Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society

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The Society

Founded 1908, the SSS works to modernize English spelling for the benefit of learners and users world-wide. It currently has members and associates on four continents, focuses research from many relevant disciplines, and campaigns to educate and influence public and political opinion.

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The Journal

The *Journal* normally appears twice yearly and is edited by Christopher Upward,
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To submit material for publication, see guidelines inside back cover.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p2 in printed version]
[Chris Upward: see **Journals**, **Newsletters**, **Pamflet**, **Leaflets**, **Media**, **Book and Papers**.]

1. Editorial
Chris Upward

JSSS 21 = 97/1
Readers will notice that 1996/97 represents a 'leap-year' in the *JSSS* series. Following accumulated slippage through the 1990s, we are now catching up with the calendar by giving the date 1997/1 to the issue after 1996/1. There has, however, only been the usual 6-month interval between issues, and the consecutive numbering 20…21 shows that there has been no gap.

Phonics implies spelling reform
It is beginning to look has though the nadir of literacy teaching in the English-speaking world is now passing, along with the view that the written language has nothing to do with the sound of words. Parts of the educational establishment in Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA are now recognizing the centrality of phonics for effective literacy. Despite the waywardness of English spelling, learners need to grasp that at some level (even if only historically) the letters used in spelling do reflect pronunciation.

In the UK, this sea-change was manifested on 27 February 1997 at a conference held in London by the Literacy Task Force, to which the SSS had previously submitted its views (see Item 11 of this issue). The Task Force presented its report A *Reading Revolution: how we can teach every child to read well*, and invited feedback from some 300 delegates, including SSS representatives. The report proposes that by the year 2006 all English children should achieve Level 4 of the reading component in the National Curriculum, as against only 57% who managed it in 1996; but there should be an interim target of 80% by the year 2000–2001. These targets are to be achieved by adopting "internationally proven best practice" in teaching (especially phonics). The SSS will wish the Task Force every success with its ambitious programme.

It may indeed make substantial progress if it can tackle what it sees as the "three fundamental problems": low expectations, inconsistent performance, and social disadvantage. Sadly, though, it is hardly likely to hit its ultimate target of 100% literacy, since it fails to address the most fundamental problem of all: the unpredictable spellings that confuse learners from the moment they confront written English. In its view of "internationally proven best practice", the Task Force likewise misses a key point by referring only to English-speaking countries. It is non-English-speaking countries which offer the real models of best practice. For they modernize their spellings to meet the needs of learners.

That England, or English, might do the same appears at present to be discounted by the Task Force on grounds of political difficulty. The SSS still has a lot of persuading to do. A new buzzword for the latest literacy drives in the USA (eg, in Baltimore) is that illiteracy is to be "relentlessly" combated, and the same spirit inspires the English Task Force. "Relentlessness" must also be the hallmark of the SSS's campaigning. Another buzzword is "zero tolerance" of illiteracy. Let there also be zero tolerance of confusing spellings.

Thanks partly to the Internet, the SSS is now in a better position than ever before to help co-ordinate members' approaches to the literacy authorities in different countries. By reporting such interventions and the responses received from those authorities, JSSS may enable members around the world to assemble the most effective arguments and the most relevant international evidence in support of their case.

Features of this issue

Leading this issue (and with a sequel scheduled for ***JSSS* 97/2**) is Thorstad's outline of her studies of how readily children, many experiencing difficulties with TO, react to regularized spelling systems. This original research, building on the i.t.a. experience, produces some fascinating and encouraging findings, and will hopefully inspire spelling reformers in the future also to test out their proposals on actual users far more rigorously than has usually been contemplated in the past.

If Thorstad's work implies English spelling may be reformed by teaching learners simplified systems, the analysis of styleguides on Item 5 explores a different scenario: the possibility that publishers' attempts to create spelling standards for their own purposes could produce improvements in TO. The findings here are less encouraging, emphasizing rather the depths of inconsistency by which TO is in everyday practice beset. A minimum prerequisite for reform from this direction, it would appear, is that today's professional practitioners should be obliged to take a course in elementary alphabetic logic.

Examples of spelling reform in other languages provide the reform movement with copious ammunition. This issue contains items on spelling reform in Danish, Portuguese, and German, the latter of great topical interest, as the first reform of written German for a century is currently underway. How it was planned, how official approval was obtained in several countries simultaneously, and how it is now being systematically implemented all merit close study.

In English we are still at the stage of tentative campaigning and educating. Samples of this process (see also remarks on the Literacy Task Force above) may be found on Item 11. Two new features in this issue are a spelling advice column (Item 13) and a readers' letters section (Item 15): it is hoped these will flourish in future issues — so keep your contributions coming!

For your diary

The SSS committee meets quarterly (normally in January, April, July, October) on Saturdays in central London. Non-members are welcome, and members living in or near London are notified when an invited speaker is to deliver a paper. The next meeting (the 1997 AGM) takes place on 19 April 1997, and will be addressed by Allan Campbell, SSS Newsletter editor from New Zealand. Why not ring the Meetings Secretary beforehand to check details? We hope to see you.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society 21 1997/1 pp3–8 in printed version]
[Gwenllian Thorstad: see **Journals**, **Newsletters**, **Paper**]

2. Children's Responses to Simplified Spelling — *Part 1*

Gwenllian Thorstad

We here present Pt.I (with Introduction and reports on Studies 1 & 2) of a condensed account of research carried out in 1994–95. Pt.II, with reports on Studies 3 & 4, will follow in the **next issue**. Dr Thorstad worked as a tutor for educational psychologists at Tavistock Clinic, England 1964–86.

Abstract
The rationale and circumstances of the research project are introduced and four linked studies (1 & 2 here, and 3 & 4 in the next issue) presented as follows:

1 An investigation into how easily schoolchildren can read simplified spelling
2 Children's preferences for the different spelling of vowels in the New Spelling, Equal Plus and Dash Plus simplified spelling systems.
3 Advantages and disadvantages of New Spelling, Equal Plus and Dash Plus, as used in a word recognition test.
4 To examine children's awareness of the function of letters in words: their opinions of the appropriateness of the traditional spelling of the 100 most frequently occurring words and their suggestions for improved spellings.

Introduction
Children have always acquired literacy skills at different rates. Some read early with ease whatever teaching method is used, but in England at least 13% leave school with inadequate skills for future training and employment (ALBSU, 1994). These children usually have some degree of specific learning difficulty, so need remedial teaching using a phonic method for which the traditional orthography of English is ill-suited.

Only about 3 per cent, the most retarded readers with a severe specific learning difficulty (Yule, 1973; Rutter, & Yule,1975), receive remedial help, because this can cost 50 per cent more than the usual educational allowance. Schools lack funds to provide remedial teaching for the other 10 per cent. Yet these children have insufficient reading ability to take part fully in the lessons from eight-years-old upwards. As a result they gradually get angry and depressed about their failure, often reveal behaviour difficulties in class, and frequently end by truanting. About three out of four of them are boys. As they grow older there is evidence from studies in the UK and US that they are more likely to become involved in delinquent behaviour via the truanting (Burt, 1945; Dunivant, 1984; Farrington, 1990; Maugham, Pickles, Hagell, Rutter and Yule, 1996; Skaret & Wilgosh, 1989; Williams & McGee, 1994).

When children are slow in learning to read, the cause is usually attributed to social, emotional and/or cognitive problems. What is insufficiently investigated is the difficulty of English traditional orthography (TO) produced by the irregularity of the relationship between sounds and letters. It is possible to highlight the problem confronting all non-readers by looking at the 12 most frequent words in children's books forming 25 per cent of their reading (McNally and Murray, 1968) and classify them according to Venezky's criteria (1970). Of these 12 words only five are predictable and invariant (a, and, in, it, that), four are predictable and variant (he, is, to, was) and three are unpredictable (I, of, the). Thus TO has always caused problems in teaching, which used to be

approached by introducing children to a small sight vocabulary followed by a carefully controlled phonic approach.

In contrast, Italian orthography is mostly predictable and invariant, so that teachers can use a purely phonic approach from the beginning at 6 years, in which reading and spelling become a reversible process. Thorstad (1991) found that 6-year-old Italian children could read and spell words that they did not understand, such as letteralmente and percettibile, whereas the English children could not read or spell literally or perceptible until 9 and 10 years respectively in TO. Yet in the same study 6-year-old English children could read those words in the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.) and attempt to write them, although the teacher had given minimal time to teaching spelling, because the children were soon going to transfer to TO.

There were two Italian children in that study, whose literacy skills were not so good as the others' at 6 years. They made the usual mis-spellings found in children with a severe specific learning difficulty, such as in the orientation and sequencing of letters, and confusion of vowel sounds. Yet in a dictation given a year later taken from the same text as previously used, they only made a few errors, showing great progress without remedial teaching. This was probably because the teaching method in Italy encourages children to pronounce words as they are writing them, which is a multisensory approach primarily only used with phonically regular words in remedial teaching in English. It would seem that the method of teaching through writing and saying the sounds as the children wrote meant that, in effect, they had a remedial lesson every day.

One head of a remedial department in an English secondary (comprehensive) school (Threadgall, 1994) discovered that if all of those who were semi-literate (reading age below 9 years) and illiterate (reading age below 7 years), about 10% of the new intake, were transferred in the first year from TO to the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.), most of them could return to TO within two or three months with a reading age appropriate to their chronological age. Further help was given for the remainder of the academic year in TO spelling rules, because children who are slow in reading TO seem unable to acquire the 202 spelling rules required in English TO automatically (Hanna, Hanna, Hodges & Rudorf, 1966) and need to be taught the most common ones.

Teachers in the past have considered the possibility of presenting beginning readers with a systematic code, that young children could learn quickly and easily, before they transferred to the more complex TO (Pitman, 1961; Downing, 1962). Between 1852 and 1860, Fonotypy, devised by Isaac Pitman and A J Ellis, was used successfully in ten schools at Waltham, Massachusetts. This was followed by a larger experiment in St. Louis in 1866 and 1886. The same technique of introducing a systematic alphabet first was also used successfully by a headmistress, Miss McCullum, in an infant's school in Scotland in 1914. This was followed by other studies between 1915 and 1924. Unfortunately no objective comparisons were made with control groups of children learning to read in TO, nor were there standardized reading tests to measure the reading ages.

Downing (1967) was the first in the UK to use an experimental design and statistical techniques to evaluate the difference between the speed of learning to read and write English in young children, in a predictable invariant phonically based alphabet in Simplified Spelling (SS) in contrast to TO. Downing also used the i.t.a. for the first time. It was developed by James Pitman from Isaac Pitman's design and was originally called the Augmented Roman Alphabet because it had 43 letters, one for each sound, instead of 26. All the letters of the TO alphabet were used except x. The long vowels were indicated by attaching an e immediately after each of the five

short vowel. The letters of the digraphs ch, sh, th in the and think, and wh were likewise joined together. There were two forms of z, for fizz and houses, and other specially designed letters for the digraphs ou in ought, oo in book and moon, ou/ow in bough and cow and oi/oy in boil and toy. Most of the children learnt to read and write long stories quickly and transferred successfully to TO between 6 and 7 years without apparently noticing the change in the orthography. The difference was still maintained at 9 years, the i.t.a. children being superior in punctuation, grammar, spelling and comprehension (Downing and Latham, 1969). Downing also later found fewer children with disabilities in reading and writing in the secondary schools among those who had started in i.t.a. compared with those reading TO from the beginning (Downing, 1970).

Since Threadgall had such good results in remedial teaching using the i.t.a. in secondary schools, it is proposed to repeat his method of teaching remedial children in the first year of a secondary school and the top two years of two primary schools using some form of SS, but not i.t.a., owing to the problems associated with the extra letters. Instead it is proposed to achieve a predictable and invariable orthography from the 25 letters in the TO alphabet with the possible addition of diacritical marks or symbols available on any typing or printing machine.
Rather than just choosing a suitable orthography according to adult's criteria and personal preference, the present study was made to discover which of two SS orthographies was read most successfully by children and preferred by them.

Study 1
An investigation into how easily school-children can read simplified spelling.
Two members of the Simplified Spelling Society, Atkinson and Footer, designed two different forms of simplified spelling (SS), which they consider might be easier for slow readers to learn initially and which minimize the need for 'unlearning' when they transfer back to TO.

Atkinson (1995) devised 'Equal-Plus' (EP) which is based on the sequences of competences through which children are known to pass in learning to read and spell. It exploits the regularities which already exist in TO, so minimizing the need for unlearning. In stressed syllables the five short vowels are retained, but when followed by an equals sign as marker, as in ma=d 'made', they represent long vowels. The alternative sound for u as in put is shown by underlining (u), while the oo spelling of this sound is also underlined, as in look. The following representations are all retained in their TO form: ar, or, au and aw; er, ur and ir; ou and ow; oi and oy; air and are (as in bare); ear and eer; and additionally war and al (as in ball). If words have vowel sounds which correspond to the ones above, but have different TO spellings, these spellings are changed to accord with the predominant patterns, eg, more to mor, caught to caut, worm to werm, and bear to bair. Unstressed syllables are specially marked. Syllabic l, m, n and r are represented as +l, +n, +m, +r, eg, Lund+n 'London'. The sound of sh opening an unstressed syllable is written ti, si, ssi, ci as in menti+n, etc. The schwa vowels are represented by the same letters which are used in their TO spellings, eg, a in about, unless they are covered by the +l, +m, +n, +r convention. The ending -ture is underlined, as in picture.

Footer (1996) devised a variant of a scheme called New Spelling 90 (Fennelly, 1991). Like Atkinson, Footer retained the five short vowels, but used e after a vowel to denote its long value, thus maed 'made'. Other stressed vowel sounds were regularized, thus au in both haunt, sau 'saw'; eu in prefeur 'prefeur', feurst 'first', feur 'fur'; ou in out, hou 'how'; aa in taart 'tart'; oi in oil, boi 'boy'; aer in air; eer in heer 'here', deer 'dear'. All silent letters are omitted and doubled consonants simplified. Syllabic n, m, l, r are marked by a preceding asterisk: *n, *m, *l, *r. The ti- in mention, si- in pension and the ssi- in mission all become sh, thus naesh*n 'nation'. In addition, c is dropped from ck, thus pik 'pick'; and s sounds are differentiated into s and z, thus az 'as'.

The greatest difference between the two forms of simplified spelling is the use of the '=' sign as a marker for the long vowel sounds in EP and the more familiar extra e as a marker in NS. Furthermore, Atkinson attempts to retain as much of TO as possible (eg, ti in action) in order to reduce the unlearning though it increases initial learning, while Footer lays more stress on the need for predictable, invariant grapheme-phoneme correspondences, which should increase the speed of initial learning, although there may be more problems in unlearning.

Essentially, this is an exploratory study to discover how children react to a change in orthography, how quickly they adapt, how it affects their competence and in what way. It was assumed that the children's ability in the new orthographies would give some indication as to which was the easiest to learn. It was also intended through a brief questionnaire to discover how aware they were of the anomalies of English spelling and which of the two orthographies they would prefer.

Part A

Method

Subjects. The children came from two inner city schools. There were 25 10-year-olds and 34 11-year-olds. There was a problem about timing of the testing, owing to the schools' commitment to the National Curriculum, so the tests were given at the end of the summer term.

Material. A number of reading tests were given. There was a comprehension test in TO, the Group Reading Test (Young, 1989), which is a short sentence completion test of 45 items, of which 15 at the beginning involve underlining the name of a picture from four given words, a task which all could do. Total time taken was about 15 minutes. It was chosen because there were two parallel tests by Young with a similar layout and total raw score of 45, Spar test A and B (1976), which could be transcribed into NS and EP respectively. Neither of the standardizations had enough raw scores to provide an above average score for the 10- to 11-year-olds, but it was anticipated that not many children would need them. Then, a word recognition test, the Graded Word Reading Test (Schonell & Schonell, 1950), was used in its TO form and also transcribed into NS and EP. A brief outline of the essentials of each code was distributed with the Spar A and B. Pencils were used for underlining.

Procedure

(a) The GRT comprehension test in TO was administered first to all the class.
(b) Two or three days later an introductory talk on the development of English spelling was given for 5 minutes, followed by a discussion as to how English spelling could be made easier to learn. The code for NS or EP was given out and discussed for about 5 minutes, and then the comprehension test, Spar test A or B, was distributed. The alternative test was then administered the following week. The order of giving the tests Spar A and B was alternated in the groups.
(c) Afterwards, in an individual interview, half the children read the word recognition test (GWRT) in TO, then either the test in NS or EP. The other half of the children began with the EP or NS version and followed it with the TO version.
(d) In an individual interview, between the two GWRT tests, the children were asked to give their opinions about the difficulties of TO and which out of NS or EP they would prefer.

Results

The 10-year-olds had a mean chronological age of 10 years 6 months. Their mean comprehension reading age on the GRT in TO was 10.2+ years. Their comprehension age on the Spar Tests A in NS and B in EP at 8.7 years were both significantly lower, but there was no difference between the results in NS and EP. Their mean word recognition age on the GWRT in

TO was 11.0 years, 11.2 in NS and 10.9 in EP. There were no significant differences between any of their mean scores, for the children tended to gain the same score on one orthography as on another.

The 11-year-olds had a mean chronological age of 11 years 3 months. Their mean reading comprehension age on the GRT in TO was 9.9 years. Their mean comprehension ages on the Spar Tests A NS and B EP were both 8.7 years, so were statistically significantly lower than in TO and the same as each other. Their mean word recognition reading age on the GWRT was 10.4 years in TO, 10.8 years in NS and 10.0 years in EP, so there was no statistically significant difference between them. There was a significant correlation between their scores on the test in TO and NS, and TO and EP, showing again that individual children tended to score as well in one orthography as another.

Discussion
There was no significant difference between the children's scores in comprehension on the Spar Test A in NS and the Spar Test B in EP, but they were both significantly lower than in TO. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between children's scores in word recognition in TO, NS or EP. When they were asked which helped them most with a long vowel, an E or an = sign, the majority preferred an E (see Study 2). As there were other differences between the two forms of simplified spelling, it was decided to replace the equal sign with a dash, and then repeat the questionnaire with a group of 9-year-old children.

Part B
Method
Subjects The 29 9-year-old children had a mean age of 9 yrs 8 mths.

Material The reading tests were as for the older children, except that those previously transcribed into Equal Plus were now transcribed into Dash Plus (DP), using a dash instead of an equal sign after a long vowel.

Procedure and treatment of results
The same procedure and treatment of results was followed with the 9-year-olds as with the older children.

Results
The 9-year-olds had a mean comprehension age of 10.2+ years on the GRT in TO. The mean age levels on the Spar Tests A NS and B DP were significantly lower at 8.8 and 8.9 years respectively, but there was no significant difference between the NS and DP mean scores. The mean scores on the GWRT word recognition test were 10.8 years in TO, 10.7 years in NS and 10.6 years in DP, so there was no significant difference either between the NS and DP scores, or between them and the scores in TO. However, although the mean scores were the same, they were obtained differently. There was a greater scatter from the first word failed to the last success on NS and DP tests than in TO. It seemed that more children did not fully understand the NS and DP codes, but if they did, then some of them had nearly all the words correct.

Discussion
The 9-year-olds' mean word recognition age on the GWRT was a year above their mean chronological age, while the standard deviation was the usual 16. This suggests the class as a whole was progressing well in their reading. However the pattern of results was the same as for the other age groups.

Thus, they scored significantly lower on the parallel comprehension tests, Spar A in NS and Spar B in DP, than in TO, though as with the older groups there was no significant difference between them in NS and DP. As in the other groups, the children read the word recognition test equally well in TO, NS and DP, and there was a high correlation between scores in TO and NS, and TO and DP.

General Discussion of Study 1

The children understood why English orthography should be discussed and several of them were able to give instances of its inconsistency in the preliminary class discussion. They did not really make use of the coding keys given out when they answered the comprehension tests and reading the word recognition test. It seemed rather that they remembered enough about the representation of the vowels and then just used what was familiar in the consonants. There was no indication in the results or in the children's remarks or behaviour that there was any negative transfer of training between NS, EP or DP, when they changed from one orthography to another.

There was no difference between the children's comprehension scores in NS and EP, or NS and DP. Nor was there any difference between children's word recognition in TO and either NS, EP or DP.

An unexpected finding was that the children's mean scores on the comprehension in NS, EP and DP were lower than in TO in all three age groups, whereas there was no difference between the means in word recognition in TO, NS, EP and DP. This is the opposite of what might have been expected, for children with a specific learning difficulty, who cannot read all the words in a passage, often manage to get a higher score on a comprehension test than a word recognition test, because they are able to use their general reasoning ability, whereas the word recognition test requires a more specific ability. Thus the change in orthography might have had a greater inhibitory effect in comprehension than in word recognition.

Some of the medium and good readers read considerably better in either NS, EP or DP than TO, producing an increased spread in the upper distribution of scores, which Downing had also found in i.t.a.. Probably they were now at a stage when they could use good sequential word attack skills on any regular orthography if they knew the code. However, most of the children retarded in reading could not make so much use of the regular relationship between phoneme and grapheme in NS or EP, possibly because they had no experience of it; for them most of English traditional orthography is completely irregular.

Study 2

A questionnaire to find the difficulties children had in reading TO and their preferred SS script: New Spelling, Equal Plus (EP) or Dash Plus (DP)

Part A

Method

Subjects The subjects were the two older age groups of Study 1, the 25 10-year-olds and the 34 11-year-olds, plus 14 children who had taken the word recognition test (GWRT) in TO and either in NS or EP, but were omitted from the calculations for Study 1 because they had missed one or both of the comprehension tests. They were now combined to make one large heterogeneous group of 73 children (many had English as a second language [ESL] or had specific learning difficulties [SLD], particularly the 11-year-olds). The mean chronological age was 10 yrs 11 mnths and the mean word recognition age was less, at 10.6 yrs. The reading ages varied between 5.8 yrs and 14.3 yrs.

Material and Procedure. A brief verbal questionnaire was given individually between administering two forms of the word recognition (GWRT) test, as described in Study 1. It was designed to discover what difficulties children experienced in reading and which of the two scripts, NS or EP, they preferred. The questions were:
1 Do you find reading easy or difficult?
2 How could you make words easier to read?
3 Which do you find helps you most with the long vowel sounds, putting an E after them, or an equal sign, '='?

Results. The children varied in their readiness to answer the questions, but these were always completed within three minutes.

It soon became apparent that the answers to Question 1 were not informative, because children often gave the answer which they thought was expected or wished was true, such as that they found reading easy, when their scores were low and they obviously found it difficult. These tended to be boys, whereas a good reader, a girl, said "Sometimes I don't understand the words. Have not seen them before. I think them very difficult".

In answer to the open ended Question 2, most of the children could not think of any way to make words easier to read, except by omitting silent letters, by which they really meant consonants.

Question 3 was simpler, involving choosing one of two methods of indicating a long vowel. Some two thirds of children (48) chose the NS script, where the long vowel sound is indicated by an extra e following the vowel, and one third (25) preferred the EP script, where the '=' follows the vowel.

Of the children preferring NS, three could give no reason for preferring e; 18 said 'e more easier' or the equivalent; 13 said they were 'more used to it' or had seen it before; 4 of them identified e as a letter, and '=' as having to do with maths; 5 made adverse comments about the '=' sign, such as 'it confuses me'; 5 chose e, but gave irrelevant reasons.

Of the children preferring '=', 7 could not say why; 9 said it was easier; 4 gave adverse comments about e; 5 chose '=', but gave irrelevant reasons.

Part B
Method
Subjects The 29 9-year-olds were better readers for they had a mean chronological age of 9 yrs 8 mnths, but a higher mean word recognition age of 10.8 yrs. However, they also had a wide word recognition range from 5.5 yrs to 13.8 yrs.

Material and procedure.
As two thirds of the 10- and 11-year-old children disliked the '=' sign, the reading tests were reprinted in Dash Plus instead for the 9-year-olds. The tests were given in the same order as before and under the same conditions. The questions were given as above, except that Question 3 involved DP instead of EP ("which do you find helps you most with the long vowel sounds, putting an E after it or a dash?")7

Results
These younger children, who as a class had a higher average reading age than their elders, were more realistic in their assessment of reading being easy or difficult. Good readers were more cautious saying reading was "sometimes easy … mostly easy … sort of easy … depends on what the words are". Some good and some average readers said reading was "most easy … medium easy … bit difficult". Weaker readers tended to say "sometimes easy, sometimes hard … quite difficult, if I have never heard of it". There was no difference between boys' and girls' comments

In response to Question 2, they had more suggestions than their elders. The most frequent was to omit silent letters, but they complained that often words did not sound as they were spelt, that letters did not always have the same sound, that the way it sounds should be the way it is spelled, that some letters could be taken out and others put in, that there were different ways of spelling long words, that there were unnecessary extra letters, such as in ck. Many complained about having long words and thought that these should be shortened or not used.

When asked to choose between following a long vowel with e or '-', 15 chose e and 14 '-'. Their reasons showed that they had not always understood the functions of either e or '-' as a marker. They tended to explain choosing e by reasons for not choosing the dash, while those who chose the dash gave positive reasons for the choice.

Reasons given for e were: "spelled like they're sounded", "more used to it" and "looks much nicer" and against the dash were: "dash looks silly", "doesn't sound anything", "wouldn't know what they meant", "teacher doesn't like dashes" and "Dash … some people do it. My mum does".

The reasons given for the dash were: "dash easy. Just draw a line", "like it's solving a puzzle", "easier to do instead of e", "easier to remember than writing letters", "because you know that dash makes it sound longer", "easier, if you can't spell a word properly — do not have to put wrong letter, just a line", "'cause it would be easier to remember". The few derogatory remarks about e were: "e sounds even longer", and "e might get muddled up" mentioned twice.

Conclusions
When the equal sign was replaced by a dash, there was no significant difference between the numbers of children preferring the E to its non-alphabetic alternative. This suggests that the equal sign should be discontinued and that the dash would make a good substitute.
However, NS is also more completely alphabetic than EP or DP, which should make it easier to learn initially. DP like EP has retained more of the TO advanced letter clusters, which may make it more difficult to read now than NS, but easier to transfer back to TO. Only teaching children in these scripts and assessing their ability in TO before and after their tuition will reveal which script is the more suitable.

General Discussion of Study 2
The introduction to the simplified spelling schemes was hurried. It was noted that children did not consult the explanatory handouts. They seemed to rely mainly on the consonants in the words with a few clues from the vowels. It became obvious that it was preferable to administer a brief verbal questionnaire rather than to conduct an open-ended discussion with each child. The first question would need to be general and undemanding, such as how they experienced reading themselves; a second question would elicit suggestions as to how the orthography could be

made easier; a third question would ask how they would prefer a long vowel to be indicated, that is, with a following E or an '=' sign. The responses were taken down verbatim.

The verbally administered questionnaire began with two general questions to encourage the children to think about the process itself, rather than the content. To the first question, the younger group, who were also relatively better readers, were able to respond objectively about how difficult they found reading, while many of the older, weaker readers, who already felt defensive about their reading, often gave wish-fulfilment types of responses. To the second question, children in the younger group displayed their expertise in the relationship between phonemes and graphemes by being able to give several suggestions as to how TO could be made easier, whereas the older group could only recommend the dropping of silent letters.

Since NS, EP and DP have other features beside e and '-' that differ, it would be useful to test them out individually on children to discover their opinions, since it is children that are going to use them, not adults. Ultimately, though, the concern is not with children's preferences, but with what can be learnt most quickly with minimal negative transfer of training when the children move on to TO. The purpose of simplified spelling in this context is to enable children to read material up to their age level, freely, with confidence and enthusiasm. At the same time they do ultimately have to transfer back to TO, where their performance is the real test of the effectiveness of the orthography.

NS is designed for easy initial learning, and EP for easy transfer to TO. However, it is not known how much detail children do transfer: when transferring from i.t.a, all teachers remarked that the children appeared not to notice the change. This suggests that they take in less detail than adults might suppose. Thus the features of EP intended to facilitate transfer, such as the ti in na=tion, might be unnecessary.

It is envisaged that children using the simplified orthography in a normal classroom situation would have a reading age below their chronological age. These children may have a specific specific learning difficulty. Stanley and Hall (1973) found that such children notice less detail in spelling than do better readers. This weakness may be an advantage when facing an orthography with features these children will need to discard when they transfer to TO. It is therefore possible, as most of them depend excessively on a phonetic approach to reading and spelling, that it is better that the orthography be phonetically predictable and as simple as possible, rather than that it should anticipate letter combinations they will face in TO.

Moreover, children in Downing's original experiment, and subsequently when it was used in infant schools, were given no systematic help with the irregularities of TO. However, Threadgall (1994) always gave remedial teaching in spelling to his 11-year-olds when they transferred otherwise successfully from i.t.a. to TO. This enabled them to learn the rules which would help them with English orthography.

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Reports on Studies 3 & 4 will appear in the **next issue** of JSSS.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p9 in printed version]
[Kenneth Ives: see **Bulletins**, **Anthology**, **Journals**, **Newsletters**, **Book**]

3. Spelling Reform and the Deaf: a problem and a strategy

Kenneth Ives

Abstract
Deaf and hard of hearing students have great difficulty with phonics as it is usually taught. However, when they learn lipreading, this has a phonic basis in the speaker. If regular students are initially taught to spell phonemicly, and the deaf and hard of hearing lipreading students are taught to write what they see in the same phonemic spellings, the two groups of students can communicate in writing. Joint educational experiences then become possible.

The problem
Nancy Randall Beiter, of Springfield, Virginia, raises a problem spelling reformers have ignored. She writes (in part):

I have a daughter who is hard of hearing and was unable to learn to read by using phonics. What is easy for you and me, ie, stringing familiar syllables together to enable us to pronounce or understand unfamiliar words, simply does not work for many types of learners, not just those who are hard of hearing. It does not work for anyone who is not an audio learner. Those who learn better by seeing a written word or a written series of numbers are not helped by phonics. My daughter learns how words are spelled not by sounding them out, but by remembering their shapes. For her and the millions of people like her, the spelling 'simplifications' you suggest would be disastrous. Deaf people learn to lipread by the shape of words on the lips, not the sound.

American Sign Language (ASL) is not a translation of American English into hand symbols. It is a totally different language. American deaf people read American English but communicate with each other in ASL. Reading different spellings of words or homonyms is less difficult for them because they are not confused by knowing how a word sounds. They work only from the context of the word in the sentence or paragraph.

We parents are terrified of any move to place additional emphasis on phonics, because it may mean that our children will again be labeled 'learning disabled' or 'slow' or 'stupid'. My daughter cannot take any foreign language in the public schools other than ASL because they are all taught phonetically.

Even in the general population people have a tremendous difficulty with homonyms. Eye half a good I four airer and eye often sea miss steaks in the paper that make it hard four me two understand watt they are trying to right."

Clearly, teaching deaf and hard of hearing people requires special techniques which few elementary school teachers have been trained for and alerted to.

There is a clue in the quotation above, that lipreading is "by the shape of the words on the lips". These are reliably but not always clearly visibly related to the phonics of the words being spoken.

If normal-hearing students were taught by a phonics-first program to spell by phonic rules, they could be writing the same way lipreading students could be taught to transcribe the speech they see.

Then both sets of students could communicate in writing with each other, even if the normal-hearing did not know ASL, and the deaf or hard of hearing had not yet learned traditional spelling. The transition to traditional spellings for the irregular English words would then be similar for both types of students and be similarly understandable by both.

Special story book editions may be needed for lipreading teachers and students, picturing lip positions along with phonemic transcriptions and traditional spelling translations. This may be specially needed for vocabulary-building picture books, as these supply 'key words' for understanding what is being talked about.

Difficulties

Lipreading textbooks describe the type of speaker who is easiest to lipread as those who:
1) speak slowiy;
2) open their mouths to show tongue motion;
3) are in good light;
4) pronounce clearly; and
5) have expressive faces. Gestures may also help.

These texts suggest that hard of hearing or deaf persons ask people
a) to use short sentences;\
b) to pause beween sentences;
c) not to try to follow every word, but get the gist of each phrase or sentence;
d) to try hard to locate 'key words' in a sentence;
e) when entering a conversing group, to ask someone "What are they talking about?"

Because of the ways various word sounds are made, some are easy, others difficult for lipreaders to decypher. Thus H, G/K/C are difficult, throaty sounds, and N, D, T, L are somewhat less difficult, the tongue being against the roof of the mouth. And deaf persons cannot distinguish between voiced and unvoiced consonants. Hence lipreaders often only get some of the sounds of the words.

Thus a deaf person may see ?OU ?OO YOO ?OO for *How do you do?* and ?E? ?U ?AH? for *Get the log*.
And: B/P ? EE S/Z ?OO? B/P R E ? F/V A S ? for *Please cook breakfast* (not *Breeze took breakfast*).

With a common phonemic spelling, some classes might train some regular students to help early lip-reading students decypher and translate the phonic and difficult sounds they see into meaningful sentences.
By training some teachers to pronounce clearly, it could be possible to 'mainstream' fluent lipreaders in at least special demonstrations and lectures, from late first grade on.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 pp10–12 in printed version]
[Valerie Yule: see **Bulletins**, **Anthology**, **Quarterly**, **Journals**, **Newsletters**, **Personal Views** 10 & 16, **Media**, **Books**.]

4. Teaching Reading and Spelling Reform

Valerie Yule

Valerie Yule is a reserch psycolojist and associat in the English department, Melbourne University, working on literacy and the development of imajination. She is the author of *Orthografy and Reading: Spelling and Society*, an investigation of writing systems and experimentl reserch on improving English spelling to betr match user needs and abilities.

This articl is ritn in a transitionl staje of Internationl English Spelling (Interspel). **[1]** Chanjes ar introduced during the course of the articl.

A lively issue during three decades of post-war reconstruction was the reform of writing systems to promote literacy. Other countries went ahead to amend or radically change their orthographies, including Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Vietnam, China, Spain, Netherlands, Israel and regions with pijin and creole Englishes. But the British spirit failed (Follick 1965, Reed 1975).

Mont Follick MP, who led the British Parliamentary spelling push, put up untested proposals that lacked face validity for the public. People thought the new 'rational spelling' lookd dificult, ie, worse not betr, and the considerabl support that had been aroused collapsd. A P Herbert MP printed as a joke Follick's opening paragraf on 'rational spelling', in an article signed ei. pii. eitch, in *Punch* (1949). This is a sample:

Ool dhis shouz dhat in dhe bilding up ov dhe North Atlantik Union, dhe rwling serkels ov dhe Iunaited Steits and Greit Britan endever tw drag intw dhis afair dhe greitest posibel number ov Steits and dhus teik dhem in hand.

'APH' had no difficulty mocking the chanjes. Any acceptabl improvements on current English spelling wer understandably overlookd. In the event, government investigation of spelling reform was passd up as a trade-in for instituting in schools the Initial Teaching Alphabet of Sir James Pitman MP. The ocasion passd. The winds of chanje blew in other directions, and spelling reform in Britain was blown into a dusty cornr.

Forty years on the media stil stir and parents stil worry about reading standards, but spelling reform has not yet re-surfaced in popular concern for litracy. One reason for this was that educators' next expedient was to try to solv the English spelling problem by bypassing it. Spelling, they claimed, was not needed for reading or lerning to read anyway — no spelling reform therfor required. As spelling was not needed, teachrs did not hav to teach it — hoorah — and children did not hav to undrstand the spelling system or fonics — wasn't that lovely? Unfortunatly cutting the Gordian knot cut an essential life-line to reading.

Ful-blown Whole Languaj (alias 'Real Books') teaching is now in retreat in the UK and America, tho stil top practice in Australia. Many stil maintain that children do not need explicit teaching in lerning to read — they absorb it from their environment as 'naturaly' and easily as they lern to speak. The claims ar falacious.

a) Litracy is not 'natural' and universl like human languaj. Only a handful of societies hav inventd riting systems. Most languajes in the world had no riting until this century and hundreds stil hav none. Like most advanced skils of civilisation, reading and riting must be taut, and lernt with aplication and practice.
b) Children do have an inbilt motivation for languaj, but they do not lern to talk as easily as they lern to brethe.

Observ the eforts of small children from their first babbling. When they arive at school, they ar stil not expert.

'Whole Languaj without Spelling' is beginning to colaps like a baloon. Cognitiv reserch shows that a necessary step to becoming an expert independent readr is ability to decode the ritn languaj into the spoken languaj, and it is betr to discovr how to do this erlier rathr than later (see, for example, Ehri & Wilce 1987, Stuart & Coltheart 1988, Bryant & Goswami 1987, and th revew in Yule 1991.) In the grim past, too much 'fonics' produced *some* lernrs who only 'barkd at print' and coud not read for meaning, but also, thruout history until recently, *all* successful Westrn readrs lernt to read for meaning starting off with the alfabeticl principl. With no-fonics Whole Languaj, lernrs ar stil found who do not read for meaning. Their problem is that they gess rongly from context or pictures, and they ar unable to chek their gesses.

It can be dificult to persuade comitd Whole Languaj litracy educators that eficient litracy needs spelling, and so spelling needs spelling reform. Like their pupils, they read by predicting what they expect to read. So they do not *read* accuratly whatevr may difr from their predictions. A recent exampl ilustrates th defect.

The Australian state of Victoria has set up a world-first Ministry for Multimedia with over $A40 milion to spend. I sujestd investing $20,000 on a half-hour take-home cartoon video with computer-animated grafics that gave an overvew of the English riting system and demonstrated *how* to lern to read, *how* to hear sounds in words, and *how* to use context and other stratejies. (See Yule 1995) Th oficial reply from th Ministry of Education (21/11/96) set out its Whole Languaj filosofy, and then itself demonstrated its basic weakness. The letr began:

…reading is a complex process… Current practice in early years classrooms focuses on reading to, with and by the student. Teachers provide students with many opportunities to engage in the reading process through shared reading activities, specific teaching of the visual features of print, independent and guided reading for students who are matched to text and language experience for those who are not. In guided reading attention is paid to the ways that students use and attempt to integrate the cueing systems.

The project to provide take-home repeat-viewing independent lerning for adults and teenagers was then rejected on grounds none of which applied — such as that a school class of small children wd not be able to remain on task for 30 minuts or to undrstand it one-off.

Whole Languaj and post-modern literary theory
It is partly a corolary of this recomended method of reading by gessing that education has become so enthusiastic about litrary theories that state explicitly that readrs do not read what authrs rite — they construct their own meanings from th text. To some extent this has always been tru. Readrs employ a gradient of personl reconstructions, that shoud be at zero when reading an instructionl manual or othr factual information, that increases when reading fiction acording to th narativ's levl of ambiguity and complexity, and that may become almost total re-creation when trying to undrstand som modrn vers. But th Whole Languaj aproach approves

gessing for all genres — altho an adult litracy course is likely to warn that it is betr not to gess when reading labels on medicin botls. Ask someone else insted.

Lerning to read without spelling

One reason why teachrs may encuraj lernrs to make gessing a primary tactic is reaction to a previus extreme. Children cd be traumatised by teachrs insisting that each word had to be decoded corectly befor attempting th next. Poor readrs might nevr read a ful sentence or paragraf or story without interruptions to the sense. How much easier, then, to giv cues. "Well, what do you think Jane and Peter wer going to fly in?" The ansr is easy: "a plane" if it is a short word, "a helicoptr" if it is long.

Children practice this sort of gessing with many worksheets of 'cloze' exercises — that is, gessing th missing words in a story or even a sentence. [2] Gessing in 'reading' erly picture books can be very successful — predicting one line of text per paje from th picture that takes up most of th space. A bright child might make up a betr story than the actual text, but this creativity wil not be encurajd. Howevr, as soon as th books cease to contain mainly pictures, children's gessing habits may stil rely too much on what they expect to find, based on their own limitd knolej of th werld. And as for 'checking bak to ensure that yr prediction is corect' — what slo reading habits this must produce, if readrs realy do chek bakwrds all th time. Unless prose is realy complex, it is surely mor eficient to read strait forwrd, knowing that th reading has been acurat in th first place.

'Whole Languaj' reading confirms readrs' own ideas about th world, rathr than teaching mor about it. Readrs without spelling nolej read unfamiliar words as ones they alredy kno that look similr. And so howlrs apear even in the daily press, as 'cohesive' is confused with 'coherent' and 'constellation' with 'catastrophe'. This is serius enough for children, but even mor so for adults. [3]

When peple can only read vocabulary that they recognise from past experience, and lak decoding skils or understanding of the spelling system, they wil be jitry about any deviation from the familiar. Nor do they become good readrs, even aftr internalising numerus spelling patrns to use by analojy. An ongoing study of how peple read airport thrilrs and blokbustr paperbaks is confirming my theory that averaj adults do not read wel.

The return of fonics, and spelling reform

'Fonics' is making a come-back. That is, teachrs can let beginrs kno that th ritn languaj is based on th spoken languaj and letr sequences represent sounds. Accurat reading of th words can again be made part of th ajenda in 'reading for meaning' without th previus terrorism.

But this aproach to teaching reading needs an emfasis that is not on series of drills, but on understanding at an erly aje what th basic English spelling system is and how to operate it. Fonics teaching faces th dificulty of demonstrating th rationality and user-frendliness of TO. It must be openly recognised in schools that th need to 'fuj the blends' in decoding is due mainly to th distortions that now clutr up th underlying system. Spelling reform may cease to seem politicly incorrect.

'Only connect,' rote E M Forster, and it is not just passion that needs connecting to prose. We need educators who can connect th masses of reserch findings — who can play music with mor than one string at a time, so to speak. Thus they wil be able to read about spelng reform without necessarily assuming it can only be 'spelng just as u speak'. Thay wil be able to *read acuratly* th definitiv reserch that shows, for exampl, that readrs who can decode unfamiliar words ar not

slowd down by having to decode them perpetualy: once th words ar familiar in print, automatic recognition takes over. U don't need to read a map for familiar places.

Teachrs hav feard spelng for too long, altho with reason. It is time for them to be able to teach it as a coherent system, so that they and their pupils can realise that English spelng cd be reformd by cleansing. The underlying system can be stripd of its inconsistencies and incongruities, even for th 19 or so vowel sounds. **[4]** There shd be no need for speling lists to lern eithr by fonics or visual rote, nor for trying to invoke pictografic-style 'reading without a riting system' in ordr to remembr th linear letr-strings of an alfabetic orthografy. English spelng is not a spider's web of majic origin, but only a human artefact.

We now can hope for mor rational teaching of literacy. To make it completely rational, 'User-Frendly Spelling for the Year 2000' must be set firmly on th educationl ajenda.

Notes

[1] **'Internasionl English Spelling' — *InterSpel***. English spelling coud be updated for internationl use by public experiment with three main steps and three principls.
i. Delete letrs in werds that mislead or do not serv to represent meaning or pronunsiasion.
ii. Consistent consonant spellings.
iii. Redusing spelling patrns for the 19+ vowel spellings from an estimated 318 to around 40.
Much of this rationalising is obvius but some questions ar stil unresolvd, eg, finel s/z, and silent e for long vowels.
Principls: Morfemic and gramaticl convension to be consistent.
Public use of Internasionl English Spelling can be adjustd to 'what th market can bear' during transision. Dictionaries alredy giv two or mor spellings for sevral thousand words, and this policy can be extended.
Some 12 very comn iregularly spelt werds may be betr retaind at first, eg, *one, all, one, was, what, who*.
See: 'A Transitional Spelling Reform for Adults and Learners. *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, xx .3. 7–10, 1980.

[2] **Context as a basic reading techniqe to gess meaning**. Th sampls of 'cloze' text below ilustrate that relying on context to gess meaning is mor risky when th text is informativ (a) than when it is a child's story (b). As in 'cloze' exercises in school, one word in eit has been deleted.
(a) To convert documents from different file expansion… , you must install the appropriate converters. To … and export graphics contained in documents with … you must install graphics filters. If you … a complete installation when you installed the … , converters and graphics filters were installed with … . If not, you can run the designated … program again. For instructions, double-click the … button on the standard toolbar, and type … .
(b)The … was coming up hot and golden over … hill-side now, and the heath was … and the bracken and gorse green and … . Down below in the valley the children .... see smoke rising from the chimney-tops and … red roofs like scarlet caps among the … . They were walking along a little path … which was steep and slippery and set with … pebbles, and which was carved into the … side of the hill. Sebastian slipped more … once and Tom had to hold his … very tightly or he would have fallen.

[3] **Good spelrs ar usualy good at undrstanding what thay read**. Whole Languaj adherents comonly make assertions such as that if readrs blend th sounds in *stop*, s-t-o-p, in ordr to read th word, they wil not kno what *stop* means. They can only kno what a word means if they read it 'as a whole'. But obervationl evidence shows that good spelrs who can use their spelling knolej to read unfamiliar werds, do imediatly recognise them if thay ar in their spoken vocabulary. This is so taken for granted that nobody (I think) publishes reserch to demonstrate the relation of

spelling and reading abilities eny mor — they may, like Frith (1982) simply quote Malmquist (1958) and correlations of 0.50 to 0.80.

Anyone can replicate th findings of th present author's unpublishd studies of this reading-spelling connection by comparing th spelling ability on th 16 Word Spelling Test of good readrs who comprehend wel, and poor readrs who comprehend badly. Sixteen words ar set out with surplus letrs deleted, and th task is to rite them out correctly in TO.

acomodate	gardian	ocasion	remembrd
disapoint	iliterat	professor	sovren
disiplin	miniture	sycology	tecnicly
exessiv	mischivus	recomend	unparaleld

This experiment has three secondry advantajes. It demonstrates to th subjects:

- how unecessary and misleading ar those surplus letrs.
- how a consistent and readabl spelling system can be perceivd when clutr is stripd.
- it can then occur to th subjects of this experiment that spelling reform is both posibl and desirabl.

[4] The basic 19 Australian-English vowel sounds (fonemes). In TO each vowel sound has some distinctiv representations but meny that overlap and require rationalisation.

a	e	i	o	u
A	E	I	O	U
ar	er	air	or/aw	
ow	oy		oo (book)	oo
			(Welsh w)	(boot)

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5. Th Potential of Stylgides as Vehicls for Spelng Reform
with a case-study of
The Times English Style and Usage Guide

Christopher Upward

This articl is ritn in Cut Spelng and was presentd as a lectur to th Societys AJM on satrday 11 may 1996.

Abstract

Section 1 examns th relationship between jenrl spelng usaj in english and its reflection in dictionris and stylgides. Section 2 anlyzs th spelngs recmendd by th *The Times English Style and Usage Guide* from th point of vew of consistncy, econmy and aplication of th alfabetic principl. Section 3 extends this analysis to othr kinds of stylgides, noting som difrnt principls by wich they may oprate, and concluding that th presnt state of english spelng creates enormus, unecesry dificltis for al print-producers. And Section 4 considrs th incentiv that producers of print may hav to initiate a co-ordnated atak at least on th most trublsm anomlis of th english riting systm.

1Stylgides and spelng developmnt

1.1 Introduction

In his classic history of English spelling, [1] SSS Presidnt Profesr Donald Scragg made th foloing point (p86): "'Printers' style-sheets may be seen to be of fundamental importance in the establishment of current spelling trends."' This paper considrs th role of stylgides and styl-sheets in determnng spelng trends, wat ther implications ar for th evlution of english spelng, th kinds of things stylgides (and one in particulr) say about spelng today, and wethr, by aproachng ther task in a principld and concertd manr, stylgides cud help improve th spelng of english.

1.2 Dictionris and usaj

Ask th avraj persn ho is responsbl for deciding how words ar spelt in english, and a likely reply wil be: "'th dictionry."' But ask th avraj dictionry ho is responsbl, and th usul reply wil be: "'usaj."' We here hav a chikn-and-eg situation. Wen we ar unsure how to spel a word, we look it up in th dictionry, hos verdict we then normly abide by. Conversly, modrn dictionris claim to base ther recmendations on 'usaj', wich they can nowadays establish by computer analysis of corpra of millions of words of authentic text wich presumebly also reflect how dictionris told riters to spel.

Howevr, th way in wich dictionris in practis reflect usaj may be less straitforwrd. For instnce, th orijnl 17-milion-word COBUILD text-corpus givs th form *gaol* as ocurng 34 times, as against 502 for *jail*, but th *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (1987), hos evidnce derives from th COBUILD corpus, merely tels us that *gaol* is "'used mainly in British English"'. It dos not tel us that *gaol* is a relativly uncomn variant of *jail*. In anothr respect too dictionry claims to reflect usaj apear questionbl: such widely used forms as **accomodate* with singl M or **recieve* with Ie ar not listd as variants on *accommodate, receive*. So wy do dictionris lend respectbility to a ludicrus, confusing (being esily confused with *goal*) and unpopulr form such as *gaol*, but deny it to th quite sensbl and notebly populr spelngs **accomodate, *recieve*?

1.3 Closed loop of dictionry and print

Th difrnce between *goal* and **accomodate/*recieve* is that th formr ocurs in th mor professionly composed environmnt of print, wile th latr do not — exept as 'misprints'. Th spelngs that dictionris rejistr as acceptbl ar those that lexicografrs observ in print, wich means those that printrs, typ-

setrs and publishrs, rathr than users jenrly, prefer. At th same time, dictionris ar th sorce of orthografic authority to wich those print-producers ar likely ultmatly to apeal wen in dout.

It begins to apear that this two-way feedbak loop myt be completely closed: print-producers use spelngs givn in dictionris, and dictionris list spelngs found in print. If this wer th hole story, english spelng myt be lokd forevr into its presnt forms, with no posbility of furthr evlution, let alone reform. It is ofn asertd that pland spelng reform is superfluus because "chanjes in languaj … take place natrly and graduly". [2] At least as far as th ritn languaj is concernd, th two-way loop described abov sujests that ther ar intractbl, intrinsic forces obstructng such alejd "'natrl'" evlution. If that is so, it is hard to argu that natrl evlution rendrs pland reform superfluus.

1.4 Fluidity of english spelng

Yet th systm is not in fact rijidly fixd at evry point, because larj numbrs of english words do not hav a singl agreed spelng. Typs of spelng variation include th foloing: difrnces between british and americn usaj (*harbour* or *harbor*?); words with fundmently diverjnt forms (*gaol* or *jail*?); vacilation over word-breks (*on to* or *onto*?); hesitation over final silent E (*caviar* or *caviare*?); douts about consnnt dublng (T or Tt in *benefiting/benefitting*?); morflojicl uncertntis (*slyer* or *slier*?); derivationl alternativs ('french' *Renaissance* or 'latn' *Renascence*?); difrnt degrees of anglicization (english plural S in *bureaus* or french plural X in *bureaux*?); variant translitrations from othr alfabets (how to represent russian o in *borsch/borscht/ borshch/borsht/bortsch*?); chanjed spelng conventions in a sorce language (befor 1901 in jermn *Neanderthal*, today *Neandertal*); chanjed translitration conventions in a sorce languaj (Wade-Giles conventions superseded by Pinyin in chinese, turnng *Peking* into *Beijing*); chanjes to base-words wen sufixs ar add (Ou cut to O in british *vigour/vigorous*); and, particulrly pervasiv, th fluidity of newly coind or recently borod words that hav yet to acheve a singl agreed ritn form (*yoghourt* or *yoghurt* or *yogurt*?) — this latr typ of variation includes many hundreds of modrn tecnicl terms. In al such cases dictionris typicly ofr a choice, and/or disagree with each othr in ther prefrnces and recmendations. This catlog, of corse, ignors th endless variation that ocurs in (especialy privat) daily use, for instnce with 'greengrocers' spelngs and uncertnty over hetrografs, as between *to bail out* or *bale out*. [3]

1.5 Stylgides resolv uncertntis

Print-producers ar ofn typograficl perfectionists anxius not to iritate ther readrs with inconsistnt or controversial spelngs. Because ther ar so many uncertntis not curently resolvd by dictionris, they comnly compile ther own 'in-house' lists of preferd forms for use in ther publications. These ar typicly incorprated in styl-sheets or stylgides, wich thus mediate between dictionris and th printd text, telng riters, proofreadrs, subeditrs, typ-setrs, etc, wich spelngs to adopt. Admitdly, th strictness with wich publishrs insist upon ther preferd forms varis considrbly: in som cases authrs individul prefrnces ar respectd, but in othr cases th stylgides recmendations ar prescribed as 'mandatry'.

Thanks to stylgides, th orthografy used by a particulr publishr may be mor consistnt than dictionris, wich atest numerus alternativ forms, can sujest for 'english spelng' as a hole. Insofar as a majority of stylgides myt opt for one spelng in prefrnce to its alternativ(s), jenrl usaj myt be graduly afectd, and if dictionris keep abrest of such chanjes in usaj, then ther recmendd forms myt, over time, com to reflect th domnnt prefrnces of th stylgides. Thus todays british dictionris tend to recmend *encyclopedia* with E rathr than *encyclopaedia* with Ae, wich was mor comnly used erlir in th 20th century. Thanks to stylgides, therfor, som potential for flexbility and evlution myt aftr al be bilt into th two-way loop between dictionris and print. A ke question then must be: do th prefrnces of todays stylgides tend to improve th quality of english spelng, or not? This articl wil atemt at least a provisionl ansr to that question.

2 The Times English Style Guide

2.1 Purpos of th case-study

Th foloing analysis wil examn th efect of one particulr stylgides recmendations on th english riting systm (as wel as providing a survey of how th problms of english spelng ar perceved to impact on one of th most prestijus print-producers in th english languaj). Our findngs wil then be briefly compared (§3 belo) with equivlnt findngs from a ranje of othr such publications, to try and provide a mor representativ pictur. In §4 of this articl we shal presume that th results of our analysis ar typicl, and discuss prospects for an improved spelng of english arising from th colectiv efect of stylgides.

2.2 Choice of stylgide

The Times English Style and Usage Guide, ritn by Simon Jenkins, came to hand fortuitusly. Its authrs concern with spelng first atractd th SSSs atention sevrl years ago thru reports that, as editr of *The Times*, Simon Jenkins had chanjed that newspapers traditionl use of th greco-americn -lze endng (as in *organize*) to th alternativ anglo-french -lse (se §2.10 belo for discussion of this chanje). Mor recently, Simon Jenkins voiced his furthr intrest in spelng in a *Times* articl, **[4]** wher he rote:

> "The world must … admit that it has a universal language at last. … The one quid pro quo it should demand is that English lexicographers bow before the great Webster, and accept American orthography. English spelling is still awful. If we English can alter *denie*, *interiour* and *musick*, we can surely end the absurdity of *thorough*, *centre* and *enough*, if the world is to learn them by heart."

From this we inferd that Simon Jenkins acceptd at least som of th SSSs basic premisses, namely th superiority of most americn spelngs over british, th importnce of taking th requiremnts of non-nativ-speakng lernrs into acount, and abov al th need for an improvemnt to th way th english languaj is spelt. We therfor contactd him to se how much farthr these shared vews myt strech: myt he indeed prove an activ and valubl suportr of reform in th public arena? In reply, he kindly donated a copy of *The Times English Style and Usage Guide* (henceforth referd to just as th *Style Guide*), a hansm litl blak-bound hard-bak of 159 pajes ritn, as he tels us, "'som years ago'". Altho th book laks th norml bibliograficl data (even th authrs name is misng), a ruf date of publication can be deduced from a refrnce to febry 1992 on th last paje.

Th book is enormusly informativ about many of th dilemas facing riters of english, and is ritn with a lyt tuch, its recmendations being intrspersd with witicisms such as th advice "Rarely start a sentence (except this one) … with an adverb". At th same time, it exudes authority, as wen it says that most of its precepts ar "'mandatory'" for *Times* writers, or opines that "'Sentences starting with adverbs are normally built on sand.'"

2.3 Spelng principls implyd

Th books Introduction (pp5–9) sets out its aims and principls with exemplry clarity undr th hedngs 'Brevity', 'Verbs', 'Abstractions', 'Punctuation', 'Conjunctions', 'Paragraphing', 'Quotations', 'Headines', 'Style'. Ther is no hedng for 'Spelling', nor dos th Introduction mention it explicitly. Nevrthless, th foloing quotations from th Introduction can be interpretd as berng strongly upon spelng:

> "English is not a language fixed for all time. Speech changes and its written forms should change too. *The Times* must use the language of its readers, but that language at its best, clearest and most concise. The writing in a newspaper should also be consistent: hence the need for a style guide."

Most of the guidance is mandatory for staff writing in *The Times*, though some is permissive.… The introductory remarks are expanded under the relevant heading in the alphabetical list. … Where the guide conflicts with *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, the guide should take precedence, but the *Dictionary* should be consulted where the guide is silent.

Brevity A writer's most precious commodity is space. Space is time for writer and reader alike. … So use short rather than long words.

Two criteria for good styl ar thus sujestd wich ar aplicbl to spelng: conciseness and consistency (these ar also criteria undrlyng th desyn of Cut Spelng). We shal want to se how far they ar observd in th spelng advice givn in th alfabetic section of th *Style Guide*. It is noticebl that adherence to th alfabetic principl of predictbl sound-symbl corespondnce is not one of th criteria, but 'consistncy', if consistntly aplyd, can take us a long way down that road. In adition, th alfabetic section (undr **hyphens**) states that "'sense and appearance are more important than rules'", but dos not specify how to aply these encurajng words in practis.

2.4 Wat proportion concerns spelng?
Th books alfabetic list is 150 pajes long and contains an estmated 600–700 items. Som ar very short (ofn just 3 words: '**forum** plural forums'), wile othrs covr sevrl pajes (eg, '**titles**', 3pp). Of slytly over 60 hedwords beginng with A, nearly half hav nothing to do with spelng (a few ar just cross-refrnces: '**and** see **punctuation**'), nearly a quartr ar partialy concernd with spelng ('**amid** not amidst'), and nearly a third ar purely or mainly spelng recmendations ('**amok** not amock or amuck'). We myt conclude that these figrs (ie, around half an english stylgide taken up by spelng advice) sho just how serius a problm th presnt spelng of english is for print-producers. That fact, one myt think, shud hav induced spelng reform long ago.

2.5 Typs of spelng advice
Th *Style Guide* is in jenrl aimd at professionl riters ho require few warnngs about comnplace spelng traps. Th entry **accommodation** thus carris a stylistic warnng ('a long dull word best avoided'), but no remindr of th need to dubl th M. Nevrthless, *Times* riters ar warnd about th R/Rr variation between *harass/embarrass*, th Ei/Ie reversl in *seize/siege*, and th G/J altrnation between *sergeant/Serjeant*. Rarer words ar mor likely to atract coment: we must remembr to rite Ph, not P, in *diphtheria, diphthong, ophthalmic*; and Y not I, in *dysentery*, *aneurysm*. Varius distinctions of meanng corespondng to difrnces of spelng ar specifyd, such as *dependant/dependent, discomfit/discomfort, discreet/ discrete, enquiry/inquiry, falangist/phalangist, forbear/ forebear, forgo/forego, gaff/gaffe, gibe/jibe, grisly/ grizzly*. Orthografrs wil natrly ask wethr th advantajs of such distinctions outwei ther hazrds, it being clear at least that, if those distinctions wer oblitrated, th *Style Guide* wud not need to discuss them. We may certnly dout th valu of distinguishng *bogey* (golf), *bogie* (weels), and *bogy* (gost), wich dictionris alow variusly to overlap; wud it not be mor helpful to use *bogey* for al meanngs? Riters ar urjd always to chek a few names hos spelng is notoriusly unpredictbl: *Alasdair, Alastair, Alaster, Alistair*; *Catharine, Catherine, Katharine, Katherine*; and th surname prefix *Mac-*.

A numbr of items deal with th spelng of foren words: nearly 3 pajes discuss arab names and ther transcription problms; th most comn chinese names ar to folo th old british Wade-Giles spelng systm, not th new pinyin standrd (*Peking*, not *Beijing*); and ther is advice on wen to use diacritics (eg, th acute accent on final É to be retained, as in *communiqué*). Th perenial uncertntis over capitlization (*President Bush*, but *George Bush, the president*) and hyfnation (*co-operation*, but *uncooperative*) ar also recurent themes.

Many of th items 'partialy concernd' with spelng involv prefrnce for a word-form wher difrnt pronunciation natrly means difrnt spelng (eg '**amid** not amidst'). We here note th prefrnce for mor

concise past tense forms endng in -T over alternativs with -Ed. Thus: '**burnt** not burned', and simlrly *dreamt, leant, leapt, learnt*; *learned* then necesrly has two sylabls. For our purposes, such variations can be ignord, since spelng difrnces corespondng unambiguusly to pronunciation difrnces shud be th norm anyway.

2.6 Americn spelngs
In adition to th abov categris, ther ar a few jenrlized spelng recmendations. One relates to americn spelngs:

> "the titles of American institutions etc that contain words of which the American spelling is different from the English (eg, Secretary of Defense, American Federation of Labor) should be written in *The Times* with English spellings: Secretary of Defence, American Federation of Labour"

Americn readrs wil hopefuly be amused rathr than irkd that 'americn' spelngs ar here contrastd with 'english' rathr than 'british' variants. We may also remark that th form *defence* is historicly and systemicly indefensbl.

This rejection of americn spelngs contradicts both th pro-americn vew Simon Jenkins advocated in his febry 1995 articl (se §2.2 abov) and th criterion of conciseness propoundd in th *Style Guide*s introduction (se §2.3 abov). Howevr, in practis th *Style Gide* is not consistntly anti-americn — and therby contradicts th Introductions othr main criterion, wich is consistncy. So we hav Ae rathr than americn E in *archaeology*, *leukaemia*, *palaeo-*, *praesidium*, but *dieresis, Greco-*, *medieval* without A. We note the longer british forms *jewel**le**ry*, *stor**e**y*, but americn *art**if**act*, *jail* preferd to british *artefact*, *gaol*. Th recmendd forms *install*, *instalment*, *instil* mix british L and americn Ll, tho this is a rare instnce wher british conventions ar mor concise than th americn. Inconsistncy is also th consequence of preferng british *pedlar* to americn *peddler*, since th verb is *to peddle*. Likewise, adherence to th principld british inconsistncy of *practice/practise* (to be consistnt, british spelng shud also distinguish *a *promice/to promise*) prevails over th esir americn blurng of th difrnce.

2.7 Treatmnt of mute E
Anothr jenrlized recmendation is givn undr th hedword **e**: "'delete this often superfluous letter when the dictionary offers you a choice, as in judgment, acknowledgment. See also **mute *e***."' This **mute *e*** entry deservs quoting in ful.

> if there is to be any consistency in keeping or dropping the final mute *e* in words taking the suffixes *-able, -age, -ing, -ish*, a rule is needed. Fowler has one that is simple and sensible: drop the *e* unless it is needed to emphasise the soft sound of a preceding *c* or *g*. Thus changeable, knowledgeable, singeing (from singe — soft *g* must be emphasised to distinguish from singing), swingeing, traceable. Observance of the rule leads to a few unusual but defensible forms: aging, debatable, milage, ratable. When in doubt consult a standard dictionary: in all cases where an alternative spelling without the *e* is given, that is the one to be used in *The Times*. Remember, the English language should be allowed to evolve, under pressure of common usage, in the direction of simplicity.

Th spirit and intention behind these recmendations ar admrbl (they also undrlie Cut Spelng). Howevr, som of them unfortunatly create systemic problms wich th orthografr needs to be aware of. (A practicl iritation is furthrmor that my spelchekr queris many of th abov forms!) Th recmendd forms ar not so much markd by th claimd simplicity (if that means predictbl sound-symbl corespondnce) as by brevity. It is one of th major defects of th presnt spelng of english that adng sufixs ofn entails an unpredictbl altration to th base-word (such as insertng or deleting letrs),

altho ther is no equivlnt chanje to th pronunciation to indicate wat th spelng chanje shud be. Endless errs and uncertntis (of th kind th *Style Guide* atemts to resolv) ar th inevitbl consequence.

Varius such problms arise from dropng mute E. One problm confronts readrs ho do not no how a word is pronounced (typicly, th very constituency of non-nativ-speakrs hos needs Simon Jenkins elswher recognized). For them th paralel spelng of, say, *milage* and *cartilage* increses th dificlty of decoding. Wat is mor, lernrs in jenrl hav trubl mastrng th function of 'majic E' in words like *mile, rate*, and th deletion of that E in *milage, ratable* only agravates matrs. Th lojic of th sujestd omissions is anyway obscure: if E must be kept in *traceable* to mark th soft C in *trace* (contrast *implacable*), wy is it not also needd in *ratable* to mark th long A of *rate* (contrast *palatable*)? Nor dos th *Style Guide* explain wy E is not needd in *aging* to sho th soft G. Th confusion is most blatant wen E is dropd from *acknowledgment* but retaind in *knowledgeable*: if th digraf Dg sufices to sho soft G in th formr, wy dos it not sufice in th latr?

2.8 Plural -OS or -OES?

A famus inconsistncy of english spelng arises in nouns endng in -O: shud ther plurals ad -S, as in *pianos*, or -Es, as in *potatoes*? (Readrs may recal th previus US Vice-Presidnt Dan Quayles public humiliation wen he reduced *potatoes* to th singulr **potatoe*.) *Times* riters get no help here, being required to memrize *frescoes*, *grottoes, mosquitoes, tomatoes* with -Oes, but *crescendos, ghettos, manifestos, tornados* with -Os. Admitdly, as Cut Spelng discovrd, neithr endng is ideal: -Oes is less concise and conflicts variusly with *does, shoes, Averroes*, wile -Os conflicts with th regulr 'greek' endng of words like *ethos, pathos*; but th -Oes/-Os distinctions proposed by th *Style Guide* ad inconsistncy and unpredictbility to th snags of both.

2.9 Dublng consnnts

Anothr inconsistncy in th *Style Guide* concerns that ubiquitus problm of wethr verbs endng in an unstresd vowl plus singl consnnt shud dubl th consnnt befor a sufix. Th *Style Guide* ilustrates, but dos not explain, th rule by contrastng *preferred/proffered*. Most exampls listd ar givn with a singl consnnt: *balloted* not *ballotted*, and simlrly *benefited, bigoted, riveting, biased, focused*. But for som reasn *hiccup* has -Pped (no othr -P verbs ar givn, so we dont no wethr *Times* riters ar to rite *gallop, gossip, kidnap, worship* with -Ped or -Pped). Th problm of -L dublng is not mentiond, tho presumebly th anti-americn principl wil ensure that *travel* and its numerus brethren (exept, presumebly, *parallel*, wich is an exeptionl exeption that gos against al th othr norml exeptions) wil keep ther perverse british -lled.

2.10 -ise or -ize?

We noted in §2.2 abov how Simon Jenkins reversd *The Times* traditionl -lze usaj, perhaps to avoid an odius americnism. Th *Style Guide* says th foloing:

avoid the *z* construction in almost all cases. This is volcanic ground, with common usage straining the crust of classical etymology. This guidance is a revision of the Greek zeta root ending in the direction of a Latin ending and common usage: apologise, organise, emphasise, televise, circumcise. The only truly awkward result is capsize which should be left in its Grecian peace.

Striking tho th volcanic imajry is, th *Style Guide*s etmlojicl explnations ar at best garbld: latn translitrated greek zeta as Z (th latn verb *baptizare* is th erliest nown exampl), not as S, and english has taken th -ISE sufix from french, not from latn (french *baptiser*). Som words endng in -Ise do hav it from latn, but it is then part of a longr root, not a sufix: in *televise* th root is *vis*, as in *vision, visible*, and in *circumcise* th root is *cis*, as in *incision, (s)cissors*. Th implication that *capsize* has anything to do with greek is fantasy — it is a modrn nauticl term. Th basis of this hole argumnt in favor of -Ise is curius: it uses etmolojy to overturn etmolojy.

In fact, th sole advantaj of -ise is that it faces riters with fewr exeptions than -ize dos. Th exeptions with etmlojicl -ise ocur in sevrl comn words hos franco-latn endng is not th greek zeta root. Th 10 most comn ar *exercise, surprise, enterprise, compromise* (acordng to COBUILD these first 4 ar al mor comn than *realise, recognise*, th comnst -Ize posbilitis)*, advise, disguise, devise, despise, demise, advertise*. Two jermanic roots ar *rise, wise* (tho th latr has Iz in *wizard*).

Th objections to -Ise ar systemic, syclojicl and sociolinguistic. Stylgides ar ritn for riters, not for readrs, but orthografrs hav to remembr that th systm needs to serv riters and readrs equaly. Only th alfabetic principl, not etmolojy, not dictionris, and not usaj, can provide th requisit gidance to both. Letrs shud be used, as far as posbl, to represent speech-sounds regulrly and predictbly. Then riters can spel words corectly without needng to chek in dictionris or stylgides, and readrs can pronounce words corectly wethr they hav herd them befor or not. That is th ideal, from wich th traditionl orthografy of english is so far removed. Spelng reformrs disagree about how closely ritn english can be made to aproxmate to pronunciation in th short term, but as regards isolated, marjnl featurs of english spelng as listd in stylgides, then evry recmendation in favor of a mor predictbl sound-symbl corespondnce is a step in th ryt direction.

Between -ise/-ize th ryt choice, by this criterion, is clear. Th final consnnt is voiced, and in english Z, not S, represents th voiced valu unambiguusly. Tho -Ise may, in traditionl orthografy, entail fewr exeptions for riters, it entails many ambiguitis for readrs, as seen in th alternativ sound-valus in *promise, paradise, expertise, organise*. And if -ize leves riters with th problm of a dozn or so exeptions, th remedy is clear: stylgides shud recmend *exercize, surprize, enterprize, compromize, advize, disguize, devize, despize, demize, advertize*, etc — and *rize, wize*.

Then th -ise/-ize dilema wud be finaly resolvd — or nearly so. For ther remains a paradoxicl litl bunch of words wich ar jenuinly of greek orijn, but hos greek root was ritn with sigma, not zeta. Th main exampls ar *analyse, paralyse* (wich th *Style Gide* lists undr -Lyse), hos spelng with Ys derives from th nouns *analysis, paralysis*. Americn spelng has long been recnciled to *analyze, paralyze*, but th alfabetic principl strictly speakng requires these words to be fuly alynd with *capsize*, givng *analize, paralize*. If this seems too bold a step for stylgide authrs, let them considr spanish (*analizar, paralizar*) and italian (*analizzare, paralizzare*.), wich hav no truk with 'greek' Y — nor with many othr spelng problms that beset english.

A last point has to be made in favor of -Ize. Wile th british tend to be alerjic to most americn spelngs, on th hole America is mor tolrnt of british forms (canadian usaj tends to fal between th two). But in th case of -Ise/-Ize th reverse is th case: 'americn' -Ize is quite comn in british usaj (Oxford University Press and Collins, two publishrs of renownd dictionris, both prefer it), wheras 'british' -Ise is strongly disliked (quite rytly) by americns. For th sake of a world standrd of english spelng, therfor, evry stylgide shud recmend -ize.

A final obsrvation here arises from th CS forms *anlyz, paralyz*: if, as *New Spelling 90* recmends (and CS tends to implmnt too), th long valu of I is best always rendrd by Y, then al th abov words wud reduce ther endngs to -Yz, thus *baptyz, surpryz, c/kapzyz*.

2.11 Mislaneus inconsistncis

Sundry othr inconsistncis wer noted in th *Style Guide*. Ther wer th discrepnt translitrations *Chekhov, Tchaikovsky*, hos initial consnnt is spelt with th same letr x in russian; english has endd up with one proprly anglicized form with Ch, and one form borod from french, wich regulrly spels that consnnt-sound as Tch, and lojicly also rites *Tchekhov*. Th principl of conciseness is breachd by th prefrnce for *loath* over *loth*; tho th paralel of *oath* implys that th alfabetic principl is perhaps being tacitly observd (but shud we then distinguish *both/cloth* as *boath/cloth*?). Tho not exactly

an inconsistncy, we may regret (Cut Spelng difrs here) th prefrnce for *gypsy, pygmy* over th less ambiguus *gipsy, pigmy* (contrast th long valu of Y in *gyrate, pyrites*). Conversly th *Style Guide* prefers *siphon* to *syphon* — admitdly in traditionl orthografy initial Sy- mostly has th valu as in *syllable, sympathy, syndrome*, tho Psy- dos not).

3 Comparisns, sorces and authoritis

3.1 Th need for comparisn

The Times Style Guide has been anlyzd in detail because its authr had expresd concern about th state of english spelng ("'still awful'"), and th hypothesis therfor seemd worth pursuing that its recmendations myt represent a systemic improvemnt to the orthografy. In that respect our findings, tho othrwise of intrest, ar disapointng. Som brief comparisns with othr stylgides and simlr publications may at least indicate how typicl th *Times Style Guide*s recmendations ar of th jenrality of publishng practis in Britn. Dos *The Times* ofr anything aproachng a british standrd, or ar its recmendations based on foundations as fluid as th dictionris wich it urjs its riters to consult wher th *Style Guide* is 'silent'?

3.2 The Economist Pocket Style Book

Th stylgide produced by th british weekly *The Economist* (1986) resembls that of *The Times* in size and structur. Most of its 107 (slytly larjr) pajes constitute an alfabeticl list. But only about a dozn of its hedwords concern spelng, tho thre of them ar fairly substantial. Minor items treat diacritics (hedword **Accents**), *program/programme* (hedword **Americanisms**), *autarchy/autarky*, th precednce of pinyin over Wade-Giles (hedword **Chinese names**), *forgo/forego*, **Hyphens**, and *meting* out *meet* punishmnt. Th thre mor substantial items com undr th hedwords **-able**/**-eable**/**-ible**, **Plurals**, and **Spelling**. *The Economist* difrs on one jenrl point from *The Times*: wheras th latr claims to aply principls of consistncy and conciseness, th *Economist*s Preface says: "'The aim of this style book is to … set some *arbitrary* rules. The *arbitrary* choices made are those of the paper's editors over many years.'" (my italics).

Th item **-able,-eable,-ible** merely lists 12 words endng in -Able, 4 words endng in -Eable, and 7 words endng in -Ible. Th -Uble/-Uable dilema, as between *voluble/valuable* is not mentiond. No gidance is givn for deciding wich endng is apropriat, non of th words ocurs among th 20 most comn with eithr th -Able or th -Ible endng, and a wel-nown spelng trap (**responsable*) is absnt. Th base-forms of 10 out of th 12 -Able words end in -E (eg, *debatable* from *debate*), and rase th question wethr -Able or -Eable is mor apropriat. (Som dictionris list *debateable* with -E, wile othrs do not; wat dos this imply about dictionris reflectng usaj?) On th hole *The Economist* recmends th same forms as *The Times*, with no E exept aftr soft C or G (*serviceable, manageable*); but *sizeable* keeps E wher *The Times* wud presumebly cut it. (Dictionris too somtimes list *sizeable* wen they dont list *debateable*; why?) In vew of al these variations, we may point out that, by adng just -Bl to th base-form in nearly al cases, Cut Spelng avoids these uncertntis, with *debatebl, manajbl, responsbl, servicebl, sizebl, volubl, valubl*. Th -Able, -Eable, -Ible problm is thus not insolubl.

Th item **Plurals** also just consists of lists, for th plurals of words endng in -O, -Eau, -Us, -Um, -F and -A. For -O, 21 words ar givn with plural -Oes and 15 with plural -Os; only 5 of these wer also givn by *The Times*, two of them with difrnt recmendations (*manifestoes, tornadoes*, for wich *The Times* gave -Os). For -Eau, plural -S is recmendd for *bureau, plateau*, but, anomlusly, th french plural -X for *chateau*, altho if this wer a tru french form, a circmflex accent wud be required (*châteaux*). *The Economist* agrees with *The Times* that th plural of -Us endngs shud not dubl th S, ie, *focuses*, but it introduces a complication of its own, distinguishng th V plural of *hooves, scarves, wharves* from th F plural of *dwarfs, roofs, turfs*, and th -S plural of *agendas* from th -E plural of *formulae*. A stylgide that gave priority to consistncy cud harmnize many of these

variations without any daring orthograficl inovation at al, but *The Economist* evidntly regards spelng as no less arbitry than othr aspects of styl — and therby helps to make it so.

*The Economist*s item on **Spelling** consists of a two-paje list of "'common difficulties"', by wich is ment dificlt words, not dificlt patrns or rules; again no gidance on jenrl principls is givn. As with *The Times*, americnisms ar tabu (write -ise, not -ize), exept that *current account* may be ritn *checking account* "'when explaining to Americans"', and *inquire* is preferd to *enquire*. Many words also ocur in th *Times* list, but here sho th foloing difrnces: *bogey* can serv for al meanngs, exept "'on a locomotive"'; *hiccup* has -Ough, not -Up; *enquiry/inquiry* ar not distinguishd in meanng, th latr servng for both senses; *loth* is preferd to *loath* (despite *loathe*); and *mileage* is preferd to *milage*. Th *Economist* aditionly recmends riting *adviser* with E beside *advisory* with O; *Filipino* with F, P beside *Philippine* with Ph, Pp; *fullness* with Ll beside *fulfil, fulsome* with L; and *gypsy* with Y beside *pigmy* with I.

One is inclined to conclude that, if *The Times* is inconsistnt, *The Economist* is confused. If we take them as togethr representng th preferd orthografy of th british press, we hav an amalgm of inconsistncy and confusion.

3.3 Othr sorces

Without atemtng any comprehensiv or systmatic listng, we may mention som furthr sorces of gidance for british riters on english spelng. Both *The Times* and *The Economist* ar exampls from th field of jurnlism, but of corse book publishrs hav no less a need for gidance. Ther is, howevr, th difrnce that, wile newspapers and jurnls ar keen to ensure consistnt spelng of individul words for ther readrs from issu to issu, book publishrs ar mor concernd to ensure consistncy within each publication, rathr than between seprat publications.

Cambridge University Press (CUP) publishs a stylgide (Butcher, 1992), with 24 refrnces to spelng in its index. Th quality book publishrs orthografic task is mor complex than that of th newspaper publishr. Regardng americn spelngs, CUP recmends respectng th prefrnces of authrs, wile ensuring that these ar internly consistnt (CUP has to cater for americn and non-americn authrs, and for readrs worldwide). This is a far mor trublsm procedur than simply banng americn spelngs outryt; for instnce, CUP editrs and proofreadrs ar liabl to hav to implmnt any recognized variant of th -lse/-lze rules, wile corectng non-recognized variants; but quotations within books may folo difrnt spelng conventions from th main text. Th CUP stylgide, like th othrs, lists spelngs wher mor than one form is comn, but on th hole it expresses no prefrnce (exept that th -Yze endng [*analyze*, etc] is only acceptbl in americn contexts), merely ruling that th same form be used thruout th book (exept in quotations). One unmistakebl anomly is unshakebly insistd on: *unmistakable* must end in -Able, but *unshakeable* has -Eable.

Two dictionris of english spelng may also be mentiond here, one publishd by Collins (1993), th othr by Harraps (Wileman, 1990). Unlike th stylgides previusly discusd, these ar refrnce works specializing in spelng, tho each has a difrnt target readrship. A main function of th Collins is to sho text-producers wher words may be split with a hyfn at th end of a line. Th foloing entry shos th format used: *un+shak+able* (but no *un+shake+able* alowd as an alternativ). Collins givs som alternativ forms, as with *hic+cup+ing* ***or*** (on th foloing line) *hic+cup+ping* (*hiccoughing* as recmendd by *The Economist* dos not apear). British *cen+tre, cen+tring* apear alfabeticly a good colum furthr on than *cen+ter* US, *cen+ter+ing*. *Jail* apears som 73 pajes later than *gaol*, with no cross-refrnce, and wheras *gaols* ar gardd by *gaolers*, *jails* ar mor jenrusly stafd, with both *jailers* and *jailors*.

The Harrap dictionry is by contrast desynd to cope with th foloing conundrm: "'Please, how do you spell 'inconceivable'?"' — "'Why don't you look it up in the dictionary?"' — "'I did, but it's not

there!"'. To resolv this problm, Harrap contains larj numbrs of likely mispelngs (printd in blu), wich can be lookd up alfabeticly to discovr th conventionl form. If u cant remembr how to spel *once*, u look up a likely candidat such as *wunse*, or *wunce* (but not *wonce*), and ther u find *once* printd in blak beside th mispelt blu form. If u no th spelng of *gaol*, u can look it up in blak print, tho u find it imediatly abov *gaol* printd in blu, wich is a mispelng of *goal*; conversly, black *gaol* is also givn against blu *goal*. A *gaol* is gardd by a *gaoler*, but *jails* apear ungardd, eithr by *jailers* or *jailors*. Th forword trys to reasure th user that "'far from being a haphazard arrangement, English spelling is based on a complex system of rules"'. These rules ar presumebly exemplifyd by th books "'spelling hints"', wich contain such jems as: "'In '**ee**' sound words, **c** is always followed by **ei**… However, there are many exceptions"'; and: "'Most words ending in the '**ize**' sound are usually spelt **ise**, e.g. analyse, paralyse."' It wud be intrestng to no wethr such advice has evr helpd anyone improve ther spelng.

3.4 Authoritis

Wile CUP and Collins present themselvs as spelng authoritis in ther own ryt, both *The Times* and *The Economist* defer to othr authoritis. We quoted *The Times* abov (§2.3) referng to the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* (1984), to wich it deferd by defalt (tho defyng Oxford wenevr it thot fit), and it furthr refers to *Collins English Dictionary* (is it coincidnce that Collins and *The Times* ar both Murdoch compnis?) and Fowler (1983). Such defrnce may, howevr, be a blunt instrumnt: th *Style Guide*s advice "'when in doubt consult a standard dictionary"' leves open th questions of wich dictionris ar standrd and wich ar not, and wat to do wen dictionris ar found to disagree. *The Economist* refers to th British Standards Institution for **Proofreader's marks**, and undr **Dashes** quotes Gowers (1979) precept "'Do not use it as a punctuation maid-of-all-work"'. Undr **Additional reading** it also lists *Hart's Rules* (1983)**.** We hav in these works a body of authority on english (especialy british) spelng wich we canot examn mor closely here, but wich cry out for ful analysis to establish wethr th gidance they ofr is any mor coherent than that of th works investigated abov.

4 Stylgides and spelng reform

4.1 Verdict on th presnt styl gides

Th abov analyses sujest that stylgides at least ar not based on any coherent undrstandng of english spelng as it now is, nor on any coherent principls for determnng wich spelngs shud be recmendd wher a choice is availbl. They seek merely to help riters shape ther text to meet mor or less arbitry editorial requiremnts. They do not considr th riting systm as a hole, eithr in its role in world comunication nor in th myriad internl intractions of its orthografic featurs. Nor do they considr th brodr needs of al categris of user, wich include non-nativ as wel as nativ speakrs, readrs as wel as riters, th barely litrat as wel as skild practitionrs, lernrs as wel as teachrs. Th two principls enunciated in th *'Times' Style Guide*, conciseness and consistency, ar fine in themselvs, tho they ar not noticebly reflectd in th spelngs recmendd. But th alfabetic principl of predictbl sound-symbl corespondnce, wich shud be th ultmat criterion for al orthografic decisions, is rarely hintd at in any of th abov publications (th use of E to indicate that a preceding C or G is soft is such a rare instnce).

4.2 Stylgides as a developmnt mecnism?

In §1.5 abov, we askd wethr stylgides myt ofr an escape from th trap of th two-way loop between dictionris and usaj, and therby provide a mecnism for th evlutionry improvemnt of english spelng. Alas, our analyses hav shown no evidnce for that hapnng at presnt. Th stylgides disagree with each othr, or in th case of CUP ar wilng to submit to most of ther authrs persnl prefrnces, wich ar likely to sho even gretr variety than do th stylgides used by th press. Th global inconsistncy of anglo-americn difrnces by defnition imposes a dilema on al british stylgides, wich ar torn between rejection of th stranjeness of americn forms and atraction to ther self-evidnt advantajs. On th one

hand they may recognize that som americn forms ar incresingly acceptd evrywher (eg, *encyclopedia*); but on th othr they may wish to emfasize th difrnce by insistng on -ISE in prefrnce to -IZE.

One of th obstacls to expectng stylgides to produce progress in english spelng is epitmized by th *Style Guide* recmendation that *inc**omu**nicado* be spelt with a singl M. Non of 4 british dictionris and 1 americn consultd lists that spelng. Two argumnts suport singl M: th word is borod from spanish, wich nevr normly rites Mm (eg, *acomodación*), so singl M in english wud reduce discrepncis between languajs; and if english nevr rote Mm, a considrbl simplification wud result. On th othr hand, since at presnt th root *commun-* is always ritn with Mm in english, creating an isolated exeption for *incomunicado* wud ad a furthr hazrd to an alredy extremely hazrdus riting systm. In othr words, tinkrng with th spelng of a singl word is bad. Th only beneficial reform is one that aplys across a definebl ranje of forms, as wen Cut Spelng simplifys almost al dubld consnnts, predictbly and by rule. If a stylgide confines itself to ruling on individul words here and ther, it is most unlikely to confer any benefits on english spelng at al, in fact it is mor likely to make an apalng situation worse; and with *incomunicado* th *Style Guides* even ofends against its own admrbl criterion of consistncy.

This hole situation testifys to th practicl caos produced by th systemic caos of english spelng. Th endless nuisnce sufrd by riters, proof-readrs, editrs, publishrs, etc, etc, that results from th lak of a rule to determn, for instnce, wethr nouns endng in -O shud ad -S or ££ to form ther plurals, shos them to be as much victms of th presnt spelng as ar lernrs worldwide. That ot to motivate al those involvd to seek a solution, but a solution requires first, an undrstandng of th problm (ie, neglect of th alfabetic principl), and secnd, co-ordnation of responses.

In his *'Times' Style Guide* Simon Jenkins shos som insyt into th potential for chanje wen he says: "'Remember, the English language should be allowed to evolve, under pressure of common usage, in the direction of simplicity.'" Wat our analysis has demnstrated is that ther is no syn today that th "'pressure of common usage'" has any significnt efect. Th lesn from othr languajs, indeed, strongly sujests that a good riting systm can only be created by co-ordnated planng.

4.3 Futur steps

Wat steps can be envisajd to take matrs forwrd? Regardng prelimnry reserch, a survey of al english stylgides curently in use that contain spelng recmendations shud be undrtaken (eg, se 'Chicago' for the USA, Pam Peters, and 'Australian Style Council' in th Refrnces belo), for these ar an expression of practicl need of professionl riters and print-producers and hence perhaps a pointr to prioritis for reform wich they themselvs myt be most inclined to embrace. This reserch shud be suportd by a survey of spelng-variants listd in dictionris. A useful methodolojy for this was developd by Donald Emery (1976) for a survey limitd to americn dictionris, and it shud be extendd now to australian, british, canadian and othr dictionris, including bilingual dictionris wich help disemnate english spelng patrns to th non-english-speakng world. Th infrmation these surveys cud provide wud then valubly complmnt al th evidnce from education and sycolojy to bild up a ful pictur of th efects of todays spelng of th premir languaj of world comunication.

Beyond reserch to establish th ful details of th presnt situation, steps ar needd to bring togethr al th intrestd partis, th professionl users, th teachrs and lernrs, and th forml recordrs of english spelng, to unite them in ther (as yet larjly unaknolejd) comn cause: th improvemnt of th English spelng systm. It is beyond th scope of this articl to speculate on how such an aliance myt be bilt, but since Simon Jenkins *Style Guide* provides 159 pajes of suport for his forthryt pronouncemnt that "'English spelling is still awful'", we myt look to him for a first ansr. A minml step myt be for his stylgide to be revised to ensure gretr consistncy and improved implmntation of th alfabetic

principl. A maxml step myt be for th Murdoch orgnization to espouse th cause of th worldwide modrnization of english spelng.

Footnotes

[1] Scragg, Donald G (1974) *A history of English spelling*, Manchester University Press.

[2] as asertd by Baroness Hooper in the House of Lords on 4 march 1987 — se ***JSSS* 87/2**, Item 3.

[3] Hutton, Will (1995) *The State We're In*, London: Jonathan Cape, has 'bale out' on p134 and 'bail out' on p135.

[4] Jenkins, Simon (1995) 'The triumph of English' in *The Times*, 25 febry.

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[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p20 in printed version]

6. The Lower Case Reform in Danish
edited by Chris Upward

We here translate and summarize a short report sent by SSS's new friends in Switzerland, the BVR (*Bund für vereinfachte rechtschreibung* 'Federation for Simplified Spelling'). The BVR campaigns particularly for German nouns to be decapitalized, and it therefore has a particular interest in the earlier decapitalization of Danish.

Until 1948 the Danish language was accustomed to give all its nouns a capital letter, as happens to this day in German and as was common in the 18th century in English. But in 1948 the then Minister of Education in Denmark, Hartvig Frisch, ensured that from then on children in school would be taught to write nouns with small letters, as is done in all other European languages except German. The change had been in the air for decades before its actual introduction. A few relics of the old system are still encountered today — a handful of firms who perisist in the old ways, and citizens of the older generation who acquired their literacy skills before the reform; but these cases do not cause the slightest concern. In 1986 a new Danish spelling dictionary appeared, clarifying the surviving uses for capital letters, for instance in proper nouns and titles. Thus if one word in a name is capitalized, then so should be all other words in the name apart from articles, so giving the name of the king *Christian the Fourth* (not *The Fourth* or *the fourth*); but by contrast the title of a book will have only its first word capitalized, eg, *Gone with the wind*, and not *Gone with the Wind* or even *Gone With The Wind*, as in English. The names of historical events are optionally capitalized, eg, either the *French Revolution* or the *french revolution*.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p21in printed version]
[Harry Cookson: see **Newsletters**]

7. Spelling reform in Portuguese: what can we learn?
Harry Cookson

Harry Cookson is a retired accountant living in Portugal. Before going to Portugal in 1969 he had been a school manager and county secretary for the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (C.A.S.E.) in Britain, but had not been interested in spelling reform. His experience with literacy in Portugal, however, opened his eyes.

Agitation to reform Portuguese spelling began at the end of the last century. The largest Portuguese-speaking country, Brazil, reformed its spelling in 1912. Portugal reformed its spelling in 1915, but unfortunately the two reforms did not agree. The difference arose because Portuguese, like other languages, is gradually changing in pronunciation. Over the past hundred years or so the main change has been the dropping of letters P and C in certain positions. However, the sound-dropping has not gone on at the same rate for every person and in every place. The dropping was proceeding much faster in Brazil and is now complete for practical purposes. Over the years attempts have been made to reconcile the differences arising from those first reforms, but without success.

For some centuries the Lisbon Academy of Sciences has had referee powers and governmental representation over spelling in Portugal. About 8 years ago the Academy met its opposite number in Brazil and concluded a secret agreement, basing reform on Brazilian pronunciation.

An employee of the Academy leaked the secret agreement to the newspapers. The Portuguese newspapers exploded into determined opposition to the reform. "Why were we not consulted?" howled the editors. "Are we not the people most concerned?"

The Portuguese people generally 'pooh-pooh' the occasional changes in the spelling of their language and stick to the spelling to which they are accustomed. This usually makes little difference because the changes are normally small, but this time they blew up in anger. The agreement made spelling slightly more difficult for the Portuguese because it did not correspond to their pronunciation. One word in its reformed state became the centre of their protests. This word was *facto* 'fact' which dropped the C, leaving *fato*, and the Portuguese screamed in protest because in Portugal *fato* means a suit of clothes. This did 2e they use a different word, *terno*.

The result was that in 1992 the Portuguese government passed a law cancelling the whole agreement and finally agreeing to disagree with the Brazilian spelling of Portuguese.

Here is an important lesson for English: its reform must be properly co-ordinated between all the countries where it is used. To a certain extent, separation has already occurred, as between Webster's dictionary and other US spellings and occasional British variants, but these are not numerous and cause few problems. The American form *center* agrees with *enter*, where the British use the French form *centre*. In some cases American pronunciation corresponds better to the spelling, as when Americans rhyme *ration* with *nation*, or give *schedule* the same pronunciation with initial SK as in *scheme, school*, but here Britain is increasingly adopting the American pronunciation and so improving spelling regularity. The greatest difference between most British and Americans in pronunciation is the letter R, which is typically silent in British pronunciation except before vowels; but British reformers recognize the situation and therefore keep R in their reform proposals, as pronounced by Americans, Canadians, Irish and Scots. In such ways English can overcome the problem that undermined the unity of Portuguese and Brazilian spelling.

A question that occupies spelling reformers in whatever country is how to put the first reform into practice. Unfortunately Portuguese reform gives little guidance here. Portugal introduced reform ten years before compulsory state education became law. This meant that only those few people who had been to fee-paying schools were affected by the reform, so there were hardly any protests. There was no anti-reform feeling as there is in Britain today.

Anybody learning Portuguese learns about spelling reform. I noticed how very quickly Portuguese children learn to read and write compared to English-speaking children. This made me interested in spelling reform. One day I saw in a Portuguese Second Year School Reader (National Curriculum) a lesson explaining the usefulness of newspapers which said (translated): "Today your teacher wi1l pass round a newspaper and ask you to read from it." — this in the second year at school a week or two after Easter. I asked one pupil if a1l the children in the class had read the newspaper. Answer: "Of course." I then asked, "Did you understand it?" I got the scornful reply, "No — it was about politics and such." Children will not understand all they see in a newspaper, but if they can read a newspaper they can read any of their textbooks on whatever subject. According to European Community statements, British children are behind continental European children in reading.

The Department of Education and Employment hopes to improve reading through the National Curriculum. Will they ask British children to read a newspaper in their second school year? I doubt it.

Something else is required and that something else is spelling reform.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 pp22–24,36 in printed version]

8. Spelling Reform in German
edited by Chris Upward

JSSS has over the past decade regularly reported on the progress of proposals for spelling reform in German (see under *German* in **Journal Topics**). We receive documentation from the Institut für deutsche Sprache (IdS) in Mannheim, which is the co-ordinating centre of the reform. We now present a selective translation-cum-summary-cum-discussion of the July 1996 special edition of the IdS *Sprachreport* (produced by Dr Klaus Heller), which bears the simple title 'Rechtschreibreform' ('Spelling Reform') and, of course, itself uses the new spellings.

Rechtschreibreform

On 1 July 1996, in Vienna, political representatives of the German-speaking countries finally issued a joint statement on the 're-regulation' (Neuregelung) of German spelling, so concluding long years of preparation and negotiation. The outcome is a reform that updates and simplifies written German in the interests of both writers and readers. However, to minimize disruption to the traditional appearance of the language it has also had to accept numerous compromises. For the future, the Mannheim Institut für deutsche Sprache is to host a permanent Interstate Commission whose task will be to oversee and co-ordinate the further development of spelling in the German-speaking countries.

The Context

The function of orthography

Both spoken and written language require rules to ensure smooth communication. It is in everyone's interest that they be observed. The rules for writing are stricter than those for speech, because writing has a more permanent function, and are therefore especially important. As a result, people are sometimes wrongly judged more by the accuracy of their spelling than by the logic or style of what they write.

Why reform German spelling?

The previous official spelling system dates from 1901–1902, and was designed to provide a standard for teaching in German-speaking schools everywhere. Simplicity was not its primary aim, and numerous complications have arisen since. Further reforms to make the orthography simpler and more systematic in keeping with today's needs were long overdue.

'Official' spelling

The new spelling will, like the old, be obligatory for schools and public bodies. It will also be recommended for all those, such as printers, publishers and editors, who wish to use generally accepted forms, as well as for private use.

What principles underlie the reform?

The main aim of the reform is to simplify by removing exceptions. The rules thereby become more widely applicable and more systematic, and the orthography easier to learn and use. At the same time, the general appearance of the written language will be unaffected, so ensuring that old texts are still readable.

How was the reform planned?
The proposals are the product of years of scholarly collaboration between working parties in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and were first published in book form in 1992. After an extended period of consultation and sometimes vociferous public debate, revisions were introduced to take account of reactions from government, the publishing industry, and the general public.

The official documentation
This contains the revised rules and some 12,000 examples of all the root forms of standard modern everyday German, including all the new spellings.

The changeover
Schools may begin teaching the new spellings from the school year 1996–97, and are required to do so from 1998. The old spellings will be considered 'out-of-date', but not stigmatized as 'wrong' until 2005.

Costs
No particular costs are foreseen. Only literacy textbooks will need to be specially reprinted. Other books will be respelt as old stocks are exhausted. The same applies to official forms.

The future
The new spellings should be considered as a long-term standard, as frequent change causes uncertainty. Nevertheless, some amendments will undoubtedly be needed to take account of changing circumstances, or to delete obsolete forms (such as alternative spellings) from the official wordlist. But whereas in the past such changes have often been made without proper co-ordination, in future they will be determined by the Interstate Commission on Orthography, to be based in Mannheim at the Institut für deutsche Sprache.

The reform at a glance
1 Sound-symbol correspondences
Switching ä-e
Certain roots spelt with Ä or E hitherto had derivatives spelt anomalously with homophonous E or Ä. So the former *verbleuen* 'to beat black and blue' will now be spelt *verbläuen*, as from *blau* 'blue'. In other cases alternatives will be allowed, thus *aufwendig* 'expensive', hitherto considered to derive from *aufwenden* 'provide finance', will now also be allowed as *aufwändig*, as derived from *Aufwand* 'expenditure'.

Consonant doubling after short vowels
This will occur where related words already show doubling. Thus, *numerieren* 'to number' becomes *nummerieren* to align with *eine Nummer* 'a number'.

Regularizing ss
In German/Austrian (but not Swiss) usage, Ss was written *ß* except between vowels when the preceding vowel was short. This caused variation of roots: thus *küssen* 'to kiss' with Ss became

ein Kuß 'a kiss', *er küßt* 'he kisses' with *ß*. Now Ss will never be written *ß* after short vowels, and Ss will persist through *küssen/Kuss/küsst*. The very common word *daß* 'that' becomes *dass*. After long vowels, *ß* remains, thereby reliably showing the length of the preceding vowel.

Consonants tripled in compounds
Hitherto, when a word ending in a double consonant was prefixed to a word beginning with the same letter, the three consonants were often (but not always) reduced to two; thus *Schiff* + *Fahrt* 'ship + voyage' combined as *Schiffahrt* 'shipping' (yet *Schifffracht* 'ship freight' always had Fff). This reduction now no longer occurs, and *Schifffahrt* in future has Fff.. Applied with the ß>Ss regularization, this will turn *Fluß* + *Sand* 'river sand' from *Flußsand* to *Flusssand*.

Simplified consonants doubled
Similarly, where in compounds identical consecutive consonants were simplified, as in *Roheit* 'rawness' from *roh* + *heit*, they will now stay doubled, giving *Rohheit*. The same principle will allow *selbst* 'self' + *ständig* 'standing', whose present form *selbständig* 'autonomous' is often misspelt with Stst, alternatively so to be written: *selbstständig*.

Miscellaneous regularizations
Since *rauh* 'rough' and *Känguruh* 'kangaroo' rhyme with *blau, Gnu* without H, the forms *rau, Känguru* will be standard in future. Adjectives ending in -Tiell may be optionally aligned with related nouns ending in -Z; thus *differentiell* may align with *Differenz* to give *differenziell*, and likewise *substantiell* may be written with Z as *substanziell*, like *Substanz*.

Foreign loanwords
Foreign loans pose a dilemma: should they adapt to German spelling rules or not? In practice, most recent loanwords keep their original foreign spellings in German, only some common ones adapting.

Where patterns of adaptation already operate, they may now be extended. Thus F may already replace Ph in *Fotografie,* so justifying *Geografie, Orthografie* by analogy; but there is no such model for changing *Philosophie*. Other Greco-Latin consonant digraphs with silent H, such as Rh, Th (pronounced /t/ in German), may similarly be reduced to R, T in selected cases, thus *Katarrh* will be allowed as *Katarr* and *Panther* as *Panter*. Silent H may disappear elsewhere too: *Joghurt, Spaghetti* may become *Jogurt, Spagetti*.

French loanwords may also be affected, so *façade, militaire* (long respelt *Fassade, Militär*) justify germanizing *Necessaire* as *Nessessär*. French *comité* 'committee' and *liqueur* have long been written *Komitee, Likör*, so *Kommuniqué* (already respelt with initial K) will be allowed as *Kommunikee*.

The list given in the *Sprachreport* includes one English loanword: *Ketchup* germanized as *Ketschup*.

2 Metaorthographical features
Word division creates uncertainty in many languages. German generally dislikes hyphens, preferring (sometimes multiple) solid compounds. However, anomalies arose over the years, as when *Auto fahren* 'to drive a car' contrasted with the compound *radfahren* 'to ride a bicycle'. The

latter will now be written *Rad fahren*. Conversely, to remove the present discrepancy between divided *irgend etwas* 'something or other' and solid *irgendwann* 'some time or other', the compound *irgendetwas* becomes the norm. Aversion to hyphens will also affect English loanwords: *Hair-Stylist, Job-sharing, Midlife-Crisis, Sex-Appeal, Shopping-center* will in future need no hyphen — and the second element will be decapitalized (*Sexappeal,* etc).

German nouns are traditionally written with capital letters, but the difficulty of deciding which words are nouns leads to error and inconsistency. Many past reform proposals therefore demanded an end to capitalization. Today's reformers encountered insuperable political opposition to such a radical change to the appearance of written German. Nevertheless, some anomalies have been resolved. The synonymous expressions *in bezug auf/mit Bezug auf* 'with regard to' will both capitalize *Bezug*, and former *auf deutsch* 'in German' becomes *auf Deutsch*.

Punctuation, particularly the use of commas, has long been subject to strict rules, which depend very often on a quite subtle analysis of sentence structures. These rules will now be somewhat relaxed, especially before the words *und* 'and', *oder* 'or', where commas are to be left to the writer's discretion.

Strict, sometimes arbitrary rules have traditionally governed the splitting of words at line-ends. Thus the string St was debarred from splitting-but not Sk or Sp; thus *Weste* 'waistcoat' could only be split as *We-ste*, not as *Wes-te*. Another peculiarity was that, if Ck was split, it became K-K, with *Zucker* 'sugar' becoming *Zuk-ker*. By contrast foreign loanwords could be subject to different splitting rules. The reform allows general simplification on all such points.

Discussion

German-English comparisons

It is noteworthy that German should have wished to reform its spelling, when it already had rules which. enabled learners and users to spell the spoken word and pronounce the written word correctly most of the time. The superiority even of unreformed German over English in this regard was recently highlighted by Wimmer & Goswami [1], who showed how much less well English primary school children read than their German counterparts, and by Upward [2] who showed how much more prone British university students were to misspelling English than German. Nonetheless, some of the rules for spelling German were needlessly complex and even inconsistent, and the overriding aim of the present reform is to improve the user-friendliness of the writing system.

Helping learners and users

Non-native-speaking learners of German as well as German learners themselves (not to mention their teachers) will at once recognize and welcome some of the main targets for regularization. The old rules for distinguishing Ss/ß, for capitalization, and for placing the comma were all notoriously error-prone. From now on Ss will always appear after a short vowel and ß after a long vowel; some perplexing anomalies of capitalization will be resolved; and the use of the comma will be left far more to the writer's discretion, rather as in English. In all these cases the chief criterion for reform has been to assist learners and users generally in exercising their literacy skills.

New spellings
Whether all the respelt forms will prove helpful is less clear. Some dozen words change E to Ä as in *verbleuen* > *verbläuen*), much as if *speak/speech* were to be aligned in English as *speak/speach* or *speek/speech*. But whereas *speak/speech* are high frequency words in English, the German examples are less common (indeed the common *Eltern* 'parents' from *älter* 'older' is excluded from this change for that very reason), and one reaction to such respellings has been "Why bother?" The IdS documentation makes no reference to error-analysis, and one wonders how far these changes may be motivated more by a desire to tidy up marginal discrepancies than to resolve a real problem of usage. Might not such changes actually aggravate the (for German) rare ambiguity of sound values between E and Ä? Is it not as though in English one had to spell the plural of *man* as *män* (cf German *Mann/Männer*) instead of aligning it phonetically with its rhyme *ten*? Might spellings with E be in any sense 'easier' than with Ä? It would be interesting to have some statistics on the use of E versus Ä in German.

Other reformed spellings, by contrast, remove obvious anomalies of sound-symbol correspondence, as when the redundant final H is cut from *rauh, Känguruh*. Of particular relevance to English is the respelling of T pronounced /ts/ by analogy with cognate words using unambiguous Z. Thus the final Z of the noun *Substanz* (and others like it) may replace the present T in the adjective *substantiell*, giving *substanziell*. English has a parallel anomaly between *substance/substantial*, as highlighted by comparison with *finance/financial, face/facial, space/spacious* (despite *spatial*), and would gain by substituting C for T to give *substancial, spacial* (cf *special*), etc. German might in fact replace T by Z in some other contexts too, thus **Posizion* for *Position*; but there are currently no examples of -Zion (Italian *posizione* is too foreign) to provide a model. (English would have the model of *suspicion* — beside Spanish *posición* — to justify reviving 16th century *posicion*). It is in general a feature of this reform of German that truly innovative spellings are eschewed.

Alternative spellings
While many of the new spellings will be mandatory, others are offered as permissible alternatives, so creating a kind of uncertainty familiar in English (eg, we have a choice between *yoghourt, yoghurt, yogurt*), but largely absent from German. Thus *substantiell* will still be allowed beside the new *substanziell*. Other alternatives are seen in *Geografie/Geographie, Spagetti/Spaghetti, Ketschup/Ketchup, Katarr/Katarrh, Panter/Panther, Portmonee/Portemonnaie* 'purse'. The IdS documentation does not state whether these alternatives represent compromises with opponents of reform and/or whether they are intended as a temporary expedient; nor is it apparent whether school textbooks are recommended to choose one or other of the alternatives in preference.

Economy
The criterion of economy is not mentioned in the documentation. It is noticeable that a good number of the new spellings save letters, as when GH, PH, RH, QU are reduced to just G, F, R. K, the French ending -AIRE is shortened to -ÄR, and, most strikingly, the French spelling *Portemonnaie* loses three letters to become *Portmonee*. Sometimes no savings arise (as when Ä or Z replace E or T), but in a majority of examples listed the new spelling involves extra letters (eg, SS for ß or C, or single consonants doubled and doubled consonants tripled), or extra spaces, or hyphens, or capitalization. Such lengthening not merely reduces the immediate transparency of word-structures, but uses more paper and takes more time to compose.

Consonant-doubling for shortness or stress?
In both English and German doubled consonants often follow a short vowel that is also stressed. Thus in English the doubled L in *holly* serves to distinguishthe preceding short O from the long O of *holy*, and in German the FF distinguishes the short O of *hoffe* 'hope' from the long O of *Hofe* 'court'. In English these doubled consonants may, especially before suffixes, also reflect a preceding stressed vowel; thus the stressed I in *omitted* before TT contrasts with the unstressed I before single T in *vomited*, though both are short. Similarly in German, the LL of *formell* 'formal' with second syllable stress, contrasts with *Formel* 'formula' with first syllable stress. (English of course is quite inconsistent in both these uses of doubled consonants — compare vowel length in *holiday* with *holly/holy* and the stress pattern of *compelled* with British *travelled*.)

Some of the German reforms bring the above functions happily together: thus former *Karamel* (culinary term) carries third syllable stress like its cognate *Karamelle* (the sweet/candy), and respelling as *Karamell* therefore satisfies all criteria (except that of economy). In other cases, the new spelling does not match the stress pattern so easily; thus former *numerieren* 'to number' and *plazieren* 'to place' are respelt with MM, TZ to match their cognates *Nummer, Platz*, although -IER- carries the main stress in both verbs. Other cases look even less comfortable: when *Paket* (already Germanized from French *paquet*) is respelt *Packet* by analogy with *Pack*, English readers will find the second-syllable stress contrasts confusingly with the first syllable stress in English *packet*. Most awkward, one might think, is the respelling of *Zigarette, Zigarillo* (third syllable stress) with RR (*Zigarrette*, etc) to match *Zigarre* 'cigar' (2nd syllable stress). Here the criteria seem stacked against the change: RR is less economical, conflicts with the stress pattern, and misaligns German with English, French and Italian (though Spanish has RR in *Cigarrillo*, to show the strong trill). One is reminded of Ed Rondthaler's wise dictum that a word should be spelt as it is itself pronounced, not as cognate words are pronounced. *Zigarrette* with RR does not at first sight look like an improvement.

Lessons for English
Though the debates that preceded the reform appeared to last for ever, and public consultation led to some dilution, now that agreement has been reached, implementation is proceeding briskly. New dictionaries have appeared, parents are hastening to buy new schoolbooks for their children, bookshops are distributing information sheets, and a belated objection from traditionalists attracted ridicule. Unlike the half-hearted attempt to reform French spelling in 1990, the German reform is becoming an inescapable reality. This demonstration that reform can be efficiently implemented may be the chief lesson for English.

Yet behind the reform lies a long-term perspective. It is recognized that not every spelling problem in German has been solved, and there are voices urging further reform, such as the Swiss BVR **[3]** calling for the decapitalization of nouns, and, brilliant but less serious, the writer Zé do Rock **[4]**, on whom we hope to report in a future *JSSS*. Most importantly, machinery to advance the cause of spelling modernization more smoothly in future has been set up in Mannheim in the form of an international Commission for Spelling Questions. English should be following its work closely.

Footnotes
[1] Wimmer, H. & Goswami, U. (1994) The influence of orthographic consistency on reading development: word recognition in English and German children. *Cognition*, 51, pp91–103.
[2] Upward, C. (1992) Is traditionl english spelng mor dificlt than jermn? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 15(2), pp82–94.
[3] *Bund für vereinfachte rechtschreibung* 'Federation for Simplified Spelling', with which the SSS has contact.
[4] do Rock, Z. (1995) *fom winde ferfeelt* Berlin: Edition diá.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 pp25,26 in printed version]

9. The Dutch IJ

Harry Cohen

Born and educated in Holland, Harry Cohen worked as a statistician for the United Nations in Geneva 1958–1962, and from then until his retirement in 1981 as a translator for the European Commission in Brussels. He has written widely on economic matters, but also on language and particularly spelling for Dutch papers and for the American journal *Verbatim*. He reported on the reform of Dutch spelling in ***JSSS* 1995/2**, J19 Item 7.

The English alphabet consists of twenty-six letters. Some European languages, such as Portuguese, manage with less; others, like Danish, need a few more. What about Dutch? Well, ask any native Dutch speaker, be it a schoolchild or a leading lexicographer, and they will invariably assert that their alphabet is identical to the English one. Then ask if there is such a thing as a letter IJ, and they will agree. So how many letters do the Dutch in fact use: twenty-six or twenty-seven?

How things came about

In Middle Dutch (12th–15th centuries) the short and long varieties of vowels in closed syllables were rendered in writing by single and double symbols respectively. In accordance with this system, the short sound [ɪ], as in *sit*, was represented by the letter I, and the long sound [i:], as in *see*, by II. This representation was satisfactory until — during the 16th and 17th century — printers added two new symbols to the alphabet: J, formed by giving the Roman I a descender (or "tail"), and U, originally a graphic variant of the Roman V. As lower-case ii was easily confused with lower-case U, writers and printers took to dotting their Is and replacing the second one of a pair with a J. This resulted in IJ.

At the same time as this graphic innovation, a phonemic change took place. The sound [i:] went through a vowel shift, and gradually turned into the diphthong [ɛi] (close to English [ai], as in *my*). These simultaneous developments led to a chaotic situation, further aggravated by frequent confusion of IJ and Y. Absence of any ruling on the subject allowed authors and printers to go their own way until well into the 19th century. Stabilization was eventually achieved in the 1860s when the linguists De Vries and Te Winkel published a spelling system which appealed to the public at large, and was eventually laid down by law. Subsequent spelling reforms have left the notations for [ɛi] unchanged.

How things stand now

Modern Dutch has three graphic representations for the sound [ɛi]:
(1) IJ as in *rijm* 'rhyme', *fijn* 'fine', *hij* 'he', *zij* 'she', *mij* 'me'.
(2) EI as in *trein* 'train', *meid* 'maid', *hei* 'heather', *zei* 'said', *mei* 'May'.
(3) Y as in *de onbekende y* 'the unknown Y', *y-as* 'y-axis', *Y-chromosoom*, the chemical symbol *Y* for yttrium, etc.

This is not to say that IJ is consistently pronounced [ɛi]. The most frequent exception is the suffix *-lijk*, as in *vriendelijk* 'friendly', where the vowel is reduced to a schwa. (Several spelling reformers have suggested **vriendelik* or **vriendeluk* but have had no success.) Other examples are *bijzonder* 'special' and *dikwijls* 'often' where the IJ likewise appears in an unstressed syllable.

The digraph EI, whose historical background is altogether different, will not be dealt with here. Suffice it to say that, thanks to the existence of two notations for the sound [ɛi], Dutch learners

have to find their way through a maze of homophones (compare the last three examples given at (1) and (2) above).

The y is only pronounced [ɛi] in scientific expressions, as shown under (3), and when called by its name (for instance, by children reciting the alphabet). Apart from these instances, it only occurs in loan words and foreign words, and is pronounced accordingly. Examples: Y sounds as [j] in *yoghurt*, as [ɪ] in *lynchen*, 'to lynch', as [i:] in *jury*, as [ai] in *byte*.

Note: Afrikaans has opted for Y instead of IJ. As a result, Y appears here in Germanic words, whereas the average Dutch speaker intuitively regards this letter as an 'alien' element. (Similar feelings exist about C, Q and X.)

Everyday problems

Do the Dutch treat their IJ as two separate letters or rather as a composite symbol that somehow has no place in the alphabet? The question may seem academic, but becomes of practical relevance if you don't know whether ij should occupy one or two squares in your Dutch crossword puzzle. (The answer is: one. Dutch Scrabble sets accordingly include a separate IJ tile.) Here are a few observations which suggest preference for one or the other view.

In favour of the separate-letters view

(a) There is no IJ in the Dutch alphabet.

(b) In Dutch dictionaries entries with initial IJ are listed as if the first letter were an I and the second a J. Thus you will find the entries *ignoreren* 'to ignore', *ijdel* 'vain', *ijzer* 'iron', *ik* 'I' in this order. Dutch atlases use the same system in their indexes. The convention also applies, of course, to non-initial IJs.

In favour of the composite-symbol view

(c) In Dutch telephone directories, names with initial IJ and initial Y are merged, and listed between X and Z. In train timetables the list of place-names is arranged in the same way, but in other reference books the entries may appear in the order either X-IJ-Y-Z or X-Y-IJ-Z. Still other variants exist. One well-known encyclopaedia has tried out four different systems in four successive editions.

(d) The combination IJ has its own name. It is called *ij* '[ɛi]' or, more specifically, *lange ij* 'long [ɛi]', or maybe we should translate it as 'tall [ɛi]' since the name refers not to any phonetic quality but to the elongated shape of the symbol, which distinguishes it from EI (sometimes called *korte ei* 'short [ɛi]') and from Y. The latter is called *Griekse y* 'Greek [ɛi]' or *i-grec* or, by children, *ij zonder puntjes* 'dotless [ɛi]'.

(e) Finally, there are a number of spelling and printing conventions. First, *ij* is capitalized as *IJ*, not as *Ij* (although there is some vacillation in Flanders). Second, when a word is letterspaced, no blank is inserted between i and j. So *stijl* 'style' becomes *s t ij l*, whereas *steil* 'steep' becomes *s t e i l*. Third, in end-of-line divisions, IJ is always left intact. And fourth, in compound words where a final I is followed by an initial J, the two letters are separated by a hyphen to prevent misreading. (Compounds are normally written solid in Dutch.) Examples: *mini-jurk* 'minidress', *gummi-jas* 'rubber coat'.

Well then, are we dealing with a letter, a digraph, a ligature, or just a homeless symbol? We don't know. All attempts to free Dutch IJ from its orthographic limbo have failed so far.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p26 in printed version]
[Roger Mitton: see **Journal 20**, **Newsletter N9**]. Frank Knowles: see **Journals**]

10. R. Mitton English spelling and the computer, Longman, 1996. Frank Knowles reviews

This volume is a very welcome addition to Longman's 'Studies in Language and Linguistics' series, perhaps especially so as it deals with what many people would — wrongly — assume to be the by-ways rather than the highways of the linguistic sciences. The fact that this book brings together two of the 'pet hates', it would seem, of a large number of people — that is, spelling and computers — makes Mitton's engagement with his subject all the more alluring.

It is natural that people who write in English should look to computers to assist them in their task. 'Assist', however, is often a euphemism for opt-out on the part of writers who place their entire faith and trust in the spell-checker attached to their word-processing package.

English spelling is wayward and its non-systematic 'system' is difficult to acquire systematically. The corollary of this is that, in spite rather than because of schooling, most native speakers of English acquire their (less then perfect) control over English spelling as a result of unrelenting exposure to it, regularities and vagaries alike. This type of 'learning' is not analytical, it is holistic, relying on visual patterns and shapes, disparately stored and rendered subliminal. The act of spelling then becomes an act and, occasionally, a test of memory. If this procedure fails, people then normally search first for analogies and only later try, if need be, to apply 'rules', bearing in mind their concomitant exceptions. Questions about associated pronunciations often verge on complete irrelevance.

If the above is granted, then it can be seen that the advent of computer assistance with spelling problem might somehow release the users of such software from any careful concern about accuracy. The burden can be 'safely' passed across to the machine — such would appear to be the subliminal impulse or the supraliminal decision of exceedingly large numbers of people. After all, computers can store very large amounts of information and retrieve arbitrary items of it almost instantaneously, can't they?

Mitton provides an erudite and sure guide to this fascinating territory. His natural starting point is 'how did we collectively arrive at the current position?'. What, too, has the body of expert opinion to contribute to the continual expression of gripes about English spelling?

The approach adopted by Mitton in his attempt to clarify issues and to indicate useful possibilities and procedures is, thankfully, empirical. The basic starting point is: what are the actual spelling errors at issue, how often do they occur, and how can they be categorized? This account provides the preface for a more wide-ranging discussion of the differentials between spelling errors, slips and typos. This, in its turn, opens the door to an extensive and expert consideration of computerized spelling checkers and correctors. The material offered here is — in this reviewer's opinion — of very high quality and interest. This is because of the detailed information provided, always of intrinsic linguistic interest, about the sort of strategies — and their associated algorithms — which have been embedded in various word-processing software packages. Of particular interest — yet in quite sharp contrast to the strictly 'symbol-processing' aspects of spelling identification-cum-correction software — is the account of the methods used to constrain the bounds of potentially extensive and time-consuming searches for potential answers to spelling problems identified. The utility value of contextual and other information is also carefully considered from a more strictly (text-)linguistic point of view, corroborated by the highly valuable operational information derived from large-scale statistical analysis of textual corpora.

The book concludes by describing an experiment involving a comparison of several spelling checking and correction software packages. The purpose of this is, first, to provide a basis for accurate quality assessment of such software tools, and second, to lay the foundations for the design and implementation of more sophisticated software of this type. Mitton's book is an excellent account of the way algorithm-based thinking and engineering can be applied to the wayward English language in the area of spelling. He deserves much congratulation, as well as the wide dissemination of his scholarly, thought-provoking and timely book.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society 21 1997/1 pp27–29 in printed version]

11. Lobbying Literacy Policy Makers

In 1996 the Simplified Spelling Society conducted the following correspondence with educationists likely to influence British literacy policy in future years.

To Michael Barber
Professor Michael Barber
Literacy Task Force
Deans' Office, Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
18 June 1996

Dear Professor Barber

The Simplified Spelling Society warmly welcomes the establishment of the Literacy Task Force, chaired by yourself, and in particular the call (*TES*, 7 June 1996, p160) for a strategic view of literacy problems. That is what our Society has always offered in the nearly 90 years of its existence.

We understand why you call for concise practical approaches, which we can also suggest (see footnote*), but without a strategic view, practical approaches risk adding to present confusion. Helpful though the many programmes like 'Reading Recovery' and now the 'Literacy Centres' and 'First Steps' may be, they are no more than palliatives, which for lack of a strategic view ultimately disappoint the hopes they raise.

We attach great importance to the name *Literacy* Task Force. We hope it means that literacy will be recognized as an interacting complex of skills based on a single writing system. To highlight *reading*, as is commonly done, is rather like insisting on *subtraction* as the key arithmetical skill. Literacy has two sides, reading *and* writing, which should reinforce each other in the learning process. By contrast, *spelling* (often wrongly quoted as a third literacy skill) is an ambiguous term, for which many languages have no exact equivalent. The role of spelling is widely misunderstood in the English-speaking world today.

Phonics is part of the strategic view, as it goes to the heart of how alphabetic literacy works, and we are encouraged that Gillian Shephard and David Blunkett are committed to it. However, to persuade people of the need for phonics, it must be presented it in its full strategic context. Phonics is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the highest literacy standards.

The enclosed sheet, *Six Axioms on English Spelling*, provides what we consider to be the essential strategic view. These axioms represent the necessary historical and psychological context for understanding the problem of literacy in English today.

We also enclose a copy of the *Cut Spelling Handbook*, which analyses the problem in depth. Though the particular solution it offers may be too radical for short-term consideration, it maps a path whose initial steps could be relatively uncontroversial, if prepared by a campaign of public education. Paradoxically, it is the most highly educated, and most influential, who most need educating. In our experience, the mass of people who have difficulty with literacy often implicitly understand the key problem* of written English today.

If the Literacy Task Force develops a truly strategic view, it could not only lead English-speaking countries toward higher literacy standards, but vastly enhance world access to English as a medium of global communication. The experience of our membership around the world suggests that non-native speakers literate in other languages often understand the literacy problems of English better than native speakers do, and need less persuading of the need for change.

These issues beg many questions, both practical and theoretical, which we urge the Literacy Task Force to pursue. The Simplified Spelling Society, with its wide-ranging expertise, will be glad to help in any way it can.

Yours sincerely
For the Committee of the Simplified Spelling Society

* The problem is epitomized by two words, though it pervades the whole language. The Basic Skills Agency found that 2/3 of people misspell *accommodation*, and well over 1/3 misspell *receive*. Such misspellings show people intuitively trying to apply phonic principles, but being frustrated by archaic spelling conventions. French *recevoir* and Spanish *acomodación* pose few difficulties, and it is absurd that English did not long ago simplify its own forms along the same lines. One short-term measure (from countless possibilities) which the Literacy Task Force might consider would be to recommend British children are in future taught *acomodation* and *receve*. But without a strategic view, isolated changes of that kind would appear merely unmotivated drops in the ocean.

Reply 24 June 1996
Thank you very much for your helpful letter in response to my *TES* Last Word article about the Literacy Task Force. The views you express are extremely interesting and I shall ensure that they are drawn to the attention of my colleagues when the Literacy Task Force meets.

If we are to succeed in transforming standards of literacy over the years ahead, a substantial constructive input from members of the profession will be essential.

Best wishes and thanks again.
Yours sincerely
Professor Michael Barber
Dean of New Initiatives

Subsequent correspondence with Professor Barber will appear in JSSS 97/2.

To David Reynolds
Professor David Reynolds
Department of Education
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
St Thomas Street
Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 7RU
23 September 1996

Dear Professor Reynolds
We welcome the publication of *Worlds Apart* as a valuable contribution to our understanding of disparities in educational standards between countries.

We are now writing to stress the importance of an additional (and, regrettably, further complicating) dimension to such comparative studies. Partly no doubt because of its concentration on standards in mathematics and science, *Worlds Apart* alludes to this dimension only peripherally (p11, the IEA study of written composition in different languages).

We would first comment briefly on the role of language in the context of mathematics and science. The mainly Greek-derived terminology of these subjects in English may well represent a barrier to learners which does not occur in some other languages. For instance, while terms like *polygon, nitrogen* are abstruse to English learners, their German equivalents (*Vieleck* = many corner/angle, *Stickstoff* = suffocating stuff) are transparent to learners in that language. Furthermore, the spelling of Greek-derived words in English is uniquely confusing (contrast English *psychology*, Spanish *sicología*). It may be worth considering how abstruse or transparent

the basic terminology of various subjects is in the languages of countries being compared, and whether standards may be thereby affected.

The main focus of our Society is the spelling of English, but we have for over twenty years taken an interest in the effect of different writing systems on literacy standards. The evidence suggests that the present spelling of English is a significant obstacle to high standards of literacy, compared with most other alphabetic writing systems. High standards of literacy are of course prerequisite for high standards in nearly every subject. The rather low rank achieved by many English-speaking countries (not just England) in various of the *Worlds Apart* tables is at least consistent with the possibility of difficulties inherent in the process of literacy acquisition in English as it is conventionally written today.

We hope that future comparative studies will wish to take account of findings to that effect published by members of our Society, eg, the late Professor John Downing, Dr Gwenllian Thorstad, Dr Valerie Yule and Christopher Upward. We will be happy to supply bibliographical references and/or copies of the publications concerned.

International comparison is only one facet of our Society's work. We are more directly concerned with the internal evidence of damage done to educational standards by the lack of a coherent writing system for English, and much of our energy is devoted to devising proposals for its improvement. At least the following languages have, for educational reasons, modernized their writing systems during this century (some of them more than once): Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Irish, Japanese, Malay/Indonesian, Malyalam, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish. English neglects this essential task to the inevitable detriment of its educational standards.

The non-English-speaking world is generally more aware of the absurdities and difficulties of English spelling than are the English-speaking countries, to whom our orthography all too often appears just as a fact of life. But as research into educational standards has intensified in recent years, and with it our awareness of the poor standards achieved by English-speaking countries, so we believe that in due course the need to confront the key underlying problem of the English writing system will become inescapable.

It is the Simplified Spelling Society's mission to try to hasten such a confrontation. If we can provide any relevant input to research on comparative international standards, we should be glad to give whatever assistance we can.

For your further information, we enclose some leaflets about aspects of our work.

Yours sincerely
For the Committee of the Simplified Spelling Society

Reply 1 October 1996
Thank you so much for sending me material on your society, and for your views on *Worlds Apart*. I thoroughly agree that the complexity of spelling in the English language may well be a significant barrier for children's acquiring other skills of literacy, and have myself become very interested in this area through my current role as a member of David Blunkett's Literacy Commission which is investigating this whole area with a view towards generating policies for an incoming Labour government. I would be very grateful if you could send me the bibliographical references that you mentioned, and would be even more grateful for copies of the various publications concerned. I will ensure that the Commission hears of your work, and hopefully has a chance to look at some of the material, at its next meeting in mid-October.

Thank you very much for writing to me.
David Reynolds
Professor of Education

To Nicholas Tate
Dr Nicholas Tate
Chief Executive
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Newcombe House, 45 Notting Hill Gate
LONDON W11 3JB
15 July 1996

Dear Dr Tate
We would … like to comment on a report in the *TES* (14.6.96, p3) that you are calling for British schoolchildren not to be exposed to American spellings in computer software, on the grounds that our culture should be defended from American influence. We would urge a more discriminating approach: by all means let undesirable aspects of American culture be resisted, but let us embrace those, such as American spellings, from which we can benefit.

We have prepared an analysis* of Anglo-American spelling differences and their implications for the UK, and enclose a copy for SCAA's consideration. We hope SCAA will reconsider its view of American spellings and make positive recommendations for the future..

We would be glad to know SCAA's response to these ideas.

Yours sincerely
For the Committee of the Simplified Spelling Society
* Reprinted with minor amendments on pp30–32.

Reply 25 July 1996
Thank you for your letter of 15 July and the accompanying … article.
…
Thank you … for the analysis of Anglo-American spelling differences which you sent in response to my reported remarks in the *TES* of 14 June. I enclose a copy of the full text of my speech on that occasion for your interest**. You will see that I mentioned Anglo-American spelling differences in the context of my broader concern about the social and cultural impact of the new technologies upon children's language usage and reading habits.

The Simplified Spelling Society's paper presents a thorough and detailed analysis of Anglo-American spelling differences. I have passed the paper on to the English officers here who will consider it as part of their ongoing work of monitoring and reviewing the curriculum and assessment arrangements for English.

Thank you for your continued interest in this matter.

Yours sincerely
Nicholas Tate

**** INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE FUTURE CURRICULUM**
Conference organised by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, London 1–2 July 1996
(excerpt from speech by SCAA Chief Executive Dr Nicholas Tate)

§15 …I indicated my worries that the expansion in the use of educational software may well lead to pupils being required to use large quantities of US-originated materials which fail to recognize this country's cultural distinctiveness.

§16 Apart from one or two predictable responses suggesting that it is perfectly acceptable, indeed a good thing, to compound our national inability to spell by using US spellings, as well as do sums in cents, dimes and dollars rather than in pounds and pence, I got a lot of support for what I said.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 pp30–32 in printed version]

12. American Spellings for British Schools?
A submission from the Simplified Spelling Society to the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA)

The following is a slightly amended version of a paper submitted to SCAA on 15 July 1996. Thanks are due to the Society's British committee for the original formulation, to SSS member Cornell Kimball of Los Angeles for researching aspects of American spelling, and to Professor Burke Shipley of Chicago for some subsequent amendments.

1 British adoption of US spellings

Most spellings perceived by British readers as typically American represent a historically more advanced form of written English, which Britain is inclined to adopt hesitantly after an often lengthy delay. The simplification of AE to just E in words like *encyclopaedia* and *mediaeval* is now general in British usage, but many other words like *anaesthetic* (American *anesthetic*) have not yet been so cut. British reduction of -OUR to -OR likewise remains incomplete: Britain long ago Americanized *inferiour, emperour, exteriour, governour*, etc, but persists with dozens of forms like *flavour, savour* despite the misleading parallel with *devour*. Similarly incomplete is British simplification of *draught* as *draft* (despite the *draughty/haughty* anomaly), though America prefers *draft* for all senses. The case of American *plow* is slightly different: although both *plough* and *plow* were current in 18th century England, America chose the simpler and Britain the more convoluted form as its eventual standard.

As this paper will show, most 'American' spellings offer improvements to the alternatives now prevailing in Britain. Yet each needs to be examined on its own merits, and in fact one of the earliest American form to be adopted brought mixed blessings. American *music* with final -C (formerly -CK in British *musick*) had the advantage of tallying with the C in the French-derived adjective musical, where A follows the C; but cutting -ICK to -IC elsewhere introduced complications, in that K now has to be restored before the front vowels E, I, Y (eg, *picnic* but *picnicked*, *traffic* but *trafficker*, *frolic* but *frolicking*, *panic* but *panicky*, though there is sometimes uncertainty, as between *arcing/arcking*, *Quebecer/Quebecke*r). It is unfortunate that C rather than K was kept from the old -CK, since K resolves the dilemma of pronunciation as /k/ or /s/ before a front vowel. The better model would have been the consistent Germanic spelling with K (Danish/Swedish *musik*, Dutch *muziek*, German *Musik*, Norwegian *musikk*) which raises no such problem, as we see from German *Musiker, musikalisch* with K before both front and back vowels. If K had been preferred to C, the present inconsistency would have been avoided by writing *traffik/traffiker*, etc.

However, few of today's American forms entail such kinds of problem.

2 Better phonics

With phonics now officially acknowledged by the British education authorities as central to literacy acquisition even in such a wayward alphabetic system as English, Britain should also acknowledge most American forms as better suited to the phonic learner than their British counterparts. Thus -Ize (eg, *organize* as opposed to *organise*) is usefully distinguished from the various alternative values of -Ise as in *expertise, paradise, promise*. The voicing indicator Z is also preferred in America to ambiguous S in -Yse words such as *analyse* (the form *analyses* may come from the verb, or, quite differently pronounced, it may be the plural of *analysis*) and likewise *brasier, cognisant, cosy, partisan, rase* (after all, Britain does not write **rasor*). The -Er in American *center* and some 20 other words, which Britain writes -Re, tallies with the far commoner ending of *enter*, and so reduces an important pattern of exceptions that British children face. American students of the life sciences (above all, those preparing for medical careers) escape the E/Ae/Oe traps that beset their British counterparts, for instance not needing to learn three different spellings for the first syllable in British *femur/faeces/foetus* (American

femur/feces/fetus), nor in countless other words of Latin or Greco-Latin derivation. (An eminent British zoologist has declared American forms in his field superior, without exception.) Both the -Re and Oe simplifications feature in American *maneuver*, contrasting with the much misspelt British *manoeuvre*. The K of American *skeptic* avoids the muddles induced by misleading analogies with *septic/sceptre* (Britain moved from *sceleton* to *skeleton* centuries ago). The I of American *artifact* aligns with that of *artist, artifice*, etc, compared with disparate E in British *artefact* (contrast *artesian*). The Au/Ou digraphs lose their confusing U in American *caldron, gage* (cf *call, scald, page*), and *mold, molt, smolder* (cf *cold, colt, colder*, phonically contrasting with *mound, louder*, etc). American *naught* (cf *naughty*) is phonically more appropriate than British *nought* (contrast *drought*, and dialect *nowt*). A non-phonic final E is shed (and some other simplifications made) in American *ax, adz* (though these two were formerly subject to controversy in the USA), *cigaret* (this latter a less common variant of *cigarette* in the USA), *epaulet* (cf *cadet, quartet*), *program* (cf *telegram*), *catalog* (contrast -Ue in *rogue, argue*). *Mustache* no longer suggests the *mouse* of British *moustache*. Ambiguous British Qu yields to simpler American C and/or K in *bark* (for *barque*), *check* (for *cheque*), *licorice* (for *liquorice*).

For phonics to work effectively, we need simpler spellings that correspond to the sounds of words, and the above American variants are therefore to be preferred for pedagogical reasons.

3 More regular consonant doubling

One of the most troublesome features of English spelling is the lack of reliable rules to tell us when to double consonants. One often cited rule has it that, when a base word ending in a single consonant letter adds a suffix beginning with a vowel, the consonant is doubled if its preceding vowel is both short and stressed (eg, *commit* has Tt in *committing*); but where these precise conditions do not apply, the final consonant is not doubled (eg, single T in *commitment* since the suffix begins with a consonant, and in *inviting* since the preceding vowel of *invite* is long and the T is not final in the base form, and in *visiting*, since the vowel immediately preceding the T in *visit* is unstressed). This rule, which is generally accepted by both American and British spelling conventions is in itself too complex to be easily mastered, but British (not American) spelling aggravates the difficulty with numerous exceptions. The most widespread pattern of exceptions affects verbs ending in an unstressed vowel plus single L, such as *travel*. In America these follow the normal rule, but in Britain the L is perversely doubled before a vowel, as in the forms *travelled, traveller, travelling*, which falsely have the appearance of rhyming with *compelled, compelling*, etc (contrast American *traveled*, etc). The regular single L is further seen in such American forms as *councilor, counselor, jewelry, marvelou*s, whose British equivalents have anomalous Ll. The reverse pattern (Britain simplifying Ll where America keeps it intact) is seen in American *appall, fulfillment, skillful*, beside *appalled, fulfilling, skill*, whose Ll Britain simplifies in *appal, fulfilment, skilful* (single L here has the advantage of brevity, but not of regularity). Further British discrepancies of consonant-doubling involve P: according to the normal rule, British *kidnapped, worshipped* (which are based perhaps on analogy with monosyllables such as *capped, shipped*) should follow the pattern of *gossiped, galloped* and the forms *kidnaped, worshiped* used in America.

4 More morphophonemic

Britain sometimes also arbitrarily varies the spelling of word roots where America is marginally less prone to such inconsistency. Thus Britain changes S to C in several words, creating anomalies such as *defence/defensive*, where American (like French) keeps the original S in *defense* (French *défense*); British C contrasts similarly with American S in *licence, mortice, offence, pretence*. Another instance is American *peddler*, modelled directly on the verb *to peddle*, where British has a doubly anomalous form with single D and -Ar in *pedlar*. Then there is British *foetus*, although the cognate *effete* is never written with Oe; American *fetus/effete* is likewise consistent. We may also explain the above pattern of single L retained from *travel* in American *traveled* etc, in the same terms, as being motivated by morphophonemic consistency.

5 Fewer unnecessary distinctions

Another troublesome feature of English spelling is its tendency to develop different spellings for different meanings of the same word, as between *flour/flower* or *metal/mettle*, even when, as in

these pairs, the words have the same origin. In a number of cases, America does not make such distinctions where Britain does, for instance writing *curb* for both *curb/kerb*, *draft* for both *draft/draught*, *inquiry* for both *enquiry/inquiry*, *meter* for both *meter/metre*, *story* for both *story/storey*, and *tire* for both *tire/tyre*. Other confusing distinctions of British spelling which America finds unnecessary are the noun/verb differences of *licence/license*, *practice/practise* and *prophecy/prophesy* (the different sound value of the final Y in the latter pair of course bears no relation to the British C/S variation).

6 Fewer etymological errors
The principle on which English spelling is often said to be based, and which is often claimed as its justification, is that of etymology: English spellings are as they are, it is asserted, because they show the derivation of words from Old English, or French, or Latin, or Greek, or wherever else. Yet when one examines in detail the history of many spellings through the centuries, one finds that the pure principle of etymology has been widely corrupted. Examples arising in comparisons between British and American spellings include anomalous British *defence*, etc (cited in §4 above) and two British preferences based on errors introduced in Latin: *foetus* was a Latin respelling of *fetus* (perhaps by analogy with *foedus*, but in fact related to *fecundity, felicity, feminine*, as well as *effete*); and *sulphur* was a Latin respelling with pseudo-Greek Ph of original Latin *sulfur*. Thus American *defense, fetus, sulfur* are etymologically more correct, as well as simpler, than British *defence, foetus, sulphur*.

7 Informal American spellings
In addition to the above American variants which are all regularly used in formal printed text, there are some simplified forms which are mainly encountered in informal situations, most notably in advertising and on public signs generally. Very often they involve omission of the grotesque Gh grapheme and sometimes of an associated silent vowel letter as well, in order to represent the sound of the words more directly (ie, more economically and more phonically); such are *tho, thru, thoro* and perhaps *donut*, with *boro* sometimes seen as a suffix in placenames (eg, *Greensboro* in North Carolina, an early English colony where the ending is especially common). But in addition, the -Ight syllable is sometimes respelt as in *lite, nite*. Such forms are increasingly seen in Britain under American influence, and some (*tho, thru, thoro*) are phonically greatly to be preferred to their traditional equivalents. Others, on the other hand, are phonically dubious: does *donut* have the O-vowel of *Donald* or of *donor*? and the final silent E in countless words like *lite, nite* creates difficulties for both beginners (they involve reading backwards, from right to left, in decoding) and skilled writers (they create uncertainty when suffixes are added).

8 Less cumbersome
Professional print-producers attach considerable importance to conciseness in writing, shorter forms being valued accordingly especially by the press. Many American forms have the advantage of being both shorter and simpler than their British equivalents, and therefore more economical and more straightforward to use. Conciseness is a particular advantage in the case of *tho, thru, thoro*.

9 Better for non-native speakers
The majority of users of English do not have the language as their mother tongue, and they suffer additional disadvantages from present spellings (American almost as much as British). Whereas native speakers of English only need to recognize the written forms of words in order to read them, non-native speakers are much more dependent on the spelling to tell them the correct pronunciation. Yet English spelling is notoriously unhelpful in this regard, and countless mispronunciations are caused by misleading spellings. American spellings that are less phonically anomalous than their British equivalents are more helpful in this respect.

A further difficulty for learners and users in non-English-speaking countries is the divergence of spellings between Britain and America, which requires alternatives to be learnt. International publishers face problems too in deciding whether to follow British or American conventions, indeed sometimes whether to incur the cost and trouble of producing separate editions. Other English-speaking countries such as Australia and Canada are particularly affected by uncertainty

between the two traditions, Australia for instance being currently torn between a general preference for British *labour* and the American usage in the name of its *Labor Party*.

British adoption of simpler American spellings would alleviate all these problems.

10 Other cases

In a few cases (eg, *gray/grey, pajamas/pyjamas*) the advantages of the alternative forms are more evenly balanced. Thus *gray* conforms to a more widespread pattern, as in *bay/hay/way*, etc, but *grey* is more phonetic; and the unstressed vowel of initial PA-/PY- does not suggest any particular letter, although we may note that *pagoda, palatial, parade* etc. at least offer a model with PA-, while PY- with that value has no such common parallel. Finally, in the cases of *vice, whisky*, the British conventions have some advantage: America makes a distinction between *vice* (=moral depravity) and *vise* (=holding tool), where Britain is satisfied with a single spelling for both senses; and Britain enjoys its *whisky*, where America puts on weight with *whiskey*.

11 Need for new understanding

We have here surveyed the majority of Anglo-American spelling differences, and we have noted that nearly all offer patterns where the American conventions are in every respect, or at least in important respects, to be preferred. Britain thus does itself a disservice in many ways if it tries to resist such American spellings. British children frequently encounter American spellings on television and elsewhere, and they naturally prefer simpler, more phonic forms that better suit their pronunciation and the wider regularities of English spelling. To insist that they reject spellings which they commonly see, and which come more naturally to them, at best discourages children, and at worst causes them real distress. The irregular spelling of English does incalculable damage to educational standards in general, but a more enlightened attitude towards American spellings in Britain (and in those parts of the world where the British tradition has taken root) would tend slightly to reduce the problem.

The world needs a new view and a better understanding of English spelling, as outlined in the Six Axioms promulgated by the Simplified Spelling Society (*see inside front cover of this issue of* JSSS).

12 Strategies for British education

A first, minimal step towards managing the modernization of our archaic writing system would be to adopt at least a more permissive attitude to American spellings. Why, after all, should British children be denied the advantages enjoyed for well over a century by their American counterparts? Such an approach could be graduated as follows:

1 Least controversial would be to instruct British examiners not to penalize American forms.
2 More beneficial would be to instruct schools to teach phonically more predictable American spellings as standard, while still not penalizing the old British equivalents.
3 Most radical would be to rule that, after a certain date, the latter forms should be considered wrong. The time may not be ripe for that yet, but the possibility should be borne in mind.

The Simplified Spelling Society believes it is time for the British to inform themselves of the true nature of their traditional orthography, and to draw the appropriate conclusions for literacy teaching. The recent acceptance that literacy teaching needs to be based on phonics is an excellent and long overdue first step on the road to such understanding, but it is only a first step. Having looked critically at, and rejected, previously fashionable but ineffective methods of teaching literacy skills, we need next to look critically at the substance of what is taught, ie, at the spellings themselves. The differences between spelling conventions in Britain and America would be a practical point at which to start.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 pp33–34 in printed version]

13. SPELLING ADVICE COLUMN

The idea for a 'Spelling Advice Column', regular or occasional, arose from the following letter (13 January 1997) received from SSS member A E Relton. Readers are invited to send in their reactions to this innovation. Is a Spelling Advice Column a promising road for the SSS to pursue? Is the approach adopted below a good one? Is the advice sound?

A E Relton of Ilford, Essex, UK asks:
I read with much interest Matthew Thommen's article in *JSSS* 1996/1, particularly his conclusion that "now it may be time for business people to move in".

I have long held that spelling change must come about from common useage. Fortunately, the dictionary publishers hold to the view that their dictionaries record useage, and they do not purport to lay down 'correct' spellings. Thus any new spellings which appear in a properly published work should eventually find their way into the Oxford English Dictionary, and others.

I am the proprietor of a small publishing house which is currently working on a transport gazetteer covering North America. As such I have seen to it that several reformed spellings have been used in the proof: *alinement, strait, thru*, all being words which occur frequently in a book about transport. The book will be sold in Britain, but sales in the USA are likely to be five times greater.

Part of the proof has been seen by an expert reader in the USA, an educated Chicagoan, who immediately took objection to these spellings. *Thru* is all right as an abbreviation in timetables, but cannot be used in running text, he opined. *Alinement*? — is that spelling correct? — he asked. *Strait* — spelling error!

I am therefore seeking some expert guidance on which spellings to use. Should I stick to my guns and use reformed spellings, on the basis of the 'useage' argument? Or should I accept the inclusion of orthodox spellings in order to avoid any adverse criticisms in this respect — but in the process lose the opportunity to promote a little reform?

Christopher Upward replies:

General comments
First, congratulations on your initiative in challenging orthographic conventions. Perhaps you will set a precedent that will encourage others and start a trend!

Probably your ultimate decision on these spellings will be based on commercial considerations: how far dare you push your proofreader in Chicago, and might your sales be affected? We may think the answer to the latter question is probably "not at all", if only 3 spellings are involved, but your relations with the proofreader may be trickier to handle.

Here are some arguments that you might think worth putting:

1. English spelling is in a mess, with much uncertainty as well as absurdities that afflict writers and publishers (as well as, in a quite different way, learners).

2. It behoves all involved (eg, writers, editors, publishers) to do what they easily can to resolve spelling problems by principled criteria.

3. The overriding criterion in cases of doubt must be the alphabetic principle, which reminds us that alphabetic writing was first designed to represent the pronunciation of words.
4. The more closely the spelling of words matches their sound, the less the danger they will be missprinted, misspelt or mispronounced, and the more easily they will be learnt.

5. When writers, editors, publishers are confronted with spelling dilemmas, that is the basis on which they should make their choices.

Comments on *alinement, strait, thru*

1. *alinement* The first edition (1928, 1933) of the *Oxford English Dictionary* gave *alinement* as its standard form, saying: "The Eng. spelling *alinement* is preferable to *alignment*, a bad spelling of the French"; and of *align* it said "there is no reason to retain the unetymological G". The second edition inexplicably changed to *alignment* as its standard form — but left its original criticism standing!

Underlying this uncertainty is a widespread problem of English spelling, that it cannot make up its mind whether to use the Latin or French spelling of words derived from those languages (that is why, eg, *consistent* has -ENT as in Latin, but *assistant* has -ANT as in French), and many anomalies result. In this case we have Latin *linea* (originally meaning 'a linen thread'), adapted by the Anglo-Saxons to *line*, and often spelt *lyne* in Middle English. However French adapted Latin *linea* as *ligne*, and that form competed with *line/lyne* around the 15th century in English. The words *align, alignment* were borrowed more recently (17th century) from French *aligner, alignement*, hence the G, but they have often also been spelt *aline, alinement* (sometimes with LL, eg, *allinement*; cf Italian *allineamento*).

It is today obviously confusing and absurd that we should write *line*, but the same root in *align(ment)* with G. The alphabetic principle (and the OED's recommendation) require *aline, alinement*. So go for it!

2. *strait* for *straight* These two words are easily confused, both because they are heterographs (same sound, different spelling) and because their meanings are not always easy to distinguish. Among the many spellings for these words used in Middle English, several served to represent both words. In Modern English, confusion arises in the biblical expression *strait/straight and narrow*: the Bible has "strait is the gate and narrow is the way" (Matthew 7:14), but the reduced formula *strait and narrow* appears tautologous (*strait* means *narrow*) and the rather different meaning of *straight* may seem more appropriate in the context. Similarly, for the garment *straitjacket/straightjacket* the qualities of *straitness* and *straightness* may seem equally constraining and therefore appropriate. The two words derive from different sources, *straight* from the Germanic root of 'stretch', and *strait* from Old French *estreit* 'narrow', and the latter in turn from Latin *strictus*; connected with this root are also such words as *strain, strangle, stress, strict, stringent*.

When we furthermore consider that the word *strait* is now rather rare (*straight* occurs about 27 times more frequently), being used chiefly as a plural noun as in 'dire straits', 'the Straits of Malacca', etc), there seems no point in trying to maintain an unnatural distinction between the two words. The simpler spelling *strait* may therefore be recommended for both senses in preference to *straight*, with its anti-alphabetic, archaic digraph GH. Paradoxically, by merging the two forms, we ensure greater clarity and accuracy of usage.

3. *thru* for *through* The form *thru* has been used continuously since the 14th century, by which time various other spellings without -GH show that the final consonant letters were increasingly

falling silent. The form *through* actually appeared in the following century. The shorter form clearly has the advantage over the complex non-phonetic *through* that it unambiguously represents today's pronunciation, enabling readers to pronounce it and writers to spell it correctly and without difficulty.

The form *thru* is encountered regularly in America, as has been documented by SSS member Cornell Kimball, especially in certain hyphenated contexts, eg, *drive-thru, pass-thru, thru-hiker* and in expressions of duration such as *Monday thru Wednesday.*

The trend toward wider use of *thru* is to be encouraged as a significant improvement on the generally still dominant form *through*.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 21, 1997/1 p34]
[Ron Threadgall: see **Journals**]

14. Ronald Threadgall: a tribute

We are sad to report the death on 26 January 1997 from cancer at the age of 75 of Ronald Threadgall, a valued friend to and collaborator with the Simplified Spelling Society over the past decade. Since the death in 1987 of our previous President, Professor John Downing, Ronald represented an essential link to that greatest of all experiments with the English spelling system, the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.).

His first contribution to the Society's work took the form of a dynamically presented paper at our 1987 conference, entitled 'The Initial Teaching Alphabet: proven efficiency and future prospects' (**JSSS 1988/1**, J7 Item 6), in which he paid tribute to John Downing's pioneering work in implementing and subsequently evaluating the i.t.a. in hundreds of British schools. Ronald had then recently become General Secretary of the United Kingdom i.t.a. Federation, a post he held until 1993, and in that time he ensured close relations with the SSS, with attendance at i.t.a. Federation committee meetings by both the Chairman and the Editor-in-Chief of the Society. Ronald's career as a remedial literacy teacher using the i.t.a. stretched over a quarter century from 1965, and he became Head of the Remedial Department at Clacton County High School, Essex. The experience he thereby gained was possibly unique, inasmuch as the i.t.a. was otherwise used with beginning learners rather than, as in his case, secondary school students with literacy difficulties. He gave the SSS the benefit of that experience in an address in January 1993 (see ***JSSS* 1993/2**, J15 Item 3).

As well as helping to preserve our knowledge of the incomparable i.t.a. experiment, Ronald inspired important developmental work within the SSS. He enabled the Society's Publisher-Chairman Chris Jolly to establish contact with Sue Lloyd, who, with her long experience of using the i.t.a. with beginners, authored his successful and methodologically ground-breaking literacy programme *Jolly Phonics*. Likewise, Ronald's experience helped SSS Research Director Dr Gwenllian Thorstad to design the extensive research programme reported on in this issue of *JSSS*.

We mourn Ronald's passing, but are grateful for his achievements, which are worth quoting whenever the SSS makes its case for spelling reform.

(Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society 21 1997/1 pp35–36 in printed version)

15. LETTERS

Letters are welcomed on any matters raised by items appearing in *JSSS*, or on any observations or experiences relating to spelling that readers may wish to report.

Comparative Literacy

Couldn't the SSS pursue the matter of wether pupils make better progress as regards literacy in Welsh or English? Perhaps this could be taken up with the Welsh Office, or directly with the educationalists in Wales.

Wales might be seen as an ideal laboratory for this with Welsh speaking communities alongside English speaking communities subject to very similar outside influences. The findings of studies could also be tested in, say, New Zealand with English speaking and Maori children.

Robert Craig, Weston-super-Mare UK

Non-native speakers' needs

I read an article in Cut Spelling which I found interesting, although a bit difficult to read. I think once you have struggled a lot to learn English spelling you are not so ready to accept changes, especially a non-native speaker. On the other hand I believe in a gradual simplification.

Virginia Pulcini, Turin, Italy.

Singaporespell

We shud emfasize th relationship between th visul and auditry senses. A comn problm for many peple is th "I have to see it written down to know if it's the right spelling" syndrome. In othr words, peple ofn rite down al th posbilitis, and then decide wich one looks ryt. Or, to put it anothr way, peple seem to bypass th alfabetic principl.

An exampl of this ocurd with my secnd-year fonetics class. I was givng a lectur on th relationship between pronunciation and spelng. Th main point I wantd to make was that ther ar two main problms: (i) inconsistncis in th spelng systm, and (ii) mispelngs caused by mispronunciations (eg, typicl singaporean pronunciation featurs). So I startd th lectur by givng th class a spelng be with twelv words: *height, separate, business, sincerely, accommodation, necessary* (ie, from th 1992 ALBSU survey); *humorous, questionnaire, idiosyncrasy, diarrh(o)ea, harassment, indispensable*. Tru to form, nobody got al twelv ryt. I didnt embarass anyone by askng exactly how many they got ryt, but my gess is that most peple only got half. In particulr, by far th majority wantd to spel *accommodation* with a singl M.

Then, in my tutorial for that class, I had set an exrcise wher they produced miniml pairs for fonemes that they comnly confuse, eg, *feel, fill*. Th next part of th exrcise was to determn how those vowls ar representd in spelng (to sho that, for these singaporean pronunciation problms, th spelng is in fact a reliabl indication). This flord most of them, ho didnt realy seem to undrstand wat I was askng for. In othr words, they didnt seem to undrstand th principl of letrs and letr combnations representng vowl and consnnt fonemes.

I also had som stranje ansrs. Wen askd how th vowl is spelt in *scene*, somone said CE. This showd (i) not only did they not hav any idea of 'majic E', (ii) but also they seemd to asociate th C with th vowl rathr than th preceding S. They took som convincing that th C, wile silent, is conectd to th S rathr than th E, as mor clearly in, eg, *science, scent*.

It has been sujestd to me that th reasn for this is perhaps that th name of th letr C contains th same vowl as in th word *scene*. That is, th name of the letr is being confused with its sound valu. A similr mistake is aparently that children mispel *farm* as *frm*, since th vowl in this word coresponds in sound to th name of the letr R.

I hav also been intriged by a recent advert for Microsoft Office software, shoing a secretry lamentng "My boss spells phonetically". Wher dos th falt lie? With th boss ho over-aplys th alfabetic principl of english spelng? Or with th english spelng systm wich itself departs from it?

In short, som peple seem to hav very litl apreciation of th alfabetic principl or of particulr sound-spelng corespondences. Riting in CS wud therfor help them (re)discovr these and scor betr on spelng bes. I dont see, for exampl, how anyone cud posbly claim that *diarrhoea* is a betr spelng than *diarea*.
Adam Brown, Singapore

Backwards compatibility in Chinese
My reservations against reformed spelling are briefly mentioned in one of your leaflets. Literature not 'translated' could be inaccessible for the young who would have known only simplified spelling until they were old enough to take classes in unreformed spelling.

I suffered the same problem with Chinese. The Communists simplified a lot of characters to improve universal literacy, but there are a lot of components which give clues to the meanings of the characters, eg, the old, complex form of *men* 'door' actually looks like an old-fashioned Chinese house door.

At Leeds University we learnt to *write* simplified Chinese characters, while other universities taught the complex forms. When I attended classes in Beijing, most of the articles I studied in Chinese were set in simplified character printing. Back in Leeds we had to study one short early Communist publication written before 1949 which was printed in complex characters. I found very difficult to equate the complex characters most commonly used with the simplified forms I had initially learnt. However, when we had to *read* a full length classic 20th century novel, we used books imported from Hong Kong printed in complex characters., and I got th hang of them a lot better. Practice made all the difference, but I'm still not comfortable with the complex forms.

I realize this does not have anything to do with phonetic spelling, but it has a lot to do with recognizing patterns on paper.
Margaret Marriott, Birmingham, UK

Spanish reflections
I have heard it asked whether the problems of english spelling are a deterrent to learning English for Spanish speakrrs in the US. As an American linguist, translator and teacher who has lived 26 years in Latin America, I can confirm that is so. Indeed, English spelling is a deterrent to learning the language for non-English speakers all around the world.

Last year I attempted to teach English to Guatemalan teenagers. It was actually embarrassing to me to have to stand in front of them and confuse them with the ridiculous skewing of the vowels in English writing. What I wouldn't give for reformed spelling to give them half a chance of learning English! It is hard enough for them to learn the many sounds of English that aren't in Spanish, without their having to wrestle with such a nonsensical, outdated orthography. Spanish

Spelling is much easier to teach and to learn. (Now if Spanish would just get rid of the discrepancies involving B/V, C/S/Z and H!)

Even though at this time I can't join your society, I am a staunch supporter on the sidelines. I have family reasons to resent English spelling. Over the years I have observed the struggles of my Mexican husband in his attempts to write English. (He has good speaking ability and great comprehension.) Even harder to take was watching the problems of my son in school over spelling. He has a high intelligence but a faulty retention of the vagaries of written language, which caused some of his teachers to consider him stupid and uneducated just because he writes English phonetically.

More power to you and your associates!
Carol Lynn Barrera, Guatemala

Despairing desperation
Which is correct, *desperate* or *desparate*?

I looked it up in the dictionary and groaned. Seemed to me that the second speling is more logical, because it comes from *despair*. Not so. The first spelling is the original, not only in the Latin, but pushing right up thru Old French and Middle English! The A didn't get into *despair*, according to my 1988 abridged dictionary, till Modern English.

How come they switched? Well, it probably wasn't a unanimous vote. Look at all the trouble they had with *there, their* and *they're*! *Despair* may have gone thru the 'pair/pear/pare' debate. They could have matched it to *there/where*, and made it *despere*. But the vote didn't go that way. They already had *here/mere* that made a different sound, and that would have been confusing. And if they already had *were*, which makes a different sound again…… — they must have been close to despair.

The 'Cut Spelling' committee did not despair. They couldn't do anything with *despair* either, so they solved the problem by coming in the back door.

They through both *desperate* and *desparate* out the window. No more meeny-miny-mo, nor reaching for the dog-eared dictionary. They settled for *desprat*. Thank you, CS, with all my heart.

Jean Wilkinson, Beaverton, Oregon.