

Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 1993/1. J14.

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Cover Design

At first sight, the small print on the cover may appear just as background to the title. However, it also offers ammunition for the spelling-reform cause, being a catalogue of nearly 3000 words illustrating the plethora of frequently inconsistent spelling patterns in T.O. Tho comprehensive, one can hardly expect it to be exhaustive, and readers are asked to write in if they discover patterns, or single words with particularly aberrant spellings, that are not covered. It will be noticed that some words occur more than once, because they represent more than one inconsistency (e.g. knowledge).

The overall arrangement is alphabetic, with A on the front at the top, and Z, on the back at the bottom. But within most letters, especially vowels, there are subdivisions. Thus letter A begins with 15 word-groups, demarcated by a comma, each listing different uses of A for the same phoneme. A semi-colon separates these 15 groups from the next 13 groups, each of which lists different pronunciations for the same graphotactic use of A. A semi-colon in turn separates these 13 groups from a list of words containing A linked by a slash (/) to phonemically similar words without A. the other vowel letters are similarly analysed, but consonants are mostly simpler and classifiable in rather more obvious ways.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 14, 1993/1 p2 in the printed version]
[Kenneth Ives: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Book](#)]

1. Editorial: Kenneth Ives

The Society's Submission to the National Curriculum Council (Item 2) is a major and important effort, and a major recognition of it in a strategic sector. It seems likely that major reform of spelling will arrive via school children taught in such a medium, and permitted to use some simpler spellings in later grades — a medial writing medium.

A key problem here is the availability of a substantial amount of interesting and useful reading materials in a medial medium. Limitation of available reading materials was one factor restricting ITA to less than one year's use by most of its pupils. This poses a substantial financial problem for reformers to struggle with, if their program begins to win acceptance.

As a follow-up to the *Symposium on Cut Spelling* in the last issue, Valerie Yule presents some considerations on readability (Item 3). This is followed by an assessment of the contributions of Cut Spelling to broader programs of spelling reform (Item 4).

The computer generated "tree" and "decision tree" diagrams (Item 5) are a way of making visual the many alternatives a writer or reader faces, and a sequence of decisions where rules apply, and error rates where they don't. The "decision tree" approach may be adaptable to classroom use. There will need to be considerable experimentation with these diagrams to find what styles are most useful for various purposes and audiences. Their author will gladly develop a few for other authors and researchers to use to illustrate their points.

Patrick Groff presents a view of Developmental Spelling (Item 6) and argues for developing a link between it and spelling reform in the guest editorial below.

With a new administration in the United States, with an emphasis on "change", and the start of an effort for 'English standards' (Item 13), it may be that spelling reformers in the United States have an opportunity to be heard and to influence educational policy, such as they have not had since the Progressive era of 1900–1916.

Guest Editorial Patrick Groff

Spelling reform needs to try to gain the cooperation of educational organizations in its efforts. One must find an issue, however, on which both parties can agree. Could this be the idea of developmental spelling?

As my paper (Item 6) implies there do not seem to be people in the *National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)* nor the *International Reading Association (IRA)* who are interested in reformed spelling. I hope my paper offers a suggestion on what advocates of spelling reform must consider in manuscripts sent to these organizations. The first stage of gaining acceptance for spelling reform by NCTE and IRA would be getting manuscripts accepted by them for publication.

In the meantime it would be appropriate to have developed standards on spelling reform, as suggested in [JSSS 1992 No. 2](#). Whether NCTE, IRA etc. would want to work on an organization to do this is highly problematic. First they must be convinced that reformed spelling and developmental spelling have so much in common that it is feasible for them to endorse each other's efforts. The main hurdle here is the direct teaching issue. Spelling reform also must be prepared to give up ideas that there should be a prearranged hierarchy of reformed spelling that children should be taught. To gain NCTE et al., as allies to reformed spelling they must be assured that spelling reform does not demand that children will be expected to reach certain spelling levels on an arbitrary schedule.

I am preaching expediency here. While I am an advocate of direct teaching, I would give this up for the greater goal of spelling reform. I think, then, that we must keep our eyes on the prize, even if this means for the time being that great compromises are made.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 14, 1993/1 pp3–8 in the printed version]

[Chris Upward: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Pamflet](#), [Leaflets](#), [Media](#), [Book and Papers](#).]

2. The Society's 1992 Submission to the National Curriculum Council Chris Upward

In September 1992 the National Curriculum Council invited the Simplified Spelling Society to contribute evidence and advice for a review of requirements for English teaching in England and Wales. We here publish the Society's response, in which the important new concept is developed of 'managing' English spelling as a preliminary to its reform.

21 October 1992

Richard Knott

English Review Team

National Curriculum Council

Albion Wharf

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YORK YO1 2XL

Dear Richard Knott

Thank you for inviting the Simplified Spelling Society to contribute evidence and advice on spelling for the review of the English Order. We welcome this opportunity to refine our earlier ideas (submissions to the Kingman Committee, the Cox Committee, LINC and the NCC itself), in keeping with the evolving situation. Please find our submission enclosed.

We have two particular reasons for being pleased that the NCC's review is aiming to define the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding more closely. The first reason is that we feel most recent statements on spelling, both official and unofficial, have lacked the precision required to give teachers and learners proper guidance.

The second reason is that a contributory cause of the problems of English spelling is the failure of any authority hitherto to assume responsibility for it. Responsibility for spelling in societies that aim for universal literacy should in our view reside with the educational authorities. We therefore see the NCC's concern with spelling as an encouraging development.

Most of our submission explores the implications of this new responsibility. We are very willing to elaborate on any points that the NCC may wish to discuss further with us, either in writing or in person.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Upward

Editor-in-Chief,

on behalf of the Society's Committee.

English in the National Curriculum

Submission from the Simplified Spelling Society

October 1992

INTRODUCTION

The Simplified Spelling Society has followed the debates on spelling in recent years with interest, but has found most of the views expressed limited by inadequate understanding of how alphabetic writing systems work. We readily confess that our own understanding of the subject has been maturing over that period, and we do not wish to imply we think we know all the answers. Nevertheless, we do believe we can offer a better founded perspective on the issues and more constructive proposals than most contributors to the debates. This submission is presented in the spirit of wishing to improve all our understanding and so help progress towards the universally shared goal of raising standards of literacy.

In our view, the current concerns with 'returning to basics' and 'correct' spelling point in the right direction. However, we have yet to see any discussion of the fundamental questions of what the 'basics' of spelling are and which spellings should be considered 'correct'. The NCC will presumably need to give specific guidance on these matters in its review, and we hope that our ideas may prove useful for that purpose.

A historical perspective is indispensable. We must ask how English spelling came to cause such trouble in the first place, what the nature of that trouble is, and whether we wish it to continue for the foreseeable future. We welcome the renewed recognition of phonics as central to mastery of alphabetic writing, but we urge the NCC to make plain just how inadequate a phonic approach is when applied to the present spelling of English. In the first part of our submission we set out the historical and phonic 'basics' of alphabetic writing in the form of ten axioms, which we believe should underpin the NCC's recommendations on English spelling.

Although the basics are in principle very simple, we assume their practical and political implications are too far-reaching to be actively espoused by the NCC in the short term. We therefore suggest that for the present they be merely acknowledged as the conceptual basis for a proper understanding of English spelling. The second part of our submission outlines some of those further implications: it examines the constraints on attempting to address them in the short term and the preparation that would be needed for effective action to be taken in the longer term, and suggests how the NCC might nevertheless lay the first foundations on which substantive action could one day be based. We believe that the present state of English spelling demands such a long-term strategy, but for the interim we suggest that the concept of 'spelling management' should be promoted as embracing a policy for dealing both with short term issues as well as, potentially, with long term problems.

The remainder of our submission consists of an Annotated Bibliography (pp11–13) of publications whose analyses we believe should be familiar to those professionally concerned with spelling policy for English.

PART I

Ten axioms on English spelling

1. Alphabets provide the simplest way of writing most languages.
2. The letters of the alphabet were designed each to represent a distinct speech sound; that is the alphabetic principle.
3. Literacy is easily acquired by the alphabetic principle, because readers can decode words by interpreting letters, and writers encode words by analysing sounds.
4. As languages change through time, the transparency of the alphabetic principle is steadily obscured unless writing systems are modernized.
5. Spelling means fixed writing conventions at any one point in time, but changing conventions over a period of time.
6. By its failure systematically to modernize over nearly a thousand years, English spelling has seriously neglected the alphabetic principle.
7. By tolerating widespread inconsistency, English spelling has become exceptionally difficult to master.
8. Because English spelling is so difficult, undue time is spent achieving unacceptably low levels of literacy in English-speaking countries.
9. To improve literacy, English needs to modernize its spelling, as other languages do.
10. There are no quick or easy solutions: a first step must be the public adoption of the concept of 'managing' English spelling, i.e. controlling it rather than letting it continue on its own arbitrary way.

The Simplified Spelling Society will be glad to elaborate on any of these axioms.

PART II

Managing English spelling

1. The need

1.1 An opportunity

The National Curriculum Council today has a rare opportunity to promote a better understanding of English spelling that would correspond to historical, linguistic, psychological and educational realities. Essentially, such a view would recognize that the problems of English spelling are not a law of nature, but that, like the spelling systems of other languages, the spelling system of English can be 'managed' to reduce those problems.

1.2 English spelling in a time-warp

For over 400 years proposals have been made for English spelling to be reformed, but the gap between idea and implementation has proved hard to bridge. English spelling has evolved over that period mainly thanks to the practice of printers and the example of dictionaries, but with little regard to that consistency of sound-symbol correspondence (i.e. the alphabetic principle) which best suits learners and indeed users generally. The need for universal literacy was until the later decades of the nineteenth century not a paramount consideration — but by then the evolution of English spelling had slowed almost to a halt. English spelling is now so antiquated that it fails to meet the educational and communicative needs of our time. Its modernization would be a step comparable to the decimalization of the currency, or the metrication of weights and measures, or the revision of the translation of the Bible, though the different factors applying to each of these reforms would make modernizing English spelling in some ways more difficult, in other ways easier.

1.3 The need to raise literacy standards

Today, when comparisons are increasingly made between standards of literacy and education in different countries, the need to raise standards of literacy assumes greater importance than ever before. However, it is now no longer (as it perhaps was 100 years ago) a need just for basic literacy, but for ensuring that whole populations acquire the highest possible levels of literacy skill.

When present spelling conventions are themselves demonstrably an obstacle to fulfilling that need, it is time to take stock of those conventions.

1.4 Spelling and curriculum overload

Furthermore, although literacy is the foundation of all education, the need to raise standards is not confined to literacy itself. Succeeding generations face new areas of study in the curriculum, with additional demands on curriculum time. This means that, even if literacy skills could be significantly improved simply by devoting more time to them, it may be difficult to make that extra time available. The NCC is aware of the danger of curriculum overload, and ways have to be sought of achieving higher standards of literacy without greater input of time. When present spelling conventions demonstrably waste learners' time, the role of those conventions as a major cause of the problem demands even more urgent attention.

1.5 Advantages of regular sound-symbol correspondence

A recent comparative study of literacy acquisition in English and Italian (Thorstad, 1991: see Section 3 of the Bibliography in Part III of this submission) showed that the much greater simplicity of Italian spelling enables Italian children to acquire their literacy skills faster, more effectively and with greater self-confidence than their English-speaking counterparts. Here lies a profound lesson for English, confirmed by the fact that whenever regularized spelling systems have been used for teaching literacy skills in English in the past 150 years, the same dramatically beneficial effects have been observed (see Bibliography, Section 2: Downing, 1967; Upward, 1992/2; Warburton & Southgate, 1969).

2. Constraints and opportunities

2.1 Diagnosis easy, treatment difficult

It is relatively easy to diagnose the problem, though there has been a widespread failure to attempt even that. It is rather less easy to devise improved spelling systems for English which, if implemented, would at least partially solve the problem (though the Simplified Spelling Society can suggest a range of possibilities). But not easy at all is the practical question of how changes to the English spelling system could be introduced. Some obvious obstacles are now discussed, along with the opportunities those very obstacles paradoxically also offer.

2.2 Political inhibition as a constraint

One obstacle is political inhibition. Before World War I President Theodore Roosevelt wanted to simplify English spelling in the USA, but finally desisted in the face of political opposition. In 1952 a Private Member's bill on spelling reform gained a majority in the House of Commons and in Committee, but the education minister (Florence Horsbrugh) only offered government support for experiments in teaching by simplified spelling, with no longer-term commitment. (The offer nevertheless had an important consequence in enabling the i.t.a. experiments to proceed.) In 1987 the Minister Baroness Hooper rejected the idea of any official spelling reform on the grounds that language change takes place gradually and naturally and is an inappropriate subject for legislation. Since writing is not 'natural' and its changes result from conscious human decision, the aspect of *natural* change will not be further considered here; but the concept of *gradual* change to the writing system will now be looked at more closely.

2.3 Change as an educational responsibility

Any proposal to make radical changes to English spelling must be expected to arouse controversy, anxiety and hostility in many quarters. A gradual (ie largely imperceptible) approach is likely to be the only politically acceptable one. We believe that the NCC could and should take some preliminary steps towards restarting the gradual evolution of English spelling which has virtually halted in the past 100 years. It is time that educational interests asserted a determining influence on English spelling again, as should be both their right and their duty. If this were done it would be

for the first time since Edmond Coote's *The English School-maister*, which with its 54 editions over 150 years from 1596 onwards perhaps more than any other work brought about the modernization of Elizabethan spelling. How the NCC might approach the task is discussed in §3 of this section, below.

2.4 Change as constraint and opportunity

Another obstacle is the difficulty of transition. No changes can be contemplated that would risk undermining written communication in English. Compatibility between old and new is a key requirement: no new spellings can be introduced that would not be easily understood by adults, nor must they endanger children's ability to read older texts. The implications for public use of new spellings (especially in publishing) would also need careful consideration, so that for instance any changes made did not entail bulk reprinting of old material. Again, a long-term programme of gradual change could ensure a smooth transition. Above all, in the present climate, spelling modernization must not involve heavy investment — it needs to be conceived as a process of wealth creation and economy, rather than of expenditure.

2.5 The international dimension

A third constraint is the international dimension. English is the prime world language, and ill-considered spelling changes to its written form in one country could have the effect of disrupting rather than facilitating international communication. However, if changes were organized in an appropriate manner, that danger could be avoided, indeed international interest could lend a strong impetus to the process, as the non-English-speaking world is acutely aware of the problems of the present spelling of English. There could be an opportunity here for Britain to give a lead to the world for which it is uniquely qualified. Indeed, if the changes were suitably conducted, there could be considerable commercial benefits, both for EFL teaching and for publishing.

2.6 'Managing' rather than 'reforming'

Dealing with such issues would be later stages in the process of 'managing' English spelling. Our Society has ideas on many of these questions, but believes they cannot be effectively promoted unless the concept of 'spelling management' itself is accepted in principle by an authority such as the NCC. In the longer term, the establishment of some kind of international advisory council for the English language would need to be envisaged.

3. Possible first steps in a gradual approach

3.1 Educating public opinion

The Simplified Spelling Society's research suggests that, although British public opinion does not as yet consider modernization of spelling as a matter of urgent practical import, it would welcome some rationalization of 'silly spellings'. The Society believes that the potential for public and political assent could be encouraged by building on such currently approved concepts as a 'return to basics' and 'correct spelling'. Firstly, public opinion could be educated as to the nature of the 'basics' by propagating the 10 axioms set out in Part I of this submission (we do not propose to discuss them further here). Secondly, by setting 'correct' spelling as an educational goal, the NCC could guide public opinion and the teaching profession towards a better and more critical understanding of the notion of 'correctness', which we will now explore further.

3.2 The importance of 'correctness'

The Simplified Spelling Society believes it is important that children learn to spell 'correctly', i.e. according to accepted conventions. We would urge that the reason for this should be made explicit in the NCC's review: children should learn to spell correctly not simply because the authorities say they must, but because the prime purpose of writing is to communicate, and successful communication depends on the writer of the message using the same conventions as the reader. 'Incorrect' or unconventional spelling interferes with, and at worst may even prevent, the

communication of the message. Children should be motivated to spell correctly not out of blind obedience, but out of self-interest (successful communication) and consideration for others (their readers).

3.3 Limitations of correctness

Two natural limitations on correctness need to be taken into account. One is that while learners are still at the second stage (the practice stage) of acquiring literacy skills and until they have reached the third stage (the stage of automaticity), mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. We would not presume to advise teachers on how to treat such errors. The second limitation on correctness is more serious, in principle entirely avoidable, yet an inevitable consequence of the antiquated English spelling system. As the Cox report observed, English spelling is too irregular for any writer (let alone the learner) to be expected never to make spelling mistakes. There is thus a dilemma: correct spelling must be the normal expectation, yet that expectation is at present unreasonable and unrealistic. We think that teachers and learners need the reassurance of knowing that the difficulties they face with English spelling today are inherent in the system's neglect of the alphabetic principle, and are not primarily the result of poor teaching, or of stupidity and laziness on the part of learners. We hope that the NCC will make these points in its review.

3.4 The need to define correctness

While the long term answer to the dilemma can only be to change the spelling of English so that correctness becomes both normal and realistic, in the short term a closer examination is needed of what 'correctness' can mean in practice. The concept is beset with uncertainty, and we believe that the NCC therefore needs to make a clear statement on the subject in its review. In §3.5 below we show just three examples of the uncertainty surrounding the concept, but at a deeper level there are as many uncertainties about correctness as there are irregularities in English spelling.

3.5 Three examples of uncertainty about correctness

1 Some conventional spellings are historically 'incorrect'. For instance, the conventional forms *scythe*, *foreign*, *could*, *island*, which flout the alphabetic principle with their silent <c, g, l, s>, are in fact historically less 'correct' than the alphabetically more consistent forms *sythe*, *iland*, *coud* and *forein*. Since one of the virtues often claimed for the present spelling of English is that it reflects the history of the language, we must ask whether children should be penalized if their natural inclination to observe the alphabetic principle leads them to use such historically more 'correct' and altogether more regular, although unconventional, spellings as *sythe*, *iland*, *coud*, *forein*.

2 A very large number of (especially rarer) words in English do not have a fixed, conventional spelling at all. Some more common examples are *jail*, *organize*, *yogurt*, *lychee* which can also be written as *gaol*, *organise*, *yoghurt* or *yoghourt*, and *lichi*, *litchi* or *lichee*. The NCC could specify which of such alternative forms is to be taught as 'correct', as determined by a longer term strategy for the modernization of English spelling based upon the alphabetic principle.

3 There is confusion (which can cause learners real distress) between British and American conventions. Should one write *traveled*, in accordance with the normal rule for <-ed> endings as the Americans do, or should one insist that British children learn that words ending in unstressed <-el> are exceptions and write *travelled* (but *paralleled* as an exception to the exceptions)? (Incidentally, if the form *travelled* is used, non-native speakers will tend to misconstrue its stress pattern and rhyme it with *compelled*.) Do British children have to be burdened with learning the arbitrary <pp/p> variation between *worshipped/gossiped*, when American children enjoy the single pattern of *worshipped/gossiped*? Can British children be allowed to write *program* in all cases as the Americans do, or must they learn an additional rule to distinguish computer *programs* from other *programmes*?

Again, as part of a longer term strategy, the NCC could specify that children be taught such more regular alternative spellings as may be current anywhere in the world.

The above examples of spelling uncertainties in English that unnecessarily confuse learners represent but a minute fraction of the total. Authorities who dispute this, claiming that English spelling is 'near-optimal' or 'superb', that its irregularity is 'exaggerated' or can be mastered by 'keeping one's head', should be challenged. The Simplified Spelling Society can present copious evidence that they are mistaken (see Bibliography, Section 1).

3.6 Applying the alphabetic principle

Such spelling variations as were listed in §3.5 above demonstrate that what is commonly thought of as 'correct' spelling is often merely an arbitrary convention, and that when such arbitrariness conflicts with the alphabetic principle, it adds enormously to the difficulties faced by learners. We would urge the NCC to state that 'correct' spelling is to be required of children, but to specify which spellings are to be taught and marked as 'correct'. In recommending one variant rather than another, the NCC should apply the alphabetic principle, and choose the spelling that conforms to the commonest patterns of sound-symbol correspondence in English. Taking the examples listed above in §3.5, the 'correct' forms to be learnt would be *jail*, *organize*, *yogurt*, *lychee*, *traveled*, *worshipped*, *program*. Such recommendations do of course require expert knowledge of the ramifications of English spelling, and the Simplified Spelling Society would be glad to advise.

3.7 Uncontroversially establishing a radical principle

Such recommended spellings would scarcely be controversial, as they are all widely used already, but they would apply a principle that has been largely ignored in the spelling of English since 1066. They would in themselves contribute only marginally to improved standards of literacy in the short term, but they would open the door for the extension of the principle to other spellings at a later date, once the principle had been publicly recognized, and thus to a more significant raising of standards eventually. Above all, they would alert the public and the teaching profession to some of the basic principles of good spelling of which there is at present little understanding.

4 Conclusion

In this submission we have only scratched the surface of a vast subject that has profound implications. No doubt the NCC could take other (perhaps much bolder) steps which would equally point English spelling forward to a better future. But in our judgment the above proposals have special merits: they are sensitive to the likely hostile reaction to any radical changes in English spelling, but would help educate the public and educationists in the true disciplines of a good alphabetic writing system. We would summarize our proposals in the following terms:

- 1 The NCC should give clear guidance on the 'basics' of spelling, along the lines suggested by our 10 axioms.
- 2 The NCC should consider the nature of 'correct' spelling, and apply the 'basics' to give appropriate guidance as part of a long-term strategic concept.

PART III

Annotated bibliography on English spelling, its problems and some possible solutions

* *Authors asterisked are (or were) members of the Simplified Spelling Society*

1 General information on the nature of English spelling

*ed. John DOWNING, *Comparative Reading*, Cross-National Studies of Behavior and Processes in Reading and Writing, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973 (demonstrates the ease with which literacy skills are achieved in languages with regular spelling systems, compared with English).

*Alfred Charles GIMSON, *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*, London: Edward Arnold, 3rd edition 1980 (lists spelling possibilities for each phoneme).

ed. Tom McARTHUR, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Oxford University Press, 1992 (separate entries, by *Christopher Upward, on the uses of each letter of the alphabet for spelling English).

Ian MICHAEL, *The Teaching of English from the sixteenth century to 1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1987 (gives a historical perspective on the confusion English spelling has always caused to both teachers and learners).

David MOSELEY & Catherine NICOL, *ACE (Aurally Coded English) Spelling Dictionary*, Wisbech: Learning Development Aids, (1986) 1989 (structured analysis of sound-symbol correspondences in English for use by learners).

The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981 (1984) (includes guidance on difficult spellings for professional writers).

Ed. G E POINTON, *BBC Pronouncing Dictionary of British Names*, Oxford: University Press, 1983 (guidance on how to interpret the spelling of names, for professional speakers).

*Donald G SCRAGG, *A history of English spelling*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974 (classic brief history of how English came to be spelt as it is).

*Christopher UPWARD, 'English Spelling and its Reform' in *terminologie & traduction*, Luxemburg: Commission of the European Communities, 1993/1, forthcoming (the history, problems, and present state of English spelling in an international context, with an outline of the main approaches to its reform).

George H VALLINS, *Spelling*, André Deutsch, 1954; revised by *Donald G Scragg, 1965 (readable overall survey of structure, history, reform proposals, etc, including chapter on American spelling).

2 Ideas on how English spelling and/or its teaching might be improved

*Robert BROWN, [Spelling reform in context](#), Simplified Spelling Society, 1991 (a typology, list and bibliography of English spelling reforms).

*John DOWNING, *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet*, London: Cassell, 1967 (major research report demonstrating the dramatic advantages of acquiring initial literacy skills in English using a regularized writing system).

*Laurence FENNELLY, [New Spelling 90](#), Simplified Spelling Society, 1991 (updated, popularized version of Ripman/Archer *New Spelling*, listed below).

Harry LINDGREN, *Spelling Reform — a New Approach*, Sydney Australia: Alpha Books, 1969 (proposal for one-phoneme-at-a-time regularization of sound-symbol correspondences in English, leading ultimately to total regularization using diacritics).

John Henry MARTIN and Ardy FRIEDBERG, *Writing to Read*, New York: Warner Books Inc., 1986 (IBM-sponsored system of teaching literacy skills on computer using regularized spelling).

*Sir James PITMAN & John ST JOHN, *Alphabets & Reading*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd, 1969 (broad historical account of writing systems and the psychology of their use, as a basis for explaining the rationale of the initial teaching alphabet).

*Walter RIPMAN and William ARCHER, [*New Spelling*](#), London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd, 1948, revised by Daniel Jones and Harold Orton (classic system of fully regularized spelling of English using only letters of the traditional alphabet).

*Christopher UPWARD, [*English Spelling and Educational Progress*](#), CLIE Working Papers No.11, British Association for Applied Linguistics/Linguistics Association of Great Britain, 1988 (refutes recent favourable assessments of English spelling and tries to place it in historical and global context, concluding that it needs to be modernized).

* — , [*Cut Spelling: a handbook to the simplification of written English by omission of redundant letters*](#), Birmingham: Simplified Spelling Society, 1992 (detailed analysis of redundant letters as the most serious problem of present English spelling, with demonstration of the effects of their removal).

* — , 'Teaching Literacy First, Spelling Second', chapter in *Psychology, Spelling & Education*, Multilingual Matters, 1992 (describes the successes achieved over the past 150 years whenever literacy skills in English have been taught initially through regularized spelling system).

F W WARBURTON & Vera SOUTHGATE, *i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation*, for the Schools Council, London: John Murray and W & R Chambers 1969 (independent confirmation of John Downing's 1967 evaluation of the initial teaching alphabet).

*Axel WIJK, *Regularized English*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959 (detailed catalogue of the irregularities of English spelling, with suggestions for how symbol-sound, though not sound-symbol, irregularities could be overcome).

3 Some relevant recent articles

David MOSELEY, 'How Lack of Confidence in Spelling Affects Children's Written Expression' in *Educational Psychology in Practice*, April 1989 (demonstrates how the irregular spelling of English restricts writers' powers of written expression more generally).

*Gwenllian THORSTAD, [*The effect of orthography on the acquisition of literacy skills*](#) in *British Journal of Psychology*, 82: 527–37, 1991 (demonstrates the dramatic advantages learners enjoy in acquiring literacy skills in Italian compared with English).

*Christopher UPWARD 'Is English spelling more difficult than German?' in *Journal of Research in Reading*, 1992/2, pp82–94 (demonstrates how native speakers of English find English spelling to be almost seven times more difficult than German).

* — , 'A simplified spelling answer to literacy problems' in *Viewpoints 13 — Methodological Issues in Basic Skills*, London: Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit, pp28–36, 1992 (discusses some widespread current misapprehensions about the acquisition of literacy skills in English, and suggests how simplified spelling could help overcome the problems).

*Valerie YULE, 'The Design of Spelling to Match Needs and Abilities', in *Harvard Educational Review* Vol.56, No.3 August 1986, pp278–307 (a humane philosophy of rational spelling design).

3. Improving English spelling for readers The necessity for research

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It is possible to improve English spelling for readers, and omission of letters surplus to readers' needs could facilitate fluency and comprehension in reading. These two statements must be demonstrated by research, not left to argument or assumption. This article discusses the visual phonological and morphemic features to be considered in designing optimal spelling for readers. It emphasises the need to cater for the wide range of linguistic ability among English-speakers and internationally, and outlines the design of some of the research required and extant to determine what spelling changes may be most quickly adjusted to by present readers, and what changes could improve reading skills most.

Spelling reformers have a hard time of it because present English spelling is generally assumed to be unchangeable — unlike almost anything else around them, even the language itself. But the whole field of reading is also full of assumptions, many of them taken for granted by spelling reformers themselves. This article is not as simple as it may seem in its review of some long-lived assumptions.

Improving English spelling to improve reading

Conservatives do not realise that English spelling needs to be improved to help readers. The spelling reform movement in general does not either. Both sides tend to assume that learning to read is the battlefield, and that once someone can read, the nature of the writing system is not a further issue.

Spelling reformers focus on improving English spelling for learners and writers, who are seen to suffer so greatly from traditional orthography (TO) (Yule 1991). The stated aims of the Simplified Spelling Society (1992) are *'to bring about a reform of the spelling of English in the interests of ease of learning and economy in writing.'*

'And what about the workers?' cries a voice from the back.
What about the major users of the written word — the readers?

The importance of reading in spelling reform

Conservatives are, I think, correct in making ease of reading the top priority for a writing system, although wrong in arguing that the very features of English spelling that make it difficult to learn make it easier to read, and so should not be changed. Only a few writers are actually needed to keep a modern economy and society operating, and computers can now handle the spelling mechanics for them. But it is desirable for everybody to be able to read, and almost every literate person spends a good deal of work and leisure time reading the printed word. Learning to read is a once-in-a-lifetime task (normally), and if the end result is sufficiently rewarding in status/ pleasure/ opportunity/ money, and teaching is excellent, learners will make as great an effort to learn as sportsmen today to excel in sport, for the same reasons — as in 18th century Scotland, which had 90% literacy compared to England's estimated 16%, and modern Japan (although this is no good argument for leaving a poor writing system unimproved).

Some authors also state boldly that an orthography easy to learn might be too difficult to read or write, or that the most economic writing might be very difficult to read or to learn (e.g. Frith 1980). Shaw's alphabet, probably the most economical English spelling conceivable is very difficult to learn and even its designer found it hard to write (Read 1973). A spelling system needs to be a 'best fit' for the needs and abilities of all three categories of user.

There is also the pragmatic point that power resides with those who are already literate, and they will be most likely to accept spelling change if it promotes and facilitates reading with comprehension with minimal disruption to their present habits.

Improving print for readers

Research-based knowledge is continually growing on how readers can be helped by the way writers organize and express their messages. We have a growing research base for knowledge on how reading can be facilitated by improvements in layouts, paragraphing, fonts, print size, and colors for typeface and background (See for example the work of James Hartley at Keele). We know that spacing words and the addition of punctuation are definitely invaluable inventions to aid readers and there is also research on the most efficient direction for a script (e.g. Gray, 1956).

The greatest gaps in our knowledge about how to improve print for readers are at the most essential level, in how writing systems themselves may facilitate or handicap. Indeed, research in spelling reforms is an excellent way to expand our knowledge of how people read, since at least 95% of the world's reading research available in English has been conducted with the assumption that TO is a fixed fact of life, as well as current fact of English print. (A rough estimate from the bibliographies of reading research now available on CD-Rom, such as ERIC and Silver Platter.)

The following discussion of print for readers will assume continuation of the Roman alphabetic script, since it is in line with international usage, although still keeping, on the back burner of the mind, the possibility of some future revolutionary breakthrough to a completely different type of writing system that can cross languages.

Research with an immediate practice orientation must consider:

- a) Sales appeal. What type of spelling reform could current literates adjust to immediately with ease?
- b) User appeal. What type of spelling reform would turn out to benefit readers more than the spelling they already know, after an adjustment and practice period of say six months?
- c) Future appeal. What type of spelling reform would benefit future readers most, disregarding the retirements of those presently literate and maintenance of backwards compatibility?

A standard spelling for readers

A standard spelling system is needed for all readers, regardless of their reading strategies. 'Spelling as you speak', without any standard, has been advocated as a solution to writers' spelling problems [1], but this would make a massive increase in difficulty for readers. Most people cannot write down accurately how they or anyone else actually speaks; and even when they can, the extreme differences between dialects and continents would hinder communication. The growing babelisation of spoken English is becoming an increasing concern, as national and local sentiments override the purpose of international communication. (See, for example, articles in *English Today*, such as McArthur 1987 and Urdang 1990). Local spellings would increase this centrifugal disintegration of the English language.

A standard spelling for readers is also essential because fast automatic word identification depends upon the familiarity of the orthography. This is easily proven. Try reading stories full of misprints or in dialect spelling even when there are no diacritics.

Curiously, this automatic word recognition seems unaffected by changes in font or print-size. Salient words such as your name or special interests jump out of a page at you, regardless of how they are printed. In the Stroop test, when good readers try to name colors of colored inks used to write the names of other colors, they get confused by what the words say, whereas very poor readers can name the colored inks without being distracted by what the print says. That is, word-recognition does not take place at the level of the literal visual appearance of words, but from an abstraction, as a more centrally located process. This is why the letters and the spelling that make up orthography matter, even though their exact shape or dress does not.

This still leaves room for alternative spellings, as they can become familiar too. Our dictionaries accept alternative spellings for thousands of words, e.g. JAIL/GOAL, and SILVAN/SYLVAN. These are

immediately recognised because of their familiarity. More words could have alternative spellings within a standard spelling system — but that standard orthography remains essential.

Expert readers, average readers, struggling readers.

A spelling reform must take into account that the needs of readers of different ability will differ to some extent. To some extent, what suits learners will suit readers, since many adult readers remain basically learners and almost every reader must encounter unfamiliar words. But the reading strategies of expert and weak readers can be very different. Some 5% of the literate population — an estimate extrapolated from research in tertiary institutions — are fast readers who can process complex prose with ease and apparently skim pages. Expert readers can master almost any form of script, and a spelling reform should enable them to skim even faster, harvesting meaning at a glance, to the limit of their inbuilt information-processing capacities of their nervous system. [2]

On the other hand, a high proportion of the English-reading population operates hardly above basic literacy. Since most of them do not read for pleasure, they do not learn to read fast, and will continually be encountering words that they have never read before, or have forgotten.

And at least 15% of the 'literate' population continue to struggle in reading as if they were perpetual novices. Surveys of adult semi-literacy in English-speaking countries are periodically luridly reported in the press (see for example International Literacy Year reports). Further, most readers of English today are not native English speakers, and therefore need an English spelling that links the written word closely to the spoken word, so that they can increase their knowledge of spoken as well as written English through their experience of reading, and use their knowledge of the spoken language to help them in their reading.

Spelling is important for reading

A common belief in education is that spelling may be relevant to writing, and even to learning to read, but not to reading. The foremost guru is Frank Smith (1982), although Goodman (1982) also stresses that good readers rely on prediction from context and the visual configuration of features of words that become automatically recognised through familiarity; reading is 'a psycholinguistic guessing game'. However, in this game, the best readers have multiple strategies to operate with while poorer readers may have only a few resources or perhaps even only one. They easily suffer information overload if trying to operate more than one strategy at once. Trouble occurs with poor readers when they can only use phonics without developing visual memory (slow poor reading) or can only rely on memory for sight words and guessing (inaccurate poor reading). A spelling reform to help all types of poor readers would be sufficiently phonemic, morphemic and consistent to make all strategies easier for poor readers, to allow them to capitalise on more techniques, and benefit more from their own particular strengths. How can the spelling system maximise the accessibility of multiple strategies in reading?

Fonemic spelling reform for readers

Some conservatives claim that it is important for readers that English orthography should not be 'phonetic'. In this, of course, they overlook the abilities of readers in the many languages that do have a more consistently phonemic spelling than English — and in fact, comparative research on this matter is not easy to find. There are several lines of argument put up against a 'phonetic' spelling system for English readers. All can be found fallacious, I think.

Gillooly (1973) has made an influential claim that a phonetic spelling reform would slow down readers, on the grounds that it would force them into 'sounding out' in order to read. This claim ignores the fact that a printed word once familiar, is no longer 'sounded out', but recognised immediately — and indeed for skilled readers, even the 'sounding out' is not the slow articulation it is for a learner, but a fast mental abstract process. Readers in languages with basically phonemic spellings such as Italian are not restricted to phonological strategies any more than we are.

It is also commonly confidently stated in textbooks on reading that 'the reformed spelling may simplify the pronunciation of words, the cost would be high to skilled readers who get grammatical and semantic

information about words from their orthographic forms' (Gibson 1975, p 187). But a reformed spelling could easily improve on TO's present shaky representation of grammatical and semantic information, as consistent modifiers of a basic alphabetic principle of sound-symbol correspondence, e.g. participles could still conclude with -D/ED without needing to distinguish /d/t/ pronunciations, and plurals could be concluded with -s, without needing to distinguish /s/z/ pronunciation.

Gibson states as confidently: 'The principal basis for the efficient recognition of words is the intraword conditional redundancies generated by orthographic rules. Phonetically precise spelling would remove these important clues to efficient word perception.' [3] But could a reformed spelling improve on these supposed benefits of TO for readers? As described by Gibson herself (pp 190 ff) the 'intraword conditional redundancies generated by orthographic rules' refers to information about letter constraints that reduce uncertainty and facilitate reading the word. These constraints are conditional rules about position of consonant clusters, and number of vowels that can follow one another. As readers gain experience, they are increasingly able to make use of this knowledge for speedy word recognition. *However*, the fallacy of the anti-reformers lies in not recognising that a consistent basically phonemic English spelling system would still have such constraints just as much, or even more, than our present less predictable TO. Orthographic redundancy, legal letter sequences, and pronounceability would simply work more closely together, and so more efficiently.

To be universally accessible to readers, a standard alphabetic writing system must be sufficiently decodable for poor average readers and overseas readers, as well as learners, to be able to work out unfamiliar words with accuracy. And unless we have picture or symbol writing, that must mean a visible relationship to the spoken language — i.e. to some degree phonemic. Although not necessarily purely phonemic, as long as consistency is maintained.

There is still controversy over how much dialect speakers are disturbed in their reading by phonemic spelling that reflects a standard pronunciation. However, the evidence is that today internationally 'English-knowers' can understand British Received Pronunciation or standard American speech from film and broadcasting, and spelling that follows these two speech forms can also be understood as a very broad-band (diafonic rather than phonemic) representation of anyone's speech, even when it is most closely connected to those norms. [4] When communication rather than self-expression is the aim of any writing, then the wider the readership that can recognise the spoken language that is represented the better. This type of uniformity is as sensible as having standard gauges for nuts and bolts, and standard gauges for linked railways.

Beginners learning to read must have some sort of phonological strategy to help them work out new words, unless they have unusually good visual memories (Yule 1992) — hence the major problem for young deaf learners. For learners who practice with motivation, automatic recognition of the words quickly follows, and it is only novel words that absolutely require the phonological route. A good reader sails ahead mainly on automatic recognition and clues from prediction, but phonology remains a back-up, not only as the chief strategy for novel words, but as the safest means of checking the accuracy of guessing from minimal clues, and reinforcing visual recognition.

There is some evidence that phonology monitors their reading anyway, even with logographic scripts. In the first place, a good reader uses short term memory to remember the beginning of a sentence by the time the end is reached, and this appears to have a strong phonological mediation. Expert readers are also sensitive to style and the rhythms of text, which supports the notion that they can 'hear' as well as see what they read. In tests of language skills, including phonological skills, they usually come out well ahead of other categories of reader. Although some say it is the reading experience that develops the phonological skills, the evidence suggests that the process is spiral, each factor encouraging further development of the other.

That is, phonology does matter to all categories of reader, and so an improved spelling should attempt to remove impediments in the way of consistent phonological representation.

Howevr, I wud also claim that a completely fonemic spelling wud not be in th best intrests of readrs, any mor than in th best intrests of child lernrs (Yule, 1992). Alfabetic spellings shud maximise th advantaj of th alfabetic principl of linking th ritn languaj to th spoken, but consistent modifications of such a fonemic spelling may also help readability. Th need for modification derives from th nature of th English languaj itself. Much of th vocabulary is bilt up from base morfemes (units of meaning); all polysylabls contain unstressd vowels which present a problem for fonemic representation; there is a furthr problem with around nineteen English vowel sounds and only five Latin letrs availabl to represent them; and while th hi numbr of homofones (words that sound th same) is not th major issue that is sometimes stressd by oponents of fonemic improvements, they must also be considrd.

Fonology and representation of morfemes

Conservativs oftn cite Chomsky's opinion that English spelling is alrady 'optiml' for readrs becaus, he claims, it represents th underlying lexicl forms of th languaj, in that when related morfemes chanje pronunciation, th spelling wil, he claims, stil represent th same 'underlying fonology' (Chomsky 1970). Chomsky's theory has been explodrd by th evidence not once, but many times (see Downing & Leong 1982, Yule 1991 for bibliografys of reserch) but it is stil quoted like any theory that justifies th status quo or a vestd interest — explodabl but unsinkable. His anecdotal evidence of related spellings such as NATION/NATIONAL, MEDICINE/MEDICAL, as wel as th singl letr vowel representation for both long and short vowels in polysyllabic words such as EDUCATION/EDUCABLE and IMPOSE/IMPOSITION/IMPOSING — with IMPOSTER — as a derivative can be countrd by a mass of anti-Chomsky exampls in English spelling such as SPEAK/SPEECH, FIRE/ FIERY, SUCCEED/SUCCESSION. Howevr, there is a case that English spelling might be improved for all categorys of user if it wer modified to resembl his ideal mor closely than Chomsky fancies alrady exists. In practice Chomsky's argument about representation of 'deep fonology' means stable representation of morfemes. Th argument is basicly that readrs can undrstand meaning mor qikly if words with similr related meanings share a comn spelling base, so that recognition of morfemic elements can lead strait into reading for meaning (e.g. COM= with, MEDI= related to medicin, ANTI= against). This relationship cud easily be improved in English spelling, if morfemes (units of meaning) wer consistently speld mor clearly and stably than they ar now. A morfo-fonemic spelling wud be basicly fonemic, but modified consistently to promote visibl representation of units of meaning, e.g. JELI/JELID, STABILITY/STABIL. However, reserch is needed to find th actual degree to which visibl identity needs be preservd. For exampl it is probably a matr of one-trial lerning to realise that FLY/FLIGHT/FLEW/FLIES (or even SLAY/SLAUGHTER/SLEW) hav related meanings — but cud a reformd spelling speed th process of reading for meaning if th words wer speld say FLY/FLYT/FLYS/FLU?

Improving vowel spelling for readrs.

TO has over 318 vowel spelling patrn for th 19 or so English vowel sounds. One argument that has been put up is that this adds to th distinctivness of words for practisd readrs, so that they ar imediatly distinguishd and recognisrd mor esily, since they hav mor distinctiv features. And so there is a value in spelling demons such as BEAUTY, MAUVE, FLEGM. Th oposing argument is that rationalised and consistent vowel spellings wud speed word recognition, in line with th primacy of th Word Frequency efect, that th mor freqcntly a word ocur in print, th fastr it is recognisrd by readrs. On this argument, th mor frequently a spelling patrn ocur, th fastr th recognition of a word containing it, if th whole-word frequency efect itself is held constant.

BUTY might ride on th bak of DUTY, MOVE on STOVE, FLEM on THM. Certainly analojy stratejys cud facilitate reading by bakwrdr readrs, if all th vowel spelling patrn wer reduced to say only forty, which wud allow for distinctivness of final position vowel spellings, a grater degree of bakards compatibility with our heritaj of print, reduction of adjustments required for present readrs, and alternativ spellings for homofones when this is proved desirabl by reserch.

Almost evry spelling reform recognises representation of th 19+ English vowel sounds as th gratest difculty in TO and problem for reform. Our most comn usajes for th singl letrs A E I O U do not

match their use on the Continent and in most other alphabetic orthographies of the world — although this is not a major problem in view of human ability to adjust quickly and even automatically to any consistent systematic change of values. However, the distinction between long and short vowels in print is a major spelling problem in TO and a major ticklish problem for spelling reformers. Dozens of different expedients to represent the long vowels have been suggested and a wide disparity has been incorporated into TO to add to the confusion.

In TO, doubled consonants and 'magic <e>' are clumsy and erratically applied expedients to retain stable morphemic representation, (e.g. MAT/MATTING, MATE/MATING). Modified spellings may attempt to introduce new letters, or diacritics, or follow the practices of reform proposals such as World English Spelling, the Initial Teaching Alphabet, American Spelling and New Spelling which remove the clumsiness and inconsistencies but also the morphemic stability by using the digraphs AE, EE, IE, OE, and UE, of which two are relatively unusual combinations and one is given a new pronunciation. Upward's Cut Spelling is original in the degree to which it completely suppresses schwa indeterminate vowels, and by so doing clarifies the distinction between short and long vowels, e.g. HOP/HOPNG/HOPE/HOPING. This eliminates the need for doubled consonants, although Upward retains the convention of using 'magic' silent letters -E and -I that can indicate a long preceding vowel. Yule's moderate CS retains doubled consonants rather than delete as radically. J. H. Martin's introductory spelling system uses an optional macron to distinguish long vowels, but allows children in their own writing to make little distinction between long and short vowels, as is their normal practice, as well as evident in pidgin spellings, which fulfil a need for maximum simplicity and broad-band representation. The neatest solution is clearly Upward's CS. But research must find whether this is the most user-friendly. [\[5\]](#)

Unstressed vowels are a notable feature of spoken English, and their erratic spelling is a notable feature of written English. They are sometimes omitted, as in TABLING, spelled with < e > as equivalent to a schwa as in LABELLED, spelled according to a formal pronunciation that matches related words as in METAL/METALLIC, CIVIL/CIVILITY, or quite unpredictably, as in SCHOLAR/ACTOR/WAITER/MURMUR/TAPIR. Most spelling reformers are unconsciously influenced by TO in representing schwa, but attempt to make the spelling less of a guessing game. Cut Spelling cuts a number of Gordian knots in completely cutting out schwa spellings, as in METL, CIVIL, SCOLR, ACTR, WAITR, MURMR, simultaneously deleting the spelling problem, clarifying the pronunciation, and shortening the words to save time, energy, ink, paper and money. To the degree that it clarifies the pronunciation and shortens words, Cut Spelling should therefore benefit readers. Since it deletes letters, rather than substituting others, it should hardly disturb them, since the appearance of the word remains basically unchanged. Upward gives the analogy of 'shorn lambs', which still remain recognisable as lambs.

However, when CVC clarification of pronunciation is replaced by consonant clusters in more radical deletions such as SPELNG, EVANJLISM, or INSRECTION, will it benefit or handicap readers? Or may it both benefit expert readers by helping them to speed up, and handicap troubled readers by complicating their decoding and impeding their vocabulary development? This is where research is essential before setting up a final model.

The homophone argument against phonological representation for readers is only a side-issue. It has often been argued that a completely phonemic spelling would not suit readers of the English language because there are so many words that sound the same (homophones) and that these must all be spelled differently to avoid confusion. It is, however, easy to point out that 90% of the time homophones are read in a context that automatically indicates the sense in which they are being used — for example, in this paragraph, no reader would have hesitated over the possible ambiguity of SIDE, ISSUE, SOUND, MUST, POINT, OUT, TIME, SENSE, BEING, OVER. There are probably only a few dozen words, if that, which may continue to require visual distinction because they are often used contiguously, e.g. TO, TOO, TWO, and FOR, FOUR, FORE. Many current heterographs may prove not really necessary, including perhaps, from this paragraph, Th/ThE, BEEN/BEAN, WUD/WOOD, NOT/KNOT, THER/THIR, SO/SEW/SOW, BEE/BE, ALL/AWL, RED/READ, NO/KNOW.

Visual recognition of words in reading

It is widely supposed that visual recognition of words enables faster reading (on analogy with the speed of light, and of seeing) than phonological decoding (speed of articulation, or even speed of sound or of hearing), although there is some evidence that for the skilled reader both these processes may take place closer to central brain processes than to actual sight, hearing or speech. Comprehension processes may act as fast on what one may 'hear in one's head' as on what one can 'see in one's mind's eye', because neither have external physical time constraints. All visual orthographic features that readers might use include recognition of orthographic regularities (i.e. recurring spellings for segments within words; the greater salience of consonants over vowels; the importance of the initial letters of a word, followed by the final ones, with medial letters possibly even ignored; the top half of the line of print conveying more than the bottom half; and idiosyncratic configurations — special configurations that make some words stand out, e.g. GIRAFFE. Fast readers may be like sports stars in ability to change tack and pick the best strategy as they go along.

The value of none of these strategies would be affected by spelling reform, as soon as readers had adjusted to the changed appearances.

Economy of word length as an advantage for readers

Short words are easier to read than long words, other things being equal. There is anecdotal evidence that Finnish is slower to read than English despite its phonemic consistency, because its average word-length is seven letters. However, if all words are reduced to about the same short length, text looks less readable and I think this could be proven. '*Shorter words make faster reading*' does not apply if all the words are short, despite the copy-editor's misleading title given to an edited *New Scientist* article on deleting surplus letters for a practicable spelling reform (Cut Spelling 1, Yule 1982). In continuum text there appears to be an advantage in a mixture of word lengths. In English, the function words tend to be 1–3 letters and the content words tend to be longer, which highlights the most important vocabulary, and adds to the variety of visible distinguishing features, thus creating visual distinctions that are similar to the Japanese use of complex kanji complemented by simple syllabic *kana*.

This probable advantage of a 'mixed economy' could be tested. For example a design for a pilot experiment compares reading three texts of cognitive difficulty and similar zoological content. One paragraph consists of short words about bears, foxes and birds, the second uses only longer words about hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses and elephants, and a third is constructed with a 'normal mix of word lengths'.

Cut Spelling

A spelling improvement by deletion of letters surplus to representation of pronunciation or meaning has benefits for learners and writers that have been pointed out elsewhere. For readers the advantages are economy in word length — there is less to process or to skim, and there is less intrusive clutter for both decoding and automatic word recognition.

A comparison of the value of simple spellings as against more complex and less predictable spellings was undertaken by a VDU lexical decision experiment, using words that have more than one spelling accepted in dictionaries. 'Press the black button if you immediately recognise this as a real word, regardless of any misspelling.' However, the findings were that familiarity was what mattered most for fast recognition of words, not their length or economy. It was the dictionary's preferred spelling, its first listing, that was recognised faster and with most certainty. Nevertheless, three subjects who had had a limited exposure to 'Cut Spelling' were more likely to respond faster to the simpler of the alternative spellings — and this clue needs to be followed up. If replicated, it shows that Cut Spelling principles can be taken on board very quickly, and generalised quickly to other vocabulary. This would also demonstrate clearly that as a strategy to teach a spelling reform, a generalisable principle gets results more rapidly than simply lists of words.

Readers' response to spelling changes

Immediate adjustment. A key experiment by Yule & Greentree (1986) compared the speed with which matched groups of subjects read for meaning several paragraphs of texts in five different spelling modes, with comprehension tests. Differences between reading in normal spelling and in both versions of Cut Spelling were not significant, followed by a control text for Cut Spelling in which other letters had been deleted. A morpho-phonemic spelling on Chomskian principles ranked next, while a phonemic spelling, World English Spelling, was significantly slower to read than all the others.

Substitution of letters was clearly a more disruptive visible change than deletion of 'superfluous letters'.

Testing 'Cut' spellings for readers

A range of pilot experiments (Yule 1991) call for replication, since replication is more convincing in this field than probability statistics. They seek to test readers' speed and comprehension on first reading in a moderate Cut Spelling. Some of these experiments will be published in detail, but replication is also desirable with more efficient electronic technology than was available to the writer, to determine which forms of letter deletion are helpful or disadvantageous for readers, and the principles that would explain and predict effects. Their designs will be briefly outlined.

Subject groups required include readers who are naive, novice or practised in Cut Spellings, and at differing levels of reading ability. Control groups read TO or other reformed spellings.

Paper and pencil experiments use a series of set texts for different types of operations at varying levels of reading complexity, and in both TO and Cut Spellings. Subjects can be tested on speed and comprehension of reading in each spelling mode, or asked to mark all 'misspellings' that they notice while reading the passages — when CS spellings such as ACOMODATE pass most subjects' observation, they are surely fit for official general use. Or subjects may be asked to underline CS spellings they approve, or to rewrite the passage in the spelling they would like to have.

Tacitoscopic or VDU experiments using TO and CS plus control pseudowords are scored for speed, accuracy, and with note taken of misreadings. Single words can be presented for lexical decision in a Latin square design ('Is this a word — taking no account of any misspelling'); Phrases can be presented ('Does this make sense?' e.g. 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' or 'JUMPING CARPET') and sentences requiring Yes/No key responses to questions of fact, such as 'AR CHOCOLATE, USUALLY GREEN?' In this type of experiment so far, TO remains significantly superior to CS for naive subjects, but some types of letter deletion appear more immediately acceptable than others. The potential of CS is seen in the far greater difficulty subjects have in recognising words which have control letter deletions. Some letters in words appear to be surplus; other letters most definitely are essential.

One experiment explores the possibility that good readers with very fast word recognition might have a mental 'form of the word' that is not necessarily TO, but may follow basic spelling structure without surplus letters, and so be an objective template for Cut Spellings. A question here of course, is that individuals may differ in their mental 'form of the word' according to their earliest experiences of the word. This question could be tested using masked priming techniques, which could hone down what forms would then be most helpful in print, and take account of the differing needs of good and poor readers. A pilot test of this question with a limited sample of words did not support this proposition — the answer appeared to be that visual appearance was still the major factor in the form of the word for average readers. However, one excellent reader who had experience of CS before provided support for the hypothesis, and this result requires replication. If not a chance effect, it could be determined whether the finding could be attributed to superior reading skill or to the CS experience. Masked priming experiments need to be repeated with a wider range of words, and include groups of very good readers, poor readers, and readers with prior practice in CS.

Can readers use analogical spelling strategies in adapting to spelling changes?

The answer is yes, according to a pilot lexical decision experimental series in which readers who had been tested with one list of words, were next tested with a list of other words using analogous TO or CS spellings — e.g. LITL/SKITL or READR/TAILR. Findings need replication but indicate that readers may make rapid adjustment to CS.

The effects of practice

Spellings need to be tested not only for readers' immediate adjustment, in experiments which are quite simple to do, but also by more difficult and expensive research that can explore how much reading practice would be required for subjects to read (or rite) better in CS than in TO, and what the ceiling of efficiency might be. Little exposure may be needed after all, as Beech's experiment with his Regular Spelling subjects (Beech 1983). In an experiment in the effects of reading practice conducted by Yule & MacKay (1987), 41 normal and poor readers read a series of forty texts in an experimental cut spelling for an hour each weekday for a month, with a similar control group of 41 subjects reading in TO. This pilot experiment incurred some weaknesses through practical exigencies — for example individuals operated their own stop-watches — but post-experimental findings were that differences in final reading rate and comprehension between the control and experimental groups were generally not significant. There was an intriguing indication, both objectively and subjectively, that some of the poor readers who had practised CS by reading the texts with surplus letters omitted, improved their ability and interest in reading in normal spelling, whereas the poor readers in the TO control group did not. It was unfortunate that circumstances prevented the planned follow-up to test for long-term effects. An experiment like this requires replication, with follow-up over time.

All such further experiments require replication that include subjects who have had prior experience in CS. Findings should be compared according to subjects' degree of experience and practice and prior level of reading skill, and there should be some comparisons with other types of possible reform — e.g. *New Spelling 90*.

Testing readers' comprehension

Gillooly (1976) and other critics of phonemic spelling have claimed that it would force readers to use phonemic strategies permanently in reading, and be forced to 'bark at print' without 'reading directly for meaning'. This is manifestly untrue, because readers of a phonemic spelling have the double advantage of being able to decode new words as well as the acquiring automatic recognition of familiar vocabulary. Most of the great readers of the past few hundred years were taught by phonetic methods, but this did not hold them back from developing speedy reading strategies.

However, it is quite possible that the nature of a spelling system may make it easier or harder to get the meaning quickly. Japanese claim that their ideographs make reading for meaning faster and easier than a script which is a linear sequence representing sounds — e.g. a train traveller can read the name of an approaching station sooner in its *kanji* version than from the accompanying linear *hiragana* or roman alphabetic notices.

Research on reading a reformed spelling must test comprehension of meaning in oral and silent reading. Now most comprehension tests consist of easily marked multiple-answer questions, allowing up to 50% guessing, or questions supply a structure from which guessing is possible, e.g. 'What colour were the tentpegs?' 'Why did the men want to get to Katmandu?' More valid tests of comprehension take longer to mark, but give more insight into what sort of purposeful comprehension is going on. One test consists of open-ended questions to be answered in writing if possible orally if not, with instructions such as 'What is the gist of this paragraph? List three facts or ideas from this paragraph.'

This sounds simple when the paragraph is only around 150 words and content is simple. The test does not even force the readers to focus on questions the examiner might focus on. It tests the readers' own personal tasks. Yet my experience with this type of comprehension question shows that even undergraduates are distressingly liable to errors and misinterpretations in what they read, because they

do not read accurately. This is a serious problem in practical affairs — and we see the disastrous effects every day in the way even journalists misinterpret simple facts through 'careless reading'. Much reading by weak readers is just 'going through the motions'. To what extent may TO be to blame for their error-condoning reading strategies?

Another feature to be investigated is why many people, regardless of whole-word, phonics or whole-language training, cannot answer such comprehension questions after first reading, even though the paragraph may have been very short and simple, and readers know in advance that they will be asked for three ideas or facts from it. These readers have to read the paragraph twice, as if once to get the words and again to get the consecutive thought. (Even expert readers of course have to reread when the thought or expression is complex.) Could a reformed spelling help these readers to get as far as the meaning on the first time around?

Spelling reform for all categories of reader

Any spelling reform should not ignore the fact that the bulk of the English speaking population and a high proportion of international readership would never have the linguistic capacity to be super-readers in English. A spelling reform that does not cater for their needs is missing its point, however theoretically perfect it may be. It is particularly desirable that our present social subclass of illiterates and semiliterates should be able to read easily, and so have more chance of being a prosperous part of the whole society. It is possible that a two-level spelling system may be necessary, as in Israel or even Greece, to cater for the difference between those who can read very well because of their high verbal intelligence and visual memory for print, and those whose functioning intelligence could be greatly promoted by their reading, but who are not above the average in basic capacity. It may prove desirable for example, to print tertiary-level texts in economic CS if it promotes the fastest processing, and material for the general public in more moderate CS if that gives a more immediate key to the spoken language.

The 'average reader' and the 'backward reader' and the 'dyslexic' may still retain to some extent characteristics of learners — constantly needing to decode vocabulary if its appearance and even meaning are unfamiliar through novelty or their own poor visual memory. Research must determine whether the difficulty they have in working out consonant clusters in TO would also apply to CS, in words such as PERMNNT and HERR. The question of whether consonant clusters would continue to be a base in automatic recognition of familiar words also needs to be settled. Experience with pinyin spellings suggests that vowel interspersions aid readability for average readers, e.g. TABEL is easier than TABLE. It may be that acclimatisation may be easier for consonant clusters in very common words, just as irregular spellings cause least difficulty in everyday reading in the most common words. Long and less familiar words may still require a crutch — to be less intimidating as well as intrinsically easier to decode.

Conclusion

Research can attempt to improve the spelling system to benefit readers. A reformed spelling that benefits learners and writers will not sacrifice its advantages for them if it is given consistent modifications in order to maximise the advantages of readers. A reformed spelling should enable readers to utilise all existing reading strategies for greater accuracy, speed and better understanding in reading than is generally developed at present with TO. Reading can be transformed from a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' to an 'efficient psycholinguistic process' that would be even more fun, because the reader never loses the game. As the people are able to read more, and therefore know more, and reason more, the functioning intelligence of the population is effectively improved. And they can develop tastes that extend beyond the present level of our mass-readership tabloids.

Copies of the author's experimental designs and materials mentioned in this article are available to replicate experiments.

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Footnotes

- [1] A futur articl on spelling reform for riters discounts th claim that 'spelling as yu speak' wud be betr for them than standrd conventions.
- [2] There may be a limit to how fast even these most expert readrs can read for comprehension, regardless of riting system. There may be a ceiling for how much information th human nervus system can take in qikly, and there ar also grat individual difrences in this capacity. Howeivr, this factr of bilt-in limitation is one that shud be taken acount of by th riters seeking to comunicate, rather than by any atempt to restrict th structure of th riting system itself. Remember that th QWERTY keybord was deliberately designed to slow down th typist so that th keys of a typeriter wud not jam — and now wen this problem is obsolete, we ar stil stuck with QWERTY.
- [3] Here we again meet th usual asumption that th only reform posibl for English spelling is pure fonemic.
- [4] Nevertheless, spelling reformrs shud be careful about assuming that we all share a comn English languaj that is represented in their own proposals. Their own eforts usualy identify their own linguistic origjins, wich is usualy RP for th Simplified Spelling. Society, but, for exampl, Leeds for Reg Dean's *Britic*, and Australian for anything I rite myself.
- [5] My personal preference wud be CS1 with a vowel system that alowd two alternativ spellings for currently digrafd medial vowels, particulrly in short words, and a further one for final vowels in longr words in texts for lerners and weaker readers.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF CUT SPELLING to a broader program of Spelling Reform Kenneth Ives

Cut Spelling is an approach to spelling reform which needed to be thoroly explored. It is simple, easily understood, and seems able to catch the public imagination. Chris Upward has done a thoro job of developing its possibilities. Now we can evaluate various of its proposals in detail.

From the detailed analysis of Cut Spelling by Chris Upward, and the commentaries on it by Valerie Yule and Edward Rondthaler, it seems that two types of cut spelling are fairly clear and uncontroversial.

- A. Those Cut Spellings which remove silent letters, and thereby bring spelling into New Spelling or other regular spelling patterns.
- B. Cut Spellings which simplify words without creating ambiguities or unduly long consonant strings.

Several other types of Cut Spellings present more difficulties.

- C. Cut Spellings which result in long consonant strings.
- D. Those which drop a vowel in a common suffix <-ing, -ment>, or a final vowel in a prefix.
- E. Those which result in a confusion of rules for pronouncing similar spellings.

This essay seeks to detail types A and B, and to divide their examples into spelling types which can be put together into reform steps. For ease of teaching, learning, and using, each step should have one or two types of change, and not over 30 of its most common words listed for initial learning.

1. Some more phonemic spellings which are already accepted alternates in many dictionaries: *altho, tho, thru, thruout*, and American standard forms, *program, programer, favor, labor*.

2. Other <ough, augh, aigh> words: *caut, taut; strait* ("straight").

3. "Short vowel consonant <c>" spellings, which thus violate the rule that "final <e> makes the preceding vowel long!":

- a) *hav, havn't.*
- b) *giv, liv, active, executiv, nativ, twelv.*
- c) *determine, examin.*
- d) *definit.*
- e) *ar, arn't.*
- f) *wer, wern't.*

4. Other silent "e" endings.

- a) *mor, before*
- b) *els, defense, hors, hous.*

5. Other silent vowels.

- a) *previus, serius, varius.*
- b) *alredy, hed, hevy, redy.*
- c) *hart.*

6. Silent consonants.

- a) *kn, gn=n:no; campain, foren.*
- b) *wh=h: hok.*
- c) *haf, tord, rong.*

7. Doubled consonants.

- a) *ll: alow, bil, dwel, fil, folo, hil, il, kil, mil, sel, shal, shel, skil, stil, tel, til, wel, wil.*
- b) *ss: acros, clas, expres, les, los, mas, mis, pas, posibl, pres, progres, unles, witnes.*
- c) *rr: cary, corespond, teribl, teritory, tomoro.*
- d) *dificult, efect, imens, begining; suply, suport; geting.*

8. Post-accentual schwa, syllabic "l, m, n, r".

- a) *batl, handl, litl, loyl, mentl, midl, norml setl, totl trubl vesl.*
- b) *problm.*
- c) *drivn, gardn, hapn, hevn, lesn, lisn, opn, litn, wagn.*
- d) *administr, afr, altogethr, ansr, betr, caractr, chaptr, difr, dolr, furthr, gathr, latr, letr, manr, mastr, matr, membr, nevr, numbr, ovr, quartr, rivr, sholdr, sufr, sumr, undr, utr, watr, wethr, wintr*

The 141 listed words and their derivatives account for 6.3 % in an average text (Dewey 1950). This figure excludes words occurring one in 10,000 or less, and those requiring other changes beyond dropping superfluous letters.

The "post-accentual schwa" list comes to 1.4 % of words. It requires redefining a syllable to include syllabic "l, m, n, r" in final unstressed position.

Including those, full application of Cut Spelling types A and B would bring words affected to about 12.5 %. Clearly then, Cut Spellings form an important part of any larger program of spelling reform.

Reference

Dewey, Godfrey (1950). *Relativ Frequency of English Spellings*. Tables 5 & 6. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

5. DIAGRAMING SPELLINGS

Kenneth Ives

Most presentations of spelling problems and spelling rules are in intellectual narrative and argument, or tabular form. Transcribing these into a more visual oriented form may help spelling reformers, teachers, and learners. The advent of computer programs which can diagram these situations and their logic may become a useful tool for these users.

To illustrate these possibilities, the "allCLEAR" computer program is herewith used to produce the present situation facing a writer of long "a" sound, and the decision process using rules which, if fully followed, would thoroly regularize writing of this sound.

There are now 19 spellings for the long "a" sound (Dewey 1970, Table 5), which are diagramed in the first chart. Dewey's data are based on his 1916 count of 100,000 words.

Unfortunately, Dewey's data is not organized by rules, so the second chart, showing application of three spelling rules, only shows 91 % of spellings. Applying rules to other sounds, and keeping the charts to one page for clarity, may mean that some charts show closer to 80 % of spelling occurrences.

Present spellings which fit the three rules account for 46 % of words with this sound. These are mark "correct" in the second chart, as they work for both readers and writers.

Table 1: Correct spellings of long "a".

Spelling	Count	Per Cent
"ai-, -ai-"	897	12%
"-a / "	1,574	20%
"-ay"	1,109	14%
Totals	3,580	46%

If six anomalies ("ey, e-e, ei, ea, eigh, aigh") were converted to follow the rules, in an early spelling reform step, this would raise the reliability of the rules from 46 % to 67 %, for both reading and writing, with relatively few words to be relearned, mostly **"thay; thair (2), whair; braik, grait; nabor, nit; strait."**

The "a-e" spelling is listed in Chart 2 as a writing error, not a reading one, as this is the commonest spelling, 25 %, for this sound. Unfortunately, it is a homograph, in which only 52 % of this spelling is pronounced long "a". At present this spelling is confusable with short "a" sound (have), and "ah" sound (are), and a few minor ones. Dropping the final "-e" off of "are, have" would raise reliability of "a-e" spellings as representing long "a" to 76 %.

This increases reading reliability of long "a" sound to 86 % for four reading rules.

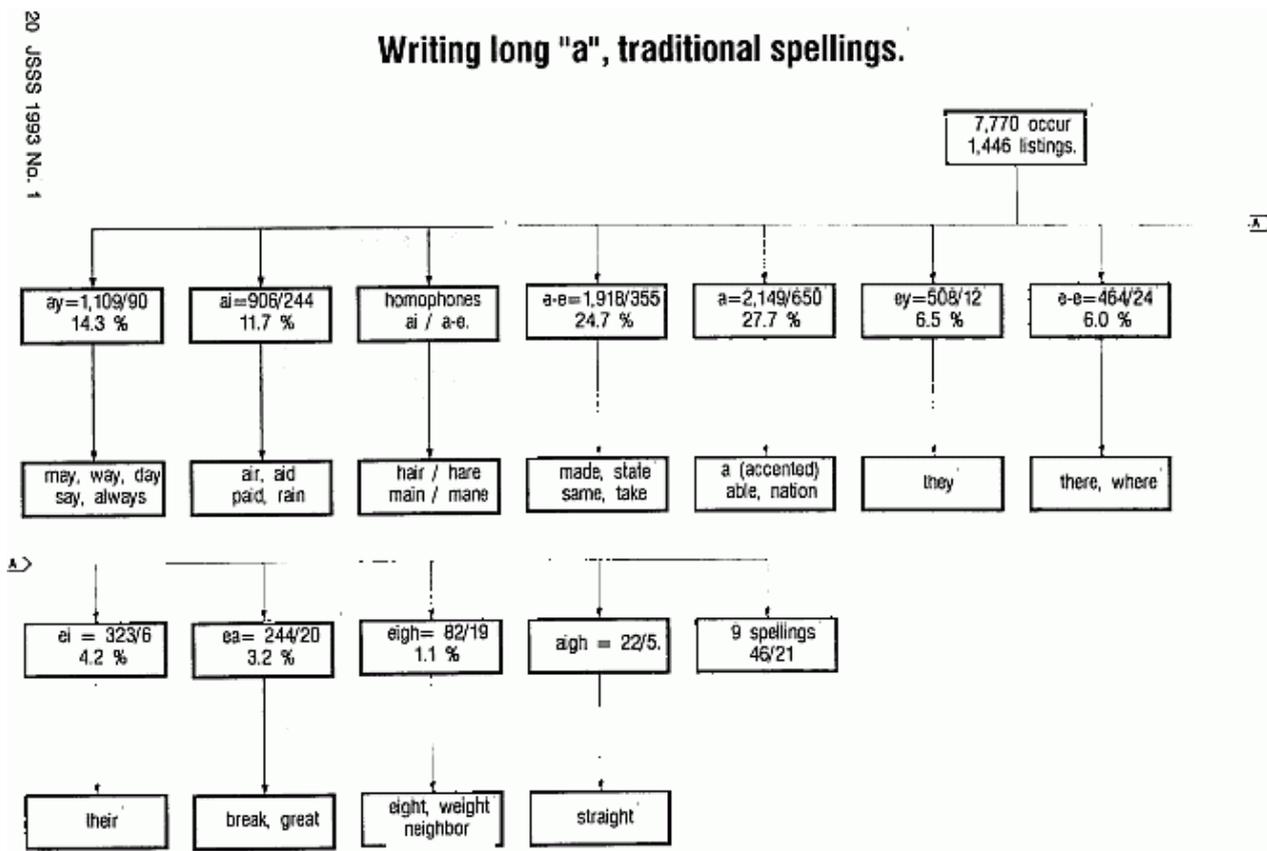
Table 2: "a-e" spellings.

Sound or Word	Count	Per Cent
long "a" sound	1,918	52 %
"have"	617	17 %
"are"	549	15 %
short "i" sound	296	8 %
other sounds	317	8 %
Totals	3,697	100 %

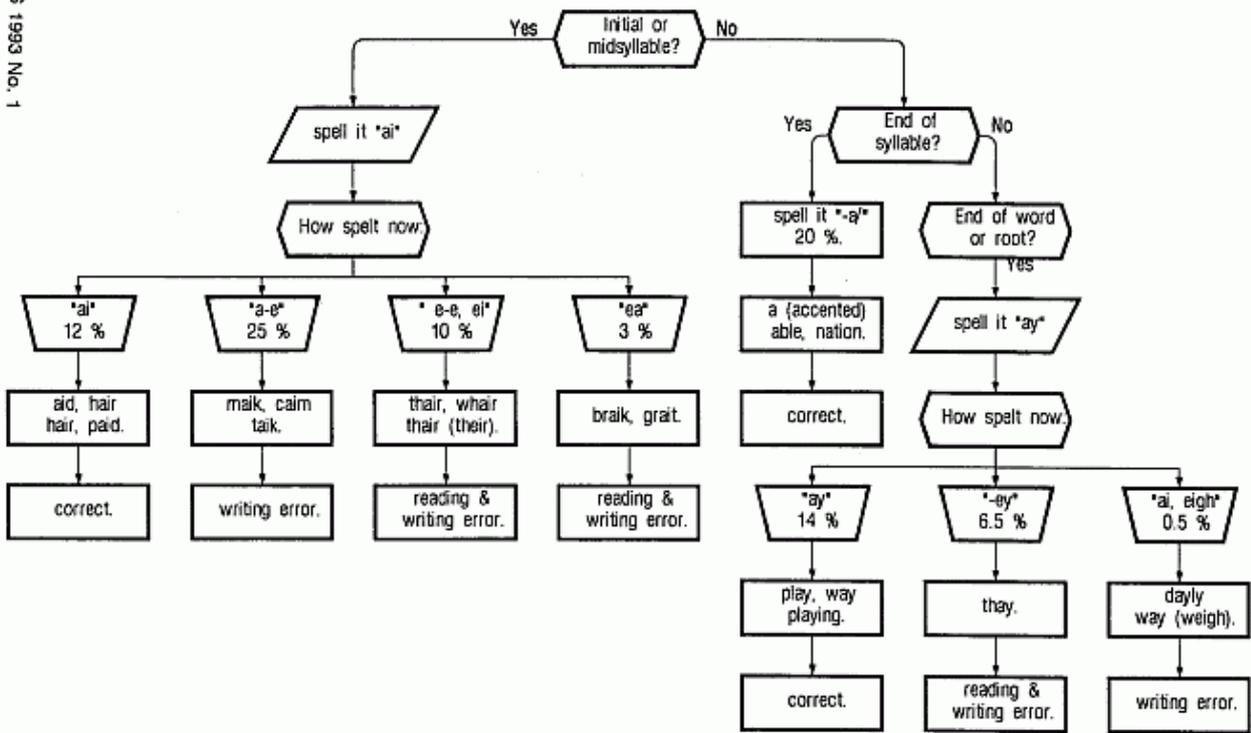
Note that if the proposed "regular" spelling of "ac" for long "a" sound is used as a guide to either reading or writing, it produces an error rate of 100 % for traditional spellings, as there are no words now spelt that way. Thus the "ac" proposal injects a barrier to learners in their transition from regularized to traditional spellings. It also makes it difficult to design and use intermediate "medial media" partly regularized spelling systems.

Charts of some other spellings are similarly clear — "ee, ie, f & v, c & k, g & j". However, the two sounds of "oo" spellings, for "food/good", have very low predictions from rules, and complicating overlaps, requiring much further study and discussion before a wise decision on spellings can be made and readily defended.

The "allCLEAR" program works best on a computer whose processor is large and fast enuf to handle Word Perfect for Windows or similar programs. Otherwise it is very slow in loading graphics and fonts for printing. Mine took 27 minutes to load these for repeated use, 7 minutes for a single use.



Reading and writing long "a" sound, using rules and regularized spellings.



Sources

Clear Software, Inc. 385 Elliot Street, Newton MA 02164 USA

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 14, 1993/1 p23–25 in the printed version]

[Patrick Groff: see [Bulletin](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

Update on Spelling Instruction: 6. THE DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING FACTOR

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The kinds of spelling research conducted, and the discussions thereof in educational publications doubtless impact upon the progress of spelling reform. Spelling reforms obviously will be influenced by what educators accept from experimental research as valid guidelines to spelling instruction. The latest summary of the research on students' acquisition of spelling abilities is presented in the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*. [1] This volume was commissioned by the U. S. educational organizations, *International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English*. It is conceded that these two associations exert more influence over the teaching of spelling than do any others.

The Domination of Developmental Spelling

The *Handbook* makes clear to educators its belief that emphasis on spelling should center "on the nature and development of spelling ability rather than on instructional issues" (p 775). Thus, whenever in this volume reference is made to spelling it is almost totally on what is called "developmental spelling" (DS). Research on spelling other than that on DS largely is ignored in the *Handbook*. Its clear implication is that educators should follow suit.

Advocates of DS observe that progress by students toward mastery of conventional spelling advances thru distinctly different developmental stages or levels. These points range from seemingly random use of letters to spell words, thru to a "phonetic" stage of spelling (which resembles reformed spelling), and on to a "correct" (conventional) level.

The proponents of DS then infer that students will move thru these stages at the most expeditious pace possible when they are not given direct and systematic spelling instruction. It is clear that DS is part of the grander "whole language" ("real books" in the U.K.) theory that children best learn to read and write in precisely the same way they learn to speak. Students' normal progress thru the DS levels thus would be handicapped by formal instruction, it is held. The teacher dedicated to the ideas of DS simply will create a learning environment in which students formulate, and evaluate their own personal hypothesis about how words should be spelt.

Basic Shortcomings of DS

There are some serious shortcomings about DS and the implications for instruction drawn from it.

One, the DS notion that direct instruction in spelling should not be begun before the "correct" spelling stage is not supported by the experimental research on spelling teaching. To the contrary, the empirical evidence indicates that direct and systematic instruction of spelling skills, no matter how these are determined, gets students to the "correct" stage of spelling faster than otherwise is possible.

Two, proponents of DS have described in only an imprecise and subjective way the parameters of the various DS levels, as well as the age norms at which children enter and leave these supposed stages. It is obvious that direct teaching of spelling would compound the difficulties in determining this time schedule for DS. Experimental research makes clear that formal spelling instruction accelerates children's acquisition of spelling skills. The critics of DS thus are asked to accept, in large measure, the intuitions of the defenders of DS as to its validity. [2]

DS and Spelling Reform

No discussion of the research on spelling in the *Handbook* suggests that there is a connection between DS and spelling reform. Nonetheless, it is immediately apparent that students' spellings at the "semiphonetic" or "phonetic" levels of DS closely resemble some of the spellings advocated by spelling reformers. In this respect, it would appear that DS offers some support for spelling reform. Unfortunately, this encouragement to spelling reform is not forthcoming. The goal of DS is not to make sure that students can spell words phonetically in a reasonable and uniform manner, that is, DS does not challenge in any way the assumption that conventional spelling does not need to be reformed. The seemingly blind spot in DS prevents it from joining with spelling reform in an implementation of students' natural inclinations to spell words phonetically.

The only reference to spelling reform in the *Handbook*, in fact is to the "proposals to reform the alphabetic vagaries of English orthography [that have occurred] at least as far back as the thirteenth century' (p. 776). However, the volume goes on, "the English writing system is more than an apparently flawed graphic transcription of phonology; it also represents lexical, grammatical, and semantic features of language" (p. 776). The *Handbook* insists that these features of language seen in spellings must be preserved, i.e., that they present more advantages to the reader than they do disadvantages to the spelling. The reader rules over the speller in English language instruction, the *Handbook* implies. Hence, the unimportance of spelling reform which it presumes.

The reasons why DS distances itself from spelling reform remain a mystery however. For one thing, DS offers no proofs that students at the "phonetic" (i.e., reformed spelling) stage take into significant consideration when spelling, the grammatical and semantic features of words that DS claims are so important to sustain. In this regard, DS actually seems at odds with itself. On the one hand, it strongly endorses the idea that students should develop "an analogical spelling strategy" (p. 778) so that their knowledge of the spelling of certain words can be used to spell other words whose spellings have not been secured in memory. In this respect, DS puts great faith in the principle that learners should make generalizations about how words are spelt. Spelling reform would agree, of course, but add that the development of such rules by students about spelling are attained more readily with reformed than conventional spellings.

In any event, DS clings to conventional spelling as the foundation on which students make generalizations about the spelling of words, despite the fact that this understructure is visibly shaky, i.e., belies the existence of a satisfactory rationale. While DS concludes that "the most significant insight" from research "is the recognition of the active involvement of developing writers in their own learning" (p. 780), it appears insensitive to the implications of the fact that students reach the "phonetic" level of spelling, which is akin to reformed spellings, before they arrive at the "correct" or conventional spelling level. This chain of events might be an incentive for DS to insist that the "phonetic" level of spelling is preferable to the present conventional spelling system. Given that students need to develop a growing awareness of recurring, consistent orthographical patterns, "Would it not be easier to achieve this awareness with reformed spelling than the

conventional mode?" DS advocates must be asked.

In fact, supporters of DS seem to unwittingly concede this argument. In their chapter on the *Handbook*, Dorothy Strickland and Joan Feeley observe that by grade two spelling becomes a "risky business" for children. By this they mean that as children move away from the "phonetic" stage of DS, the special pressures they encounter from trying to spell conventionally create such emotional distress for them that children "refuse to 'spell it like it sounds' or even to write much at all" (p. 292). These students seem as content with rational phonetic spelling as are the spelling reformers.

Can DS and Spelling Reform Be Allied?

As implied so far, DS presents a potential means for spelling reform to gain some greater general acceptability than it now has. As DS is now determined, however, certain trade-offs between it and reformed spelling would be necessary if an alliance between the two were forged. Notably, spelling reformers, at least those concerned with instruction, would have to give up for the time being their insistence on direct and systematic teaching of spelling. It is clear that for spelling to form a merger with DS it must in effect agree to a de-emphasis on the instructional issues regarding spelling, as called for by the *Handbook*, and concentrate on the nature and development of spelling. Doubtless, many spelling reformers could live with this arrangement. These are the reformers who presently believe that the instructional issues of spelling should remain for the educators to resolve.

In exchange for this concession by spelling reform, DS would be asked to assist in convincing the public that phonetic (i.e., reformed) spelling, which children find much easier and more natural to acquire, slowly replace the conventional variety. If this agreement could be shaped, spelling reform would gain an immensely influential ally, indeed. As noted, the forces of DS now dominate the field of educational research, its reports, its practice, and the journals that educators typically read. These periodicals at present will not print negative critiques of DS, per se. They may be amenable, however, to the acceptance of manuscripts that argue that since DS clearly has established that "phonetic" spelling is more pedagogically economical to strive for than is conventional spelling, the former ultimately should become the generally accepted orthography.

In this manner, spelling reform might open a much needed crack in the barriers to its advancement that now appear so formidable. In this way, the spelling reform movement, desperate for a means to better publicize its solution to the spelling burden that conventional spelling now engenders, could wedge its foot into the door, or get its nose under the tent, so to speak. If spelling reformers can agree that a new momentum for the movement is its most critical goal at present, an alliance with DS could be the needed agent for this advance.

References

- [1] James Flood, et al. (Eds.) (1991). *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*. New York: Macmillan.
- [2]. Patrick Groff (1986). The implications of developmental spelling research: A dissenting view. *Elementary School Journal*, 86, (3), 317–323.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 14, 1993/1 p25,26 in the printed version]

[Adam Brown: see [Journals](#), [Book](#)]

7. Adam Brown Pronunciation Models

Singapore University Press, 1991, 143pp, ISBN 9971-69-157-4

Chris Upward reviews

Dr Brown teaches at the British Council, Singapore, and has taught at universities in Thailand and Malaysia, as well as in his native Britain. This review is written in Cut Spelling.

To many readers this book will probably come as a revelation — as it certainly did to this reviewer. It puts the whole question of English as an international language in a new, balanced and rational perspective, with direct implications for the pronunciation non-native speaking learners should aim for, and indirect implications (of a profoundly interesting kind) for the question of world English spelling and its future.

One of the greatest bugbears of spelling reformers in the twentieth century has been the problem of defining the pronunciation of English which we want the spelling to represent. No sooner does a southern British reformer suggest that a single spelling could suffice to represent both *TO candied* and *candid*, or both *which* and *witch*, than Americans object that it is essential the writing system make a distinction between them. Conversely, any American proposal that *missile* could be written *misil* arouses hackles in Britain. And when an Australian suggests that *ate* could be reduced to *et*, all those speakers in Britain and America for whom *ate* rhymes with *late* and not with *let*, firmly reject such a change.

A similar, but more complicated, problem faces non-native speakers when they learn to pronounce English. First there is the question of which accent they should try to emulate, with British RP and general American offering the two most obvious alternatives. But secondly there is the question of how far the phonology of the learners' native language can be allowed to influence their pronunciation of English. To answer 'not at all' is unrealistic, since retaining at least a trace of a 'foreign accent' is nearly always an inescapable outcome of foreign language learning, and in any case few teachers are likely to have a 'perfect' English accent for the learner to imitate anyway. There are also sociological difficulties: many learners will themselves resist being forced to attempt a full-blown British or American accent, feeling it sounds affected when used in the company of their peers and compatriots. In this way there have developed independent varieties of spoken English in different countries, such as Nigeria or India or Singapore, and for most learners in those countries their native variety becomes the natural standard. At the same time, the requirements of international communication demand that English should retain at least a minimum of mutual intelligibility between speakers all over the world.

Adam Brown's book explores these issues, using the tools of a trained phonetician, and ends by applying the lessons of the analysis specifically to Singaporean English. The technique developed could equally be applied to learners of English as a second or foreign language in any other linguistic environment. In general it appears that learners are likely to bring to their pronunciation a reduced phoneme inventory (i.e. typically those phonemes which their mother tongue happens to share with English), and a key question the book discusses is how far this matters. Thus it may not matter whether the learner distinguishes the vowels in *pull/pool*, but it is important that the vowels of *bad/bed* be differentiated. What Adam Brown is doing is to accept the reality of the variations English displays around the world today, and to ask what the best way might be to ensure that learners acquire both a useful standard of English for their local needs, while not cutting them off from English as a medium of world communication. His findings provide a powerful tool of language planning for the English of the future.

Adam Brown is a friend of the Simplified Spelling Society of some years standing, having contributed a paper to its 1987 international conference ('A Singaporean Corpus of Misspellings: Analysis and Implications', [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society Vol 2, 1988/3](#), Item 3), and having since been one of the *Journals* advisors. It is noticeable how far his specific analyses are based on the work of such phoneticians as Professor A C Gimson, a former Vice-President of the Society (see his obituary tribute in the Society's [Newsletter, Summer 1985](#), Item 3), and Professor John Wells, whose seminal address to the Society on 'English accents and spelling reform' also appeared in the *Journal 3* ([Summer 1986](#), Item 3). Adam Brown is thus fully aware of the spelling dimension of the question he is addressing.

On p27, for instance, he notes that 'many features of non-native speech are the result of spelling pronunciations', i.e. English spelling is the cause of many mispronunciations by non-native speakers. And on p43 he raises the very important question of whether learners' spelling could be improved by teaching them a pronunciation that reflects the spelling more closely than for instance British Received Pronunciation does. Either an American or a Scottish accent could be helpful here, for instance teaching the learner to pronounce the first syllable of *support* differently from that of *surprise*, so that <r> would then not be silent. (This very important idea is one that could with profit be taken up by native speaking literacy teachers too.) And on p59 Adam Brown cites as one of the criteria for a good pronunciation model for non-native speakers that it should 'not increase the existing difficulty of English spelling'.

I find it hard to praise this book too highly. It combines clarity and simplicity in its argumentation with exemplary treatment of the technicalities of phonetic analysis. It is realistic in its appraisal of the needs and abilities of non-native speaking learners, and draws on years of experience of EFL teaching in the field. It surveys the most authoritative specialist literature, but always remains close to the practical situation of the learner and teacher on the ground. It has a vision of the future of English as a system of world communication.

For spelling reformers it contains a wealth of lessons, both in how to consider the vexed question of the interface between speech and writing, and in how to overcome the problem of the different accents of English.

Perhaps the key to its approach lies in the concept of 'common denominators', although I didn't notice that term being used: it effectively asks, what are the common denominators of English pronunciation around the world? The same concept has much to offer the spelling reformer too, suggesting how we may try to transcend the preconceptions of our individual accents. We should be asking, what are the common denominators of English spelling, which can maximize the representation of a universally intelligible pronunciation of English for all users, native and non-native speakers alike? (Readers may like to consider how far Cut Spelling fits that bill.)

Meanwhile we must wish Adam Brown's ideas the widest possible currency. His book should be at the top of many a reading list. It can be obtained from Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore, Yusof Ishak House, Kent Ridge, Singapore 0511, tel. 7761148. The price (paperback) is US\$18.00 plus US\$3 for postage and handling outside Singapore.

8. Thomas R Hofmann Crossdialectal phonology, with application to English vowels Adam Brown reviews

Bulletin of Hokuriku University 15 (1991): 21–72

Ron Hofmann teaches English as a foreign language at Hokuriku University, Japan. Adam Brown has taught Phonetics and English as a foreign language at universities in South East Asia and in the UK, and has written extensively on related subjects. His most recent book is reviewed in this issue of the JSSS.

All languages have accents. However, with English there is probably a wider range of accents than with any other language in the world. It is spoken as a native language in countries all over the world, mainly in Britain, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Also, we cannot totally ignore the fact that there are many people nowadays who speak English quasi-natively (eg in Singapore) or as a second or foreign language. Indeed, it is difficult to find a country where English is not spoken.

This is of course a monumental problem for considerations such as English spelling, which should be applicable to all speakers of the language. In the past, phonologists have largely dealt with a single variety, or with one or two major accents, eg British Received Pronunciation (RP), General American (GA). Crossdialectal phonologies, dealing with all major spoken varieties of the language, are more relevant for the purpose of spelling reform and, Hofmann argues, for language teaching.

There are two extreme possibilities for such a phonology. A *minimal* phonology describes what all major varieties have in common, with no treatment of features which occur in certain accents but not in all. At the other extreme, a *maximal* phonology therefore contains merger rules accounting for the fact that certain contrasts are present in some accents, but not in others.

Hofmann's approach favours a maximal phonology, and rests on six propositions:

1. Few if any native speakers of a language are familiar with only one variety of that language.

To this we might add that few non-native speakers of English are familiar with only one variety of it. In this regard, a maximal crossdialectal phonology is preferable. For example, I have long argued that much pronunciation teaching is ineffective because of the model accent used. In classrooms, one often comes across three separate accents in play:

- the model accent, usually RP or GA, found in the textbook and accompanying material such as cassette tapes.
- the teacher's accent. If the teacher is not a native speaker of English, then his/her accent is unlikely to correspond to that found in the textbook. Even if the teacher is a native speaker, there may still be substantial differences in this respect.
- the student's accent. Many writers have noted that, for the purposes of group identity, students have little intention of using an accent such as RP outside the classroom.

2. People's exposure to non-native accents (ie accents different to a speaker's own) can, and no doubt does, modify the phonology that they use to speak their own varieties.

3. The order and range of exposures is likely to be unique to each individual.

As a result of these last two statements, any one speaker's phonology can be said to be different from everyone else's.

Hofmann's point of view is often biased towards the perception rather than the production of English. This is justifiable for at least two reasons.

Firstly, we are probably all able to understand many accents of English other than our own. However, our ability to produce such accents convincingly may be limited. This is not normally a drawback since we are rarely required to assume different accents in speech.

Secondly, for learners of the language, the immediate need is to make oneself understood and to understand speech directed at oneself. The former may be accomplished in one accent, whereas the latter requires familiarity with various accents. This has been neglected in certain kinds of teaching. For example, Hofmann cites the English professor in Japan who is proud of his excellent command of English, but cannot comprehend a single word of a taxi driver in Los Angeles and has to resort to writing messages to him.

4. In a literate society, the orthography can be considered as another accent or variety.

This is the most novel line of thinking in this paper. The process of spelling has certain similarities to the process of familiarising oneself with different accents. For example, many Scots and Americans do not distinguish the RP phonemes /O:/ and /Ä/. For them, the information underlying the decision whether to spell a word *tall* or *toll* is analogous to the information required to understand either of these words when pronounced by a speaker who does distinguish them.

5. Orthographies tend invariably towards overdifferentiation, having several ways of writing the same sound.

In languages such as English with various acceptable varieties, the orthography usually supports them all, where some spelling features are pronounced in one dialect but not in another. The only varieties that are not supported by a standard orthography are those too low socially to warrant support; by the fact that they are supported, they automatically acquire this status.

We may also use this justification for excluding consideration of non-native accents in establishing spelling norms. Many features of non-native pronunciation can be classified as spelling pronunciation, ie the spelling determines the pronunciation. For example, many Singaporeans pronounce *almond* and *salmon* with /l/, and *want* and *what* with a vowel of the /æ ~ ʌ/ type rather than /O/. However, for native speakers, pronunciation is learnt first, with spelling being taught at a later age. It seems right that pronunciation should determine the spelling for reform purposes too.

6. Nearly all the variability in individual phonologies can be captured as in a crossdialectal description of the native accent(s) plus the standard orthography.

Accents encountered later cannot modify this base phonology significantly, as the writing system already supports them. Those later encounters will only bring awareness to the differences in spelling that had earlier been seen as homophonous.

Hofmann's goal is therefore a crossdialectal phonology that is valid for all dialects, with orthography being considered as one of those dialects. This will inevitably produce a linguist's artifact, ie a phonology which exists in no speaker. However, Hofmann claims that a maximal crossdialectal phonology matches the writing system of English better than any one dialect does, and as a result can help both native and foreign students to learn to read and write. It is therefore necessary for purposes such as spelling reform.

However, it cannot be completely followed. For example, there are exceptional words, eg *apricot*, *economic*, *dynasty*, *dahlia*, *fete*, which differ in irregular ways between accents.. These are ignored for the purposes of this study, on the principle that a correspondence which is found in only a handful of words is not worth cluttering up a maximal crossdialectal phonology with. They are analogous to lexical items which are peculiar to particular dialects.

Hofmann's work raises background questions which anyone interested in spelling reform should ponder. However, he limits his analysis to stressed vowels. Since he does not touch on unstressed vowels or consonants, the reader interested in spelling reform will have many other questions to add.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 14, 1993/1 p28,29 in the printed version]

[Jean Hutchins: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

9. Brenda Bryant *StorySpell*

Teacher's Resource Book and Whole Language Program for Infants.

Jean Hutchins reviews

Brenda Bryant *StorySpell*, Martin Education, Australia, 1992. Jean Hutchins is a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher, as well as Chair of the British Dyslexia Association Computer Committee and Committee Member of the Simplified Spelling Society. She was also a member of the Society's Cut Spelling Working Group.

It is clear that a great deal of successful experience has enabled this programme to evolve. There are many good ideas in it, teaching principles as well as the particular strategy of *StorySpell* spelling. If all infant teaching were as structured as this, there might be little need for the expensive Reading Recovery Scheme for six year olds of Dame Marie Clay, which originated in New Zealand, and has been taken up in Australia, the USA and now the UK.

During the 1980s schools were encouraged and expected to devise language development programmes. Now the National Curriculum sets out areas to be covered by all age groups, so teachers may not have time to use as many of the interesting integrated activities based on the sound for the lesson as they would like to choose.

The book begins by stating Brenda Bryant's reasons for teaching reception class pupils to spell each sound in one way only to start with. She describes her approach to free writing from transcription by the teacher, through stages of supported writing to independent work. The greater part of the *StorySpell* book is devoted to reinforcing the sounds one by one.

The English/Welsh National Curriculum says that children must learn letter-sound relationships, phonics and correct spelling. So the ideas in this book are more acceptable than they might have been up to a year or so ago. Many schools in England use Lyn Wendon's pictograms of the *Letterland* programme. In a similar way to *StorySpell*, *Letterland* has stories, songs, activities and games to reinforce the knowledge. There are other programmes, and specialist dyslexia teachers all use pictures as keywords for sound/symbol relationship, and teach one standard way of writing each sound before going on to alternative spellings.

Some areas of England went through a phase of Emergent Spelling, when children spelled as they wished for uninhibited free writing. When done properly, spelling instruction accompanied Emergent Spelling, so standard spelling was gradually learned. It is now accepted that children go, however slowly or quickly, through a phase of phonic spelling before internalizing traditional orthography (TO).

Regarding Brenda Bryant's particular scheme, it is interesting that she says her pupils were not confused by reading TO while they used *StorySpell* writing. This emphasizes the fact that reading and spelling are very different skills, and that children often do not recall the spelling of words they can read.

She does not say what the parents thought of the scheme. This information is necessary for evaluation, as the i.t.a. (Initial Teaching Alphabet), which had additional letters to represent separately all 44 sounds, survives in very few schools now because parents thought it looked strange and confusing.

Members of the SSS, and teachers, will be interested in the choice and presentation of the 40 sounds in the *StorySpell* scheme, which uses the following letters to represent them:

- each single consonant-letter except K, Q and X, with C and G sounded hard.
- short, long and schwa sounds for A.
- short and long sounds for E, I, O.
- short sound only (as in 'but') for U, as long U can be replaced by <yoo> or <oo>.
- twelve digraphs: <ar>, <air>, <ow>, <or>, <oy>, <ur>, <sh>, <ch>, <th>, <oo>, <oo>, <ng>.

There could be endless discussions about the merits of sound-symbol correspondences Brenda Bryant chooses for early written work by her pupils, but at least she is getting on with the job of teaching!

The long vowels can have 'teacher-only' pictographic additions, eg a halo over 'angel-A', although it seems unnecessary to have different marks for each of the five vowel letters. After all the forty sounds have been introduced en bloc, and gradually reinforced, alternative spellings are linked in; and work begins on common irregular spellings, eg *was*, *saw*, *said*, *because*.

It is quite impossible — as it was with i.t.a. — to tell whether it is the structured, step-by-step, individualized methodology that is the crucial factor in the success of *StorySpell*, or whether it is the emphasis on 'one sound, one spelling' for initial teaching. I have no doubt that such an enterprising teacher would be very successful anyway. The children will write confidently, and writing will help reading. However, children without good visual memories may have difficulty unlearning phonic spellings which have become automatized. Brenda Bryant recommends that teachers should translate all pupil writing into standard spelling (TO) for reading purposes, but pupils might persist in spellings to which they had become accustomed, such as:

mi dad tooc me too sidne. we sor the octapos in the acwairium. it lookdt feyas.

The ideal would still be to find an acceptable simplified spelling and for all of us to keep to it for the rest of our lives! Until we achieve that aim, teaching on the lines of *StorySpell* will benefit reception class pupils.

10. AgiliWriting—the readable shorthand of \ the English language

Anne Gresham:

London: Agilitytyping Ltd, 1990, ISBN 1-872968-00-7, £9.95. This review is ritn in Cut Spelng.

Chris Upward reviews

ALFABETIC SHORTHAND

Th *AgiliWriting* self-tuition handbook explains, and givs practis in using, a new shorthand systm based entirely on th letrs of th roman alfabet. It is by definition therfor of direct intrest to spelng reformrs, ofrng as it dos an inovativ way of riting english that has a numbr of practicl advantajs.

Th first advantaj is that, as required for any shorthand systm, its spelng requires far fewr caractrs than th Traditionl Orthografy (TO) of english. Wile Cut Spelng (CS) saves only around 10% of th letrs used in TO, *AgiliWriting* (henceforth AW) claims a saving of som 40%.

Th secnd advantaj is that, unlike non-alfabetic shorthands such as Pitmans, Gregg or T-Line, AW shud in principl be readbl by anyone litrat in english. How esily it can be red in practis by th uninitiated may be jujd from th foloing sampl from th bak covr of th book: *W hv plzr n sndg u detls v th gds on spzl ofr untl th end v ths mnth*; but even if it is a strugl to read, AW is clearly accesbl, wher non-alfabetic shorthands ar totaly inaccesbl without lengthy trainng.

A third advantaj of AW is that, since it uses only th letrs of th roman alfabet, it can be kebordd to a word-procesr (or even a typeriter). This featur is then valubly complmntd by a computer program cald *AgiliTyping*, wich autmaticly converts text in AW into TO for editng or printng out.

It is perhaps this third advantaj wich may equip AW for th modrn aje, wher non-alfabetic shorthands ar becomng incresingly obsolete. Wher ther is a need for spoken languaj to be recordd in riting at th speed of speech (eg taking minuts at meetngs, or notes of talks) for subsequent typng up, then it is a considrbl gain for ther no longr to be any uncertnty over decyfrng, and for th decyfrng and typng up (ie printng out) to be don imediatly, relybly and autmaticly. And if typng up is don from a dictafone recordng, then th gretr speed of AW again givs a notabl gain in efficiency. One may even speculate that a systm like AW cud rendr th efrts of foneticians and computer experts almost redundnt, ho hav for so long been strugling to produce a usebl systm of machine recognition of speech. And in employmnt terms, AW wud hav th advantaj of not rendrng secretris redundnt...

One may ask if ther is not a practicl drawbak, in that wheras the Pitman secretrys only equipmnt was a pencil and notepad, th AW secretry shud idealy hav a kebord to hand at al times if th advantajs of th systm ar to be fuly realized. But now that laptop computers ar widely availbl, even that is no longr th obstacl that it myt hav been up to five years ago.

It is howevr not only traditionl shorthand with wich *AgiliWriting* needs to be compared. Inventd as long ago as 1906 and used for instnce for recordng th deliberations of parlamentry Select Comittees (as seen on TV), th stenotyp machine has som of th qualitis of *AgiliWriting*. It is a systm that uses only th letrs of th alfabet, and is intelijbl to othr users of th systm (se David Crystal *The Cambridge*

Encyclopedia of Language, p207 for a brief account). It would be instructive to have a comparative evaluation of *AgiliWriting* and stenotyping.

SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE SYSTEM

So far, so good. However, when the spelling reformer comes to study the *AgiliWriting* handbook, certain limitations soon come to light. The first is that there is little explanation of the rationale behind the spellings used, some of which at first appear decidedly counter-intuitive. Why should the initial <s> of *sound*, for instance, be written <z>? Why should the long value of <a>, as in *pail*, be written <h>? There may be good reasons, but in the short time the present reviewer could spend studying AW, he was unable to discover them. The same frustrating lack of explanation applies, as will be seen later, to some sweeping mergers of whole sets of digraphs and diphthongs which quite take the breath away with their daring.

Perhaps, we may optimistically surmise, there are excellent reasons for the above features, but one wonders how firm a grasp the author has of the principles of writing systems when she describes AW, despite such peculiarities of sound-symbol correspondence, as 'based on phonetics'. The most one can clearly say is that *AgiliWriting* does away with many of the most outrageously 'unphonetic' (more strictly, 'unphonographic') features of traditional orthography. Further doubts are raised when, in her expositions, the author fails to distinguish clearly between letters and the sounds they stand for. However, here again there may be a good reason: it may be that she is cunningly blurring such distinctions so as not to confuse her intended readership, who will not have an academic interest in such niceties.

But lastly, her own spelling does not inspire unbounded confidence when we repeatedly read of *diphthongs* and *apostrophies*. Shouldn't we, then, as people who appreciate the endless problems TO causes, perhaps rather take a charitable view of such errors?

For the spelling reformer using the AW handbook, a further slightly irritating feature is the constant repetition of the rules, often using identical wording, with a generous allocation of space on each page. The essential system could probably have been described comfortably over 10 pages of normal print, rather than the 230+ of this volume. However, such repetitiveness and generous spacing may well be virtues in a self-tuition manual such as the AW handbook primarily sets out to be.

WHERE AW AND CS AGREE

The present reviewer however regards such criticisms as quibbles, when set beside one remarkable feature of AW. Quite independently, Anne Gresham has come to most of the same conclusions as CS in analysing redundancy in TO. The introduction to AW states that 'letters which are phonetically weak or silent' are substituted or eliminated. And so we find a strong echo of all the CS rules throughout AW.

As by CS Rule 1 (omitting letters unconnected with pronunciation), such forms as *breath*, *debt*, *evolve*, *ignore*, *money*, *you* are cut in AW to *breth*, *det*, *evolv*, *ignor*, *mony*, *u* (though curiously it appears that *write* keeps its silent <w>).

As by CS Rule 2, Category 1 (cutting post-accentual schwa before <l, m, n, r>), *abundant*, *bundle*, *doctor*, *filter*, *under*, *upward*, *urban*, *cultural*, *tolerant* are cut in AW to *abundnt*, *bundl*, *doctr*, *filtr*, *undr*, *upwrd*, *urbn*, *cultrl*, *tolrnt*. CS Rule 2, Category 2 is seen in AW in the past tense <-ed> reduced to <-d> and the <-able, -ible> endings reduced to <-bl> (the TO <-ing> reduced to CS <-ng> is further cut to AW <-g>).

And as by CS Rule 3 (simplifying doubled consonants) *clock*, *spell* are cut in AW to *clok*, *spel*. And as by combinations of those CS rules, *answer*, *battle*, *cotton*, *dagger*, *heighten*, *hidden*, *tackle* are cut in AW to *ansr*, *batl*, *cotn*, *dagr*, *hytn*, *hidn*, *takl*.

Likewise, the CS substitution rules are observed, as in AW *brij, tuf, fyt, aplyd*.

GOING BEYOND CS

To reduce text by as much as 40%, far more cuts are necessary than are allowed by the rules of CS, and it is interesting to see when they are made in AW. As was observed in the *CS Handbook*, Chapter 6, further economies can be made by certain substitutions. So, for instance, letters can be saved by always spelling long <i> as <y>, rather than just substituting <-ig> as in CS *sy, syn, syt* for TO *sigh, sign, sight*; and AW seizes this opportunity, respelling for example TO *bite, guide, knife, lied* as *byt, gyd, nyf, lyd* (however this sound-symbol correspondence is not consistently applied: *idle, item* become *idl, itm*, not *ydl, ytm*). Similarly, as urged by Robert Craig for CS, the varying vowel letters of *heard, her, sir, burn* (though not, it appears, *word*) are cut so that the <r> alone represents the vowel sound, giving AW *hrd, hr, sr, brn*. And as several commentators have urged for CS, some pre-accentual schwa letters are cut too, most notably in the unstressed prefix <con->. The combination of several of the above cutting rules reduces TO *conserving* to AW *cnsrvg*.

TH <W> INNOVATION

A feature of AW which should be of particular interest to spelling reformers is its innovative use of <w>. The linguistic logic behind this device requires some explanation, as it may be unfamiliar to many spelling reformers.

The letters <w> and <y> can have several functions in TO: they can be consonants (sometimes called semi-consonants or semi-vowels), as initially in TO *worry, yellow*; or they can function as vowels, as <y> in *worry* or *reply*, or <w> in the <ow> digraph in *yellow, allow*; or they can function (like <u> and <i> respectively) as glides, as in *swayed, lanyard* (compared with <u, i> having the same glide function in *suède, laniard*). But while <y> can also have the value of a long <i> (as in *reply*), TO does not use <w> with the long value of its vowel-letter equivalent, which is <u> (except, arguably in *two*). Yet <u> suffers from the heaviest functional overload of all the vowel letters, as seen in its standard values in *but, put, truth, music, fur, persuade*. As Robert Craig has again suggested, the letter <w> could well be used to reduce the overload on <u>, perhaps by taking over the latter value in *music*, and/or in *truth*, giving *mwsic, trwth*. One is reminded of the Welsh spelling of *ambulance*, which is *ambiwllans*.

Spelling reformers sometimes object that to use <y> both as in *yes* and as in *by* is ambiguous, but they overlook the clear positional distinction between the two values. With its value as in *yes*, <y> must initiate a syllable and precede a vowel, whereas with its value in *by*, it does not normally do so (prevocalic occurrences of long <i, y> as in *ion, iodine, dyer* are few). This graphotactic distinction between the two values of <y> effectively ensures there will be no ambiguity between its value in *yes* and its value in, say, *Argyll*.

The same logic could usefully be applied to a double value for <w>. If it were used to relieve <u> of one or both of its long values (when it would truly have the value of 'double-u'), that would not normally occur before a vowel, whereas the consonant value of <w> by definition must occur syllable-initially before a vowel. So the conflicting uses of <u> in *cucumber, unused* etc could be resolved by respelling such words as *cwcumbr, unwsed*. (Occasional oddities such as *ww* for TO *woo* or *swwp* for *swoop* would however arise.)

AW demonstrates this use of <w> to represent three values of <u>, namely as in *put, truth, music*, and often saves a letter in the process. Thus *tube* becomes *twb*, as opposed to *tub*, which is unchanged. Other examples are *bwk, bwgl, acwt, rwl* for *book, bugle, acute, rule*. Spelling reformers may like to explore the potential of such uses of <w>, which have not usually formed part of their armoury.

TH VOWL SCALE & CONSEQUENCES

An interesting and ingenious (though perhaps questionable) device in AW is the vowel scale, by which the five vowel letters are arranged in order of precedence in the sequence <u, o, a, i, e>, with short <u> never (?) being cut, <o> being protected unless the word contains a <u>, <a> having lower status than <o>, and <i> and especially <e> being cut all over the place. This hierarchy is rationalized in terms of the descending order of 'resonance' of these vowels, <u> thus being claimed as the most 'resonant' and therefore most worthy of protection from cutting. The phonetic basis for this concept is not explained, indeed the general confusion of sounds and letters in the AW handbook makes one wonder whether this 'resonance' may not be at least as much a matter of the visual prominence of the letters as of the acoustic prominence of the sounds.

However, this scale of vowels does offer an easily applicable rule for removing vowel letters, although the average spelling reformer will be unhappy at the outcome, which often results in the loss of stressed vowels and the retention of unstressed vowels. For instance, one might expect that in the word *renovate*, the first <e>, being stressed, would survive whatever other letters were cut, and that the <a>, which carries the secondary stress, would be more likely to survive than the unstressed <o> whose value is merely schwa. However by its vowel-scale rule, AW produces the form *rnovt*. This counter-intuitive spelling is just one of innumerable examples of the effects of the vowel scale.

It would be good to know what the justification for such forms is. Perhaps they are adequate for this shorthand system, inasmuch as the form *rnovt* may still be recognizable to anyone familiar with TO *renovate*; or perhaps they are determined by the needs of the computerized AW-to-TO conversion program. But on the evidence of the AW handbook those possibilities must remain mere conjecture. One is left wondering whether, by applying other AW rules, the form *renvht* might not have been more appropriate.

At all events the form AW *rnovt* for TO *renovate* clearly demonstrates why such a system cannot be considered as a fully fledged orthography (though paradoxically, the non-alphabetic shorthand systems might be so considered). A proper orthography needs to tell readers how to pronounce words they are not familiar with, and to tell writers how to spell words whose pronunciation they do not know. *Rnovt* for *renovate* meets neither of these criteria.

ALARMING, OR DARING, FEATURES?

Another disturbing feature of AW for the spelling reformer is the way 'magic' <e> is sometimes cut without compensation, so that *vote* for instance becomes just *vot*, and *sage* becomes just *saj*. Then there is the way in which the letters <y> and <w> are applied not just as described above, but also to represent a wide range of <i> and <u> glides. Thus *joyial*, *medium*, *onion* become *joyyl*, *medym*, *onyn*, while *fluent*, *poetry*, *ruin* become *flwnt*, *pwtry*, *rwn*. There is a certain logical attraction in these uses of <y, w>, but the effect is so daring that the average spelling reformer is likely to react to them as would the most dyed-in-the-wool orthographic conservative. Suspicion is then likely to turn to outright rejection of such forms when we find that *day*, *may*, *say* are cut to *dy*, *my*, *sy*, and <w> is brought into service for all the vowels in *broad*, *foil*, *count*, *draught*, giving AW *brwd*, *fwl*, *cwnt*, *drwft*.

Underlying this feature of AW is of course the major deficiency of TO—that there are nowhere near enough letters in the Roman alphabet to represent all the 40+ phonemes of English unambiguously, the deficiency being particularly acute for vowels. In general TO resorts to digraphs to deal with the problem, but also makes some positional distinctions. AW adopts a different solution: it coolly allocates a single letter, such as <w>, to stand for a wide range of different sounds. Does that matter, especially if AW works in practice? On the evidence of the AW handbook, we are perhaps not entitled to conclude that it does matter. Possibly this daring device is based on a quite brilliant new insight. It would be nice to know.

OTHR ABBREVIATIONS + TEXT SAMPL

This review of AW has not done full justice to the system by any means. It has not discussed its extensive patterns of abbreviation ('Shorts' and 'Strings'), but at this point a few lines of AW must suffice to give an impression of them in the context of the full system.

The following TO text:

The instructions for the operation of our Ideal instruments appear on pages 6 to 9 of the illustrated leaflet. Kindly indicate your intentions by initialling on the index each item in which you are interested. We will invoice you for any increases or incidentals.

appears as follows in AW:

Th nstrucns fth oprhzn v ur Idyl nstrmnts apr on pgs 6 t 9 v th ilstrhtd lflt. Kndly ndct y ntnzns bi nshlg on th ndx ech itm n wch u r ntrstd. Wwl nvz u f ny ncrzs or nzdntls.

The linking of two separate short words, as in *fth* for *of the* and *wwl* for *we will* is reminiscent of Harry Lindgren's radically streamlined system, *Phonetic B*. It is also noticeable how the shorter words allow a typographically far more compact text, with many more words on each line than in TO. But in terms of reading psychology one must say that recognizability for the initiated, rather than decipherability for the uninitiated, is the key quality of AW spellings.

VALU

This review has analyzed AW as a writing system, indeed to some extent even as a potential reformed orthography for English, which is of course unfair. The conclusion reached is that while AW contains many useful and some highly original features that are well worth considering for a reformed orthography, it also contains (inevitably for a shorthand system perhaps) many features which would be simply perverse if designed for normal use. But such criticisms of AW are unfair, both because we have not discovered the rationale behind some of those features, and because we have not really attempted to judge AW for the purposes for which it was designed, namely as a shorthand system. Such evaluations must be made by others, that is by teachers, learners and practitioners of shorthand. Spelling reformers would however no doubt be interested in the results of a properly organized professional test.

Anne Gresham is currently working on an even more radically abbreviated version of AW, to be called *Agili+Plus*. It will be fascinating to see what further cuts she manages to make in the spellings.

Meanwhile, we may end by wondering whether, just possibly, AW might have been a better system even by its own lights (ie it might have been more readable) if it had taken on board some of the basic principles of regular writing systems. The most notable: that the psychology of readers and writers is ill-served if the stressed vowel-letter in a polysyllabic word is deleted, while an unstressed vowel-letter is left unscathed. The reason is that the success of alphabetic writing systems depends crucially on a transparent relationship between written letters and spoken sounds, and stressed vowels represent the phonological core of spoken English. It is the failure of English to observe this principle itself, after all, that is the fundamental cause of its problems today. Can a shorthand system that uses only the letters of the alphabet be exempt from such considerations?

The answer may well be, 'yes', as English is now known to be still legible with all vowel-letters removed. At all events, it is hoped that this review has aroused interest in AW as a powerful system that probably has strengths that have not been adequately elucidated here. We shall be interested to learn of its progress.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 14, 1993/1 p33, 34 in the printed version]
[Edward Rondthaler: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal View 8](#)]

11. AMERICAN LITERACY COUNCIL

Report on 1992 activities

Edward Rondthaler, President American Literacy Council

For the first time we have received grants from recognized foundations: \$ 3,000 from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in Winston-Salem earmarked to print 1500 copies of a new experimental "SoundReeder" book (described below); and \$ 20,000 from the OCRI Foundation in Oregon to carry out professional testing of the "SoundSpeler" program.

A gift from a member has made it possible to begin adding audio — so pupils may hear correct pronunciation as they type. It is likely that many SoundSpeler users will be minorities or bilingual pupils with non-standard pronunciation. Thus the program's usefulness will be significantly enhanced when a pupil can press a key and HEAR what he or she has typed onto the screen. Adding the power of instant audio feedback to SoundSpeler's other strengths should double its teaching effectiveness and expose pupils to standard pronunciation — making it truly multisensory.

Another gift financed formative evaluation of the program at Columbia University Teachers College. This was carried out by Clareann Grimaldi with Joe Little assisting. The two sites selected were

1) a Teachers College adult class of women who spoke English as a second language and were seeking to improve their job search skills in the TC vocational program.

2) A Brooklyn merchants block association of black adult lower literacy students whose native language was English. Ms Grimaldi found that students would often "sound out" the words and enjoyed the fact that the computer corrected the spelling immediately. We'll be glad to send copies of her 10-page report to any member. The following summary of the report, however, gives its general tenor:

It is clear from this evaluation that many adult remedial students and ESL students could benefit from use of the SoundSpeler program. The design team may wish to pursue this research with other groups of learners, such as children, teenagers and learning disabled, or those interested in improving pronunciation. Not one student in this evaluation reacted negatively to the phonetic technique or SoundSpeler program. In fact, thruout the research period, new students continued to volunteer because of word of mouth recommendations. The interest of the design team, as well as the importance stressed on improving the software and documentation during this formative evaluation speaks to the Integrity of the project.

The concept and publication of the SoundReeder book, with its unique format and purpose, is one of the year's major accomplishments.

In recent weeks Joe Little has concentrated primarily on setting up remedial SoundSpeler classes in community or neighborhood institutions. This looks very promising. We have signed a contract to develop a literacy/ESL program using SoundSpeler and SoundReeder for the Bloomingdale Family Program. Bloomingdale, located at Amsterdam Avenue and 107th Street, is a "Head Start" children's center that also assists parents who want to improve their English skills. Joe is now teaching parents and training Bloomingdale staff members to use SS and SR in teaching adults to

write and read. Out of this experience he is developing a training manual for teachers.

What we learn at Bloomingdale will, no doubt, be a pattern for getting our program started in other settings. The problem is that there are too many people interested in using SS and not enough staff to teach them how to use it. Fortunately, Mary Hayley (lately from Memphis) heard of us, called out of the blue and wants to be a SS volunteer tutor. She has quickly grasped the ALC philosophy and technology, and is ready to volunteer at Bloomingdale and elsewhere as needed.

Increasingly we find that educators see SoundSpeler as a "natural" for teaching spelling and pronunciation to immigrants and foreigners learning English as a second language. An independent evaluator, contracted by Gessler Publishers, reported in part:

The more time I spend using the program ... the better it looks. Having used it in various ways, I like it a lot. It is a clever way to encourage experimentation with sound and spelling in English, and the phonetic spelling should help students get an idea about what words should sound like in English. In ESL use, SoundSpeler is good for fine-tuning students' ear for English ..."

We, of course, are very pleased with this unsolicited recommendation.

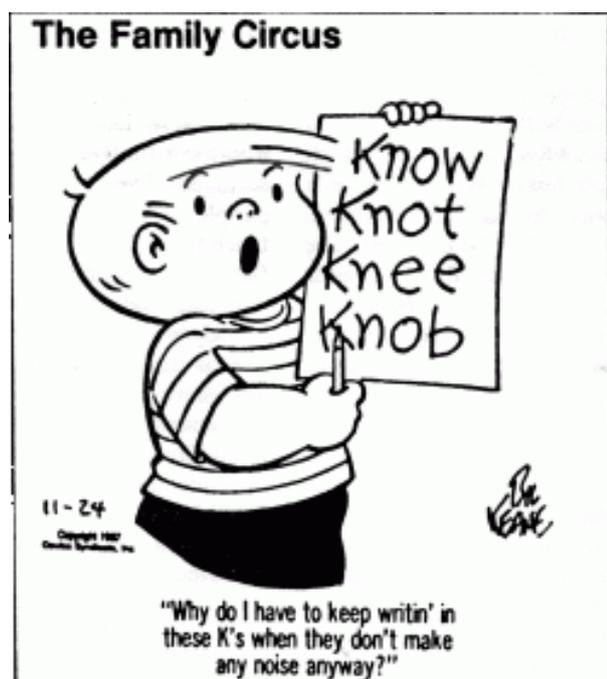
Academic Therapy Publications, whose education materials go out to 250,000 parents, special educators, and others, agreed to place "The Gift" in its catalog. ATP's decision bodes well for a later distribution of SoundSpeler, since "The Gift" was designed to resemble and complement the computer program.

Warp Graphics, America's third largest comic book publisher, is making a contribution to literacy by agreeing to print 1200 copies of a Fonetic/English version of its "Elfquest" conies. This will enable us to make available to adolescents and adults a wider selection of exciting, Fonetic-based, picture-filled reading materials.

Dr. Helen Bisgard, of Denver, has accepted the post of ALC secretary. She has wide experience in teaching reading — from primary grades up thru college remedial programs. Her concern now reaches beyond that. She finds that the spread of English as the world's lingua franca is no longer assured. A combination of factors in which English spelling plays a dominant part is causing the European Economic Community to consider changing to German as its official language. Dr. Bisgard's travels abroad have given her a chance to suggest to various groups that our "fonetic" notation could be used as a simple code for writing English internationally. The response has been enthusiastic. She now wishes to pursue the matter further and offers to devote her energies to that end.

All this is the up-side of ALC. The down-side is that we have no source other than memberships to cover the \$ 47,000 annual operating costs — rent, equipment, telephone, printing, postage, electricity, travel, and modest compensation for Joseph Little. Since 1988 we have been drawing on funds inherited from the American Language Academy. Those funds, so frugally used, are nearly exhausted. It will now take very substantial support from our members to enable us to push on, innovatively, sharpening the tools that will bring practical help to the functionally illiterate, enabling them to overcome their handicap and take their place in the socioeconomic mainstream.

Cartoon



12. Harry Lindgren 1912.6.25 — 1992.7.1

Doug. Everingham sent this tribute at the request of Editor-in-Chief Chris Upward. He used a statement by Harry's daughter at Harry's funeral, and personal views. Harry's Spelling Reform step One (SRI) is used herein.

Harry was born in Newcastle, England, in 1912. He won a scholarship to Newcastle-on-Tyne Royal Grammar School and many prizes, including a scholarship to study German in Germany later. He never lost pride in Scandinavian origins and named his Spelling Action Society, launched SRI day (September 1, 'seventy-1) to conform with the Scandinavian airline's initials, SAS.

His family migrated to Perth, Western Australia (WA), in 1922. Harry stayed with his grandparents to continue his education. After apprenticeship as electrical engineering draftsman with Roy Rolls in Newcastle he had no job because of the Depression. He joined his parents, sister and two brothers in 1935. While completing his B.Sc. and Dip. Ed. at Perth's University of WA he earned a little by teaching English to European (mainly German) immigrant students, and met Eve, a B.A. and Dip. Ed. student. They were married in 1941.

After teaching in WA for a few years Harry joined the Australian Patent Office in Canberra as an Examiner in electrical specifications, until retirement in 1962. He published articles in America, England and Australia, in *Scientific American*, *Australian Mathematics Teacher*, *Mathematical Gazette*, *Journal of the Australian Mathematical Society* and *Recreational Mathematics Magazine*. He joined mathematical societies in Australia, India, and Sweden. His first book *Geometric Dissections* (Van Nostrand, 1964) was published in Russian in 1969. Of it, Martin Gardner of *Scientific American* wrote

he is the world's leading expert on such problems ... His beautiful book is the only comprehensive study of dissections in any language, and is likely to be the classic reference for many decades.

Harry read *and spoke* many languages, some of them self-taught. His grasp of phonetics excelled that of a friend of mine who passed International Phonetic Association exams with honors.

In 1969 his *Spelling Reform: A New Approach*, was published as a paperback by Alpha Books, 104 Bathurst Street, Sydney, Australia. The book uses down-to-earth words and cartoons lampooning damaging traditions. It calls for everyone to *start now* a step-by-step reform to align writing with speech. The plan shows and shuns the commercial impracticability of faster reform projects.

Harry notes the arguments for helping slower learners and reducing social handicaps, but also turns against critics their own arguments concerning uniformity of dialects, outdated current texts, and preserving written distinctions among homophones. He outlines new benefits of thought facilitation to be achieved when the written language becomes analogous with the spoken, and anticipates new language planning after spelling reform.

The Lindgren saga resembles that of many a pioneer, beried as a crank, later hailed as a seer, or obscurely acclaimed in old age. Harry's work is still sidelined on "grounds" that his book has meticulously demolished. Experts in language arts fail to answer, in the integrated manner he exemplifies, his technology, step by step logic, common sense and aesthetics. Harry's supporters have espoused their stance because of personal awareness or gut feelings that present spelling is barbarous, its chaotic principles an abomination, its social costs a collective crime in which we are all, to varying extents, accessories.

Dr L.J. Jarvis ('Bill) Nye, medical innovator and author, wrote a novel using SRI. Mark O'Connor, tertiary English teacher, national winner of poetry prizes, published in SRI. The Australian Teachers' Federation, editor Kevin Grover of *The Teachers' Journal*, editors of at least five other small periodicals, and the 1971 October 5 education supplement of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Australia's most senior daily, have used and advocated SRI. I used it in my first official publication as federal Minister for Health in 1973.

To produce his (originally monthly) newsletter, *Spelling Action* (1971–89), Harry took an offset printing course at Canberra Technical College and became a registered printer. He bought an offset printing plant. He and Eve printed and mailed for friends newsletters on science fiction, the Neighbourhood Watch Zone, a self-help health organization and others.

Another of Harry's skills was violin playing, learned while at university. He became a member of the Canberra Philharmonic Orchestra, cycling to rehearsals with the violin strap to his back.

He had a debilitating stroke after surgery for stomach cancer, but remained alert to the end.

News Briefs

edited by Ken Ives

13. English Standards Project

Maribeth Vander Weele, Chicago Sun Times, 27 October 1992

The University of Illinois at Urbana will play a key role in developing the nation's first voluntary standards for teaching English to elementary, middle and high school students.

The three-year \$1.8 million project is part of the U.S. Education Department's effort to create standards in science, history, the arts, geography and now English. The standards will serve as a "catalyst" for designing English curricula nationwide, said Jean Osborn, project coordinator and associate director of the University's *Center for the Study of Reading*.

National standards are controversial. Critics fear the standards will not reflect diverse cultures, and will be used to create a national examination that does not fairly show students' abilities. "It's really important who sets these standards ... how it's decided, and how to make sure the standards don't lead to a national exam system," said Veda Wright, field organizer for the *National Center for Fair and Open Testing* in Cambridge Mass.

"We are very aware of multiculturalism in this country," Osborn said. "That will certainly be part of the consideration."

The 25-member **English Standards Board** will oversee the project. Representatives will come from the English and reading professions, business, industry and communications, the education community, the general public and policy makers.

The university's *Center for the Study of Reading* will design the standards with the *National Council of Teachers of English* in Urbana and the *International Reading Association* in Newark Del.

The standards will be in literature, writing, reading, and oral communication. But whether spelling and grammar, for example, will be part of them is a question, Osborn said.

"We need national standards for English in order to guarantee all students access to the best possible education in language and literacy," said P. David Pearson, dean of the university's College of Education. "But to prevent standards from becoming narrow, parochial and rigid, we need to make sure that the process for setting standards is open, democratic, and dynamic."

14. Nu waz for kidz tu lern rdn, rtn

Should children write before they can spell? Whole language teaching is spreading fast
Thomas Toch, U.S. News and World Report, 14 September 1992

In Denise DeFranco's kindergarten class at Hunters Woods Elementary School in Northern Virginia, where students were doing final editing on their latest stories recently, Karen Hopkins, 5, paused to read her finished manuscript:

i wt to the ntri hstre muzem and sw sm butfl rks and gms.

Taking a purple crayon, the child added a few more "gms" (gems) to a drawing she would later publish with her prose. To Karen and her classmates, writing a "book" was a normal part of a kindergartener's workday. But, in fact, the classroom is in the forefront of a national movement to shift the way primary schools teach their most important subject — reading. The "whole language" movement, as it's called, uses children's literature, daily writing projects and other "advanced" language activities from a child's first days in school.

The theory behind this drive is that the skill of reading is best grasped by experiencing words in context. Until recently, most educators have stressed the teaching of phonics, the relationship of letters and syllables to sounds, in their beginning reading instruction. With, whole-language teaching, many experts say that students read and write earlier and, despite the ubiquity of television, do so with enthusiasm.

But the whole language movement also has its critics, who insist the shift away from phonics is a mistaken return to the 1960's, when basic skills training was de-emphasized.

Tho the roots of whole-language teaching can be found in the hands-on progressivism of turn-of-the-century educator John Dewey, the movement came to U.S. schools in the late 1970's via New Zealand, Australia, and British Columbia. Now it is spreading rapidly. Today there are fully 350 grass-roots organizations of whole-language teachers, with 22,000 members nationwide.

The key to teaching reading, whole-language advocates argue, is in emphasizing what words say rather than how they are put together. Reading is a process of "unlocking meaning," not one of "decoding symbols into sounds," writes Frank Smith, a founder of the movement.