

# Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society 1994/2. J17.

## Contents

### 1. [Editorials](#).

#### Articles

2. [Phonicsphobia](#). Joyce M Morris.
3. [Spelling and Society: Orthography and Reading Summary of a Research Thesis](#). Valerie Yule.
4. [Err Analysis, Part II: som reflections on aims, methods, limitations and impoptnce, with a furthr demnstration](#). Christopher Upward.
5. [A Pidgin-like Bridge to English](#). Doug Everingham.
6. [Introduction to the Classic Concordance of Cacographic Chaos](#). Christopher Upward.
7. [The Chaos](#). Gerard Nolst Trenité.

#### Viewpoints

8. [Self-Proclaimed Experts Stumble](#). Ian Aitken.
9. [Dyslexia and Dysability](#). Christopher Upward.
10. [A Smoother Path to Literacy](#). Edward Rondthaler.

#### Reports

11. [Spelling Czecher](#). Chris Pomery.
12. [BEtSS: Better Education thru Simplified Spelling Annual Meeting 1994](#).
13. [An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Sound-Speler and Fonetic English in Increasing Literacy Skills](#). Jeffrey J Strange & John B Black.
14. [ALC American Literacy Council: Annual Report for 1993](#).
15. [Perspectives from the International Reading Association Convention](#). Kenneth Ives.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 17, 1994/2 p2 in the printed version]

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

## 1. Editorials

### Kenneth Ives

#### Getting Reformed Spellings Into Schools: What Will It Take?

This past year I have attended the International Reading Asso. convention in Toronto, and a workshop and state convention of the Orton Dyslexia Society. That organization and its members have developed detailed, step by step methods for teaching phonics to students who don't "catch on" to reading easily.

A major concern of teachers attending such conferences is "What can I do with the kids next Monday morning?", and thereafter. Hence if we want to get simplified spellings used in early grades, we will have to develop materials that those teachers find useful with their students — and likely a whole curriculum for grades K-3. An example of what this involves — but without the simplified spellings — is "The Phonics Handbook", published by our Chairman Chris Jolly.

Simplified or regularized spellings can form an important bridge between "invented spellings" that many schools now permit in Kindergarten and first grade, and traditional, "received" spellings. A few schools permit "invented spellings" as high as grade 5.

Advantages of regularized spellings include:

1. Permit fluent writing. If accepted in second and third grade, they avoid the inhibition of writing noticed in second grade if standard irregular spellings are enforced there. Teach the spellings that are regular for writers.
2. Reinforce phonics instruction by using consistent, standard spellings for each sound, rather than guessed "invented" ones that may vary from student to student.
3. Delays most "sight words" to third or fourth grade. This fits better with developmental factors.
4. The use of a standard regularized spelling can result in students spelling over half (56 %) of words as in received spellings.

However, any existing phonics program would need a thorough revision to include an intermediate stage of regularized spellings. And it would need to be accompanied by a series of readers in a (44 %?) regularized spelling.

These two aspects would initially need to be subsidized, by government education departments, foundations, and/or SSS. They would need testing and revision, and the development of manuals for teachers and materials for parents.

### **Whole Language and Phonics**

A report from the IRA Convention in Toronto (see page 36) notes the emergence of a "Whole Language Plus Phonics" movement. This approach is supported in a letter in the October/November 1994 issue of *Reading TODAY*.

"Phonics alone is boring, and highly creative children 'tune out' what is repetitive and unrelated. Phonics does, however, form a solid foundation for the English language.

"Whole language adds spice, vocabulary, and relationships between reading, writing, and oral language. It stimulates creative minds and exposes students to different authors' voices. It allows freedom of expression not found in straight phonics.

"... parents were amazed at the quick results when we threw phonics and whole language together. Reading suddenly became fun instead of work, became appropriate for the young child, and resulted in many kindergarten readers and writers emerging with strong word attack and comprehension skills.

"Phonics has a place in reading. Whole language also has a place. One without the other creates unnecessary voids."

Two books on "Spelling for whole language classrooms" (Gentry 1993, Wilde 1992) seem to imply that the teaching of irregular spellings may dominate the curriculum. Thus Gentry and Gillet's final chapter is on "The effective schoolwide spelling curriculum". Wilde has a chapter on "Spelling across the curriculum".

This is not necessary in Italian, which is spelt phonetically, hence has no need for spelling books or spelling classes. But if regularized spellings were used in grades 1 thru 3, including in their story and text books, a great amount of time and temper could be freed for comprehension and content learning.

Then teaching students to edit their writing for the intended audience can more easily move their finished products into received spellings.

### **Phobias**

While some educators have a phobia about phonics, as Joyce Morris describes in the lead article, some also have a phobia about spelling reform. Several BETSS members recently encountered an example of this

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## **2. Phonicsphobia**

### **Joyce M Morris**

*Dr Morris addressed the Simplified Spelling Society on the subject of this paper at its meeting on 23 April 1994, and has kindly given permission for it to be reprinted here. It originally appeared in the Proceedings of the Literacy 2000 Conference held on 18 September 1993 at the Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Lane, London. It provides an invaluable and vivid account 'from the inside' of recent debates on the methodology of literacy teaching, which are an essential part of the environment in which spelling reformers have to make their case. We plan to follow it up in the next issue with a discussion between Joyce Morris and Chris Upward on the relation between phonics and spelling reform*

Dr Joyce Morris has been a teacher, psychologist and 'professional' researcher for 40 years. She is the author and editor of numerous pure and applied publications, including *Standards and Progress in Reading*, *Language in Action*, and the latest (1990) *Morris-Montessori Word List* which incorporates her 'Phonics 44' system for developing initial literacy in English. In 1963 she was a Co-founder of the United Kingdom Reading Association, and is now President of the Turn-a-Page Society and a Council Member of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists. Dr Morris is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and has been appointed OBE for her services to literacy. She has also received from the International Reading Association the 1972 Special Service Award and the 1988 International Citation of Merit.

### **1. Resistance to Phonics**

As an English teacher, psychologist, researcher and writer, I have been privileged to work for the cause of literacy all my adult life. It has been an enriching experience to serve such a worthy cause with dedicated colleagues at home and abroad. Nevertheless, like them, I am very disappointed that, despite our concentrated efforts at local, national and international level during the last forty years, no significant progress towards universal literacy has been made and, at present, over half the world's population remains illiterate.

For obvious reasons, I am even more disappointed that in England, where compulsory education was introduced in 1870, thousands of today's children leave school at sixteen with 'inadequate' reading, writing and spelling skills for all but the most menial jobs. Various reasons are advanced for this unsatisfactory state of affairs, some based on the findings of reputable research and others mainly reflecting the much publicised views of prominent citizens.

This paper is about a phenomenon which has long prevented many children from receiving the effective teaching they need to build a sound foundation for literacy during their early schooling. To my knowledge, until I coined the word 'phonicsphobia' for it last year, nobody had given a name to what is essentially an important reason for poor literacy standards and, consequently, it has not hitherto been discussed in the literature.

Naming an impediment to literacy acquisition is obviously a prerequisite for understanding its nature and for getting it removed or, at least, reducing its effect. However, especially if the impediment is the outward expression of an inner emotional turmoil as in the case of a phobia, and it is also in an educational context, the time has to be right for this process to be set in train with any prospect of a successful outcome.

In my view, the time has come for 'phonicsphobia' to be publicly identified in discussions about phonics following publication of the consultation document for the revised National English Curriculum. This is because phonicsphobics must not be allowed to influence the requirements of the English Order at a time when there is the best chance for many years of systematic phonic teaching being given its rightful place in educational provision for literacy, including teacher-training.

## **2. Definitions for the Key Constituents of Phonicsphobia**

At this point one does not have to be a psychologist or teacher to deduce that phonicsphobia is a 'phobia about phonics.' Therefore, phonicsphobics are people suffering from a pathological condition which, if they are in a position of influence, can and does have serious implications for literacy learners, student and practising teachers and the provision of published resources to aid them in their respective tasks.

However, for the purposes of this paper and to avoid misunderstandings, one does need to know that the key constituents of phonicsphobia are defined as follows:-

'Phonics' is the singular noun and 'phonic' the adjective covering all methods and materials designed to develop initial literacy in English by highlighting its major spelling patterns, and by making explicit the relationships between speech sounds (phonemes) and graphic symbols (graphemes).

'Phobia' is the singular noun and 'phobic' the adjective for a pathological condition characterised by irrational attitudes (including prejudice and hatred) to natural situations, objects or subjects and, in its severest form, by excessive and uncontrollable fear of them.

On rational grounds, one might expect 'phonicsphobia' to be a rare condition like for instance, 'linonophobia' (fear of string). This is because it follows logically from understanding the alphabetic nature of the English writing system and its complexity that phonics is an essential ingredient of educational provision for literacy. Unfortunately, phonicsphobia is far from rare and, in the space available, I can only describe briefly a few of the many cases I have come across before summarising what I suggest are the main causes of the condition, its consequences and possible cures.

## **3. Cases of Phonicsphobia**

I first encountered irrational attitudes to phonics when I was a newly-qualified teacher in a London primary school during World War II. I had not been trained to develop initial literacy in English by any method or materials, and phonics had not even been mentioned by my college tutors. Consequently, I was totally unprepared to meet the needs of my first class of 40 children aged seven to ten, none of whom could read or spell more than two words.

In a traumatic state which I shall never forget because it affected the course of my professional life, I explained my predicament to the headmaster. He uttered a few words of encouragement with reference to my academic and school practice record and, after handing me some tatty copies of *The Beacon Readers* (Fassett, 1922), advised me to study the teacher's manual carefully. He then explained that the scheme had originally been used successfully in the feeder infant school on the same site. But it was discarded by the headmistress and her staff after she had taken a university course which had persuaded her that Beacon phonics had no place in the 'modern' infant school she aspired to create. Henceforth, 'activity' methods and a 'look-and-say' approach to reading were to be the order of the day.

As the headmaster used professional terms which were new to me, I simply asked him whether these changes had made a difference in terms of the intake to our first-year, junior classes. He simply replied that it was 'not as good as it used to be'. Therefore, he was very pleased that the A and B streams were taken by experienced, infant-trained teachers who used 'traditional' methods and a predominantly 'phonic' approach to reading.

Soon after that particularly memorable day, I learned that our school was due for a general inspection, and I could expect an observer in at least one of my lessons. I trembled at the thought that it might be in one of my trial-and error reading lessons when I was trying to get to grips with my pupils' difficulties. In the event, I need not have worried because an inspector came to my classroom during a scripture period when we were dramatising the fall of Jericho. He approved of this activity and of the class library I had formed from my own and donated books. In short, as a preserved note from my headmaster testifies, I passed some sort of informal test of competence even though, in my heart of hearts, I knew it was largely due to chance.

At lunchtime, the same inspector sat next to Miss B., the infant-trained teacher responsible for the first-year, junior B stream. I sat opposite but did not take part in their discussion which began something like this:-

Inspector: Which methods do you use to teach reading Miss 'B'?

Miss B: Phonic mainly and systematically.

Inspector: Surely not the old-fashioned c-a-t- and all that!!!

Miss B: Certainly.

Inspector: But c-a-t- sounded out does not make 'cat'!

Miss B: It does in my class.

Inspector: How do you manage that?

Miss B: I use the 'nip-behind-the-knee' phonic method. A smart nip behind the knee when a child stands by my desk going c-a-t, c-a-t, soon joins the sounds together to make 'cat'.

Needless to say, I was astonished by this exchange and the ding-dong battle of words which continued until lunch was over. Moreover, I could hardly wait to ask Miss B privately why she had responded to the inspector's questions in a manner which could result in a black mark on her professional record. She replied that such an outcome was hardly likely because it was well-known that she was very successful in raising the reading, writing and spelling standards of children who came to her almost as retarded as those in my backward class. In any case, she was not professionally ambitious except to be regarded as an outstandingly effective class teacher. Therefore, she felt in a strong position to challenge those in authority like the inspector and infant school head who advocated 'fashionable', untested methods and, albeit unwittingly, deprived children of their basic human right to literacy by denigrating the role of phonics.

Not long after the war ended our junior school became oversubscribed, and I was allocated a spare room in the contributory infant school for two years. This gave me plenty of opportunities to observe activity methods at close quarters, and to study the possible reasons for the failure of so many of the school's pupils to make a successful start on the road to literacy.

I discovered that the headmistress had made phonics a taboo subject and got very emotional if anybody questioned the methods used in her school. I also discovered that below the surface some of the staff were uneasy about what she expected them to do and not to do. In fact one of them, Miss S. who was a friend of Miss B. confessed to me that she was glad to have the excuse of getting married to resign her post as she was afraid that, if she stayed much longer, she would openly flout the head's wishes especially about phonics.

I found a similar emotional cauldron bubbling away in the Surrey secondary school to which I was appointed after deciding that I needed to broaden my professional experience. The main problem there was a headmistress who had led a sheltered life, and knew virtually nothing about how to cope with the behaviour of teenagers from deprived backgrounds. There was also a problem of illiteracy amongst those pupils which I was expected to help solve because, by then, I was an experienced teacher of 'late' beginners in reading and a graduate in psychology to boot.

No member of that school was phonicsphobic, and I was encouraged to persist in trying to find a more motivating, published scheme than *The Duncan Readers* (Duncan, 1947) which, at that time, was the only remedial reading resource available in the school. Having done so without success, I wondered why educational publishers generally had not catered for the needs of retarded, older readers especially for phonic resources. I realised that it was probably because it is not profitable in commercial terms to provide for minority groups. Later on, when I was responsible for reading investigations at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), I discovered that this was not the only reason. Some school book publishers had irrational attitudes towards phonics and feared that their 'progressive' image would be tarnished if they published phonic resources. Consequently, to my knowledge, even a much-needed research-based resource like Stott's *Programmed Reading Kit* (Stott, 1962) was rejected by many publishers before, at long last, being accepted for publication by Holmes.

Phonicsphobics became more visible during the mid 1950's when Daniels and Diack headed what became known as the 'phonic revolt' by publicising in the *News Chronicle* (Daniels & Diack, 1954a) the rationale of their 'phonic-word method' as incorporated in their *Royal Road Readers* (Daniels & Diack, 1954b). They subjected both men to the most appalling verbal abuse and on one astonishing occasion in London, Dr Daniels was physically attacked for daring to give a lecture challenging the 'ultra-progressive' methods of teaching reading advocated by members of the anti-phonic movement.

In 1958, for the first two issues of the NFER journal *Educational Research*, the Foundation's Director asked me to write articles summarising research into the effectiveness of different methods of teaching reading. At his suggestion, the first article was about 'The place and value of phonics' because, being such a highly controversial subject, it was the most likely to attract readers for the new journal. It certainly did so and revealed cases of phonicsphobia I would never have suspected or expected to meet. For example, soon after publication of that article (Morris, 1958), I spent a day in the University of London library checking research references for my second article, 'The place and value of whole-word methods' (Morris, 1959a), and for my first report on the Kent Reading Inquiries called *Reading in the Primary School* (Morris, 1959b). Having skipped lunch and wanting to avoid a tube journey home in the rush hour, I decided to have a light meal in 'The Restful Tray' at the then Lyons Corner House in Tottenham Court Road.

In the event it was one of the least 'restful' meals I have ever had. For I had no sooner sat down with my tray when into the restaurant came Miss K., a former colleague in the junior school where I found my vocation for the cause of literacy. I had got to know her well during fire-watching in the evenings when there was no enemy activity over London. But we had lost touch during the intervening ten years or so. Consequently, as she came to sit at my table I greeted her with, 'It's good to see you again. How are you these days?' To my amazement she stabbed a finger at her open copy of *Educational Research* and replied, 'Very angry! If I ever meet the Joyce Morris who wrote this article on phonics, I shall give her a piece of my mind.' Then, almost without pausing for breath, she launched into a diatribe about phonics which was so irrational and emotionally-charged that I realised that my old colleague had become 'phonicsphobic', apparently incapable of

distinguishing between fact and opinion about a subject, the mere mention of which disturbed her equilibrium.

If further proof of this was needed it came when, eventually, I managed to get a word in edgeways and explain that I had got married since our last meeting and my surname was now Morris. At which point, visibly shocked to find that I was the author she had so decried, she simply said in a manner I shall never forget. 'Oh Joyce. How could you? You used to be such a nice person!'

About six months after my fall from grace in Miss K.'s phonicsphobic estimation, I was appointed reading research adviser and NFER representative on the London University committee supervising the first experiment with Pitman's initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.). I suggested that the experiment should allow comparisons to be made between i.t.a. and both phonic and look-and-say methods of teaching infants to read. Unfortunately, partly because vociferous phonicsphobics tended also to be anti-i.t.a., the late Sir James Pitman persuaded the Steering Committee that it would be best to confine experimentation with his alphabet to a comparison with look-and-say using the then most popular infant reading scheme, *The Janet and John Books* (O'Donnell and Munro, 1949) as the main published resource. This caused a good deal of critical comment, especially after the results were published, and prompted Dr Haas, Professor of Linguistics at Manchester University, to write a critique for *The Times Educational Supplement* entitled, 'From look-and-say to i.t.a.' (Haas, 1969) in which he pointed out that, if phonics had been included, the results in favour of i.t.a. might have been very different.

Be that as it may, experimentation with i.t.a. had several important bonus effects. For example, it focused widespread attention not only on the intrinsic difficulties of English orthography for literacy learners but also on its alphabetic nature and, hence, on the basic reason for including phonics as an essential ingredient of educational provision for literacy. It encouraged scholars like Professor Haas to contribute contemporary linguistic knowledge and fresh insights to the task of teaching children to read and write as in his book *Phono-graphic Translation* (Haas, 1970). Moreover, experimental i.t.a. teachers naturally acquired a more explicit, detailed understanding of the orthography than was generally expected of primary school teachers when one considers the content of their pre-service courses. Consequently, they had a better foundation for giving effective phonic instruction when subsequently teaching reading and spelling in traditional orthography and, because of that, were very unlikely ever to develop phonicsphobia. Moreover, some i.t.a. teachers such as Sue Lloyd have helped to change attitudes to phonics in recent years and, in her case, by publishing the results of her considerable classroom experience as a resource for teachers called *The Phonics Handbook* (Lloyd, 1992).

Despite these and other favourable consequences of i.t.a. experimentation, I believed in 1959 (and still do) that, instead of orthographic innovations, what was really needed was a radical reform of teacher-training which would put language and literacy at its very heart and give phonics its rightful place in the teaching and learning of initial literacy. Sadly, as explained in my 'mini-autobiography' (Morris, 1989), I also had reason to believe from my experience as a professional researcher at the NFER that such a reform, if it ever came to pass, was probably light years away. Therefore, with strong support from Professor Dennis Fry, Head of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics at University College, London, I decided to carry out linguistic research with the object of providing a more informed base than hitherto available for the phonic ingredient in initial literacy provision.

At first the linguistics-informed system developed from this research was known simply as 'new' phonics and, in 1965, it was incorporated in the pioneering BBC television series, *Look and Read*. To my knowledge as consultant/writer for the series over the next twelve years or so, it was warmly welcomed by teachers of the poor readers in junior classes for whom it was primarily intended,

and there was no opposition to its use in schools by LEA advisers and HMI. With only a few objections from educationists opposed to phonics for infants, there was also a similar favourable response when my system was subsequently incorporated in the television series for infants called *Words and Pictures*, and in the research-based scheme for four to nine-year-olds called *Language in Action* (Morris et al., 1974–83) whose core storybook titles are mnemonics for the basic spelling patterns and main sound-symbol correspondences of English.

All this caused me and like-minded colleagues to be hopeful that the influence of the anti-phonetic movement, which naturally attracts phonicsphobics, was petering out. Alas! It proved not to be the case. If anything, the movement began to grow stronger in 1978 with the publication in Britain of *Reading* by Frank Smith, and the dissemination by enthusiasts, mainly among teacher-trainers, of Kenneth Goodman's notion of reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' and his 'whole language, top-down' theories which provide a foundation for the 'real books, apprenticeship approach to reading'.

On my professional visits to the USA in the mid 1970's, prominent researchers in the reading field told me that they were alarmed at the growing influence of Smith and Goodman in American schools and teacher-training institutions. They warned me that it could spread to Britain as it had done to New Zealand. But I did not take this warning too seriously because, like them, I could not find any evidence to support the disturbing statements of the two theorists and, besides my own in the major research series of the NFER, I knew of much to refute them.

In face-to-face discussion with each theorist, I had been similarly disappointed in my quest for evidence. For example, in May 1975, I met Frank Smith with his publisher in New York mainly because the latter admired the first wave publications of *Language in Action* (Morris et al., 1974–83), was contemplating a collaborative project with me, and wanted to witness Frank's reaction to the scheme and my response to his radical views.

It was an extraordinary meeting during which Frank admitted that he had never been a school teacher. Nevertheless, he made confident assertions such as 'reading cannot be taught' and 'phonics is unnecessary', knowing full well that his publisher and I thought otherwise, and believed that American children and their teachers would benefit from using a research-based, motivating resource like *Language in Action* for the development of initial literacy in English. Then, politely ignoring our request for scientific evidence to support his views, he introduced me to his then latest publication, *Comprehension and Learning: A Conceptual Framework for Teachers* (Smith, 1975) with its declared theme, 'Children know how to learn'. Finally before leaving us to digest all this, he handed me a copy of the book in which he had written, 'For Joyce Morris — on an afternoon of mutual comprehension and learning'.

That polite, diplomatic inscription and afternoon meeting should have warned me not to underestimate Frank's charismatic power to influence the teaching of reading when, three years later, he came to Britain to lecture and publicise his book *Reading* (Smith, 1978) which includes the above extraordinary assertions unsupported by research evidence. I also should not have overestimated the importance of scientific research in education. For, without any real evidence that Smith and Goodman's ideas are effective in classroom practice generally, Liz Waterland's translation of their ideas into her own practice (Waterland, 1985) has found widespread acceptance among British teachers, teacher-trainers and LEA advisers. This has led to what Margaret Donaldson calls the 'minimal teaching movement' using an apprenticeship approach to reading with 'real' (trade) books and a 'generalised rejection of anything that can be called a reading scheme.' (Donaldson, 1989).



Fortunately, Bevé Hornsby and others working in the dyslexia field have not been unduly influenced by these developments if at all. They have remained steadfast in using and advocating systematic phonic teaching and multisensory techniques to help children build a sound foundation for literacy. So have Montessori-trained teachers who work mainly in the private education sector. Significantly too, members of both groups are in the van of progress in that they use and recommend phonic resources which have a linguistically-sound base such as *Alpha to Omega: The A–Z of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling* (Hornsby and Shear, 1974) and *The Morris-Montessori Word List* (Morris, 1990) which is the latest publication to incorporate Phonics 44.

For obvious reasons, there are no phonicophobics among those two groups. Whereas, to my knowledge, there are some with influence working in the state education sector. They are largely responsible for the hostility amounting to hatred towards psychologist Martin Turner who reported in *Sponsored Reading Failure* (Turner, 1990) that reading standards fell during the previous five years or so, and suggested that this was due to increasing widespread acceptance of the 'real books philosophy' and a corresponding decrease in systematic phonic teaching in infant classes.

Thus, phonicophobics nowadays are as hostile to reading researchers who dare to challenge anti-phonic orthodoxy by their findings as Miss K. was to me 35 years ago. It could also be argued that they are even more so. For instance, the American psychologist Marilyn Jager Adams, author of the scholarly report *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (Adams, 1990) has been subjected to a great deal of harsh criticism for even accepting the task of carrying out an extensive, detailed review of what research tells us about the place and value of phonics. In reply to her critics (Adams, 1991) she states, 'People told me that I would lose old friends and make new enemies. People told me I would be shot.' She also points out that, although phonics advocates appreciate the value of whole language, whole language advocates do not reciprocate, and she is apprehensive of their 'strong-arm tactics'.

It will be interesting to see what the critics and phonicophobics make of a new book edited by Roger Beard and entitled, *Teaching Literacy: Balancing Perspectives* (Beard, 1993). This is because it contains chapters which critically examine and highlight the weaknesses of the Smith and Goodman theories and the practices of their disciples. Jessie Reid, for example, states that the radical notions she reviews in her contributory chapter 'have been responsible for leading some teachers to believe that word recognition is not a crucial skill (see, for instance, Meek et al., 1983)'. She also provides the following insightful paragraph:-

'It is strange that a reading methodology erected on such shaky ground should have wielded so much influence. The reasons take us far beyond reading itself into the philosophical world of Rousseau's *Emile* and Froebel's 'Kindergarten', of the whole progressive movement in primary education. Its appeal lies perhaps in the promise of a kind of liberation'.

I agree with these sentiments and, indeed, have made similar observations in my own publication such as the paper (Morris, 1979) to which Beard refers in his Introduction as indicative of earlier critical responses to the views of Smith and Goodman. As already indicated, I also believe that the reasons go beyond even the influence of Rousseau's *Emile* which was the starting point of my widely-publicised address, *Reading in Education: Facts and Fallacies* at the North of England Education Conference in January, 1975. In short, they include the previously unnamed pathological condition 'phonicophobia' which, as a psychologist, I would suggest has a number of causes summarised below after a further word about its nature.

#### **4. Causes of Phonicsphobia**

Like all phobias, phonicsphobia is learned behaviour and therefore can be unlearned albeit with varying degrees of difficulty. However, unlike agoraphobics for instance, phonicsphobics are not usually consciously aware of their condition and, consequently, do not seek treatment. Indeed, those I have personally encountered over the years would probably not consider that they are phobic or even that they belong to an anti-phonetic movement, most of whose members I must stress are not so irrationally prejudiced against phonics as to be classed as 'phonicsphobic'. Yet despite all the research evidence against their views, phonicsphobics persist in making fallacious statements such as 'phonics is discredited' and, like Miss K., reveal that the mere mention of the word 'phonics' has the power to render them emotionally unbalanced.

Although I have only recently coined the word 'phonicsphobia' for this strange phenomenon, I have discussed it with professional colleagues at home and abroad for many years. All have agreed that it should be countered because of its disastrous consequences for literacy acquisition in English, but how best to do this is difficult to decide. In my view, it would be unethical to name influential phonicsphobics responsible for those consequences. But it is not so to highlight those consequences and suggest both causes and cures for phonicsphobia. Accordingly, I have done just that in what follows. beginning with a numbered summary of suggested causes.

4.1. In some cases, the origins of phonicsphobia can be traced to traumatic experiences during early childhood. For example, experiences caused, albeit unwittingly, by parents and/or teachers who, in their well-meaning desire for children to make rapid progress towards initial literacy in English place them under a great deal of pressure to acquire alphabet knowledge and word recognition skills with an emphasis on phonics.

Emotionally-secure children can and do flourish with this approach. But some of their peers, not so stable or with English as a second language, are confused by it and fail miserably at first, especially when inadequate attention is paid to their need to develop phonemic awareness and an understanding that reading is a purposeful, meaningful activity giving pleasure and information. When, eventually, they do make a successful start with learning to read, write and spell, potential phonicsphobics among them forever tend to associate with phonics the trauma of initial failure and pressure from adults which, unfortunately, they first experienced as incomprehensible, boring activities involving sounds and letters.

4.2. Student teachers who start their training disposed towards anti-phonetic attitudes because of their childhood experiences are also predisposed to adopting an educational philosophy which, as Jessie Reid surmises, offers 'a promise of a kind of liberation.' They are also naturally attracted to a progressive, child-centred view of education of the kind associated with the English state sector as distinct from that, for example, advocated by Montessori which uses phonic and other materials of a didactic kind in systematic progression. What is more, according to research recently reported by Wyatt and Pickle (1993), they are inclined to accept uncritically the views of college reading tutors about knowledge, classroom authority and control of learning which are often expressed in strong terms. These bear witness to the existence of two extreme belief systems identified by Barnes (1976, 1990) and called by him 'interpretation' and 'transmission' views.

Thus, potential phonicsphobics among student teachers tend to adopt the views of tutors which are interpretative. This means that they see their future role as 'facilitators' of their pupils' cognitive development, enabling them to be 'agents of their own learning' and 'interpreters of knowledge'. In other words, they reject the traditional view of teachers as transmitters of established knowledge and, hence, of phonic knowledge through the use of didactic materials.

4.3. The publications of some phonicsphobic supporters of the whole-language movement indicate that they do not have the comprehensive, detailed knowledge of the English writing system which one would expect of reading 'experts', especially those who are teacher-trainers and educational writers. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Morris, 1990b), they also appear to know nothing about 'modern' or 'new' phonics exemplified by 'Phonics 44', or simply choose to ignore the difference between 'linguistics-informed' and 'traditional' phonics about which they find it easy to poke fun. Consequently, their students, and readers training to be teachers, are not encouraged to acquire the orthographic knowledge essential for the effective teaching of initial literacy which my research (Morris, 1985) indicates that they generally lack at the beginning of their pre-service course. In other words, ignorance of the true nature of the English writing system is associated with phonicsphobia and is very likely a root cause of it.

4.4. Inadequacies in pre-service courses for the teaching of reading have long been documented, and recently by the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE, 1992). These include, as recorded in the NFER contribution (Brooks et al., 1992) to that report, the claim by more than half the graduates of recent courses that they had received little or no teaching about phonics.

This claim and previous claims by newly-qualified teachers known to me and other researchers, give reason to believe that a lack of essential knowledge about the role of phonics and the techniques of phonic instruction are another cause of phonicsphobia, especially where there is also ignorance regarding the 'true' nature of English orthography.

4.5. Understandably, newly-qualified teachers with limited knowledge of phonics find it difficult to give phonic instruction successfully even if they are persuaded that this is crucial for many children. Because of this, they experience feelings of failure as I did long ago and, unless likewise inspired by the example of colleagues like Miss B. and/or a feeling of vocation, these feelings persist, and they pay only sufficient attention to phonics to allow them truthfully to declare their allegiance to 'officially approved', 'mixed' methods. In doing so, the needs of some pupils are not met and they, in turn, experience failure. Thus, a limited knowledge of phonics leads to failure in teaching and learning, and it is but a short step for some to becoming phonicsphobic.

4.6. On visits to hundreds of schools, I have found that teachers whose conversation in the staffroom has revealed at least an adequate knowledge of phonics have not always succeeded in putting it into practice. This is because they have apparently be unable to control the noise generated by chattering children in their classrooms. In other words, classrooms where children are happily engaged in absorbing activities, yet oblivious to requests for peace and quiet whilst their peers are reading silently or to their teacher, and especially when the object of individual tutoring is to develop phonic skills.

Teaching is a stressful occupation, and particularly in such conditions. They arouse anxiety in both teacher and learner, and make it virtually impossible to give and receive effective phonic instruction which requires recognising the phonemes in spoken words, and understanding how they correspond to alphabet letters identified singly and in combination. However, noisy classrooms are not only a cause of ineffective phonic teaching. They are also a breeding ground for phonicsphobia because they cause phonic 'withdrawal' symptoms in inexperienced teachers, who naturally tend to abandon their efforts in a situation fraught with anxiety for them and their pupils and, hence, doomed to failure.

4.7. Although the fears of phobics are apparently irrational, they can usually be traced to a frightening situation in which it would be reasonable to expect anyone to be fearful. For example,

coalminers trapped underground by a mine explosion can, on being rescued, easily develop claustrophobia, i.e. a fear of confined spaces. Likewise, phonicsphobia can be caused by circumstances in which, for instance, class teachers conceal their support for phonic instruction like the previously mentioned Miss S. But, in their case, they do so nowadays because they fear that they will be labelled 'reactionary', 'right wing', or even 'not politically correct', and thereby ruin their chances of promotion to headships. Moreover, as I have also stated elsewhere (Morris, 1990b), 'so great is this fear that, on certain memorable occasions, it has been confided to me literally in whispers by inservice course members who agree with me about the place and value of phonics, but dare not say so publicly.'

In this context, it is also significant that, before his Birmingham primary school won the £100,000 Jerwood Award in 1992 for educational excellence, headmaster Kevin Cassidy wrote a TES article *anonymously* about how all his staff provided children with systematic phonic instruction on a daily basis with outstanding results in terms of literacy acquisition. He did so because he too feared the unfavourable reactions of 'experts' opposed to phonic methods and materials.

## 5. Consequences of Phonicsphobia

Literacy is a political subject and never more so than in the last few years. Even if pro-phonics supporters have no political affiliation, they are considered to be 'ultra right wing' by the anti-phonics movement and especially by its influential, phonicsphobic members. Yet, strange to relate, when Dr Daniels led the 'phonic revolt' in the mid 1950s, and was verbally and physically abused for his efforts to apply research findings and restore phonics to its rightful place in the teaching of initial literacy, he was known to be an admirer of Chairman Mao and his *Little Red Book*.

Besides the abuse suffered by researchers from influential phonicsphobics and their followers, some of the consequences of phonicsphobia may be summarised as follows:-

5.1. Despite the findings of reputable research about phonics, the vast majority of basal reading schemes available in Britain today are predominantly look-and-say. If they do include phonics, the resources provided for teaching and learning are only a relatively small proportion of the whole scheme and, as in the case of the currently popular, *Oxford Reading Tree* (Hunt et al., 1987), are advertised as 'optional'.

Older basal phonic schemes such as *The Royal Road Readers* (Daniels & Diack, 1954) are out of print or have been brought into line with what some 'experts' (including phonicsphobics) refer to as 'modern' thinking about the reading process. For example, *Gay Way* (Boyce, 1949) has been given some new content and renamed *New Way*. More recently-published, basal schemes for systematic phonic teaching and learning have also gone out of print. They include *Language in Action* (Morris et al., 1974–83) which ceased to be available as a whole scheme in July 1989 largely because of the influence of the 'real books philosophy', and despite the fact that its core story books are by authors of 'real' (trade) books writing to linguistic briefs.

It is hoped that urgent requests from many teachers for a reprint edition of at least those core books will be met in the near future. However, much depends on the economic situation, and whether publishers feel that the time is ripe to ignore the advice of phonicsphobics and meet the need for motivating, linguistically-informed phonic resources. To my knowledge, a few publishers believe this to be so, and they are looking around for authors able to prepare such resources. Meanwhile, they cautiously await reactions to the consultation document for the revised National English Curriculum which will largely determine whether they go ahead with their tentative plans.

5.2. Phonicsphobics appear to have influenced Key Stage 1 of the original National English Curriculum because it contains only two references to phonic cues in reading. There is also reason to believe that they influenced the choice of authors for some of the chapters in *The LINC Reader* (Carter et al., 1990) i.e., the Reader which Ronald Carter, the Editor, says is 'related organically to the LINC (Language in the National Curriculum) Project.' For example, Chapter 7, 'The development of initial literacy' is by Yetta Goodman, wife of Kenneth Goodman. Not surprisingly, it endorses his whole-language, top-down theories and decries the use of structured reading programmes. Chapter 8, 'What do we know about reading which helps us to teach?' by Margaret Meek restates her well-known view that it is the texts by children's writers of 'real' (trade) books which really teach children to read. Moreover, she criticises orthodox reading research because, in her opinion, it 'breeds its own brand of evidence', and then goes on to make the extraordinary statement, 'The consequent problem is that reading specialists are bound to ignore the evidence that arises spontaneously in classrooms because it isn't generalisable'.

5.3. Statements about research like that of Meek, quoted above, certainly do not persuade other teacher-trainers to encourage their students to read the published reports of 'professional' reading researchers who appreciate the importance of scientific method in their work and, naturally, do not accept anecdotes as 'evidence' that a particular theory works in practice as some phonicsphobics do. On the contrary, to my knowledge, such fallacious statements have helped some teacher-trainers to continue ignoring generalisable evidence about the crucial role of phonics in teaching initial literacy and they, in turn, have managed to persuade their students also to do so. In other words, it is reasonable to suggest that ignorance of 'real' research evidence about phonics is a contributory cause of phonicsphobia and, hence, one of its consequences is that student teachers are not trained to understand research methods and/or to teach phonics. This of course also accounts for the fact that the book lists given in the NFER report, *What Teachers in Training Read about Reading* (Gorman, 1989) do not include any research reports or how to use phonic methods and materials.

5.4. Experienced teachers who do read research reports, and are enthusiastic, successful users of *Language in Action*, not least because it is research-based, have drawn my attention over the years to how some English advisers and inspectors have tried to persuade them to abandon the scheme. Clearly, what they have suggested after acknowledging the above-average standards achieved by using the scheme does not make sense. For instance, the head of a delightful, suburban infant school I visited told me that, despite receiving that kind of acknowledgement, she was recently advised not only to have a less structured reading programme, using children's literature as the main published resource, but also to provide opportunities for more 'sand and water' activities in her school. From this one may justifiably conclude that phonicsphobia is a cause of inappropriate advice, and one of its consequences is that *Language in Action* is now out of print after the generally favourable response to it previously mentioned. Moreover, as already indicated, another related consequence is the failure of all but a few educational publishers even to contemplate following the lead given by that scheme and bring phonics into the modern age. In other words, to make available the carefully-researched, linguistics-informed, motivating phonic resources which many children need to make a successful start on the road to literacy.

5.5. Of course, the most important consequence of phonicsphobia is the depressing effect it has had on initial literacy teaching. Therefore concerted efforts must be made to remove or at least reduce the influence that, directly and indirectly, phonicsphobics have so far had on educational provision for literacy.

## **6. Cures for Phonicsphobia**

Removing or at least reducing the influence of phonicsphobics is probably the best scenario one could hope for. They do not respond to appeals to commonsense, and some even deny that commonsense plays any part in how children are taught to read, write and spell. They also ignore the vast amount of professional research which demonstrates that their anti-phonics stance is ill-founded. So how can they be cured of a pathological condition which now that it has been named they will deny its existence, and are unlikely ever to recognise it in themselves, especially if left to their own devices?

It is obviously no good suggesting the classic treatments for phobias such as behaviour therapy and its opposite number, psychoanalysis, even though, as previously mentioned, phonicsphobia is learned behaviour and, in some cases, can be traced to traumatic experiences in early childhood. Shock treatment is out of the question too. Yet drastic measures are called for. Accordingly, I suggest that these begin by including phonicsphobia with dyslexia in future public debate about the causes of illiteracy and poor reading standards. As phonicsphobics need to be confronted with the consequences of their damaging anti-phonics stance, all the news media should be asked to make a concerted effort to inform parents about the crucial role of phonics in initial literacy acquisition. For example, some television programmes could well focus on children who are disabled readers, and show clearly that in their case it is primarily because they lack basic phonic knowledge. Others, in significant contrast, could highlight the achievements of pupils in primary schools like that of Headmaster Kevin Cassidy, previously mentioned, where the daily teaching of phonics has made such an enormous difference to the children's lives.

Influential phonicsphobics who protest against such a concerted effort to counteract their views should be publicly challenged by knowledgeable interviewers to explain exactly why they do so. Unfortunately, they would not be cured of their phobia by putting the spotlight on them and on the rationale for the provision of systematic phonic teaching in all schools. But they would be forced by public pressure to think again. Publishers would also have second thoughts about publishing the books of educational writers who make no reference to 'real' research to support their anti-phonics views. Furthermore, although in a democracy one is entitled to one's own views, if those views are phonicsphobic and therefore harmful, those who hold them should not be promoted to headships, the inspectorate or, indeed, to any post which would give them power significantly to affect educational provision for literacy.

Finally, as what should be done is a very different matter from what will be done, it is important to point out that the damaging influence of phonicsphobics has already been counteracted in some parts of the U.S.A. by resorting to the force of law. For instance, three years ago, the Ohio State Board of Education made it legally binding for phonics to be used in schools as a technique to achieve minimum standards in grades Kindergarten through three.

It may be that, in the autumn term, the revised National English Curriculum will likewise make phonics a statutory requirement in English state schools. If it does so, and the English Order is accepted by the teaching profession, many more children will receive the systematic phonic instruction they need. For their sakes, therefore, we must hope that this will happen whilst regretting that the law, rather than commonsense and the findings of professional research, has won for them the provision of an essential ingredient in their literacy education.

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[Valerie Yule: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Quarterly](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal Views](#) 10 & 16, [Media](#), [Books](#).]

### 3. Spelling and Society: Orthography and Reading

#### Summary of a research thesis [1]

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##### Summary

This doctoral thesis (1991) sought to provide a comprehensive account of the grounds for spelling improvement, to open a wide field for empirical research, and to back this up by a network of theory and research. Twenty six experiments, small-scale studies and other original investigations filled in apparent gaps and tested a specific spelling modification, the deletion of surplus letters in words, that was supported by the theory and evidence presented. The following is a reorganized and updated summary of content and conclusions. [2]

##### Introduction

Britons and Americans have been leaders in devising hundreds of new writing systems that are now used by previously illiterate peoples — but they have not put their own spelling in order. Language planning is a thriving field for national efforts world-wide — but not for the written English language. Almost every major language in the world has made major or minor improvements in its writing system over the past century — including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, German, Dutch, Turkish, Portuguese, Korean, Hebrew, Malaysian, Indonesian, Norwegian, Czech, and even French — but not English (except in the United States, 1898–1920, ed.).

One reason for this is that English spelling has got itself into such a mess that rationalising it has seemed too difficult. Intending reformers have usually regarded a clean sweep to some form of direct fonemic sound-symbol correspondence as the only way to go. Indeed, that is Crystal's definition of spelling reform in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (1987).

Empirical research in spelling improvement is therefore necessary. All assumptions must be checked, whether tacit or explicit. Until recently, most attempts at English spelling reform have been conducted from armchairs or the equivalent of barricades, with fusillades of arguments and new systems or lists of revisions presented as *à priori* constructions demanding implementation. Although children have at times been taught to read successfully by various fonemic spelling schemes, there has been no mainstream research that compared these schemes or explored other issues involved in improving a writing system. The ERIC database of 1982–1993 listed 32,293 articles on READING and 2,172 on SPELLING, but it reported only 12 articles on SPELLING REFORM, and of these, only Beech (1983) and Citron (1981) were positive. All other spelling reform research during that period has been effectively censored out from future researchers simply by being omitted. The Modern Language Abstracts database 1981–92 listed nine items on spelling reform — all on reform in other languages except for one on the Renaissance and an article of mine in a Spanish journal.

Only recently has research begun to investigate the question of what might be optimum to meet the real needs and abilities of users of the English writing system. The *Harvard Educational Review* was one of the first major learned journals to take this question seriously without the aim of dismissing it (Yule, 1986), and an empirical comparison of responses to different types of spelling reform was published in *Human Learning* in the same year (Yule & Greentree). The topic had a hard time in 1987 to gain acceptance in a University as a respectable field of study for a thesis. But now a mainstream international literacy journal, *the Journal of Research in Reading* (1992) has broken ground in publishing a research article written throughout in a reformed spelling (Christopher Upward's



pioneering experiment, 'Is traditional English spelling more difficult than German?'), showing that a door is now open, and progress is possible.

## **PART I. An overview of writing systems**

The variety of possibilities for the relationship of written and spoken language.

The first step of the argument of the thesis is a cross-cultural review of writing systems, how they relate to the languages that they represent and how they meet the needs and abilities of users. It describes how and why writing systems other than English have changed over time, the role of planned interventions and the conditions for national reforms. Other contemporary orthographies beside English have their own ways in which to be difficult for learners and users, but most are relatively user-friendly. Other countries also attempt and often succeed in deliberate orthographic improvement, with trends towards simplification and consistency. Cross-disciplinary data can be reanalysed from the perspective of its relevance to English.

The four major possibilities so far invented for writing to communicate language are 'logographic', syllabic, alphabetic, and mixtures and messes of these possibilities. The messes result from language change over time, and the accidents and expedients that accrue. The language may be living, but the writing system may be deadening.

Logographic writing systems (characters represent words) and alphabetic writing systems (characters represent the speech-sounds of a language) both have advantages and disadvantages. They are compared and contrasted because they bear on the 'Whole-Word' and 'Phonics' controversies in English education which are currently unresolved, but have significant implications for the direction of spelling reform.

Chinese is the outstanding example of writing that is logographic, or ideographic (characters represent ideas). Since it does not represent speech sounds, written Chinese was able to unite an empire of many languages. It is particularly suited to its original mandarin spoken language, which is made up of around 400 monosyllables, with multiple homophones and distinctions of up to five tones, making it difficult to represent by any alphabetic or syllabic principle. Learning and recognition is difficult but not impossible because the characters are not entirely arbitrary: they have components of radicals and significs, made up of simple and compound ideograms with semantic associations, pictograms and rebuses that are often now unidentifiable and some phonetic clues.

However, acquiring full mastery of from 40,000 to 70,000 complex characters was always considered work for a lifetime scholar. It is a writing system for an elite. All efforts at simplification down to a bare minimum of around 4,000 characters, and the intensive literacy campaigns undertaken by Communist China, failed to achieve universal literacy. Now roman alphabetic 'pin-yin' is commonly used to introduce beginners to reading.

The alphabetic principle is that each character should represent a speech sound, as in Latin, but this is rarely found intact in any living language, since spoken languages change over time and place, accidents and expedients occur in the writing of it, and other aspects such as morphemes and grammatical markers may assume importance. The great advantage is that most languages are made up of only 15 to 40 speech-sounds to be represented by letters, so that these should be as easy as ABC to learn, and it should be easy for readers and writers to work out what any unfamiliar combination of letters should represent. All you have to do is to segment the artificial speech-sounds from the stream of speech — and this skill can be taught, even if it is usually not.

Writing systems in which each character represents a syllable, as in many Indian languages, are probably the easiest of all, since the spoken syllables in words are easy to segment. However, they

are only suitable for languages with a limited range of syllables, like Japanese, where beginners need learn only 48 hiragana characters, increased to 71 by diacritics. English however, would need hundreds, if not thousands of characters to represent its extensive range of syllables — around 70 in this paragraph alone.

### **Writing systems in society**

The nature of a writing system is bound up with the nature of a society. Orthographies have roles in society as bearers of literacy, with functions in maintenance or change of social structure. Orthographic change is usually related to social change.

When a writing system is very difficult, it can be the property and governing instrument of a ruling elite, or the secret of the priests who alone have the opportunities for the scholarship to master them. (Hieroglyphics = sacred carvings.) Indeed when the ingeniously simple Korean alphabet was invented in the 15th century, the Chinese-cultured Korean mandarins suppressed it as soon as possible on the express grounds that its simplicity could enable ordinary people to read and write, whereas the Chinese script was their monopoly. It was the Korean court ladies, debarred from education, who maintained *hangul* for their own use among themselves over the following centuries.

The invention of the alphabet in the Middle East made possible the trading success of the Phoenicians and the transmission of Greek culture, because anyone with a little effort could learn from 20 to 40 rudimentary characters to represent the speech sounds of their language. The alphabet has made democracy possible. Where, however, over time the spelling system no longer represents the spoken language in any consistent way, then universal literacy is no longer an easy matter.

Two apparently very successful orthographic solutions, Japanese and Korean, are mixtures. Foreigners tend to call Japanese the 'devil's own language', and the Japanese put intense and determined effort into learning the written form — but then can often read and write it extremely fast. A single sentence of Japanese could in theory contain up to six writing systems — Chinese characters or *kanji* for the key vocabulary, the 'syllabic' *hiragana* that children learn first that carries the Japanese grammar, *furigana* a little phonetic key to give clues for some *kanji* characters, Arabic numerals, and for imported vocabulary either syllabic *katakana* or the Roman alphabet *romaji*. It is possible that so much visual distinctiveness between types of language may aid fast access to meaning.

Korean is more systematic and simple, but also ingenious. It shows what can be done when a writing system is purpose-designed rather than developed over a period. It is constructed of symbols which represent speech sounds, which in turn are combined into the semblance of gestalt-like characters which represent syllables, giving it the visual advantages of logographs rather than the visual disadvantage of linear strings of letters, while it directly represents the spoken language. *Hangul* (the 'Great Letters') can be used to represent the Korean grammar embedding traditional Chinese characters, but today is more commonly the complete script.

New orthographies designed for existing and invented languages are also relevant to English spelling design. A fifth of the world's languages have writing systems that were only invented in the last 50 years or so. These show the fruits of experience and experiment, as well as how practical and social issues thwart ideals of theoretical perfection. They also scotch the popular myth that orthographies have to develop mysteriously and organically without human intervention (e.g. Henderson, 1986: 68). If English spelling had been invented this century, it would be very different from what has developed over the past thousand years.

## How orthographies change

Writing systems reflect the changing cultures in which they operate, and fill strategic functions in societies. There has been a tremendous variety of challenges and responses to the pressures to reform. Today's changes to writing systems reflect modern trends to simplification and greater efficiency and accessibility. Some specific national reforms are described, to illustrate themes and theories that counter Anglo-Saxon orthographic parochialism.

Reasons for failures make a wry comment on the chequered career of English reform campaigns. Some examples are the continuing German controversies over whether it is important to capitalise nouns, the Danish dilemma over preserving their very small language area, French linguistic xenophobia, Hebrew and Arabic reverent attitudes to their sacred scripts, and the unfortunate Indian delusion that if the Roman alphabet were used as a shared alternative script for their many languages with their many regional scripts, it would have to be as difficult as English spelling, which is their only experience of the Roman alphabet in action.

Successful reforms carried through by stable governments include Finnish, Norwegian, Dutch, Afrikaans, Greenlandic, and the intercontinental orthographic reforms of Spanish and Portuguese.

The most radical reforms have usually been among the first actions of revolutionary or radically reforming new governments, as in Turkey, Russia, China, and postwar Indonesia, Malaysia, Israel, and Korea. It is in fact strange that spelling reform has never been on the agenda of the Left in English-speaking countries, when in other lands so much priority has been given by idealists and seekers of justice to reform of the writing system.

## PART II. English spelling

Part II examines the nature of English spelling, its basic structure and deviations from that structure, its adequacy as a vehicle for the English language, and current theories that describe it. English spelling has advantages, but also disadvantages that could be reduced. Trends to change reflect and are caused by social change and the changing functions of spelling in society. [3]

An alphabetic writing system suits the English language, which ideally would require only about 40 symbols, including around 19 for vowels. However, it has to make do with 26 Roman letters, with only five for vowels, and the uncoordinated expedients that have been resorted to to get around this have added to the other impositions of history. Other considerations investigated in detail for an 'optimum' English spelling include the unreliability of etymology, the limits of Chomsky's concept of lexical structure, the morphemic nature of the language, the place of grammatical markers, the importance of backwards compatibility with our heritage of print, and the representation of homophones. (There are 11 homographic homophones in this paragraph, compared to 5 heterographic homophones.)

Theories of English spelling are mainly attempts at classified description. The theory of orthography that is proposed regards English spelling as a basically diaphonic conventionalised representation of the sound system of the language, modified by morphemic principles to represent the structural principles of English, but currently obscured by inconsistencies and elaborations. English spelling improvement may require only clearing up the inconsistencies and what is in effect clutter, from that basic structure.

English spelling has changed since Johnson's standardisation in 1755, which he tried to base on etymology to bypass the dialect problem. The changes have reflected changes in society, and in the function of education to screen out or to raise up.

In the 18th century, the complexity and elaboration of English spelling were valued, because these made it an instant screening test for social gentility. The sociologist Veblen (1899) described it as

a striking example of the 'conspicuous consumption' of the time. Victorian England valued difficult spelling as a vocational screening test for intelligence and diligence. Today an accessible spelling is needed for an efficient society more than a lexical barrier to protect an hierarchical one.

There have been dictionary as well as popular changes which follow the technological trend towards greater user-friendliness. When dictionaries list alternative spellings, the simpler versions tend to gain popular support (e.g. *lacquey* to *lackey*). Seventy per cent of the spelling changes in commercial spellings are shortenings, and imported vocabulary is now often given simpler spellings. Even the spelling reformers achieved some changes, as in the 'American spellings' that have been adopted from the lists of Noah Webster and the 1905 proposals of the Phonemic Spelling Council.

### **Today's challenge**

The great importance of English spelling today is that it can promote or destroy English as the international language of the world. The poor link between the spoken and written forms risks losing it the universality that the Empire gained for it. Even the most pragmatic rising nationalisms often reject the continued use of English because the difficulties of the writing system undercut the advantages of English language for education, technology and international communication. For foreign learners, English is a double language, with its relatively easy spoken form sabotaged by its very difficult written form.

An international angle on how English spelling could change is provided by the spellings of 'International English', as in *Franglais*, *Japlish*, *Russlish*, and so on, in loan words from and into other languages, and in the new pidgin-English orthographies. Papua New Guinea has changed from English to Tok Pisin as the official language to unite its 900 or so tribal languages mainly because the spelling of pidgin-English is easy to learn and read and write. The practice principles of pidgin English spellings could be usefully considered in the design of English spelling.

In the 20th century, universal literacy is necessary for a democratic and technological society; the most powerful forces against it are economic and political interests that want dumb passive consumer fodder. The direction of our interests in spelling improvement can follow this century's trends for simplicity, streamlining, and efficiency.

### **PART III Needs and abilities of the users of spelling [4]**

This section investigates and refutes the educationally-popular claim that learners and readers do not use spelling because efficient readers operate on context and whole words — so that improving spelling will not help them. 'Orthography' and 'Spelling' may not even appear in the index of books about reading theories and teaching. A vigorous critique is made of Frank Smith's wilder and most popular claims (e.g. Smith, 1982) about the dangers of phonics and the value of guessing or asking others in order to identify a word (e.g. Weckert, 1994). Theory and research is reviewed to show that the needs and abilities of readers and learners must be considered in orthographic design.

**Skillful readers** are shown to recognise most words with visual automaticity, but they use many strategies in reading text, including context and prediction, with phonetic decoding for unfamiliar words. The skillful reader neither 'barks at print' and misses the meaning (the result of poor 'Phonics' teaching) nor guesses and skips words and misses the meaning because incorrect guesses cannot be checked nor new vocabulary identified (the result of teaching without Phonics).

A good reader appears to use a whole cognitive organization with recognition memory, visual search, short-term memory, free and cued recall, intentional and unplanned learning, semantic and lexical decisions, imagery, prose comprehension, the activation and utilization of knowledge, and long-term memory (Puff, 1982). Both visual and phonological features of orthography are processed at an abstract level in the brain — so that the visual features are independent of letter case and font that distinguish

words in space, and the phonological features are independent of the chronological constraints that distinguish words in time. Skilled readers can play the 'psycholinguistic guessing game' of reading (Goodman, 1982) both 'top-down' using context and 'bottom-up', through detailed processing of words, which involves the importance of spelling regularity, use of sound-symbol relationships and spelling analogies, representation of morphemes and grammatical markers, etymology, context and visual features such as distinctive visual elements of words, their frequency, length, shape, distinctiveness, letter information and sequences, and 'sequential redundancy', which means no interfering letters, not 'as much clutter as possible'.

**Poor readers.** English spelling is shown to be a critical additional barrier for all learners facing any other type of handicap, and although not the only factor, it is a final barrier preventing adequate literacy in English-speaking countries despite costly universal education. Excellent methods are now available to teach learners to 'hear sounds in words' — removing one criticism of using spelling in reading, that 'phonological awareness' is often difficult to acquire.

'Information overload' is a major factor in reading difficulties — too much has to be done at once, and inefficient readers may focus on one aspect or another, at the expense of comprehension. Since multiple levels of operation are required in reading, any reduction by simplification in the amount of simultaneous processing required in reading can help to save them.

Short studies to illuminate these issues included Asian students' reading in different writing systems, the correlation of spelling and reading abilities, and a demonstration that even highly educated people usually cannot spell 16 common words correctly.

**Learning to read.** All readers continue to be learners, and many adults never reach the stage of fluent easy reading. The discussion here includes theories of learning to read, critical longitudinal research studies which follow children's cognitive development, the phonetic intuitions of early 'spontaneous' readers, and experience with initial learning spellings. Studies of learners show that spelling is relevant to them at three stages — when they need to understand the nature of reading and how to relate the written language to the spoken language that they know, to ensure accuracy in identifying unfamiliar words, and to facilitate practice toward fluency.

The phonics-taught poor learners who merely bark at print without regard for meaning, and the 'whole-word' taught poor learners who wrongly guess 'whole words' could all be assisted by a more custom-designed spelling that gave them more opportunity to reach rapid automaticity in accurate word recognition, with their limited resources. Faster checking of the accuracy of guessed words means greater fluency, and greater fluency increases the ability to follow the meaning of a text, as short-term memory can carry more of it. An orthography that makes it easy for beginners to be established as confident learners, must also make it possible for able learners to race ahead. But young learners aged five to six, and most adults with reading difficulties — indeed most adults — do not know the history of the English language, nor etymology, nor do they have explicit knowledge about morphemic relationships of words to explain the English spelling they must learn by rote.

A more consistent, economic and predictable representation of language in spelling would also make possible improved teaching methods, and less rote-learning, whether of whole 'sight-words' or of phonetic drills. It would assist movement from strategies of limited logographic and random feature recognition, and make 'decoding' a faster process on the way to automatic recognition. Children could read earlier at their mental age level, and this would assist the development of their still immature spoken English, as well as their reading for subject content. More learners might be able to 'teach themselves to read' than the few who do so today — especially now that video and CD-ROM make possible independent home learning. [5]

Original experimental studies on learning to read include a comparison of whole-word and alphabetic learning strategies, a demonstration of why the pedagogy of Paulo Friere for teaching South American peasants to read cannot be used with English spelling, children's silent and oral reading in TO and in Surplus-cut spelling, and three studies of orthographic structure and analogical strategies in word recognition. Children's own 'invented spelling' is shown to provide leads for a user-friendly English spelling; spelling is shown to be a major factor in the graded reading difficulty of a standard reading test, the *Neale Reading Analysis*, and five case-studies show how different are the ways by which children may learn to read so that there are risks in using group data to make generalisations about 'stages' for all children. All these confirm the necessity of improving English spelling, to improve literacy in the English language for learners, skilled readers, writers, disadvantaged groups, foreigners, immigrants, and now computers. The 'optimum' writing system would consistently and broadly represent the spoken language for learners, with consistent modifications (e.g. possibly morphemic components) found by research to facilitate fast and skilled reading.

#### **PART IV**

'PART IV reports a network of studies and experiments in spelling modification [6]. A central experimental series tests the proposition that letters surplus to the representation of meaning and phonology could be acceptably deleted from words in English spelling, leaving the basic spelling structure of the words intact. The specific letter deletions in the experiments were based on application of linguistic principles and observations of reader behavior. Results supported the *à priori* deletions, but full verification and definition remain a further task. This spelling modification, at first named Surplus-cut Spelling (SC) was designated as Clipd Spelling in the thesis to distinguish it from Upwards' extension of the original concept, since this is now well known as Cut Spelling. However, in this account I revert to the first title, Surplus-cut, as this too has become known through published articles (e.g. Yule & Greentree, 1986).

Deletion of surplus letters in spelling does not solve all the problems of misleading representation of phonemes and morphemes in English spelling, but it has the advantage as a first step of retaining close backwards compatibility with the visual appearance of traditional spelling. Although around 32 % of words in text may be modified, only 5 % of letters are deleted, so that visual familiarity is minimally affected, while visual clarity of word structure is greatly improved. Surplus letters are involved in the spelling of 40.3 % of vowel graphemes. In primary school children's reading, these proportions are 35.5 % and 23.7 %, which are still a high proportion of 'irregularity' to be produced by letters which may well be regarded as intrusions into the written word. Other proposed forms of spelling modification have been shown to lack the rapid transitional facilitation of deletion rather than vowel-letter change (Yule & Greentree, 1986). [7]

A core experimental series tested the effects of Surplus-cut spelling (SC) on the reading of words and word-pairs and continuum text. The focus was on readers' immediate adjustment to SC, since, if possible, any orthographic change should not be initially disruptive to those already literate, and should be backwards compatible with all that is now in print. The central experiment was a lexical decision task for 30 adults which was backed up with replication and three types of control experiment, including letter-deletions ('control-cut') which matched Surplus-cut deletions in all except apparent superfluity.

The experiments were complemented by smaller pilot experiments with children, poor readers, and adult learners of English as a foreign language, and with studies of attitudes and of the needs of the writers. Earlier unpublished research on practice effects in reading modified text and comparisons with other types of orthographic modification were included in the appendix.

Surplus-cut spellings were recognised by naive readers significantly faster and more accurately than control-cut — for example, words flashed at 30 msec in CRT experiments had a rejection rate of around 10 % for TO spellings, 25 % for CS, and 50 % for Control-cut. Familiarity of spelling as well

as of word was found to be the major factor in speed and accuracy of recognition of words, including in the recognition of alternative spellings accepted by dictionaries. Three practice trials could be sufficient for SC recognition rates to match TO, but control-cut recognition remained slower and less accurate. It is still to be ascertained whether, with further familiarity, SC spelling would actually improve the efficiency of already skilled readers, but some individual poor readers showed this improvement. A less clearly established finding from Experiments 9.4 and 6.5 requires further replication and elucidation. Positive attitudes and comprehension of the spelling system were improved by familiarity, even though 20 hours' practice spaced over 20 days was not sufficient for all readers to fully overcome the frequency effect that often gave TO the advantage. But only a little reading in Surplus-Cut Spelling appeared to help readers to pick up the principles of surplus-deletion and apply them in their own writing and understanding of spelling. This suggests that if Surplus-cut spellings were permitted as acceptable alternative spellings, readers could pick up the principles of Surplus-cut simply by reading, and could then apply them to both reading and writing — which would be a more effective and inexpensive way of transferring to modified spelling than by learning sets of lists or undertaking special costly training. The ability to generalise language principles by analogy, which is so important in children's learning of the spoken language, could then also be exploited to greater advantage in the teaching of reading. That is, our demonstrated abilities to switch code and change set would facilitate transition to a consistent spelling system.

It is crucial that beginning readers are not demotivated by initial decoding confusions. Experiments and studies gave some support to two claims — that those already literate would not be disturbed in accuracy or comprehension in their first exposure to reading continuous text in Surplus-cut Spelling, and many would not even be initially disturbed in reading rates, and that learners might read more new words independently and accurately if presented in Surplus-cut Spelling.

Pilot masked-priming experiments (Appendix 9.3) did not confirm the proposition that for skilled readers the mental representation of words might be a morpho-phonemic core as represented in Surplus-cut Spelling rather than the visual features of the orthography, but further investigation is indicated, since this type of experiments procedure tests only one type of recognition and/or lexical entry.

Two further tendencies could be significant. For both reading text and reading single words, readers tend to make use not only of the visual configuration and/or the visual patterns and redundancy in the orthography, but also profit from the morpho-phonemic representation of the spoken language in print. This also held for children who were learning to read successfully, although not for those who were failing. This has important implications for the teaching of reading, confirming the evidence and arguments presented for helping children to awareness of sounds in the spoken word and how they are represented in print. Appendix 6.2 sets out some 'childish' techniques for children to help them to this critical awareness.

Further small rating experiments used ratings to assess attitudes, and letter-cancelling and similar tests to study comprehension of Cut-Spelling principles.

## **PART V. CONCLUSION**

The studies and experiments disprove some traditional and Chomskyan claims for advantages in conventional English orthography, while supporting others, and have implications for theories of reading in education and cognitive psychology. The experiments bring out some of the unsolved issues in the nature of reading processes, and the problems that must be faced in research on spelling design. It is concluded that a Surplus-cut spelling would clarify the morphemic and phonemic structure of the English language and be minimally disruptive as a practicable step towards an optimal English orthography. All categories of reader would benefit by spelling modifications that increased predictability and revealed the underlying structure of the orthography more consistently.

Further cross-cultural studies of the efficiency of writing systems for other languages can clarify useful

features for orthography that may be incorporated into our own spelling, and others may be worked out from fuller knowledge of the psychoneurological processes involved in communication by language. Some possible directions for orthography are discussed. Research in spelling design also offers a point of entry towards solving some of the puzzles that still tantalise scholars in the cognitive psychology of reading. The goal is Chomsky's concept of 'optimum orthography' (1970), — defined as the written representation most favorable for readers in a particular language, and the best fit to meet the different and sometimes incompatible needs and abilities of users and learners, readers and writers, native-speakers and the foreign-born, the bright and the dull, the normal and the handicapped, humans and machines, while maintaining access to our heritage of print (backwards compatibility). Following Venezky's (1970) principles for the design of a practical writing system, it should harmonise with linguists' phonological classifications and with native speakers sometimes conflicting perceptions, it should be compatible with the linguistic, political and sociocultural aspects of its cultural setting, and it should be psychologically and pedagogically appropriate for its users. This investigation shows that these ideals can be realisable, and that acceptable trade-offs would be possible, refuting the common *à priori* argument that orthographic change useful for one purpose or group might disadvantage another (e.g. Frith, 1980).

Implementation by action-research is feasible with popular acceptance following familiarity as the criterion for what is most 'user-friendly'. Methods of introduction include 'trial by television' in subtitling, initial learning spellings, and alternative 'demotic' spelling for those groups currently cut off from conventional literacy.

## APPENDICES

The appendices include details and data from the experiments, and further short studies:-

- A complex chart showing the multiple ways that English vowel phonemes may be spelled, and the multiple ways that vowel spellings may be pronounced.
- An orthographic analysis of the types of difficulties which complicate the '120 Worst Spelling Demons'
- Some curiosities of English spelling
- A selection of impolite quotations about English spelling
- The spelling of words compared and contrasted with the spelling of their sources — which disposes of claims about the value and reliability of etymology as distinct from morphology in reading and spelling
- The spelling of morphemes in related words, which is relevant to the 'Chomsky theory' (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, C. Chomsky, 1970)
- The differences in representation of morphemes in texts for adults and children
- A demonstration of the risks in guessing from context as a reading strategy
- Notes on problems of research in the design of spelling
- Notes on some possible directions in theory and research in spelling design
- How Surplus-Cut Spelling would simplify the Morris-Montessori Word List for schools (Morris, 1990) — reducing its 150 pages by 15 % and shortening 42 % of the remaining words
- A sample of words that have two or more spellings accepted by dictionaries (which in total make up around 2,500 words in a 64,000 word dictionary)
- A short list of spelling reformers, listed under occupation
- Examples of 'International English'— the spellings of some English words that have been imported into two Indian languages, when they are set out in the Roman alphabet (from Gogate, 1988); examples of 'Indonesian English'; and English language in Esperanto spelling (from Campbell, 1982)
- A demonstration of the relationship of errors in spelling and errors in comprehension
- A report of two unpublished pilot experiments by M. Taft and D. Bradley on the effects of letter deletion on primed word recognition
- A condensed version of an unpublished manuscript reporting an extended experiment by V. Yule and C. D. McKay, 'Practice effects for adults and poor readers in reading than in a modified spelling'.

The bibliography contains approximately 860 references, and there is an extensive glossary.



## NOTES

- [1]. Copies of the thesis are held by the Simplified Spelling Society, Manchester University Mont Follick Library, and the Library and Education Faculty at Monash University, Clayton, Vic., Australia, 3168.
- [2]. The manuscript of a book for the general reader based on the first two parts of this thesis is still looking for a publisher. This updated and rewritten version includes the oddities and fascinating miscellanea that an academic thesis must leave out, and corrects its defects.
- [3]. Chapters on 'The politics of spelling' and 'The politics of international English spelling', using material from this section, appear in *The Politics of Literacy in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region*, ed. David Myers & Nicholas Walker, Melbourne; Australian Scholarly Publishing. In press, 1994.
- [4]. Articles using material from this section:-  
Learning to read without effort. *Reading* (U.K.), 26.2 1992, 12–16.  
Children's abilities and 'Surplus-cut' spelling reform. [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J13 1992](#), Item 2.  
Improving English spelling for readers: the necessity for research. [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J14 1993](#), Item 3.
- [5]. The half-hour 'take-home' computer graphics cartoon video *Teach Yourself to Read or Find out where you got Stuck* (Melbourne: Literacy Innovations, 1993) is my attempt to exploit the potential of the new media for Do-it-Yourself literacy. One of its innovative features is its explanation to learners of how and why English spelling is silly, and how to cope with this problem. Spelling reform is promoted as the eventual solution.
- [6]. See 'Experiments in public response to Surplus-cut spellings in text' [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society J17 1994](#), Item 3, for an article based on this material.
- [7]. In this article the extent of letter deletion has varied, so that readers may monitor their own responses. Substitutions of < f > for < ph > and < j > for soft < g > are also made, since these are now familiar through spelling in advertising and in new vocabulary.
- [8]. An article using this material appears in *Visible Language*, 28.1 1994. 26–47. 'Problems that face research in the design of spelling.'

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 17, 1994/2 p21–24 in the printed version]

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

## 4. Err Analysis: som reflections on aims, methods, limitations and importnce, with a furthr demnstration. Part 2.

### Christopher Upward

This articl in ritn in Cut Spelng (CS). Th first part apeard in [JSSS 94/1, J16](#) Item 6.

### 6. Mispelngs as symtms of th english spelng diseese

Mispelng analyses can be conductd for varius purposes. One reasn, as in th case of th NFER study, may be to try and mesur levls of litracy. Anothr, as with Wing & Baddeley, may be to shed lyt on th sycology of riting jenrly, perhaps (tho not in th case of Wing & Baddeley) askng wethr riters retrieve spelngs primarily from ther auditory or ther visul memry, ie ar riters tryng to recreate wat they recal of th pronunciation of words, or ar they tryng to reproduce visul imajs? For spelng reformrs, howevr, th main purpos of mispelng analysis is to identify th difictis that riters experience in tryng to comit a givn riting systm to paper. Wen Thorstad [\[1\]](#) showd english children making nearly 8 times as many mispelngs as ther italian countrparts, her findngs conveyd a powful mesaj about th relativ dificly of litracy in two languajs; a simlr mesaj arose from a study by th presnt authr [\[2\]](#) wich found nativ english-speakng students of jermn making nearly 7 times as many mispelngs in ther english mothr tong as in jermn, th foren languaj they wer studying.

For spelng reformrs to incorprate th lesns of mispelng analysis into ther proposals for improved orthografy implys an ergnomic vew of ther task wich contrasts strongly with th aproach adoptd by erlir jenrations of reformrs. Wen Walter Ripman and William Archer first publishd *New Spelling* in 1910, wen Daniel Jones and Harold Orton revised it in 1948 [\[3\]](#), and wen Laurence Fennelly updated it as *New Spelling 90* in 1991 [\[4\]](#), they wer al startng from th premis that spelng reform means respelng words systmatically acordng to ther deemd pronunciation. Th way traditionl english orthografy is mispelt is scarcely relevnt to this task of desynng a completely new orthografy. Since th mid-20th century an alternativ aproach of step-by-step reform has tendd to domnate thinkng on th subject: it looks for specific falts in th presnt orthografy, and sujests how som of these may be individuly corectd. Th main proposals along this path hav com from Axel Wijk [\[5\]](#), Harry Lindgren [\[6\]](#), and CS. It is in th identification and especialy in th prioritization of such specific falts that mispelng analysis may provide useful evidnce.

### 7. Simplifyng metaorthografic rules

How shud we then interpret th errs found in th presnt study? We hav alredy noted that both in size and subject matr th corpus is smal and therfor canot lead to any definitiv conclusions; at best it may hav som indicativ and methodolojicl valu. Of th metaorthografic errs, aberant capitlization was by far th most serius, th gret majority of cases involvng arbitry use of capitl lettrs in midsentnce or somtimes even midword. No spelng reform can reduce this problm; wat is required is simply that lernrs be traird to hyr standrds of scriptorial disiplin. Fewr errs involvd failur to use capitl lettrs wher convention at presnt requires them. As is proposed for CS (se th *CS Handbook*, Chaptr 5), th presnt conventions for using capitl lettrs in english cud be simplifyd to mach those in othr languajs, for instnce only requiring capitlization of th names of peple and places. Many errs wud be avoidd if th corect forms wer then *England, english, America, american, friday, october*. A notabl area of uncertnty, regardng capitlization of th seasns (*Summer* or *summer?*) and points of th compass (*South* or *south?*), wud then also be larjly resolvld.

As far as word-division is concerned, probably no spelling reform would be able to help much, as the conventions are always likely to be arbitrary: would we write *into*, would we *in to*? But there is no particular justification for writing *a lot* as a single word, as happened so often in the present survey. Learners have to grasp that a simple noun phrase like any other is involved here, and that they should no more write *alot* than they would write *a friend*. On the other hand, the use of the apostrophe, and hence its misuse, could be substantially reduced by simplifying the present rules. Again as proposed in the *CS Handbook* (Chapter 5, Part 2), apostrophes can be dispensed with almost entirely for indicating possession (hence *peoples* would be both the plural and the singular possessive form), and in contractions like *dont* (the latter omission was already practised by George Bernard Shaw). If these important uses of the apostrophe were abolished, there would be far fewer errors like *happen's*, *injustis's*, *are'nt*. However, pronoun/verb contractions would still need apostrophes to show the difference between, say, *he'd/head*, *she'll/shell*, and by this criterion the difficult distinction between *it's/its* would still need to be maintained.

## 8. The NS and CS approaches

Vowel sounds are notoriously hard to spell in English, and in the present study they constituted the largest single category of misspellings proper. Among the long vowels, the many alternative ways of spelling the sound /i:/, as E, EA, EE, EI, IE, etc., are commonly observed to cause particular trouble, as was seen in our corpus in the forms *acheive*, *corea* (=career), *meat* (=meet), *peice*, *resonable*, *wierd*. The spelling of /æ/ (*Brain* [=Brian], *buy* [=by], *deiyng/dieyng/dieing* [=dying], *kaliadoscope*, *liabary* [=library], *paralized*, *sosity* [=society]) and to a lesser extent of /e/ (*raisist* [=racist], *waist* [=waste]) were also shown to be troublesome. Isolated misspellings of the other long vowels were seen with /o:/ in *lonley* (=lonely), and /u:/ in *babon* (=baboon), *crewl* (=cruel).

The classic solution to these problems in the Anglo-American spelling reform tradition is that of *New Spelling* (NS) [7], which uses the basic long-vowel digraphs AE, EE, IE, OE, UU/UE. The above words might then be spelled as follows: *acheev*, *kareer*, *meet*, *pees*, *reezonabl*, *weerd*; *Briën*, *bie*, *dieing*, *kaliadoscoop*, *liebrary*, *parraliez*, *sosiëty*, *raesist*, *waest*, *loenly*, *babuun*, *cruël*. Advocates of NS have always regarded these long vowels as representing the core of the English spelling problem, and they have few qualms about the major impact their respelling has on the familiar form of words and the appearance of text. CS on the other hand is constrained by the criterion of not making drastic changes to what is familiar, and therefore cannot systematically regularize the spelling of long vowels. CS only reduces three of the above spellings, giving *acheve*, *pece*, *reasnbl*, where redundant letters can be removed. But if CS does not claim to provide a long-term ideal solution here, it at least largely overcomes the perennial bugbear of the 'I before E except after C' rule, creating the regularity of *eve*, *leve*, *sleve*, *receve*, *beleve*.

Hovering somewhere between long /i:/ and short /Ē/ (depending on accent) is the last vowel in words like *happy*, *stupid*, which present conventions may require to be variously and unpredictably transformed from Y to IE etc., depending on the grammatical form of the word in any given context. This kind of variation produced a whole batch of errors in the corpus: *enemys*, *happyness*, *humanites*, *marride*, *showey*, *stupied*, *worryng*. For these NS has *enemiz*, *hapines*, *humanitiz*, *marrid*, *shoy*, *stuepid*, *wurryng*, as opposed to CS *enmis*, *happiness*, *humanitis*, *marrid*, *showy*, *stupid*, *worryng*. Related to the long A-vowel problem are spellings with a following R, with the errors *billionare*, *there* (=either 'their' or 'they're'), *unfare*; for these, NS has *bilyonaer*, *dhaer*, *dhae'r*, *unfaer*, while CS has *bilionair*, *ther*, *they'r*, *unfair*. The /O:/ vowel also causes difficulty, especially for non-Rhotic speakers for whom *caught/court* are homophones and hence are therefore prone to misspellings like *thort* for *thought*, though this error was not found in the present corpus. So we see the misspellings *addition* (=audition), *afull* (=awful), *thoght*, for which NS has *audishon*, *aufool*, *thaut*, and CS has *audition*, *awful*, *thot*. The confusion of *aloud/allowed* is overcome in NS, which has *aloud* for both, while CS still distinguishes *aloud/allowd*. The misspelling *inturperet* anticipates NS *inturpret*, though CS keeps *interpret*. A few anomalously spelled short vowels which also gave rise to misspellings, namely *dosen't*, *meny*, *wepans*, *freind/frend*, appear in NS as *duzn't*, *meny*, *weponz*, *frend*, and in CS as *dosnt*, *many*, *wepns*, *frend*.

As regards the unstressed central 'obscure' vowel shwa, there is an additional difficulty. Not merely is the choice of letter largely unpredictable in traditional spelling, but so is its position—and it is furthermore sometimes not spelt at all. The risks are therefore multiple: the shwa may be spelt with the wrong letter(s), as in *acter, categorery, closists, consios, favourate, independant, intelligant, listern, politician, Sharan, sponcerd, wepans, alcaholic, crimenals, intelegant/intellegent, knowladgable, orphaniges, prejudice, proberly, corea, Farari, sucure*; or the letter may be omitted as in *alcoholic, diffrent, famly, intrested/intrests, jewelry* (cf. American *jewelry*), *misrable*; or a letter may be inserted altogether unnecessarily as in *inturperet* (or it may be placed in the wrong position, as in *tabel*, though no example of this was found in the present corpus). For these words NS has *aktor, kategory, kloesest, konshus, faevorit, independent, inteligent, lisen, politishan, Sharon, sponsord, wepons, alkoholik, kriminalz, nolejabl, orfanejes, prejoodis, probably, kareer, Ferari, sekuer; diferent, family, interested, juëly, mizerabl, inturpret*; and CS has *actr, categry, closest, concius, favorit, independnt, intelignt, lisen, politician, Sharon, sponsrd, wepns, alcoholic, crimnls, nolejbl, orfnajs, prejudice, probbly, career, Ferari, secure, difrnt, famly, intrest, jewlry, misrabl, interpret*. It is clear that the CS use of syllabic L, M, N, R allows a number of more economical and predictable spellings than NS, which is surprisingly conservative and inconsistent in its treatment of shwa, not even harmonizing the troublemaker *-abl, -ibl* suffixes.

With regard to consonants, the problem of whether to rite them double is resolved by most spelling reform proposals with the rule that they are never normally double. NS is almost entirely consistent on this, since its regularization of long vowels means that consonants do not need to be double to show a preceding short vowel. NS therefore has *drugy, akademikaly, aloud, inteligent, eekwaly, realy, poluushon, tely, imatuer, anoi, bilionaer, kwestyonaer, apreeshyaet, droping, arae, posibl, profeshonal, sadnes, of* (for *off*), with only *embarrassing* and *to-morroee* keeping RR. Although CS simplifies most double consonants, it cannot always emulate NS. CS has to keep GG from *druggie* (pairs like *tinny/tiny* need to be distinguished by consonant doubling in CS); it preserves SS in most contexts (*profession* needs to be distinguished in CS from *adhesion, hardiness* from *sardines*); and the *of/off* problem remains untouched; but CS does normally simplify RR. So CS writes *druggi, academicly, aloud, intelignt, equally, realy, polution, telly, imature, anoy, billionair, questionair, appreciate, dropng, aray, posbl, professional, sadness, off, embarasng* and *tomoro*.

The overlapping uses of the letters Q, K, C, S, T, X, Z were discussed in the CS *Handbook* (Chapter 6, §1.3.1, §1.3.2, §1.4). With these consonants too NS offers a far more complete regularization than CS can. NS has *chek, thik, sponsord, konshus, kritisiez, injustises, sosiëty, praktis, sukses, raesist, profeshon, seksist, Lester, muezishan*, compared with CS *chek, thik, sponsrd, concius, criticize, injustices, society, practis, success, racist, profession, sexist, Lestr, musician*. Would NS rite *etcetera* as *etsetera*, abbreviated to *ets*? CS keeps *etc*.

The remaining, more miscellaneous consonant errors in the corpus become NS *asthma* (the NS dictionary is unsure here, giving *asma, astma* as alternatives), *brilyant, deesent, involvd, tramp, understand, vandal, koodn't, taebi, whaer*, as against CS *asma, brilliant, decent, involvd, tramp, undrstand, vandl, cudnt, table, wher*.

Silent letters are generally omitted in reformed spellings, though in CS it has to be remembered that by no means every silent letter is also a redundant letter, and only redundant letters are cut out. For the misspelled words in this category from our corpus, NS writes *aloud* (=allowed), *sponsord, unfortuenetly, U'r, behiend, muuving, pouch, raesist, huu'z, els, noing*, for which CS has *alowd, sponsrd, unfortunatly, u'r, behind, moving, pouch, racist, ho's, else, noing*.

## 9. Desynng spelng for peples needs and abilitis

Until th mid-20th century at least, most spelng reform proposals wer based on mor or less straitforwrd, but rathr academic, scemes for th consistnt representation of th sounds of words. These hav had virtuly no influence on th actul developmnt of rith english. Insofar as we can put names to any of th peple ho, by contrast, hav influenced spelng developmnt in english, they hav tendd to be concernd with th processes of litracy teachng, most notably th 16th century scoolmastrs Mulcaster [9] and Coote [10], and in America som 200 years later, Noah Webster [11], ho set th americns on th road to a marjnly mor ratiol spelng systm than that undr wich th british stil labor. Th fact that these pedagogicl aproachs hav had a mor significnt impact than hav regulrizing academic scemes sujests that a pedagogicl aproach today may prove th mor productiv. Intlectully stimulating (even intoxicating) tho al spelng reformrs find th task of desynng ther spelng systms, ther public motivation needs to be th public good. They need to ask how ther exprtise can be practicly aplyd to publicly beneficial ends, wich may be defined in th brodst terms of improving rith comunication, or in naroe terms such as making publishng mor cost-efectiv (a larjly economic criterion) or litracy aquisition mor succesful (an educationl criterion). It is with th latr criterion in mind that we may usefuly recal Valerie Yules precept that spelng shud be desynd to meet peples needs and abilitis [12].

So wat can err analysis tel us about peples needs and abilitis? A negativ reply wud be that it merely tels us how stupid peple ar, in othr words wher they lak ability, or wher ther needs conflict with ther abilitis. But that implys we ar prepared to accept that lak of ability shud disqualify peple from ful litracy, wich is tantmount to sayng they do not need ful litracy. No socially responsbl persn in advanced industrial societis can accept that conclusion today, wen such a premium is placed on th hyst posbl standrds of education for al. (In erlir centuris th educated classes comnly considrd that education for al was a positivly danjerus idea.) Th positiv reply is that err analysis tels us wher th spelng systm fails to meet peples litracy needs because it is not atuned to ther abilitis. Th importnce of comparativ err analysis such as Thorstads between english and italian is that it proves th falt lies with th english spelng systm, and not with inate lak of ability on th part of lernrs. Much hydr standrds of litracy ar posbl in english too (th i.t.a. experimnt proved that), [13] provided we lern from th evidnce of wher lernrs ar stumblng in th presnt systm. Wenevr a particulr modl of car is found to sufr persistnt accidnts, th most meticulous err analysis is undrtaken to ensure that wherevr human err ocurd, wethr in th desyn or bildng of th vehicl or in its opration, th cause is identifiyd and eliminatd. Exactly th same principl shud aply to th accidnts of litracy. We can asume that al drivers wud wish to avoid accidnts if they cud, and we can asume al lernrs wud wish to avoid ilitracy if they cud. Th spelng reformrs task is to ensure they can.

Th smal sampl of mispelng analysis demnstrated in this paper indicated th importnce of simplifng th spelng of long vowels, wich is somthing rathr neglectd by CS (exept insofar as long E is regularized in *eve*, *leve*, *receve* etc, and long I is regulrized as Y in *sy*, *syn*, *syt*, *replyd*, etc). Conversly, th abov analysis also showd how serius ar th problms of spelng shwa, wich is somthing rathr neglectd by NS. These ar lesns that hav been derived from err analysis and can be aplyd in th desyn of spelng reform.

Th title of this articl referd to 'err analysis' in jenrl, and not only to mispelng analysis. Equally importnt is th recordng, catalogng, and analysis of errs of readng. Readrs, like riters, stumbl wen ther is som kind of obstacl in ther path, and those obstacls apear not yet to hav been subjectd to th same degree of analysis as hav th obstacls that face riters. One of th objections most ofn rased against CS is that it is feard readrs may hav dificlty decoding its long consnnt strings. Thus CS may be very helpful to riters wen it irons out th arbitry vowel variations between th unstresd syllabls of, say, *equivalent*, *excellent*, *sibilant*, *insolent* by riting them al with -LNT, as *equivlnt*, *exlnt*, *siblnt*, *inslnt*, or of *permanent*, *covenant*, *dominant*, *continent*, *consonant* by riting them al with -NNT, as *permnnt*, *covnnt*, *domnnt*, *contnnt*, *consnnt*; but, it is askd, arnt th vowel lettrs necesry for readrs in

decoding the syllabic structure of such words? Here is where error analysis of reading is needed. Valerie Yule has done some pioneering experiments<sup>[14]</sup>, but much more requires to be undertaken.

Could reformed spelling systems be designed on the basis of error analysis alone? Errors certainly do not provide any immediate solutions to spelling problems. They may highlight what is wrong with the current system, but they do not tell us directly what changes are needed. Taken en masse, they represent a heterogeneous collection of scriptorial junk, the detritus produced by (typically) young minds in their struggle with intractable material. It is the recurrent patterns which the corpus displays that have to be interpreted if their significance is to be understood. But even when the interpretation has been done, and conclusions drawn, that does not necessarily mean that a resulting optimum system for avoidance of those patterns of error can be proposed for introduction at once. The next stage is the testing of the proposed simplified spellings, not only on learners, but on all categories of user. The reason why this i.t.a. could not be considered as a genuine system of reformed spelling, despite its overwhelming success as a medium for literacy acquisition by beginners, was that it was technologically and psychologically incompatible with the existing culture of literacy.

Error analysis is probably in its infancy. We need far more information about the performance of readers as well as of writers, of beginners as well as of older learners, of adults as well as of children, of non-native speakers as well as of natives. Such information can increase our confidence that our proposed improvements to the spelling of English as the primary world language will truly serve the needs and abilities of all its users.

## Notes

- [1] Thorstad, Gwenllian (1991) 'The effect of orthography on the acquisition of literacy skills' in *British Journal of Psychology*, 82: 527–37.
- [2] Upward, Christopher (1992) 'Is traditional English spelling more difficult than German?' in *Journal of Research in Reading*, Vol. 15 No. 2, September 1992, pp82–94.
- [3] Ripman, Walter & Archer, William *New Spelling*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd, 6th edition revised by Jones, Daniel & Orton, Harold (1948).
- [4] Fennelly, Laurence (1991) *New Spelling 90*, Simplified Spelling Society [Pamphlet No. 12](#).
- [5] Wijk, Axel (1959) *Regularized English*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- [6] Lindgren, Harry (1969) *Spelling Reform — a New Approach*, Sydney Australia: Alpha Books.
- [7] The 1940s version of NS is used for illustration here in preference to the broadly similar NS90, as the former is more consistent and a dictionary is available. NS90 does however have some advantages over the older version.
- [8] These forms are taken or deduced from: ed. Walter Ripman (1941) *A Dictionary of New Spelling*, published on behalf of the Simplified Spelling Society by Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, London.
- [9] Mulcaster, Richard (1582) *The First Part of the Elementarie*.
- [10] Coote, Edmond (1596) *The English School-maister*.
- [11] Webster, Noah (1783) *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, subsequently republished over 400 times under the title *The American Spelling Book*.
- [12] Yule, Valerie (1986) 'The Design of Spelling to Match Needs and Abilities' in *Harvard Educational Review*, August 1986, pp278–307.
- [13] Downing, John (1967) *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet*, London: Cassell.
- [14] Yule, Valerie (1993) *Orthography and Reading: Spelling and Society*, PhD thesis for Monash University, Victoria, Australia, published by Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Information Service, Order Number 9231850, Part III 'Experiments in Orthographic Modification'.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 17, 1994/2 p25,26 in the printed version*]

[Doug Everingham: see [Bulletins](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 5. A Pidgin-like Bridge to English

### Doug Everingham

Doug is a former family doctor and federal Minister for Health. [\[1\]](#) He edited *Spelling Action*, the newsletter of the Spelling Action Society, from July 1986 until December 1989 when the Society dissolved. In retirement he is compiling a grammar and dictionary of an English-derived language using simplifications of (a) the international auxiliary language movement (Esperanto, Ido, Interlingua etc.), (b) Basic English, (c) natural contact languages (pidgins and creoles) and (d) spelling reformers. At the same time he proposes an improved version of Blissymbolics, the interlingual writing which has found its first application as the sole verbal expression medium for palsied pre-literate and post-literate folk, predominantly cerebral palsied children. The chief aim is to encourage development of a global learners' and shoppers' contact language or *lingua franca*. Like Australian pidgin and its creole offspring (Kriol), this may become a bridge to English, the world's most used and sought bridging language. This article deals only with spelling and word building aspects.

Lindgren proposed that English users, wherever they dare, should now use a single spelling reform (SR1) based on a single rule defined purely in phonetic terms. This was a new approach, because most reform schemes base their rules on common traditional spellings of some or all of the phonetic elements of English, and often compromise these rules to conform with traditional spellings of some words.

Lindgren did, however, compile as tentative examples two comprehensive reform schemes, Phonetic A and Phonetic B, to illustrate possible outcomes of an orderly series of about 40 such steps (SR2, SR3, etc.) at yearly or longer intervals [\[2\]](#). These would suffice to make prevalent spelling practically fully phoneticized.

An innovation of Phonetic A and B was the use of an apostrophe for the obscure or neutral vowel (schwa, and in most cases for its often dialectal variant schwi) as in the less stressed syllables of **salad, surfeit, ragged, rapid**. This apostrophe was omissible between consonants which could not be pronounced in English without an intervening vowel: **knaiv, brou'k, fnetk, horr, oflsr** (but **of's'rz**), **gramr, sistr, martr, kulr, hansm, litl**. These would replace **connive, heroic, phonetic, horror, officer(s), grammar, sister, martyr, colo(u)r, handsome, little**. I follow Lindgren in dropping an apostrophe or second part of a digraph before non-prevocalic **r** in words like **tar(t), fer(d), wir(d), sor(t), fur(l)** in place of **tar(t), fare(d), weir(d), sore, sort, fur(l)**. My proposed **a** replaces an apostrophe at word ends to avoid confusion of the apostrophe with a single unquote mark. In monosyllables it can replace **aa** (e.g. **ma** for **mother**).

By careful choice of the order and spacing of the changes, the phonemic codings would also be more consistent with the phonetics of other languages and with the International Phonetic Alphabet than prevalent traditional spellings. Thus the diphthong spellings in **aisle, veil, soul, sauerkraut** would not need to change to the commonly recommended **iel, vael, soel, sourkrout** because years before such spellings as **sail, seize, out/nou, sauce/saw** would have become less familiar than such words as **seil, si'z, aut/nau, so's/so'**. In turn, **seil** and **aut/nau** would be recognized without confusion because the **seize** and **sauce/saw** changes would have become prevalent much earlier.

Phonetic A adapted the then current Ripman and Archer's *New Spelling* (sponsored by SSA and SSS, the UK Simplified Spelling Association and US Simpler Spelling Association [3] **good muun**. The reasons of the American Literacy Council (ALC), successor to SSA) for preferring **guud moon** persuade me. I have therefore adopted ALC's **uu**. I compromise between ALC and Phonetic A with the following vowel and diphthong sequences:

<b>aa/a</b>	<b>a'</b>	<b>'i</b>	<b>i'/i</b>	<b>ao</b>
<b>palm/sofa</b>	<b>aunt</b>	<b>aisle</b>	<b>kiwi</b>	<b>Maori</b>
<b>e'e</b>	<b>oa/or</b>	<b>o'o</b>	<b>'u</b>	<b>u'u</b>
<b>veil/café</b>	<b>broad/oar</b>	<b>solo</b>	<b>use</b>	<b>Zulu</b>

respectively, the full stops indicating the end of a syllable (word ending, hyphen, or vowel letter not forming a digraph with the preceding letter). The **a'** represents a vowel sounded variously as in **ant** (more usual in the New World) or as in **aren't** (more usual in the Old World, Australia etc.).

For (unaccented) monosyllables ending with schwa, I omit both apostrophe and final a. The words involved are few but common, e.g. **t, fr, tu, for** replace standard English **to, for, two, four**.

The vexed question of when to obscure or neutralize an unstressed vowel has been put in a 'too hard' or 'too slovenly' basket by most reformers. Lindgren tackles it. Most pronouncing dictionaries do so too, with liberal use of a schwa symbol. It is unnatural and inaccurate in phonetic terms to de-neutralize every vowel symbol. The rules for doing so are at times as big a dilemma as whether to use a schwa symbol at all. For example, one needs special non-phonetic rules for de-neutralizing in spelling the unstressed vowel in **captain, bo's'n, fo'c's'l, forehead, sovereign, porous, thorough, should've, what'll, boss's**. ALC uses **captēn**, the Oxford Concise Dictionary 1971 uses **capti`n**.

Lindgren's rule [4] is to use the spelling that conforms with non-slovenly everyday speech: **kaptn**. My project avoids nearly all of this problem because of its vocabulary economy like that of Basic English (fewer than 1,000 word stems). Nearly all stems are monosyllables. Some have also a single unstressed suffix. In most cases this is a single vowel, or a single consonant preceded, where needed for ease of pronunciation, by schwa. That schwa is shown only by an apostrophe, and that only where the following consonant might otherwise adjoin the vowel of the previous syllable and change it into a different word stem.

### Word structure

Consonant clusters and consonants terminating syllables are much rarer outside the Indo-European and Semitic language families than in Esperanto, Basic English, or even Pisin (Melanesian pidgin English). Esperanto has **flustri** for **whisper**. Pisin tolerates insertion of a vowel to break up consonant clusters. Thus **straight** becomes **sitiret** for many Melanesian speakers. My project shares this option but avoids most of the consonant clusters and polysyllables of Basic English. Basic is an interlanguage frugal in grammar and vocabulary, proposed by C K Ogden and commended by H G Wells, W L S Churchill and F D Roosevelt as suitable for universal learning and use as an auxiliary language by the year 2000.



Examples:

<i>Basic</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
addition	ading	country	lan
amusement	fun(ing)	married	wedt
argument	arging	a/c; advertisement	billing
competition	v'iing	apparatus; machine	gir
delicate	f'in	comparison	maching
adjustment	fit(ing)	connection; join	join(ing)
animal	bi's	separate	partt
attraction	lu'r(ing); puul		

The **-ing** and **-t** endings illustrate an economy lost in Basic. Dropping the suffix makes available a different part of speech, frequently a verb. Basic limits itself to 18 operations using verb forms, declares them not to be verbs, and proceeds to combine them with other words (**make an adjustment, put out an advertisement, have/give some amusement, see a connection** etc.) to avoid including a long list of verbs. Many such verbs come easily to pidgins and creoles, for example by dropping a suffix, or to Esperanto by changing a suffix.

Esperanto claims to have only five vowels, but these vary in practice with the native tongue of the speaker. English speakers pronounce differently the **E** and **e** of **Esperanto**. My project, like pidgins, chooses most word roots so that speakers who find the different phonemes of English hard to distinguish are unlikely to be misunderstood if they confuse the sound of a lone vowel with that of a digraph including that letter, altho occasionally there will be a chance of confusion (e.g. of **rod** and **ro'd**).

### The way forward

I would be grateful for discussion of the aims, principles, development and possible value of this concept. I appreciate helpful comment so far from Mark O'Connor, an Australian prize-winning poet and tertiary English teacher who has used SRI in some of his published work.

### Footnotes

[1] SRI [Lindgren's Spelling Reform step One] used: Thus eny clear short vowel sed as that in hemmorrhage and led may here be red as **e** insted of eny spellings wider spred, as approved by a *Sidney Morning Herald* Education Supplement, a Teachers' Federation and other journals and Australia's two Nobel laureate Fellows of the Royal Society: Sir Mark Oliphant, Sir Macfarlane Burnet. The chief aim: to curb social costs of old spellings by reviving their prime purpose: recording sound categories which show word differences as in pronouncing dictionaries regardless of local brogues.

[2] *Spelling Reform: A New Approach*. 1969. Pages 110–114. Alpha Books, 104 Bathurst DSt., Sydney 2000 Australia.

[3] Pages 107–8.

[4] Page 82.

## 6. The Classic Concordance of Cacographic Chaos Chris Upward introduces

A number of readers have been urging republication of *The Chaos*, the well-known versified catalogue of English spelling irregularities. The SSS *Newsletter* carried an incomplete, rather rough version in the summer of [1986](#) (Item 5) under the heading 'Author Unknown', with a parallel transcription into an early form of Cut Spelling. Since then a stream of further information and textual variants has come our way, culminating in 1993–94 with the most complete and authoritative version ever likely to emerge. The time is therefore now truly ripe for republication in the *JSSS*.

Our stuttering progress towards the present version is of interest, as it testifies to the poem's continuing international impact. Parts of it turned up from the mid-1980s onwards, with trails leading from France, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The chequered career of the first version we received was typical: it consisted of a tattered typescript found in a girls' High School in Germany in 1945 by a British soldier, from whom it passed through various hands eventually to reach Terry De'Ath, who passed it to the SSS; but it did not mention who its author was. A rather sad instance of the mystery that has long surrounded the poem is seen in Hubert A Greven's *Elements of English Phonology*, published in Paris in 1972: its introduction quoted 48 lines of the poem to demonstrate to French students how impossible English is to pronounce (ie to read aloud), and by way of acknowledgment said that the author "would like to pay a suitable tribute to Mr G Nolst Trenité for permission to copy his poem *The Chaos*. As he could not find out his whereabouts, the author presents his warmest thanks, should the latter happen to read this book". Alas, the poet in question had died over a quarter of a century earlier.

For the varied materials and information sent us over the years we are particularly indebted to: Terry De'Ath of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Tom McArthur (Editor of *English Today*) of Cambridge; Benno Jost-Westendorf of Recklinghausen, Germany; Professor Che Kan Leong of the University of Saskatchewan, Canada; the Editor of *Perfect Your English*, Barcelona; and SSS committee member Nick Atkinson for the French reference. From them we learnt who the author was and that numerous versions of the poem were in circulation; but many tantalizing questions remained unanswered.

Three contributions in 1993–94 then largely filled in the gaps in the picture. The first of these contributions was due to the diligent research of Belgian SSS member Harry Cohen of Tervuren which outlined the author's life and told us a good deal about the successive editions of the poem. The second came from Bob Cobbing of New River Project (), who sent the SSS a handsome new edition (ISBN 1 870750 07 1) he had just published in conjunction with the author's nephew, Jan Nolst Trenité, who owns the copyright. This edition had been based on the final version published by the author in his lifetime (1944), and must therefore be considered particularly authoritative. Finally, Jan Nolst Trenité himself went to considerable trouble to correct and fill out the details of his uncle's biography and the poem's publishing history which the SSS had previously been able to compile.

The author of *The Chaos* was a Dutchman, the writer and traveller Dr Gerard Nolst Trenité. Born in 1870, he studied classics, then law, then political science at the University of Utrecht, but without graduating (his Doctorate came later, in 1901). From 1894 he was for a while a private teacher in California, where he taught the sons of the Netherlands Consul-General. From 1901 to 1918 he worked as a schoolteacher in Haarlem, and published several schoolbooks in English and French, as well as a study of the Dutch constitution. From 1909 until his death in 1946 he wrote frequently for an Amsterdam weekly paper, with a linguistic column under the pseudonym *Charivarius*.

The first known version of *The Chaos* appeared as an appendix (*Aanhangsel*) to the 4th edition of Nolst Trenité's schoolbook *Drop Your Foreign Accent: engelsche uitspraak oefeningen* (Haarlem: H D Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1920). The book itself naturally used the Dutch spelling current before the 1947 reform — see [JSSS 1987/2, J5](#) Item 12. That first version of the poem is entitled *De Chaos*, and gives words with problematic spellings in italics, but it has only 146 lines, compared with the 274 lines we now give (four more than in our 1986 version). The general importance of *Drop your foreign accent* is clear from the number of editions it went through, from the first (without the poem) in 1909, to a posthumous 11th revised edition in 1961. The last edition to appear during the author's life was the 7th (1944), by which time the poem had nearly doubled its original length. It is not surprising, in view of the numerous editions and the poem's steady expansion, that so many different versions have been in circulation in so many different countries.

*The Chaos* represents a virtuoso feat of composition, a mammoth catalogue of about 800 of the most notorious irregularities of traditional English orthography, skilfully versified (if with a few awkward lines) into couplets with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes. The selection of examples now appears somewhat dated, as do a few of their pronunciations, indeed a few words may even be unknown to today's readers (how many will know what a 'studding-sail' is, or that its nautical pronunciation is 'stunsail?'), and not every rhyme will immediately 'click' ('grits' for 'groats?'); but the overwhelming bulk of the poem represents as valid an indictment of the chaos of English spelling as it ever did. Who the 'dearest creature in creation' addressed in the first line, also addressed as 'Susy' in line 5, might have been is unknown, though a mimeographed version of the poem in Harry Cohen's possession is dedicated to 'Miss Susanne Delacruix, Paris'. Presumably she was one of Nolst Trenité's students.

Readers will notice that *The Chaos* is written from the viewpoint of the foreign learner of English: it is not so much the spelling as such that is lamented, as the fact that the poor learner can never tell how to pronounce words encountered in writing (the poem was, after all, appended to a book of *pronunciation exercises*). With English today the prime language of international communication, this unpredictability of symbol-sound correspondence constitutes no less of a problem than the unpredictability of sound-symbol correspondence which is so bewailed by native speakers of English. Nevertheless, many native English-speaking readers will find the poem a revelation: the juxtaposition of so many differently pronounced parallel spellings brings home the sheer illogicality of the writing system in countless instances that such readers may have never previously noticed.

It would be interesting to know if Gerard Nolst Trenité, or anyone else, has ever actually used *The Chaos* to teach English pronunciation, since the tight rhythmic and rhyming structure of the poem might prove a valuable mnemonic aid. There could be material for experiments here: non-English-speaking learners who had practised reading parts of the poem aloud could be tested in reading the same problematic words in a plain prose context, and their success measured against a control group who had not practised them through *The Chaos*.

## 7. The Chaos

### Gerard Nolst Trenité

This version is essentially the author's own final text, as also published by New River Project in 1993. A few minor corrections have however been made, and occasional words from earlier editions have been preferred. Following earlier practice, words with clashing spellings or pronunciations are here printed in italics.

Dearest *creature* in *creation*

Studying English *pronunciation*,

I will teach you in my *verse*

Sounds like *corpse, corps, horse* and *worse*.

I will keep you, *Susy, busy*,

Make your *head* with *heat* grow dizzy;

*Tear* in eye, your dress you'll *tear*;

*Queer*, fair *seer*, *hear* my *prayer*.

*Pray*, console your loving *poet*,

Make my coat look *new*, dear, *sew it!* 10

Just compare *heart, hear* and *heard*,

*Dies* and *diet, lord* and *word*.

*Sword* and *sward, retain* and *Britain*

(Mind the latter how it's *written*).

*Made* has not the sound of *bade*,

*Say* — *said, pay* — *paid, laid* but *plaid*.

Now I surely will not *plague* you

With such words as *vague* and *ague*,

But be careful how you *speak*,

*Say: gush, bush, steak, streak, break, bleak,* 20

*Previous, precious, fuchsia, via,*

*Recipe, pipe, studding-sail, choir,*

*Woven, oven, how* and *low,*

*Script, receipt, shoe, poem, toe.*

*Say, expecting fraud* and *trickery:*

*Daughter, laughter* and *Terpsichore,*

*Branch, ranch, measles, topsails, aisles,*

*Missiles, similes, reviles.*

*Wholly, holly, signal, signing,*

*Same, examining, but mining,* 30

*Scholar, vicar, and cigar,*

*Solar, mica, war* and *far.*

From "desire": *desirable* — *admirable* from "admire",

*Lumber, plumber, bier, but brier,*

*Topsham, brougham, renown, but known,*

*Knowledge, done, lone, gone, none, tone,*

*One, anemone, Balmoral,*

*Kitchen, lichen, laundry, laurel.*

*Gertrude, German, wind* and *wind,*

*Beau, kind, kindred, queue, mankind,* 40

*Tortoise, turquoise, chamois-leather,*

*Reading, Reading, heathen, heather.*  
 This phonetic labyrinth  
 Gives *moss, gross, brook, brooch, ninth, plinth.*  
 Have you ever yet endeavoured  
 To pronounce *revered* and *severed*,  
*Demon, lemon, ghoul, foul, soul,*  
*Peter, petrol and patrol?*  
*Billet* does not end like *ballet*;  
*Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.* 50  
*Blood* and *flood* are not like *food*,  
 Nor is *mould* like *should* and *would*.  
*Banquet* is not nearly *parquet*,  
 Which exactly rhymes with *khaki*.  
*Discount, viscount, load and broad,*  
*Toward, to forward, to reward,*  
*Ricocheted* and *crocheting, croquet?*  
 Right! Your pronunciation's OK.  
*Rounded, wounded, grieve and sieve,*  
*Friend and fiend, alive and live.* 60  
 Is your R correct in *higher*?  
 Keats asserts it rhymes *Thalia*.  
*Hugh*, but *hug*, and *hood*, but *hoot*,  
*Buoyant, minute, but minute.*  
 Say *abscission* with *precision*,  
 Now: *position* and *transition*;  
 Would it tally with my *rhyme*  
 If I mentioned *paradigm*?  
*Twopence, threepence, tease* are easy,  
 But *cease, crease, grease* and *greasy?* 70  
*Cornice, nice, valise, revise,*  
*Rabies, but lullabies.*  
 Of such puzzling words as *nauseous*,  
 Rhyming well with *cautious, tortious*,  
 You'll *envelop* lists, I hope,  
 In a linen *envelope*.  
 Would you like some more? You'll *have it!*  
*Affidavit, David, davit.*  
 To *abjure*, to *perjure*. *Sheik*  
 Does not sound like *Czech* but *ache.* 80  
*Liberty, library, heave* and *heaven*,  
*Rachel, loch, moustache, eleven.*  
 We say *hallowed*, but *allowed*,  
*People, leopard, towed* but *vowed*.  
 Mark the difference, moreover,  
 Between *mover, plover, Dover*.  
*Leeches, breeches, wise, precise,*  
*Chalice, but police and lice,*  
*Camel, constable, unstable,*  
*Principle, disciple, label.* 90  
*Petal, penal, and canal,*  
*Wait, surmise, plait, promise, pal,*  
*Suit, suite, ruin. Circuit, conduit*

Rhyme with "shirk it" and "beyond it",  
 But it is not hard to tell  
 Why it's *pall, mall*, but *Pall Mall*.  
*Muscle, muscular, gaol, iron,*  
*Timber, climber, bullion, lion,*  
*Worm and storm, chaise, chaos, chair,*  
*Senator, spectator, mayor,* 100  
*Ivy, privy, famous; clamour*  
 Has the A of *drachm* and *hammer*.  
*Pussy, hussy and possess,*  
*Desert, but desert, address.*  
*Golf, wolf, countenance, lieutenants*  
 Hoist in *lieu* of flags left *pennants*.  
*Courier, courtier, tomb, bomb, comb,*  
*Cow, but Cowper, some and home.*  
 "Solder, soldier! Blood is *thicker*",  
 Quoth he, "than *liqueur* or *liquor*", 110  
 Making, it is sad but *true*,  
 In bravado, much *ado*.  
*Stranger* does not rhyme with *anger*,  
 Neither does *devour* with *clangour*.  
*Pilot, pivot, gaunt, but aunt,*  
*Font, front, wont, want, grand and grant.*  
*Arsenic, specific, scenic,*  
*Relic, rhetoric, hygienic.*  
*Gooseberry, goose, and close, but close,*  
*Paradise, rise, rose, and dose.* 120  
 Say *inveigh, neigh*, but *inveigle*,  
 Make the latter rhyme with *eagle*.  
*Mind! Meandering but mean,*  
*Valentine and magazine.*  
 And I bet you, dear, a *penny*,  
 You say *mani*-(fold) like *many*,  
 Which is wrong. Say *rapier, pier,*  
*Tier* (one who ties), but *tier*.  
*Arch, archangel; pray, does erring*  
 Rhyme with *herring* or with *stirring*? 130  
*Prison, bison, treasure trove,*  
*Treason, hover, cover, cove,*  
*Perseverance, severance. Ribald*  
 Rhymes (but *piebald* doesn't) with *nibbled*.  
*Phaeton, paeon, gnat, ghat, gnaw,*  
*Lien, psychic, shone, bone, pshaw.*  
 Don't be *down, my own*, but *rough it*,  
 And distinguish *buffet, buffet*;  
*Brood, stood, roof, rook, school, wool, boon,*  
*Worcester, Boleyn, to impugn.* 140  
 Say in sounds correct and *sterling*  
*Hearse, hear, hearken, year and yearling.*  
*Evil, devil, mezzotint,*  
 Mind the Z! (A gentle hint.)  
 Now you need not pay attention

To such sounds as I don't mention,  
     Sounds like *pores, pause, pours* and *paws*,  
     Rhyming with the pronoun *yours*;  
 Nor are proper names *included*,  
 Though I often heard, as *you did*,                     150  
     Funny rhymes to *unicorn*,  
     Yes, you know them, *Vaughan* and *Strachan*.  
 No, my maiden, coy and *comely*,  
 I don't want to speak of *Cholmondeley*.  
     No. Yet *Froude* compared with *proud*  
     Is no better than *McLeod*.  
 But mind *trivial* and *vial*,  
*Tripod, menial, denial*,  
     *Troll* and *trolley, realm* and *ream*,  
     *Schedule, mischief, schism, and scheme.* 160  
*Argil, gill, Argyll, gill. Surely*  
 May be made to rhyme with *Raleigh*,  
     But you're not supposed to say  
     *Piquet* rhymes with *sobriquet*.  
 Had this *invalid invalid*  
 Worthless documents? How *pallid*,  
     How *uncouth* he, *couchant*, looked,  
     When for *Portsmouth* I had booked!  
*Zeus, Thebes, Thales, Aphrodite,*  
*Paramour, enamoured, flighty,*                     170  
     *Episodes, antipodes,*  
     *Acquiesce, and obsequies.*  
 Please don't monkey with the *geyser*,  
 Don't peel 'taters with my *razor*,  
     Rather say in accents pure:  
     *Nature, stature* and *mature*.  
*Pious, impious, limb, climb, glumly,*  
*Worsted, worsted, crumbly, dumbly,*  
     *Conquer, conquest, vase, phase, fan,*  
     *Wan, sedan* and *artisan.*                     180  
 The Th will surely *trouble you*  
 More than R, Ch or W.  
     Say then these phonetic *gems*:  
     *Thomas, thyme, Theresa, Thames.*  
*Thompson, Chatham, Waltham, Streatham,*  
 There are more but I *forget 'em* —  
     Wait! I've got it: *Anthony*,  
     Lighten your anxiety.  
 The archaic word *albeit*  
 Does not rhyme with *eight* — you *see it*;             190  
     *With* and *forthwith*, one has voice,  
     One has not, you make your choice.  
*Shoes, goes, does\**. Now first say: *finger*,  
 Then say: *singer, ginger, linger*.  
     *Real, zeal, mauve, gauze* and *gauge*,  
     *Marriage, foliage, mirage, age,*  
*Hero, heron, query, very,*

*Parry, tarry fury, bury,*  
*Dost, lost, post, and doth, cloth, loth,*  
*Job, Job, blossom, bosom, oath.* 200  
*Faugh, oppugnant, keen oppugners,*  
*Bowing, bowing, banjo-tuners*  
*Holm you know, but noes, canoes,*  
*Puisne, truism, use, to use?*  
 Though the difference seems *little*,  
 We say *actual*, but *victual*,  
*Seat, sweat, chaste, caste, Leigh, eight, height,*  
*Put, nut, granite, and unite.*  
*Reefer* does not rhyme with *deaffer*,  
*Feoffer* does, and *zephyr, heifer.* 210  
*Dull, bull, Geoffrey, George, ate, late,*  
*Hint, pint, senate, but sedate.*  
*Gaelic, Arabic, pacific,*  
*Science, conscience, scientific;*  
*Tour, but our, dour, succour, four,*  
*Gas, alas, and Arkansas.*  
 Say *manoeuvre, yacht* and *vomit*,  
 Next *omit*, which differs from it  
*Bona fide, alibi*  
*Gyrate, dowry and awry.* 220  
*Sea, idea, guinea, area,*  
*Psalm, Maria, but malaria.*  
*Youth, south, southern, cleanse and clean,*  
*Doctrine, turpentine, marine.*  
 Compare *alien* with *Italian*,  
*Dandelion* with *battalion*,  
*Rally* with *ally; yea, ye,*  
*Eye, I, ay, aye, whey, key, quay!*  
 Say *aver*, but *ever, fever*,  
*Neither, leisure, skein, receiver.* 230  
 Never guess — it is not *safe*,  
 We say *calves, valves, half*, but *Ralf*.  
*Starry, granary, canary,*  
*Crevise, but device, and eyrie,*  
*Face, but preface, then grimace,*  
*Phlegm, phlegmatic, ass, glass, bass.*  
*Bass, large, target, gin, give, verging,*  
*Ought, oust, joust, and scour, but scourging;*  
*Ear, but earn; and ere and tear*  
 Do not rhyme with *here* but *heir.* 240  
 Mind the O of *off* and *often*  
 Which may be pronounced as *orphan*,  
 With the sound of *saw* and *sauce*;  
 Also *soft, lost, cloth* and *cross*.  
*Pudding, puddle, putting. Putting?*  
 Yes: at golf it rhymes with *shutting*.  
*Respite, spite, consent, resent.*  
*Liable, but Parliament.*  
*Seven* is right, but so is *even*,



*Hyphen, roughen, nephew, Stephen,* 250  
*Monkey, donkey, clerk and jerk,*  
*Asp, grasp, wasp, demesne, cork, work.*  
A of *valour, vapid vapour,*  
S of *news* (compare *newspaper*),  
G of *gibbet, gibbon, gist,*  
I of *antichrist* and *grist,*  
Differ like *diverse* and *divers,*  
*Rivers, strivers, shivers, fivers.*  
*Once, but nonce, toll, doll, but roll,*  
*Polish, Polish, poll and poll.* 260  
Pronunciation — think of *Psyche!* —  
Is a paling, stout and *spiky.*  
Won't it make you lose your *wits*  
Writing *groats* and saying 'grits'?  
It's a dark *abyss* or *tunnel*  
Strewn with stones like *rowlock, gunwale,*  
*Islington, and Isle of Wight,*  
*Housewife, verdict and indict.*  
Don't you think so, reader, *rather,*  
Saying *lather, bather, father?* 270  
Finally, which rhymes with *enough,*  
*Though, through, bough, cough, hough,*  
*sough, tough??*  
*Hiccough* has the sound of *sup...*  
My advice is: GIVE IT UP!

\* No, you're wrong. This is the plural of *doe*.

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 17, 1994/2 pp31–32 in the printed version*]

## 8. Self-proclaimed experts stumble

This excerpt is taken from 'Hard sell for the brain dead' by Ian Aitken, *The Guardian*, © 26 February 1994, p22.

...While listening to the Today programme ... I was jerked awake by an exchange between Peter Hobday and Frank Delaney, who is currently presenting a programme called Word of Mouth. Mr Delaney was explaining how his show planned to help young people spell a bit better by conducting ... dictation tests over the air. These tests would concentrate on straightforward words you might encounter in your newspaper.

Declaring these words were often misspelled, he asked Mr Hobday if he could spell the word 'niece'. The latter insisted that he could, spelling it out "n-e-i-c-e". Mr Delaney congratulated him, adding that many people, including himself, tended to spell it n-i-e-c-e.

There was much self-satisfied ho-ho-hoing about this triumph in the war against so-called "falling standards". However I invite Messrs Hobday and Delaney to go to their dictionaries, where they will find the word is spelled n-i-e-c-e. As for falling standards, the BBC reports that they had scarcely any calls on the subject.

## 9. A thot from Chris Upward on th analojy of Dislexia and Dysability

This pece is ritn in Cut Spelng.

Among th objections comnly rased to spelng reform is that it wud pandr to childrens laziness. Teachrs and parents ho hav direct experience of lernrs struglng with english spelng mostly no betr. They ar aware how unjust th implication is that litracy problms ar merely th result of laziness. But th difictis of litracy aquisition in english can certnly demotivate, and public opinion al too esily misinterprets demotivation as laziness.

Argumnts ar therfor needd against th slur of laziness, wher simpl countr-assertions based on persnl experience may not convince. Th analojy of modrn atitudes to disability may sujest a new kind of response. It is now widely acceptd that society must make a concius efrt to enable peple with disabilitis to lead lives as much like th non-disabled as posbl. This means taking delibrat steps to facilitate employmnt, travl and access to premises.

Dyslexia is ofn glosd as a 'specific lernng disability'. But al lernrs ho experience any dificlty at al in lernng to read and rite english, and not only those ho ar formly diagnosed as 'dyslexic', sufr from such 'disability' to som degree. Evryone ho stumbls (and that probbly means most peple at first) over pairs like *would/mould*, *high/height*, *afraid/affray*, because th audio-visual memry dos not at once imprint such arbitry distinctions on th brain, deservs th same considration as peple with othr disabilitis. Failur to mastr litracy skills in english as redily as is don, for instnce, in finish, italian or spanish is no mor a syn of laziness than is th failur of paraplejics to walk. If ramps ar now provided to ese access to weelchairs wher stairs wer previously insurmountbl, th same considration shud require orthografic ramps to be provided to asist access to litracy. It shud be th mark of a humane and civilized society to make such provision. Its desirability shud not be at issu, tho its desyn and implmentation ar mor complex mats.

This argumnt is basicly a variant on th old one for spelng reform to improve educationl and economic efficiency, but it may persuade som oponents ho wer unmoved by th apeal to efficiency. So next time th old 'laziness' cliché is trotd out, wy not try apealng to th social concience of those ho produce it, by getng them to think about th analojy between disability and litracy problms? If they aprove of mesurs to giv th disabled access to bildngs, then they shud also aprove of mesurs to giv those struglng for litracy esir access to th skills of readng and riting.

## 10. A SMOOTHER PATH TO LITERACY

### Edward Rondthaler, American Literacy Council

"Invented spelling" is a term used by educators to describe the various self-made spellings that children use in their first attempts to write. Such spellings are now widely accepted in early schooling because they free children from confusion, frustration, and discouragement.

One child's invitation to a bicycle ride might read: *If yoo kum too see mee yoo kan rid mi bik.*  
Another child might write the same message: *If u cum lo se me u can ryd my byk.*

Our 5- and 6-year-olds use a wide variety of invented spellings — mixtures that are often unintelligible to their classmates, but can usually be deciphered by adults who have learned to take the bewildering inconsistencies of English spelling in stride. Most children try to write before they try to read. They quickly grasp the idea that letters represent spoken sounds, and struggle to put their thoughts on paper. Children speaking other languages do the same; but since most languages are written phonetically they do not need invented spelling. Our children face a very different situation: many of our words, including some of the most common, are not written as they sound.

Written English is full of misfits. A child may ask, "How do I spell the oo-sound?" one dare not answer "O-O" because, unfortunately, English spells the oo-sound in many different ways: *oa/ue/ew/wo/ough/o/u/oe/ou* — as found in the words *zoo, true, drew, two, through, do, flu, shoe, you.* We have 42 spoken sounds, but we write them in over 400 different ways! Despite claims to the contrary, learning English spelling requires the heroic memorization of countless irregularities. John Steinbeck, the author, has said, "Learning to read is perhaps the greatest single effort that the human undertakes, and he must do it as a child."

#### **We can do better. We can sharpen our spelling tools.**

How? By taking the hodgepodge out of our children's invented spellings. Right from the start we can teach them a simple, logical, systematic, 26-letter, no-diacritic, "invented spelling" JSSS that is phonetic, rational, and applicable to all words. This will forestall a child's need to invent spellings haphazardly. Many of the words will be exactly like our present spelling. Others will change just enough to be compatible with spoken sounds. The child's first attempts at writing will then be rational and logical rather than confused and topsy-turvy. As pupils progress they will, of necessity, begin to use more and more standard spellings. Meanwhile the logic of phonetic will give educators a solid foundation on which to build better and better ways to expedite the transfer to standard.

**One way with good potential:** Children with access to computers may now use a program that lets them type a word normally if they are sure of its spelling. If not, they may type it phonetically, logically, as it sounds. If the phonetic spelling differs from standard spelling the computer will automatically correct it. Both spellings — standard and phonetic — appear in colors on the screen so the child can see the difference and begin to memorize the spelling of words not written as they sound. Computer teaching, of course, saves valuable classroom time. Pupils appreciate its privacy and patience. It builds confidence, sends strong signals to memory, and opens up a vocabulary far in excess of even the longest "word list". Teaching the correct spelling of a new word at the very moment it is needed opens up enticing possibilities.

Ending the child-invented hodgepodge does not encroach on modern methods of teaching. It just fine-tunes them. It brings them closer to the way writing and reading are taught in other languages — where spelling difficulties are rare. It is a step forward that should be welcomed by educators and parents alike. Greater progress toward literacy for all can be expected when the spelling used by beginners is uniform and tied to orderly ways of memorizing our normal but often frustrating spelling. The U. S. stands near the top in dollars-per-pupil spent for education. But the UN tells us that we've slipped to 49th place in literacy.

#### **We must erase that disgrace.**

## 11. Spelling Czecher

The following item by Chris Pomery appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 15 October 1993, p18, under the title 'Almost better dead than zed'. It is here reproduced with permission.

Moves to update a national spelling guide for teachers that was last revised in the early 1950s have unleashed a flood of protests from intellectuals fearful that the Czech language is being undermined and debased just as the country regains its political and social freedom after four decades of communism.

Academician Zdenek Hlavsa, who worked on the update, said: "One old man wrote to tell me I should be imprisoned for changing it. This feeling goes back to the nineteenth century when the official language was formed. It may sound ridiculous to English speakers where the dictionary can adjudicate between variable spellings. Here it is a matter of public debate.

As is often the case, English loanwords are the culprits. As Czech is written the way it sounds, should loanwords be spelled the way we write them or the way a phonetically trained Czech would write them? Some early arrivals — *foťbal* and *volejbal* — have already been assimilated. *Woircestrova omacka* in context remains good old Worcester sauce even when pronounced "vorchester". The howls of protest begin over *plejboj* — when everyone knows the eponymous magazine is *Playboy* — while "software" remains unchanged. Is philandering more quintessentially Czech than computer engineering, critics ask? They become positively strident over the transmogrification of president to *prezident*, "No, no, no, for the rest of my life I will spell it with an s," says 21-year old medical student Klára Nedelňíková emphatically rejecting the vernacular s/z shift now legitimised by the academy. "I can tell you all educated Czechs will do it the same."

The academy is well aware that it is damned as a centralizing legislator as well as being culturally demonic. "Those that criticise us say institutions should follow the highest level of education and not common use," says Dr Hlavsa of the s/z shift, "but it is difficult to decide what to suggest."

While not always defending language against the tyranny of *les paroles*, as in France, the debate over change is underpinned by a dark fear, not of transatlantic cultural imperialism but of political domination by a powerful neighbour. "Czechs still suffer from an uneasiness of the danger of the influence of German," notes Dr Hlavsa. "There are a lot of people living who were taught in school that they should pay attention to German loanwords and thinking and that these should be stopped and fought against. "Czech finally supplanted German when the country achieved full statehood after 1918.

The spelling changes are intended to make life easier for Czech children. Their problems begin with Jan Hus, the Protestant reformer burned at the stake through the treachery of Emperor Sigismund the year Henry V won the battle of Agincourt. Hus ditched the old Czech orthography where two or three letters could stand for a single sound, as in Polish, and introduced four accents. His system won acceptance because of a parallel technological innovation — the first printed book in Czech appeared just 50 years later — and is the orthographic equivalent of holy writ. With more than one-third of all Czech words sporting one or more accents, many Czech children need remedial pronunciation coaching to learn to roll their r's properly. The English of course have

never adopted them: we spell "Czech" the Polish way, instead of *Çech*.

Dr Hlavsa believes spelling rules like y/i and s/z have prestige because they must be learned by heart, an observation which points at the centre of a wider debate: how to move away from rote learning and oral exams to develop children's debating and essay-writing skills, and foreign language abilities. Meanwhile in a classic fudge, the education ministry has decreed that both systems should coexist for one year.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 17, 1994/2 pp35,36 in the printed version]*

## **12. BETTER EDUCATION thru SIMPLIFIED SPELLING Annual Meeting, May 1994**

A 23-minute video tape on BEtSS and the need for spelling reform has been produced. It has sound and can be shown on a 'I'V set with the aid of a VCR. this was presented to a meeting of the program committee of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association, where it was well received.

Officers elected for two year terms were: Charles Kleber, President; James Campbell, Chairman of the Board; Abe Citron, Vice President; Rollin Marquis, Secretary; and Michael Brice, Treasurer.

*[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, J17, 1994/2 p34 in the printed version]*

## **13. AMERICAN LITERACY COUNCIL Annual Report for 1993, Ken Ives.**

Media publicity achieved in 1993 was in 9 places, from the New York Times to the Stuart FL, News. Group demonstrations of its Sound-Speler were to 9 groups, including testing representatives at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton NJ, and the IBM/Eduquest Educational Software Conference, in Pearl River NJ.

Sales of its Sound-Speler programs, and compensation for tutor training sessions came to over \$ 6,000. In addition, 63 people contributed to the support of ALC activities. They live in 24 states, DC, and two foreign countries.

The new "Voice SoundSpeler" under development by Edward Lias, was demonstrated by him.

## **14. AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOUND-SPELER AND FONETIC ENGLISH IN INCREASING LITERACY SKILLS**

**Jeffrey J. Strange and John B. Black**

Teachers College, Columbia University

The overall pattern of results found in this study leads us to conclude that the use of Sound-Speler and Fonetic English led to modest yet meaningful differences in the acquisition of selected literacy skills by beginning-to-intermediate level students of English as a second language. The mean performance of students in a group using Sound-Speler was higher than that in a control group on measures of vocabulary, phonetic analysis, writing productivity and reading. On each of these measures, the advantage of the Sound-Speler group was present for students in both the top and bottom halves of a Literacy Skills Index devised to gauge pre-existing levels of targeted proficiencies in English. Statistical analyses showed the advantage of the Sound-Speler group to be reliable or marginally reliable in each case except for reading comprehension.

No reliable differences were found on measures of spelling. However, our analysis suggests that control group students spontaneously employed resources available in the classroom to effectively mitigate the potential advantages that Sound-Speler may bring to the process of learning to spell. As such resources are not characteristic of many learning environments, the lack of differences found here may not extend to other contexts in which Sound-Speler is likely to be used. It is also worth noting that the kind of spelling test used here may not have been sensitive to some of the phonetically-based spelling gains potentially supported by Sound-Speler. Finally, Sound-Speler students reported more positive attitudes toward the computer program as a learning tool than did students in the control group.

On the whole, these results show Sound-Speler to be a promising tool when used to facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills. While the curriculum used in the present study emphasized meaning-based learning activities, the promise of Sound-Speler is accentuated by its versatility. Particularly, its design as a flexible support tool makes it susceptible to use in both meaning-oriented and code-oriented learning activities, thus rendering it adaptable to diverse teaching philosophies and learning needs. As Sound-Speler is designed to present the standard English sound-symbol system at the same time it introduces the simplified one, it also circumvents problems of transition experienced by learners of other simplified spelling systems — notably, the initial teaching alphabet.

In pursuing further use, study and development of Sound-Speler, our analysis suggests several areas in which refinements can be made. These pertain to:

- (a) a fuller understanding of the processes thru which Sound-Speler supports the acquisition of various subskills, and how these processes may differ for native and non-native as well as primary and adult students of English,
- (b) a thoro analysis of the areas in which the simplified spelling system may interfere with the acquisition of various literacy skills,
- (c) a systematic approach to the development of curricula using Sound-Speler,
- (d) alternative means of assessing some of the targeted literacy skills, and
- (e) improvements in the editing and file-handling functions of Sound-Speler.

Finally, developments in each of these areas will need to be rethought in light of the sound

component that is currently being implemented in Sound-Speler.

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## 15. PERSPECTIVES FROM THE IRA CONVENTION

Kenneth Ives

At the 1994 Convention of the International Reading Association in Toronto, Canada, April 1994, three perspectives were found by this attender to have significance for spelling and writing.

1. A pre-convention institute on the 1964 First Grade Studies financed by the U.S. Office of Education, and how their conclusions have held up in the interval.
2. A session sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, on their new study "Basal Readers: A Second Look", after their 1987 study, "Report Card on Basal Readers". Basals are "reading schemes" which have stressed learning many skills and words outside of context, and much filling in of blanks and testing, with limited vocabulary and writing not chosen by pupils.
3. The emergence of a conscious "**Whole Language Plus Phonics**" movement, avoiding the polarization and extremes which some enthusiasts for each of those two movements get into.

### The 1964 First Grade Studies

In 1964, the U. S. Office of Education financed 27 studies of reading instruction in first grade. These each involved 140 days of teaching, by various methods, to a total of 9,100 children on whom readiness data were obtained. The cost was \$800,000.

What was the situation in teaching reading at that time?

These studies were conducted shortly after James Pitman's *Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA)* began to be used in some schools in England and the United States. In the 1950's in the United States, Basal Reading schemes were used 100 %, with workbooks. In 1955, Rudolph Flesch criticized the results of sight reading (look and say) teaching. Only about 7 % of prereading instruction taught the letters. This was before the Sesame Street TV program.

Very narrow vocabulary was the rule. Some schemes had only 150 or so different words. Only in 1963 did one publisher come out with books having as many as 2,000 different words in their vocabulary.

Key results of the studies were:

1. No clearcut gains for any teaching methodology. None were 100 % good or bad.
2. Print awareness was a key factor.
3. The total school environment for teachers and learners was most important.
4. Reading research was important, for the findings and for training new researchers.
5. Students who started reading and writing with ITA wrote fluently. Parents liked their writing. At the end of second grade these students spelt better than those taught without ITA.

Recommendations from those studies included:

1. Teach reading readiness, don't wait for it.

2. Avoid difficult types of texts: dialog, varied punctuation, contractions. Use noun clause, verb clause.
3. Limit the instruction time on skills.
4. Teach more vocabulary.
5. Have more oral reading.
6. Adjust the vocabulary to the students' level: they should recognize 90 % or more of the words.
7. Make use of class or reading groups of 10 or less. Students in groups this small are more attentive.

The conclusions of the panel of speakers was that the results and recommendations of these studies stood up well over the 30 years.

### **NCTE Session on Basal Reading Schemes**

National Council of Teachers of English has recently published "Basal Readers: A Second Look" as a sequel to its earlier (1987) study "Report Card on Basal Readers". That volume had 28 recommendations.

The authors of the second study found that, in the intervening six years publishers made what the writers felt were "cosmetic" changes: they -

1. use Whole Language terms in their introduction, but changed the program rather little;
2. include some trade books ("real books");
3. still have students fill in blanks, write on topics they do not choose, and work on unconnected words;
4. use literature for control and drill, and squeeze it to fit their pattern;
5. teach an average of 164 skills, and stories are organized around them;
6. still have tests as a major factor. Many of these test background knowledge not comprehension. Tests on literature may kill students' interest.

In 1993, a publisher's sample kit to a school for first grade weighed 37 pounds. Only 2 % of this was trade ("real") books.

In 1988, a National Assessment study found that 90 % to 98 % of schools used basal reading schemes.

In 1993–4 in fourth grade, 36 % use basals exclusively, 49 % use a combination, and 15 % do not use basals at all. A third of teachers say they use daily work sheets, but half the children say they use them daily. Some schools use the basal readers but not the work book. And 44 % of fourth grade students read for fun every day.

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## WHOLE LANGUAGE PLUS PHONICS,

### An Emerging Perspective

At least three sessions at the Toronto IRA Convention indicated that a combination of Whole Language and Phonics is emerging as a conscious, open perspective and practice. While "exclusivist" proponents of each of these two perspectives often engage in "theory-bashing" (Lofland, 1993) of the other philosophy, this newer perspective tries to avoid those extremes and coordinate the best in both practices.

Morton Botel gave a seminar, publicized in advance and presented by publisher Scholastic Inc., titled *Whole Language versus Phonics: Is This a Proper Debate?* He argued for a negative answer, and reported that 80 % of Whole Language teachers do teach a phonics program, many quietly. He argued for formal, explicit, structured learning, especially for those students who do not come from a literate environment at home.

He argued for a limited time on phonics, with only a little "practice and drill" on isolated components. It is important to start from the whole to the parts. Read an entire story, or other text, then draw attention to some specific features of the text.

A large packed session of the Reading: Orthography and Word Perception interest group was chaired by J. Richard Gentry, who spoke on "Is Spelling Caught or Taught?" He argued for, and illustrated the "Taught" answer. Two other speakers there gave classroom examples on "Integrating Spelling in a Second Grade Classroom" and "Once You Give Up the Workbook, How Do You Teach Spelling?".

Bill Harp's session was titled "If I Teach Phonics, Can I Be a Whole Language Teacher?" He presented 10 myths about Whole Language, including # 10, "Everyone understands what Whole Language means." He reported that when Portland Oregon schools changed to a version of Whole Language, their reading scores went up.

He presented four principles for effective phonics instruction:

1. Word identification should be an aid to constructing meaning. Teach sound-letter correspondences to aid meaning.
2. Skill instruction should look as much like reading and writing as possible.
3. After analysis, put the parts back together again, so the children can see part-whole relations.
4. Word identification is only useful when the word is in the listener's vocabulary. Graphic cues are only effective if the child can recognize miscues and self-correct. Work on meaning and skills together.

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