

Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981

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1. Notice of Meeting

Special Interest Group, Internat. Reading Assoc. 27th An. Convention, Apt. 26-30, 1982, Chicago, Ill.

Topic: Phonics and Word Perception.

Session: 9:00 – 11:45 A.M. Thur, Apr. 29, 1982, Williford B Room, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Ill.

Program Organizer: Dr. Emmett Albert Betts, Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Miami, Winter Haven, Fla.

Discussion Topics: Reading Levels, Word Perception, Comprehension.

Chairperson: Dr. Katherine P. Betts, Florida Southern Col.

Part 1. Demonstration with children by Dr. Emmett A. Betts.

Part 2. Evaluation of pupil learning needs and achievement by participants, responses to questions from confrees, and open-ended discussion of the topic.

Chairman: Dr. Jack E. Haynes, Florida Southern College.

Part 3. Business meeting: Reports, election of officers, planning for Anaheim, May 2-6, 1983.

Participants.

Dr. Paul Berg, Univ. of So. Carolina.

Mr. Joseph E. Brown, Hill Vocational Academic Center.

Dr. Lou Burmeister, Univ. of Texas, at El Paso.

Dr. Earl Cheek, Louisiana State Univ.

Dr. H. Ward Ewalt, Jr. Vision Specialist, Pittsburg. Pa.

Dr. George E. Mason, Univ. of Georgia.

Dr. John Henry Martin, Phonemic Spelling Council.
Dr. Betty Roe, Tennessee Technological Univ.
Dr. Robert L. Trammell, Florida Atlantic Univ.
Dr. Josephine Wolfe, Community College of Philadelphia.
Other participants to be added.

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The 3rd International 888 Conference on Spelling & Spelling Reform
was held at Edinburgh Univ. July 31-Aug. 3, 1981. There were two major developments:

1. Previously the aims of spelling reformers has been 'sound-symbol correspondences of one-to-one.' But the resolution of the Conference is: We should aim at a consistent system of writing based on the general principle of phoneme-grapheme correspondence; but research must be applied to the need to preserve uniform graphic representation of some morphemes & the written differentiation of some homophones.
2. The 2nd important development is recognition that Eng. sp. ref. is a world problem and any future reform should take into account the international aspects & implications of proposed changes.

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Obituary: Raymond H. Pierson

Born Nov. 24, 1897, in Chrisman, Illinois. Died Dec. 2, 1981, in San Diego, Ca.

B.A. degree, Magna Cum Laude, U.S.C., 1942. Graduate work at USC, UCLA, and Cal Inst. Tech.

Author of more than 50 technical papers in the fields of chemistry, petroleum, propellants, explosives, and Statistical analysis. Taught college level courses in Psychology and General Semantics. Now retired but formerly active in eight scholastic societies. Past chairman joint Army-Navy panel on Analytical Chemistry of Solid Propellants.

Listed in American Men of Science, 8th Edition, 1949.

Author of Chap. 32, "Explosives and Propellants" pp 1283-1408, of *Standard Methods of Chemical Analysis*, pub. by D. Van Nostrand Co, 1963.

Author of the book, *2300 Spanish Idioms*, 1974, 174 pp.

Was Research Chemist, U.S. Naval Test Sta. Terminal Island, Cal. Latest, Research Director, U.S. Naval Test Sta. China Lake, Ca. till retirement.

Just a few weeks before death, gave seminar at San Diego State Univ. on the Laubach System of teaching reading via a phonetic alphabet.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §7.8pp123-125 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 pp2-4 in the printed version-

2. Could Adoption of the Metric System Serve as a Model for Spelling Reform? **by Lottie Hirsch**

About 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson proposed that Congress adopt the Metric system. By 1868, Public Law 90-472 legalized the use of the Metric system in the U.S.A. But it did not supplant the cumbersome English system. How, after innumerable frustrating efforts, was this finally achieved?

An attempt will be made to:

1. Review the history of the Metric system (now referred to as m.s.).
2. Compare the nature of the problems of metrification to those of spelling reform.
3. Suggest some strategies for spelling reform based on Metric success.

History

Starting with the administration of George Washington, the United States Congress has been asked to consider the adoption of the m.s. Thomas Jefferson, at that time, submitted a proposal to extend the decimal system, used in coins, to weights and measures.

Meanwhile, in 1783, in England, James Watt urged its adoption. France finally adopted the m.s. in 1795, but it did not go fully into effect till 1840s. [\[1\]](#) In 1928 farmers in Europe still were using customary measures, but industry and commerce no longer did. [\[2\]](#)

In 1821, John Quincy Adams tried to persuade Congress to adopt m.s. And in 1863, following the report by the National Academy of Science, use of m.s., alongside the customary measures, became legal. At that time the postal system used it to weigh its foreign mail. In 1876, U.S. coinage went metric, and in 1878, the U.S. Navy Medical Corps used Metric. By 1889 the U.S. received the *Metric Measurement Standard* (from France), from which henceforth all U.S. customary measures were derived. In 1896, Representative Dennis Hurley of Brooklyn introduced a metric bill to the House that passed. Subsequently, opponents forced it to back into committee, where it died. [\[3\]](#)

Similarly in 1897, Britain almost went Metric.

In the U.S., between 1896 and 1907, many attempts to introduce metric measures into Congress were made. They all required that the U.S. Government adopt them first, and the rest of the country would follow after. In 1900 utility companies began using m.s. [\[4\]](#)

By then, all European industrial nations, with the exception of Britain and Russia, had adopted m.s. Britain held out because of the cost of conversion and re-education. [\[5\]](#)

In 1901 the Bureau of Standards was created. Very many organizations and individuals then favored conversion, as documented by the World Metric Standardization Council in 1922. [\[6\]](#) During World War 1, when the U.S. Army discovered that the shells it supplied to the French did not fit their guns, it went increasingly Metric. Pharmaceutical and optometric companies followed. So did film companies with their 35 mm film, and airlines with their 44 and 66 lb. baggage limit (20 and 30 kg. respectively). [\[7\]](#) During the depression only weak attempts at metrification were made.

In 1950, Britain tried to go metric, but British commerce and industry were opposed because the United States and the British Commonwealth, its trading partners, had not yet gone Metric. Then India went Metric in 1950.

Sputnik, in 1957, gave conversion a new impetus. In 1960, the U.S. participated in the SI (système internationale d'unités) Conference in Paris. That same year, the Department of Commerce announced it wanted an in-depth study leading to the m.s. But Congress decided the subject should first be considered by the legislative branch, which finally did so. But it took 8 more years, as discussed below.

In Britain, the proportion of their metric trading partners had increased. By 1965, 85% of the world's population had gone metric, and more than one half of the world's GNP was being produced in countries using the m.s. Public opinion in Britain became pro-metric. Industry took the initiative. The Federation of British Industries (roughly equivalent to our NAM) informed the government that the majority of firms favored adoption. In 1965, Britain adopted the m.s. A governmental agency, the Metrification Board was formed, whose purpose it was to guide, stimulate and encourage metrification. The government felt that education and promotion were needed. To that end, \$3 million was devoted to TV, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and a 24 page pamphlet was distributed to every household (20 million).

Various groups were expected to do their part. For instance, unions were responsible for their members, publishers of textbooks had to help. The government left the initiative in conversion to industry. The construction industry led the way. In education, regional and national examinations required Metric knowledge. [\[8\]](#)

Meanwhile, in the U.S. in 1965, the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), in its study, suggested that there seems to be an inevitability about the m.s., and that costs would be less than expected if conversion were spread over many years. [\[9\]](#)

Abroad, "standard based" agreements, such as quality assurance and product certification schemes were being prepared by Metric nations that threatened to leave the U.S. out in the cold. Being on customary measures created the danger of a non-tariff barrier against our exports. And a slight drop in exports could have meant an unfavorable balance of trade. [\[10\]](#)

In the U.S., the idea of going Metric gained momentum. In 1965, the Senate passed legislation to direct the Secretary of Commerce to conduct a three-year study "to appraise the desirability, practicality and cost of a general conversion to use of the Metric system. . . in the U.S." \$500,000 was provided for the first year of the study; the total expected cost was to be \$ 2.5 million. The study was divided into three major sections:

- a) comparison of weights and measures in engineering, manufacturing, commerce, scientific areas and education,
- b) cooperation with other government agencies,
- c) cooperation with foreign governments. [\[11\]](#)

The House amended this legislation in committee, but it never reached the floor.

Finally, in 1968, the Metric Study Bill was signed into law by President Johnson. The study was to be conducted by the Bureau of Standards, an agency of the Department of Commerce. Public Law 90-472 authorized the Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans, to:

- 1) conduct a study on the impact of worldwide use of m.s. on the U.S.
- 2) determine the desirability of increased use of m.s. in the U.S.
- 3) study the feasibility of retaining customary measures in engineering.
- 4) estimate the costs and benefits for international trade, the military, commerce, manufacturing, scientific areas and education.

Many groups participated in this Metric study: 4000 companies, 53 federal agencies, hundreds of

educators, and 1400 families. Others were weights and measures groups, small businesses, trade associations, consumer education groups, state and local government, farmers, federal and civilian agencies, Pentagon, professional societies, industries, labor unions, educators, international trade associations, advertising, publishing, law, medicine, public health, finance, insurance, transportation, highway, communications. All were asked opinions and estimates of costs and benefits. The choices and wording of questions were cleared by panels of special interest groups, convened by the Office of Management and Budget in a sample of 1400 families analyzed by the SRI, they found that the more they knew about m.s., the more they favored it. [\[12\]](#) A clear consensus, emerging from the study, was that 10 years should be devoted to the changeover. By then, the nation should be predominantly, if not exclusively, Metric.

Meanwhile, NASA directed that measured values be expressed in SI. [\[13\]](#) Science, medicine, pharmaceuticals and ball-bearings had gone Metric, and it was believed that if new setbacks in the U.S. international trade were to be avoided, the U.S. had to go Metric. [\[14\]](#) By then, multinational corporations, many of whom were U.S. owned, produced \$450 billions worth of goods and services, which was then half the U.S. GNP. [\[15\]](#)

In 1971, the three-year study, headed by lawyer D.V. Simone, was published, entitled, "A Metric America, A Decision Whose Time Has Come." As a result, the House of Representatives considered establishing a National Conversion Board. Proponents considered subsidies for workers and businesses that were faced with retooling costs. There was to be a two-step transition:
1) soft phase: engineering labels, road signs, measuring tools (length, weight and temperature), and
a
2) hard phase: redesigning products to Metric measurements. [\[16\]](#)

Then, when Ford went Metric in 1973, Leo J. Bednarczyk, manager of Borg Warner Corp, a major supplier of transmission and brake components, commented: "The auto makers represent such a major part of our economy, that when they say 'Go Metric,' that's what will happen." Multinational integration of the auto industry, pushed by auto makers to switch to Metric, became inevitable. Adopting a system used by the rest of the world offered a chance for big savings, through worldwide standardization of parts. Shift to Metric reduced inventories for auto makers. The auto industry's move towards Metric made congressional action on transition almost superfluous. [\[17\]](#)

The House of Representatives tried to pass a "voluntary" 10 year conversion limit because of the urgency of doing something about the unfavorable U.S. balance of trade. By then 90% of the world had gone Metric. [\[18\]](#) Now, although the Metric system has not been fully accepted in the US, it is well on its way.

Why did it finally succeed after 200 years of floundering? Was it Sputnik and the competition with Russia that created the initial pressures? After Britain and its Commonwealth had adopted it, the U.S. really didn't have much choice any more if it wanted to remain in the world market. Was it the profit motive that gave the U.S. its secondary, mighty push towards metrification? Both in Britain and the US, the major initiative came from commerce and industry. The fear of losing out in an increasingly competitive market motivated industry to suggest Metric to the government.

Comparison with Spelling Reform

About 1350, in Chaucer's day spelling was phonetic, but ever since pronunciation and spelling have drifted apart. This was caused by the infiltration of foreign words into English and the great "vowel shift," the printing of dictionaries and the 1611 Bible, (since the word of God could not be changed, not even the spelling could). [\[19\]](#)

Until 1870, the beginning of public education in England, spelling reform had been deemed

unnecessary, because education, up to then, had been for the elite only. Soon thereafter, the first efforts for spelling reform were under-way. Cost of simplification has always been one of its obstacles – just as it had been in Metric conversion. In 1978 Metric conversion, including tool and product changes was estimated at \$52 billions. [20] The cost of spelling conversion would be a lot less since it would mainly mean an effort at re-education, printing and distribution, and translation problems. Competition and the profit motive gave Metric its impetus. How could the lesson be applied to spelling reform? Presently, English is widely used as the language of commerce. Would that automatically remain the same? Would its position be improved or lessened? No other widely used language has an irregular spelling like English. The Japanese have simplifying their spelling. [21] Suppose that Japanese or Russian should threaten to become the world language of the future, what would the loss in trade and prestige to America be then? It is proposed that by the year 2000, of the estimated 14 million engineers, only 2 million will be American, 2 million Russian, and the other 10 million Chinese, Indian, Japanese and African. [22]

To summarize the nature of the problems in both metrification and spelling reform, a table follows:

A Comparison

<i>Metric</i>	<i>Spelling</i>
clear goal	unclear goal
agreement among proponents	disagreement among proponents
very many years of effort	many years of effort
problem involves whole population of English speaking countries	same
successful pattern of:	pattern could be followed
1) groundswell	
2) legislation	
3) support and co-operation by executive branch	
Britain, more dependent on world trade, takes lead	Will US, with its many multi-national corporations, take the lead?
Initiative by industry	How can we get industry to take the initiative?
Stimulus through competition with Sputnik	Stimulus through competition with third world?

Strategy for Spelling Reform

First and foremost, an agreement has to be made, by those who favor spelling reform, on the kind of system to be adopted. (Could we take advantage of the computer revolution, and compromise by horning in on the translation of speech to print?)

Secondly, the imagination of the English speaking public will have to be aroused, so that many of them feel that there is something to be gained from spelling reform, and there is an urgent need for it.

Thirdly, business has to be convinced that profits and savings could be made by adopting spelling reform.

A few sample arguments follow: A whole year of schooling (maybe 2) could easily be eliminated if teachers did not have to spend so much time on spelling and teaching of decoding in reading. Children could start school at age 7, as they do in Sweden (Sweden only has 9 years of compulsory education, as do Germany and Japan) and much heartbreak could be avoided caused by frustrating attempts to teach reading to the immature. More money could be saved by abolishing the then unnecessary special reading teachers and programs, not to mention the enormous waste that now is

created by our masses of illiterates or semi-illiterates. Jails are filled with dropouts, first from school, then from society. In 1977, 21 million Americans could not fill out an employment application. [23] Many children are accused of having dyslexia, yet childhood dyslexia is uncommon in Japan. [24]

Once the public and business are convinced of the advantages of spelling reform, government could coordinate the effort. A mini-dictionary (pamphlet) would have to go to each household, or person. Textbooks would have to be reprinted, and a time for the conversion period would have to be recommended.

Altho these are major tasks, spelling reform is not a hopeless proposition. The obstacles to Metric were no less formidable than those for spelling reform.

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11. See 9.
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22. See 20.
23. Shenker, Israel. Lurn to Reed Eezy Wae – Soundspel, *The New York Times*, Jul. 12, 1977.
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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 pp4–7 in the printed version*]

3. Fowler's English Usage, Revised, by Valerie Yule* (SR-1 used)

* Old Aberdeen, Scotland.

The criterion for what is historically memorable, sed Sellars and Yeatman, is what you can remember. In theory, dictionaries record how people spell, rather than direct how they ought to spell, and so they can allow change.

It is time, then that *Fowler's English Usage* (1926, updated 1937) was revised in regard to spelling. Full-scale spelling reform is an international matter to be based on thorough research, but there are areas where popular change can legitimately begin, which can be indicated.

Two hundred years ago it was correctly assumed that all educated people began with a grounding in Latin and Greek, and this could be their guide to correct spelling. Even in 1926, H. W. Fowler's court of appeal was Greek and Latin, with the unfortunate results for the rest of us faced with little heaps of *ible/ables, efy/ify, er/ar/or/ir/ur* and so on, particularly when Fowler himself gave up justification in many cases and could only repeat in effect 'This is how it is and so will be.'

About a hundred pages on *Modern English Usage* are taken up with spelling and related issues, and I will conclude with some of Fowler's own conclusions. However, spelling trends of the past fifty years, snail's pace as they are, could now be usefully summarised and extended to counter some of the more troublesome erudition, and boil down the hundred pages to a few pages only.

Some transitional stages will be necessary in any spelling reform, unless there is a technological change as radical as the petrol engine in transport. What advice can be given to help ordinary people in the meantime? Here follows:

A Modern Dictionary of Spelling Usage

(*especially for reference by bad spellers pending spelling reform.*)

-abl, -ibl. Use -abl because words with this formation imply 'with the ability to', and most are -abl already. Get with the strength.

e.g. *likeable, comparable, viable, capable, dependable*. Fowler has 4½ pages on *abl-ibl*, and his own comment was, "The principle is that the normal form -abl should be used when there is no objection to it." He only had an objection when the other spelling got there first, e.g. re: *gullible*, "the form, which should have been *gullable*, may perhaps be thought too firmly established to be meddled with and of some other words "it is a pity they were not originally made of the more easily understood and equally legitimate -abl type."

all-, al- You are free to extend the trend to spell with *al* in a single word, e.g. *almost, altogether, always, alright*.

Analogy. Analogy with familiar words is an easy way to try to read and spell. It is also a reasonable way. Fowler was concerned that the use of analogy could "corrupt the language," but "corrupt" seems the wrong term to use for making changes based on reasoning.

-ate, -at, -it, -iye. Go by sound plus related words. When in doubt use -et, e.g. *perpetrate, literat* – related to *perpetration, literacy; finite, infinit* – related to *infinity, infinitude*.

c, ck, k, qu, s. To maintain the general appearance of the written word without overburdening the

memory with distinctions and exceptions:

ck and *-k* in end wordstems – *back, milk, soak, dike*.

qu for *kw* only – *quick, quiet, queer*.

c for all other hard *k* sounds, but never for *s* sounds – *can, music*,

s for all *s* sounds – *sity, sivil, desent*.

Double letters. To double or not, that is the question. "Hence a large proportion of the tears shed over spelling," said Fowler. He then added, "Little relief can be given. The words in which sound is no guide to whether there is one consonant or two is not a score or so of which a list could be made and learnt, but thousands. Nothing short of a complete spelling book will serve the turn of a really weak speller. . ."

Now for something short, since it is now 1981:

Rule: *When in doubt, cut it out. (When in dout, cut it out)*. This disposes of a question that occupied Fowler for three pages of a general article as well as further conundrums about particular letters (*mm-m, dd-d, etc.*)

Readers will have no problem in recognizing and adjusting to: *disapoint, disapear, unparaleld, banister, bilius, woolen, etc.* if they want to.

Double letters may still be used:

1. *To indicate unusual stress location, e.g. comitty, embarras, acommodate.*

2. *To prevent homographs by distinguishing long and short vowels when necessary, e.g. hoping/hopping, riding/riding, griping/gripping, liking/licking.*

-d, -ed, -t. (See grammatical markers)

Added word endings. Simply *add the ending*. Cut off a mute *e* but change nothing unless the sound changes. e.g.

traveld, damd, landed

ladys, ponys, canarys, deary

proseed/ prosesion, intervene/ intervension, hope/ hoping,

potatos, radios, emus

Chomsky makes much of the line that present English spelling saves the word root (alias deep structure) when related words change their pronunciation, but most changes in spellings of related words come through alterations of final letters.

Incidentally, Fowler himself disapproved of *ie* endings for diminutives.

Mute terminal e. This will be with us for a while yet until there is an agreed solution to the problem of 19 vowel sounds with only five letters to use for them. Omit the silent terminal *e* when it serves no useful purpose at all. Mute *e* not only is inconsistently used but causes as many problems as it solves.

-efy, -ify. Prefer -ify. This is contrary to Fowler's recommendation, but it is more common, and the present situations often go by contraries, e.g. *stupid/ stupefy, horrendous /horrible /horrify*.

-ar, -er, -ir, -or, -ur. Use *-er* for unstressed sound, *-ur* for longer, stressed vowel, e.g. *ocur*.

-ar, and -or if related words give clues, e.g. *grammar/ grammarian, polar/ polarity*

Foren words. Unlike many other languages, English has tended to take in foreign spellings with foreign words, although over time English pronunciations come closer to the English sounds of the spellings (e.g. *salon, vaudeville, crayon*). However, English spelling reform is hampered because the French words often look most 'ridiculous' away from their French spelling. The Penguin English dictionary pronunciation key for *embonpoint* is *ongbongpwang*.

What can the bad speller do about *Franglaise*? If you know the 'correct' spelling, go ahead and use it, but some consistent rules can keep your guesswork looking at least exotic rather than gauche. (Gauche? goesh?)

1. *As usual, omit surplus letters: buro, bulevard, morg, caserol, siloett*

2. *Recognize 'foreign' spelling patterns:*

ch – champagne, charade, chartreus

-oir – memoir, burgeoir, budoir

-eu – provacateur, amateur, (or amatur)

-ge – masage, protege, sabatoge

-é – use it where you want, e.g. matiné, finansé, melé, chulé.

The French need spelling reform too.

Fowler's advice is to pronounce French words in English conversation with English pronunciation, not as in French. In this way, they will gradually become capable of English spelling, or spelling and English pronunciation will coincide. e.g. *automobile, cadet, biju, trait, coupon*.

Grammatical markers. It has been claimed that 'grammatical markers' in English spelling aid fluent readers to decode meaning faster. This is not completely settled by research, but in the meantime they may as well be retained, inconsistent though present English spelling is in this respect.

1. *-d, -ed, -t.* The *-t* is currently used when a long vowel is shortened, and this may be retained, e.g. *keep/kept, dream/dreamt, leap/leapt*. Use *-d, -ed* according to sound – *grounded, landed, skimd, hopd*.

2. *Plurals.* The present situation is mixed.

Final *s* in singular nouns can be as in *thermos, grass, fleece, loose*.

Final *z* in singular nouns can be as in *buzz, quiz, freeze, surprise, rabies*.

Plurals do not always end in *s* – *data, cacti, mice, deer, radii*, though the trend of the language is to generalise *s* – *indexes, cactuses, radiuses*. The sound may be *s* or *z*.

An interim solution, pending research findings as to whether the grammatical distinction needs to be retained in spelling, would be to mark off singular words ending with *s* by *se*, and spell *z* as *z.*, e.g. *leese, fense, freez, plase, prise*, distinguished from *lees, fens, frees, plays, prys, prize*.

(But we are not confused by *apparatus, cactus, iris, lens*, etc. so it may not be a necessary distinction except to prevent homographs.)

3. *i, y.* The present situation is mixed. Both are used for long and short *i*, as well as many other *i* spellings – *city, nylon, fry, fries, confetti*, and many others.

What a final spelling reform would decide is uncertain, but in the meantime, most problems would be resolved by pushing the trend for *i* to be short and *y* to be long, as in *mini, hydraulic, scampi*, etc. as versus *hi-fi, terylene*, etc., since *i* is already the most frequent for short *i*, single vowel symbols are preferable to digraphs when possible, and word-lengthenings are least clumsy with *y*, e.g. *tying*,

flying.

4. *-ise, -tze.* Use according to sound, e.g. *size, realize, concise, excise, precise.* Omit final *e* when not needed, e.g. *promis, premis, practis,* if research on grammatical markers proves retention is not needed.

5. *j, g, gu-*. Keep *g* hard and in the interim retain *gu* for *gw* only, e.g. *penguin, anguish,* but omit *u* in *guardian, gess.* Except for foren words (q.v.) *j* replaces *g* in *caref, colej, jeneral, languej, marej, majic,* and replaces *dg* in *baj, gajet, juj, brij, aeknolej.*

Homonyms and Confusable Words. *Homonym* is a confusable word itself, being defined (O.E.D.) as a 'word of same form as another but different sense (e.g. *pole, pole*) but is sometimes taken to mean a homograf or homofone only.

There are so meny hanografs alredy in English spelling that it might seem a few more would not matter. However, there are some that cause a little confusion now, and some homofones that may always need distinction in writing, or else should be discarded by the language in favor of less troublesome words.

General principles for bad spellers. Use the simplest and shortest spellings for the most common words; variations may apply to the less common, e.g. in present and possibly in reformed spelling too – *be/ bee, in/ inn, bait/ bate, for/ four.*

As an illustration, homofones not distinguished in the past four sections include: *present, singular,, can, loose, sound, may solution, distinction, mark, spell, or, fence, plays, place, iris, prevent, long, well, mean, time, single, size, excise, practice, keep, hard, carriage, general, form, sense, taken, might, matter, cause, past, common, apply, illustration.*

Homofones that might become homografs with spelling reform could include: *be, in, not, deer, to, or, needs, would by, so, but, there, seem, some, four.* These are fewer, but they tend to be high-frequency words, so that it might be useful to continue distinguishing some of them – and while we are at it, start distinguishing existing duplicates often used together, e.g. *letter* and *letter*? How about *epistle*?

Hyphens. Fowler's general rule is to avoid them when you can.

(a) He sees hyphening as the mid-process between separate words and emergence as a single commonly-used word, and this middle step might as well be avoided.

(b) Hyphens can be useful in avoiding confusion in meaning through ambiguous or complex word sequences, as above, or in *red hot peppers, red-hot news, superfluous hair remover* and in a reformed spelling, *litl red book, litl-red book.*

-ion. This classically-derived word-ending is ubiquitous and has similar renditions in almost all modem languages. The phonemic ambitions of spelling reformers have tended to obscure to them the facts that radical change of *-ion* for greater fidelity to modern speech only represents articulatory slurring, has major regional variations, and may be an unnecessary alteration of an easily acquired spelling pattern which also aids transfer to other languages.

(a) The real difficulty lies in the inconsistency of representation of the preceding sounds, e.g. *passion, nation, declension, fusion, question* for which the solution could be: *mansion, pasion* (sound *sh*)

question, bastion (sound *ch*)
fusion, desizion (sound *zh*)
conexion, dixonery (sound *ksh*)

(b) *-ion, -ian*. Use *-ian* for people only, e.g. Marian.

ng:nk. Can be pronounced in varying ways – *sing, finger, ginger*. Spellings such as *fingger, anggl, singgl*, may be better kept for first learner's books; the simpler spelling is then easy to pick up and use. *Ginger*, of course, becomes *jinjer*.

-ngk would be a nightmarish construction. *Nk* is thankfully preferred.

Pronunciation: A standard English spelling can represent everyone's speech, regardless of dialect, in the same way that everyone can recognize the conventionalised line drawing of a house or a man, regardless of culture. It is 'diafonic' rather than 'fonetic' because each symbol can consistently represent a range of sounds, just as the 'form of the letter' covers a range of actual representations of it on paper.

A conventionalised standard English spelling would represent formalised speech without the varieties of slurring that occur in different regions. (Just as writing has more formal constructions than speech.) Learners of the language could discover what the basic shape of the words was, without being led to slur the language into indistinguishability, which could occur over time if all spelling was based on casual speech alone. Careful, deliberate speech should be the criteria.

Dictionaries have usually felt pronunciation keys to be no great burden despite being designed for half the English-speaking world.

Slurring. Spelling reformers appear most clumsy in representation of words of classical derivation where present spellings of *-ture, -sure, -tial, -nial, -lion, -tious, tiable*, etc. are now pronounced as: *cher, zher, shl, nyal, lyen, shus, shubl*, etc. The former are internationally recognisable, and if spoken as spelt, usually slur easily into current pronunciation.

The solution may be simply to make the present forms consistent, i.e. *t=ch, s =sh, z = zh*.

Reformed spellings might then look like this: *pictuer, natuer, presuer, trezuer, perenial, milion, marsial, spesius, pretensius, negosiabl*.

th, dh. The introduction of unnecessary new distinctions is to be avoided. People have enough problems with auditory discrimination as it is, and children particularly have problems with *d-t, c-g, p-b, a-e*, and so on. Foreners have enough trouble with one *th*-sound as it is. [\[1\]](#) While there are spoken differences between *th* in *than* and *thin*, a learner or forener mixing *th* pronunciations would only be considered as showing a regional form and the *dh* forms tend to come naturally as familiarity develops for articulatory reasons. *Dh* would also be a major disruption in the continuity of the printed word, since it would occur in some of the most frequent words.

Triphthongs. A major handicap for spelling reform has been spelling reformers who patiently spell out every digraf vowel and triphthong, producing great long polysyllables that would slow down all adult professional writing, be difficult for learners to master since long words are difficult, however fonetic (cf Finnish spelling problems) and which offer a major opportunity for ridicule.

A simple table is recommended for bad spellers and spelling reformers.

A vowel pattern table for bad spellers & spelling reformers.

(Basic vowel sounds are in brackets)

	a	e	i	o	u
a	(kraal)	(brae)	(bait)		(auto)
			dais	caos	
e	idea	(beet)			(Fr. saboteur)
		preempt	deity	peon	
i	dial	(died)		iota	glorius
		diet		idiot, milion	pius
o	oasis	(roed)		(boot/book/bout)	
		poet	going	zoology	
u	dual	(cued)			(suut)
		duet	gluing	duo	

Vowels. The nineteen basic English vowels (apart from the unstressed sound sometimes called schwa) are listed with their most frequent spelling patterns (obsolete *gh* constructions omitted)

bat	bet	bit, city	bog	but
bate	beet	bite	cote	cute
bait	beat	died	boat	
educated	remedial	confiding	provoking	educate
bay	be	by	go	emu
far	her	ocur	air	for, almost
banana				taut, saw
bout	boil	boot	book	
cow	boy	tabu		

The "terrible problem" of English vowel spellings can be found to boil down perhaps to the questions of:

- a consistent spelling for the long vowels *aeiou*, taking account of location in a word,
- whether a distinction is necessary between the vowel sounds in *boot* and *book*, and if so, by what means.
- a consistent spelling for the sound of *ah* as in *fast*. A solution may be to leave the spelling as a since that is an international and regional pronunciation of such words in any case.
- "You say *dawg* and I say *darg*," etc. The principle may well be to confirm the regional pronunciation closest to present spelling, -in this case, *dog*, to be the conventional standard representation.

er, ur, or, our. Use *er* when unstressed, *ur* when stressed, as in *murder*. The *o* in *our* is superfluous and misleading.

ious, ous, us. The *o* is superfluous and its elimination would not only save time and effort but be closer to the original Latin derivation.

x. Is short and easy, so retain it until further notice to represent *x, gs, ksh*, except for plurals, which add *s* or *es* to the original word, i.e. *box, exajerate, exept, exema, anxius, bricks, strikes*.

Inconsistency. This item is out of alphabetical order – inconsistent again. The point to be made, and exemplified throughout the article, is that few people are capable of switching completely to new alternative spellings. Almost everyone will be using both old and new together during the period of transition until the more consistent spellings take over because they prove their worth. (cf. the transition in Korea between ideographs and alfabet, and even metrification here. Some old people are still using the currency as pounds and shillings.)

H. W. Fowler on Spelling Reform. Like many other lexicographers, this distinguished scholar of the

Oxford English Dictionary had caustic things to say about present spelling, altho like most of them, he wanted change to occur slowly. "The substitution for our present chaos of a phonetically consistent method that should not sacrifice the many merits of the old spelling would be of incalculable value." But Fowler felt that he could not trust spelling reformers with the disposal of so vastly important a matter, and he finally concluded that "English had better be treated in the English way, and its spelling not be revolutionized but amended in detail, here a little and there a little as absurdities become intolerable, till a result is attained that shall neither overburden schoolboys nor stultify intelligence nor outrage the scholar." He himself made "some modest attempts at cleaning up the more obtrusive untidinesses."

Fowler stated his concern about the effect that "phonetically consistent" spelling would have upon word-families with variations of stress, and gave the example of *fraternity/fraternize* with three vowel sound changes by reason of shift of stress. However, the principles advocated here would result in the spellings *fraturniti/fraternyx* at the extreme, *fraturnity/fraternize* in the transition – neither obscuring the basic relationship of the words, any more than in *medical/medisin*. (See Yule, 1978 for a fuller discussion of this issue.)

It is interesting to note that the main thrust of Fowler's preaching was directed at the pedantic and snobbish tendencies encouraged by the education and society of his times. He even thought that there needed to be a warning agensnt the "nearly universal" impulse of children to devote pains to picking up and airing new vocabulary, and "tickling our elders by it" so that "there we are, pedants and polysyllabilists all."

Today the problem is children's paucity of language and disinterest in verbal communication – and adults' lack of interest in encouraging them to learn.

A *Modern English Usage* today would not take the classical derivations of words as the dogmatic guide to their spelling and meaning. The battle for precision would be on a shifted front, agensnt the cutting of words away from precise meanings at all, or the allocation of debased or cliquy alternative meanings that can prevent the continued use of their more plesant sense. To preserve both the richness and precision of the English language, literacy itself must be extended and improved among English-speakers. 'Bad spellers' must be given a better chance of 'getting it right.'

References

- Fowler, H. W. *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, Eng. 1926, revised 1937.
- Yule, Valerie. "Is there evidence for Chomsky's interpretation of English Spelling?" *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, 18-4.78, pp 10-12.

Postscript

This article is a spin-off from work for the United Kingdom Reading Conference on Spelling. It looks at the *transition* problem for ordinary people, a problem which has not been sufficiently considered, and I think the issues raised need careful consideration and investigation, however controversial.

Pinning it to Fowler's *English Usage* would extend the readership to English studies, not just the occasional spelling reformer, as well as giving it a recognizable and usable structure.

[1] **Editor's comment:** I disagree strongly. The reason why foreners have difficulty with the *th*-sounds is because English has no way of distinguishing the two sounds. If we had a way of showing the difference via symbolization, it would be easier to teach both sounds. I will agree tho, that the *dh* symbol is bad because it suggests: *deze, doze, dem, dat* – which pronunciations the teacher should correct.

4. The Evolution and Use of a Phonemically Consistent Alphabet, by John Henry Martin, Ph.D.*

*Stuart, Fla.

Preface

Some observations on the use of a phonemically consistent alphabet in teaching children to write preliminary to their learning to read.

Over the years there have been quite a few phonemic alphabets. One of these, Dr. R. E. Zachrisson's Anglic, gained prominence in the 1930's. The British Simplified Spelling Society adopted it a decade later and called it World English. Dr. Godfrey Dewey noticed some flaws in it and made two changes that made running text in W. E. look less strange. When Sir James Pitman devised his alphabet, he based it on the phonetics of Dewey's W. E.

The major differences between the Dewey WES alphabet and Pitman's Initial Teaching Alphabet were based upon Dewey's conviction that the letters of the Roman alphabet singly or in combination were the source of all the symbols needed to represent the sounds of spoken English. Dewey's contributions are of major significance. He eliminated Pitman's use of some 20 new characters. But it is fitting to recall how indebted we are to Pitman for his achievement in inventing the first phonemically consistent alphabet that has successfully demonstrated in widespread use that children learn better when such an alphabet is used as the initial learning medium for beginning readers. Pitman's logic in creating new alphabet characters was for its time sound. Our standard alphabet contains only 26 characters with which to represent over 40 sounds. Two of the characters are redundant and two duplicate each other. What Dewey did was to demonstrate, as you can see from the illustrations of the two alphabets, that the sounds of English could be designated with only the characters of our regular alphabet by using digraphs when there is no single letter available. Dewey eliminated the ligatures Pitman used to connect the letters in each of his digraphs and diphthongs. Pitman held, without research evidence, that the ligature was necessary to distinguish between the sounds called for by the single and separate letters such as *c* and *h* and the sound represented by the same two letters when combined in the digraph *ch*.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet.



Dewey's WES.	Dewey Modified	New Phonemic Alphabet
b c d f g h j k l m n	b c d f g h j k l m n	b c d f g h j k l m n
p r s t v w y z	p r s t v w y z	p r s t v w y z
a e i o u	a e i o u	a (cat) e (bred) i (it) o (on) u (tung) a (father)
ae ee ie oe ue	ā ē ī ō ū	a (gam) e (we) i (nit) o (soda) u (fu)
ch sh thh th	ch sh th	ch (cheek) sh (short) th (bruther)
wh zh	wh zh	wh (whi) zh (televizhun)
au ou	au ou	au (sauft) ou (hous)
ar er or ur	ar er or ur	ar (star) er (lecher) or (hors) ur (durt)
oi	oi	oi (boi)
oo uu	oo uu	oo (yoo) oo (book)
aa aer	air	air (hair)
ng nk	ng nk	ng (thing) nk (sink)

Our experience with children indicates that Dewey's elimination of the ligature was educationally sound.

The elimination of the new letter forms and the pedagogically unnecessary ligature makes possible the use of the standard typewriter for young learners and eliminates for them the complex calligraphy Pitman imposed. Dewey went further in changing Pitman alphabet. There are in standard English speech two sounds designated by the single letter *r* and two each by the digraphs *th* and *oo*. Pitman used the standard letter for one of these sounds and then created a new but visually similar form for each of these symbols to represent their second sound. Dewey eliminated the new letter forms and relied upon the single standard Roman letter and digraphs to carry both linguistic values. Similarly, Pitman uses two forms of the letter *z*, one standard and one his own variant to look like a cross between an *s* and a *z* to represent the sounds in the words *zebra* and *dogs*. Dewey once more erased the variant form.

Dewey added the digraphs *aa*, *ar*, *er*, *ur*, *ng*, and *nk*, as well as *aer* to simplify the transition to traditional orthography.

We have made a series of additional changes based upon our experience with young children, their teachers, and their parents. Our observations of children learning were sharpened because we used Dewey's WES alphabet to teach them to write. We endeavored to have children understand that the sounds of their speech could be made visual. The process, the mental operations involved, was not the same as in reading. In most simple fashion, the children were taught that they could encode their speech with symbols that were relatively consistent. Putting sounds on paper, talking with their fingers, was the process called writing. Aside from the greater ego involved in writing one's own thoughts, reading is a decoding process of someone else's ideas or narrative. Children come electrically to the conclusion that they could write anything they could say. With five and six year old children possessing vocabularies of several thousand words and a remarkably sophisticated syntax, the controlled vocabularies and simple sentences of current basal readers are indefensible.

With the observational stance previously noted, we came to understand how children would write in the pronunciations of their local dialect. Accordingly, while Dewey spells *soft* and *dog* as in their traditional forms, our children most frequently pronounced and hence spelled these words as *sauft* and *daug*. Accordingly, we broke with Pitman's insistence on his orthography. Pitman requires a new orthodoxy, as rigid in its requirements as conventional spelling – in our judgement, an unnecessary obstacle to learning. One real life illustration will perhaps bring the issue into focus. A child working at the typewriter one day could be seen and heard sounding out the words of the story he was writing. Saying the word "real" aloud, he pronounced it with two syllables and so wrote what he heard, "reeul." To have "corrected" this boy would have been to destroy learning at its nascent best. The teachers in our program were urged to accept any spelling which made phonemic sense. For example, the pronoun *you* is spelled in WES as *yoo*, but *yu* with the macron bar above the *u* or simply the long vowel *u* will communicate as accurately. Freeing children at the initial stages in writing of burdens imposed by old or new conventions that make no sense psychologically or linguistically is to remove the clutter from the act of learning.

A second series of changes we made in the WES alphabet were based on the pronunciation key in the standard dictionaries. Thus Dewey's and Pitman's use of the convention of an added *e* to each of the five vowel symbols to designate their long sounds was based upon the criteria established by linguists in England and the United States more than a generation ago that a new, more rational alphabet should use no diacritical marks. We have in contradiction to this protocol introduced the use of the macron to designate long vowel sounds, and our early observations tell us that the children are responding well.

A third group of changes we have made in WES came from our effort to make a temporary learning alphabet less visually strange to teachers and parents. So we have dropped the diphthongs *aa* as in the sound of *a* in *father*, and *uu* as in the sound of *oo* in *book*. The short vowel *o* as in *bother* substitutes for the first omission and the use of the *oo* to represent both the *oo* in *school* and *book* as in conventional spelling is thus far not producing any difficulties. Additionally, we have changed Dewey's *aer* to *air* as being visually more readily acceptable for all the spellings of that common phoneme.

An additional result of our keener observation of children's learning made possible by having them write preliminary to reading has been the understanding that phonemic consistency need not be and in fact is not rigidly imposed. In our 100 year old effort to simplify English spelling to eliminate in Dewey's language "A Roadblock to Reading," we should take pleasurable notice of our finding that children can handle some ambiguities provided they are in a rational matrix. If the whole of a learning task is largely sensible, that is consistent, minor aberrations will be learned by children without confusion. For Example, Dewey and we teach the sound of the consonant *y* as it is pronounced in *yellow* but introduce without explanation its use as the long vowel *e* in *baby*. Inconsistently, having dropped the use of the vowel *e* added to designate the long vowel sounds, we have retained the double *ee* for such common words as *cheek*, *teeth*, and *feet*. We should be pleased to find that the reduction of irrationalities to a readily understood few seems to be all that is required to facilitate learning. Most children learn to read now without a phonemically consistent alphabet. It

is pleasing to recognize that children can handle as they do in everyday life some ambiguity if the bulk of their experiences are sensible, that is, somewhat consistent. Happily, child logic in learning does not require absolutes; a reasonable symmetry will do.

And finally, a major change derives from our experience with children responding to this eclecticism and flexibility. Our children were encouraged to adopt conventional spelling as rapidly as they recognized the alternatives. Thus they wrote the first person pronoun, as in Pitman and Dewey, as *ie* but changed almost instantly to the capital letter "I". Similarly, they wrote *wuns* for *once*, but then we found them alternating between the two spellings. When questioned, they said they liked *wuns* better than *once*, even though the books wrote it that way. Our experience would sharply question the long held assumption that children need an extensive period of learning with a phonemically consistent alphabet covering from one to three years. Consequently, all programs including Pitman's have required a gigantic publishing effort to produce a textbook series printed in the special alphabet. We would, on the basis of our preliminary observations, seriously challenge that presumption. Our children began making the transition to conventional spelling almost from the first day that they gained the insight of how to write. Many did not. But there seems to be little to be gained in prolonging their dependence on a learning medium whose central justification is to give learners the gestalt of the process. A program of learning to write using a phonemically consistent alphabet is quickly seen by the children to differ from conventional spelling and is understood by them to be a temporary and discardable personal tool. We took the stance with the children that they should spell the way a word sounded to them; that it was important to write what they say. Conventional spelling came along as soon as they recognized the difference. The implications of the significance of this observation for the position of the Phonemic Spelling Council are very great. We have assumed incorrectly that any change from Pitman would require getting publishers to invest millions in new textbook series printed in the new orthography. If our evidence continues this year to support our present position, the introduction of a phonemically consistent alphabet into a pedagogic system based upon writing as the initial learning act and typewriting as its culmination will largely remove the basal reader *in any spelling system* as the keystone of teaching to children to read.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 p10 in the printed version]

5. A Discussion of SR-2 and On, by Newell W. Tune.

About 8 years ago in Australia, Harry Lindgren started his step-by-step plan of spelling reform by announcing SR-1. It was adopted by the Australian Teachers Union at their convention and the idea was off to a good start. However, in the ensuing 8 years, little progress has been made-and little will until the government takes some action to make the plan official.

Lindgren has said that a journey of a thousand steps begins by taking the first step. But Tune has added a corollary: You don't start on a journey until you know where you are going. Harry Lindgren has refused to discuss steps SR-2 and further on the grounds that unless the public is willing to accept and utilize SR-1, there is no point in discussing the subsequent steps. This author disagrees and thinks that more public acceptance may be forthcoming if they know the subsequent steps and how easily they can be put into use without disruption of our adults' reading habits.

Let us see what are the possible steps that are the least controversial and the least objectionable to the public. In a survey taken about 1% years ago, the least controversial step by consensus was: use *f* for *ph* when sounded as *f*. (but not in such words as: *uphill*, *top-hat*). This would make the letter *f* fonetic, except for one word: *of*, which should be spelt *ov*. '

The third step was to make *c* fonetic by replacing it with *s* when *c* is followed by *e* or *i* and has the sound of *s*, as in *civil defence* (sivil defense). This latter spelling is already in general use in Britain.

The fourth would be to make the silent terminal *e* reliable by continuing to use it when it truly indicates the previous vowel is long but eliminating it when the previous vowel is short, as in *hav*, but *behave*.

Then the fifth would be to make *s* fonetic by using *x* when *s* has the *x*-sound. This can be done in the case of plurals by rules. The plural ending has the *s*-sound when the last letter in the word is unvoiced and the *x*-sound when voiced. When the last letter in the word is *s*, add *ez*. (Are there any conditions where *es* should be added according to the sound?)

The sixth could be to make *g* fonetic by replacing *g* with *j* when *g* is sounded as *j*, as in *ginger*, *judge* (jinjer, juj).

The seventh could be to eliminate the unnecessary silent letters in some 888 words. (Ref. SPB, Spring, 1970).

For the eighth step, the use of *i* and *y* could be clarified. Always use *i* for the short *i*-sound and *y* for the long *i*-sound. This idea is likely to be controversial, but it works often enuf to be considered. And tests will determine whether there are any bugs in the idea.

At this point in the step-by-step plan, it becomes less clear and more controversial as to which changes could (or should) be undertaken. Or whether then a completely fonetic sistem of reform should be undertaken, to correct all remaining anomalies. This is because so many letter combinations, such as *ch*, *gh*, *ll*, *ti*, *si*, *ou*, *eu*, *ue*, *ei*, *ie*, are not only unreliable but are used as a subterfuge for indicating vowel changes that are not based on any fonetic or easily learned rules. A

truly fonetic sistem would eliminate all these confusable digrafs.

Now to recapitulate: SR-1. Use *e* for the short vowel sound when it is clearly indicated. # of words affected by this rule: among commoner words, 72.

SR-2. Use *f* for *ph* when sounded as *f*. # of words affected by this rule: over 420. A corollary to this rule: use *v* insted of /in the word of. (ov)

SR-3. Use *c* fonetically. # of words affected: over 300. SR-4. Use the silent terminal *e* reliably. # of words affected: over 327.

SR-5. Make *s* fonetic, especially in plurals. # of words affected: thousands.

SR-6. Make *g* fonetic. # of words affected: about 100.

SR-7. Eliminate the silent letters in 888 words. (There are also more eliminations because of the unsounded *e* in -ed and when the *d* is sounded as *t*.)

SR-8. Use *i* for the short *i*-sound and *y* for the long *i*-sound. # of words affected: meny, probably over 1000.

Altogether these steps would affect more than 5000 words and make our spelling a lot more reliable and a little strange but not difficult for literate adults to read. But it still would not be nearly a fonetically spelt language like Finnish or Turkish.

Would such a step-by-step plan be more likely to be acceptable to the public than a completely fonetic sistem? How about a survey among the public to find out?

Here is a demonstration of SR-1 thru SR-8, following the above rules:

The wether waz grate; the sun waz braking thru the cloudz, and a slight breeze wafted the smell ov newli mown hay and alfalfa to the noze ov the farmer's wife who waz starting to prepare the noon-day lunchon. All wax peese and quiet when suddenli a sonic boom startled the farmer and hiz wife. A militari plane flew overhed and quickly disapeerd from sight. The farmer sed, "Thoze damd planes scare our henz and then they don't' lay eggs. I wish they'd take then manuverz elsewhere." But ov cours, they didn't hear and could not appreciate hiz wish.

The mountinz and neerby hillz at resplendent in ther bueti, with the hether in bloom and the sent ov sage in the breeze. After a while the henz settld down and appeerd to becom calm. But woud they agen lay eggz? That iz what the farmer iz asking himself. But az long az the planez don't return, thingz will return to normal and the farmer will be content. Truli life on the farm haz bin good to them.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 pp11–14 in the printed version]

6. "I LUV U" Abraham F. Citron.*

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MICHIGAN READING JOURNAL Volume 15, No. 2 Spring, 1981.

I

If a child writes to Grandma "I luv u," why can't we call that correct? [1] Had we a sistem that spelz lyk this, mor children woud lyk it, lurn it and uez it.

A shorter, simpler word is more easily written. Anything a child can more easily write is more likely to be written. The more children write, the more they read (for one thing, writing is, at the same time, reading); the more they read the more they are likely to write, and so on.

We ought to have a system that spells words straight out, the way they sound. Did you ever see anything as crooked as the way we spell straight? Straight should be strayt, to join the pattern of day, way, stay, stray, etc. If the stimulus is clear and reliable, learning is easier, faster. The less ambiguous the symbol, the quicker the learning. This is a basic rule we use everyday in education, indeed, in all life. Why don't we use this rule in spelling?

II

We do, partly, and this enables children to get some kind of hold on our spelling. We have a goodly core of words spelled as they sound in contemporary standard English speech, taking "standard English" as a broad dialect and not a narrow one. These are words such as at, see, fish, claptrap (implement comes very close) bit, top, fool, but, God. For various reasons, historical and developmental, a majority of our words are spelled more or less unphonemically. Why don't we bring these words more closely into regular phonemic patterns?

Our spelling, essentially fashioned during the 5th thru the 18th centuries, has been for most of its existence an expression of the needs and life styles of churchmen, aristocracy, and gentry. During the feudal ages no one dreamed that common folk should read or write. One's letters were an unmistakable sign that one was gentlefolk. Thorstein Veblen rightly pointed to English spelling as a classic example of conspicuous consumption (16, p. 257). Because of this heritage we have the feeling today that a longer, more complex word is more cultured and genteel than a short, blunt word.

Our spelling is outmoded, inflated, inconsistent, clumsy, and much more difficult than need be. Loaded with fat and waste, it is by far the worst in the West. [2] An historian of our language has termed our spelling "the world's most awesome mess" (14, p. 337).

Many are offended at the suggestion of practical reductions such as *have*, to *hav* and *dead* to *ded* because because our spelling comes down, to us a matter of grace and style in which ladies and gentlemen had time and were happy to take time for the niceties of gracious forms. After all, isn't slashing letters from words of our hallowed tradition a mark of barbarism?

The inconsistencies of our spelling are notorious. Foreigners (another word carrying erroneous etymology; the *g* does not belong there), struggling with the absurdities of our spelling, do not know

whether to laugh or cry. They know a system does not have to be that way. There are attempts, with the aid of computers, to show that our system is really more consistent than a superficial view reveals (10, p.79-98). But children are not computers, and a child, seeing that *t-o* spells /*too*/, expects *g-o* to spell /*goo*/. [3]

III

Do we have evidence of what happens when children learn to read using phonemic alphabets? We have much evidence from experience with i.t.a. (Initial Teaching Alphabet) in Britain (2;6;7;15), and from systems like Unifon in this country (5, p.29), that children learn more easily and with lower failure rates to read when they use phonemic alphabets. There is also evidence that children learn more easily to spell in phonemic forms than in traditional forms (1).

IV

Without a doubt the main blockage to spelling reform is the vast resistance of traditional, well-set habits. The simplest and most common protective device against new forms is ridicule. However, in academic circles an elaborate protective mythology has developed, the main strands of which are the following:

1. esthetic objection
2. differing dialects objection
3. etymological objection
4. "lexical" objection
5. discipline objection
6. "lowering standard" objection
7. cost objection
8. displacement objection

None of these objections is substantial. They have served well, however, as "learned" and as "practical" blockages to change, surrounding our spelling system with an aura of sacrosanctity. It is difficult, in brief space, to make clear the superficiality of these objections, but perhaps a good start can be made.

1. Esthetics.

This is the complaint that phonemic spelling appears childish and crude, offends not only the sense of propriety and learning, but is unsightly and rubs raw the esthetic sensibilities.

But surely, to John Winthrop, and his companions on the *Arabella* in 1630 (9, p.26a) our contemporary spelling would be crude and objectionable, and to Chaucer's generation, hardly readable. A few years ago *cheque* was the norm, *check* was an upstart. The esthetic objection is uninformed by the history of English spelling, and naive, blissfully unaware that what is considered proper and right in spelling is what one is accustomed to. Further, preference is not all on one side; there are those who feel that *lyt* is a more beautiful word than *light*, that *helth* is handsomer than health, and so on.

2. Differing Dialects.

This is the argument that a phonemic spelling cannot be fashioned on the basis of standard English pronunciation because so many children and adults in this country do not speak a standard English dialect.

The first response to this is that a shortened word is easier to spell, write, read no matter how a person speaks. If a person says *haid*, it is easier to learn *hed* than *head*, if a person says *mo*, it is easier to learn *mor* than *more*, etc.

Second, dialect is not evenly distributed over all syllables of words. In the spoken phrase, "Cain't go now, gotta stay with mah bruthuh," only three of the eight words are really away from the broad track of pronunciation we call standard English. These are *cain't*, *mah*, *bruthuh*. When Jack Kennedy said "New Yawk" and "Cuber," he seemed off standard English, but not when he said, "Ask not what your country.

Third, Germany, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Mexico, Italy, and other lands, despite differing dialects, have adopted phonemic spelling systems, based on a standard dialect. No problems are evident based in the differing dialects spoken within these countries.

Fourth, there is evidence that black students in this country learn phonemic spelling as easily as white students (1; 5 p. 29).

3. Etymology.

This is the objection that phonemic spelling would alter many of the spellings so as to obscure or destroy roots and origins, robbing the reader of insights into the background and meaning of words.

The first response to this is that roots, plus prefixes and suffixes are *always* carried, never abandoned or destroyed, but merely re-spelled. *Psychology*, for example, composed of *psycho* and *logy*, becomes *syco-loji* in which the Greek roots are plainly identifiable. The same is true of *technology*, which becomes *tecnoloji*.

Second, letters dropped are often semantically quite meaningless. For example, if we spell *night* as *nite* or as *nyt*, we drop the *gh*, which, ages ago, had a sound function (pronunciation), but today is merely hauled along; the reader has not been robbed of meaningful background; the *gh* belongs in reference works, not in the word. If we dropped the *k*'s in *knee*, *knife*, *knob*, etc., meaningful background would not be lost.

Third, in many cases the present spelling carries a false etymology, which would be corrected by phonemic spelling. For example, the *s* in *island* never belonged there, for this word does not come from the Latin *insula*, but from Old Norse *eyland*, Anglo-Saxon *ealand*, German *eiland*, that is *water-land* (13p. 29). *Delight* has nothing to do with *light*, but comes from the Old French *deleiter*, thus the *gh* should be dropped (13, p: 29). All our words which use *ph* for *f* (*photo*, *phone*, *graph*, etc.) are in error, for the Greeks never used such a form (8, p. 43). Our spelling today carries hundreds of these errors.

Fourth, it should be noted we are dealing with two sharply differing concepts of what a written code should do and be. Classicists, etymology lovers, lexicalists, and others, are entranced by what can be *pictured* (a retreat to picture-writing) in the spelling. They want an "enriched code," with everything in it. If a letter here, a digraph there, a borrowing yonder, make their way, by any happenstance, into the spelling, this material becomes "valuable," part of "beloved tradition" and is dragged along forevermore. In the clasp, of such a view, words accumulate letters like a ship accumulates barnacles. Classicists view words as miniature antique shops containing exhibits of their history. Should written words be required to carry such displays?

Our spoken language does not do this. How do we manage to understand each other in speech? Alphabetic writing was created to represent speech, nothing else. Classicists say: "Look how primitive is speech; look how enriched and sophisticated the written code can be!" Over the years they have dropped everything in it but the kitchen stove. During the last two hundred years American written forms have been slowly, very slowly, casting off some of the feudal encumbrances. This paper takes the position that a written word should be as lean and clean as possible.

4. The "Lexical" Objection.

This states that phonemic spelling will drop crucial non-phonemic letters of a word which serve to aid the reader in visually relating that word to other words of the same family (3, p. 287-309). For example, lexicalists say that the *g* in *sign* should be retained, although not sounded, to show that one is dealing with a word belonging to the family of *signal*, *signature*, *significance*, etc. A second example: we must maintain the *a* in *said* to show its relationship to *say*.

The first response to this is that neither i.t.a. nor Unifon have a single letter of lexical spelling, yet children use these systems without any difficulty in relating related words. When it is gone, no one misses it.

Second, if such aids are helpful, why are they so often absent in speech? Why is the *g* in *sign* absent in speech, yet we relate spoken /*sign* /sīn/ to /*signal*/? How do we relate so easily /*say*/ to /*sed*/? Third, if we need visual similarity to relate related words, why does the orthography develop forms such as *mind-mental*, *reason-rational*, *whole-holistic*, *is-was-will be*, etc.? Were lexical theory sound, *was* would be *wis* to relate it to *is*.

The fact is that in usage, according to our particular language development, we relate thousands of words in countless ways, from gross and obvious to subtle and fleeting. This is, most of the time, independent of the sound or appearance of given words.

Fourth, good readers read so swiftly and take in so much at a glance, that they usually do not even see the spelling. A person trained to read *said* will snap it up, just as a person trained to read *sed* will snap that up. Good readers will whip through *wil* and *woud* as swiftly as through *will* and *would*. It is the beginning reader and the speller who pay a terrible price for this lexical spelling which is unnecessary.

5. The Character and Discipline Objection.

A number of teachers and administrators have expressed to me the idea that they are not sure that making a word easier to spell is a good thing. They go on to say that spelling is an excellent discipline, requiring close attention, dedication and perseverance. It builds character. Making it easier would detract from its educational challenge.

Alas, all is mistaken in this: its philosophy, its psychology, and its pedagogy. We can take time here only to say that spelling is a tool, like a key, necessary to open the door to writing and reading. The lighter and better fitting the key, the quicker the students can go on to the vast universe of subjects thus opened to them. There is plenty of genuine challenge and difficulty in educational growth without intentionally placing stumbling blocks in the paths of children.

6. The "Lowering Standards" Objection.

When those who mention this are asked which standards they mean, they refer to one or more of the objections before listed. Without specific content, it remains an effective slogan, an umbrella term for specific objections.

7. The Cost (to school districts) Objection.

First, this need not be great if a step-by-step pace is adopted, one type of change each two years or so. Special groups of parents or students could mark changed spellings in workbooks, dictionaries, texts and readers. Books wear out in any case and could be purchased at the normal rate in a given district. Little money need be invested in workshops to introduce teachers to the new spellings, and to the purposes of phonemic spelling.

Second, a national commission, set up by the fifty state boards of education, would set national goals and timing. The expense to each board would be minimal.

Third, as changes take hold, and groups of students pass through the elementary schools, less time and texts need be spent on spelling; time and money saved can be put to use in other areas of curriculum.

Fourth, more academic success for more children, less failure, more career development, healthier self-images, cannot be measured in dollar savings, but they will be felt by the schools and be the entire society.

8. The Displacement Objection.

This points to all the books in the libraries and in the collections, in the homes, all the habits set, to the vast institutional flow based on the present system, to massive resistance that will develop to block change, to costs of replacement, etc.

The history of civilizations has an inexorable answer to this. The people who do not adjust to the demands of changing conditions perish. We need a spelling for a technical, computerized, highly complex, modern society. We must have more citizens reading and writing at higher levels. Civilizations that do not displace and throw off what is no longer functional develop, like venerable dragons, huge scales, and gradually immobilized under the weight of these petrified excrescences, die.

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Footnotes.

[1] *Love* comes from the Old English *lufe*, hence *luv* is etymologically more correct than *love* (17, p. 681). There is nothing wrong with *u* standing for *you*; we just feel it is ungenteel.

[2] If *laugh* were *laf* we would save 40% of the letters.

If *give* were *giv* we would save 25% of the letters.

If *there* were *ther* we would save 20% of the letters.

At each saving the small hands of children are writing or typing with greater ease. This is what we want, a written language that children *will* use. This will aid all children, the fast as well as the slow, and no matter how they speak.

[3] A non-profit organization promoting simplified spelling is BE t SS (Better Education thru Simplified Spelling), Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

[4] Noam Chomsky, with Morris Halle, wrote the famous sentence: "There is, incidentally, nothing particularly surprising about the fact that conventional orthography is, as these examples suggest, a near optimal system for the lexical representation of English words" (4, p. 49). This is intended to convey the impression that lexicality is an inherent quality of our orthography, a natural development, with survival value. The assumption of the natural evolution of lexicality within our written forms is false. It is there because certain classes of persons, operating under certain ideas, placed it there. So far, they have had the power and influence to make it stick. It is not at all a natural partner of our orthography because it is anti-alphabetical.

7. A Transition to Improved Spelling for Learners and Literate Adults, by Valerie Yule.*

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The most important step in scientific progress is clearing away mistaken assumptions that bar the way to new thinking and breakthrough. Every assumption that now hedges progress in English spelling reform must be recognized and tackled. The rest of our communications systems has been revolutionized within the past forty years by multidisciplinary research. Now attention must turn to English spelling.

This paper presents the rationale for the type of reform that might result from converging research today, and how it could be tested and developed by experimental research and introduction into public usage. Comparative research is also required, and the outline of a 'morpho-phonemic' spelling reform is set out in a systematic form that could also be used for the description and testing of alternative approaches.

A. Mistaken assumptions

1. *Almost everyone argues about English spelling reform as if it could only mean 'spelling as you speak' – a phonetic or phonemic reform.* ('Phonemic' means that 'sound-symbol correspondence' uses alphabet letters to represent the 42 or so sounds (phonemes) recognized as distinct in the English language, as against the hundreds of sounds a trained phonetician can actually distinguish in world languages, or the 'diafonic' idea that letters can represent quite a broad range of sounds used in different dialects for the same words, that is, rather like the visual conventions in international signs universally recognizable although they are not photographs.)

The result of this assumption has been a century of argument about transcontinental and regional dialects, homophones, discontinuity with present spelling, how to represent slurred vowels, the clumsiness of longer polysyllables, and whose speech, if any, could be accepted as the standard. Spelling reformers themselves have argued about hundreds of schemes, all trying to do the same thing, with the same assumption.

However, we now have a century's experience of design of new orthographies for non-literate developing countries as well as spelling reforms in almost every modern language except English and French. This experience has shown that in practice, the most efficient spellings modify plain sound-symbol correspondence in consistent ways to make faster and more accurate reading for meaning and more convenient learning and writing. Some of the most theoretically perfect designs for spellings for newly literate tribes, have proven disastrously impracticable. The important differences between an easy spelling and a difficult one such as English appear to be that the modifications to plain sound-symbol correspondence are consistent, not unpredictable, and the exceptions to rules number only dozens, not thousands, and the rules themselves can fit in a single page.

2. *Another serious mistake is assuming that English spelling reform can be argued out in armchairs, and that what reformers can manage to agree on is what should be put into practice.* The corollary is that opponents can argue it all out too.

The breakthrough here is to realize that spelling reform research is essential, and that it is essential that it be action research such as is behind all modern progress in technology – and spelling is technology – a tool, not a totem. Some reformers look impatiently; and rightly so, at the volumes upon volume of academic research there have been on English spelling regarded as a totem. ("What is wrong with people who can't learn it?" etc.) Modern human engineering however takes another approach – "How can English spelling be adapted to the people?" Reanalysis of i.t.a. data could be useful here, to find what children did and now feel.

We need experiments and investigation about the degree to which present spelling actually fulfills the claims made for it, including the claims made for advantages for fluent users. Evidence so far suggests its redundancy in spelling is a handicap, not an advantage, and contrasts badly with reader fluency in say Japanese or Indian scripts. Claims about etymological representation, or representation of the lexical form of the word, and so on, also do not stand up when investigated; we need also to investigate whether it would actually be an advantage to have such claims represented more consistently in a reformed spelling or not.

We can investigate how quickly present readers can adapt to a more consistent spelling of English; pilot experiments such as Beech's (1981) and my own suggest only a few hours of practice may be required for morfo-fonemic types of reform. The value for adult illiterates is now being checked. Methods of 'test-and-try' can be used in gradual introduction of reforms into public usage, testing also the rate of change the public can tolerate (one change in eight lines to develop familiarity?) as well as the use of 'flooding' with full reform in say: multilingual notices, advertising gimmicks, magazine competitions, a couple of 'alternative pages' inserted in paperbacks, international English communication, etc.

3. *The conservative assumption that English spelling is not really important and so we can afford to keep it as an antique like old castles, while we continually trade in important technology for more up-to-date models-cars, computers, TV, medical treatments, even alas weapons.* Yet the tiny elite minority of educated people capable of appreciating the etymology of 'light' and 'rhyme' is now not one hundredth of one per cent of the millions of English-speaking semi-literates who now threaten democratic civilization, and the millions more, increasing annually, who need a better English spelling for international communication.

4. *The assumption that the needs of learners are the only needs to consider (as well as the possibly mistaken assumption that one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence would be ideal to meet those needs; it has been proven easier than present spelling. It has yet to be proven as the best solution.)* A reformed English spelling must be the 'best fit' to meet the needs of users and learners, readers and writers, humans and machines, native speakers and the foren born, and the counter-assumption that these needs must be incompatible may also prove unfounded.

5. *That school education and/or government decrees are the avenues to instant spelling reform.* The tremendous changes in culture and life-style within the last decade have occurred mostly thru other means-mainly by private enterprise.

6. *That people cannot change their spelling habits or accomodate to alternative spellings during a transition.* The evidence is that change of set can be made easy by appropriate strategies.

Motivation is the most important factor of all. The need to know the new spellings (and use them) as a factor in holding a job can be very persuasive.

B. Directions for Spelling Change.

1. Eventually the alfabet may be superseded, but at present the urgent need is for an English spelling that can be used easily, internationally. This condition must therefore specify the Latin alfabet, with as much representation of internationally recognizable word-forms as possible, even tho pronunciation rules may vary systematically among languages, as they alrely do within limited ranges for pronunciation of letter sounds.

2. Minimum rules and minimum exceptions, but the facts of real life suggest that some rukes and some exceptions are both inevitable for the practical implementation of eny ideal principle (such as one-sound-one-spelling) and are also desirable and possible for learners. Dr. Johnson himself commented on the fact that the English language is such a mixture that no principle for its spelling could avoid exceptions. But one page of them is better than the need to memorise or use a whole dictionary of them.

3. *Speed and Economy.* Present English spelling was developed in an age when ornamentation, elegance, and elitism were ideals; complex spelling fitted the bill. Today we need a spelling that can ensure literacy for the mass of the people without years of painful, expensive acquisition. All the evidence available so far about children's learning, including their 'natural' spelling, indicates that an economical spelling, with short uncluttered words, is easier to learn to read and write than one which makes its main demand on skills of auditory discrimination.

Research on visual strategies in reading by learners and users still has gaps, but suggests that an uncluttered spelling would produce more distinctive word-shapes, and the notion of pasigraf for function words could make sentence structure more immediately visible for detection of meaning as well. Pasigraf are single symbols for words, and have an advantage for reading if not for writing in meny ideografic and pictografic scripts. The example of numerals can give English speaking readers an idea of this advantage – the ease of reading (and writing) arabic numerals rather than the spelled out words: 17 rather than seventeen; or rather than 0.25. Current tests using alfabet letters to represent single very common function words indicate that learners find them easier than the full representation.

There is evidence that skilled readers control their eye movement patterns in such a way as to avoid what is normally uninformative parts of the text-surplus letters and short function words-and use periferal cues to process information well ahead of actual word identification. Skilled as well as less skilled readers may be aided by simple condensation or omission of parts found redundant by

experiment.

The savings of time, energy, paper, ink, and money even in a five percent reduction in English spelling would represent millions of dollars and pounds annually.

4. Some arguments presented against spelling reform collapse when English vocabulary is actually examined for evidence of present advantages, since they apply so inconsistently.

Etymological representation is no advantage – few people have any worthwhile knowledge, and derivation can always be looked up in a dictionary more accurately than guessed at from the spelling. Beauty of spelling depends upon familiarity and childhood links – 'the eye of the beholder.' The multiple cues at different levels from different sources which supposedly benefit the skilled user are actually mainly useful because without them he is sunk with present spelling – but half the battle of learning it is learning which cues operate when, and when they will let him down. It is these which treble the 'complexity of the processes of reading and writing', as recent models of the cognitive processes required are now demonstrating.

However, multiple cues at different levels could conceivably be useful if they were consistent and related in predictable ways. One major claim for present spelling is that it 'optimally' represents the 'lexical form of the word.' In fact, it applies to under 3% of the difficult spellings in a school list of over 6000 words (Yule 1978). But suppose it were taken seriously as a basis for reform; it might make possible faster reading for meaning, decoding of new vocabulary, spelling conventions that crossed dialect boundaries to cope with shades of pronunciation, more compact spelling than laborious indication of every distinguishable foneme, and closer appearance to international spelling usage, especially for Indo-European Vocabulary.

The methods to achieve 'lexical representation' could in fact be rule based. The following model put up for testing uses spelling choice for vowels modified by place in word and type of word, some invariant grammatical markers, rules to distinguish long and short vowels, 'formal' spelling for unstressed vowels, omission of all superfluous letters, and pasigraphs for many function words and suffixes, avoidance of three-vowel letter sequences, and special cases for those few homophones that research shows may in practice be confusable.

This model will now be described, with an explanation of rationale, and of how learners on the one hand and users on the other could adapt to its transitional introduction.

What might a morfo-fonemic spelling look like?

(The following example is not the final answer and comments are welcomed. Present spelling is 10% longer, as shown by / marks. In the following example over half the words are unchanged; the rest are only shortened by omission of surplus letters, apart from 16% with change in letters. That is, looking at the total letter count, only 4% will be unfamiliar to the reader, and the continuity with present spelling makes the reform basically a 'clean-up job').

"T spel and how t spel: that is th qestn,-----/"

Whethir it is nobler in th minde t sufir--/
 th slings and aroes o outrageus customs--/
 or t take arms ag enst this set o trubls-----/
 and bi reforming, end them. T spel with rule,--/
 no mor, and bi this simpl meens we end--/
 th hed-ake and th thousand litiral shoks----/
 our yung ar eir tu. . . Just to amend ---!
 Ay, ther's th rub---/
 for if we spel with sens, whot scool may du---/
 when we hav shufld off this ansient coil---/
 may giv us pauz. Ther's a respect---/
 that makes calamity o comon sens.---/"

Notes:

1. *Consistent consonant spellings* with transitional rules for *c*, *k*; *g*. (*qu* becomes *q*; present general rules for *k* and hard *c* are followed consistently).
2. The 318 present ways to spell 20 *vowel sounds* are reduced t 37. Place in a word can modify vowel spelling, e.g. werd-ending or within a long werd.

bat	bet	bit	not	nut
		piti		
mate	mete	mite	mote	mute
mating	meting	biting	notasn	educasn
may	me	fly	no	emu
	been			
car	her	hair	for	taut
banana	ocur			always
paam	matir			saw
about	boil	boot	book	
cow	boy	flute	put	
		tabu		

That is, seven vowel spellings have two to four possible pronunciations; all others have only one possible pronunciation. (This also gives leeway to most of the major regional pronunciations.)

a as in *bat*; *mating*, *banana*, *always*, *haul*

e as in *bet*; *me*

i as in *bit*; *hi-fi*

o as in *not*, *no*

u as in *nut*; *emu*, *tabu*, *put*

u-e as in *mute*, */lute*

oo as in *boot*; *book*

Difthongs and trifthongs avoid 3-vowel letter sequences:

paam	paela	dais	cans	taut
idea	been	deity	peon	odeus
dial	diet	tiing	iota	pius
oasis	poem	boil	boot	bout
dual	duet	ruin	duo	arduus

3. 'Lexical form of the word' is maintained while still indicating pronunciation of sound changes, except in a few unavoidable cases, by means of:

(a) Silent *e* indicates preceding long vowel. If a different vowel follows, preceding vowel is short.

(b) When distinction by silent *e* is impossible, double consonants can indicate that preceding vowel is short.

Examples: spoke, speke, speche; slepe, slepd; fli, flite, flier; hoping, hopping; sleping, stepping; ajes, affect; 'cellar, seller, sealer, sailor'=selir, selor, seler, saler (-ir endings for objects, -or for people) finish, finel; babe, babey; pepel, populer.

In the semi-Shakespeare example, 'lexical forms' shown in this way include *spel* (*speld*, *spelling*); *raje* (*outrajeus*, *rajing*), *litiral* (*letir*), *yung* (*yuthe*)

(silent *e*): nobler, minde, take, rule, tike, ancient, make (short vowel): whether, sulfir, trubl, mor, simpl, litiral, shufld.

4. *Grammatical markers.*

-s for all plural endings and also verbs, -*d* and -*n* for verb endings as in: cats, dogs, pitys, houses, jumpd, filed, filld, fitid, gon, bloen, groen, dun. Single nouns may end in -*ss* or -*se* (-*nse* is always preceded by short vowels)

5. *Special cases:* very common words and distinction of some homophones.

Shortenings such as: -*tn*; -*sn*, -*ssn*, -*xn*, -*zn*, *cd*, *wd*, *shd*, *t*, *o*, *th*, *ws*, *l*.

Distinctions such as: *air/eir*, *tu/tuw/too*, *som/sum*, *then/their*

6. *Irregular stress* can be indicated by double letters, e.g. *comitti*, *umbrella*, but a better solution is to drop gradually the irregularities in the spoken language, – as is tending to happen in any case. It is likely that popular pronunciation would tend to change for words which were special cases to the rules of a reformed spelling (e.g. 'respect' and 'amend').

C. Implementing transitional reform, starting now

Transition to a regular spelling of this type could be begun easily for both learners and fluent readers of present English spelling.

1. *Learners*

Oral language, whether dialect or 'standard', is the crucial pre-reading skill for a morphemic spelling reform, which emphasizes reading for meaning, and vocabulary extension, not rote learning, would be the basic form of extending 'spelling' knowledge. (e.g. prime, primery, primel, primer, primer, primeval, primate, primit, primitiv.)

School children could become independent readers quickly, as they could be taught to teach themselves the consistent principles with the aid of a £10 microprocessor, wall charts, a couple of video cassettes, and books at their mental age level, to acquire knowledge, culture and good style from the start. A village school could provide comprehensive and economical primary education.

They would begin with sound-symbol correspondence and modify it with the six principles as soon as they comprehended the basic principles of reading. Present spelling could be used in transliterated pages ('dubl-dekir' books) so that children would also be able to recognize present spelling for reading, but not be required to use it in spelling.

2. *Current print* can modify present spelling in a series of stages so that the unfamiliarity ratio remained about one change in eight lines, which is about the tolerable level of misprints. The first steps, recommended at the Edinburgh Spelling Conference of 1981, are the use of *f* for *ph* and *e* for the short *e* sound, as acceptable alternative spellings. Further steps can be introduced as research and experimental public usage indicates, because a fuller use of spelling changes can be made in private correspondence, international English, multilingual notices, remedial and adult illiterate teaching of the hopeless, advertising, business names, spelling games, special regular features in periodicals, insert pages in paperbacks, etc. Individuals can use alternative spellings inconsistently, to develop greater familiarity in the easiest way, as alternative spellings rather than an immediate complete change-over.

With a regular system such as the one described, 70-80% of running text can remain unchanged – but the problem spellings are cleared up. As it is a reform by stages, anyone can begin now. Later features will be modified by research and experience, co-ordinated by national spelling commissions internationally linked. But at present the next stages would seem to be:

1. Omission of surplus letters. ("When in doubt, cut it out")
2. Further consistency for vowels and consonants, with shortenings and special cases included.

It is likely that as the idea of change becomes popularly accepted, faster change may be more acceptable, and acclimatization by fully transliterated spellings in more and more newspaper features be preferred to the jerks in expectations and set caused by too many stages one after the other.

3. Electronic machines can be programmed to write and speak using the rules and few exceptions – a different proposition from having to have entire English dictionaries built into them, giving the edge only to the most expensive computerware.

There is the advantage that specific proposals can fit on one page, or even in card form for the

pocket, as can be done with the spellings of most major languages, so that handy reference is possible for spelling as well as reading for a brief period. Most journalists would find this indefinitely preferable to their present necessity to keep a dictionary nearby. (For further details of implementation of spelling improvements, see Yule, 1980).

Conclusion

There have been barriers to improvement of English spelling thru unchecked assumptions – that the only direction for reform can be to a simple one-sound-one-symbol fonemic principle, that armchair arguments can make final decisions, that only the needs of learners (for change) or for present users (assumed to be agens change) need to be considered, and that any useful reform must be a drastic change.

However, research evidence is accumulating that the most useful reforms would include principles of conciseness, visual readability, preservation of morfemes across word form-possibly even internationality, and an attempt has been made to illustrate what such a reform could be like, so that experimental testing and comparisons can be made. Altho there is some evidence that adults could read such a spelling at normal speed after a few hours practice, methods of transition are discussed for general introduction of alternative spellings first, commencing with acceptance as alternative spellings of /' for *ph* and e for the short *e* sound.

Literacy in the next generation is in a more parlous state than we care to recognize within Anglo-Saxon countries; developing countries and international communication are also seriously handicapped by the difficulties of English spelling. It is not a parochial question.

Toynbee's theory of history is that the rise and fall of civilizations depends upon their response to challenges. If we cannot respond to what is really a small challenge, we can expect larger disastrous consequences.

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8. A summary of ten disasters to English literacy during its evolution, by Sir James Pitman, KBE.*

*London, England.

1. The Roman alphabet was used unchanged for English – a language with *sounds* different from Latin.
2. This alphabet happened to be deficient in unique characters for 17 of the sounds of English.
3. The names for six of its characters were each an obstacle, not an aid, to indicating the pronunciation to be associated with that character: *g* /jee/ (often), *h* /aytch/ (always), *y* /wie/ (always), *u* /yoo/ (often), and *w* /doubleyou/ (always). Furthermore *s* /ess/ had its vowel (wrongly) placed before the consonant, instead of after as in /suh/. The pronunciation of the common word *get* is not /jet/, (*g* before *e* is frequently pronounced as in *gem*); the sound of /aytch/ is never heard instead of the aspiration in words such as /hay/ and /heaven/, etc.; *u* for the sound frequently heard and spoken as /up/ is not heard in words such as /union/, (but is heard in *onion*), and as for *w*, the name /double you/ (and for that matter /double vée/ in French! – is as ridiculous as a name as it is misdirecting, having arisen only at the time of its introduction, as a new-comer to the Roman alphabet, by evolution from *v* as in *Jesvs* to become half of the digraph *vv* in *vvas*, which, in course of time, became the present digraphic monograph *w*. Its very name was unfortunate. /wuh/ would have been much better.

But the damage was even worse still. Many further misnomenclatures followed inevitably the "reduplications of allocations of characters to sounds to characters" mentioned in paragraph 4 below.

The name for *a* in /able/ was excellent, but to allocate it also with the same name to the *a* in /has/, in /was/, in /father/, in /many/, in /all/ and in /image/, not to mention /about/ and /isaac/ was further to confound misdirection by additional mis-nomenclatures. Similarly the names for the other vowels added yet other confusions.

4. Notwithstanding that deficiency of 17 apparently essential characters for 17 English sounds, various ingenious improvisations by digraphs and re-duplications of allocation of characters to more than one sound, enabled writers, for many decades in the 13th and 14th centuries, to provide a number of effective conventions of representation which enabled written and eventually printed English to become practical and to flourish, e.g. Chaucer ? 1340-1400.

However, there was a disastrous element for those who could not read which accompanied the practical gain for those who could. It happened because those who determined the digraphs (and trigraphs) for representing the 17 sounds were Latin, not English-speaking clerks in Holy Orders. The new characterizations chosen to represent, for instance, the sound of /sh/ in *creation*, *ocean*, etc. was largely, as in this case, based on the Latin roots for the corresponding English word, e.g. the *ti* was chosen in the word *creation* because the Latin root was known to be *creatus*; similarly *ce* was chosen because the Latin root *oceanus*, *ssi* because of *passus*, *sci* because of *conscio*, and *ch* because of *machina*; and *s* in *sugar* on the principle of reallocating such sounds, in words not

having a Latin root, to characters already otherwise allocated.

The sixteen other sounds, which were present in English, received similar digaphic or re-allocated treatment. (pages 284-296 of *Alphabets and Reading*, by Pitman & St. John, 1969, London. SBN: 273 43343 give examples of 727 different spellings for these 17, together with the remainder, of the only 40 sounds of English – an average of 18 characterizations per sound.

This disastrous variety was compounded by the introduction as mentioned in No. 8 below of the two variant alphabets. Together these account for the over 2000 spellings for the only 40 sounds – possibly the greatest confusion of all for the initial learner.

5. The suggestions, and the designs, of John Hart (1570) of a proper English alphabet were rejected, notwithstanding Hart's advocacy of systematic augmentation of the alphabet by dropping *c*, in favour of *k*, by adding new characters resembling the current digraphs and by modifying the retained characters (e.g. a dot underneath to indicate lengthening of the vowel otherwise mistaken as short); and all in such a way that the result was immediately legible by those habituated to read the improvisations mentioned in 4 above.

6. No one heeded those simplifications notwithstanding that John Hart (and Benjamin Franklin, 1768) both advocated their comparable systematic augmented alphabets as more of proposals for a temporary, or what we call an initial learning medium (ILM). [1,2] Neither was intended solely as a spelling reform. They each had in mind the distinction between the two purposes and had sought to concentrate the attention upon the fact that learning to read, for those who could not, was the first and most important purpose and issue, and that those who could already read needed no consideration. (The skilled reader needs no help. In context, amazing variations of letter forms and of spellings are read by him with ease, just as amazing varieties of handwriting are read and understood, and of dialect are heard and understood.)

7. A new policy of orthography, the one and only correct order of letters for every word in the English language, ousted the old freedom for the writer and printer to continue, within the need to convey meaning correctly, what had for so long worked effectively as in no. 4 above.

8. Two alphabets, additional to the upper case Roman (A, B, C, D, etc.) were introduced: the lower case Roman (a, b, c, d, etc.) and the cursive alphabet [see s18.4p18cursive.gif] thus providing at least 66 (not 26!) characters to be learned causing thereby even greater difficulty for the learner. Their use moreover became "orthographic."

9. The myth had arisen and had gained universal acceptance that learning to read was the easiest of all learning tasks. Indeed "As easy as ABC" became an axiom as the acme of simplicity. Its falsity in application to the initial teaching of reading led those concerned in teaching literacy, in succeeding generations over the centuries, to accept those overpowering difficulties as nevertheless sublime simplicities.

The essential qualification for teaching literacy was inevitably to have succeeded in learning it, and moreover so long ago as to have forgotten altogether the difficulties of having done so. All teachers of literacy thus inevitably regarded what they had been taught, (and how), as wholly right, and proceeded to inflict those great difficulties upon all those who had not already learned.

This no doubt was the most fundamental of those disasters and the one which led to the rejection first of John Hart's proposals for simplifying the *learning* of literacy; secondly of Benjamin Franklin's comparable proposals and designs; and finally of today's only very limited acceptance of the Initial Teaching Alphabet.

10. It is not surprising, but still further damaging that the growth of and spread of the concept of Spelling Reform (S.R.) should have stifled any growth from the seed of the proposals of John Hart and Benjamin Franklin. It effectively diverted the purpose from the primary objective – to make learning very easy – to the sterile purpose of making what was already easily read by those who could read, supposedly more easy, and in the process to force upon those who could write and spell, the necessity of learning new spellings.

There is ample evidence that the policy of both John Hart and of Benjamin Franklin was right and that if the consequences of the above disastrous difficulties, created so long ago were no longer to be inflicted on the learners of English – the young learner, the foreigner and immigrant, the failed learner and the deaf, all would be greatly benefitted. Many millions of children have already learned to read in the simplified medium (ita) and have extended their skills effortlessly into reading in Traditional Orthography (T.O.) and to have become better spellers in T.O. than those subjected to the full range of learning difficulties.

How long need they all be kept waiting before they may be helped by the removal of so many outdated difficulties and by the benefits of simplification? After all, such help is only a temporary expedient and only for the then much shorter period of learning.

[1] Starrett, Edmund V. Unpub. D.E. thesis, Wayne St. Univ., Detroit, Mich, 1980. p. 103. Saying about John Hart: "Hart believed that his alphabet would save one-fourth to one-third of the paper necessary to print in the traditional alphabet and was certain that his alphabet would eliminate many of the difficulties in learning to read. In speaking of a student who has used his alphabet, Hart comments: 'So soon as he were able to learne reasonably and perfectly to know and name the number of figures or members of the bodie and substance of our voice and speech, and so observing the new or strange order hereafter written, the learned man may instruct any natural English reasonable creature, to read English, in one-quarter of the time that every any other hath heretofore bene taught to reade, by any former manner. And in what lesse time and how much more easier and readie, it will be for the writer or Printer, Reader and hearer, I will not write, but leave it to the Judgement of the Reader, of the sayd following treatise, and to the experience it selfe as occasion shall serve.' "

[2] Willcox, Wm. B, Editor, 1972. *The papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Vol. 15, (1768). New Haven: Yale Univ. Press. pp. 173-178, 215-220.

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9. A proposal for the implementation of a rationalized form of English spelling, by Harvie Barnard.*

*Tacoma, Wa.

In virtually all real dictionaries – those which are definitely more than 'spelling books,' or listings of simple definitions or synonyms – there will be found 'respellings' together with 2nd choice spellings which in other dictionaries appear to be spelt differently. These 'different' spellings are sometimes known as 'Variants,' or optional spellings. Thus, not all spellings are fixed, cast in bronze or chiseled (or chiselled, or chizeld) in granite, but vary according to the 'authority.'

If we consult the original basic authority for English spelling, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), and still regarded as 'standard' by many authorities, we will find 'honour', 'valour', 'colour', 'litre', 'theatre' and even 'shoppe.' These differences are not complaints against the English system. The English – those living in any part of the British Isles – have been spelling according to custom and time honoured tradition for quite some time, and would not be disturbed by modern trends, educational developments, or progressive movements of any sort.

It is indeed a great shame, a pity, a blemish of English tradition, that the meter, (they at least had the courage to stay with 'metre'), has at long last replaced the inch, foot, yard, rod and mile as "standards of linear measurement." Similarly, it is with great reluctance and the shedding of a silent tear, (not as in tare, but as in deer), that we succumb, (as in rum, not as in comb), to the liter, (they still prefer 'litre' – as in 'theatre') – All of which makes English so amusing, if not challenging, to the small children and foreigners whose efforts to learn it meet with sadness, failure, frustration and frequently violent disrespect for teachers, the system and those blameless schoolhouses whose windows and glass doors so frequently receive the vengeance of our thoroughly thwarted pupils, if not recently expelled drop-outs.

There must be an alternative or some sort of compromise between Samuel Johnson's honourable tradition and the use of letters, (graphemes), which seem to correspond with or phonemically to represent the English language as it is customarily – if not 'properly' spoken.

Unfortunately, those who have the most to gain from such a compromise have little or no representation in the process of negotiation which could bring about a reasonable settlement of the controversy. These are the children, the foreigners, and their teachers, – at least those teachers whose livelihood depends on the monthly paycheck – whose linguistic and economic fate depends upon the pendulum of political prudence or perhaps on the persuasive salesmanship of drop-outs from the academic system whose talents have turned to textbook salesmanship. (It might be exciting to observe how well these exponents of T.O. (traditional orthography) might perform in that custom of customs, – the what-to-do-when-all-else-fails, "Spelling Bee.")

And do without demanding complete surrender to the dictation of outmoded tradition, it is proposed that an introduction to rational spelling be considered. In essence, and without attempting to present a completely new and revised dictionary of the English language, the idea is to allow what could be described as "Alternative" spellings. The alternative spellings would be based on phonics, – or as spelt phonetically, *fonics*. Such an alternative would not be either shocking or devastating to the casual or ordinary reader. In fact, many English words would not be affected at all, and most of those that are would have only one letter change. None of the ten most commonly used words would be affected. These are: *it, is, I, that, the, of, and, in, to, a*. While some of the most frequently used 2 and 3 letter words could be modified to represent true foneticity, they would be retained

substantially as is, altho in some cases the alternative spellings would be acceptable and would, if spelt alternatively, lose neither in value or meaning.

The dropping of silent or non-pronounced letters would probably be one of the most desirable starting points in our alternative program, and except in those rare cases where such letters as: *k, w, h, b, l, gh,* and the silent final *e* are really needed to clarify the contextual meaning, they would hardly be missed after the first few omissions. Examples of the above letter drops would be: *knife, written, thumb, ghost, shoud, bought, and little,* which would be better shortened to *litle.*

Then there are many cases where the unsounded *a* could be omitted, as in: *dead, head, bread, learn,* and about as many where the "short *e*" would serve better than the *a*, as in *eny, meny, ready, anyhow,* and many other similar instances where the same "short *e*" better represents the true sound (as we customarily pronounce the word), than *ai* or *ea*, as in *sed* for *said*, and *tred* for *tread*, and *alredy* for *already*.

By introducing these logical alternatives in the early grades, it would be possible to cast out these "spelling demons" which bother most persons throughout their lives. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that small children are more willing to write (and write longer themes) when they are permitted to write phonetically. Also it has been obvious that when children can write a word, they can also read it.

A "freedom of choice" in teaching methods should make alternative spellings attractive to teachers as well as proponents of instructional systems. Whether it be the "Each One Teach One" program of Laubach International, or the "Writing Road to Reading" by the well known Spaldings, or the "True Phonics" of the Society for the Advancement of Reading, or any other structured program favored by various schools, both public and private, alternative spellings should present no serious objection. The proponents of each system would be at liberty to introduce the traditional spellings either early or later, at the option of the teacher. It is a fairly safe bet as to which spelling the student would prefer to use as far as writing is concerned, altho until conventional "readers" have been converted to rational phonics, the pupils should not be exposed to the non-phonetic spellings.

A very important and basic point to be observed in teaching the alternative spellings is to avoid the discriminating castigation of either "right" or "wrong" (rong). The principle objective is to develop and encourage communicative skills, which involved: 1) listening, to get the correct sounds (pronunciation); 2) observing, imitating and practicing, to learn the symbols (graphemes); 3) writing (writing) the symbols to form words (building a written vocabulary); and 4) reading what they, the pupils, have learned to write (alternative 'write'). Thus, according to the well proven methods of "The Writing Road to Reading" (Spalding), reading becomes a very natural process requiring almost none of the rote memorization techniques, which some have characterized as equivalent to "teaching a monkey to ride a bicycle." And as every teacher knows, some "monkeys" are harder to teach than others, which is to say that even with the benefit of alternatives and with a certain "freedom of choice," teaching will still require patience, understanding, and a recognition of personality differences!

Rather than attempt to append a condensed dictionary of commonly used words – such as Thorndike's list of 1000 (or 10,000) commonest English words, which teachers and students could very appropriately use for practice in preparing a list of acceptable alternatives, a page of fonic "rules" is given. If practiced (used) for learning the alternative system (system), it will rather quickly become obvious that there is very little really new about simplified spelling, other than in the alternative system WORDS ARE SPELT AS THEY SOUND – *when correctly pronounced*. This mode of spelling had also been introduced "Soundspell," and is nearly identical to "World English" as well as other proposed systems of simplified spelling, such as L I F E, (Logical International Phonetic English), as used in the above paragraph.

Here is a condensed table of pronunciation rules and guides for the use of customary symbols in spelling in accord with an alternative simplified system, as used in this paragraph. For the proper pronunciation, refer to the respellings, (given with diacritical marks), in any dictionary.

CONDENSED TABLE OF SPELLING RULES AND GUIDES FOR "L I F E" & ALTERNATIVE SPELLING

Alphabetical symbols, using Roman letters, with corresponding sounds, in English (LIFE) spelling.

Consonants		Vowels	
Symbol	Sound exampl	Symbol/long sound:exampl	Short sound symbol:exampl
B b	bad, rub	ae, or a---e ..tael, or tale	a as in and, cat, rat
C c	cat, cud	ee, or e---e ..feel, or benzene.	e as in end, eny, sed
D d	dad, did	ie, or i---e ..pie, or ripe	i as in ink, fin., lili
F f	fad, foto	oe, or o--e ..hoe, or bone	o as in not, hot, thot
G g	get, gag	ue, or u--e ..due, or use	u as in pup, shut, up
H h	hat, hed	As in the above "sound:examples",	When used alone, vowels
J j	jam, jump	there are 2 ways to express the	are given the "short" sound
K k	kit, krok	sound of a long vowel: 1) use the	as in the above examples,
L l	lad, hold	'e' immediately following the vowel	except when it occurs as
M m	man, mum	or as the final 'e' of a word or	the final vowel of a syllable
N n	nan, nun	syllable when a consonant separates	or word, as: pre-, de, me, be,
P p	pap, pop	the long vowel from the 'e'.	re-, he, we!
R r	rap, war	Note: the "long" vowel has the	Note: Exceptions are the
S s	sit, suds	same sound as the name of the letter.	personal pronoun I, and
T t	tag, rat	The personal pronoun 'I' is	the final 'o'. In LIFE
W w	wit, wow,	always "long", (without the 'e'!)	spelling, when the final
X x	xray, exam	Also, a final 'o', as in so, no, go,	unsounded 'w' is dropt,
Y y	yes, yet	is usually "long".	the final 'o' is "long*"
Z z	zip, raz	Also, see Note #2, below:	as in pillo, willo, thro.

Note: The consonant Q may be used in alternative spelling, but in LIFE spelling is not needed, and is replaced by kw, as in *kwit*.

Also, note that the 'c' is used both "hard", as in 'cat', and as "soft", as in 'cent' and 'since'.

Note #2: In T.O.(traditional orthography), short vowels are also indicated by the use of doubled consonants following the vowel, as in matter, setter, potter and mutter.

In order to effect all the 44 different sounds of the English language with the Roman alphabet of 26 symbols, it is necessary to use various 2-letter combinations, "digraphs", to achieve the 18 additional sounds. Thus we use double consonant "digraphs" and double vowel digraphs, also known as diphthongs, (diphthongs, (in T.O.), and mixed digraphs, consonants with vowels:

6 standard consonant digraphs:

- ch, as in chip, church, cheez
- sh, as in ship, hush, sheep
- ng, as in sing, long, song. -ing
- rr, as in arrow, merry, hurry
- th, as in thin, thru, thaut
- wh, as in when, where, wheel

4 standard vowel digraphs (diphthongs):

- aa, the ah sound, as in father
- au, the /aw/ " " " raw, naut
- oo, the sound occurring in pool, and wherever this sound is heard.
- uu, the sound of /uu/ in 'book' and soot'.

Thus we hav 'buuk', and 'bruuk'

6 mixed digraphs:

- as in art and start
- er, as in refer, baker
- ir, as in present usage, as in fir, firm.
- or, as in for, favor
- ur, wherever the /ur/ is emphasized, as in urgent.
- ow, as how, now, cow, wow,

In order to correctly apply or use symbols in accord with true fonic principles, it is obviously necessary to observe and follow correct pronunciations as closely as possibl. For proper pronunciations we need only to refer to the "re-spellings" given in all standard dictionaries. The re-spellings utilize diacritical markings which indicate "long" and "short" vowels, whereas in the fonetic, (or foneemic), spellings, (simplified spellings), we are able to avoid the need for diacritical markings by the use of the 'e' symbol, as indicated above. Most of the pronunciations employed in simplified spellings are those preferred by the BBC, ABC, and NBC Radio Handbook listings.

To facilitate the transfer from traditional spellings to L I F E or W E S, (World English Spellings), also "Soundspell", some compromises hav bin made in order to avoid as much confusion as appears practical and at the same time preserving, rationality. The use of the 'c', both in the "hard" and "soft" form, are examples of this compromise. In "Alternativ" spellings the writer has the choice of using T.O. or reformed forms, whichever appears most acceptable, or rational, depending upon the purposes of the written material and the writer's preferences.

NOTE: Alternativ Spelling is essentially a compromise designed to enable the user to make a transition from T.O. to true fonics, – simplified spelling, – with minimum difficulty.

*****L I F E, an acronym for Logical International Fonetic English!
Harvie Barnard (1981)

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[*Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1981 p19 in the printed version*]

10. Book Review, by Newell W. Tune

Rondthaler, Edward. *Life with Letters – as they turned photogenic*. Hastings House, Publishers, New York, 10016 1981, pp 207.

This beautifully printed book is not only a pleasure to read, it is a monument to the House of Photo-Lettering built by Edward Rondthaler. It's both a history of photo-lettering and a biography of Rondthaler and the development of that process of printing. It reads easily, like a narrative – which it largely is.

While the idea and a machine for photo-typesetting had been around for about a half century, the original machine was not so reliable and practical, but it did have the advantage that one alphabet provided an endless number of sizes of type, and that an alphabet could be designed once and used endlessly afterward by anyone with a film negative and the machine.

It took Rondthaler and his crew several years to get the bugs out of his machine, but now that the increased speed cut costs, it has nearly superceeded the linotype.

Rondthaler shows how easily sr. ref. could be utilized with photo-lettering without the operator knowing the new spelling. The machine had a memory of 50,000 words.

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