

# Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 1993/2. J15.

## Contents

### 1. [Editorial](#).

#### Articles

2. [The 1990 French Spelling Reform: An Example to be Followed?](#) Susan Baddeley.
3. [Remedial Education and a Consistent Alphabet](#). Ronald Threadgall.
4. [Illiteracy in British Prisons](#). (Prison Reform Trust)
5. [Some Empirical Data on the mat-mate System](#). Patrick Groff.
6. ["Quite Good" or "Totally Unacceptable?"](#) Christopher Upward.
7. [Towards Roman Lipi \(Scripts\)](#). Madhukar Gogate.
8. [The Transparency of Spanish Orthography](#). Ian Mackenzie.

#### Documents

9. [NCC. Revised Proposals for English in the National Curriculum](#)
10. [SSS. The Simplified Spelling Society's Response](#). Christopher Upward.

#### Commentaries

11. ["Informal" Spelling as a Way to Literacy](#). Edward Rondthaler.
12. [Computers in Education](#). Michael Gianturco.

#### Cartoon 13. [Dr Seuss. The Tough Coughs as he Ploughs the Dough](#).

Extra Item: 14. [Why the ph in the name Stephens is pronounced /v/](#). Chris Upward.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J15, 1993/2 p2 in the printed version*]

[Kenneth Ives: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Book](#)]

## 1. Editorials

### Kenneth Ives

In both Great Britain and the United States, spelling reformers are now engaged in discussions with educational authorities. In the last issue, the SSS submission to the National Curriculum Council was presented. In this issue are that Council's references to spelling, and a response from the SSS.

The SSS response calls for explicit rationales for phonics, "correct spelling", "regular" and "irregular" spellings. It calls for using letter sounds rather than letter names, the simplest ways of representing sounds, and eliminating some irregular spellings. If the material pupils need to learn is to be given adequate time, learning many of the irregularities of received English spellings must be viewed as a waste of time and effort.

In the United States, the first round of draft standards for English have appeared. The word "spelling" only occurs about 9 times in 65 pages, but with no analysis of spelling nor of the difficulties it causes. Hence your editor urged the project to give explicit attention to spelling, and submitted five proposed standards:

1. Pupils be encouraged to use their own approximate ("invented") spellings during the First Grade in school.
2. Standard regularized spellings for English be developed (with the National Information Standards Organization) for use as an aid to phonics instruction. Use of such standardized spellings by pupils be encouraged thru Second Grade.
3. No standards for use of traditional received spellings be established prior to the end of Third Grade.

4. Establish as **preferred** spellings those common more phonemic versions **already found in most dictionaries**: *altho, tho, thru, thruout, thoro, thoroly; dropt, fixt, mixt, spelt, stopt, programer, catalog, dialog, prolog*. Also their derivatives.

These words make up 0.2 % of an average text. Encourage their use in professional journals, textbooks and story books.

5. Encourage the use of regularized (or hybrid) spellings for first drafts, and teach copy editing for the intended audience, including computer spelling check programs.

These proposed standards need to be widely publicized and discussed, at reading conferences and elsewhere. Articles and notices including them could well be sent to reading journals, and shorter notes about them to other journals.

### **Alliances**

Several sources in recent reading conferences and journals indicate that, overall, no one teaching strategy — language experience, whole language, phonics — is demonstrably **more** successful, **nor less** successful, than basals and other traditional methods.

Steven Stahl, at the Great Lakes Regional IRA Reading Conference in September argued persuasively for an eclectic approach, in his talk "What Did We Do Before Whole Language, and What Will We Do Afterwards?" The best teachers vary their tactics to fit varied pupils and problems.

This would indicate that spelling reformers need to forge alliances with at least several "schools of thought" in the field.

Patrick Groff, in his guest editorial in the last issue, argued strongly for an alliance with the developmental spelling movement. Alliances would also seem desirable with the Language Experience, Whole Language, phonics, and English as a Second Language movements, and with those who use or advocate ITA.

Thus spelling reformers need to produce and distribute introductory leaflets and sample materials for each of these movements.

### **Regularized materials**

A major problem is in coordinating phonics with other approaches. Here is where fully or partly regularized spellings, such as American Literacy Council is field testing, can help. They can considerably simplify initial phonics instruction, and help delay the confusions of irregularities until a firm base in phonics is achieved. They can also pave the way for acceptance of some simplifications as pupils familiar with them become adults.

Ronald Threadgall, in this issue, stresses the importance of early school materials in a consistent spelling. Can the spelling reform movement assist some publishers of successful First and Second Grade materials to produce an edition in a consistent spelling? If these should sell well some other materials in simpler spellings may find a market too.

### **Popularization**

Popularizing such materials is a major challenge. Lessons from the experiences in India, reported in "Towards Roman Lipi", in this issue, can be adapted to efforts of spelling reformers in English.

## 2. The 1990 French Spelling Reforms: an Example to be Followed?

Susan Baddeley

Susan Baddeley is a lecturer in English at the *Institut Universitaire de Technologie* in Vélizy, near Paris. She has worked for many years with the HESO research group on orthographies and writing systems at the French National Research Centre (CNRS), and was involved in the drawing-up of the spelling reform proposals described in this article.

### Introduction

On December 6th 1990 an unprecedented event took place in French spelling history: the government published, in an official document [\[1\]](#), a series of recommendations aimed at rationalizing certain aspects of the written language and giving guidelines for the spelling of neologisms. That measures such as this should be taken in a country that ranks not far behind Britain in orthographical conservatism (altho the state does not hesitate to interfere in other linguistic spheres) is a matter that should be of interest to all would-be spelling reformers. What did the the French experience consist of, and what can we learn from it? This article sets out to answer these two basic questions.

#### 1. A Short History of the "*Rectifications*"

In a speech given on October 24th 1989, Michel Rocard, who was then Prime Minister, invited experts in the matter to turn their attention to the problem of the French spelling system and to propose appropriate measures that might be taken to improve it. This was in response to a campaign that had been going on for about a year in the media, following the publication of a survey on spelling by the teachers' journal *L'Ecole Libératrice*: of the 1150 teachers that replied, 1035 said that they would be in favour of a reform, and these results were widely commented on by the press.

That survey had been devised by a member of the AIROE association, Jacques Leconte, and the association worked closely alongside the teachers' union during the following months to promote the campaign in favour of a reform and to put together a limited but coherent set of proposals. The AIROE manifesto (see SSS Journal 1988/1) had comprised 4 main points (regularisation of anomalies, the circumflex accent, doubled consonants and past participle agreement), chosen unanimously after a great deal of (often heated) debate, and it was no coincidence that the Prime Minister should have included them among the points he mentioned in his speech. These were:

1. use of the hyphen
2. plurals of compound words
3. the circumflex accent
4. past participle agreement of pronominal verbs
5. various "anomalies"

These points had been chosen for several reasons: first of all, it is in these sectors that the most irregularities in what is otherwise a generally coherent system are to be found, and here that people make the most mistakes and that teachers have the most problems. Two sectors in particular are notoriously difficult in French: compound words (with or without use of the hyphen) and their plurals, and the spelling of loan-words. Even the major dictionaries, which are most people's touchstone for spelling problems, are unable to decide amongst themselves how a great many of these words should be spelt and often give two spellings.

Secondly, the points of reform chosen were deliberately limited in their scope : only specific sets of words would be involved, and the most frequent words in the language were not to be affected. Indeed, the intention was not to reform (hence the term of "rectifications" used to describe the proposals), but rather to eliminate anomalies by generalising the main tendencies already present in the system. For example, in most words containing the sequence **e plus consonant plus mute e**, the first **e** is pronounced open and takes a grave accent, as in the word **avènement**. However, there is a small number of words which have an acute accent in this position (which is nothing more than a historical leftover), such as **événement**. It was therefore proposed that these few exceptions should be made to follow the general rule, and take the grave accent.

## 2. The Reforms and Linguistic Research

*The Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française* (CSLF) was then asked, by the Prime Minister, to present a report outlining the reforms that they considered the most urgent. The CSLF appointed a group of experts (including linguists and dictionary editors) which met several times to discuss the various points, and the final report was based on their conclusions and proposals.

Among the experts was Nina Catach, who is the leading figure in the field of research into spelling systems in France today, and who was then head of the HESO (*Histoire et Structure de l'Orthographe*) research team at the *French National Scientific Research Centre* (CNRS). For over twenty years, the HESO team has been studying the many intricacies of French orthography: its history, its contemporary structure and the pedagogical methods used to teach it, and the team had available both the scientific methods and the materials necessary to formulate exhaustive reform proposals. It was therefore natural that the task of compiling the lists of words (with the help of several spelling databases) and drawing up the preliminary reports for the experts should have been entrusted to HESO.

I myself worked on some of the points, and can say that the work was carried out both efficiently and thoroly. For each sector, a short report outlined the different problems encountered and several proposals of varying scope were made, accompanied by the complete list of words that would be affected by the various reforms, their frequency, the number of derivatives, etc.

After a great deal of deliberation, the experts finally agreed on a series of proposals which were then submitted to and accepted by the *Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française* and approved by the *Académie Française*. The proposals, together with the lists of words to be modified, were published in the "Administrative Documents" section of the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* on December 6th 1990. It was made clear that the proposals were for alternative spellings and that the "old" spellings remained valid; the document also gave a number of guidelines for the spelling of neologisms intended mainly for dictionary compilers and specialists in terminology.

The scope of the reforms proposed was indeed extremely limited: all in all just over 2000 "new" spellings were recommended, and very few of the most frequent French words have been affected. Having adopted the "new spelling" myself, I have noticed that the most obvious change is the omission of the circumflex accent (particularly in verbs ending in **-aître**, such as **connaître**), and that the number of words affected rarely exceeds one per two pages.

### 3. After the "Rectifications"

Altho the initial reactions of the press to the announcement of these measures (made in June 1990) seemed to be generally favourable, there was something of an outcry when the proposals were actually published. For many pro-reformers, the "Rectifications" were negligible and didn't go far enough; others argued (reasonably enough) that a few measures such as these would not be sufficient to eradicate the problems many children have with spelling (and which often, it should be noted, have nothing to do with the spelling system itself). The ultra-conservatives as usual bewailed the "massacre" of the French language (the language, not the spelling), illustrated by a few shock-horror headlines in "reformed" phonetic spelling in *Le Figaro*. However, what most opponents seemed to object to was the "official" nature of the *Recommendations*: "You can't reform by decree, and the spelling system should be left to evolve naturally". This attitude was due mainly to ignorance of the actual terms of the *Conseil Supérieur's* document (the new forms are proposed as alternatives), and also to an ignorance of the history of the language that is unfortunately widespread among the French public, in spite of the interest that the latter has for language matters.

The French spelling system has been "brought up to date", sometimes drastically, at various times in the past, and in particular (paradoxically as it may seem) by the Académie dictionaries (the 1740 edition changed almost 25% of the spellings of the previous edition). Most people are simply not aware of the extent to which spelling has changed over the centuries [2], and this makes them immediately hostile to what they mistakenly consider to be an attack on a part of their "national heritage". In spite of two books, one by Nina Catach and one by André Goosse [3], an influential member of the *Conseil International de la Langue Française*, explaining the new measures and giving detailed lists of words affected the hostility remained, and the "Battle of the Circumflex Accent" was finally forgotten when the Gulf War broke out at the beginning of 1992.

However, all was not lost. Despite the reluctance of the Education Ministry to recommend the teaching of the new forms, which would have guaranteed them gradually coming into general use, new editions of major dictionaries (Robert, Larousse) have included many new forms as alternative spellings [4], and the main impulse in favour of the recommendations has come from the *Académie*, which gave the new spellings in the latest edition of its dictionary: some in the body of the Dictionary itself, and others on a separate leaf at the back of the book. Altho very few people today ever consult the *Académie* dictionary, it's the symbol that counts. So now it is up to each individual to use the new forms, and the role of associations like AIROE is mainly to inform people of the new uses and of the precedents for these measures thruout history.

### 4. The Implications of the French Experience

What future is there for this reform, and what can other spelling reformers learn from this experience? First of all, to be modest in their expectations: it is extremely difficult to satisfy everyone, but not so difficult to reach agreement on a limited and well-defined set of proposals, even if many people may think that it is not worth "reforming" for so little.

Secondly, the points to be chosen should be those which create the most spelling problems, but wide-reaching reforms (such as that of doubled consonants) should be avoided. This can be shown by the example of one of the reform proposals that was not accepted, that of simplifying the double **n** that appears in some derivatives of words ending in **-an** and **-on** (compare **japonais** and **dijonnais**, from Japon and Dijon, or **traditionnel** and **traditionalisme**, both from **tradition**). The subject turned out to be fraught with all sorts of unforeseen difficulties: for example, can **dictionnaire** be said to be a "derivative" of **diction**? — not to mention the fact that the simplifying of any set of doubled consonants would be likely to set off a sort of "chain reaction" leading to the simplification of all doubled consonants, some of which are still functional in the spelling system, and a reform of such scope is hardly likely to be on the agenda at least for many years to come.

A third point that should be considered is the individual situation of each country with regard to spelling-reform policy. Who should decide what reforms are to be made, and who can implement them? In the absence of a body like the Académie, which is widely (albeit falsely) believed to be invested with the supreme power to bring about spelling reforms, the cooperation of the teachers and of dictionary compilers is essential: they are the main creators of usage, and the first to have to deal with spelling difficulties, and we should be looking at the problems from their point of view.

But first and foremost, any credible reform proposals must be backed up by serious research, based on an exhaustive description of the spelling system: its relation to pronunciation, of course, but also an in-depth examination of the many other functions that the graphic elements of the language can have (morphological markers, spellings that distinguish homonyms, etymological notations, etc.). A description of this kind has been made for French; for English, it is still to come.

## Notes

- [1] *In the Journal Officiel de la République Française*, in the section entitled "Documents Administratifs". This was a particularly astute measure: as the *Recommendations* were not published in the JO itself, they cannot be said to have been imposed officially; however, the fact that they appeared in a government document gives them a certain stamp of approval by the State.
- [2] The myth of an orthography impervious to change has been fostered partly, since the 19th century, by a popular and widely-used series of editions of French classics, "Les Grands Ecrivains de la France", published by Hachette. These classroom editions present the works of Molière, Corneille, Racine and others in an entirely modernised spelling, thus creating the illusion that the great writers of the past used the same spelling as we do nowadays.
- [3] Nina Catach, *L'orthographe en débat*, Paris, Nathan, 1991; André Goosse, *La "nouvelle" orthographe. Exposé et commentaires*, Paris and Louvain, Duculot, 1991. The January 1992 issue of the journal *Liaisons-HESO* also contains a number of articles on the *Rectifications*.
- [4] We were surprised, while drawing up the lists of proposals, to find that many of the "new spellings" had in fact already been adopted by some dictionaries, or had at least been included as possible variants.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 15, 1993/2 pp6,7 in the printed version]*

[Ron Threadgall: see [Journals](#)]

### **3. Remedial Education and a Consistent Alphabet**

#### **Ronald Threadgall**

Ronald Threadgall was for many years a remedial literacy teacher at secondary level, in particular Head of the Remedial Department at Clacton County High School, Essex. For this work he used the Initial Teaching Alphabet, and from 1985 to 1993 was General Secretary of the United Kingdom i.t.a. Federation. As the Simplified Spelling Society's research group was planning an investigation of the use of a regularized spelling system for remedial teaching, he was invited to address a meeting of the Society's committee on Saturday 30 January on his experiences in using the i.t.a. with remedial pupils. The following is an outline of his address. He published a general account of the i.t.a. in the [JSSS 88/1](#), Item 6.

The problems of an alphabet, like that of English today, that does not fit the sounds of the language may cause little difficulty for many children in gaining literacy, but for some the problems seem to be insuperable. The real solution would be a consistent alphabet for everyone to use; but as there is no immediate prospect of one being introduced, some turn to the idea of using a consistent spelling system as a teaching medium. But many questions arise in the minds of teachers, and problems are envisaged.

It is very easy to turn down an educational idea on the basis of what we imagine happens when a child learns. We need to open our minds, observe, and ourselves learn from the way things happen in the classroom. We need not be totally in the dark about the use of consistent alphabets in the teaching of literacy, as we have a very well researched precedent in the experience of the Initial Teaching Alphabet.

Sir James Pitman, who invented the i.t.a. in the 1950s, once told me he had considered using i.t.a. as a remedial tool rather than as an initial medium for infants, but the opportunity presented itself for the latter rather than the former. Nevertheless it has been used as a remedial tool: I so used it myself and developed ways of so using it for over 20 years in schools in different teaching situations.

The one difference between using i.t.a. and a consistent spelling system using the Roman alphabet is that, if the latter were used, all the letters would already be familiar to parents and teachers, as well as to many of the pupils. Such familiarity reduces the problem of moving into a new system. In every other respect there will be close parallels between using a regularized alphabet like the i.t.a. and the regularized use of conventional letters.

It is important that the method of instruction is completely phonic. It must not be assumed that, because remedial pupils have experience of the alphabet, they know the sound that each letter represents. It must be checked that each pupil knows and can pronounce each sound and connect it with the appropriate letter or letter combination.

Remedial pupils need to understand that the new system, unlike the old one they have already failed with, is consistent. They no longer need to guess any word: each one can be worked out. Confidence will grow with experience. Because each word can be worked out, there is no need to use very simple vocabulary. Adolescents, even if they are non-readers, have a much larger vocabulary than infants. Any word within their vocabulary can be used, which will make for more interesting texts. Boring or infantile texts will discourage reading. Material of interest to individuals

should be prepared so as to encourage them. Consistent spelling also means learners are free to use any word they want in their writing, and not just those they can spell.

Regular, frequent practice and instruction is necessary. I insisted that my class had one period every day of English, and that they spent at least half an hour reading every day, even during weekends and holidays. The pace of improvement needs to be maintained so that pupils can measure their improvement and so be encouraged to continue. After six years of failure a pupil can become depressed and unwilling to persevere. To this end the course needs to be prepared with care. Material should be interesting or exciting. Then the pupils will want to read. Transliterating texts from other school subjects into the regular spelling system, while involving much work, is well worthwhile, as it gives pupils more practice in reading, and enables them to work faster and with more interest in these other subjects.

Pupils will progress at their own pace. I found that many transferred to traditional orthography after only 3 months, and most of those were then reading at least at their chronological age. Some took as long as 9 months. The time of transfer is therefore an individual matter. The reading transfer is usually immediate, occasionally without the pupil even realizing it has happened! The writing transfer usually takes from a week to a month. During this period the pupils were instructed to use traditional orthography only where they were sure of it; otherwise they would spell in i.t.a. Spelling needs to be systematically taught. I developed a Transfer Spelling Book with a small group of spellings to be learnt every day.

Everyone involved should understand exactly what is required, so that the greatest cooperation can be achieved. This includes teachers, parents and the pupils themselves. One thing that will slow progress and lose much of the benefit the use of regularized spelling can confer is the non-cooperation or the opposition of one of these. The leader of the project must be absolutely clear about the aims and objectives, have honestly examined the problems, real or imagined, and have solutions ready. It is important to discuss the project fully with all the parties involved. Pupils should be encouraged to look forward to taking part with excitement and real hope for an improvement in their literacy skills.

The results I found of using i.t.a. in such a situation were:

1. a higher self-esteem and confidence and an improved comparison with peers
2. improved school attendance.
3. improved attitude and behaviour
4. an opportunity to catch up with peers rather than continuing to slip back, in spite of effort
5. intelligence and ability was given scope
6. remedial help was needed for a much shorter time
7. reading speed was greatly increased, giving an improved comprehension
8. a pleasure in reading is experienced that continues for the rest of pupils' lives.

I used i.t.a. in two differing remedial situations. One was with a special remedial class, giving them one year's instruction (no more was needed), using i.t.a. in all subjects which were taught by a small group of teachers working together. The other was in a multi-ability situation with team teaching. The pupils were withdrawn for one period a day while they were learning the alphabet and early stages of reading. Otherwise they took a full part in the lessons with the rest of their class, but with all their written material in i.t.a. The teachers needed only to be able to read i.t.a. to mark pupils' work. I went into the classes occasionally to help individual pupils.

I believe all this would be valid for any scheme using a consistent orthography in a secondary remedial situation.



[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 15, 1993/2 p7 in the printed version*]

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

## 4. Illiteracy in British Prisons

Chris Upward.

*This item is ritten in Cut Spelling.*

An important field of background research for spelling reformers is the degree of illiteracy found in the prison population, as the social evil of illiteracy is there manifested in a particularly acute form. The following summary and excerpt from a recent report contain some basic information on educational standards, but they really only represent the starting point for much needed further research specifically on the question of illiteracy. Readers who can contribute further information to help pursue this line of inquiry are invited to write to the editor.

In December 1991 the Prison Reform Trust (59 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU) published a 6-page paper entitled *The Identikit Prisoner: characteristics of the prison population*. It appeared in advance of the promised results of a national prison survey, for which 10% of all male prisoners and 20% of all female prisoners were interviewed during 1991.

### Topics covered in the paper were:

- 1 homelessness,
- 2 unemployment,
- 3 education,
- 4 mental health,
- 5 family ties,
- 6 the route from care to custody,
- 7 relatives in jail,
- 8 age,
- 9 gender,
- 10 ethnicity,
- 11 average sentence length,
- 12 discussion and conclusions.

Section 3, on education, is now given in full.

### Education

Over 40% of prisoners have no formal educational qualifications on entering prison. Preliminary results from the national prison survey are shown in the table below.

<b>Education Qualifications</b>	<b>Proportion of Prisoners</b>
None	43%
Vocational qualifications	8%
Highest qualification O level or equivalent	36%
Highest qualification A level or equivalent	8%
Other	5%

In the academic year 1984/85, of 28,225 prisoners assessed for literacy, 6.2% had a reading age of eight years or less and 9.4% of 10 years or less. The Home Office has estimated that around one half of all prisoners have functional difficulties with literacy (source: NACRO)."

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 15, 1993/2 pp8,9 in the printed version]

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

## 5. Some Empirical Data on the *mat-mate* System

### Patrick Groff

Patrick Groff is Professor of Education Emeritus of San Diego State University, and will be reporting regularly in the *JSSS* on spelling matters in America.

In [New Spelling 90](#) (Fennelly, 1991) considerable comment is given to what is described there as "the *mat-mate* problem" (Item 4.1). "English has evolved a complicated — and inefficient — way of dealing with it." Fennelly, et al. (1991, Item 3) observe. The *mat-mate* spelling pattern "in fact is at the very heart of the spelling problems of the English language," they conclude (Item 3).

The crux of this problem, *New Spelling 90* advances, is the single vowel letter — consonant(s) — final <e> spelling of words (eg *mate*). The final e in such words signals that the speech sound to be given the first vowel letter is its "long" vowel sound. The final <e> is not sounded.

*New Spelling 90* recommends that spellings such as *mate* be reformed so that the final <e> here is placed alongside the first vowel letter in these words. Thus, *mate* would be spelled *maet*. This decision is based on "a statistical analysis of current spelling," *New Spelling 90* (Preface) explains. In coming to this determination about the spelling of words that contain "long" vowel sounds, there seemingly was no consultation made, however, of the empirical evidence about learners' abilities to spell and read the words in question. Such information is in short supply. There apparently are only two readily available sources of these data.

The first is the *New Iowa Spelling Scale* (Greene, 1955). The NISS reports the percent of students at grades two through eight who could spell correctly 5507 commonly used words. The second source is *Children's Knowledge of Words* (Dale & Eichholz, 1960). It presents the percent of students at grades four, six, eight, ten, and twelve who could read and were familiar with 12302, 6130, 4460, 3431, and 2027 commonly used words, at these grade levels respectively.

The NISS reports that 52 percent of fourth-grade students could spell correctly monosyllabic words that have the final e spelling pattern described above (eg, *mate*, *theme*, *hike*, *nose*, *cute*). The NISS also reports that 50 percent of fourth-graders could spell correctly monosyllabic words with a cluster of two contiguous vowel letters (rather than two separated vowel letters as is the case in the final <e> spelling pattern) (eg *nail*, *seal*, *seed*, *tries*, *soap*, *pour*, *thrown*). The second vowel letter in both these categories of words signals that the first vowel letter should be given its "long" speech sound. [\[1\]](#)

When the fourth-grade students in the NISS spelled words in these two categories (eg, *mate* vs. *nail*) onto which the suffix *ing* had been added, they were more successful with words of the latter category (eg *nail*) than with the former (eg, *mate*). On the average, 52% of these students could spell correctly words such as *raining*. On the average, only 39 percent could spell words such as *smiling*. It is also pertinent to note that on the average 13% of the students who could spell words such as *rain* could not spell their inflected (*ing*) forms. This inability increased to 22% for words such as *smile-smiling*.

There was no significant difference between fourth-grade children's ability to read words in the two categories discussed here (eg, *mate* vs. *nail*). The CKW study reported that 77% of these students could read monosyllabic words in the final <e> category (eg, *mate*). Of these students, 76% could read words in the vowel letter cluster category (eg *nail*).

The data from both NISS and the CKW studies appear to support the *New Spelling 90* advocacy of the reform of spelling represented by the change of the spelling of *mate* to *maet*. In this respect, it is obvious that spelling final e words (eg *mate*) requires the learning of only a single rule regarding the initial vowel letter — final <e> connection. On the other hand, with vowel letter cluster words (eg, *nail*) the learner must remember that various letters are used in the secondary position of the clusters to signal that the initial letter should be given its "long" vowel sound. These secondary letters in the cluster can be <a> (as in *seal* and *soap*), <e> (as in *seed*, *lies*, and *hoe*), <i> (as in *paid*), <o> (as in *door*), <u> (as in *four* and *soul*), <w> (as in *bowl*), and <y> (as in *days*).

Despite suffering the disadvantages of being less predictably spelled, the vowel letter cluster words (eg *nail*) were spelled (by NISS students) and read (by CKW students) almost as well as were final <e> words (eg, *mate*). When spelling monosyllabic words inflected with *ing*, students had more success with vowel letter cluster words than ones with final e endings. These accomplishments become all the more remarkable when one discovers that in the NISS the ratio of monosyllabic predictably spelled words with final <e> endings to unpredictably spelled ones in this category was 3.2 to 1. For vowel letter cluster words (eg, *rain* vs. *bear*) this ratio was 1 to 1.13.

The explanation for the impressive ability of students to spell and read vowel letter cluster words as well or better than they can words that end in final <e>, despite the apparent unpredictable spellings of so many of those in the former category, is not altogether clear. We know at present more about the developmental stages of children's spelling ability than we do about why these stages evolve in the order that they are observed to follow. We know, for example, that children ordinarily learn to spell words such as *coat* and *wheel* before they do words such as *home* and *knife* (Barnes, 1992). Moreover, in attempting to spell *home*, for instance, children typically will write *hoem* before *home* (Barnes, 1992).

It is significant, at this point, to note that children's inventions of plausible spellings of words reflect the kind of thinking on this matter employed by the learned authors of *New Spelling 90*. This notably similar cogitation by both parties is to discover a tenable system for spelling words that is based on the knowledge about phoneme-grapheme correspondences that respectively is available to them. The common goal for the young and the mature here is to bring reason to bear on a practical problem. We must infer that young as well as older humans inherently are rational beings. This deduction explains to some extent why young children are eager to spell words linearly by segmenting them into a sequence of speech sounds, and by regularly symbolizing each sound with a letter or digraph that has a reasonable connection to it.

The agreements between *New Spelling 90* and young children as to the plausible way to spell words has some immediately practical implications for the Simplified Spelling Society. It is becoming evident (Ehri, 1992) that it is wise to teach students to spell phonetically before they are expected to spell in the conventional ways. The best expert opinion available to schools as to what phonetic spellings should be taught comes from the SSS.

By acting as a source to schools' spelling programs in this manner, the SSS can enhance its prestige, help improve children's chances of mastering traditional orthography, and gain some favourable publicity. The movement toward the reform of spelling doubtless can be intensified more by the Society's active engagement in educational affairs than from an attitude by it of splendid isolation. When the time comes that society elects to accept spelling reform, the SSS wants to be on the school scene, ready and able to assist educators to implement this transformation.

## References

- Barnes W G W (1992) 'The developmental acquisition of silent letters in orthographic images' in S. Templeton & D. R. Bear (Eds.) *Development of orthographic knowledge and the foundations of literacy* Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dale E, Eichholz G. (1960) *Children's Knowledge of words* Columbus OH: Bureau of Educational Research and Service, Ohio State University.
- Ehri L C (1992) 'Review and commentary: Stages of spelling development' in S Templeton & D R Bear (Eds) *Development of orthographic knowledge and the foundations of literacy*, Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Fennelly L R (Ed.) (1991) *New Spelling 90*. Croydon, England: Simplified Spelling Society.
- Greene H A. (1955) *New Iowa spelling scale* Iowa City IA: Bureau of Educational Research and Service, University of Iowa.

[1] Certain unclassifiable words were omitted from both these calculations, and all others that were made (eg *weave*, *seize*, *noise*, *choose*).

## 6. 'Quite good' or 'totally unacceptable'?

### Christopher Upward reviews

#### **Spelling it out: the spelling abilities of 11- and 15-year-olds**

by Greg Brooks, Tom Gorman, Lesley Kendall (1993), National Foundation for Educational Research (The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 2DQ), 39pp, £5, ISBN 0 7005 1332 9. This review is rith in Cut Spelng.

#### **Th study**

Readrs ho hav not previously considrd th importnce of spelng err analysis for questions of spelng policy cud do worse than start with this butifully desk-top-publishd study. Its lucid styl, clear and wel-explained statisticl charts, and helpful hedngs make it a plesur to read. It has received publicity as a fresh contribution to current debates on litracy standrds in England, and concludes that standrds ar 'quite good' (§4.2). Th reserch is based on a corpus of 3,342 spelng errs, wich is substantialy larjr than th undr 2,000 examnd in th [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 1987/3](#), Item 12. Th errs wer colectd from short exerpts from nearly 1,500 texts rith by 11- and 15-year-olds in four difrnt years in th period 1979–88.

#### **Th questions and th ansrs**

Besides givng a brod pictur of spelng standrds, th study askd wethr certn variabls (aje and sex of riters, dificlty of topic, year of composition) wud be reflectd in difrnt err frequencis found in th scripts. Som of th variabls showd up clearly (as one wud expect): 15-year-olds spelt betr than 11-year-olds, girls spelt betr than boys, and esir subject matr containd fewr misspelngs than mor dificlt. One wondrs howevr wethr th comparisn of standrds by aje was fair to th 11-year-olds, as th 15-year-olds wer askd to rite a story as tho for a 4-year-old audience, wich shud hav encourajd them to strive for childish vocablry hos spelng they ot to hav mastrd many years befor. Th difrng years of composition wer examnd for any syns of a chanje of spelng standrds over th 10 years concernd.

If ther had been a markd chanje, th results wud hav add furthr evidnce to th public debate on litracy standrds jenrly; but altho ther wer som syns of improved performnce of 11 year olds from 1979 to 1988, th authrs express resrvations, sayng that th improvemnt may hav been du to samplng difrnecs. This then rases th question wethr a survey of errs made by som hundreds of pupils can posbly demnstrate a nationl trend, even wen they constitute a 'nationally representativ sampl'.

#### **Classification of errs**

Of most intrest to readrs unfamiliar with spelng err analysis wil be th tecniqes for classifyng errs. Trubl was taken over a watrtyt definition of a 'misspelng', with an 'agreemnt trial' beforhand to ensure al th script-markrs wer asesng errs in th same way. Words with 2 misspelngs wer countd twice, but discrimnation was needd in a case like \**thort* for *thought*, wher it was decided that esentially only one err (a singl 'grafeme substitution') had been made, rathr than two, or thre, for the number of letters misspelt. Each err was classifyd undr one of th foloing 'major err categris' wich describe th typ of letr-misuse that constituted th err:

- 1) insertion (eg \**untill* for *until*),
- 2) omission (eg \**occurring* for *occurring*),
- 3) substitution (eg \**definate* for *definite*),
- 4) transposition (eg \**freind* for *friend*), and
- 5) grafeme substitution, as in \**thort* for *thought*.

Altho such categoris ar comnly used in spelng-err analysis, we shud realize that they ar of limitd explanatry powr: they tel us wat kinds of errs wer made, but not wy they wer made. It is th causes of err that shud be our primary concern. Here wat th report merely calcs 'minor err categoris' ar of much gretr significnce. These categoris classify errs undr th hedngs 'homofones', 'real words', 'efects of pronunciation', 'dubld lettrs', 'silent lettrs', 'majic e', 'shwa vowls', 'transposition of i and e'. These ar al featur of english spelng wich ar comnly observd to trip peple up. It wud hav been useful if these categoris had also been cross-refrncd against th category of 'redundncy', to se how many of th errs involvd redundnt lettrs (wich is wat Cut Spelng specifically targets); past studis sujet th numbr myt hav been in th rejon of 65% of th total numbr of errs.

### **Dubius statistics**

Th study provides evdnce for asesng curent litracy standrds in England, and readrs wil natrly look to se wat spelng standrds wer found. It is therfor unfortunat that, to save time, th reserchrs used a countng method wich seriously blurs th results. They countd th errs in th first 10 lines ritn by each pupil, and not from a fixd numbr of words (say, th first 100). Consequently, wen th covr of th report reasuringly tels us "over half the scripts contained only one error or none in the first 10 lines", this dosnt actuly say how err-prone th pupils riting was. Larj handriting with 5 errs in 50 words spread over 10 lines was thus deemd to be of th same standrd as 5 errs in 100 words of smal handriting. It may also be that certn categoris of riter tend to hav larjr handriting than othr categoris: perhaps yungrr riters rite larjr than oldr, or girls larjr than boys, or less skild riters larjr than mor skild. Th reserchrs did considr this question, but decided it was not a significnt variabl. It is dificlt not to conclude this misjumnnt that invalidates ther results.

### **How bad is 'quite good'?**

Once one realizes that an importnt part of th statistics thus laks a firm numericl basis, one looks again at th claims that standrds ar "quite good", that ther is a "very lo mean numbr of errs" (§3.1), and that most pupils "can sho control over a gret deal of th english spelng systm" (§4.2). Th study found an avraj of 2.2 mispelngs per 10 lines of riting, wich (for th sake of argumnt) myt hav containd an avraj of 66 words. That wud mean that pupils wer on avraj mispelng one word in evry 30 they rote. Anotr conclusion in th report (§3.2) states that only 6% of pupils ar making frequent errs by the end of compulsry scool; so evidntly one word in, say, 30 mispelt is not considrd 'frequent'. Othr jumnnts made by th reserchrs similrly tendd to produce mor favorabl results than one myt feel wer justifyd. Punctuation errs wer excluded. Riting 'of' insted of 'have' was rated a syntactic err, not a mispelng (by that argumnt, confusion of *there/their* myt be ignord as merely syntactic too). And al th riting was of an elementry kind, ie it did not relate to any of th pupils scool subjects othr than english. Wen one takes al this into acount, th pictur looks far less reasuring than th reports conclusions imply.

### **Lo expectations**

In th presnt crisis of english (british? american? english-speakng?) education, a constnt coment is how lo expectations ar in England, compared with those on th european contnnt or in japan. Regretbly, th NFER study of spelng standrds bers furthr witness to those lo expectations. Even if

English teenagers only misspell one word in 50 when writing elementary English, that would surely be an indictment of 6 (or 10) years of literacy teaching. The fact is that, in English, people are often unable to write words properly (or at all — see David Moseley's findings on how pupils avoid using difficult spellings in their writing), which they are perfectly capable of thinking and speaking. This is a severe limitation on the potential for literacy, and should be regarded as an absurd and unacceptable situation. Yet the literacy classes still seem largely oblivious to the problem. The present writer did not spot a single misspelling in the 39 pages of the report under review, and the authors no doubt took care to ensure accuracy. Yet they describe as 'quite good' the fact that under 25% of 11-year-olds and under 40% of 15-year-olds managed to achieve the same standard when writing just 10 lines on the most undemanding of subjects. Why this discrepancy of expectations?

### **Inadequate understanding**

Conspiracy theorists put it down to the educated trying to keep the uneducated in their place, and there are indeed teachers who fear improved literacy will undermine their own status. A more charitable view will note that, in the English-speaking world, a profoundly irregular spelling system obstructs understanding of how an alphabetic writing system should work. The very title of the NFER study demonstrates this: it refers to the 'spelling abilities' of 11- and 15-year-olds, when in fact it is concerned not with their abilities, but with their performance. Ability and performance, as educationists should know, are by no means always the same thing. Otherwise Thorstad's findings on literacy acquisition in England and Italy would mean that Italian children have an innate spelling ability several times greater than their English counterparts. But of course English children are not stupider than Italians — they just face an infinitely harder task when learning to read and write; and when the task is made easier, their performance improves accordingly (see Downing on the Initial Teaching Alphabet).

Another area of inadequate understanding concerns the phonics versus visual strategies debate. On p13 the report calls for teaching to incorporate "not just phonics but also visual strategies" (an odd order of precedence, in view of recent priorities in teaching methodology), and one of the report's conclusions highlighted on the cover is that "many of the errors involved misapplication of phonics or 'sounding-out' strategies". Yet in one form or another this argument about a phonics versus visual approach has been going on for over 400 years (see Ian Michaels' history of English teaching), and as the one approach is found unsatisfactory, so the pendulum swings back to the other. But just as the key to the success of the wheel was that it is round, so the key to the success of the alphabet is that the visual and the phonics should reinforce each other. In modern English the two all too often contradict each other instead. Until they are better harmonized, literacy standards can never be as high as in most other languages. The system generates cognitive confusion: it is just not user-friendly.

### **Diagnosis without treatment**

The NFER study presents fresh and useful data in an attractive manner. Its glibly optimistic verdict on current literacy trends is however not supported by its evidence. More seriously, it was soon exaggerated in the media, when Professor Brian Cox, editor of the 1989 'Cox Report', claimed on television that the study showed a large improvement in spelling standards. But if its verdict is questionable, its analysis of errors provides a useful diagnosis of the disease. It is to be hoped that one consequence of the present crisis will be that literacy professionals will begin to look beyond the symptoms and ask about causes and cures. The analysis of 'minor error categories' in the present study sets out along the road towards establishing causes — but the idea of cures appears not yet to impinge on its discourse. The spelling reform movement still has everything to offer!

## 7. Towards Roman Lipi

### Madhukar N Gogate

Following our reports back in the late 1980s ([JSSS 87/3](#), *tem 6*, & [89/2](#), Item 7) on the RLP (Roman Lipi Parishad, founded 1984, the movement for introducing Roman alphabet scripts for the languages of India), we here provide a first update for the 1990s. The following is the background paper for the 4th Roman Lipi Sammelan (conference), held in Bombay in December 1991. (The paper was widely distributed as a printed circular, with nearly 10000 copies.) It describes the linguistic situation in India, the particular factors affecting the development of writing systems in that situation, and the practical steps taken by the RLP movement to advance its cause. We have to thank Madhukar N Gogate, Executive Director of RLP, for keeping us abreast of RLP's activities.

1. India is a multi-language, multi-script country. Roman Lipi Parishad (RLP) recommends optional use of Roman lipi (script) containing symbols *abcd...xyz* and global numerals *0123456789* for writing Indian languages. Roman numerals *I, II, III, IV*, etc are not recommended.
2. Existing scripts have certain merits, sentimental value and vast literature. They are not to be discarded. Roman lipi may be used where existing scripts prove inadequate.
3. Advantages of Roman lipi are: (a) All compact machines such as typewriters, computers etc designed for English would be usable for our languages. (b) Language learning would be simplified.
4. We use English for higher education and higher business. Roman symbols are displayed on industrial products. RLP is not against making compact machines for various scripts. But looking to the thrust of English language, and for reasons of economy, it is advantageous to accept Roman lipi. Moreover, our scripts are multi-tier with symbols interconnected at various levels with distortions. Roman lipi is linear and very convenient for typing work, phone books, dictionaries, address diaries, computers etc.
5. It is baffling to see signboards in unfamiliar scripts when visiting different states in India. Obviously, signboards in 2 scripts (local and Roman) would help everyone. Communication will be hampered if phone books, vehicle number plates etc are made in various scripts.

#### Selection of Symbols

6. RLP had convened three Sammelans (conferences) in the past, to select symbols for various sounds. Three principles were adopted (a) Roman lipi should be phonetic. (b) Minor sound variations may be ignored for simplicity. A script is not a taperecorder. (c) Take symbols available on English printing machines.
7. Roman script contains only 26 symbols. So some combinations have been accepted, such as *aa, ae, d:, t:* (see table of symbol-sound relations below). Symbol <:> is called colon. Only small symbols <abcd...> may be used for our languages, reserving capital symbols <ABCD...> for special uses such as telegrams, personal names and brand names (if not changeable) and original English sentences, if required to be quoted within **Indian language text**.
8. For a natural phonetic flow, it is necessary to respell names and English words (absorbed in our languages as per our way of pronunciation). Thus words *icecream, pencil, company, nurse*,

*injection, pneumonia, cricket, oxygen, Germany, Cambridge, John, Anand* will be recast in our languages as *aaiskrim, pensil, kampani, nars, injekshan, nyumonyaa, kriket:, awksijan, jarmani, kembrij, jawn, aanand*. Note that *aanand* is a male name (spelled in English as *Anand*) and also a common noun 'delight' in many languages. *saamne aanand pensils kaa kaarkhaanaa hai* 'Factory of Anand Pencils is in front' looks well in Hindi. But, if the brand name cannot be changed, write *saamne ANAND PENCILS kaa kaarkhaanaa hai*. Some English words, if not respelled, may clash with regular words.

9. Dictionary sequence for words would be *abcd...xyz*.

10. Punctuation marks would be as in English. But prose writing becomes difficult to read when only small symbols *abcd...* are used in the text. For clarity, use slant stroke *</>* in place of the full-stop *<.>* at the end of a sentence.

### **Popularization**

11. Obviously, Roman lipi cannot be imposed on people. Then how and where to popularize it? For the last few years, RLP had concentrated on Marathi language for some experience, which is summarized below.

12. Marathi (*maraath:i*) is written in Devanagari script, almost similar to Hindi's Devanagari. English explanations and examples (*k-king, l-lamp* etc) are necessary for multilingual readership. For Marathi readers, Marathi explanations and direct Devanagari-Roman relations (in Devanagari sequence) are far more effective.

13. Mailing of printed circulars to intellectuals generates a thin written response, but it keeps the movement under public eye. Occasionally, it draws media-attention, donor-attention.

14. Printed circulars may be hand-delivered, followed with personal meetings to clear doubts. Circulars may be distributed at public meetings of educated persons. Some of them may be interviewed during recess hours. Circulars should be brief, giving main reasons for taking Roman lipi on an optional basis. They should give the symbol-sound relations, with few examples of sentences in both scripts. Numerous intellectuals support Roman lipi as it would instal Marathi on all machines. However, all these supporters do not start using Roman lipi. (How to begin?)

15. Meetings called to discuss Roman lipi are thinly attended. It is better to combine a talk on Roman lipi with other programs arranged by clubs, colleges etc.

16. There are, of course, many critics. Initially, some of them saw a foreign hand in the movement. But RLP's constructive approach has dispelled such doubts. Devanagari is like rail-travel. Roman lipi is like air-travel. Use either option, to suit. This analogy helps to win supporters.

17. Doordarshan took interest in the movement and invited RLP for a 25-minute telecast on Maharashtra-Goa network. Excellent publicity.

18. No attempts were made to teach Roman lipi to illiterates or to Devanagari literates not knowing English at all. According to some literacy-campaigners, Roman lipi is easy and yet unsuitable. There are no story books or jobs awaiting the Roman-lipi-literates.

19. Rural shopkeepers with Devanagari signboards do not need Roman lipi for their business. Moreover, additional Roman lipi signboards involve expenses, wall space etc. (Next question: why Roman Marathi? why not English itself?)

20. Some elected representatives and officers of Government/Municipal bodies were contacted. Would these institutions accept Marathi letters typed in Roman lipi, while the official reply may go



in Devanagari? The suggestion was appreciated by many, but it cannot be implemented without government approval.

21. Tests show that the printers (adults, experienced in both Devanagari and English typesetting) are initially puzzled, but they grasp Roman lipi with 15 minutes discussion. Use colons, slant strokes, no capitals, etc. Directions should be given. Printers are not concerned with the symbol-sound relations. They would need a properly written Roman manuscript (and not a Devanagari manuscript) for executing a printing order in Roman lipi (similarly, for typists).

22. Tests show that a class of 30 children in Marathi-medium schools, age 14–15 (with 3 years study of English ) can be oriented to Roman lipi within 45 minutes. Distribute xerox copies of symbol-sound relations, sample words and sentences in both scripts. Read loudly in the class, intermittently taking responses. There should be 2 exercises each of say 10 simple sentences. One is about reading Roman sentences. Almost in chorus, children give correct answers. Other exercise is on romanizing Devanagari sentences. Children hesitate, but slowly some of them attempt on blackboards. Explain mistakes in a friendly way. Children (and the curiously-watching teachers) are happy to learn a new script. They like Roman lipi. Treat this as a game.

23. Several newspapers published RLP's articles on reasons for taking Roman lipi, and gave free publicity to a poem competition, mentioned below. But newspapers are commercial ventures. Their space is valuable for news and advertisements. They cannot oblige every time.

24. A poem competition in Roman lipi was held. Thousands of explanatory pamphlets were distributed. To avoid printing mistakes, a sample poem in both scripts and symbol-sound relations were typeset, and blocks/bromides were supplied to newspapers. This put RLP to heavy expenditure. 109 entries were received, checked, and token prizes were awarded. Two conclusions emerged. (a) Response is fairly good. People are willing to try Roman lipi (b) 75% entries did not use symbol-sound relations properly. Tutorials (explain, students err, correct errors, take examinations etc) are needed to set Roman- lipi in public mind.

25. Generally speaking (there are exceptions), Active English-users (doctors, engineers, scientists) support optional Roman lipi and global numerals in Devanagari text. Active Marathi-users (authors, journalists) are indifferent to Roman lipi and insist on Devanagari numerals, though they see global numerals on watches, coins, calculators, phone dials, thermometers, playing cards etc.

26. Literature develops within a framework of standard symbols, words, orthography and grammar. Devanagari has some flaws, but its framework is known to authors, readers, teachers, printers. Both Literature and Roman lipi would acquire bad name, if the untrained printers use wrong symbols. It would be premature for Roman lipi to enter the field of Literature. However, for public practice and evolution of orthography, Roman lipi may be tried for short pieces such as poems, jokes, cartoon strips etc. For guidance, RLP has published a booklet on few Marathi poems in Roman lipi.

27. Roman Lipi supporters generally agree that the orthography in Roman may be modified. Thus, eliminate the duality of short-long vowels in Devanagari. Write *sarkaar* (government), *madhe* (within) in place of non-phonetic Devanagari equivalents *sarakaara*, *madhye*. Split long words where possible for dictionary convenience, thus *rashiyaa madhe* (within Russia), and not *rashiyaamadhye* as done in Devanagari Marathi. However, grammar should not be over-simplified. Thus, genders allotted to inanimate objects are irrational, but their removal would be unacceptable.

28. Film titles are given in Devanagari and Roman on posters. These are spelled according to the 'lucky' number of symbols, advised by astrologers. Hence, one sees a variety of spellings such as *gita*, *gitaa* or *geetaa*. (Variety is amplified since South Indians prefer <th> in place of <t>. This raises question—who is going to enforce standardization of symbols? Do we allow marginal

adjustments of symbols for every language?).

29. Shortforms of names are preferred in Devanagari style. Devanagari is written in syllables (consonant plus vowel). Thus *raam govind joshi* may be shortformed to *raa.go.joshi* and not *r.g.joshi* (pronounced aar. ji. joshi).

30. Industrialists have shown some interest in the movement for 2 reasons: (a) Roman lipi is helpful for quick training in spoken Marathi, for non-Marathi staff in Maharashtra for better customer relations. (b) Roman lipi is useful for industrial culture. "One machine—all languages" gives a strong message of productivity, wide market and mutual considerateness. RLP hopes to get the Industrialists support for starting training courses, 2-script advertisements etc. RLP's booklet on few trial sentences in four languages is well appreciated.

31. A practice lesson is given below, with some sentences in Marathi in Roman lipi, separated by slant strokes. Basic words are alphabetically listed in a dictionary extract. Various suffixes for gender-number-case-tense are not listed. Even then, a non-Marathi, non-Devanagari, English-knowing person can judge substantial meaning of the Marathi sentences, as seen from tests made on some persons. Proper English translation is given.

### Practice Lesson in Marathi

rashiyaa madhe kraanti chaa prayatna zaalaa/ me 91 madhe maaji pradhaan mantri raajiv gaandhi yaanchi bawmb sphot:aat hattyyaa zaali/ gaajaraa madhe si jivansatva aste/ shikshakaan chaa pagaar vaadh:vu ase mukhya mantryaani aashvaasan dile/ aaj paaus pad:el asaa tarka aahe/

### Dictionary Extract (English words *italics*)

aahe *is* / aaj *today* / aashvaasan *assurance* / ase *like this* / aste *exists* / bawmb *bomb* / chaa 's (possessive suffix) / de *give* / gaajar *carrot* / hattyyaa *assassination* / jivansatva *vitamin* / kraanti *revolt* / maaji *former* / madhe *within* / mantra *minister* / me *May* / mukhya *chief* / paaus *rain* / pad: *fall* / pagaar *salary* / pradhaan *prime* / prayatna *attempt* / shikshak *teacher* / sphot: *explosion* / tarka *guess* / vaadh: *increment* / yaa *come; this* / zaalaa *happened*.

### English Translation

A revolt was attempted in Russia. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in a bomb explosion in May 91. Carrots contain vitamin C. Chief Minister gave an assurance to increase the salaries of teachers. Rains are forecast for today.

(Readers may write the practice lesson in their language so that the end English Translation is same. Please comment on various points such as 8, 10, 27, 28, 29; make tests as in 21, 22; discuss with intellectuals.)

### SYMBOL SOUND RELATIONS

**a** (u in *up*), **aa** (a in *car*), **ae** (a in *apple*),  
**aw** (aw in *law*), **b** (*boy*), **ch** (*church*),  
**d** (soft-th in *they*), **d:** (hard-d in *dog*),  
**e** (*egg*), **g** (*girl*), **h** (*he*), **i** (*it*), **j** (*jam*),

**k** (*king*), **l** (*lamp*), **l:** (hard-l), **m** (*man*),  
**n** (*no*), **o** (*open*), **p** (*pin*), **r** (*run*),  
**s** (*sit*), **t** (soft), **t:** (hard-tin *toy*), **u** (*put*),  
**v** (w in *woman*), **y** (*yes*), **z** (*zebra*)

### NOTES ON SOUNDS

- Sound **h** is combined in **bh**, **chh**, **dh**, **dh:**, **gh**, **jh** (**s** in *measure*), **kh**, **lh**, **mh**, **nh**, **ph** (*photo*), **rh**, **th** (*thin*), **th:**, **vh** (**wh** in *what*, **v** in *victory*).
- Long vowels **e:** (**ay** in *may*), **i:** (**ee** in *meet*), **o:** (**oa** in *boat*), **u:** (**oo** in *cool*), vowel nasalizer **m:** are used for some languages. Thus **kyom:** (*why*) is pronounced **kyo** with **o** nasalised in Hindi.
- Read **me**, **ham**, **tame**, **ai**, **au** as **m-e**, **h-a-m**, **t-a-m-e**, **a-i**, **a-u**, and not as in English words.
- For additional sounds in some languages, use **f**, **q**, **x**, **zh**, **h:** (visarga), **r:** etc.

## 8. The Transparency of Spanish Orthography

### Ian Mackenzie

Ian Mackenzie studied Spanish and French at the University of Oxford, then moving to Cambridge to embark on research in the field of semantics. In October 1992 he took up a lectureship in Spanish at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and now contributes this survey of Spanish spelling to the Society's *Journal*, where the lack of any account of Spanish has long been felt as a grievous omission. He hopes eventually to follow up this introductory article with a study of some of the practicalities of Spanish spelling, such as its pedagogical effects and the mechanisms for reform today.

#### Introduction

Unlike its English or French counterparts, the Spanish orthographical system is designed to express sound-symbol relations as transparently as possible. Indeed, most institutional authorities on the Spanish language treat orthography as a sub-branch of descriptive phonology. For example, in its *Esbozo de una Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española*, the Real Academia Española includes a chapter on orthography in the section dealing with phonology. The paragraph introducing that chapter contains the revealing statement:

In this [chapter]...we look...at the system established by distinctive [phonemic] oppositions, that is to say, we specify a single sign for each phoneme. (op cit: 120)

The highly phonemic character of the Spanish spelling system will be illustrated below, followed by a sketch of how such a model phonographic system has developed.

#### 1. The orthographic system

The Spanish alphabet is conventionally viewed as containing the following thirty letters:  
*a, b, c, ch, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, ll, m, n, ñ, o, p, q, r, rr, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.*

This means that in the dictionary words beginning for instance with *ch* follow those beginning with *c*, thus *chacal* comes after *cuyo*. However, the inventory of units central to the system is as follows (brackets indicate units peripheral to the system and having low frequency):

*a, b, c, ch, d, e, f, g, gu, h, i, j, (k), l, ll, m, n, ñ, o, p, (q), qu, r, rr, s, t, u, ü, v, (w), x, y, z.*

The basic system of sound-symbol correspondence for Spanish is shown in the following table. [\[1\]](#) Irregularities are dealt with afterwards, in section 2.

#### Sound-symbol relations in modern Spanish [\[2\]](#)

Phoneme <a href="#">[3]</a>	Symbol(s)	Distribution of symbols and/or exemplification
VOWELS		
/i/ <a href="#">[4]</a>	<i>i</i>	(i) syllable-internal position: <i>fino</i> [fíno] ('fine') (ii) post-consonantal position: <i>sierra</i> [sjérra] ('mountains') (iii) word-internal syllable-final position: <i>raigón</i> [raiγón] <a href="#">[6]</a> ('thick root') (iv) stressed post-vocalic word-final position: <i>fui</i> [fwí] ('(I) went')
/e/	<i>y</i> <a href="#">[5]</a> <i>e</i>	(i) unstressed post-vocalic word-final position: <i>rey</i> [réi] ('king') <i>fue</i> [fwé] ('(he) went')
/a/	<i>a</i>	<i>patata</i> [patáta] ('potato')
/o/	<i>o</i>	<i>hola</i> [óla] ('hello')

/u/	<i>u</i>	all contexts except between <i>g</i> and <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>fuego</i> [fwéyo] ('fire'), <i>lucha</i> [út[a] ('struggle');
	<i>ü</i>	between <i>g</i> and <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>lingüista</i> [liŋgwísta] ('linguist')
<b>CONSONANTS</b>		
<b>Plosives</b>		
/p/	<i>p</i>	<i>peseta</i> [peséta] ('peseta')
/b/	<i>b</i>	distribution not rule-governed <i>haber</i> [aβér <b>17</b> ] ('to have')
	<i>v</i>	<i>ave</i> [áβe] ('bird')
/t/	<i>t</i>	<i>tilde</i> [tílde] ('accent')
/d/	<i>d</i>	<i>doy</i> [dói] ('(I) give')
/k/	<i>c</i>	all contexts except before <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>capa</i> [kápa] ('cape');
	<i>qu</i>	before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> : <i>queda</i> [kéða] ('(he) remains')
/g/	<i>g</i>	all contexts except before <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>gato</i> [gáto] ('cat');
	<i>gu</i>	before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> : <i>guerrilla</i> [geríʎa] ('guerrilla warfare')
<b>Fricatives</b>		
/f/	<i>f</i>	<i>fé</i> [fé] ('faith')
/θ/ <b>[8]</b>	<i>z</i>	all contexts except before <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>zapato</i> [θapáto] ('shoe');
	<i>c</i>	before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> : <i>cédula</i> [θéldula] ('cell')
/s/	<i>s</i>	<i>sierra</i> [sjéra] ('mountains')
/j/ (palatal fricative)	<i>y</i>	<i>payaso</i> [pajáso] ('clown')
/x/	<i>j</i>	all contexts except before <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> : <i>paja</i> [páxa] ('straw');
	<i>g</i>	before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> : <i>gitano</i> [xitáno] ('gipsy')
<b>Affricative</b>		
/tʃ/	<i>ch</i>	<i>macho</i> [matʃo] ('male')
<b>Flap</b>		
/ɾ/	<i>r</i>	<i>pero</i> [péro] ('but')
<b>Trill</b>		
/r/ <b>[9]</b>	<i>rr</i>	<i>perro</i> [péro] ('dog')
<b>Lateral</b>		
/l/	<i>l</i>	<i>lío</i> [lío] ('mess')
/ʎ/	<i>ll</i>	<i>llama</i> [ʎáma] ('flame')
<b>Nasal</b>		
/m/	<i>m</i>	<i>mamá</i> [mamá] ('mummy')
/n/	<i>n</i>	<i>pan</i> [pán] ('bread')
/ɲ/	<i>ñ</i>	<i>mañana</i> [maɲána] ('tomorrow')
<b>Double consonant</b>		
/ks/	<i>x</i>	<i>léxico</i> [léksiko] ('lexicon')

### Note

Unless they carry a written accent, *i* and *u* always stand for a glide (ie one of the semi-consonantal/semi-vocalic allophones of the relevant phonemes) when they appear before or after any of the three other vowels. Compare, for example, monosyllabic *ley* [léi] ('law') with disyllabic *leí* [leí] ('(I) read'), and monosyllabic *pues* [pwes] ('then') with disyllabic *púa* [púa] ('sharp point'). Only the first member of each pair may be said to contain a diphthong.

### Stress rules

1. If a word ends in a consonant other than *n* or *s*, it is stressed on the final syllable unless it carries a written accent indicating stress elsewhere. Words ending in a vowel or *n* or *s* and which do not carry a written accent are stressed on the penultimate syllable. Examples are: *hablar* [aβlár] ('to speak'), *cama* [káma] ('bed'), *hablan* [áβlan] ('(they) speak') and *hablas* [áβlas] ('(you) speak').

2. A written accent must be used to indicate the stress on those words which are not covered by (1): *fútbol* [fútbol] ('football').

3. Written accents are used to distinguish a small number of otherwise homographic homophones, such as *sé* ('I know') and *se* (third-person reflexive pronoun).

## 2. Irregularities

A small number of Spanish spellings are not predictable from the above table and stress rules. These are accounted for by the following observations:

1. Before *e* and *i* /x/ and /θ/ are sometimes represented by *j* and *z* respectively. Examples are *pasajero* ('passenger') and *zeta* ('zed').

2. *h* is always silent.

3. In word-internal syllable-final position the /m/ ~ /n/ ~ /ɲ/ opposition is neutralized, yielding the archiphoneme /N/. Syllable-final nasals are assimilated to the following consonant, as in *enfermo* [emférmo] ('ill'), *conllevar* [konɲjeβár] [10] ('to involve'), and *diente* [djénte] ('tooth'). The representation of such syllable-final nasals is consistent with neither the phonetics nor the phonemics of the situation. Thus, while the archiphoneme /N/ may be represented by either *n* or *m*, neither graph consistently stands for the same phonetic segment, as revealed by a comparison of *diente* [djénte] and *enfermo* [emférmo].

4. *w* is used in a few recent loan-words, to represent either /b/, as in *wáter* [báteɾ] ('lavatory'), or /u/ as in *windsurf*.

5. *k*, representing /k/, is employed in a small number of loan-words deriving from a variety of sources. Examples of words containing *k* are *parking*, *káiser*, *kermes*, *kilómetro*, all of which reflect borrowing of one kind or another.

6. Use of *q* to represent /k/ (ie with *qu* pronounced as in English *quick*) is also limited to loan-words, such as *quantum* [kwántum] and Latin American *quáker* ('porridge').

7. A small number of learned words, such as (*m*)*nemotécnia* [nemotéknja], may be written with a redundant initial letter. A few rather more common words, such as (*p*)*sicología* [sikoloxía] may also be written with a silent initial letter. In the *Nuevas Normas* of 1952, the Academy proposed the dropping of initial silent *g*, *m* and *p*, and users of Spanish may now choose between etymologically-oriented and phonemic spellings for these words. However, full assimilation into the orthographical system has not proceeded at a uniform pace, and some of these words still retain their redundant initial letter in general written usage. A comparable situation exists for *se(p)tiembre* and *sé(p)timo*, which are generally written with a *p*, despite the fact that these words are generally pronounced [setjémbɾe] and [sétimo] respectively. [11]

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Use of digraphs

Schoolchildren and foreign learners of Spanish are generally taught that *ch* and *ll* are 'letters of the alphabet' representing /tʃ/ and /ʎ/ respectively. Consequently these digraphs are easily assimilated as indivisible units with no internal structure. Since *qu* almost always stands for /k/ rather than /ku/ (ie when /ku/ is realized as [kw]), this digraph is also easily assimilated as an indivisible unit. The grapheme *rr*, too, is treated as a single unit, standing for the alveolar trill — as opposed to the alveolar flap, represented by *r*. The grapheme *gu* is less consistent in its phonemic

value, since it has two possible pronunciations. These are /gu/ (realized as [gw] or [ɣw] before a or o — eg *guardia* [gwáɾðja] and *agua* [áɣwa] — and as [gu] or [ɣu] before a consonant — eg *Guzmán* [guθmán]<sup>[12]</sup> and *lúgubre* [lúɣuβre]) and /g/ (realized as [g] or [ɣ] before e and i — eg *guerrilla* [geríʎa] and *erguir* [erɣír]). The unit *gu* cannot, therefore, be learnt as an indivisible unit. Other double consonants, such as *cc* and *nn* represent two phonetic segments. Consider, for example, *acción* [akθjón] and *innegable* [inneyáβle].

The foregoing remarks indicate that apart from *gu*, those digraphs which do not correspond to two distinct phonetic segments are virtually always susceptible to one and only one interpretation, and thus do not pose any serious problems for either the reader or the writer of Spanish. Mapping *gu* onto the relevant phonemes — and the converse process — requires knowledge of a single orthographical rule. This is not an ideal state of affairs, but at least the mapping process is entirely rule-governed.

### 3.2. Breakdowns in one-to-one correspondence between sounds and symbols

The occurrence of *h* and the *b ~ v* alternation are, from the synchronic point of view, completely arbitrary. Users of Spanish simply have to memorize which words are spelt with *h* and which are not, which words represent /b/ (which, as is pointed out above, has the allophones [b] and [β]) as *b* and which as *v*.

A further weakness <sup>[13]</sup> in the system originates in the principle that before *e* and *i* the symbols *g* and *c* have the phonemic values of *j* and *z* respectively. This situation not only represents in itself a reduction in the transparency of the system, but the structural readjustments it triggers further obscure the relationship between the spoken and written codes. For in order to represent /g/ or /k/ before *e* or *i*, the digraphs *gu* and *qu* have to be brought into play. Use of *gu* as a contextual variant of *g* in turn requires use of a dieresis in order to provide a spelling for /gue/ or /gui/, as in *pingüe* ('greasy') and *pingüino* ('penguin'). The situation is further complicated by the facts that (i) *j*, rather than *g*, occurs before *e* and *i* in quite a large number of words (for example, *dije* [díxe] ('(I) said')) and (ii) *z*, rather than *c*, occurs in the same environments in a smaller number of words — for example, *enzima* [enθíma] ('enzyme').

The only other major weakness lies in the use of both *y* and *i* to represent /i/. Here again, the distribution of each symbol is rule-governed, although the use of two symbols to represent one phoneme further removes the spelling system from an ideal one-to-one correspondence with the sound system.

Less serious weaknesses are the mapping of the two phonemes /k/ and /s/ when they occur as a sequence onto the single symbol *x*, and the irregularities arising from neutralization of the nasals in certain positions.

Points 4 to 7 from Section (2) cover peripheral irregularities, which are of no consequence for the vast majority of Spanish words.

### 3.3. Heterographic homophones

It follows from the above remarks that there are very few heterographic homophones in Spanish. The causes of heterographic homophony are (i) the silence of *h* (eg *echo* ('(I) pour') and *hecho* ('fact')), (ii) the existence of two symbols for /b/ (eg *valón* ('Walloon') and *balón* ('ball')) and (iii) the existence of two symbols for /θ/ (eg *encima* ('on') and *enzima* ('enzyme')).

### 3.4. Basic regularity

In contrast to English and French, then, the Spanish orthographic system is highly phonemic. When one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence breaks down the resultant alternations between graphs are normally rule-governed and thus predictable. A few spellings can be described as irregular, but such cases are rare and the overall picture is one of generalized regularity. It is worth noting at this point that many of those words of Latin origin which in English include double consonants (despite the fact that the corresponding phonetic segment is not geminate), have a single consonant in Spanish. Examples are *acomodación*, *diferente* and *atención*.

### 3.5. An example of written Spanish, with a phonetic transcription [14] of the text

Y salió de Granada, donde dejó una escasa guarnición, el día 19 de abril. Cuando avistó Vélez, el sitio cristiano se había afirmado por tierra y mar. Acampó en el castillo de Ben Tomiz. Le urgía despachar el combate y regresar; en consecuencia, atacó sin dilación al enemigo. Por entre los viñedos, verdes todavía, clamorearon sus gritos de guerra.

[i saljó θe γ ranáða | donde ðexó una eskása γwa rniθjón | el día ðjeθinwéβe ðe aβ ril | | kwando aβistó βeléth | el sítjo kristjáno se abía afir máðo por tjéra i má r | | akampó en el kastílo ðe βen tomíθ | | le urxía ðespatjar el kombáte i reγ resár | | en konsekwénθja | atakó sin dilaθjón al enemíγo | | por entre los βijnéðos | bérðes toðaβía | klamoreáron sus γ rítos ðe γéra] (Antonio Gala, *El manuscrito carmesí*)

## 4. Historical development of the system

It was under the direction of Alfonso X (1252–84) that a written standard Spanish — based on the speech of the upper classes of Toledo — emerged. As there was as yet no opposition to the principle that letters should represent speech sounds, the medieval orthography generally reflected the way Spanish was spoken in official and cultured circles in Toledo in the latter half of the thirteenth century. However, as Entwistle (1962: 158) points out, adjustments to the system failed to keep pace with changes in spoken Spanish, particularly in the pronunciation of medieval *x*, *j*, *g*, *ç*, *z*, *s* and *-ss-*, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century the orthography was ready for reform by the Academy. A brief look at the history of *x*, *j*, *g*, *ç*, *z*, *s* and *-ss-* and the sounds they represented at different times should give an excellent idea of the main problems which the Academy has had to deal with and the extent to which this institution has sought to make Spanish orthography a phonemic system.

As Penny (1991: 86 ff) explains, in Old Spanish there were seven sibilant phonemes:

### Old Spanish sibilants

	voiceless	voiced
dental affricate	/ts/	/dz/
alveolar fricative	/s/	/z/
prepalatal fricative	/ʃ/	/ʒ/
prepalatal affricate	/tʃ/	

The following spellings were used in intervocalic position:

/ts/ - *c* (before *e* and *i*) and *ç*: *decir* ('to descend', now obsolete), *caça* ('hunt', modern equivalent: *caza*)

/dz/- *z*: *hazer* ('to do', mod equ: *hacer*)

/s/ - *ss*: *passo* ('step', mod equ: *paso*)

/z/ - *s*: *casa* ('house', mod equ: *casa*)

/ʃ/ - *x*: *dixo* ('(he) said', mod equ: *dijo*)

/ʒ/ - *g* (before *e* or *i*) and *j*: *mugier* ('woman', mod equ: *mujer*), *fijo* ('son', mod equ: *hijo*)

/tʃ/ - *ch*: *fecho* (ppt of *hazer*, mod equ: *hecho*).

The affricate /tʃ/, together with its graphical representation *ch*, passed unchanged into the modern language. The sub-system consisting of the remaining six phonemes underwent a series of changes which eventually yielded the three phonemes /θ/, /s/ and /x/ of modern Spanish. The first change, consisting in a weakening of the dental affricates to the dental fricatives /s/ and /z/, had probably been accomplished by the end of the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century the voiced series was eliminated (leaving /s/, /s/ and /ʃ/) and by the middle of the seventeenth century, probably as a consequence of the fact that the places of articulation of /s/, /s/ and /ʃ/ are very close to each other, the dental and prepalatal phonemes had moved forward (to an interdental articulation, /θ/) and backwards (to a velar articulation, /x/) respectively.

This phonological restructuring created a disparity between pronunciation and spelling, and prior to the reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth century at least eight graphs — ie all those employed in old Spanish — were employed to represent the three phonemes descended from /ts/, /dz/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. However, as the Academy began to take official control of the language, orthography was brought once again into line with pronunciation. The 1741 and 1763 editions of the Academy's *Ortografía* abolished *ç* and *ss* in writing, and in the 1815 edition *x* was officially prohibited as a representation of /x/ (its value being fixed as /ks/). [15] With the disappearance of *ss*, *s* had come to be the only symbol for /s/, while /x/ and /θ/ were each left with two graphical representations, namely *j* and *g* and *z* and *c*. As a concession to tradition, these graphical alternations were not abolished, the Old Spanish distribution of the graphs (*g* and *c* occurring only before *e* and *i*) being maintained.

The other principal irregularities in the system can also be traced back to medieval orthographical practices. The *b* ~ *v* alternation, for example, is clearly a vestige of former times. By the end of the sixteenth century the /b/ ~ /β/ opposition (represented graphically by the *b* ~ *v* contrast) which had existed in Old Spanish had disappeared and the letters *b* and *v* had come to have identical phonemic values. In the eighteenth century the use of these two letters was officially fixed, primarily on the model of the Old Spanish practice, with some concessions to Latin spelling, as in the case of the reflex of intervocalic -B-: eg Latin DEBET > Old Spanish *deve* > post-1800 Spanish *debe*.

The use of silent *h* records the previous existence of a laryngeal fricative /h/, which had disappeared from standard Spanish by the end of the sixteenth century.

The modern distribution of *i* and *y* was officially established in the 1815 edition of the Academy's *Ortografía* and to a certain extent represents a compromise between phonemic transparency and respect for tradition. For example, the phonemically unjustified retention of vocalic *y* in unstressed post-vocalic word-final positions (eg *rey*, *ley*) reflects the medieval practice of employing this graph in word-final position after any vowel except /i/ (see Penny (1988: 343) for statistics concerning the Alfonsine corpus).

It is also worth noting that the use of *qu* for /k/ before *e* and *i* results from the generalized loss (according to Penny (1991: 83–4), at a period prior to the development of written Spanish) of the glide [w] from reflexes of Latin QU-, as in the case of QUINDECIM, which became Spanish *quince* ('fifteen'). Before stressed /a/, however, the glide was not eliminated, and it was only in 1815 that the Academy replaced *qua-* by *cua-*. Thus modern *cuando* [kwándo] was written as *quando* until the last century.

An equally important date is 1803, when the fourth edition of the Academy's *Diccionario* was published. In this work use of the digraphs *ch*, *ph* and *th* to represent /k/, /f/ and /θ/ respectively, a practice hitherto limited to a relatively small number of learned words, was formally prohibited.



## Concluding remarks

It is clear that the phonemic transparency of modern Spanish orthography is the result of sustained observance of the principle that spelling should reflect pronunciation and not linguistic history. In the modern period at least, it has been the Academy which has played the most significant role in maintaining sound-symbol correspondence, although in making a number of concessions to tradition and etymology it has stopped short of implementing a one-to-one set of sound-symbol correspondences. [16] Its most significant reforming work was performed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## Bibliography

- Butt, J. & Benjamin, C. (1988) *A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish*, London: Edward Arnold
- Canellada, M.J. & Madsen, J.K. (1987) *Pronunciación del español*, Madrid: Castalia
- Entwistle, W.J. (1962) *The Spanish Language, Together with Portuguese, Catalan and Basque* (2nd edition), London: Faber & Faber
- Lapesa, R. (1942) *Historia de la Lengua Española*, Madrid: Escelicer
- Penny, R. (1988) 'The Old Spanish Graphs *i, j, g* and *y* and the Development of Latin  $G^{e,i}$  - and  $J^-$ ', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 65
- Penny, R. (1991) *A History of the Spanish Language*, Cambridge: CUP
- Real Academia Española (1952) *Nuevas Normas de Prosodia y Ortografía* (made prescriptive in 1959), Madrid: Espasa-Calpe
- Real Academia Española (1973) *Esbozo de una Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española*, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe
- Sampson, G. (1985) *Writing Systems (A linguistic introduction)*, London: Hutchinson
- Smith, C. (1988) *Collins Spanish-English English-Spanish Dictionary* (2nd edition), London: Collins
- Spaulding, R.K. (1962) *How Spanish Grew*, Berkeley: University of California Press

## Notes

[1] The phonemic system described here is based on that given in Canellada & Madsen (1987). This system represents a rather formal standard pronunciation. Many Spanish speakers operate with rather different systems, one of the commonest departures from the standard being the neutralization of the / $\lambda$ / ~ / $j$ / opposition. For such people, *mayo* ('May') and *mallo* ('mallet') would be pronounced identically as [májo].

[2] The phonetic symbols are those of the IPA.

[3] Vowels are listed in their order of appearance on the vowel quadrilateral starting from high front and moving in an anti-clockwise direction towards high back. Consonants are listed in the first instance by manner of articulation (plosives, fricatives, affricate, flap, trill, laterals, nasals) and then by place of articulation (from the lips backwards). The voiceless member of each voiced ~ voiceless pair is always given first.

[4] /i/ and /u/ are realized as glides when they are unstressed before or after /a/, /e/ or /o/. When either of /i/ and /u/ follows the other, the first vowel is realized as a glide. I have represented the on-glide allophones (ie the realization of /i/ or /u/ when they precede each other) by /j/ and /w/ respectively. The off-glide realizations are represented by the same symbols as those which stand for the full vocalic realizations of the two phonemes.

[5] The words *y* ('and'), pronounced [i], and *muy* ('very'), pronounced [mwí] represent rare exceptions to the distributional patterns given here.

[6] In Spanish voiced plosives (ie /b/, /d/ and /g/) are realized as fricatives (ie [β], [ð] and [ɣ])

respectively) in word-internal positions (unless they follow a nasal; /d/ is also plosive after a lateral). For example, the d of dar ('to give') and andar ('to walk') is pronounced [d], while the d of ayudar ('to help') is pronounced as [ð].

[7] [β] is an allophone of /b/. Note that the distribution of b and v does NOT correlate with the distribution of the allophones of the phoneme /b/.

[8] In most Andalusian and Latin-American varieties of Spanish the /θ/ ~ /s/ opposition is neutralized. In some areas (eg the province of Cádiz) the neutralization is in favour of /θ/ (this phenomenon is known as ceceo), and in most others it is in favour of /s/ (this phenomenon is known as seseo).

[9] At the beginning of a word, in syllable-final position and after /l/ or /n/, there is neutralization of /r/ ~ /r̄/. The resultant archiphoneme (ie the abstract unit representing both the phonemes whose opposition has been suspended) /R/ is always represented by r. Although this arrangement does not capture the phonetics of the situation — r will stand for [r] in word-initial position and after a nasal or lateral, but for [r̄] in syllable-final position — it constitutes a consistent representation of the phonemics involved. Thus sonreír ('to smile') may be transcribed phonemically as /sonReíR/ and phonetically as [sonreír].

[10] [ɟ̞], a voiced palatal affricate, is an allophone of /j/.

[11] Schoolchildren may be taught either the etymologically-oriented spellings or the more phonemic ones. In formal written Spanish, people generally opt for the etymologically-oriented spellings. For example, in a corpus drawn randomly from mid-1980s editions of the Spanish daily newspaper El País there were 35 occurrences of septiembre and none of setiembre.

[12] See note 14.

[13] By 'weakness' I mean a departure from the theoretical ideal of one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence.

[14] Note that in discourse, word-initial /b/, /d/ and /g/ are only realized as plosives if the word containing them is preceded by a pause (indicated by | or | |), or if they are immediately preceded by a nasal or — in the case of /d/ only — a lateral. Word boundaries are not generally observed in extended speech — I could just as well have written the transcription without leaving a space between the representations of individual words. Note also that /s/ and /θ/ are voiced ([s] and [θ] respectively) when they occur syllable-finally before a voiced consonant.

[15] Modern Spanish México, Texas and Oaxaca, in which x stands for /x/, represent rare exceptions to the rule that x stands for /ks/.

[16] It is interesting to note that initially the Academy employed, in Lapesa's words (1942: 208–9), 'un criterio conservador y latinista'.

## **9. Revised Proposals for English in the National Curriculum & the SSS Response**

**Chris Upward**

### **Background**

In September 1992 the British Secretary of State for Education John Patten asked the National Curriculum Council (NCC) to conduct an urgent review of the National Curriculum Order for English. As part of the consultation procedure for that review, in October 1992 the SSS submitted some ideas for a long-term strategy for the development of English spelling, which were published in the [\*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society 1993/1\*](#), Item 2. The Department for Education published the outcome of the review in April 1993 in the form of Proposals for a revised English Order, and a new round of consultation was announced. The SSS then took the opportunity to make a further submission, relating specifically to the new Proposals' treatment of spelling. We here first reproduce the references made in the Proposals to spelling and related issues, and then publish the SSS's response, which was submitted to the NCC in July 1993.

### **What the NCC Proposals say about spelling**

Pupils' attainments in English at various stages in their education are now to be assessed under three Attainment Target (AT) headings: AT1 Speaking and Listening, AT2 Reading (including Literature), AT3 Writing (including Spelling, Grammar and Handwriting). The following abbreviations are also used: Statement of attainment = SoA, Programme of study = PoS, Key stage = KS.

***Page and paragraph references are given below to the NCC Proposals, so that interested readers can relate the following excerpts to the full context if they wish.***

The remit given to the National Curriculum Council by the Secretary of State for Education refers (piii) to "the need to... (2d) define more clearly the basic writing skills... which pupils needed to master and the variety of ways in which competence in spelling could be developed". In presenting the Proposals, the Chairman of the NCC states: "...An important part of our approach is to identify phonics as an essential skill in initial reading rather than a teaching method." The Proposals then contain the following statements relevant to spelling:

p2. §5.1 We have endorsed the... statement that the overriding aim of the English curriculum is "to enable all pupils to develop to the full their ability to use and understand English... this means the fullest possible development of capabilities in... reading and writing."

p2. §5.2 The writing attainment target more effectively signals the integration between spelling, handwriting and the broader definition of writing.

p3 §6.6 Council has sought: • to identify the essential knowledge and skills involved in learning to read and to define a balanced approach to initial reading which gives proper emphasis to the acquisition of phonic skills.

p4 §6.7 Teachers do not possess a 'conceptual map of reading development'. There is in particular no consensus about the phonic skills which pupils require... Initial reading requires the acquisition

of phonological awareness (conscious awareness of sounds and patterns of sounds in words as a preparation for phonic instruction) and phonic skills (a knowledge of the relationship between print symbols and sound patterns). The importance of pupils' acquisition of phonic skills in the very early stages is the reason why the Council has identified within Level 1 both the skills which need to be developed at the outset (eg the recognition of the initial sound when they hear a word) and those which follow on (eg the identification of initial and final sounds in words).

p4 §6.10 Council recognizes that reading schemes are a resource rather than a method of teaching.

p5 §6.18 The spelling strand terminates at level 6... Council recognizes the role of vocabulary enrichment in conveying meaning.

p5 §7.1 **Manageability** One of the foremost concerns in Council's recently published advice on *The National Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2* is the fact that '...the breadth of National Curriculum requirements means that there is now insufficient time to teach the basics of reading, writing and spelling...'

p6 **Guidance** §7.4 Teachers will require guidance to implement the new Order. This will be addressed in part through non-statutory guidance and also through separate guidance on specific issues. The priorities are the approach to standard English vocabulary and grammar, spelling and punctuation, all aspects of the teaching of initial reading...

## **p7 Attainment Target 1: Speaking and Listening**

### **p25 Attainment Target 2: Reading**

p27 General introduction, §2. Pupils' progress in **initial reading** is characterized by: ... • developing knowledge and awareness of the alphabetic system and the sounds and structures of the spoken language.

#### **p28 PoS KS 1 LEVEL 1. KS-related.**

§1 Pupils learn to read when they are taught the necessary skills, of which phonics is an essential component.

§2 Pupils... will need... teaching specifically designed to raise their awareness of sounds and patterns of sound as a preparation for phonic work.

§4 Pupils... should be taught the alphabet... The sources of information are: • phonic knowledge — of the relationship between sounds and letters; • graphic knowledge — the letter patterns in words... This means being taught: • **word identification and recognition** i) Phonics — knowledge of the relationship between print symbols and sound patterns. They should be made aware of the sounds of spoken language, and taught how symbols correspond to those sounds. Activities should include: • identifying and using a comprehensive range of letters and sounds (including combinations of letters, blends and digraphs), and paying specific attention to their use in the formation of words; • attention to syllables in longer words; • recognizing alliteration, sound patterns and rhyme; • experimenting with sound symbol relationships in their own writing.

**LEVEL-RELATED ... Subsequently**, pupils should: • be taught the alphabet; • be taught to identify initial and final sounds in words; • build up a sight vocabulary of common words in books read, or the reading scheme(s), and from their personal experience; • apply knowledge or phonic

and spelling patterns to their own writing.

p29 **SoA. INITIAL READING SKILLS.** Pupils should be able to: say the alphabet; identify first and final sounds in spoken and written words. **EXAMPLES** *Highlight the initial letters of children's names by singing a rhyme about the alphabet. Using objects, the names of which begin or end with the same sound (eg pen, pencil, paint, picture; coat, boat), list them and identify how the sound might be written.* **COMPREHENSION** Pupils should be able to: read aloud a minimum of 30 common usage words in a simple, short narrative. *Words such as: boy, girl, shop, cat, dog, mum, dad, book, big, small, they, I, we, you, was, had, can, come, go, and, of, the, to.*

p30 **KS1, LEVEL 2**

ii) **Information about words** — what can be learned about word meanings and parts of words from consistent letter patterns including: • plurals — by adding 's', 'es', and 'ies'; • spelling patterns in verb endings — 'ing', 'ed'; • relationships between root words (eg *magic*) and derivatives (eg *magician*).

iii) **Word recognition** — a developing vocabulary of words recognized on sight. Pupils need to be able to read words automatically and quickly. Pupils should acquire a sight vocabulary which extends from a few words of personal importance (their name, mum, dad) to a larger number of words from books and the environment around them (verbs, adverbs, adjectives).

**LEVEL RELATED** Pupils should: • be taught to combine initial sounds, simple consonant blends and vowel patterns and to learn common irregular words; • be taught about word endings (-ing, -ed), syllables, word families, roots of words; • learn how to use dictionaries to check spellings and find meanings.

**LEVEL 3.** Pupils should be taught about: • more complex blends and digraphs; • inconsistencies in phonic patterns; • prefixes and suffixes. Pupils should be taught to develop a sight vocabulary which goes beyond the personal and words in reading schemes.

p31 **STATEMENTS OF ATTAINMENT INITIAL READING SKILLS. LEVEL 2.** Pupils should be able to identify two-letter consonant blends and the most common digraphs; use more than one strategy (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) when reading unfamiliar words. **EXAMPLES** *al, aw, or, ar, sp, st, cl, ce, ci, cy, ch, sh, ir, cr, th, ou, ow, ge, gi, gy, ai, ee, ie, oa, oo, au, oi.*

**LEVEL 3.** Pupils should be able to: use with confidence a range of cues (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to read unfamiliar words.

**p47 AT 3: Writing (including Spelling, Grammar and Handwriting)**

p49 **General introduction:** progress in writing is characterized by • more accurate spelling.  
**STRAND** — spell correctly.

p50 **PoS KS 1, LEVEL 1, LEVEL-RELATED.**

**Initially**, pupils should: • be encouraged to make early attempts at writing using letters and known words; • discriminate between words and letters. **Activities should:** • help pupils understand the alphabetic nature of writing and pay attention to the visual spelling pattern of a growing number of words. **Subsequently**, pupils should be taught to • start and finish letters correctly; • form lower case and capital letters correctly; • write common letter strings within familiar and common words, eg *their name, 'ring', 'hand', 'shop'*; • remember the spelling of familiar words and use them in their

writing; • recognize the most obvious sound of each letter.

p51 **SoA**

**Spelling.** Pupils should be able to **write each letter of the alphabet**. EXAMPLES *Add the letters of the alphabet to an illustrated version of the poem 'A Was an Apple Pie'.*

p52 **PoS KS 1, KS-RELATED, LEVEL 2**

**10 Spelling** Pupils should be taught to: • write each letter of the alphabet; • learn simple spelling patterns; • spell commonly occurring simple words; • use simple morphemes (un-, in-, -ed, -ing). They should be taught to check their writing for accuracy. Teachers should continue to encourage pupils to experiment with the spelling of complex words and, at the same time, discuss misapplied generalizations and other reasons for misspellings.

p53 **SoA Spelling** Pupils should be able to: spell simple monosyllabic words correctly.

EXAMPLES: *cat, dog, sun, leaf, desk, skip.*

p55 **LEVEL 3 SoA Spelling** Pupils should be able to: spell simple polysyllabic words which conform to regular patterns. EXAMPLES: *because, after, open, teacher, animal, together.*

p57 **KS 2, LEVEL 4, SoA Spelling** Pupils should be able to: spell correctly complex polysyllabic words which conform to regular patterns. EXAMPLES: *medical, procession, signature, demonstration.*

p58 **KS 2, KS-RELATED, LEVEL 5**

**7 Spelling** Pupils should be accumulating a bank of words which they can spell correctly and learn to check spellings... using a dictionary... They should use their knowledge of letters and words including: • initial and subsequent letters; • the relevance of roots and origins of words, eg *'loveliness' is to be found under 'lovely'*; • alternative ways of spelling the same sound eg *n as in gn, kn, mn, pn.*

p59 **SoA Spelling** Pupils should be able to: spell correctly words with inflectional suffixes and consonant doubling and vowel deletion where required. EXAMPLES: *tapped, tapping; running, jotting, dimming, coming, hoping, liking.*

p65 **KS 3 and 4, LEVEL 6, SoA Spelling** Pupils should be able to: spell correctly polysyllabic words which do not conform to regular patterns. EXAMPLES: *accommodate, acquaintance, conscience, irrelevant, schedule, technique.*

p66 **KS 3 and 4, 6 Spelling** Pupils should continue to use their knowledge of regular patterns of spelling, word families, roots of words and their derivations. They should learn to spell correctly increasingly complex polysyllabic words which do not conform to regular patterns. They should proof-read their writing carefully to check for spelling errors and use a dictionary correctly. Classroom activities should develop discrimination in relation to homonyms (*their, there, they're*), and sight rhymes (*tough, rough, slough*). Pupils should be taught to use dictionaries to check spellings.

## Letter accompanying SSS response

13 July 1993

Sir Ronald Dearing, CB  
Chairman, National Curriculum Council

Dear Sir Ron

### **STATUTORY CONSULTATION: NATIONAL CURRICULUM ENGLISH**

Thank you for sending the questionnaire for the National Curriculum English consultation. We now enclose it, along with documentation amplifying our response.

Our comments all relate directly or indirectly to spelling, both under AT2 and AT3, and they are of two kinds.

Some of the comments concern points of detail and accuracy, and these we hope may help the NCC to make some refinements and corrections to the present Proposals.

Others of our comments however suggest a radical reappraisal of the role and character of English spelling in the National Curriculum. They do not make specific suggestions for action (as our submission of October 1992 did), and we do not imagine they can have an immediate effect on the present Proposals. Their purpose is rather to point the way to the future, when we believe the need to modernize English spelling will become ever more urgent.

We hope our submission may lead to a recognition of the importance of this question, and to its consideration in due course by curriculum and assessment authorities. We will be glad to assist in any way we can in this long overdue task, and will continue to communicate our views at appropriate junctures, as we have done from the time of the Kingman Report onwards.

We would be grateful if we could be sent whatever guidance material on spelling has already been, and may in future be, produced for the National Curriculum.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Upward  
Editor-in-Chief, on behalf of the Committee of the Simplified Spelling Society.

## 10. The Simplified Spelling Society's response to proposals for English spelling contained in English for ages 5 to 16 (1993)

(The Response is divided into sections A, C, D as requested by the Department for Education.)

Our response is confined to Sections A, C and D, but within these sections most of our observations do not fall neatly under any one of the Codes (A1, C3, etc), and we have therefore numbered them in sequence A-i, A-ii etc, in the order that the points arose from our reading of the Proposals. We hope this arrangement does not make processing our response difficult.

### Section A: General issues

#### A-i "Pupils to develop to the full their ability"

All experience and research shows that the present spelling of English represents a major obstacle to the achievement of the admirably stated aim of enabling "all pupils to develop to the full their ability to use and understand English... in reading and writing". The new emphasis on phonics must be expected to highlight this conflict even more sharply than before between the aim and the medium through which it has to be achieved. We would urge the Curriculum and Assessment authorities formally to evaluate the extent of this problem as a preliminary to considering how it might best be tackled.

#### A-ii Manageability

It appears to us that the problem of the *Manageability* of the literacy programme should be considered the other way round. The problem is not primarily, as implied, that the National Curriculum is too broad to allow time for the proper acquisition of literacy skills, but that the acquisition of literacy skills is taking too much time for the full breadth of the National Curriculum to be implemented. What has to be asked is why, when in many other languages the acquisition of basic literacy skills is a straightforward task that occupies only the initial stage of schooling, it takes so much longer and causes so much more trouble in English. The answer is implicit in the NC Proposals themselves when they still, in all seriousness, have to envisage pupils learning to spell words at Level 6: the present spelling of English confuses beginners, holds back older pupils, restricts expression, generates countless errors, and is an impediment to learning in all subjects. What the Proposals are in effect saying is that, because literacy acquisition is so time-consuming in English, pupils must receive a narrower education than originally thought appropriate. There is here a conflict of educational objectives which a country with high educational aspirations needs to resolve. See also our comment D-vi on this point.

#### A-iii Explaining the rationale behind phonics

The SSS welcomes the new emphasis on phonics as the foundation for literacy acquisition. We think the importance of phonics should however not simply be asserted, but explained in terms of learner psychology. In Section C-i below we suggest some points that could be made. We consider this an important precaution, as phonics will be found not to be the panacea some may imagine, and educators need to understand why, despite its limitations and pitfalls in English, it is nevertheless essential to the learning process.

#### A-iv Training needs

Recent reports have suggested that many recently trained teachers feel unprepared for literacy teaching in general, let alone a phonics approach in particular. This is not surprising, since not merely are teachers themselves naturally as uncertain about English spelling as most people, but there is little explicit understanding of English spelling available on which their training might draw, and myths are widespread (eg 'English spelling is not as irregular as is sometimes claimed',



'Shakespeare couldn't spell', 'the spelling of other languages is just as difficult as English', etc, etc). If higher standards of spelling accuracy are required, then teachers at all levels will need appropriate training, for which appropriate training programmes will then need to be developed.

### **A-v Psychological unity of reading and writing**

Although the insistence on phonics represents a crucial advance in the recognition of learner psychology, we believe further steps in this direction are needed. The first of these would be to recognize and exploit the essential psychological unity of the processes of learning to read and to write. These processes take place within the same brains and involve the same writing system, yet the Proposals scarcely seem to take account of the way they interact. We would mention two specific examples of this hiatus. Firstly, AT2 (Reading) mentions the learning of sight vocabulary without reference to spelling; but learning to spell words is the most direct and accurate way of acquiring sight vocabulary, as it entails learning by active involvement in the spelling rather than just its passive registration (in Section C-ii we call for a clearer statement of what is to be understood by 'sight vocabulary' anyway). Secondly, AT3 refers to the spelling of categories of words to be mastered for certain levels in the Curriculum; but pupils will often already have encountered such words in reading; and that experience that could be regarded as a first step towards mastering their spelling.

### **A-vi Learning psychology requires regular spelling**

It is the mission of the SSS to draw attention to the difficulties of English spelling, and to try and persuade the relevant authorities to consider strategies for their alleviation. The reason why literacy is currently such an issue in English speaking countries is that the present irregular spelling makes satisfactory standards of education impossible to achieve for a large percentage of learners. Failure can cause reactive behaviour disturbance or depression, and there is even some evidence that the developing intellect of learners is actually damaged by the attempt to master English spelling as it now is. The psychology of learners (based on the neuro-physiology of memory acquisition) and of all users of writing systems cries out for regular spelling. Although it is clear that the forthcoming revised Order for English in the National Curriculum cannot now go to the root of the problem, the SSS will continue to make this point.

### **A-vii Varying standards**

An important question which appears to us not to be addressed in the Proposals concerns the standard of proficiency in English spelling which can reasonably be expected from pupils of different ages, and in particular, of different levels of ability. The blanket aim of 'correct spelling' cannot be applied in English as it can in many languages: while one may expect an able A-level candidate to make perhaps no more than one misspelling in a page of relatively sophisticated writing, such expectations are unrealistic at younger ages and for less able pupils, especially those who need special tuition. The crux of the dilemma is this: pupils with good visual memories (to say nothing of other advantages) will achieve higher standards of accuracy in spelling more quickly than less advantaged pupils; to achieve the same standards, those less advantaged will therefore need more time — at the expense of other learning; so how much more time does the National Curriculum recommend be so spent? In a nutshell: how long should any pupil spend mastering, say, the different endings of *assistant*, *consistent*, *persistent*, *resistant*, instead of acquiring other knowledge or skills? Teachers need to know when time spent on spelling should be considered time wasted.

### **A-viii Phonics for writing**

We note that the Proposals link phonics particularly to reading skills. Phonics is however no less relevant to writing.

## Section C: AT2 Reading

### C-i Explaining the psychological necessity for Phonics

We feel that the necessity for phonics needs explaining, as the irregularity of English spelling has long prevented a proper understanding of the role of phonics. Such an explanation will also help teachers acquire a 'conceptual map of reading (and writing) development'. The following may be thought useful points to make:

1 Phonics is the psychologically natural starting point for the acquisition of literacy skills. It starts with what is familiar: the sounds which pre-school children produce and understand in speech. The first step is thus to teach pupils to identify those sounds. Phonics then proceeds from what is familiar to what is new: the relationship between those sounds and the letters of the alphabet.

2 Phonics provides a firm cognitive foundation and training in accurate observation which will stand pupils in good stead in facing the cognitive confusion of English spelling.

3 Phonics provides a simple system of rules which enables learners easily to master the correct reading and writing of a significant proportion of English words, ie those that are spelt in accordance with those rules. **The fact that phonics fails with many other English words is the fault not of phonics, but of the irregular spelling of those words.**

4 An essential literacy skill is the ability to read and write unknown or less familiar words, as well as words out of context. Phonics provides a necessary, if in English often insufficient, tool for the de- and en-coding of such words.

5 Phonics provides a systematic insight into the phonological structure of English. That will also help pupils articulate clearly, understand the morphology of words, and refine their appreciation of the language generally.

6 Knowledge of phonics is essential in learning foreign languages. The ability to apply phonic analysis to English can then be transferred to the sound-symbol correspondences of other writing systems.

### C-ii 'Sight vocabulary' an unclear concept

It appears to us that more thought should be given to the implications of 'sight vocabulary'. For the fluent reader all commonly occurring words constitute 'sight vocabulary', whereas for the absolute beginner there is no 'sight vocabulary'. The question is: how can unfamiliar spellings be best transferred to the steadily growing 'bank' of pupils' sight vocabulary? The Proposals refer to the 'teaching' of sight vocabulary, which suggests a 'look-and-say' or 'psycholinguistic guessing game' approach to the precise written form of words which sits ill with a phonics-based approach and is detrimental to the aim of correct spelling. It is over-reliance on 'sight vocabulary' that in the past has led to difficulty in distinguishing similar pairs such as *quiet/quite*, *cloud/could*, *infection/injection*. Perhaps it is only intended that teaching 'sight vocabulary' should apply to irregular spellings which are not readily amenable to phonic analysis; but if pupils are to spell correctly, it is surely better that they learn to recognize words like *once*, *who*, *ought* by writing them, than that they learn to recognize them as 'sight vocabulary' without being able to spell them.

### C-iii 'Print'

We wonder why 'print' in particular is referred to more than once in the Proposals as the target of learning to read. The target is written language in general, whether printed or not.

#### **C-iv 'Initial' or 'medial'?**

P4, §6.7 of the Proposals ends with the parenthesis "(eg the identification of initial and final sounds in words)". Initial sounds were already discussed in the same sentence, so we assume 'initial' is printed here in error for 'medial'. Phonics requires a grasp of the tripartite structure of most syllables (initial, medial and final segments, typically CVC or Consonant + Vowel + Consonant), but we could not find the term 'medial' mentioned anywhere in the Proposals.

#### **C-v Why reading schemes are needed in English**

We would point out that reading schemes are needed chiefly because the irregularity of English spelling makes free-range reading difficult for early learners. We understand that reading schemes are not used, for instance, in Italian because such restrictions on pupils' reading are unnecessary in writing systems based on regular sound-symbol correspondence.

#### **C-vi Greek spelling for vocabulary enrichment**

We note (p5, §6.18) that the spelling strand terminates at level 6, but that vocabulary enrichment is here emphasized, presumably as a continuing task. At some point, it seems to us, vocabulary enrichment requires systematic examination of the spelling of Greek-derived words in English. Greek-derived words are central to the more learned (eg scientific) vocabulary of English, yet their patterns of sound-symbol correspondence (eg words such as *diphthong*, *psychology*) frequently conflict with those of other categories of English vocabulary. This point is equally relevant to AT2 and AT3.

#### **C-vii Reading skills taught or acquired by practice?**

On p28 it is stated that "pupils learn to read when they are taught the necessary skills". We think this should be rephrased if it is to match the 'conceptual map of reading development' teachers need. **Skills are essentially acquired through practice.** What pupils have to be taught is the cognitive basis of what they are to practise. While phonics is central to this cognitive basis, the irregularity of English spelling generates cognitive confusion, and thereby constitutes for most pupils a major obstacle which has to be overcome. Insight into the rules, followed by practice, however laborious and however frustrating, is the only way to overcome it.

#### **C-viii Experimenting with sound-symbol relationships in writing**

We wonder if this reference, which comes on p28 under AT2, rather belongs under AT3. We support experimenting with sound-symbol relationships to help pupils develop both strategies for spelling less familiar words, and a critical understanding of the problems of English spelling, and a willingness to consider how these problems could best be eliminated. Nevertheless, experimentation needs to be pursued selectively and with caution: with regular spellings, it provides useful practice in the application of phonics, but if applied to irregularly spelt words, it is bound to interfere with the aim of 'correct' spelling. Our view, which we set out in detail in our submission to the NCC in October 1992, is that the concept of 'correct' spelling in English is at present profoundly flawed, and needs to be re-appraised.

#### **C-ix Reading common usage words aloud in narrative**

P29, SoA says "Pupils should be able to read aloud a minimum of 30 common usage words in a simple short narrative". We do not see how pupils' ability to read such words can be tested in a narrative, where context and guesswork can conceal the inability to recognize words of all kinds. Reading words without a context is a vital literacy skill whose importance has been underestimated in recent years. If pupils can read words without a context, they can read them in context; but the reverse does not hold good. Nor do we understand how reading words in a context relates to 'sight vocabulary', when presumably the latter is envisaged as not having a context.

### **C-x What are 'irregular words'?**

P30 states that pupils should "learn common irregular words". This needs clarifying. Are 'irregular spellings' meant? Does 'learning' them mean learning to recognize them in context, and/or out of context, or learning to spell them? The latter would help ensure that recognition both in and out of context was learnt too. The National Curriculum will also need to list which common words are 'irregular', as there is at present no agreed definition of which they are, nor indeed of what is meant by 'regularity' either (see our comment D-x for an example of the Proposals' confusion on this point, resulting from this lack of a definition).

### **C-xi How can unknown spellings be checked in a dictionary?**

We are surprised that pupils should be expected to check spellings in a dictionary at KS1 (p30, Level 2). (Does this perhaps belong under AT3, rather than AT2, anyway?) We have more to say about this under D-xii.

### **C-xii Only teaching 'about' inconsistencies?**

We find this statement on p30 epitomizes a problem which we referred to under C-x above and will discuss more directly in connection with AT3 below. The irregularities of English spelling are inadequately dealt with in the Proposals. Does this statement mean that pupils have to memorize the inconsistencies, or just to know that inconsistencies exist? 'Correct' spelling would require the former.

## **Section D: Writing (mainly spelling)**

### **D-i How realistic is the aim of 'correct spelling' in English?**

As explained in our submission to the NCC in October 1992, we are strongly in favour of pupils being able to spell correctly. However, whether such an aim is realistic depends very much on how 'correctness' is defined. We would recall the words of the Cox Report (§17.33): "The aim cannot be the correct unaided spelling of any English word — there are too many words...that can catch out even the best speller." The present Proposals only refer marginally to the learning of irregular spellings (indeed several of the examples given suggest that the nature of spelling irregularity has not been understood — see D-v and D-x below) and do not discuss the difficulties they give rise to. If 'correct spelling' is to be an aim of the National Curriculum, these difficulties must be fully acknowledged and their implications thought through. We discuss a number of aspects of the problem in the following paragraphs.

### **D-ii What order of difficulty?**

While spellings have to be taught in order of difficulty, we doubt the practicality of scheduling by word structure (eg monosyllabic, polysyllabic), which does not correspond to the real-life experience of children in the classroom and in the world outside school. It implies that children will not have access, either in reading or in writing, to the full vocabulary of English which in practice they may encounter or wish to use at any time. In particular, it raises the problem of incorrect spelling. If pupils are not expected to spell, say, polysyllabic words correctly below Level 3, then teachers will face a choice: either they should forbid pupils to use such words, or they will have to allow incorrect (or 'experimental') spelling, or else require them to ask an adult for the correct form. Yet for children to be forbidden to use certain kinds of words must be an intolerable constraint, while first to acquire the habit of incorrect spellings is clearly not conducive to correct spelling at a later stage. This dilemma is inherent in the present spelling of English, and it needs to be acknowledged as such by the National Curriculum if pupils and teachers struggling with English spelling are not to be excessively demoralized. They need to realize that their difficulties and the contradictions in what they are trying to achieve are not their fault, but the fault of the currently 'correct' spelling.

### D-iii Categories of spelling difficulty

Concern with correct spelling should mean concern with those spelling patterns which are most error-prone. The following aspects of English spelling pose particular problems which the National Curriculum needs explicitly to address:

- Almost all spelling patterns in English can represent more than one sound, many of them many different sounds. How and when are they to be learnt? How far can the Phonics programme deal with them?
- Almost all sounds in English can be spelt in more than one way, many of them in many different ways. Over 400 such spelling patterns can be listed, most of which apply unpredictably to different words (eg why *receipt* but not *\*conceipt*, *\*decept?*). How and when are they to be learnt, and in particular what is the best way to learn which pattern is correct for which word?
- Many of the most elementary words in English have spellings that confuse the beginner and ensure a shaky start to the process of literacy acquisition for many learners: *one*, *two*, *four*, *once*, *who*, *come*, *does*, *could*, *they*, *all*, *where*, *their* are some well-known examples. How and when are such spellings to be learnt?
- Related words can vary unpredictably in spelling: compare *comparative/comparison*, *four/forty*, *fire/fiery*, *high/height*, *precede/proceed/procedure*, *speak/speech*. How and when are such variations to be learnt?
- Suffixes affect words in unpredictable ways: *past/passed*, *rapt/wrapped*, *coming/homing/humming*, *ageing/raging*, *singing/singeing/hinging*, *abusing/busing/focus(s)ing*, *befitting/benefiting/inviting*, *debatable/traceable*, *eatable/edible*. How and when are such variations to be learnt?
- Many words have alternative spellings: *gaol/jail*, *organize/organise*, *yoghourt/yoghurt/yogurt*, *guerilla/guerrilla*. If children are to be allowed such alternatives, how and when can they learn not to write *accomodate*, a commonly seen alternative to *accommodate*?
- British pupils facing spellings like *septic/sceptic/sceptre*, *travelled/traveller/travelling*, *vigour/vigorous* have more irregularities to learn than Americans with *septic/skeptic/scepter*, *traveled/traveler/traveling*, *vigor/vigorous*. How and when are British pupils to be taught that the more regular American spellings they naturally often prefer are wrong?
- How can pupils be taught when and where to insert silent letters, and which ones? When to write *strait* and when *straight*, and whether *straitjacket* or *straightjacket*? Whether it is *gauge* or *guage*, *gaurd* or *guard*, *biusness*, *buisness* or *business*, *biuld* or *build*? And how to spell the /tʃ/ in *eighth*, the /r/ in *colonel* and the /f/ in *lieutenant*?
- How and when can pupils be taught the correct vowel letter(s) to use before the final R of *briar/brier*, *adapter/adaptor*, *vicar/soccer*, *enter/centre*, *miner/minor*, *vigour* (despite *vigorous*), *honour* (and *honourable*, but *honorary*), *figure*, *murder/murmur*, *barter/martyr* and the literally thousands of words for which just one of these endings is correct and the others all incorrect?
- How and when can pupils be taught which words have double consonants? And that *affraid/afray*, *abridge/abbreviate*, *embarass/harrass*, *ommit/comit/ vommit*, *inocuous/innoculate* are all incorrect?
- How can pupils starting to learn a foreign language be taught which of the following spellings is correct in which language: *carot*, *carrot*, *carott*, *carrote*, *carotte*, *carrotte*? *Comitee*, *commitee*, *comittee*, *committee*? *Personal*, *personnal*, *personel*, *personnel*, *personell*? *Negociate*, *negotiate*? *Accommodation*, *accomodation*, *acommodation*, *acomodation*? *Responsable*, *responsible*? *French*, *french*, *Français*, *français*?

If the aim of the National Curriculum is to ensure pupils spell correctly, categories such as "complex polysyllables" etc are of marginal relevance, and merely to "discuss misapplied generalizations" (isn't that just gobbledegook for 'misspelling' anyway?) will not get very far in teaching irregular spellings. The above categories of real difficulty are what have to be confronted. However they beg some fundamental questions as to whether our children should in fact be expected to fill their brains with all the details of this, "the world's most awesome mess" (Mario Pei), instead of knowledge and understanding of life and the world; because these are the alternatives. The Cox report referred to the absurdity of learning lists of irregular spellings, but the route suggested by the present Proposals to reach the destination of 'correct' spelling largely evades the greatest difficulties pupils face in practice. Are pupils to learn lists of irregular spellings, or not? What would be the consequences of doing so, and of not doing so? These are central questions to which pupils, parents and teachers need to find answers in the National Curriculum. There are no answers in the Proposals as they now stand.

#### **D-iv Names and sounds of letters**

When it is suggested (SoA, p51) that pupils "add the letters of the alphabet to an illustrated version of the poem 'A Was an Apple Pie'", the Proposals should warn of the phonic confusion liable to arise from associating letter-names with sounds (especially vowels). In this case, for instance, 'A was an Ancient Ape' would avoid this difficulty. Similarly (p29), highlighting the initial letters or children's names needs to be done selectively: *Celia, Christopher, George, Philip* for instance are known trouble-makers.

#### **D-v Dubious examples of regular spellings**

The SoA for spelling on p55 includes the words *because, animal* among examples of "polysyllabic words which conform to regular patterns". They are not: with its common pronunciation rhyming with *was, Boz*, the spelling *because* is unique — its closest (but still inexact) parallels are *sausage, Aussie*, but they certainly do not constitute a regular pattern; and *animal* contains two major unpredictabilities, <n> rather than <nn> (cf *anniversary*), and <i> rather than another vowel — it thus appears scarcely more regular than *\*annemal* would be. Such spellings have to be learnt individually, and not by 'regular patterns'. That is why they are difficult.

#### **D-vi Overdrawing the "bank of words which pupils can spell correctly"**

The contradictions between the "bank of words which pupils can spell correctly" (p58), "correct spelling", and the overall aim of enabling "all pupils to develop to the full their ability to use and understand English... in reading and writing" are glaring. It is an absurdity and a scandal ("an insult to human intelligence" — Mario Wandruschka) that English spelling does not allow writers to spell correctly, without reference to a dictionary, whatever words they wish to use. The curriculum and assessment authorities of all English-speaking countries should adopt as a long term aim the simplification of English spelling, so that it ceases to be the obstacle to education which it is today.

#### **D-viii Dictionary listings**

Not all dictionaries list *loveliness* under *lovely*, as stated on p58. Some list these words in alphabetical order.

#### **D-ix Misapplying misapplied generalizations**

The SoA on p59 lists some fairly regular instances of consonant doubling and vowel deletion to be learnt for KS2. At what stage, however, should pupils be able to distinguish the single and doubled consonants of such spellings as *gossiping/worshipping, galloping/ kidnapping, travelling/paralleling, having/revving* etc? Should pupils write *busing/gasing* or *bussing/ gassing*? The case of verbs ending in L like *travel* is especially problematic, since British spelling here misapplies the generalization that verbs ending in an unstressed syllable do not double their final

consonant (eg *visit/visiting, compel/compelling*, but *travel/ travelling*); should British pupils be penalized for misapplying the misapplied generalization, and writing *traveling* as Americans do?

#### **D-x Difficult regularities and simple irregularities**

The SoA on p65 lists *accommodation, acquaintance, irrelevant* as not conforming to regular patterns; but that depends on how one defines regularity (hence the importance of defining the term, as mentioned in C-x). If regularity means (as it surely must in English) the most common spelling pattern for a given sound in a given context, then the above spellings are not irregular at all. The reason why those words are so prone to misspelling is that the regular spellings they use are not the simplest way of representing the sounds they contain: it is rather the simpler alternatives which are the irregular spellings in these cases. Such paradoxes are characteristic of the present spelling of English and naturally the cause of great learning difficulty. Their resolution should therefore be a prime objective of an effective policy for improved literacy in the English speaking world. Specifically, the single <m> in *comic* is irregular (but much easier to spell) compared with the regular pattern of <mm> in *accommodation*; the <aqu> in *aquatic* is irregular (but much easier to spell) compared with the regular pattern of <acqu> in *acquaintance*; and the <ir> in *Iran* is irregular (but much easier to spell) compared with the regular pattern of <irr> in *irrelevant*. In our view, children should be taught that *accomodation* (cf Spanish *acomodación*), *aquaintance, irrelevant* are correct spellings, and that *accommodation, acquaintance, irrelevant* are merely archaic variants they may encounter in print; in this way simplicity of sound-symbol correspondence would combine with regularity, instead of conflicting with it. (Of course, *accommodation, acquaintance, irrelevant* also contain other difficulties besides those discussed here.) If children were taught that such simpler spellings were 'correct', not merely would higher standards of literacy be achieved in less time, but the value of phonics in the learning process would be greatly enhanced. In fact the spelling difficulties of innumerable English words could be quite easily simplified along such lines, and so made more appropriate for a society that desperately needs the highest possible standards of literacy.

#### **D-xi What are sight rhymes?**

On p66 *tough, rough, slough* are described as 'sight rhymes', when in fact (assuming *slough* = 'to shed', not 'a swamp') they are full (ie sight and sound) rhymes. Examples of pure sight rhymes are *bough, tough, trough, though, through, thorough*. Sight rhymes (indeed all GH spellings) are a further symptom of the chaos of English spelling and yet another obstacle to literacy acquisition. To be fully effective, phonics would require that rhymes align in both sound and spelling — and that the letters represent the sounds in the simplest possible way.

#### **D-xii The difficulty of checking English spellings in dictionaries**

Checking spellings in a dictionary is difficult in English, unless a specialized dictionary such as the *ACE Aurally Coded English Dictionary* is used. It is one of the most tantalizing consequences of the irregularity of English spelling that one can only be sure of finding a word in an ordinary dictionary if one already knows its spelling. Pupils certainly need to know how to use dictionaries — but we wonder how many by KS2 could find such words as *colonel, nephew, saucer, wring*, which are precisely the kind of words most likely to need checking. We think the considerable difficulty of checking spellings in an English dictionary should be acknowledged. The use of electronic spelling checkers should perhaps also be mentioned in this context.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 15, 1993/2 p31,32 in the printed version]*

[Edward Rondthaler: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal View 8](#)]

## **11. "Informal" Spelling as a Way to Literacy for our Immigrants and 40 million Adult Illiterates**

**Edward Rondthaler**

An immigrant's concept of written words is entirely different from ours. Words in his or her native language are spelt as they sound. He expects ours to be the same. He expects our spelling to help him learn English. But most words in English are not spelt as they sound.

Our spelling is a hand-me-down of irregularities inherited from the time when British aristocracy failed to simplify English spelling — failed to make reading and writing easy for the masses. These ancient spelling irregularities haunt us today, and are largely responsible for our widespread illiteracy.

If you are flying to Mexico you can hold in your hand a little card that shows the spelling of every Spanish sound. Then, when the plane lands, you can pronounce, in Spanish, virtually every word on every sign you see. You won't know the meaning of many of the words, but you can pronounce them, and that's a good start toward learning the language.

The reverse is not true. No immigrant coming to the U. S. can hold in his hand a card that shows the spelling of English sounds. Such a card would be the size of a refrigerator door, since we spell our 42 sounds in a potpourri of over 400 different ways. Scores of rules and exceptions add to the confusion.

In our major cities over a hundred different languages are in daily use. For many immigrants this means little or no communication beyond their ethnic borders. They never see the big picture. We lose them as creative and productive citizens.

### **An innovative proposal:**

Instead of compounding our multilingual problem by printing information in more and more languages for those who cannot read English, we should begin to remove our reading and writing roadblock. How? By denouncing the folly and shortsightedness of our British linguistic ancestors and using selectively — or at least experimentally — an optional spelling that matches the sound of our speech, and blends comfortably with present spelling. It might be called "informal" spelling. This proposal, doubtless seen by many as heretical, recognizes two undeniable facts: Present remedial methods reach only 10 % of those in need. Functional illiteracy is increasing and has no prospect of diminishing unless very innovative steps are taken. Optional, alternative spellings reflecting our speech may well be the only realistic way to rescue our 40 million illiterates, to end the vicious circle of generational illiteracy, and to address creatively the immigrants' English language problem.



What then is needed to give us a simple, logical spelling?

(1) The simpler, "informal" spelling must not be a hodgepodge of everybody's "invented!" spelling, but a practical, rational, well-conceived, sound to letter system. Other countries have done it. We can too.

(2) It must be as near normal spelling as possible, and easily read by present readers.

(3) It should, of course, be a little shorter than our current spelling, and completely compatible with standard keyboards.

(4) The rules for "spelling the words as they sound" must be minimal.

Computer software that converts ordinary keyboarding into "informal" sound-spelling is now available. It unscrambles our inherited topsy-turvy spelling. As a demonstration, the above paragraph is repeated below, converted automatically by computer into a carefully considered reflection of English speech likely to be no more awkward to present readers than a regional dialect.

Whut, then, is needed to giv us a simpl, lojical speling?

(1) The simpler, "informal" speling must not be a hojpoj of evrybody's "invented" speling, but a practical, rashunal, wel-conseevd, sound-to-leter sistem. Uther cuntrys hav dun it. We can too.

(2) It must be as neer normal speling as posibl, and eezily red bi present reeders.

(3) It shuud, of cors, be a litl shorter than our curent speling, and compleetly compatibl with standard keebords.

(4) The rools for "speling werds as thae sound!" must be minimal.

Among the millions to benefit from "informal" spelling are the poor and disadvantaged, half our prison inmates, most of our high school dropouts, virtually all of our immigrants — and our industries, schools, penal system, and taxpayers who estimate the all-inclusive, nationwide cost of illiteracy at \$180 billion a year. Computers stand ready to help root out the root of English illiteracy. The only losers will be the promoters of spelling bees.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 15, 1993/2 p31,32 in the printed version]*

## **12. Computers in Education**

### **Michael Gianturco**

Functionally illiterate adults in the U.S. — nearly 15 % of the adult population — cannot read and write well enough to understand a want ad or fill out a job application. Fortunately, desktop computers and innovative software promise to help.

By the turn of the century, there will be at least as many personal computers in this country as there are people. There are currently a paltry 3 million computers in public schools, about one computer for every 16 students. A few educational software companies have already emerged as dominant suppliers to this growing base.

Josten Learning Systems, a subsidiary of class ring and yearbook vender Jostens Inc., is one. Last year the subsidiary sold \$220 million worth of computers and educational software into the schools. Jostens' chief competitor is Computer Curriculum Corp., part of Simon & Schuster.

Computers bring many advantages to the classroom. They deliver self-paced, one-on-one instruction. They are infinitely patient and quick to reward progress.

The teacher, in computerized instruction, is really the programmer. He or she is in effect cloned — multiplied — by the number of computers in use. Hence, for each student, a personal teacher.

Jostens offers a range of English-teaching software for everyone from kindergartners to adults doing remedial work. The American Literacy Council has developed and tested over a period of years the program "Sound-Speler," which instantly corrects misspelled words like "speler".

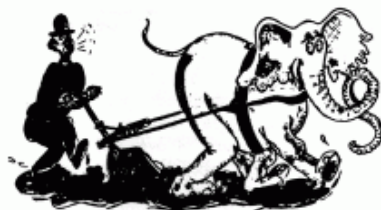
The key is instant feedback — the constant, endlessly patient correction of errors. Contrast that with, say, a graded paper returned to the student a full week after an exam.

One of the most exciting developments is the advent of digitally synthesized sound. A tiny company in Vancouver, B.C., Boswell Industries, has developed a multimedia computer that uses voice chips and a special, simplified keyboard like that used by court reporters. Non-English speaking students, starting from zero, can use the Boswell technology to bootstrap into a working knowledge of English in about one-fifth the time they might spend using the familiar language lab.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 15, 1993/2 p34 in the printed version]*

## **13. Cartoon.**

### **The Tough Coughs As He Ploughs the Dough**



Early Writings and Cartoons by  
**Dr. Seuss**  
Edited and with an introduction by Richard Marschall

## 14. Why the PH in the name *Stephens* is pronounced /v/.

[On 10 November 1993, Chris Upward sent this letter to the Guardian, in response to a question. We do not know whether it was published.]

Dear Notes & Queries

M Stephens in *Any Answers?*, Guardian 5 November 1993, asks why *pheasant*, *phoney*, *morphine*, *sapphire* contain PH although they do not all derive from Greek, and furthermore, why the PH in the name *Stephens* is pronounced /v/.

The vast majority of words spelt with PH do derive from Greek. In ancient Greek there were two /p/ consonants, one pronounced as in English, the other heavily aspirated. The difference was rather like that between P in *upon*, and P+H in *uphold*.

Greek had separate letters for its two /p/ sounds, P called *pi*, and F called *phi*. The Romans didn't have a special letter for *phi*, and when they wanted to spell Greek words in Latin, they just added H to the P.

Later, the sound of PH merged with Roman F, and languages that use Latin spelling now, like English and French, can spell the sound /f/ with either F or PH. Mostly we keep PH for words from Greek, like *pheasant* (whose Greek origin is very remote indeed), *morphine* and *sapphire*.

However PH became so popular that it spread to a number of other words as well. Latin used PH in non-Greek *lymph*, *triumph* and sometimes in *sulphur*, while English adopted it in *nephew* (contrast French *neveu*, German *Neffe*) and *cipher* (from Arabic; contrast French *chiffre*, German *Ziffer*).

English has also used PH inventively as in *phoney* and perhaps to represent a strong puff in the expletives *phew!*, *phooey!* A nice example was the Greek tourist poster, which advertised the island of *Corfu* as *Corphew!*

*Stephen* derives from Greek *stefanos* 'garland', but the original /f/ sound is pronounced /v/. That is usual between vowels in English, where it is normally spelt V, as in *haven*, *even*, *heaven*, *given*, *oven* — and of course in the alternative form *Steven*.

Before people got interested in Greek in the Renaissance, Greek derivations were often spelt with F in English. Spellings like *fesant*, *filosofi*, *fisik* were common, and Greek-derived *fantasy*, *frenetic* still have F rather than PH. America prefers *sulfur* to *sulphur*, while Italian and Spanish have abandoned PH altogether, sensibly spelling *photography* as *fotografia*.

These inconsistencies of PH epitomize the crazy state of English spelling, which makes literacy so needlessly difficult to achieve. If standards of education are to be significantly improved, the spelling must be modernized.

This is the aim of the Simplified Spelling Society, which can be contacted at —

Yours sincerely

Christopher Upward  
Editor-in-Chief, Simplified Spelling Society