultivated of professional men on both shores of the Atlantic, the incoherent character of English orthography is a timeless problem."

Unfortunately, however, most of the writers imply or openly state that nothing can, or should, be done to change our spelling. They use the same old time-worn objections that we have heard for decades, and which have been refuted by eminent scholars time and again. It may surprise reformers to realize that some linguists are still seriously repeating such objections in 1971! For example:

"Despite all the idiosyncrasies of English spelling and continual complaints against it, those who use the language cherish it. Defenders of traditional spelling point out, quite correctly, that the written form of any English word reveals its etymology; it may afford no clue as to pronunciation, but its ancestry is clearly disclosed. In the diversified letter combinations of English words, one may read the long, tumultuous history of the British Isles." [\[1\]](#)

"A remarkable amount of consistency is found when *positions* of phonemes in syllables and in monosyllabic words and the amount of *stress* given to syllables are considered." [\[2\]](#)

"The silent letters which the advocates of simplification find so repellent often do perform a real function. *e.g.* column, columnar; *solemn, solemnity.*" [\[3\]](#)

"There may be a real and intelligible reason for the spelling of a word without its being a phonetic reason."

"Suppose a new system of spelling were planned. . . . Finally only scholars would remember how to read and write as we do now. . . . Boys and girls would no longer be able to use the system of writing that we now use just as you cannot use the system that was used for Old English." [\[4\]](#)

In the Hanna study, "The computer process showed that of the 17,000 words 49% were spelled correctly, 37.2% were spelled with only one error; 11.4% with two errors, and 2.3% with three or more errors. . . . Many of the errors could be obviated with the mastery of simple morphological rules."

"Would our spelling reformers have us indiscriminatingly lump off together phonetically all such homonyms as *cite*, *site*, *sight*, and *done* and *dun*, or *sun* and *son*?"

It is only thru a thoro understanding of linguistics and of its terms and definitions that these arguments can be convincingly met. This book, in which a few authors raise their objections, also presents principles providing answers. But the answers have not as yet become apparent to those who still fear reform. Their fear arises from seeing the awkward flounderings of an alfabeteer who does not understand the science of linguistics, who does not foresee the side effects of each decision he makes, even if it is only about such a minor matter as the writing of the prefix *re* in five different ways (*re*, *ree*, *ra*, *ri*, and *ru*) according to the accent it receives in each particular word.

This book will help him make defensible decisions about any changes he makes. The perusal of all the articles and the mastery of the principles presented in some of them is heartily recommended as a challenge for spelling reformers.

[1] Ed. note: As if the function of spelling was solely to show ancestry-not sounds-just like a millstone hanging on the necks of every citizen would be useful to sharpen his knife when he needed it.

[2] As if these are more important to a first-grader than indicating pronunciation.

[3] How often do silent initial letters perform any function other than etymological?

'Ben Franklin, in his letter of Sept. 28, 1768, to Mary Stevenson

Dear Madam:

The objection that you make to rectifying our alphabet, 'that it will be attended with inconveniences and difficulties' is a natural one; for it always occurs when any reformation is proposed, whether in religion, government, laws, or even as low as roads and wheel carriages. The true question then, is not whether there will be no difficulties or inconveniences, but whether the difficulties may not be surmounted; and whether the conveniences will not, on the whole, be greater than the inconveniences. In this case, the difficulties are only in the beginning of the practice; when they are overcome, the advantages are lasting. To either you or me, who spell well in the present mode, I imagine the difficulty of changing that mode for the new is not so great bat that we might perfectly get over it in a week's writing. As to those who do not spell well, if the two difficulties are compared, viz., that of teaching them the true spelling in the present mode, and that of teaching them the new alphabet and the new spelling according to it, I am confident that the latter would be by far the least. They naturally fall into the new method already, as much as the imperfection of their alphabet will permit; their present spelling is only bad because it is contrary to the present bad rules; under the new rules it would be good. The difficulty of learning to spell well in the old way is so great that few attain it; thousands and thousands writing on to old age, without ever being able to acquire it. 'Tis besides, a difficulty continually increasing, as the sound gradually varies more and

more from the spelling; and to foreigners it makes the learning to pronounce our language, as written in our books, almost impossible.

Now, as to 'the inconveniences' you mention. The first is, that 'all our etymologies would be lost, consequently we could not ascertain the meaning of words.' Etymologies are at present very uncertain; but such as they are, the old books would preserve them, and etymologists would find them. Words, in the course of time, change their meanings, as well as their spellings and pronunciation; and we do not look to etymology for their present meanings. If I should call a man a knave and a villian, he would hardly be satisfied with my telling him that one of the words originally signified only a lad or a servant; and the other; an under-ploughman, or the inhabitant of a village. It is from our present use only, the meaning of words is to be determined.

Your second inconvenience is, that 'the distinction between words of different meaning and similar sound would be destroyed.' That distinction is already destroyed in pronouncing them; and, we rely on the sense alone of the sentence to ascertain which of several words, similar in sound, we intend. If this is sufficient in the rapidity of spoken discourse, it will be much more so in written sentences which may be read leisurely, and attended to more particularly in the case of difficulty, than we can attend to a past sentence while the speaker is hurrying us along with new ones.

Your third inconvenience is, that 'all books already written would be useless.' This inconvenience would only come on gradually, in the course of ages. You and I, and other now living readers, would hardly forget the use of them. People would long learn to read the old writing, though they practised the new. And the inconvenience is not greater than what has already happened in a similar case in Italy. Formerly its inhabitants all spoke and wrote Latin; as the language changed, the spelling followed it. It is true, that at present a mere unlearned Italian cannot read the Latin books; though they are still read and understood by many. But, if the spelling had never been changed, he would now have found it much more difficult to read and write in his own language; for written words would have had no relation to sounds; they would have only stood for things; so that if he would express in writing the idea he has when he sounds the word 'vescovo', he must use the letters 'episcopus.' In short, whatever the difficulties and inconveniencies now are, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter; and sometime 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 the Saxon spelling and writing used by our forefathers.

I am, my dear friend, yours affectionately, B. Franklin.

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12. Book Review, by Helen Bonnema

Harris, Albert J. and Edward R. Sipay, *Effective Teaching of Reading*, 2nd ed. New York; David McKay Co., Inc., 1970, 480 pp, \$6.95.

Subscribers to *Spelling Progress Bulletin* have acquired their interest in orthography thru concern over difficulties met by pupils learning to read and write English. They may, therefore, enjoy skimming thru this entire book with its description of four steps in the reading act: sensing, perceiving, achieving meaning, and reacting. However, it is upon the second step of the reading act, *perceiving*: "*seeing* a printed word with an awareness of the sound and meaning it represents" that orthographers will wish to focus their attention.

This book describes two basic differences in the approaches used to teach children to perceive words:

First, emphasis upon decoding, or synthetic phonics, working out the pronunciation from the letters. *Second*, emphasis upon meaning, or sight-word approach, saying the word that "belongs."

Harris and Sipay's bias is toward the second, that is, the sight-word approach followed very soon by analytic phonics. Their aim is to be realistic and practical, to make the best of the bad situation resulting from inconsistent English spelling. They are among those people who cling to the basal reader whole-word approach because of the impossibility of dealing with many common words thru synthesis. They admit "it would seem probable that many basal reader programs could introduce phonic principles somewhat faster than they do. In particular, vowel sounds, which most basal readers teach at second-reader level, appear in enough first-grade words so that it would be possible to teach short vowels during pre-primer and primer reading."

I assume that the authors (hereinafter referred to as H&S) would not object to having children start with phonics, if graphemes were consistent in representing morphemes, for H&S are not averse to allowing children to point to small units or vocalize them. They assure us that children will discontinue such notions as soon as fluency is acquired. It is, therefore, not from fear of acquiring a habit of slow reading that they object to phonics first, but to the difficulty of teaching common words which are unphonetic. They state, "because of irregularities, it has been found that some learn better through employing synthetic and others through analytic word attack." Also, ". . . individualization, rather than . . . one method best for everyone, may prove to be the only way to help every child to learn to read as well as his abilities will allow. The alternative is to employ a method which gives balanced attention to decoding and to comprehension from the start, and that teaches children to use visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues in combination with meaningful context in solving new words."

It may seem that H&S straddle the fence. However, in justification of any apparent vacillation, it may be shown that their main purpose is not to propagandize for anyone program. They are writing for the college student who is taking his first course in the teaching of reading and who must be prepared to work in any state or community where either of two opposing procedures for starting beginning readers may be used. They want the new teacher to come to his first school' with a willingness and the skill to use effectively whatever reading materials are provided, whether (as is likely) belonging to a basal program using the sight-word approach or to a phonics or linguistics program. They know that as a new member of the faculty, the novice must be appreciative of the good that is present in whatever system is being used. He will have plenty of time to make improvements after he has demonstrated that he can cooperate in working with the staff. H&S give him background needed to fit flexibly into diverse situations. They give helpful explanations of various methods which can be used with any of these programs. Their advice may seem like

common knowledge to experienced teachers, but is stimulating to the college sophomore. Examples are:

Grouping. "What a teacher calls the group is less important than how the teacher feels about them."

Differences. "Adapting any [remedial] procedure for all children is likely to substitute one set of difficulties for another. Children simply do not all learn the same way."

Supplementary phonics. "If supplementary material is used, care should be exercised lest the children become confused by differing approaches, wording of generalizations, etc."

Pointing. "For some children, pointing to each word with a finger helps them to keep the place; without it their eyes roam around the page. Pointing is a real aid, and if we insist that they stop, it may interfere with their progress. Children who like to point should be allowed to do so through first-grade reading."

In explaining basal reader programs, H&S show the advantage of going straight through one series to develop and reinforce specific reading skills.

The book abounds in descriptions of other good classroom practices such as 3-group plans, which are worthy of mention. Its format deserves commendation. The summaries at the end of each chapter are convenient, and the size of the book appeals to students who find some other textbooks as cumbersome to carry as an encyclopedia.

However, as said previously, most readers of this *Bulletin* are not future teachers. Of more interest to such people is the 20-page *Concise Summary of Phonics* which defines phonemes and graphemes, consonants-single, double, and blends; vowels-single and silent, blends or diphthongs, those followed by *r* and *l*; syllabication-principles of division, accent, and vowel sounds. The complete summaries at the end of chapters will direct them to other expositions of interest throughout the book.

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Cartoon

BLONDIE A-6 Los Angeles Herald-Examiner. Saturday, May 18, 1968.



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Our Readers Write Us

13. Pride and Prejudice

Greetings:

by Ivor Darreg

I wonder how one would go about getting some sociologists – or would it be certain kinds of psychologists – interested in the causes of resistance to spelling changes, in particular the introduction of new letters. It appears to be a matter of social snobbery, not of reason or economics, as it might appear to be on the surface.

The reason I say this is that there are many instances of journals which bat no eyelashes about printing most of the letters of the greek alphabet, so long as they are also mathematical symbols. The inconvenience and expense of printing these characters, as well as subscripts and exponents, is actually greater than that involved in a scheme like Leo Davis', for instance.

You have to go beyond i.t.a. to the "Shaw" alphabet before you run into greater expense. That is, mathematical notation requires so many new symbols, and symbolic logic greatly adds to that number.

The prestige of mathematics seems to be going up and up. It is thus very ironic that the theta and delta so badly needed for the TH-sounds are being added to so many character-sets, but a **No Trespassing** sign is posted – they may not be used for phonetic purposes!

I have read over and over, and grown very weary of, the attempts to rehash century-old arguments in behalf of spelling reform. It is now time to attempt to uncover the psychological and sociological reasons. Perhaps you have read "*The Hidden Persuaders*" which is a Motivational Research inquiry into advertizing technique. "Depth interviews" are conducted by advertizing agencies to find out the hidden reasons why people don't buy so-and-so.

The question was brought closer to me by several recent events. The *Electronic News Weekly* is using more and more mathematical signs and especially exponents. So are *Datamation* and some other journals. Any resistance to Numaudo and Numalittera [1] have to be for opposite reasons – i.e. opposite arguments must be used to the arguments against new alphabets or spellings. A fairly young man was here a couple of weeks ago, whose handwriting is impossible, and he rather snobbishly refuses to use a typewriter even though he has one. He handed me a whole series of arguments against phonetic symbols, against spelling reform, against foreign-language abstracts of technical articles, and for the use of only 6 or 7 of the letter-groups in Numalittera. I wouldn't have any system left if I gave in to him, and when I did give in about one point he wanted me to surrender completely. My suspicion is that he is parroting the prejudices of some people he used to admire-perhaps teachers in high school and college-indeed he almost named them. One argument ran that there was no spelling or reading problem whatever! Spelling problems are only for young children and they just naturally outgrow it. Adults don't have to waste time worrying about it.

Well, after spending an hour trying to decipher his hentracks, I have quite a different opinion. One fellow I know simply answers letters to him without reading them – just guesses at what the writer might be trying to say this time and takes it from there. If he misspells a word you are never given a fair chance to be sure about it.

I had another unexpected visitor the other night, about 22 or so, who had left a note on my note-pad a few days before with half the words misspelt. But his handwriting is at least acceptable and fairly legible. He has had severe reading problems and it is just pitiful to have to listen to him read anything out loud. It's not eyestrain, because he can draw very well and doesn't need glasses.

Until fairly recently, down here on Sunset Blvd. about mile from here were several signs with glaring errors that had been there for years. Even sign-painters make mistakes – a restaurant had Catering to the *unprejudiced palate* up there for a year or more. It would still be there if they hadn't gone under new management. Latest one seen from the bus last week said *toplss*.

So before putting too much effort into spelling systems, psychologists should be consulted. Things are sold for the strangest reasons, and sometimes for specious and spurious reasons, and yet appeals to common sense get nowhere. Perhaps common sense is an uncommon trait.

I suspect that what success the i.t.a. has had is from Pitman's personality and social standing rather than any rational basis. Not even the money involved has much to do with it. Wealth alone is not enough.

There is a certain amount of fear involved also. Some is conscious fear of what other people might think; other of it is deeply buried to the point that the fearer doesn't ever realize he is afraid. I have checked on this recently – the opposition of certain people to learning Nunaudo turns out to be a fear of losing their job if they were caught doing something unconventional or an attitude as though I were trying to make them wear purple hats.

Some years ago I ran across another irrational prejudice and have saved myself a lot of grief and opprobrium since then – I am extremely careful never to use the term "inventor" or let anybody else refer to me as an inventor or to my "inventions" – this word has taken on a connotation of insanity or at least mental aberration, and so I use synonyms and various euphemisms: consultant, innovator, originator, innovation, device, technique, method, research and development.

There is no rational basis whatsoever for preferring these terms to "inventor" and "invention", but my experience the last few years has been a tremendous gain in attention and respect by avoiding the terms which have been prejudiced.

Maybe there is a hint here: find some synonym for spelling reform that has a higher social standing. We might be amazed to the results.

Regards, Ivor Darreg, Los Angeles, Calif.

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14. Intermediate vowels?

Esteemed Addressee:

by Fred C. Wingfield

I praise you for your persistence in this cause, and do hope you will find it convenient and possible to continue the SPB, if only 4 times a year.

I wonder what you think of the following subject in the science or lore of phonetics. Are there really intermediate vowel sounds? Is there truly a Parisian *ah* "between" *a*-Patrick and *o*-pot? A vowel between *o*-pot and *ough*-bought? A vowel sound between *e*-pet and *a*-pat?

I once was acquainted with a man from Russia, who could articulate a vowel which I could identify neither as that of *o*-pot nor *ough*-bough. I once consulted a barber reared in Germany, having come here after War II. He was able to sound a vowel which I could not readily identify either as *e*-set nor *a*-sat. Some T-V announcers try to attain an intermediate vowel neither *ah* nor *aw*. The ears of U.S. people are unaccustomed to identifying intermediates. My verdict at the moment is that intermediate vowels can and do occur but we habitually interpret them as belonging to one of the phonemes which are normal to our speech habits. Best wishes for progress of the *Bulletin*.

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971 p18 in the printed version*]

15. i.t.a. and Spelling Reform

Dear Mr. Tune:

by William Reed

In the Summer issue of *SPB*, Dr. John Downing wrote, "British and B.C. Teachers agree i.t.a is better." He does not attempt to explain what i.t.a. is better for, but, presumably, he means that it is better for teaching children to read in Old Spelling (O.S. is a better term to use than T.O. because it contrasts more effectively with New Spelling).

The experiments following 1961 showed once again that children, using a consistent spelling, will learn to read and write better, quicker and more happily than if they have to use an inconsistent spelling. Spelling reformers have been saying that for centuries.

From all the accumulated evidence, including the i.t.a. evidence, thoughtful teachers may fairly draw two conclusions: (1) Old Spelling is a serious obstacle to children's education. (2) A spelling which is consistent (even if not completely so), would be a boon to learners, not only in the infant school, but also, it would be reasonable to assume, *in all later stages of education*.

John Downing did not say this. Warburton did not say it. Southgate did not either. Sir James Pitman has not said it during recent years. It is surely time that some spokesman for i.t.a. *did* say this.

i.t.a. can be used in such a way as to help children to see the disadvantages of Old Spelling and to see the advantages spelling reform will bring. It is possible to use O.S. in the same way and I know teachers who do so use it, but it is clear that i.t.a. has important advantages in this respect. Both media are most often used *without* any thought of reform.

i.t.a. seems to avoid much of the frustration for infant learners but only a simplification used over a much longer period, and perhaps even a permanent simplification, can avoid all the frustration for later age groups.

I have supported i.t.a. for several years, and have used it in my school. I think teachers ought now to be asking questions such as these. Is the new medium any more than a way of learning Old Spelling?

Is it any more than a quick way of teaching children the wrong thing (O.S.) – something which many of our greatest scholars have thought to be intellectually and emotionally undesirable? In short, is it really the answer to our problems?

Yours sincerely, W.R.

16. ORTHOGRAFIK REFORM

Dear Editor;

by LEO G. DAVIS

It is my contention that ORTHOGRAFIK REFORM offers the only solution to our so-called reading problems, – all els BEING but temporary improvisations for living with the malady, rather than a permanent innovation for either curing or preventing it. Modified spellings or deliberat demonstrations of "fool-proof" reform that cannot BE challenged by any progressiv thinker.

Thus the following opinions on yur summer issue of SPB.

ROAD TO BETTER SPELLING;- The best rode is orthografik reform, – anything els is just a gimmick!

PHONICS vs LOOK-SAY;- This is a rather ambiguous subject. Ther iznt ONE letter in the alfabet that doesnt play two or more roles ov its own, – share one or more roles with one or more other letters, – or is sumtimes silent. With a fonetik alfabet "environment" wud hav very litl bering on literacy. Children wud lurn to read "on ther own". The mane rezon 30-35% ov our children or frustrated is because we start out by trying; to make them beleve that A, a, α, or all the SAME letter, – and explaining(?) that eny one ov thoze DIFFERENT letters may play eny one of SIX roles, – some of which or also played other letters. No wunder we hav so meny drop-outs! whæt els cud we expect? . . . "Language Experience" cant contribyut much to literasy, – unles that languaje iz fonetik. . . . Ther or no "auditory" clues in T-O, – just wild gesses! . . . The percentaje ov "brain-damajed" children iznt nearly as grate as the pereentaje of drop-outs, – the inconsistensy of T-O accounting for that difference. Ther iz nuthing that wud help the nit-wit that wudnt also benefit the normal child, – each in keeping with hiz mentality. After all, "brains" or not listed in any catalog! . . . The pedagog, who says that we shud "fit the instructions to the chlld" iz on the rong track. We shud fit the ORTHOGRAFY to the normal BRAIN. LikewIze with thoze who say the only "alternative" iz to be plaged with millions ov frustrated chIldren. Whats the matter with ORTHOGRAFIK REFORM as an alturnativ??

I-T-A;- It shudnt take eny resurch to deturmin that the i-t-a, – or any other rezonably stable orthografy, – wud be better than T-O. WE NEED hav no "fear" about the i-t-a pupil lurning to spell traditionally,- because no truly progressiv thinker wud even sujet that the inconsistensys of T-O shud be perpetuated.

HOMOPHONES;- This is a master-piece on behalf of reform that shud be studied and heeded by all progresivs.

REFORM IN OTHER COUNTRYS;- I understand that Spain haz had a national languaje bord for several jenerations. But whether it was established legally, – or by voluntary cooperation I do not no.

However it SEEMS that reform has bin mandatory only in school texts, and perhaps guverment records. At least I hav SEEN nuthing to indicate that any nation haz attempted to force John Publik to chanje hiz pursonal spelling habits. Thus, WE must expect an indefnit period of optional spellings, regårdless of what is officially apruved.

GUIDE LINES;- Fitting the NU orthografy to current KE-bords lacks reality. T-O will remain dominant long ENUF to wer-out current EQUIPMENT "AZ IZ". Modified KE-bords wud promptly BECUM standard, – therfor progressivs and just TRADE ther old machines in on NEW ones, and PAY the difference, – just as WE do every FEW YEARS anyway. The difference wud BE a modest price to PAY for avoiding digrafs or other distortion of patterns. . . RENAMING sum of the letters iz a gud idea. VOCABULARYS shud BE SO controled that the pupil encounters no "unknown" wurds, – until HE USES his dictionary fluently, – after which HE NEEDS no further instruction in DECODING, per se. With A fonetik alfabet a child wud hav no more difficulty lurning to spell and valUe of the letters, – than HE NOW has lurning to count and the value of the figures. . . . Altho guverment control of dictionaryS is possible as well as logical, its hardly probable. Politicians are too bizzzy "pollyticking" to bother about anything that doesnt benefit any recognized voting block.- CHILDREN dont vote!

NEW APPROACH;- This SEEMS a bit ambigUOUS,- no comprehensiv distinction BETWEEN the "parallel" languAJE and any uther REVIZED orthografy. And altho I endorse "brevity" I SEE nuthing "NEW" about it.

Thus, except for the article on HOMOPHONES, the items on which I comment SEEM to deal with trivia, – az compAred to the REAL problem, – - our diabolic orthografy!.

Realistically,

LEO G. DAVIS, Palm Springs, Ca. U.S.A.

17. A Parallel Language

Dear Mr. Bardwell:

by S. S. Eustace

Thank you for your letter about ə. This 27th letter of the alphabet (some call it 'yer') is absolutely essential. It represents the commonest English sound, and no kind of ingenuity can provide an acceptable substitute for it from the existing letters and marks on the typewriter.

You call it 'the biggest headache.' I would not call it a headache. The cost of fitting it is trifling, and no progress is possible without it. There are several answers to the problem of variant pronunciations. For instance, one might select Daniel Jones's most frequent form in his famous pronouncing dictionary, with the few variants necessary for American speech taken from the excellent dictionary of Kenyon and Knott. In this way we should obtain the necessary *objectively* chosen compromise between the conflicting requirements of a fixed spelling on the one hand, and a truly alphabetic spelling on the other. This conclusion derives from the statistics and careful discussion in my paper 'The pro's and con's of adding a letter for the unstressable central vowel ə.'

The approach of some reformers has hitherto been somewhat unpractical, to say the least. Have you ever tried transcribing the small-ads page of a newspaper into reformed spelling? or a bus timetable? I believe that spelling reform as hitherto conceived is simply out of the question.

But there can be no harm in at least trying a new approach. One idea is for what is called a parallel language: an English spelling based strictly on speech yet so designed that it can be used for many general purposes. This is quite possible, and I can send you an example of one such parallel language if you like. It is very concise, dignified, and easy for you to read, yet it is a true mirror of speech. Indeed in the old sense it is not a spelling reform at all, because its point of reference *is not traditional spelling but traditional speech*.

It might first be used for expressing the facts of English pronunciation to the foreigners of the European Common Market. They will welcome it, for at last they will know what the spoken language looks like when properly written down, and exactly how it should be pronounced.

Later, the parallel language may create its own uses, and gradually spread to any field where its merits prove it superior to traditional spelling, and more useful. It should aim at first not to supplant traditional spelling, but to supplement it. But if anyone wishes to use it for traditional purposes, who are we to stop them? The English language is like a picturesque old town. We do not bulldoze a new highway through the middle, we build a bypass.

But to get back to 'yer.' That one little letter is absolutely fundamental to the parallel language concept. Any system without it is like a waistcoat with ten buttons and nine buttonholes: it can never fit the language. No reform without yer can bring an advantage sufficient to compensate for the disruption, and there can be no progress in spelling till the yer idea is accepted.

We cannot have more than one new letter because there is not room on the typewriter. Yer goes on the key next to 'M', and the question mark and comma (or whatever) go on a fraction key. You lose the fraction, but you can't have everything, can you?

Yours sincerely

18. Abbreviated Block Letters

Dear Mr. Tune:

by Reg Deans

I am sorry it has taken so long to reply to your letter dated 6th May. The leaflets we sent you were in response to a letter we received from you asking – if I remember rightly, for contributions to your SPB. We sent something we thought you could easily reproduce. I was careful not to ask for a copy of your 10-year index because without the publications, very few of which we have got, the index would be useless. However, you were good enuf to send us a free copy. I am amazed at the colossal amount of work you have put into it during 10 years. What a pity we have not all been pulling in the same direction.

I have just received from Miami Univ. 28 different transcriptions of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address – all different, and there must be many others. Again, no united efforts.

Dr. R. W. Browne died about three years ago, aged 73, leaving me to hold the fort. I shall soon be 80, fortunately very well and active. Like Pitman and Bernard Shaw, I am a vegetarian. Naturally, we are making very little progress. I managed a couple of talks on BBC a few months ago, inviting comments and criticism, but rec'd none. It is amazing how indifferent people are today to any sort of learning. Last Winter the local university gave a dozen lectures to the general public addressed by experts in all fields, yet none was attended by more than four people. To some of them no one turned up.

I am glad the books I sent you have been of use to someone. I can afford to subscribe to your magazine but don't want to because 1/the contents do not interest me, 2/ because its circulation seems confined to people who have an ax to grind and 3/ the articles of mine you were good enuf to print produced not a single letter, even of criticism. Naturally I am not interested in what I consider amateuric alphabets; and with polyphonic or new symbols. I still think my system by far the best yet. I shall be glad to help if I can.

May I suggest a diversion: official bodies in all countries to write in block letters. They certainly make writing more readable and I think we could be on the right lines if we used capitals exclusively. The objection is that they take too long to write. E for instance, requires 6 or 7 movements. But by a slight simplification of the outlines, it is possible to write every letter with no more than two movements without departing much from their traditional shape. This makes it possible to write in "reduced" capitals as quickly as in cursive. By using one type of letter, we could make it easier for backward people to learn to read and write. Here is my suggested alfabet, irrespective of pronunciation. We are burdened with a lot of queer letters nowadays, but this has the advantage of being readable without instruction.

Sincerely,

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Dear Mr. Deans:

by Newell W. Tune

We are using your letter of 21st June in our column "Letters to the Editor" but think it necessary to transliterate it into conventional spelling because we have recd complaints before about alfabet that were not easy to read without instruction in the code.

You might be happy to know that Caleb Gattegno (of Words in Colour fame) is also a vegetarian. We had him to dinner when he was visiting in L.A. about 4 years ago. I have had luncheon with Sir James three times but did not notice what he ate because he was so interesting.

I think you have hit upon several points that are or should be axiomatic. You say: What a pity we have not pulling together in the same direction. If we had been, surely better progress would have been made. But I think the reason why most alfabeters don't cooperate is that they are more concerned about proselyting others to their alfabet than they are concerned about helping future generations to learn how to read by some (or any) rational, easy-reading system. If they were truly interested in helping future generations and foreigners, they would not care *what* system was selected by some officially appointed governmental body created for the sole purpose of reforming our spelling, so long as it is: 1. Simple, regular, and easy to learn, 2. hence, easy to teach, 3. not confusable with our conventional spelling, 4. not too different from T.O. that all present books would be unreadable by pupils trained in the New Spelling.

I think that if everyone would be unselfish in their consideration of such changes in spelling as would hinder them little, or in most cases, not at all, it would be a boon to humanity.

Your second truism you mentioned: people being indifferent to any sort of learning, is only partly true. They will gladly accept learning if it helps them economically, but often can't see that the learning offered will do this.

You say we should all pull together. That is why we have the SPB. With its new column, Letters to the Editor, it offers every alfabeteer a chance to offer suggestions on how to make progress toward our goal. Each one can add his ideas of how to proceed with those of others and we can then explore every possible line of approach.

Yes, I agree, many alfabeters have an ax to grind, but don't we all? If you didn't, you wouldn't bother to write me and I to answer you. Everyone has an objective and tries to reach it. But a large number of our subscribers are college libraries and college reading clinics, whose objectives are to find better means of teaching reading a noble objective, but hardly an ax to grind.

Your article, "Illiteracy – its cause and cure," which we printed, was not criticized by our readers probably because they agreed with all you said. It offered them no challenge, nor any argumentive statements to be refuted. However, it was appreciated, as I have quoted from it several times and Betty Allen Iles did also in her lengthy M.S. thesis, in our Fall and Winter, '70 issues.

I am intrigued by your abbreviated caps alfabet and would like to see something lengthy written in it. Enclosed is some nonsense prose which was designed to test spelling systems to see if they are really readable without points of confusion. Try yours on it, and let us see it. With hopes of a union of all our efforts,

I am, yours sincerely.