

Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society

No.25—1999/1

The Society

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Subscription: £10/US\$20 or equivalent per year, payable in cash or by check to Simplified Spelling Society.

The Journal

The Journal normally appears twice yearly and is edited by Christopher Upward, School of Languages & European Studies, Aston University, Birmingham.

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1. Editorial

Chris Upward

Realms of research

Only in recent decades has the multidisciplinary nature of English spelling studies begun to be fully appreciated. Etymology has always played a part, in the 16th century especially the Latin and Greek legacy, by the 19th also the origins and evolution of the Germanic substrate, and at the end of the 20th comparisons with contemporary languages; the work done in this field enables us to categorize and explain the many variegated spelling patterns of English. Phonetics was another early contributor, revealing, by contrast with etymology, the basic simplicity and unity of English phonology; by the 19th century this knowledge was feeding into initial literacy schemes using regularized spelling systems and to this day it gives us a vision of how uncomplicated the written representation of English can, in principle, be. The discipline of psychology has come into its own in the 20th century, with the concept of skill acquisition and debates over whether the visual or auditory aspect of literacy is the more fundamental in learners' minds. All these scholarly and scientific fields have been represented with distinction among the SSS's six Presidents from its foundation in 1908 up to the millennium.

As the 21st century approaches new fields are opening up for exploration, which have more to do with the implementation of reform than with the nature of English spelling itself. One is the potential of the electronic revolution for helping to simplify English spelling; Ed Rondthaler's American Literacy Council early grasped the power of computers to assist in remedial literacy teaching; Alan Mole's automatic spelling converter BTRSPL has shown how fast and how easily text published in today's conventional spelling can be recreated using a reformed orthography; email is proving an unprecedented vehicle for trying out and debating the merits of reformed spellings; and the WorldWideWeb is enabling the SSS to present its ideas to an infinitely larger public than ever before. As yet, though, we are very far from exploiting the medium to the full.

Another new field might be broadly termed 'consumer research' to find out how people react to simplified spellings, using the results to fine-tune our simplification proposals either to meet public preferences or to best suit their needs and abilities. Research of this kind has been carried out by Valerie Yule, Gwen Thorstad and John Thorstad, but a great deal more needs to be undertaken, testing both reading and writing, both children and adults, both native and non-native speakers. There is considerable scope for university researchers to do valuable work here.

Features of this issue

Burke Shipley continues his account of the Chicago *Tribune's* forty-year use of its own fluctuating selection of simplified spellings. In this second part he describes the reactions of its staff and readers, and of other publications. Readers' reactions were evidently fairly muted, though some teachers made the point that learners found it confusing to read one spelling in the *Tribune* and a different spelling everywhere else. This objection, we may feel, was the predictable result of the *Tribune's* go-it-alone innovations: by definition, its idiosyncratic new spellings could not represent a standard usable in the classroom. Such unco-ordinated initiatives are doomed to fail.

Colin Davies' years of first-hand experience with Finnish lend charm and authenticity to his account of its exceptionally regular, yet to English eyes extraordinarily exotic-seeming writing system. The total predictability of its spellings naturally minimizes the challenges of literacy acquisition, though a pure form of dyslexia is recognized. How has Finnish come to be blessed with such a system? We note the following factors: it is of relatively recent origin (16th century), but has been steadily improved over the succeeding centuries; it has only one digraph (though plenty of doubled letters); and, by borrowing very few words from other languages (not even 'telephone!'), it has avoided the problem of whether, or how, to adapt the spellings of other languages.

Patrick Groff's article comes most opportunely, coinciding with the current debate in the UK as to whether 'analytic' (letters-to-speech, ie, reading first) or 'synthetic' (speech-to-letters, ie, spelling first) methods of literacy teaching are more effective. He surveys the research evidence from recent decades, and concludes that the 'synthetic' approach is in all probability more effective, though conclusive experimental evidence is lacking either way.

Jennifer Chew compares the results of two studies of teenagers' changing levels of spelling accuracy through the 1980s and 1990s. Both studies show a decline, but subtle differences between them are analyzed and explanations proposed, and factors that can influence levels of accuracy are deduced. The decline in standards is shown to correlate with the neglect of phonics teaching in the years of the teenagers' early schooling. The conclusion reached is that systematic phonics teaching in the first stages of literacy acquisition should suffice largely to overcome the difficulties of English spelling, making spelling reform unnecessary. Readers convinced of the need for reform will be stimulated to rehearse the counter-arguments.

2. Spelling the Chicago Tribune Way, 1934–1975, Pt. II by John B. Shipley

Dr Shipley is Professor of English (Emeritus) at University of Illinois, Chicago. Part I of this study appeared in [JSSS 24](#), Item 2, and Part III will appear in [JSSS 26](#).

Abstract

This article falls into the following divisions:

Pt.I. The spelling reforms.

1. From 1934 until the autumn of 1955, soon after the death of the owner-publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormick;
2. from late 1955 into 1975. (Published in JSSS 24, Item 2.)

Pt.II. Responses.

1. The *Tribune* staff;
2. Readers; and
3. Books, periodicals, domestic and foreign newspapers.

Pt. III. Conclusions.

1. Dictionary publishers as possible allies;
2. Causes of abandonment of the reforms;
3. Possible influence.

Acknowledgments

I thank the following for their help in my research: Kenneth H. Ives, Chicago, Illinois, and Eric Zorn, Staff Writer, Chicago *Tribune*, and especially Cornell Kimball, Sherman Oaks, California; and Robert Wiedrich, Archivist, *Tribune* Archives, McCormick Research Center, Cantigny, Wheaton, Illinois. Copies of material Mr. Wiedrich has given to me will be identified as at the McCormick Research Center. I also thank the reference and other librarians at the University of Illinois at Chicago library and the staffs of the Chicago Historical Society library and the Newberry Library, Chicago. Finally, a special word of thanks goes to Deborah S. Graham for her meticulous conversion of the typescript to electronic form.

Part II

1 Responses: the *Tribune* Staff

In February 1934, *The Trib*, in-house publication for *Tribune* staffers, headlined its brief account of the newly created spelling reforms, "Help! Help! Cries Vox Pop as Tribune Opens Drive for Simplified Spelling." The account began, "Vox Pop has been brimming with letters from Tribune remers pro and con the simplified spelling ... adopted by the Tribune ..." [\[1\]](#) Unsurprisingly, this house organ did not publish staff reaction to the experiment.

Yet indications appeared elsewhere, mostly negative. The editorial of March 26, 1939, furnished one clue: "...[T]he staf was agast," it said, at the initial spelling reforms in January/February 1934. [\[2\]](#) One ought not to make too much of the word 'public' as against in-house response in an early Bennett news article: "Public response to the changes already adopted has been for the most part favorable." [\[3\]](#) Occasionally, a staff member or a department of the newspaper was said to favor a specific change. [\[4\]](#) Occasionally also, a shocker surfaced to which staff members vehemently objected: *iland* and *frater* come to mind here. As a whole, a knowledgeable writer observed, "The

simplified spelling project ... was abused even more [than in letters to the editor] by members of the paper's editorial staff in their private conversations." [5] *Tribune* editorialists admitted, in spring 1939, that "our own writers and compositors have not become fully accustomed to these forms [then introduced]." [6] In a 1973 interview, the then-executive editor and later *Tribune* archivist, Harold Hutchings, spoke of the simpler spelling crusade in more measured terms:

"It was thought of as an interesting experiment" — this, apparently, in the 1940s — "which brought to the public attention a movement that was discussed in academic circles. There was a certain logic behind it so the words would become acquainted forms. At the time, it caused a lot of people to think in an important area, but nobody acted." [7] That Hutchings may not have confided fully in his interviewer, a college student, should not surprise. Another *Tribune* staffer, in a more personal and perhaps more forthright reminiscence, struck, nonetheless, a reasonably positive note: "It was something to play with when writing a humorous story. Shorter spellings made it easier to handle words. Why not make the language easier? Some of the changes made good sense. We used to laugh and grin about it in the newsroom before ... [some simpler spellings were cut back], but simplified spelling was a real identifying mark, a tradesman of the Trib." [8]

The only insider account in print (that I am aware of) furnished an interesting glimpse of staff reaction to the changes from simplified to standard spelling, which as time went on apparently divided along generational lines. In this account, written in 1970 by Dorothy Collin, assistant Sunday features editor of *Chicago Today* [9] a veteran copy editor made the point: "... The young writers like the changes [recently made in style and spelling, but], ... one old-timer on the copy desk said it was an awful blow at the Colonel." Collin agreed: "The younger generation of journalists at the *Tribune* and *Today* think the new style is another indication of the *Tribune's* stately progress into the latter half of the 20th century." These reporters and copyreaders, according to Collin, *W* scarcely been able or had troubled to learn the earlier style — involving, to be sure, many more elements than just simplified spellings — but older copyreaders disapproved and found it all "rather confusing..."

The Colonel would also have disapproved. In his day, that would have been enough. Despite the humor or light tone in one editorial or another in those earlier years, McCormick took his experiment with simplified spelling seriously. That possibly apocryphal account of his insistence on using *frater* may be a case in point. When "...Bennett started a complete *Tribune* style-book ... McCormick, with the reason, considered [it] invaluable to unify practice [of spelling and so forth] among stablesful of varied writers. He adopted it for his books and letters ... and searched the paper every day against sinners" against *Tribune* spelling and style. [10] From later 1933 until his death in 1955, McCormick wrote two books and delivered upwards of 500 speeches and radio addresses, the last of these apparently in 1951. His book of 1934, *Ulysses S. Grant, The Great Soldier of America*, employing some *Tribune* spellings of that time, offered some oddities as well — *neophites* (p.ix), and *vocabularinism* (p.31 — unless this is a typographical error for *vocabularianism*). [11]

Perhaps these number among the *Tribune's* unheralded spellings from before 1934. In his speeches and radio addresses, all or nearly all of which seem to have been published, McCormick — or his printers — sinned occasionally against *Tribune* spelling, a *doctrine* here instead of *doctrin*, a *thoroughly* there instead of *thoroly*. A few speeches and broadcasts contained spelling sin after sin, sufficient to suggest a printer's devil at work or a McCormick flouting his own rules. [12] One supposes that in the vast majority of his speeches and radio addresses McCormick and his printers followed the straight and narrow, spelling words the *Tribune* way.

Whatever way that was, it was time, as Bennett said concluding his first presentation of simplified spellings, to "let the Voice of the People rage". Vox Pop was to be mightier than staffers' memos.

2 Responses: Vox Pop

Something of overall reader response may be ascertained from a comment in the 1939 editorial, 'Not Yet the Hemloc': "Five years ago this February [*sic*] we turned (perhaps we should say we definitely and genuinely turned) humanitarian, only to discover, as so many reformers have in the past, that the rifraf does not appreciate efforts put forward in its behalf. [13] If readers objected to being called "rifraf" none of their outrage appeared in Vox Pop ("The Voice of the People"). Yet negative reader response came to play a major, perhaps even the major, role in the ultimate abandonment of the experiment.

Letters on simplified spelling in "The Voice of the People" came in clusters, linked to the pattern of the *Tribune* campaign over the years. Just how many letters all told on this issue the newspaper received one can only guess at. For the four decades between February 1934 and autumn 1975, 1 have come upon 82 such letters. [14] Several, both pro and con, came from as far as Australia, early news articles asserted, none of these letters actually appearing in Vox Pop or the news articles themselves. [15] Chicagoans, Illinoisans and those living in Chicagoland — in such places as Auxvasse, Missouri; Dubuque, Iowa; La Crosse, Wisconsin; and Norway, Michigan — constitute the bulk of Vox Poppers on simplified spelling. But letters from farther afield also showed up: one each from Columbus, Ohio, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Burlingame, California. Headlined "HE VUZ WITH ALARM" was one from a "Bil Russel" of Athens, Georgia (home of the University of Georgia), who played the comic with his own version of simpler spelling. [16] Of all the 82, only two bore foreign place-names: that from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, had no great distance to travel, as against the one, in August 1955, from Mexico City.

The frequency of these letters seemed to follow a discernible pattern. Some 15 letters appeared in 1934, the first year of the experiment; surprisingly, none apparently was printed the next year. In 1936 a mere seven letters saw print. The introduction of *tho*, *thru* and *thoro* in 1939 caused the number of letters to peak at nearly three dozen, almost all of them commending the change. From here on out, letters on simplified spelling rarely showed up in Vox Pop. In all of 1945 (the year of *frate* and *frater*), 1946, 1948 and 1949 combined, only about a half-dozen apparently made it into print. For those telling years of 1955 and 1975 the letters-editors chose only about a half-dozen each year. In the intervening decades the gleanings remain meager, fewer than a half-dozen coming from the mid to later 1950's. [17] For all of the 1960's, there was apparently nothing other than a cryptic "No phonetic spelling" from one respondent to an open-ended 1968 reader survey. [18] From 1970 until the abandonment of the experiment in summer-early autumn 1975 Vox Pop kept silent on simplified spelling. Its editor, when queried in 1973, could "not recollect a letter from the public in some time." [19] But then the *Tribune* itself had not called attention in editorials or news articles to its way of spelling for years. The old adage, "out of sight, out of mind", seems to have worked here.

The *Tribune's* editors, including the one charged with "The Voice of the People", had decided early on one grand distinction: letters from distinguished and influential persons were, almost entirely, swept up in news articles and editorials. Comments from "the rifraf..." were, by and large, consigned to the letters column. Interviews, almost always with academic types, constituting news, thus helped inform news articles. Another obvious distinction obtains here: unsurprisingly, the individuals mentioned in news articles and editorials almost to a man — the gender emphasis is intended — praised *Tribune* spelling to one degree or another. Letters in Vox Pop uttered decidedly varied opinions, some, we are assured, expressing their negative views in high dudgeon.

A short news item, headed "Scholars Approve Tribune Move For Simpler Spelling", appearing the day after the first list of January 28, 1934, indicated the level of support that Bennett, and behind him, McCormick, sought. [20] Few prominent persons turned up in other early news articles and editorials, indicating, perhaps, that the response from such individuals was not what

was hoped for. Sir George B. Hunter, chairman, Simplified Spelling Society, wrote from England to approve. [21] Only a few more persons rounded out the early phase of the campaign in news articles, five being unnamed and only one of some prominence. [22] "Letters from university students," Bennett had written in an earlier article, "from business-men and from teachers have welcomed rather than resented the changes. ..." [23] This distinction between "university students..." and "teachers..." suggests this latter group comprised primary and high school teachers. If so, it is a group, especially the primary school teachers, that confronted the *Tribune's* spellings.

Just once more did a *Tribune* news article muster names supporting them, this time 15 years later under the headline, "Experts Like New Spelling Used in Tribune", the best known having been the author Hugh Walpole, examiner in languages, University of Chicago. [24] What had commenced with the president of Northwestern University and the chairman of the Simplified Spelling Society had come down to a representative of an obscure religious publishing house and an acting dean at a small mid-western college. This change in level of support does not image forth the arc of a successful campaign.

Most noteworthy about these letters is the ratio of male writers to female: seven to one. Given that *Tribune* spelling directly challenged primary school teachers in their classrooms — and that these teachers were almost exclusively women — that they were not more heavily represented in Vox Pop leads to surmise. The *Tribune* spelling and letters editors obviously would have preferred to receive words of praise from academicians, then almost exclusively male, than words of criticism from those female grade school teachers. The editors doubtless would also have welcomed support from these teachers. But it was then a culture in which the male voice, especially if some weighty judge or serious author sounded it or if "Professor" announced it and "Ph.D." came up behind, carried farther and dominated discourse. The bias was culture-wide, culture driven. Few correspondents over the years actually gave their occupation, but of those that mentioned it, nearly all were teachers: two to three each, primary and high school, and three on the college-university level. A discrepancy thus exists between the very few letters from schoolteachers, of one mind in their criticism of the experiment, and the reasons offered in 1955 and again in 1975 for severely limiting and then abandoning it (ie, the *Tribune* did not want to get between Johnny and his teachers). Why the letters editors allowed this anomaly to develop over time almost certainly finds its answer in that cultural bias. Just how many letters, and phone calls, the *Tribune* received about simplified spelling from all those teachers of Johnny remains unanswerable.

Among the earliest letters in Vox Pop from a teacher are two in February and March 1934, written by a priest of the Augustinian order, who taught at a Roman Catholic high school. [25] Conservative doubtless by cast of mind and by his training, this teacher-priest objected "to the statement that the spelling of our words is 'utterly illogical'" and expressed the judgment that "in phonetic spelling we perhaps acquire something easier, but superficial, and lose something fundamental." "Our spelling," he sought to establish in his first letter, "is systematic and follows the logic of linguistic science." As for learning to spell, that comes about through "the formation of a habit... based on a complexity of images," dissociated from etymology and meaning. Concluding his second letter, he addressed a problem serious students of orthography and orthographic systems have before and since sought to overcome or work around with varying degrees of success — namely, "... to keep a difficult spelling with an easy alphabet; or to have an easy spelling with a difficult alphabet." (By 'difficult alphabet' was presumably meant an expanded alphabet with unfamiliar extra letters.) These two letters, however strong or weak their argument, were among the most thoughtful on the subject to appear in Vox Pop.

Between these two letters the letter editor inserted another one from a teacher, this to serve perhaps as contrast. This correspondent, a woman, wrote in from a small Indiana town in a quite different tone — though also negative, and then some. "As a teacher and a lover of euphonious construction in all writing, I feel my very soul rebel at the butchery of words such as you list today [letter dated Feb. 10] ." *Fantom* offended her; *rime* was "more than ... [she could] silently

endure. 'Aile' ... is heresy, 'crum' ... pure laziness and your simplified bureaucracy and pulley are the worst of bad manners, slovenliness. In fact there is not one word in this morning's list for which there is a legitimate excuse for changes of spelling." [26] Representative of letters in Vox Pop from primary and high school teachers in their rejection of *Tribune* spelling, these two correspondents struck the extremes: the reasoned, measured response and the vitriolic.

The next-to-last letter on simpler spelling to appear in Vox Pop, 41 years later, seems also to have been from a teacher (possibly a college teacher) to judge from its contents, as civilly and as thoughtfully presented as those of the letters from the teacher-priest. Like that male teacher earlier, this correspondent, a woman, criticized the phonetic basis of *Tribune* spelling: "If the Tribune really wishes to aid students and teachers, it would help them to see that spelling is a visual skill, not an auditory one. ..." She referred to published and unpublished research (her own?) "that shows how regular our language is ...", this point being quite similar also to that the teacher-priest had made four decades before. [27]

For the rest, relatively little remains to report. The *Tribune* had most directly addressed teachers' concerns in Marcia Winn's series of articles on Johnny and his spelling in Chicago and suburban elementary schools, spring 1955. These articles elicited much interest, leading to many letters and a TV program moderated by Ms. Winn. [28] They also gave *Tribune* brass the opportunity to look upon what they had wrought in their way of spelling and, in finding it all too confusing, to mend their ways by returning to Webster III. Yet out of all the resultant outpouring from "the rifraf", the *Tribune* letters editor saw fit to print a mere five letters that August, all approving shelving simplified spelling.

The letter most germane came from the dean of a teachers' college in Evanston, Illinois. He appreciated — "we in the teaching field..." is appreciated — "THE TRIBUNE's contribution in focusing public attention on the problems of spelling in our language" — this a reference, of course, to Ms. Winn's articles. Yet the *Tribune* authorities ought to recognize, he said, that as 'most of our teachers seem to feel ... , changes in the spelling ... of words must come gradually and as a result of common usage.' With *Tribune* spelling on the one hand and Webster III otherwise — "words ... spelled differently in different places ...", to quote the dean — children find it "all the more difficult ... to learn ..." English. The dean's mild language settled like a wet blanket upon the bedrock idea of *Tribune* spelling. [29] For the next 20 years, comment remained smothered, whether because few wrote in or because the letters editors wished to de-emphasize *Tribune* spelling, or both. At a workshop in 1972, in response to a query about it from a *Tribune* staffer, "almost half [of the 80 English teachers in the group] said they did not like it because it confused their students [30] Ah statistics: one has to wonder about that other, larger half. Within three years the *Tribune* put its experiment behind it, so as no longer to confuse.

Over the years of the experiment general or summary comments on reader response in news articles and editorials revealed a basic shift in attitude from approval to disapproval. Initially optimistic, reporters could say that 75 per cent of correspondents favored the new spellings, with merely 25 per cent being critical. [31] Negative response seems quickly to have increased, for other early commentary indicated a "clamor of protest" was present from the start, or close to it. [32] An editorial in March 1939 spoke of having been "deluged with protests", and the same note was

struck a decade later. [33] "Chicagoans", according to one of them, "developed the [expression]: 'you spell like the *Tribune* ... ; it was not intended as a compliment. [34]

The *Tribune's* own early estimate best epitomized the opinions about simplified spelling of the letter-writers as a whole. "There was intelligent praise. There was intelligent blame. There was some abuse more remarkable for virulence than for intelligence. A neutral observer, scanning certain of the letters, would have found difficulty in believing that etymology and orthography could enkindle such passion in the human breast." [35] Virulence against *Tribune* spelling almost never appeared in Vox Pop. What passed for humor or wit occasionally made its way

into print. Nearly all of the letters came down on one side of the question or the other, with perhaps a half-dozen bestowing both accolades and brickbats.

Sounding the death-knell of the experiment, Johnny and his teacher had entered the scene in an editorial, "Helping Johnny to Spell", in 1955. They still sounded it 20 years later in another editorial which ended with the words:

"Sanity some day may come to spelling, but we do not want to make any more trouble between Johnny and his teacher. [36] Oddly, in 1955, when the *Tribune* cut back its experiment, six of seven letters praised lopping the list, whereas in 1975, when the newspaper abandoned that experiment, six of the seven letters voiced regret. These letter-writers seem also to have hoped, "Sanity some day may come to [English] spelling ..."

3 Responses: books, periodicals, domestic and foreign newspapers

"Editorials about the *Tribune's* simplified spelling campaign", *The Trib* of February 1934 said, "have appeared in newspapers all over the country. *Literary Digest*, *Editor and Publisher*, *Time* and other weeklies have carried stories about it. [37] News of the campaign, we were told, reached newspapers as far as Australia. Recovering these editorials from "newspapers all over the country" and news reports in Australian newspapers and those of other countries becomes a fool's errand, especially given the years in question. (Not that I have not tried.) What follows thus rests on a necessarily very limited number of possible sources. In the light of this limitation, an epitome of responses to *Tribune* spelling in books of that time, in other newspapers and periodicals, American and British (the only non-American sources available), would be, baldly put, in the negative.

Looking close-in at how Chicago-land publications reacted to *Tribune* spelling previews the national scene and beyond. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* had been the first to remark, if not comment, in those items about McCormick's name, and datelined January 27, 1934 — though there is no telling how many other papers printed that AP dispatch, in addition to the *Post*. Yet one might expect a friendly reception on home territory, and that — if the few sources available are representative — was not quite the case. The *Illinois Medical Journal* lent measured approval. [38] But in noting that "the *Chicago Tribune* has decided to spell it 'advertisement'", *Advertising Age* added, "The average publisher is worrying about everything except how to spell it." [39] A newspaper beyond Chicago-land, the *Fairmont (West Virginia) Times*, may have favored spelling change, though not necessarily the *Tribune's* way. One in the *Tribune's* backyard, the Boone (Iowa) *News-Republican*, did not, saying, "The beautiful English language is to be dissected and reset to accommodate somebody's notion that it will read better in print." [40] *Newsweek* and then *The Literary Digest* had given basically neutral accounts of the *Tribune's* first foray into simpler spelling. [41] That May, however, in an exhaustive analysis in *Fortune* of the *Tribune's* modus operandi and business-financial activities, the writer dismissively characterized the "crusade ... for modified spelling reform" as "not ... exciting." [42]

From here on — in terms of available sources — it is largely a story of East versus Mid-West, with *The New Yorker* and the *New York Times* leading the forces of contempt against the Colonel's newspaper. Coming in right behind the *Times* and the *Washington Post* was another New York newspaper, the *World-Telegram*, that asked the question of the Colonel, "IS NOTHING SACRED?" — this on the 29th January 1934. Noting that he had pared his name down to M'Cormik, the *World-Telegram* observed, "... 'Controller' will become 'controler' [in the *Tribune*] while benighted New York sticks to 'comptroller.'" (The Colonel, for his part, thought that America began at the Hudson River.) "After most of us reach a certain age," the *World-Telegram* concluded, "we resent such tinkering. Once having learned to spell 'exaggerate' and 'Alexander Woolcott', it's easier to keep on the old way than undergo the anarchy of remembering which words are stand pat and which reformed. And what now will become of the crossword puzzlers in Chicago?" [43]

The next effete Easterner to toss words at the *Tribune* — again given available sources — was H L Mencken in that *New Yorker* piece. The newspaper, he wrote, "went over to ... [spelling reform] without warning, to the astonishment, I daresay, of the Chicago literati and assassinati alike" — this in 1936, after all, the year also of the fourth and final edition of his *American Language*. [44] "In theology," he concluded, "economics, astronomy, anatomy, sociology, punctuation, and most of the other arts and sciences ... [*the Tribune*] leads indisputably, but not, apparently, in orthography." [45]

Next to throw words from the pages of *The New Yorker* was A J Liebling, who, though he had not worked for the *Tribune* as had Mencken, did spend time in Chicago late in 1949. Liebling needed no visit to the Tribune Tower to have a go at the Colonel, all his points of view, his whimsies and settled convictions, his practices and exhortations forming fair target, simplified spelling having been, for Liebling, in the war ranks. Thus a three-part series on "THE ALIEN EAST..." that the *Tribune* ran in 1946 enabled Liebling to say of the reporter: he "...delimited what he meant by the East at the very beginning. 'Geografically speaking,' he ruled, employing the Chicago *Tribune*'s simpliphied [sic] orthografy, 'the east is east of the Hudson.'" [46] Liebling took ample aim at McCormick and the *Tribune* in his four *New Yorker* articles early in 1950, but "simpliphied orthografy" had dropped out of Liebling's line of fire. [47]

Though *frate/frater* seem not to have weighed unduly heavily on the popular press in 1945 — there was the war's end to attend to, after all — Astley-Cock's spelling change from PH to F, in July 1949, reverberated among a few such organs. There was the inevitable Eastern representative, this time the *New York Post*. Its July 15th editorial "Phantasy" saw the change as "a new blow [that The World's Greatest Newspaper has struck...] against the English (language). ... There is probably some merit in this ephort," the editorial concluded. "Our instinctive negativism about the Tribune no doubt explains our pheeling that there is something phunny about the whole business." The *Post*'s source was not the *Tribune* itself, but a *Newsweek* item on ... M'Cormik's Spelling", its tone similar to the newspaper's. It spoke of McCormick's grudge against the English language, the paper's "gimmick ... call[ed] 'modified spelling'", and Astley-Cock as "vice-president in charge of Tribunizing His Majesty's English..." Out of the blue, *Newsweek* declared that "the Trib also was busy shushing an old rumor — that being that McCormick would not be fonetisized [sic] to M'Cormik." Wherever the magazine's staff came upon this notion, it was not from the *Tribune* of summer 1949, nor many a prior year. Silent on this long-time scotched rumor in its own comparable story, "F as in Alfabet", the other national news weekly, *Time*, adopted a somewhat less acerbic, scornful tone. Its account featured, not McCormick, but "Amputator" Astley-Cock — the British-bom John Lucius Astley-Cock, possessor of "the most resounding by-line of the Anglophobe Chicago *Tribune*..." — who was responsible for the latest loppings. Readers of this account, nonetheless, learned in full of these changes. Though other domestic news outlets remarking his reducing PH to F have not come to my notice, certain ones among the English press, as we shall see — the *Newsweek* account instanced the *Daily Graphic*'s "'Few! Fetch Me a Dikshunnery'" — responded as had their American counterparts. [48]

The press, the *Tribune* included it should be emphasized, said nothing further about McCormick's long-enduring stand for simpler spelling until his death in 1955. Typical of the obituaries was that in the *New York Times* recognizing the *Tribune*'s "phonetic spellings" as one of its trademark features. [49] McCormick's death came, as we have seen, just as Marcia Winn launched her many articles on Johnny and his spelling, spring and summer 1955. Her series and its reception enabled the *Tribune*'s new management to cut back drastically on simplified spelling, among other changes. Several publications, including the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine, brought these changes to their readers' notice.

For its account of the changes the *New York Times* ran a straightforward news story sent in, not by its own news service, but by a news agency, whereas that in *Time* conveyed a sense of regret, the old order passing and so forth. "For the first time," the account said erroneously, "since the day in 1934 when McCormick ordered radical new simplified spelling, the *Trib* was

going back to some old spelling rules. Instead of such words as *rtate*, *grafic*, *tarif*, *soder* and *sofisticated*, the *Trib* will now use *freight*, *graphic*, *tariff*, *solder* and *sophisticated*, just like everybody else. Still unchanged are the Colonel's spellings of such words as *thoro*, *burocratic* and *altho*." Journalistic applause at the new management's "efforts ... to strike out on their own ... was tempered by some regret." [50]

The most gracious of notices, ever, came not of course from New York City newspapers or magazines, but from that proper Bostonian, the *Christian Science Monitor* in an editorial in August 1955. This is not to say that its editors repined at the *Tribune's* cutting back on simpler spelling. The *Tribune*, it said, had had to negotiate "a conditional surrender with a world-wide fact: custom will not be rushed." Nevertheless, the editorial acknowledged in concluding

We would not begrudge the *Tribune* its share of credit were it to point to the fact that others also now drop the UE and spell it *catalog* and the UGH to make it *thoro*.

And the *Tribune* can testify that he who goes far and fast in a matter so intertwined with precedent is likely to find himself very much alone. All the more is it due some plaudits for trying. [51]

Nowhere else was the *Tribune* to receive this sort of recognition.

As following those publicized cut-backs in the number of simplified spellings in 1955 the *Tribune* seemingly fell silent on the matter for 15 years and more, the press at large seems to have given little if any thought to it, and no book then seems to have taken it up, either. But as the defining year of 1975 approached, at least one publication, *Newsweek*, that note of those changes in the early 1970's, changes that, as it turned out, were stages in a process to be completed that year. "... Readers," the magazine said, "are no longer confronted with 'frate trains'", though *Time* had said it better in having the *Tribune* "hop from *frate* to *freight*". *Frate* had actually been consigned to the *Tribune's* transport museum years earlier, yet reporters elsewhere still could not get themselves off those *frate trains*. [52]

It remained for the New York *Times* (and doubtless others, unknown) to attend the wake for *Tribune* spelling in 1975. The New York *Times* had quietly expressed its opinion of simpler spelling years before, in 1934 in fact, but not in terms of the *Tribune's* experiment, of which of course it was well aware. Editorially ignoring the *Tribune*, the *Times* singled out "An English Simple Speller", a Professor Barnes, recently retired from Cambridge, who had lamented (in *The Times* of London) the sorry state of English spelling. "Why," Professor Barnes asked, "shouldn't we write 'deth' with CHAUCER?" "Well," the New York *Times* writer returned, "why shouldn't we write 'death' with King ALFRED, a good deal earlier authority?" On "Mr. BARNES's preference for *befeev*, *cheef*, *feeld*, and *frend*", the New York *Times* commented, "Everybody to his taste." [53]

The New York *Times*, having made known its distaste for simpler spelling, relied once more on a straightforward news agency account to signalize the end of *Tribune* spelling announced late in September 1975. Yet that following Sunday, the *Times* did register that the *Tribune* "has virtually surrendered in its fight, begun in 1934, to correct an 'unspeakable offense to common sense' by simplifying the spelling of 80 words", in its weekly column headed, "Epilogue: A Glance Back at Some Major Stories". [54]

Just the day before, the New York *Times* had let its attitude show, not officially in an editorial, but in a Russell Baker essay, 'Dee Feet In Shacahgo', attributing the defeat to a failure "to allow ... for the fact that English words sound different to different people". [55] We all recognize, he said, "that English spelling is absurd and intolerable.... [but] the difficulty about bringing sanity to ... [it] arose from the [*Tribune*] reformers' excessively sensible assumption that words should be spelled as they sound." Baker then proceeded to contrast various pronunciations of words, such as *love* by Americans (luv) and Liverpudlians (loov) and *schedule* by Americans

(skedyul or skedyoo-ul) and educated English (shedyul), with an understandable emphasis on American speech. Thus in Chicago *the mayor* becomes "thuh mayor" — I think it is closer to "duh mair" — and in New York City, "de mare"; while in the Ozarks (a small mountain range running north-south from Missouri through Arkansas into northern Mississippi), instead of "hare' growing on one's "hed," it is "hayir" on the "hayid." (That Colonel McCorinick, who, despite all, had "something of a British accent..." and who is said to have believed that the name of his birthplace should be pronounced "Chisago" [56] would have concerned himself or his newspaper about such Southern speech patterns staggers belief.) Even if we were to pattern our speech after that of our presidents, Baker went on to demonstrate, we would encounter difficulties, as with Eisenhower's "nukular" for the usual American "nuclear" and Kennedy's "Cuber" for "Kewbah." Tacitly using the principle of easier said than done, Baker remarked, "...If we try to do something sensible, like spelling words the way they sound, we are likely to end up unable to communicate with each other any better in writing than we now do in speech, and then we'd really have insanity to worry about. Or, to put it more plainly, tho enough is not enawf, it is often better to quit while you're still behind," Thus the East gave burial, more or less decent, to the *Tribune's* "long, lonely struggle to simplify English spelling..."

Assisting at these obsequies there came at least one (dare I call it?) Chicago-land newspaper, the Milwaukee *Journal*, and at least one so far and off as the Los Angeles *Times*. The *Journal* attended in straight up and down fashion, using the same agency account of the demise of *Tribune* spelling as had the New York *Times*. The account in the West Coast *Times*, headed "ALL THAT JAZ // Chicago Trib // Casts Its Spell", came from one of its own staffers (in Chicago). Even though this account began with a certain "too-bad" attitude in noting that "the Chicago Tribune, that paragon of American individualism, abandoned its efforts Monday to teach the rest of the English-speaking world how to spell", the staffer gave over the rest of his story to straight reportage. A decent enough burial, it was. [57] That proper Bostonian, the *Christian Science Monitor* absented itself.

The foreign press, so far as the thin record attests, did not attend last rites. Perhaps one day those Australian commentaries and news items helping at the birth of the experiment may come to light. And it may well be that such a paper as the Toronto *Star* or *Mail & Empire* (now *Globe & Mail*) also assisted at the experiment's arrival.

For as the record now stands, it is an embarrassment of poverty. Once and once only, so far as one is aware, the *Tribune* was able to inform its readers that the "BRMSH PRESS TAKES // NOTE OF SIMPLIFIED // SPELLING IN TRIBUNE", as the headline announced on July 5, 1949. The Chicago Tribune Press Service news item reported: "Five London and two leading Lancashire dailies carried stories from their own reporters in the United States or Reuters' agency dispatches announcing the Tribune's ..." latest spelling modifications. "Most [of these] newspapers, " the account ended, "sought to capture the reader's eye by exaggerated spelling in headlines. The London tabloid *Daily Graphic*, as previously mentioned, carried the head: 'Few! Fetch Me a Dikshunnery,'" but the *News Chronicle* found it "Easier for the reeders." [58] As the *Tribune* story stated, the *Daily Express* headed its short account, "Having Phun?," while that, somewhat longer, in the Liverpool

Daily Post declared it "Orl rite for sum", in going on to notice the changes additional to such as *frate, epilog, and tho*. [59] The *Manchester Guardian*, also utilizing the Reuter dispatch, gave a fuller, straightforward account of the changes, under the head, 'A THORO CHANGE'. It remained for its equally liberal allied publication, the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, to vent its displeasure several days later. Obscuring the Greek ancestry of such words as *geography in geografy*, the notice said, "will only rid them of any suspect taint of unamerican activities". It went on to remark, living as it were up to its title as keeper of the verities, that "anyone this side of the Atlantic ... [need not] follow the 'Chicago Tribune's' example. In fact, we might even launch a movement to resuscitate and extend some of the 'ph's' which the 'Tribune' has ruled out of order. What about a counter-attack to denounce this type of spelling reform as phrivolous, phat-headed, phantastic, and phootling?" [60] Foreign press notice of *Tribune* spelling thus seems to have terminated *in medias res*, the experiment having at least six years more of life in it and, to take it to 1975, as much as a quarter century. Once again, one must observe that the *Tribune* itself barely kept the experiment on a life-support system all those years.

Notes & references

- [1] *The Trib*, Feb. 1 934, XV: 8, 5.
- [2] *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (henceforth CST), that date, Pt.1, p.16, c.1.
- [3] CST, Feb.1, 1934, Pt.1, p.1, c.1.
- [4] "The sporting department..." and "jocky", CST, Feb.11, 1934, Pt.1, p.10, c.6; Paul Potter, the agricultural editor, and "drouth," CST, Mar.4,1934, Pt.1, p.4, c.4; Charles Collins, drama editor, and "jaz," CST, Mar.18, 1934, Pt.1, p.9, c.4; and George J Scharschug, cable editor, and "tarif," same issue, c.6.
- [5] Lloyd Wendt (1979), *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper*, Chicago et al: Rand McNally & Co., p.568.
- [6] "Simplified Spelling", Apr.9, 1939, in Mencken, *Supplement II*, p.294.
- [7] Vicini (1973), pp.44–45; interview, Sept.28, 1973.
- [8] Interview with Harry Adams, a reporter, Sept.28, 1973, in Vicini (1973), p.50.
- [9] Her art., *Chicago Journalism Review*, Sept.1970, III:9, 7. *Chicago Today* was a wholly owned subsidiary of the *Tribune*, running from late April 1969 to mid-September 1974. See Wendt, (1979), pp.762 and 780.
- [10] Frank C Waldrop, *McCormick of Chicago: An Unconventional Portrait of a Controversial Figure*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc. (1966), p.106.
- [11] Published that Nov., New York & London: D Appleton-Century Co., not the Tribune Co. See, for instance, *unskillful* (p.219), *skillful* (pp 24, 75, 95, 99), *skillfully* (pp.13, 82, 174). Another McCormick oddity is the spelling *felix-itously* occurring in a speech of November 1933. In McCormick's *The War Without Grant*, New York: Bond Wheelwright Co., 1950, conventional spellings appear throughout.
- [12] In the Newberry Library, Chicago: See McCormick, *How We Acquired Our National Territory* (1942); *A Handbook of the American Revolution ...* (1946); *Make Chicago America's Greatest City ...* (1946); *A Voyage to Three Continents* — this has *frate* (pp.3, 66) and *freight* (p.61) and *tarif(s)* (pp.37, 62) and *tariffs* (p.69). The Newberry Library also has typescripts of four McCormick speeches, two each in 1943 and 1944, with various spelling anomalies.

- [13] *CST*, Mar.26, 1939, Pt.1, p.16, c.1.
- [14] Of this number, 72 dealt entirely with the subject; two or three discussed it in part, one sought information (in another section of the newspaper), and six were mentioned just by writer's name with their opinion on the issue (the change to *tho*, *thru*) at hand. I have not undertaken an exhaustive search for such letters throughout the 41 years involved: the first annual index for the *Chicago Tribune* is for 1972. Vicini (1973), pp.48–49, cited four other letters apparently appearing in editions unavailable to me for the days in question. See my footnotes 17 and 28.
- [15] On letters from Australia, see Bennett, *CST*, Mar.4, 1934, Pt.1, p.4, c.1; and Virginia Gardner art., *CST*, Mar. 11, 1934, Pt.1; from a photocopy in the McCormick Research Center, the original issue unavailable to me.
- [16] *CST*, May 2, 1948, Pt.1, p.22, c.7.
- [17] Vicini (1973), pp.48–49, noticed one each from Oct.19, 1955 (apparently misdated 1953); May 12, 1956; Feb.12, 1957; and Mar. 12, 1957.
- [18] Vicini (1973), p.51 — cited by Vivian, *Journalism History*, Autumn 1979, VI:3, 96.
- [19] Vicini (1973), pp.50-51, identifying 'The Voice of the People' editor as Alfred Ames. Vicini also noted the following, based again on interviews in late 1973: Genevieve Flavin, editor, 'Voice of Youth' column, "could not recall any instance when teachers or students ever commented on *Tribune* spelling" (p.50); "Eleanor McConnell [a *Tribune* staffer] scanned the reader surveys compiled by the *Tribune* and found no major reaction to spelling" (p.51).
- [20] See *Chicago Daily Tribune* (henceforth *CDT*), Mon., Jan.29, 1934, p.3, c.6. Named are Walter Dill Scott, President, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; Denis E Sullivan, Chief Justice, Superior Court of Cook County, Illinois; and two University of Chicago professors.
- [21] Bennett art., *CST*, Mar.4, 1934, Pt.1, p.4, cs.2–4; Hunter, who also received mention in a later article, joined three others here, one being the only woman to receive such notice. The letter from one of them, a Walter F Schwank, the *Tribune* called "the most arresting communication that has come ... in the course of this whole campaign ...", Schwank having presented the word *potato* in the form, *GHOUGHPHTHEIGHTTEEAU*. This example of mangled pronunciation for *potato* had also appeared, in somewhat different form, in *News-Week* magazine, Feb.10, 1934, p.35, in the account of a speech, favoring simpler spelling, by DeWitt Clinton Croissant, head, Department of English, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- [22] See Gardner art., *CST*, Mar.11, 1934, Pt.1; one unnamed person was a professor of English, while another was the only one to render negative verdict. See also Bennett art., *CST*, Mar.25, 1934, Pt.1, p.8, cs.4–6: the article focused primarily on a letter from Dr Thomas Kite Brown, co-editor of a dictionary, and mentioned Hunter again, along with three others.
- [23] *CST*, Feb. 11, 1934, Pt.1, p.1, c.1. Instancing a businessman, it presented the favorable views of a Benjamin Franklin Affleck "formerly Affleck", President, Universal Atlas Cement Co.

- [24] Rev. John Evans art., *CDT*, Mon., July 11, 1949, p.14, cs.3–4. Evans interviewed eight in all; the others were a Professor of German, Northwestern University; four Professors of English, DePaul and Loyola Universities, Chicago; a representative of a religious publishing house, Chicago; and an acting dean, Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa.
- [25] The Rev. A B Maxwell, O.S.A., St. Rita High School, Chicago, in *CDT*, Wed., Feb.14, 1934, p.14, cs.6–7; *CDT*, Thurs., Mar.1, 1934, p.16, c.6 — this headed "The Psychology of Spelling."
- [26] Glea Brown Richer, letter dated South Whitley, Ind., Feb. 10, in *CST*, Feb.18, 1934, Pt.1, p.14, cs.6–7. The date must be an error for Feb.11, when the list in question appeared unless, of course, as happens today, the Sunday edition was made available on Saturday.
- [27] Letter, Helen Sprietsma Wolf, dated Northfield [Illinois], n.d., in *CT*, Sat., Oct.18,1975, Sect.1, p.8, c.3.
- [28] Vicini (1973), p.49, may be technically correct in saying that "the long range public reaction to Marsha [*sic*] Winn's article[s] was negligible [*sic*]." The *Tribune* may have received only three inquiries — one in May 1956 and one each in February and March 1957 — "during the two years after it started to abandon simplified spelling", if one supposes that the letter editor printed all those sent in on the subject. Vicini has ignored the short term, however, Ms. Winn herself having spoken of the many letters she had received.
- [29] Letter, Robert F Topp, Dean of the College, National College of Education (now National-Louis University), Evanston, Illinois, dated Aug.24, 1955, in *CST*, Aug.28, 1955, Pt.1, p.20, c.7. This letter, plus four others, including two from high school teachers and one from Ernest Sirluck, Associate Professor of English, University of Chicago, came under the heading "Helping Johnny to Spell."
- [30] Vicini (1973), p.51, gave as his source Allen Yamakawa, director, Tribune Educational Services Division.
- [31] Gardner art., *CST*, Mar.11, 1934, Pt.1. See also Bennett art., *CST*, Mar.18, 1934, Pt.1, p.9, c.1.
- [32] Bennett art., *CST*, Feb.25, 1934, Pt.1, p.1, c.3. See also editorial "Spelling", *CDT*, Tues., Mar.24, 1936, p.12, c.1.
- [33] Edit., "Not Yet the Hemloc", *CST*, Mar.26, 1939, Pt.1, p.16, c.1; and Astley-Cock art., *CST*, July 3, 1949, Pt.1, p.3, c.1.
- [34] Vicini (1973), p.60. About 21 in 1973, Vicini also relied on his mother's experience, she too having grown up in Chicago.
- [35] Bennett art., *CST*, Feb.25,1934,Pt.1,p.1,c.3.
- [36] *CST*, Aug.21, 1955, Pt.1,p.20, c.1; and edit., "Thru is through, and so is tho", *CDT*, Mon., Sept.29, 1975, Sect.2, p.2, c.2.
- [37] XV:8, 5. 1 have not located the account in *Time* from late January through February 1934; the *Time* index for this period also refers to no such story.
- [38] Mar.1934, LXV:3, 195. The *Journal* was the official publication of the Illinois Medical Society.

- [39] Under "Rough Proofs," Feb.3, 1934, Pt.1, p.1, c.1.
- [40] Both editorials appear in "The Other Side," a column of editorials from other newspapers reprinted on the *Tribune* editorial page, the *News-Republican* in *CST*, Feb. 11, 1934, Pt.1, p.16, c.2 (sent to me by Cornell Kimball); and the *Times* in *CDT*, Tues., Mar.6, 1934, p.14, c.2. According to the list in *Editor & Publisher*, Sat., Jan.27, 1934, pp.188–89, the number of daily newspapers then published in Chicago-land were as follows: Illinois, 25, plus the three Chicago dailies; Indiana, 23; Iowa, 14; Michigan, 16; Missouri, 17; and Wisconsin, 18 — a total of 116 daily newspapers. Then there were the weeklies.
- [41] *Newsweek*, Feb.3, 1934, III:5, 34, c.2; "Simpler Spelling in Chicago", *The Literary Digest*, Feb.10, 1934, CXVII:7, 38. See Mencken, *The American Language* (1986), one-volume, abridged edition, pp.490–491 and fn 5, and 499.
- [42] *Fortune*, May 1934, IX:5, 113.
- [43] New York *World-Telegram*, Mon., Jan.29,1934, p.16, c.3.
- [44] "The Dizzy Rise (and Ensuing Bust) of Simplified Spelling," *The New Yorker*, Mar.7, 1936, p.38.
- [45] Mencken, *op.cit.* His surveys of spelling and spelling reform in his *American Language*, first published in 1919 and its fourth edition in 1936 — this edition, p.406, condensed the *Tribune* section of *The New Yorker* article and, unlike the article, gave the start-up date as Jan.28, 1935; and his *American Language, Supplement II*, published 1948, see pp.294–295 and 317 on *Tribune* spelling (still with the wrong year) — these are readily accessible and thus need no comment here, Mencken's attitude having been the same in 1948 as in 1936.
- [46] A J Liebling, "Wayward Press: Two Pounds for a Dime," *The New Yorker*, Nov.2, 1946, pp.82, 85–89; see *The Wayward Pressman*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1947, p.208. On p.211, Liebling took off, in passing, on the difference between the *Tribune*'s "photograf" and the "inquiring Fotographer" of the New York *Daily/Sunday News*, published by McCormick's cousin, Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, until his death, May 26, 1946, the difference leading Liebling to wonder "whether it was a difference over how to spell this word that for ten years had come between them. See also p.220. The three *Tribune* articles appeared on July 28, Aug.11 and 18, 1946. On Sept.22, 1946, the New York *Times* printed a humorous rejoinder, featuring an interview with McCormick, who is quoted as saying of Thomas E Dewey, soon to be elected governor of New York and Republican candidate for president in 1948, "He's no American; he's a New Yorker."
- [47] *The New Yorker*, Jan.7, 1950, pp.52, 54–59; Jan.14, 1950, pp.63–68; Jan.21, 1950, pp.54, 56, 58, 60, 63–65; and Mar.25, 1950, pp.97–105.
- [48] New York *Post*, Friday, July 15, 1949, p.X5 ("Home News" section), c.1 — the only belief-system the liberal *Post* shared with the *Tribune* was anti-communism; *Newsweek*, July 18, 1949, p.48, c.3; and *Time*, July 18, 1949, p.56, c.2 — these news magazines always appear before their issue date. *Newsweek* erroneously attributed *wile* to the *Tribune* for *while*. *Time* filled in its readers on the then "74, bushy-browed, patrician Astley-Cock", who had begun his varied career as a Cambridge University athlete long before joining the *Tribune* staff in 1932.
- [49] "Tribune Reflected McCormick's Vigor ...", New York *Times*, Fri., Apr.1, 1955, p.17, c.4: "With its multicolored cartoon on page one; its phonetic spellings; its savage editorials, The Chicago Tribune was probably the most popular, feared, hated and quoted newspaper in the Midwest."

- [50] "Chicago Tribune Revises Spelling", *New York Times*, Tues., Aug.23, 1955, p.19, c.8, its source the North American Newspaper Alliance; "After the Colonel", *Time*, Aug.29, 1955, p.51. See also "When Three Bosses Fill One Vacant Chair,, *Business Week*, May 19, 1956, p.85.
- [51] Edit., "Fonetic Phonetic Again", *Christian Science Monitor*, Fri., Aug.26, 1955, p.18 (edit. p.), cs.1–2. The editorialist got two items wrong: Col. Robert C [*sic*] McCormick; and "fotograf", a *New York Daily News*, not *Tribune* spelling ("photograf").
- [52] Frank Maier, "The Media: The 'Liberal' Trib,," *Newsweek*, LXXXII: 1, July 2, 1973, p.50; caption to a photograph, *Time*, Aug.29, 1955, p.51.
- [53] "Topics of the Times", *New York Times*, Thurs., Sept.27, 1934, Sect.1, p.20, c.4. Barnes was the Rev. Dr William Emery Barnes (1859–1939), Emeritus Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and Emeritus Professor of Divinity, 1934. An AP news item, "596,000 Ways Alleged for Spelling 'Scissors'", *New York Times*, Sun., Dec.23, 1934, Sect.2, p.3, c.7, concerned an Ernest B Roberts of Toronto — whose letter to the *Tribune* that paper had quoted in part the previous March [*CST*, Mar.25, 1934, Pt.1, p.8, cs.4–5.1 — and his claim about the number of ways to spell "scissors", "as an example in advocating his 'spel-rid-ryt' system." "He did not list ... [the different ways]", the news item offered in deadpan.
- [54] "'Thru is Through' As Chicago Tribune Ends Spelling Fight", *New York Times*, Tues., Sept.30, 1975, p.22, c.1. The account is UPI. For the weekly column, compiled by Joyce Jensen, see under "Spelling Lesson", *New York Times*, Sun., Oct.5, 1975, Sect.IV, P.9, C.4. The other major story in that column casts a pall over the *Tribune* item, in that it concerned the shooting by his wife during a quarrel of a gun enthusiast, member of the Alabama House of Representatives, a segregationist and preacher, who had been bringing a revolver into the House and who had bought pistols for all his family. The House eulogized him the Tuesday before.
- [55] Russell Baker, "Dee Feet In Shacahgo", *New York Times*, Sat., Oct.4, 1975, p.27, c.1.
- [56] John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.*, New York & London: Harper & Bros., 1947, pp.361–62.
- [57] "Tribune Gives Up on Spelling Crusade", in Accent section, *Milwaukee Journal*, Wed., Oct.1, 1975, p.3, cs 1–4; and *Los Angeles Times*, Tues., Sept.30, 1975, Pt.1, p.5, c.4.
- [58] *CDT*, Tues., July 5, 1949, p.1, c.5; the dispatch was dated July 4. In addition to the *Daily Graphic*, the London newspapers were the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* — the two others were not named (*The Times* was not one of them) — and those in Lancashire were the *Liverpool Daily Post* and the *Manchester Guardian*. The *Tribune* modification was that one changing such words as *sophomore* to *sofomore* and *tariff* to *tarif*. Vicini (1973), pp.41–2, had noted the *Tribune* news item.
- [59] *Daily Express*, Mon., July 4, 1949, p.5, c.5 — from Express News Service; and *Liverpool Daily Post*, Mon., July 4, 1949, p.1, c.6; and *London News Chronicle*, Mon., July 4, 1949, p.4, c.2 — both from Reuters, this being one of the two unnamed London newspapers in the *Tribune* news story.
- [60] *The Manchester Guardian*, Mon., July 4, 1949, p.5, c.6. "MISCELLANY: Spelling Reform in Chicago," *The Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Thurs., July 14, 1949, p.15 — p.95, as given in some sources. Vicini (1973), p.43, referred to this commentary.

3. Spelling and Literacy in Finnish

Colin Davies

Dr Davies lived and worked in Finland during the 1950s and 60s, and got to know the language reasonably well; but having only spent a month in Finland in the past 25 years, he begs indulgence for any errors this may have given rise to. Later, he worked for the Open University, and obtained a Ph.D. in ultrasonics. He believes English spelling to be the most difficult subject that he has attempted to learn.

0 Abstract

Finnish is spelt exactly as it is pronounced, and is pronounced exactly as it is spelt. The rules for Finnish spelling are given, and it is shown, with examples, that English could be spelt using the same rules. Consonantal gradation in Finnish and English is explained, and its implications for spelling are discussed, as are the different reactions of Finnish and English speakers to the resulting alteration of words. Questions about the teaching of reading in Finland are answered by an expert from the University of Helsinki, who also confirms that the concept of 'spelling' to a Finn means by syllable rather than by letter as in English. Some examples of written Finnish are given to show the effects of case endings.

1 The predictability of Finnish spelling

Once you grasp the basic idea of how Finnish works, it is an easy language to teach yourself from books, because there is never any doubt about how to pronounce words. You just follow the rules, and you will be right every time. It has long occurred to me that English could be spelt using the same system, and introducing a Welsh Dd. Some advantages would be:

1.1 It is much simpler, and so quite quick to learn.

2.2 There would be no further doubt as to the correct pronunciation of words like *kilometre*, *controversy*, *harassment*, *subsidence*, *Pisces*, *cervical*, *Fresnel-lens*, *mandatory*, *sauna*, *metallurgist*, *homogenous* / *homogeneous* and plenty more.

1.3 It would enrich the language; eg, it would show that we have plurals in /z/ as well as /s/, and a different definite (as well as indefinite) article before a vowel as opposed to a consonant, and that English speech uses consonantal gradation. On the other hand, there would be no heterographs; thus in Finnish *kuusi* can mean either 'six' or 'spruce tree', but there is no possibility of spelling them differently.

The rules of Finnish spelling are as follows:

A letter in Finnish has one sound only, irrespective of its position in a word. A doubled letter lengthens that sound; this applies to consonants as well as vowels. (The lengthened pronunciation of consonants is known as 'gemination'.)

Words are spelt exactly as pronounced, and pronounced exactly as spelt. This is very precise indeed. So, for example, *mato* 'worm' is not pronounced the same as *matto* 'carpet'; *kisoissa* 'in the games' is not pronounced the same as *kissoissa* 'in the cats', although few ears trained on English can hear any difference. Furthermore, neither *koko* 'all', nor *kokko* 'midsummer night bonfire' rhyme with the English words *cocoa* or *Morocco*.

A sentence like *Kokoo kokoon koko kokon kokko* 'Collect together all the fuel for the midnight fire' is pronounced exactly as written, giving equal value to each letter.

2 Rules of Finnish spelling

2.1 Consonants

Finnish uses the consonant letters D G H J K L M N P R S T V, although others may appear in foreign loan words. Combinations of consonants (digraphs) do not normally occur except in NG (the only use of G).

The consonants have almost the same sounds as in English except for J, which is sounded as Y in Yes. NK and NG are sounded as in English *sinking*.

The lack of a B means that most Finnish ears cannot distinguish, eg, *Big Ben* from *pig pen*. Nor can they distinguish between *shoes*, *choose* and *juice*, and as they always stress the first syllable, they tend to pronounce *interpret* as *interbreed*.

There seems no reason why more consonants and combinations of them should not be used for writing English by Finnish rules.

2.2 Vowels

Finnish uses A E I O U Y Ä Ö. They occur alphabetically in that order. A, O, Ä, Ö are regarded as completely different letters, and Ä and Ö come at the end of the alphabet. I have discussed this with Mr Lyytikäinen (see below) and we decided that while the Scandinavian and Finnish letters Ä and Ö must have had their origins in German, the German name for the two dots, *Umlaut*, is not used in Scandinavia or Finland.

Using a BBC-type southern English pronunciation as a guide

Finnish A sounds as the U in English *hut* (*hat*); AA as the A in *part* (*paat*);

E as in *met*; EE as in *air*, *care*, *pear* (*ee*, *kee*, *pee*);

I as in *sit*; II as in *feet*, *meat*, *sea* (*fiit*, *miit*, *sii*);

O as in *pot*; OO as in *port*, *caught*, *bought* (*poot*, *koot*, *boot*);

U as in *put*; UU as in *shoe*, *who*, *slew* (*shuu*, *huu*, *slu*);

Y as in French *tu*, a sound that does not occur in standard English (neither does YY);

Ä as in *hat*; ÄÄ I think only occurs in English local dialects;

Ö as in *the* before a consonant (schwa);

ÖÖ as in *hurt*, *sir*, *earn* (*hööt*, *söö*, *öön*).

Combinations of vowels sound as if the two individual vowels are spoken in quick sequence. Many of these sounds only occur in English local dialects, but in BBC southern English there are:

AI as in *pipe*, *life*, *while* (*paip*, *laif*, *wail*);

AU as in *cow*, *house*, *sauna* (*kau*, *haus*, *sauna* — the latter is the correct pronunciation);

EI as in *mate*, *weight/wait*, *lake* (*meit*, *weit*, *leik*);

OI as in *boil*, *noise*, *boys* (*boil*, *noiz*, *boiz*)

OU as in *pole*, *coal*, *odour* (*poul*, *koul*, *oudör*).

ÄY, ÖY, YÖ, and perhaps a few others don't seem to occur in southern English speech, but I did know a northerner with a fiancée he called *föiböi* (=Phoebe).

Once the rules are known, any Finnish word can be spelt correctly, or pronounced correctly from writing.

3 Finnish rules applied to English

The same basic rules could equally be applied to produce a delightfully easy spelling system for English, with English J, Y and consonant digraphs, and a Welsh DD for the voiced TH, /ð/.

Ddö seim beisik ruulz kud iikwöli bii öplaid tu prödyuus ö dilaitfuli iizi speling sistöm foor Inglish, widd Inglish J, Y änd konsönönt daigraafs, änd ö Welsh Dd foo ddö voukölaizd TH.

Lauri Hakulinen (1981) in *The Structure and development of the Finnish Language* says the vowel Ö is the least used (1% of all usage). In English it (ie, schwa) is the commonest sound, but instead of a special symbol to reflect its importance, English uses any one of the other vowels at random. If we are going for phonetic spelling, we had better find a substitute for Ö that is quicker to write, and has no dots on top.

Here are two sample texts used by the Simplified Spelling Society. They show how I pronounce English; people with other accents might write them differently.

Oud tuu ö Naitingeil / Ode to a Nightingale (Jon Kiits / John Keats)

Mai haat eiks, and a drauzi namnis peinz
Mai sens, az ddou ov hemlok ai häd drank,
Oo emptid sam dal oupiöt tuu ddö dreinz
Wan minit paast, and Liithiwoodz häd sank:
Tiz not thruu envi ov ddai häpi lot,
Bat biiing tuu häpi in ddain häpinis,
Ddät ddau, lait-wingid Draiad ov ddö triiz,
In sam möloudiös plot
Ov biichön griin, änd shädouz nambölis,
Singist ov samö in ful-throutid iiz.

Fazi-oupeik Oothögräfiköl Vizhönz / Fuzzy-opaque Orthographical Visions (Kristöför Apwörd / Christopher Upward)

Ddee woz ö poo boi kudönt spel
Haaf ddö wöödz in auö längwij tuu wel.
Hiz tiichöz thoot: "Brein-sik!"
Mam änd Däd houpd: "Disleksik?"
Yet ddö chaild räshli jjiöd: "Wot ddö hel!"

4 Consonant gradation & vowel harmony

I don't expect to see the Finnish writing system used in England without a dictator such as an English Atatürk. However, if we had such a system, we would have to decide our policy on what the Finns call *aste vaihtelu*. This means 'consonantal gradation', and occurs in English a little, and in Finnish a great deal.

A word like *ranta* 'shore' has the adessive form *rannalla* 'on the shore'. The /t/ drops out and the /n/ doubles, but the point to emphasize is that these sound changes are *always* followed by the spelling. *Puhelin* 'telephone' has the inessive form *puhelimessa* 'on the phone', in the sense of speaking on the phone. The /n/ sound becomes an /m/, and is written that way.

This sort of thing is the rule rather than the exception in Finnish, but it does occur in English. Obvious examples are words like *leaf* and *sheaf*, where the /f/ sound becomes a /v/ in the plural. These are obvious because the spelling follows the sound (*leaves, sheaves*), but other

examples where the spelling does not follow the sound come to mind: *lecture*, which has the same root as *lecturn*, but has unnecessarily retained the written T. Similarly a large number of nouns like *attraction*, *disruption*, and *direction* keep the written T from their verbs. The final /s/ sound in *house* becomes /z/ in the plural, the final TH sound in *bath* becomes a Welsh DD sound in the plural, and as pointed out by Cornell Kimball (1998), the /z/ sound in *advertise* changes to an /s/ in *advertisement*. He seems to see this /z > s/ shift as a problem; I don't. But would people be prepared to see these changes reflected in the spelling of words?

Finnish allows no exceptions: proper nouns get the full treatment too. *Alavus* is the name of a village; 'at Alavus' is *Alavudella* (adessive case). *Helsingissä* means 'in Helsinki' (inessive case) — the /k/ sound has become a /g/, and that's how they write it.

Likewise with people: 'the music of Sibelius' is *Sibeliuksen musiikki*. The Finnish for 'wolf' is *susi*, which is also a common surname. A Mr Wolf in England might resent hearing his family described as 'the Wolves', but Mr Susi would not notice anything untoward. For example the Finns would say and write:

Mr Susi's book	Herra Suden kirja (genitive)
I don't know Mr Susi	En tunne Herra Sutta (partitive)
I don't like Mr Susi	En pidä Herra Sudesta (elative)
Mr Susi has the book	Herra Sudella on kirja (adessive)

Finnish words also have vowel harmony. This means that the front vowels Y Ä Ö cannot occur in the same word (unless it is a compound) as the back vowels A O U, though the front vowels E and I can go with either group. So Ä, Ö contrast with A, O in forming a front/back switch in vowel harmony. Thus, 'in Helsinki' is *Helsingissä*, because Helsinki has no A, O or U, so is a front vowel word requiring a final Ä. 'In Lahti' is *Lahdessa* with final A, as the stem contains A and is thus a back vowel word. Similarly, *on* means 'it is', and *onko?* with final O means 'is it?'; but the front vowel word *käy* meaning 'it goes' becomes *käykö?* 'does it go?' with final Ö, not O.

5 Literacy in Finnish

When I was living in Finland, I was told that all Finns could read and write unless they were mentally defective. The only article I've been able to find on the subject of learning to read in Finland was by Hannele Branch. She writes: "(learning to read) was enforced in a very effective way. One could be married only by the church. To be granted permission to marry, one had to know by heart the main articles of faith of the Lutheran church, and furthermore, one had to pass a reading test. As a result of this programme, Finland today claims 100 percent literacy." (Branch 1984)

To get more information, I wrote to the Head of the Finnish Language Department of the University of Helsinki, and asked if anyone could help me with the answers to various questions. I had some very helpful replies from: Erkki Lyytikäinen, *amanuenssi*, *Helsingin yliopiston suomen kielen laitos* 'research assistant, Finnish language department of the University of Helsinki'. Mr. Lyytikäinen said that it was extremely interesting to hear that an institution like the Simplified Spelling Society operated in England. "All in all, it is exciting to know that even in England people are having such heretical ideas about their orthography."

Here are my questions and Mr Lyytikäinen's replies as well as I can translate them. In this respect, I should point out that the Finnish word *Englanti* can refer to the whole island; the Finns never use a word for *Britain*. The word *hän* can mean *she* or *he*; there are no genders in

Finnish. *Book language* is a literal translation of *kirjakieli*; it seems to mean the officially accepted correct language.

Q1 Can you provide me with information on the development of written Finnish? Can you tell me how the spelling system was devised, and whether it has been updated over time?

A1 The 'book language' was born around the beginning of the 1500s; the initiator was the religious reformer Mikael Agricola. The orthography was entirely foreign, close to the styles of Swedish and German. One sound had many ways of writing it, and one letter represented many different sounds: in that way it resembled modern English. From this starting point, things slowly moved towards the modern phonetic way of writing. There were no sudden breakthroughs. The first translation of the Bible appeared in 1642, and used a much improved spelling system compared with that of Agricola's time.

One must take note that not much literature in the Finnish language had appeared until the beginning of the 1800s. The 'book language' appeared in its modern form in a short period, within fifty years at the end of the 1800s, at which time the language was taken into use alongside Swedish as a true language of culture. At this time there was born, amongst other things, a copious vocabulary, and a correct orthography was established. From around 1880, the spelling system was about the same as it is today.

Q2 How long does it normally take for Finnish schoolchildren to learn to read and write? Are they taught phonics, or are they taught to recognize the look of a word as a whole?

A2 Schoolchildren learn to read and write during their first school year. Of course there are large individual differences, but in general, that is how it is. The teaching operates so that at first the names of the letters are taught. After that the children are taught to form syllables from the letters, and words from the syllables. The look of a word as such is not taken into account during primary teaching. I am not an expert on this subject; I have the feeling that during an earlier period of education there were experiments in recognizing the basic look of a word in the teaching of reading, but this scheme was abandoned.

Q3 *Nykysuomensanakirja* (Dictionary of Modern Finnish) (1966) indicates that *tavata* means 'to syllablize', rather than 'to spell'. And *tavaus* translates in Alanne's dictionary (1956) as 'spelling by syllables'. This suggests that there is no other way of spelling that a Finn might discuss or consider. *Nykysuomensanakirja* also makes the point that in foreign, but especially English language situations, *tavata* means 'to enumerate from letter to letter how a word is written'. This suggests that the concept of spelling as the English speaker thinks of it, is not something that Finns normally come across, unless they are dealing with non-Finnish matters. Do you agree, and can you comment further?

(In the following answer, *tavaaminen* is a sort of gerund of *tavata*, which means to spell in the Finnish syllable sense. *Talo* means 'house', *talossa* means 'in a house'.)

A3 The spelling or *tavaaminen* puzzle. You have interpreted the situation quite correctly. *Tavaaminen* to a Finn is indeed the enumeration of a word from one syllable to another. Once the letters have been mastered, children are immediately taught in the way I explained in *A1* above. I will *tavata* now the Finnish word *talo*: tee, aa, **ta-**; ä, oo, **-lo**; **talo**. (*Tee*, *aa*, *ä* and *oo* are the Finnish names for the letters.) In the same way the word *talossa*: tee, aa, **ta-**; ä, oo, **äs**, **-los-**; **talos**; **äs**, aa, **-sa**; **talossa**. This is classical Finnish *tavaaminen* or *tavaus*. In letter enumeration situations, for example using the English word 'spell', a Finn does not really think in terms of the word *tavata*. So the English request "Spell your name please" would be translated into Finnish as "Please indicate the letters of your name", or "Please say your name letter by

letter". *Tavaaminen* does not seem the right word in this situation. Perhaps it is because *tavaaminen* is more of a children's affair. To ask an adult to *tavata* something seems mildly insulting. This (discussion) has certainly gone a long way into the interpretation of nuances between languages.

(Answer 3 suggests to me that Finnish might alternatively be written as a syllabary like Japanese 'Kana'. [See McGuinness pp80]).

Q4 I also wonder how Finnish people think about spelling; do they ever think about it?

A4 My impression is that Finns just don't think about *tavaaminen* or spelling. The need only crops up when reading and writing in foreign languages.

Q5 How do Finns who speak local dialects cope with spelling? Eg, *glasspaper* is pronounced *glaaspeipö* in the south of England, and *gläspeepö* in the north. *Clerk* is *klaak* in England, but *klöörk* in America, and we say *clock* as *klok*, but Americans say *klaak*. This sort of thing, the argument goes, makes phonetic spelling impossible in English. However, I noticed that in Finland, the letter D is often pronounced as an L in Häme, a T in Karelia, and an R in the west.

A5 I admit I have never thought of this! This is really weird (and hardly to my credit!) because I have worked with dialects for the greater part of my adult life. It is all thanks and honour to you that I have now hit this problem. Everything I say now on this matter is merely my intuition after mulling it over; I have no firm academic information on this subject.

To put it briefly, I don't think a dialect speaker ever tries to take a stand on *tavaaminen*, so no problem arises. Please bear in mind the difference between the Finnish *tavata* and the English 'spell'; *tavaaminen* is the formation and enumeration of syllables. The Finnish syllable is usually the first step in the phoneme analysis of the language, it is the examination of the frame of the language, and — note this — it only applies to the 'book language'. A person gets into the way of *tavaaminen* quite normally when learning to read. *Tavaaminen* is an expedient, an intermediate stage to full reading ability, and to a person who has attained reading ability, *tavaaminen* is of no further consequence. Teaching material is always in the 'book language', so that *tavaaminen* is officially under the governance and control of the 'book language'. For speaking, *tavaaminen* is of no relevance. If for example a listener does not clearly hear what another has said, s/he (*hän*) asks for it to be repeated. And the other repeats it as many times as is needed for understanding. That is, s/he (*hän*) repeats the whole unclear sequence. In spoken language one never asks: "spell the word please".

(Diane McGuinness, in her book *Why Children Can't Read*, claims that there is no such thing as dyslexia, only bad teaching. So I asked Mr Lyytikäinen about it.)

Q6 'Dyslexia' is a condition that is commonly cited when English children have difficulty in learning to read. Chambers Dictionary defines 'dyslexia' as: "Word blindness, great difficulty in learning to read or spell, of which the cause (not lack of intelligence) has not been established." I cannot find a Finnish translation of 'dyslexia'; does it occur in Finland, or is it an English disease?

A6 Dyslexia is indeed not unknown in Finland either. One may see this Greek-based word in scientific articles, but generally the term *lukihäiriö* (reading/writing disturbance) is used. Formerly, the expression 'word blindness' was used, but it was given up because of inexactness. *Lukihäiriös* are of many degrees, severe or mild, and they appear in all types of school pupils. In undergraduate writings, that is, after leaving school, one can in some

circumstances notice a slight reduction in the students' level of performance as a result of *lukihäiriö*. In general, without getting too specific, I do say that of course some Finnish school children have some difficulties in learning to read. I am not an expert in this field, but I imagine that their difficulties are minor compared with difficulties in the rest of the world. Dyslexics of course have their own specific problems, but, leaving them aside, first year school children learn to read largely without difficulty.

(It is here worth mentioning that, as reported in *JSSS 95/2* [esp. p6, §5, and the table on p7], that Finland has repeatedly appeared in top position in international tables of literacy achievement.)

6 Further points of discussion

Mr. Lyytikäinen suggested I contact Pirjo Sinko who is Counsellor of Education on the National Board of Education. So I wrote to her asking about dyslexia in Finland. She has supplied me with a considerable amount of information, and Jean Hutchins of the Simplified Spelling Society has sent me a copy of Lyytinen's (1997) chapter on dyslexia in Finland..

Both Pirjo Sinko and Heikki Lyytinen say very much the same thing about Finnish dyslexia. Abbreviating what Pirjo Sinko writes:

"Yes indeed, there is dyslexia in Finland, just like anywhere else. I don't believe that it can in any way depend on any specific language, but certainly there are differences in the way it manifests itself. Adding to our problem is the fact that most of the information on the subject comes from the English-speaking world, and the way our Finnish problems manifest themselves is different from those of English.

"The estimates of the extent of *lukivaikeus* (reading/writing difficulty) vary considerably. According to the most specific estimates they affect 6–7% of the population, but if the field is widened to take in general understanding and learning difficulties, one easily reaches 20%.

"Modern neurological investigations have shown that the brain's special methods of processing information are involved. Some parts of the brain operate more slowly and less well in a person with *lukivaikeus* than in 'a normal healthy person'. It is certain that not all difficulties in reading and writing or counting are examples of *lukivaikeus* though. *Lukivaikeus* occurs in people with all degrees of academic aptitude.

"Here it is sometimes said that *lukivaikeus* is not (just) a learning difficulty, but also a teaching difficulty, by which is meant that the teacher ought to be able to develop procedures which explicitly help the pupil who has problems of spatial cognition.

"Because the words in our Finnish language are long, neither a comprehensive system, and certainly not a national system, have become recommended for teaching reading. We generally use a mixture of methods, but the sound to letter correspondence method is a sound base for teaching."

I have also received a statement from Finnish TV presenter Airi Valkama who writes roughly as follows: "I am myself *lukihäiriönen* ('read/write disturbed'). In my early school years letters and numbers appeared either glued together into an incomprehensible porridge, or they changed places among themselves. Lines jumped and disappeared. It made reading very laborious. Writing was difficult too."

This suggests to me that Diane McGuinness is oversimplifying the dyslexia problem.

Valerie Yule has written (20 May 1998) to make a few points on Finnish spelling. She says:
1 "The difficulties for beginners in reading and learning to read Finnish result from the word length and the phoneme-confusability of the spoken language.

"Finnish words tend to be remarkably long, often with seven or more syllables. Text in English would be 25% shorter than the same text in Finnish."

Certainly some words, such as the numbers, are very long. The numbers 1–12 are *yksi, kaksi, kolme, neljä, viisi, kuusi, seitsemän, kahdeksan, yhdeksän, kymmenen, yksitoista, kaksitoista*.

However, *menin kirkkoon vaimoineeni* with 24 letters in 3 words means "I went into the church with my wife", using 28 letters in 8 words. In a Finnish cinema, the subtitles go up in Finnish and Swedish, and it always seems to me that the Swedish subtitles take up more room than the Finnish.

2 "Critical differences between some Finnish phonemes are very small and hard for beginners to detect, with a large number of diphthongs and sliding vowels, eg, *tule, tulee, tulle, tullee, tuule, tuulle* and *tuullee* are all real words, with minor differences in pronunciation as well as spelling."

I have not identified all these words, but I think it wrong to describe the differences in pronunciation as 'minor'. They are pronounced differently, just as *Jews, shoes, choose, juice* are pronounced differently in English, though they cause problems for Finns who don't easily distinguish the sounds of S, J, SH, CH, Z.

Mr. Lyytikäinen saw Valerie Yule's letter, and wrote: "What she says about the length of Finnish words is true. But the average number of syllables in a word is surely under seven. In compound words of course syllables abound. But I find it hard to believe the length of a word as such would make learning to read difficult. Finnish spelling by syllables has the splendid feature that even a long word flashes into its separate letters and syllables, which then join up one after the other to form the word, quite mechanically."

From that I conclude that Finns learn to read by recognizing syllable patterns rather than whole words. In view of the twenty or thirty possible inflections that Finnish words go through, that is probably the best way, as 'whole word recognition' means that one would have to learn to recognize twenty or thirty times as many words as in other languages. I myself have to read Finnish from syllable to syllable, although I seem to recognize the most common variations of common words as a whole. If you have a page of Finnish text, you will (at a guess) only find about one word in five in a dictionary in the form in which it appears on the page. The rest will be inflected in some way.

However, Pirjo Sinko writes "We also have a problem for people with *lukivaikeus* in variations in the length of sounds, eg, *tuli — tuuli — tulli* ('fire' — 'wind' — 'Customs'). These timing mistakes are typical of people with *lukivaikeus*.

"The Finnish letter and sound correspondence is obviously easy for beginners of reading, but because our language (as opposed to English) gets a lot of information into one word, our words are long while English words are short, eg, *talossammekaan* 'even in our house'. As the concentration span of a person with *lukivaikeus* is short, reading Finnish is difficult for such people, and many of them guess word endings."

Christopher Upward has asked me:

1 To explain why Finnish looks so unlike other European languages.

I have read that the three commonest letters in Finnish are I, A, and Ä in that order. For English-speaking observers, who discount the dots, it looks as if A is the commonest letter instead of the E in English. There are words like *vaaalla* 'on the scales', *kovaaääninen* 'loudspeaker', *hyvää päivää* (a greeting like 'good day'), and names like *Yrjö Häyhä* or *Terttu Häyhtiö* which don't look like names at all to the non-Finn. First names like *Vainö* and *Riitta* have to be spelt with care; *Vaino*, *Riita* and *Rita* mean 'persecution', 'quarrel' and 'trap' respectively, and are not names to give a child. The rarity or absence of B, C, F, Q, W, X, Z, and the low usage of D and G add to the unexpected appearance. Finnish is a member of the Finno-Ugrian group of languages, and has little in common with the Indo-European languages (which comprise the great majority of European languages), the appearance of which is more familiar to us.

2 To include some Finnish text including familiar place names like New York.

So how about: "Mennään meritse New Yorkista Lontooseen" 'Let's go by sea from New York to London' (*meritse* is the prolativ case of *meri* 'sea'). *Menimme oopperaan Pariisissa kun olimme Ranskassa* 'we went to the opera in Paris while we were in France'. *Hän meni Uudesta Seelannista Australiaan, ja takaisin Uuteen Seelantiin* 's/he went from New Zealand to Australia and back to New Zealand' (*Uusi Seelanti* 'New Zealand', with the S becoming T in the illative and D in the elative cases).

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4. The Phoneme-to-Letter Route for Phonics Instruction

Patrick Groff

Patrick Groff, professor of education emeritus at San Diego State University, has written extensively on his academic specialty, children's literacy development. This article, written in mid-1998, anticipates the current debate in the UK between advocates of an 'analytic' (ie, letter-to-sound) approach to initial literacy teaching and advocates of a 'synthetic' (ie, sound-to-letter) approach.

Abstract

Whether phonics rules are best acquired by children by teaching them (1) to spell speech sounds, as versus (2) to sound out letters in words, remains an empirical question. So far, there do not appear to be experimental findings necessary to resolve this issue. Accordingly, a debate between reading instruction specialists continues in this regard, based exclusively on opinion and logic. One argument in favor of the second procedure, that it involves significantly fewer phoneme-letter correspondences for children to learn, is not substantiated, however. From the standpoint of simplified spelling, there appear to be inherent advantages in the speech sound-to-letter approach. Instructing children to spell words, as a means to develop their phonic skills, could concentrate teachers' attention on the need to simplify English orthography, and thus make them more hospitable to plans for implementing this reform. The overriding importance of regularizing speech sound-to-letter connections might receive more acceptance from educators if children's phonics knowledge ordinarily was developed as they learned to spell speech sounds.

Introduction

In the past, the customary manner in which children were taught the relationships between speech sounds and how letters are used to represent them in writing was a *letter-to-speech sound* procedure. In this method, children first learn to recognize letters. Next, the traditional "phonics method introduces many of the sounds of letters and letter combinations so the child can put them together to make [ie, pronounce written] words" (Zintz, 1980, p189). Seldom offered to teachers of yesteryear, however, was advice as to how to be certain that the novice reader had become consciously aware of the separate speech sounds, a discovery that is necessary for him/her to successfully attach speech sounds to letters, ie, to sound them out.

It previously was noted in this respect, but only in passing, that the fledgling reader's "ability to discriminate among the various [speech] sounds...appears to be crucial" to his/her "success in reading" (Knight, 1983, p29). Teachers were encouraged by Smith and Robinson (1980, p70) to believe that the "conscious attention" of children "directed toward the [speech] sounds of language" was needed by them to learn phonics information. Nevertheless, these well-known reading teaching experts of their day provided only a way to test, not teach, this "auditory discrimination" ("pupils clap once whenever a word is said beginning with the [target speech] sound."

Defense of phoneme-to-letter teaching

At the same point in time, however, a few reading instruction experts did maintain that a *speech sound-to-letter* instructional routine may be as effective (or more) for fostering beginning readers' phonics knowledge as the reverse practice. It thus was ventured that knowledge about associations between phonemes and letters formed in one direction, phoneme-to-letter, should be usable for decoding words, letter-to-phoneme (Barron, et al., 1980). If so, "only one set of

print-phonology connections is logically necessary" for children learning to spell, as well as to read, it was held (Cossu & Marshall, 1985, p29).

Moats (1995, pp43–44) also is confident that children progress faster in learning to read words if they are "taught to spell them by using speech sound-symbol correspondences."

Other recent commentary is even more direct about the superiority of a speech sound-to-spelling approach to children's acquisition of phonic skills. McCracken and McCracken (1996, p2) insist that "teaching children how to spell is the most direct way of teaching how print works." Wilde (1997, p75) agrees that "spelling, rather than reading, is the appropriate arena for children to focus on phonics relationships."

To this effect, McGuinness (1997, p97) asserts that the "true logic of the alphabetic code" demands that beginning readers first become consciously aware of the phonemes in English. Following this basic accomplishment, she (p102) goes on, students should learn "the most likely spelling for each phoneme," then "the next most likely spelling, and the next."

Three main assumptions

The argument for teaching children to spell speech sounds, as the means by which to develop phonics skills, rests on three main assumptions. *First*, it is vouched that this practice develops novice readers' conscious knowledge of speech sounds (phonemic or phonological awareness) faster and more securely than otherwise is possible. This learning is an imperative goal, say several recent experimental studies. They found that prereaders' and beginning readers' phonemic awareness has a positive effect on their learning to accurately recognize written words.

These empirical findings consistently indicate that "children who discriminate and manipulate phonemes with ease learn to read and spell more successfully than peers who do not have these skills" (Goulandris, 1994, p410). If entry-level readers develop phonemic awareness before attempting to read written words, it is found, they thereafter will learn phonics information (how letters represent phonemes) better than otherwise is possible.

It therefore is indisputable that children's phonemic awareness "bears an important relationship to achievement in reading," and as a consequence, that "instruction [in phonemic awareness] improves reading skills" (Snider, 1995, p443). In this regard, Stanovich (1994, p284) believes that "a 7-minute phonological awareness test will predict ease of initial reading acquisition better than a 2-hour intelligence test!"

A *second* defense of the phoneme-to-letter route to children's phonics knowledge attainment rests on the deduction that it is more time-effective. In this respect, it is said that as students learn to spell words, during the same time they will gain the phonics knowledge required for sounding-out letters in words. As proof for this contention is cited the fact that students always can read words they are able to spell. While there is a single set of experimental findings to the contrary (Bryant & Bradley, 1980), it has been discredited as having a disabling flaw in its research design (Foorman, 1995). Learning to spell a word thus is deemed the most time-efficient manner in which to learn to read it.

Compounding this issue, however, is the incidence of children who can read normally, but still have serious problems in learning to spell (Thomson, 1990). Some children read well "but spell appallingly" (Treiman, 1993, p36). Thus, the "ability to read words does not assure the ability to spell them" (Dryer, et al., 1994, p309). "Being able to read a word is insufficient to enable

misspelling to be detected reliably because reading does not establish a full orthographic description of a word," it is judged (Funnell, 1992, p. 98).

In any event, the reason that spelling-only retardation occurs in students appears to be a pedagogical one (Kirk, 1983). Retarded spellers/normal readers demonstrate they somehow acquire the ability to recognize familiar spelling patterns in words without having satisfactorily learned phonics generalizations. It is clear that the able reader/speller thus gains mastery of the phonics rules; the spelling-only retarded child relies on a partial number of phonics cues when reading words.

The experimental evidence indicates that reading instruction therefore must make certain that all children master all of the phonics rules. To be able to do so, students must give close attention to the sequence of speech sounds in spoken words. Speech sound-to-spelling instruction concentrates students' attention on the sequence of phonemes in words more intently than otherwise is possible. Hence, it will work better to prevent spelling-only deficiency among children learning to read than will spelling-to-phoneme instruction, it is submitted.

A *third* justification for phoneme-to-letter teaching is based on the close relationships found between students' learning to spell and to read. For example, relatively high coefficients of correlation (*r*'s) have been calculated between these two variables. It is true these *r*'s do not always denote a causal connection between the factors they examine. A sharp rise in the appearance of storks in a region, with an accompanying precise rate of increase in the area's birthrate, would calculate into a very high *r* between the two instances. But no causal link between them could be attributed, of course.

Nonetheless, when rationally related matters are of concern, such as different aspects of literacy attainment, *r*'s between such factors do have legitimate interpretative values. Thus the relatively high average *r* of .83 found between children's spelling and reading achievement in the various grades (Ehri, 1997) suggests that students' acquisition of reading skills benefits significantly from their ability to spell words, and vice versa. In further support of this conclusion is the finding that an *r* obtained between children's phonics knowledge and reading is approximately the same as one computed between their phonics knowledge and spelling (Hammill & McNutt, 1981).

However, reading skills are not exactly the same as those employed in spelling, the *r*'s between them suggest. In fact, about one-third of the variance in common between the two is not accounted for with an *r* of .80. Nevertheless, most literacy development specialists do not concur with Bosman's (1994, p122) judgment that "reading does not benefit from spelling."

To the contrary, reading and spelling are seen by them as "two sides of a coin" since a "logical symmetry" exists between the two processes (Perfetti, 1997, pp28–29). In this regard, experimental research is cited that suggests spelling ability is "a necessary component in a complete theory of early literacy acquisition" (Cataldo & Ellis, 1990, p101). Spelling therefore is inferred to be "an independent contributor to the emergence of reading," and accordingly has "the major role in promoting [children's] insight into the alphabetic nature of the written language" (p101). For instance, Barker, et al, (1992) found that by grade three (age 8) the spelling skills of children made a significant contribution to their performance on five types of reading tests.

Learning to spell doubtless helps make clear to beginning readers the relationships between written words and their pronunciations. Specifically, it forges a link between these children's phonological awareness and their letter-to-sound knowledge (Cataldo & Ellis, 1990). The service given in this regard contributes an explanation as to why children's phonemic awareness

has such high utility for predicting how well beginning reading instruction with them will progress.

Letter-to-phoneme teaching resistance

Nonetheless, there remains active resistance to the contention that a speech-to-letter system for developing children's phonics skills is superior to its competitor. This is shown by the fact that teaching phonics to children by first having them learn to identify the letters, and then to attach speech sounds to them, clearly has the weight of conventional practice on its side. Popular texts over the years on phonics teaching (eg, Heilman, 1981) did not even contain the term *spelling* in their indexes. An up-to-date volume on this topic (Chall & Popp, 1996) devotes only a page and a half to the relationship of students' acquisition of writing/spelling and phonics skills.

Opponents of the phoneme-to-letter approach remain convinced that it has "been well-established" that "mastery of spelling is generally subsequent to [that of] reading" (Barry, 1994, p35). Henderson (1990, p88) concurs that "to study a word for spelling, it is necessary that the pupil [first] be able to read that word." A common contention over the years has been that children's identification of letters must be "thoroughly mastered" before phonics instruction for them is begun (Bloomfield & Barnhart, 1961, p36).

Bryant and Bradley (1980, p362) support the idea that "children start learning to read and spell in rather different ways." With this point in mind, it "would be quite wrong to regard the spelling process merely as the reverse of the reading progress," Nelson (1980, p491) warns teachers. Statements that "spelling and reading can't be simple inverses of each other" (Wilde, 1992, p27), ie, that "spelling cannot be simply the mirror image of reading" (Gough, et al, 1992, p42) are often expressed. Therefore, "spelling-to-sound rules just plain do not work in reverse," Adams (1990, p389) is convinced.

The major reason given for the belief that spelling and reading processes are in large part inimical is that letter-to-speech sound correspondences in English are more regular, predictable, consistent, dependable, reliable, etc, and therefore are easier for students to learn, than are phoneme-to-letter correspondences (Berninger, 1995; Bosman & Van Orden, 1997; Ehri, 1997; Henderson, 1990; Stanovich, 1993). It is relatively easy to locate such declarations of opinion on this matter. However, only rarely is any citation provided here as to comparative analyses of the two frequencies of correspondences that were consulted for making the declaration.

The Actual Number of Correspondences

Therefore, it is appropriate to calculate precisely how accurate is the often expressed generalization that phoneme-to-letter correspondences are much more numerous than are letter-to-phoneme correspondences. A comprehensive source of evidence in that regard is the compilation of the frequency of phoneme-grapheme correspondences made by Hanna, et al. (1966).

These researchers compiled, for a corpus of the 17,000 most frequently used words, the total number of different ways speech sounds can be spelled with letters, digraphs, trigraphs, and quadrigraphs. For example, the speech sound of A as in *sad* is spelled 3 different ways. The speech sound of A as in *late*, is given 16 various spellings.

By cross-referencing these data, I calculated the total number of different speech sounds that can be attached to each of the letters, digraphs, etc. For example, the letter A in words can be sounded-out (decoded) with 6 different speech sounds. The letter E in words can be so decoded in 8 diverse ways, one of which is not to give it a speech sound.

My recalculations of the Hanna, et al. (1966) data did not include the correspondences between the schwa sound /ə/ and letters used to represent it, nor vice versa. It is not practical, ie, time-effective, to teach beginning readers these correspondences (Groff, 1983; Heilman, 1981).

My reanalysis of the Hanna, et al. (1966) data does not support the contention that the total number of letter-to-speech sound correspondences is much smaller than the number of phoneme-to-letter correspondences. In fact, I found that these numbers are approximately the same: 303 versus 290.

Discussion and conclusions

The present review of the argument for use of the speech sound-to-letter technique for developing children's phonics knowledge, as versus that in favor of the letter-to-speech sound practice, reveals that neither side of this debate can cite findings of a teaching experiment, of at least a year's duration, as corroboration for their respective view on the issue. "I cannot come up with any reference pertaining to such a study," internationally known spelling researcher Anna Bosman (1998) writes to me.

A study by Thompson and Fletcher-Flinn (1993), which concludes that the speech sound-to-letter correspondence knowledge of 5–6-year-olds is not a source of their letter-to-speech sound knowledge, does not meet this research design criterion. Therefore, it remains an open, empirical question as to whether phonics knowledge of beginning readers is best developed by classroom teaching of one, as versus the other of these two procedures. Experimental studies of that question obviously are greatly in demand.

Such investigations are needed to answer pressing questions such as: (1) Is the difficulty children have in mastering the handwriting of letters, which is needed for spelling, so great that it nullifies an advantage found in spelling words as a means of acquiring phonics rules? and (2) To what relative degree does the speech sound-to-spelling process overcome the disruptive effects of spelling irregularities on children's acquisition of reading skills? If this process was found to be more effective in this respect than is a letter-to-speech sound procedure, its reputation among educators doubtless would be enhanced.

In the interim, a simplified spelling point of view about this matter suggests that teachers should not be hesitant about giving priority to a phoneme-to-letter instructional approach to developing their pupils' phonics skills. That is to say, simplified spelling constructs are based on the principle that the number of phonemes in a language is of primary consideration in determining its optimum spelling system. In that respect, simplified spelling holds the phonology of English constant, while experimentally augmenting, to the least degree possible, the number of written symbols needed to represent it. Hence, from the simplified spelling vantage, the most advantageous spelling system for anyone learning to be literate is one in which a static number of phonemes, and their protean written representations are equal in number.

In this regard, the likelihood that a phoneme-to-letter approach will put more emphasis on a development of children's phonemic awareness, ie, attentiveness to speech sounds, than will its competitor, should impress advocates of simplified spelling. The consistent empirical verification of the important influence that children's phonemic awareness has on their acquisition of traditional spelling skills, and the close relationships discovered between children's reading and spelling ability, lends substance to a simplified spelling precept that phoneme identification may be the first step in the spelling reform process.

Then, as noted, in traditional spelling there is about an equal number of correspondences in both phoneme-to-letter and letter-to-phoneme directions. This fact should help reduce

apprehension by teachers that their emphasis of the former will unnecessarily complicate students' task of attaining knowledge about phonics rules. Thus, if the spelling reform movement were to endorse speech sound-to-letter instruction, this decision probably would not risk creating greater difficulty for children learning to read than they historically have experienced. As an added bonus, this ratification of a speech sound-to-letter approach may help reduce the number of spelling deficient-normal reading students.

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5. Aspects of Spelling Standards among English 16-year-olds in the 1980s and 1990s

Jennifer Chew

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0 Abstract

A survey of standards of written English carried out by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES, 1996) gave evidence of a sharp fall in spelling standards from 1980 to 1994, though the researchers had reservations about the representativeness of the available data. The present article suggests that data collected at one college annually from 1984 until the late 1990s may be regarded as supplementing and confirming the Cambridge findings. Apparent discrepancies between the two studies are explained, reasons for declining spelling standards are offered, and remedies are suggested.

1 The UCLES survey

In [JSSS 22](#), Item 11, Chris Upward (1997) reviewed a report from UCLES by Massey & Elliott (1996) which showed a steep decline in spelling standards between 1980 and 1994. The authors of that report were cautious about drawing firm conclusions:

This paper ... cannot say conclusively if grading standards in English have risen or fallen in recent years. But it does present some rare comparative data concerning features of the writing of pupils awarded ostensibly 'equivalent' 16+ examination grades between 1980 and 1994, which are interesting and worth public consideration. (p 5)

Massey & Elliott looked at scripts produced under examination conditions in 1980, 1993 and 1994 and analysed the fourth sentence in 60 scripts (30 from girls and 30 from boys) for each grade (A to E in the O Level year (1980) and A to G in the later GCSE years). Although sentence-length, range of vocabulary and punctuation were among the aspects of writing studied, it is the findings on spelling which will be of greatest interest to JSSS readers.

Massey & Elliott were aware of certain factors which might have affected the reliability of their comparisons: in particular, the scripts they had for 1980 were originally selected for a different purpose, and unrepresentative of the weaker end of the ability-range, and the scripts they had for 1993 did not represent candidates who had been assessed entirely by coursework. The present article suggests that a survey carried out at a sixth-form college in south east England may go at least some way towards filling the gaps.

The UCLES study was undertaken as a result of public concern about a possible decline in standards of written English following a major change in the public examination system in 1988. Until 1987, there had been a two-tier examination system in England: abler sixteen-year-olds had taken the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (O Level) examination and the less able had taken the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination. From 1988, all students took a common examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The rapid rise in the pass-rate suggested to many people that grade-inflation had occurred, that is, higher grades were being awarded without higher standards being achieved.

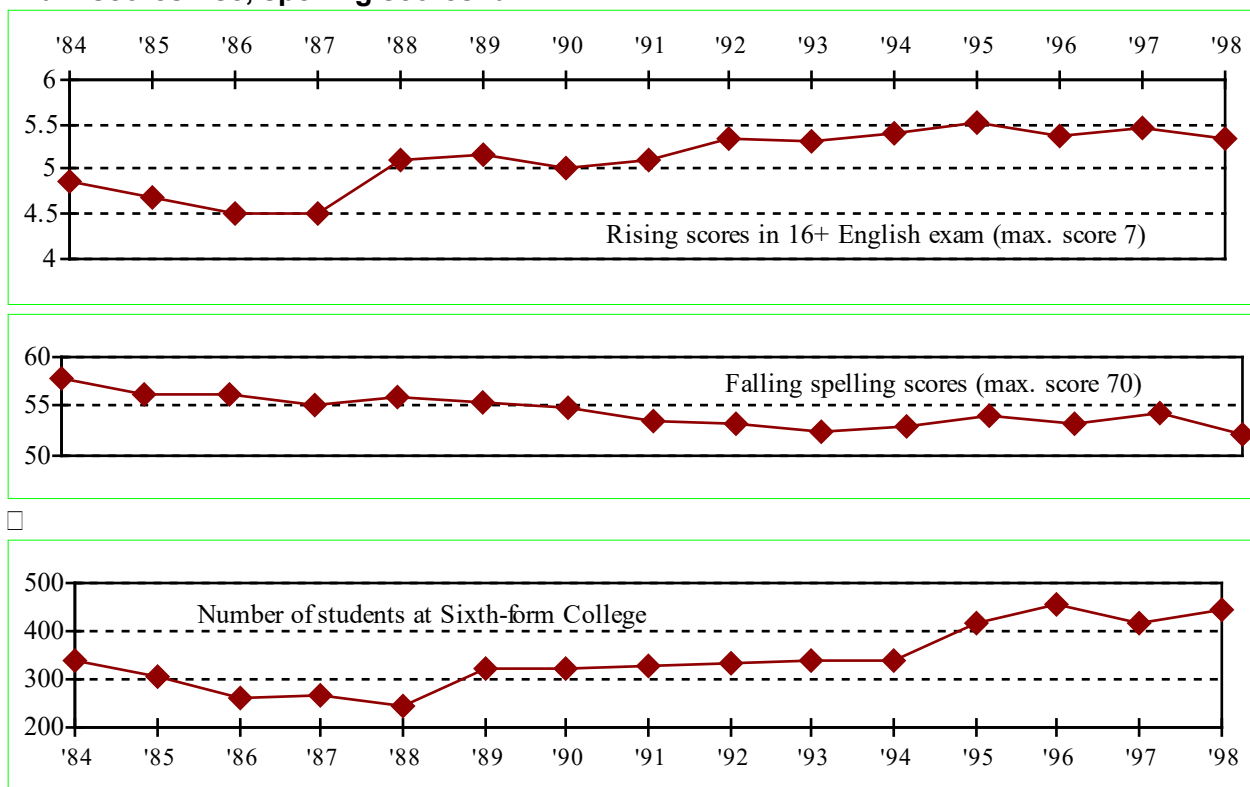
2 Sixth-form college study: background and method

Sixth-form colleges cater for students aged 16 and over who wish to continue their education after the period of compulsory schooling. The college study discussed here arose out of a need for a quick screening process which would help to identify without delay students entering the

college after taking their GCSE exams at age 16 who had literacy difficulties, so that they could be given appropriate help.

From September 1984 onwards, a spelling test was administered to all new entrants to the college. The test used has always been the same: Fred Schonell's Graded Word Spelling Test B (Schonell 1950, minus the first 30 words, which were considered by Schonell himself to be suitable for children up to the age of eight). Scores have always been recorded together with the students' grades in the 16+ English examination taken about three months earlier. Examination grades are given a numerical value according to a nationally-accepted formula (7 for an A, 6 for a B, 5 for a C etc) and this makes it possible for an average English examination score as well as an average spelling score to be calculated for the college intake each year. A starred A grade (A*) was introduced in 1994, to which a numerical value of 8 was assigned nationally, but the college survey continued to count A* as 7 as it was a subdivision of the old A grade and counting it as 8 would have made average GCSE grades from 1994 onwards look even more inflated than it was suspected they already were. The implications of changing levels of performance over the years are set out in Fig. 1.

**Fig. 1: Grade Inflation at Sixth-form College 1984–1998:
Exam scores rise, spelling scores fall**



3 Comparability of the UCLES data from the three years

The UCLES researchers recognized that the available scripts might not provide a fully reliable basis for comparison across the years. Two problems are particularly relevant to the present article, one affecting comparability of the one O Level year with the two GCSE years, and the other affecting the comparability of the two GCSE years with each other:

1 For 1980, O Level scripts were available but not CSE scripts, which meant that a less able group which was represented in 1993 and 1994 was not represented in 1980

2 The 1994 GCSE scripts came from the full cohort of GCSE English candidates, whereas the 1993 scripts came from only about 20% of the cohort. The reason for this was that in 1993 it was still possible for candidates to be assessed entirely by coursework, and about 80% of candidates were entered for this option. By 1994, the 100% coursework option had been withdrawn and all candidates had to take an external examination for the first time since the

inception of GCSE six years earlier. This was therefore the first GCSE year in which examiners saw scripts from all candidates.

The use of grade-for-grade comparisons by the UCLES researchers should have meant that neither of these points affected the comparability of the data: educationists had always assured the public that the standard of each grade was being maintained, regardless of the name of the examination or the amount of coursework involved. The credibility of these claims was, however, rendered rather suspect by the study, which showed seriously declining spelling accuracy within the 'unchanged' grades.

4 Comparability of sixth-form college data from year to year

The college study included data from the groups which were missing from the UCLES study. In the first four years of the project (1984–7), the spelling test was taken not only by students who had taken O Level English but also by some students who had taken CSE. In the six years from 1988 to 1993, the test was taken not only by students entered for an external examination but also by large numbers of students who had taken the 100% coursework option. The key point is that grade-for-grade comparisons suggest declining spelling standards whether the CSE and 100% coursework candidates are included or excluded.

5 Findings common to both studies

Both studies found that candidates in GCSE years (ie, 1988 onward) made more spelling errors than those in earlier O Level/CSE years. Grades A (and A* after 1994) to E should have represented the same standard in O Level and GCSE English examinations, but the UCLES researchers found that '1994's writing samples had about two to three times the error rate of their 1980 equivalent' (Massey & Elliott, 1996, p2). At the college, the average spelling score of the whole intake dropped from 57.83 out of 70 in 1984 (the first year of the project) to 52.51 in 1993. (1994 will be dealt with in the next paragraph). The same grade-for-grade discrepancies were noted in the college study as in the UCLES study: for example, the average spelling score of candidates with grades A to C in the last four years of O Level/CSE (with a CSE grade 1 counted as an O Level grade C, according to the convention of the time) varied only slightly, between 60.19 and 59.84, but by 1993 it had dropped to 55.51. This meant that the top end of the ability-range in 1993 (the A to C candidates) made, on average, not only more errors on the spelling test than candidates with ostensibly 'equivalent' grades in 1984–87 but also more errors than the whole college intake, many of whom had English grades below C, had made in 1984.

6 Apparent discrepancy between the studies

The only point at which the college findings appear to diverge from the UCLES findings is in the comparison between 1993 and 1994. The UCLES researchers found more spelling errors in the writing of the 1994 candidates than in the writing of the 1993 candidates, whereas the college study showed 1994 entrants to be slightly better spellers than 1993 entrants: the average score rose from 52.51 in 1993 to 53.04 in 1994.

The difference is almost certainly explained by the first-time inclusion, in the 1994 UCLES data, of candidates from the 80% of schools which had formerly favoured the 100% coursework option. The UCLES researchers suspected that this might be the case:

Might schools which had formerly used the 100% coursework option (who formed the majority of those examined in 1994) have placed less emphasis on the necessity of accurate spelling? No other explanation comes readily to hand. (Massey & Elliott 1996, p26)

At the college, the spelling of these students had *always* been seen in the annual spelling test. Occasional checks on students whose English grades seemed surprisingly good in relation to their spelling ability indicated that they had usually done the 100% coursework option. More objective checks were made in 1992 and 1993: students were asked to state on their spelling scripts whether or not they had done 100% coursework, and separate averages were calculated for the two groups. In 1992, the average spelling score of students with grades A, B, C, E and below for GCSE English was lower if they had done 100% coursework than if their assessment

had included an external examination; only at grade D did the 100% coursework candidates have a slightly higher average mark on the spelling test than the 'examination' candidates. In 1993, the difference was more marked: the two groups had the same average spelling score at grade A, but at every other grade, the average spelling score of the 100% coursework candidates was about 2 marks below that of the 'examination' candidates.

This pattern seemed consistent with the great emphasis placed, by teachers who favoured 100% coursework, on the correction of spelling during redrafting rather than on first-time accuracy. It seemed likely that the 100% coursework candidates had not had much incentive to internalize correct spelling. It was certainly true that teachers favouring 100% coursework had often said that first-time accuracy was less important than accuracy achieved in redrafting, and it is arguable that this had left their students inexperienced in coping with examinations and spelling tests where redrafting, at least with the aid of a dictionary, was not possible. In 1994, when an examination became compulsory, these schools no doubt made an effort to encourage first-time accuracy, but were still inexperienced at doing so. In the college survey, which had always included these schools, it was the *effort* which showed in the improved test results, whereas in the UCLES survey, which had not previously included these schools, it was the *inexperience* which showed in the far worse GCSE scripts. To put it slightly differently: in a situation where the work of inexperienced examinees was being seen for the first time, it was the gap between them and the experienced examinees which was striking, whereas in a situation where both groups had always been seen, it was the slight closing of the gap between them which was striking. The discrepancy between the UCLES findings and the college findings was apparent rather than real.

The slight improvement in the average spelling score of the whole college intake in 1994 suggested that the prospect of a compulsory external examination might have made first-time accuracy a higher priority for teachers and students in schools that previously used the 100% coursework option. A further improvement occurred in 1995, followed by a slight decline in 1996 and then another improvement in 1997. Unfortunately, however, a major decline occurred in 1998, taking the average spelling score of the whole college intake down to its lowest-ever level (52.22). This was disappointing, but as the average GCSE English grade also dropped slightly it could be argued that examiners were at least not over-rewarding poor spellers as much as they had seemed to do in the past.

7 Other factors affecting spelling standards

It is likely that the fluctuations noted in the UCLES and college studies were largely, if not entirely, the result of developments at secondary level: changes in assessment methods at 16+ influenced the amount of emphasis secondary-school teachers placed on first-time spelling accuracy.

It is also likely, however, that developments at secondary level have only a modest effect on spelling habits acquired during the seven *primary* school years. Students who turned 16 in 1993 and 1994 had started primary school in the early 1980s. During this period, there was a well-documented move towards a type of early literacy teaching which played down the need to teach beginners the letters of the alphabet and their relationship to speech sounds (phonics). In Britain, the approach was called 'real books' or the 'apprenticeship approach'; in North America, it was called 'Whole Language'. The American term highlights the movement's preoccupation with keeping language 'whole' — i.e. not breaking it up into little bits for teaching purposes. Two of its leading proponents are Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman. Both are hostile to phonics teaching, because its focus on graphemes and phonemes constitutes a breaking up of language into small and meaningless units. A famous dictum of Smith's is 'We learn to read by reading' (Smith, 1978), and Goodman has called reading a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' (Goodman, 1967). Their theories dominated teacher training throughout the English-speaking world from the 1970s onwards. In the UK, Dr Tom Gorman, of the National Foundation for Educational Research, surveyed the reading lists issued to students by teacher-trainers, and made the following statements:

The majority of the books in the lists cited espouse an approach to the teaching of reading which is now sufficiently widely accepted to be considered orthodox, sometimes referred to as the 'apprenticeship' approach ... The approach, as it is frequently expounded, tends to underplay the amount of knowledge teachers need to have about the sound system and the written system of English ... I concluded from this enquiry, therefore, that it is likely that many teachers in training are *not* being provided with the information that they need to provide information to beginning readers. (Gorman, 1989)

The sixteen-year-olds taking GCSE from 1988 onwards had been 'beginning readers' during a period when teachers had been inadequately trained in how to teach 'the sound system and the written system of English', and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the spelling of these students had suffered as a result

8 The way forward

Large-scale spelling reform may not be necessary to reverse this decline in spelling accuracy. Checks made at the college suggest that even the weaker sixteen-year-olds (those with grades D and below in GCSE English) misspell, on average, only about 3% of words in their normal writing. The proposals of some spelling reformers would alter the spelling of a far higher percentage of words: the first 100 words of Chris Upward's (1997) article (ritn in Cut Spelng) on the UCLES report, for example, contain 46 spellings which diverge from TO. This will surely seem like overkill to anyone who is familiar with the writing of average youngsters. When spelling standards change over a period as short as that covered by the UCLES and college studies, the orthography cannot be to blame. Changes in teaching and assessment methods over the same period, however, can evidently have a noticeable impact. The best hope for an improvement in spelling standards seems to lie with good teaching at primary level followed by high expectations from teachers and examiners at secondary level.

The logical place to start teaching beginners to read and spell in a language with an alphabetic writing-system is with the simplest letter-sound correspondences. Even in countries with much more straightforward orthographies than English, teachers start with the shortest words and delay the introduction of digraphs or other complications (for example Umlauts in German). In English-speaking countries, by contrast, such ideas were increasingly rejected from the 1960s until the mid-1990s: it has been considered more important that beginners' reading books should have 'natural' vocabulary (ie, vocabulary which is not controlled for orthographic simplicity), and that 'invented' or 'emergent' spelling should be encouraged (children make their own attempts to spell words which they want to use in their writing and misspellings are not corrected).

If teaching methods for English beginners were governed by the same principles as they are for beginners in non-English-speaking countries, the first stages of learning to read and spell in English should be no more difficult than the first stages of learning to read and spell in other languages providing the vocabulary is controlled. It is only later that English traditional orthography makes greater demands on learners, but the evidence suggests that a good phonics start makes it relatively easy for children to go on to master the more complex aspects of English spelling. In South Africa, where systematic phonics teaching was routine at the time in primary schools, several hundred English-speaking sixteen-year-olds tested in 1987 had a much higher average score on the Schonell spelling test than the college students (Chew 1990). There were signs that it *was* the phonics teaching which had produced this result: the weakest South Africans were better at matching symbol to sound, producing (for *equipped*) attempts such as **equipt* and **equiped* compared with the weakest college students' attempts of **equit*, **quipet*, **epitt* and **accipt*.

A change in teaching methods would be well supported by a very large body of empirical research and would have massive public support. It would therefore be easier to justify than spelling reform as a first step in raising spelling standards.

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[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 25, 1999/1 p23 in the printed version]

6. Notes on the Decapitalization of Danish 1948

Chris Upward

These notes on the 1948 Danish reform derive from *Rechtschreibung* (Nov.1998), newsletter of the Swiss Bund für vereinfachte rechtschreibung (Federation for Simplified Spelling), whose main aim is to abolish the German noun-capitalization rule (the newsletter laments that the Allies did not impose this in 1945, when they had power to do so; the rule did not exist in medieval times).

- In 1998 the Danish spelling reform celebrated its 50th anniversary with a commemorative book.
- In 1948 Danish decided that instead of all nouns being capitalized, only proper nouns should be. This occurred because it was already the practice of local authorities, the press, business and private citizens (including writers).
- Norwegian had done the same 70 years earlier.
- The Danish reform was launched by the Minister of Education with a 2/3 parliamentary majority.
- In 1997 Parliament gave legal status to the Danish Language Council (Dansk Sprognævn), which produces the official Danish spelling dictionary. Future spelling changes will need agreement from the ministers of culture and education. New spellings will be binding on schools and public administration, but no sanctions are prescribed for infringements.

7. Overcomng Orthografic Frontirs, Part II Christopher Upward

Th first part of this articl is appeared in [JSSS 24 1998/2](#), Item 4. Both parts ar ritn in Cut Spelng.

Abstract

As th European Union expands, so do its problms of languaj manajmnt. Many se a solution in english as a natrl lingua franca, but its caotic orthografy is a major deterrent to lernrs. This paper sujests that comunication between european languajs is made unecesrily dificlt because ther ritn forms hav not been co-ordnated since roman times. English, notably, represents an unregulated mishmash of orthografic traditions, wich, if co-ordnated, cud make it a mor efectiv lingua franca.

Part I then anlyzed Cut Spelng (CS) for its compatbility with othr languajs. CS, wich simplifys traditionl orthografy (TO) chiefly by omitng redundnt letrs, has thre cutng rules, each adresng a particulr spelng problm: Rule 1 omits letrs irelevnt to pronunciation, Rule 2 omits vowl letrs from suffixs, and Rule 3 simplifys dubld consnnts. Rule 1 is shown to asimlate numerus individul words (and som jenrl spelng patrns) to cognate forms in al th main west european languajs. (End of Part I)

In Part II, publishd here, CS Rule 2 is shown mainly to brij som importnt difrneces between french and jermn, wile Rule 3 introduces to english a major avantaj of iberian orthografy. CS also substitutes F for PH, so alyning english with danish, duch, italian, norwejan, portugese, spanish, swedish, and, for certn words only, french and jermn. It furthr simplifys th use of capitl letrs in line with italian/spanish, and th use of apostrofes in line with othr jermanic languajs.

Finaly, th paper considrs th implications of th abov concept for intrlingul spelng co-ordnation, and speculates on possibiltis for its realization.

3 Harmnization thru Cut Spelng (cont.)

RULE 2 OMISSIONS — CATEGRY 1

Th efect of th CS Rule 2 omissions difrs from that of Rule 1, wich alyns many english word forms with ther equivlnts in varius european languajs. Rule 2 (Categrty 1) by contrast introduces patrns rarely found in those languajs, altho they did ocur in Old English (and thence Old Norse), and do so today in welsh, in th transliteration of arabic and russian, and ocasionally in modrn english. These patrns ar chiefly th use of word-final syllabic L, M, N, R. Thus we se syllabic L in *segl* 'sail' in Old English and Old Norse (cf, modrn jermn *Segel*), syllabic M in *bosm* 'bosm' in Old English, syllabic N as in *hræfn/hrafn* 'raven' in Old English/Old Norse respectively, and syllabic R in *silfr* 'silvr' in Old Norse. We furthr se syllabic L as in welsh *trestl*, N as in *cefn* 'bak', and R as in *calendr*. From arabic we hav patrns with syllabic N such as *ibn* 'son' (cf, hebrew *ben*) and R as in th name *Nasr* (alternativly *Nasser*). Th russian equivlnts of *Alexander*, *Peter* ar comnly transliterated as *Aleksandr*, *Pyotr* [\[1\]](#).

Modrn english has syllabic L in endngs such as *apple* (th final E is silent), M as in *spasm*, N as in *hadn't*, and R in the british form of som dozn words such as *centre* (th amerinc form *center* has non-syllabic R) as wel as in a few words like *acre* (th E here has 'majic' function, shoing th long valu of th preceding vowl A). Since syllabic L, M, N, R scarcely ocur in th major languajs of westrn Europ (a rare instnce is in certn south jermn surnames like *Lendl*, *Haydn*, *Mayr*), th main efect of CS Rule 2 is not directly to harmnize english with those languajs, but to remove inumerabl anomlis from th spelng of english words that formrly made ther relationship to equivlnt forms in othr languajs unpredictbl. Th consequences ar now anlyzd.

Sylabic L is spelt in a variety of ways in TO, as word-final -LE, -AL, -EL, -IL, -OL, -UL, -YL. In CS these are harmonized to -L as in *beetl, forml, novl, lentl, symbll, consl, methl*. In other languages the equivalent endings appear in different guises. For English TO -LE, the typical range of equivalents for English *possible* gives -LE in Fr. *possible* and Sp. *posible*, -EL in Jer. *possibel* and Port. *possível*, -ILE in It. *possibile*, and syllabic -L in Welsh *posibl*; the CS form *posbl* uses letters common to all the other languages, but reduces the English pronunciation to its minimal representation. A different range of endings, but with the same CS outcome, is seen in TO *bottle*, Dutch (verb) *bottelen*, Fr. *bouteille*, It. *bottiglia*, Sp. *botella*, Welsh *potel*, CS *botl*.

Where TO ends in -EL, different patterns again are seen across the various languages: the -EL of TO *tunnel* is seen in identical forms in Fr., Jer., It., as well as in Port./Sp. *túnel* and Welsh *twnel*; CS again uses syllabic -L in *tunl* to represent the same final syllable as in *posbl* and *botl*. TO *chapel* corresponds to Dutch *kapel*, Fr. *chapelle*, Jer. *Kapelle*, It. *cappella*, Port. *capela*, Sp. *capilla*, Welsh *capel*; CS *chapl* once more uses the -L common to all languages for the final syllable. Similarly CS *counsl* (TO *counsel*) compares with Fr. *conseil*, Jer. *Konsilium*, It. *consiglio*, Welsh *cwnsel*.

The unstressed -AL ending of TO *formal* is seen variously modified in Dutch *formeel*, Fr. *formel*, Jer. both *formal* and *formell* (with different meanings), It. *formale*, Port./Sp. *formal*; here too the CS spelling *forml* subsumes both the E-based and A-based variants of those other languages.

The anomaly between the U of TO *difficult* and the I in Fr. *difficile*, Jer. *diffizil*, It. *difficile*, Port. *difficil*, Sp. *difícil* disappears in the CS form *difictl*.

It will be noted that the syllabic -L used for the CS forms is particularly suited to representing the unstressed final vowel of the English pronunciations, whereas in most other languages the equivalent vowel is stressed and therefore requires to be represented by a full vowel letter. (Historically what has happened is that the original final syllable stress of the source languages has been systematically shifted forward in English, often to the first syllable, following the usual first-syllable stress pattern of Germanic languages, a process seen today in the increasing tendency to stress the first syllable of *grimace*.) However, the greatest advantage of syllabic -L in CS is its predictability: in writing, simple -L replaces 9 alternative TO spellings for a final syllable with the same pronunciation; and in reading the danger is obviated of giving full value to the vowels by analogy with the (usually) stressed -AL, -EL, -IL, -OL, -UL in such words as *apal, compel, fulfill, control, helpful, occult*.

Sylabic M occurs after a variety of vowel letters, as in TO *madam, system, victim, custom, album, synonym*, whose endings are harmonized to CS *madm, systm, victm, custm, albm, synnm*. Some of these words appear in other languages in variant forms, as in Fr. *madame*; Fr. *système*, Jer. *System*, It./Port./Sp. *sistema*; Fr. *victime*, It. *vittima*, Port. *vitima*, Sp. *victima*; Fr. *coutume*, It./Port. *costume*, Sp. *costumbre*; Fr./Lit. *album*, Jer. *Album*, Port./Sp. *álbum*. A group of words ending in TO -OM corresponds to -EN in German, as in *bosom, bottom, fathom, seldom* corresponding to German *Busen, Boden, Faden, selten*, while the TO suffix -DOM corresponds to Jer. -TUM (*christendom* parallels Jer. *Christentum*). CS *ransm* relates to Fr. *rançon*, CS *randm* (distinctly) to Fr. *randonnée*, CS *venm* to Fr. *vénin* (adjective CS *venmus*, Fr. *vénimeux*), It. *veleno*, Port./Sp. *veneno*. Thus CS syllabic M does not significantly enhance the harmony of European spelling patterns (the O of *venom* is perhaps the main anomaly in TO), but the benefit for the predictability of English spelling to both readers and writers is considerable.

Sylabic N occurs after a variety of vowel letters, as in TO *American, garden, cabin, lemon, Whitsun, curtain, cushion, pigeon, assistant, consistent, consonant, can(n)on, linen* which are cut to CS *americn, gardn, cabn, lemn, witsn, curtn, cushn, pijn, asistnt, consistnt, consnnt, cann, linn*. CS brings some European differences here: TO *American*, Dutch *Amerikaans*, Fr. *américain*, Jer. *amerikanisch*, It./Port./Sp. *americano*, CS *americn*; TO *garden*, Fr./Sp. *jardin*, Jer. *Garten*, It. *giardino*, CS *gardn*; TO *cushion*, Dutch *kussen*, Fr. *coussin*, Jer. *Kissen*, It. *cuscino*, Sp. *cojín*, CS *cushn*; TO *mountain*, Fr. *montagne*, It. *montagna*, Port. *montanha*, Sp. *montaña*, CS *mountn*. A particular feature of CS is its alignment of the -ANT/-ENT variations as between TO *assistant/consistent*. On this point most other languages prefer Latin-derived -ENT, but French has developed its own -ANT ending (-ENT in Dutch *assistent/consistent*, Jer. *Assistent/konsistent*, It./Port. *assistente/consistente*, Sp. *asistente/consistente*, but -ANT in Fr. *assistant/consistant*). As

wel as removing th unpredictability of TO and gainng econmy, th CS forms *asistnt/consistnt* thus brij (or evade?) a confusing franco-latn divide.

Syllabic R occurs aftr a variety of vowel lettrs, as in TO *vicar, teacher, amateur, doctor, ardour, centre, languor, murmur, injure, martyr*, wch becom CS *vicr, teachr, amatr, doctr, harbr, centr, langr, murmr, injr, martr*. Numerus deviations from these patrn ar seen in difrnt european languajs.

For english -AR as in TO *sugar*, duch has *suiker*, fr. *sucre*, jer. *Zucker*, it. *zucchero*, norw. *sukker*, port. *açúcar*, sp. *azúcar*, welsh *siwgr*, th latr with syllabic R wch is then adoptd for CS *sugr*. On th othr hand, th -AR of TO *vicar* merely ses th variation -AIRE in fr. *vicaire*, but elswher -AR, as in it./sp. *vicario* and jer. *Vikar*. Difrnt again ar th french endngs for TO *calendar* (fr. *calendrier*) and *particular* (fr. *particulier*), wile TO *cellar* relates to fr. *cellier*, but jer. *Keller*.

Th TO -ER endng has a wide ranje of mostly comn equivlnts in french, with -R in *tour* 'tower', -ER in *danger*, -EUR in *porteur* 'porter', -RE in *ordre* 'order', -IER in *papier* 'paper', -IÈRE in *matière* 'matter', -AIRE in *partenaire* 'partner', and -OIR in *pouvoir* 'power'. CS retains th R of al th french variants, most notably in th aproximation to french *tour* in CS *towr* (cf, also *powr, flowr*, and welsh *tŵr*). Welsh provides sevrl instnces of syllabic -R, as in *meistr* 'master', *theatr*.

For final -OR, -OUR in TO (eg, *doctor, labour*), we note that amerinc spelng has larjly eliminated this variation, cutng -OUR to -OR (eg, *doctor, labor*, wch ar also th spanish forms), and that french laks that variation too, havng -EUR for both (*docteur, labeur*).

In a few words, these syllabls aquire an extra consnt in english, thus TO *standard, modern, sojourn*, wch CS treats no difrntly, producing *standrd, modrn, sojrn*. In fr. *éstandard, moderne, séjour* th vowels ar quite distinct in their pronunciation.

In jenrl, we observ that in languajs othr than english these varid endngs pose no problm because each coresponds to its own pronunciation. Thus in jermn th -AR of *Vikar*, th -ER of *Winter*, th -EUR of *Amateur*, th -OR of *Doktor* or *Humor*, th -UR of *Natur* and th -YR of *Satyr* ar mostly pronounced, acordng to th vowel letr used. English TO by contrast has a dubl problm with these endngs: first, as they ar pronounced alike, pronunciation is no gide to ther spelng; and secnd, since th spelngs can ofn hav an alternativ pronunciation (as with -AR in *debar*, -ER in *defer*, -OR in *decor*, -OUR in *devour*, -UR in *demur*, and -URE in *demure*), they ar no sure gide to th pronunciation eithr. Th obstacl therby placed in th way of lernng and acuracy jenrly ar imense, but th use of syllabic -R in CS resolvms most of these problms at a stroke.

Rule 2 omissions — category 2

CS Rule 2 also simplifys th main english inflections, but with one exeption th resultng CS forms hav no bernng on th spelng of othr languajs. Th exeption concerns -S inflections atachd to base words endng in -I, -O, -U, wher th TO endngs -IES, -OES, -UES becom just -IS, -OS, -US in CS. Som of these endngs then alyn with equivlnts in french and spanish, wher th plural inflection ads just -S to a singulr endng in -I, -O, or -U. Words hos base-form alredy ends in -I, -U in TO ar unafectd, as wen *taxis, menus* remain unchanjed; but words endng in -O ar unpredictbl, as described belo.

Th TO -IES plural forms *enemies, mercies, parties, rubies* becom CS *enmis, mercis, partis, rubis* like th french plurals *ennemis, mercis, partis, rubis* (singulr also *rubis*). At th same time, howevr, a much larjr numbr of plurals cut in th same way in CS lose ther alymnt with equivlnt french words hos singulrs end in -IE, thus TO *industry/industries* becom CS *industry/industris*, as against french *industrie/industries* (th difrnt -II/-IE endngs in fr. typicly reflect a difrnce in jendr that is supresd in english, as between masculin *un ennemi* but femnn *une industrie*).

Th situation regardng -O endngs is complicated by th fact that TO alredy ofrs alternativ -S/-ES plurals in a numbr of cases (eg, *eskimos/eskimoes*), and CS then natrly prefers th -OS form, as in *eskimos, getos, mosquitos, porticos, tornados*. Wher th -OS alternativ is not alredy availbl, CS somtimes alyns with th french and/or spanish wher TO did not, thus TO *echo/echoes*, CS *eco/ecos*, french *écho/échos*, indeed th CS forms ar here precisly ecod by spanish *eco/ecos*.

Othr exampls of CS alnmt with french and/or spanish final -OS (wher TO has -OES) ar seen in sp. *búfalos*, fr. *cargos*, fr. *desperados*, fr./sp. *dominos*, fr. *embargos*, sp. *frescos*, fr. *ghettos*, fr. *héros* (singulr also *héros*), sp. *mangos*, fr. *mémentos*, sp. *mosquitos*, sp. *pecadillos*, sp. *porticos*, sp. *tornados*, sp. *torpedos*. In a much larjr numbr of cases, th TO plural alredy follos franco-spanish patrn, thus TO/CS/fr./sp. al hav *radios*.

TO forms endng in -UE, with plural -UES, ar reduced to -U/-US in CS on th modl of *menu/menus*. Som of these words hav -UE in french (TO *avenue-s*, CS *avnu-s*, fr. *avenue-s*), but som hav no -E, in wich case th CS forms aln with th french endngs. Thus: TO *residue-s*, CS *residu-s*, fr. *Résidu-s*; TO *revenue-s*, CS *revnu-s*, fr. *revenu-s*; TO *tissue-s*, CS *tissu-s*, fr. *tissu-s*; TO *virtue-s*, CS *virtu-s*, fr. *vertu-s*.

Rule 3 omissions

If CS Rule 1 cuts ached a scatrng of individul alnmts with othr languajs, plus a few patrnd alnmts, and Rule 2 ached far mor by way of regulrization of english than of harmnization with othr languajs, th efect of Rule 3 is dramatic and systmatic in alnng english with th most straitforwrd contntl european spelng modls. For Rule 3 simplifys th overwelmg majority of th unpredictbl dubld consnts that prolifrate in TO. One of th consequences is that numerus inconsistncis in english itself ar removed, as wen TO *abbreviation* alnys with its cognate *abridge* (CS *abreviation*; cf, fr. *abréviation/abrégé*), and a root like *stop* keeps its singl P regardless of suffixs (CS *stopd*, *stopng*, *stopr*, *unstopbl*).

Consant dublng in asimlated latn prefixs

A larj numbr of words made up of a latn prefix asimlated to a base word beginng with a consnt dubld that consnt in latn. They do so usuly in TO, ofn in french, variably in italian, but jently not in portugese and spanish. CS follos portugese/spanish with singl consnts in many such cases, as with TO *accusation*, port. *acusação*, sp. *acusación*, CS *acusation* (CS in fact somtimes gos furthr by also reducing NN to N and RR to R, wher portugese/spanish do not).

Such patrn of alnmt with spanish ar seen aftr th prefix A- in th cut from TO BB to CS B in *abreviation* (port. *abreviatura*, sp. *abreviación*); CC to C as in *acusation* abov, but stil CC wen pronounced /ks/ as in CS *accidnt*, port./sp. *accidente* (but brazilian *acidente*), DD to D in *adition* (port. *adição*, sp. *adición*), FF to F in *afection* (port. *afeição* [brazilian *afeição*], sp. *afección*), GG to G in *agravation* (port. *agravação*, sp. *agravación*), LL to L in *alusion* (port. *alusão*, sp. *alusión*), MM to M in *amunition* (sp. *amunicionar* 'to suply with amunition'), NN to N in *anexation* (sp. *anexión*), PP to P in *aparition* (port. *aparição*, sp. *aparición*), RR to R in *arognt* (port./sp. keep RR here, both riting *arrogante*), SS to S in *asumtion* (sp. *asunción*, but port. *assunção*), TT to T in *attention* (port. *atenção*, sp. *atención*). To these may be add CQ to Q in *aquisition* (port. *aquisição*, but sp. *adquisición*) and DJ to J in *ajust* (port./sp. *ajustar*).

Aftr othr prefixs th ranje of consnt simplifications is smalr, but simlr CS/portugese/ spanish paralels aply. Aftr CO- ther is TO LL to CS L in *colection* (port. *colecção* [brazilian *colecção*], sp. *coleccion*), MM to M in *comission* (port. *comissão*, sp. *comisión*), NN to N in *conection* (port. *conexão*, sp. *conexión*), RR to R in *corection* (RR stil in port. *correção* [brazilian *correção*], sp. *corrección*). Th prefix DI- trigrs consnt-dublng in TO, but not CS *difrnt* (port./sp. *diferente*), *disolv* (sp. *disolver*, but port. *dissolver*). Aftr th prefix E- we hav only TO FF to CS F, as in *efusion* (port. *efusão*, sp. *efusión*). Aftr th prefix I- (wich is a reduced form both of th preposition *in* and of th negativ prefix *in-*) ther ar simplifications as with TO LL to CS L in *ilusion* (port. *ilusão*, sp. *ilusión*) and *ilejbl* (port. *ilegível*, sp. *ilegible*), MM to M in *imigration* (port. *imigração*, but sp. *inmigración*) and *imature* (port. *imatur*, but sp. *inmatur*), NN to N in *inovation*, *inocent* (contrast port. *inovação*, sp. *innovación*, beside port./sp. *inocente*), RR to R in *irigation*, *irationl* (port./sp. RR in *irrigação/irrigación*, *irracional*). A few words dubl consnts aftr th prefix O, as with TO CC to CS C in *ocur* (port. *ocorrer*, sp. *ocurrir*), tho with CC kept if pronounced /ks/ (eg, CS *occidnt*, port./sp. *occidente*, but brazilian *ocidente*), FF to F in *oficial* (port./sp. *oficial*), and PP to P in *oposition* (port. *oposição*, sp. *oposición*). Rathr mor hav th prefix SU-, as with TO CC (eg, *succour*) leadng to CS C as in *sucr* (but keepng CC for /ks/ in *success* etc; portugese/spanish patrn vary here, with port. *sucção*, sp. *succión* 'suction', but port. *sucessão*, sp. *sucesión* 'succession'), FF to F as in *suficient* (port./sp. *suficiente*), GG to J in *sujestion* (port. *sugestão*,

sp. *sugestión*), PP to P in *suposition* (sp. *suposición*), and RR to R in *surrealism* (but RR in port./sp. *surrealismo*).

Siml'r patrn's arise from th' greek prefix SYN-, wher th' N is asimlated to a folloing consnnt producing TO LL but CS L in *sybl* (port./sp. *sílaba*), and MM cut to M in *symetry* (port. *simetria*, sp. *simetría*).

In a few cases, these simplfyd consnnts of CS alyn with french and/or italian as wel as with portugese/spanish. Examp's in french include *abréviation*, *adresse*, *agrandissement*, *agrégation*, *agression*, *apaiser* 'apese', *comité* 'comitee', *exagération* and, as alrely noted, J in *ajourner*, *ajuster* for TO DJ. Italian is inclined rathr to dubl consnnts wich othr languajs rite singl (eg, MM in *commedia*, BB in *repubblica*), but also rites singl M in such forms as *accomodare*, *comandare*, *cominciare* 'comence', *comitato* 'comitee', *comune*, and singl G in *esagerare* 'exajrate'.

Medial consnnt dublng

Beside this widespred patrn of consnnt dublng in TO wher latn prefixs ar asimlated to stems, ther ar also many english words wich hav dubld a medial consnnt in a french loan wher french has it singl, ofn reflectng a stress-shift. For instnce, wen french *bouteille*, with final sylabl stress and singl T, was respelt with TT from Midl English *botel* in th' 15–16th centuris for TO *bottle*, this reflectd th' stress shiftng to th' first sylabl in modrn english.

Othr examp's of such dublng ar seen (th' dubld consnnt being kept in CS befor final Y, as in *carry*, and in a few othr cases) with:

BB in *bobbin* (fr. *bobine*, CS *bobn*), *Bobby* (from *Robert*; CS uncut), *cabbage* (fr. *caboch*, CS *cabaj*), *gibbet* (fr. *gibet*, CS *jibet*), *ribbon* (fr. *ruban*, CS *ribn*) We may also compare th' english loan *snobisme* in french, with B beside BB in TO *snobbery* (CS *snobry*).

CK (th' dubld form of C) in *buckle* (fr. *boucle*, CS *bukl*), *cuckoo* (fr. *coucou*, CS *cukoo*), *jackal* (fr. *chacal*, CS *jakl*).

DD in *sudden* (fr. *soudain*, CS *sudn*).

FF in *traffic* (fr./CS *trafic*), *muffler* (fr. *moufle*, CS *muflr*), *saffron* (fr. *safran*, CS *safron*), *scaffold* (fr. *échafaud*, CS *scafld*).

GG in *baggage* (fr. *bagage*, CS *bagaj*), *bugger* (fr. *bougre*, CS *bugr*), *faggot* (fr./CS *fagot*), *juggle* (fr. *jongler*, CS *jugl*), *haggard* (fr. *hagard*, CS *hagrd*), *nigger* (fr. *nègre*, CS *nigr*).

LL in *bullet* (fr. *boulet*, CS *bulet*), *fillet* (fr./CS *filet*), *folly* (fr. *folie*, but CS uncut), *gallant* (fr./CS *galant*), *gallery* (fr. *galerie*, CS *galry*), *gallop* (fr./CS *galop*), *jelly* (fr. *gelée*, but CS uncut), *jolly* (fr. *joli*, but CS uncut), and simlrlly *galley* (CS *gally*), *gullet*, *hello*, *pellet*, *pillar*, *villain*, *volley* (CS *volly*).

MM *hammock* (fr. *hamac*, CS *hamok*), *mummy* 'embalmd body' (fr. *momie*; but CS uncut).

NN *dinner* (fr. *dîner*, CS *dinr*), *manner* (fr. *manière*, CS *manr*), *cannon* (fr. *canon*, CS *cann*), *pannier* (fr. *panier*, CS *panir*), and simlrlly *channel*, *fennel*, *kennel*, *linnet*, *rennet*, *tennis* (from fr. *tenez*).

PP in *Appalachian* (fr. *apalachien*, CS *aplachian*), *sapper* (fr. *sapeur*, CS *sapr*), *supper* (fr. *souper*, CS *supr*), *supple* (fr. *souple*, CS *supl*).

RR as in *carrot* (fr. *carotte*, CS *carot*), *cherry* (fr. *cerise*; but CS uncut), *current* (fr. *courant*, CS *curent*), *marriage* (fr. *mariage*, but CS *marrij* from *marry*, uncut), *mirror* (fr. *miroir*, CS *mirr*), and simlrlly *barracks*, *barrel*, *carrion*, *ferret*, *garrison*, *herring*, *parry* (CS uncut), *quarrel*, *squirrel*, *turret*, *warren*.

SS less directly in a few cases like *lesson* (fr. *leçon*, CS *lesn*), *scissors* (fr. *ciseaux*, CS *sisrs*), and *cossacks* (fr. *cosaques*, CS *cossaks*).

TT in *battle* (fr. *bataille*, CS *batl*), *bottle* (fr. *bouteille*, CS *botl*), *cotton* (fr. *coton*, CS *cotn*), *matter* (fr. *matière*, CS *matr*), *committee* (fr. *comité*, CS *comitee*), and simlrlly with *battalion*, *batten*, *battery*, *Brittany*, *button*, *fritter*, *glutton*, *gutter*, *jetty* (CS uncut), *lettuce*, *litter*, *lottery*, *mattress*, *mitten*, *mutton*, *petty* (CS uncut), *pittance*, *potter(y)*, *rebuttal*.

ZZ, typicly relating to modrn french S, in *buzzard* (fr. *busard*, CS *buzrd*), *grizzled* (fr. *grisailé*, CS *grizld*), *mizzen* (fr. *misaine*, CS *mizn*), *muzzle* (fr. *museau*, CS *muzl*).

In addition to these examples, there are numerous others where the Old French equivalent, from which the English was first borrowed, has not survived into modern French, as when Old French *atorne* led on to English *attorney*, but has no descendant in modern French.

We should also note that there are many cases where modern French doubles a consonant that is written singly in English TO, and where, if any simplification were to be proposed, it should apply to French, not English. The TO forms *battalion*, *carrot* show both tendencies, the double and single consonants being reversed from modern French *bataillon*, *carotte*. The L, LL variation between English *solicit*, French *solliciter* appears to reflect vacillation in Latin. Often the doubling seems as arbitrary in French as it frequently is in TO: compare TO *honest*, Fr. *honnête*, It. *onesto*, CS *onest*. Other common examples are French *maisonnette*, *marionnette*, *traditionnel* with NN, *appartement*, *développement* with PP and *carrousel* with RR for English *maisonette*, *marionette*, *traditional*, *apartment*, *development*, *carousel*. Several French words begin with RESS-, thus *ressemblance*, *ressentiment*, *ressource*, *ressusciter*, where the English equivalents have single S, thus *resemblance*, *resentment*, *resource*, *resuscitate*. Like consonant doubling in English, so in French such spelling patterns are sometimes inconsistent (cf. *traditionalisme* with only one N, but *traditionnel* with NN), and ritters confusion is further aggravated when they encounter opposite patterns in English. Although the question cannot be more closely examined here, there may be as much of an argument for French to consider merely aligning its double consonants with single consonants in English (and Spanish), as for English, in other instances, to align with single consonants in French. [2]

Final consonant doubling

English also sometimes doubles consonants word-finally where French writes them singly, a notorious case being the much misspelled TO *tariff* (Fr./CS *tarif*), and similarly *plaintiff*, or French may have -FFE, as in *étouffe* for TO *stuff*. Final -CK occurs in some TO forms, eg. *block*, *shock*, *hammock*, whose French equivalents end in -C (*bloc*, *choc*, etc); here however CS prefers the less ambiguous final -K to French -C (*blok*, *shok*, etc); the -CK of *cock* (CS *cok*), unusually, has a corresponding -Q in French *coq*. Likewise, TO 'doubles' French G to DG in *budge* (Fr. *bouge*), *judge* (Fr. *juge*), *lodge* (Fr. *loge*), but CS respells them with -J (*buj*, *juj*, *loj*). French *drôle*, *roule* correspond to TO *droll*, *roll* with -LL, but to CS *drol*, *rol* with -L. French simplifies Greco-Latin MM in *symmetry* to give *symétrie*; single M being used in CS *symetry* too. Where Middle English borrowed a French word ending in -S, it is normally doubled in TO, but has fallen silent in modern French, as in *mess*, *progress*, *success* (Fr. *mets*, *progrès*, *succès*); with adjectives, the French feminine inflection shows that S is still pronounced by writing -SSE; thus for TO *express*, *gross*, French masculine *exprès*, *gros* with silent S become feminine *expresse*, *grosse*. The French diminutive suffix -ETTE is sometimes written -ET in TO, as in *clarinet* (Fr. *clarinette*) and the American forms *cigaret*, *omelet*; CS systematically reduces these endings to -T, as also in *brunet*, *etiquet*, *gazet*, *siluet* etc.

German commonly doubles a final -L and -T after E in French loanwords, to show that the final syllable is stressed. Thus German *Formel* 'formula' has stress on its first syllable (rhyming with English CS *form*), while *formell* 'formal' (Fr. *formel*) has second-syllable stress. Similarly, *Kabinett* (from Fr. *cabinet*) reflects its stressed final syllable by doubling the final -T. German could in fact preserve the French -EL, -ET endings without consonant-doubling in such words, while still marking the stress pattern, if unstressed final -EL were reduced to -L (writing *Formel* as *Forml*) as produced by English CS Rule 2. Already final -ETT does not compete with an unstressed -ET, and *formel*, *Kabinett* would therefore still show their stress patterns unambiguously.

CS also aligns *well*, *will* with Dutch *wel*, *wil*.

In general, it is clear that there is considerable scope for languages other than English also to harmonize their patterns of consonant doubling.

CS LETR-SUBSTITUTIONS

In addition to the above 3 rules of letter-omission, CS has 3 rules of letter-substitution, chiefly replacing anomalous G in various contexts by F (TO *tough*, CS *tuf*), or by J (TO *ginger*, *judge*, CS *jinjr*, *juj*), or by Y (TO *sigh*, *sight*, *sign*, CS *sy*, *syt*, *syn*). These substitutions have little or no relation to spelling patterns in other languages (Turkish *mesaj* is a rare instance, though the J reflects French pronunciation of final -AGE in *message*).

Howevr, one furthr CS substitution alyns very strikingly with many european languajs: wen PH is pronounced /f/, CS substitutes F. (Th PH orijnatd as a roman transliteration of th greek letr *fi* (φ), and standrd greek itself has nevr ritn PH.) Most notably, italian, portugese and spanish long ago made this substitution, so that TO *photographer* apears as italian *fotografo*, portugese/spanish *fotógrafo*; likewise, duch has *fotograaf* and danish/norwejan/swedish *fotograf*. Jermn is less consistnt, with greco-latn PH spelngs mostly preservd, although words to do with certn evryday modrn tecnolojis ar jenrly modrnized with F (*Fotograf, Telegrafie, Telefon*); in adition, *Stefan* alternates with *Stephan* (cf, TO *Stephen/Steven*), *Fasan* 'pheasant' derives its F- from french, and, since th PH in english *cypher, nephew, sulphur* is aberant anyway, ther is no question of jermn *Ziffer, Neffe, Sulfur* being ritn with PH. (Th 1996 jermn spelng reform cald for a modest extension of F spelngs for PH, thus alowng *Ortografie* beside *Orthographie*. [3])

French is rathr less predictbl, since altho in jenrl greco-latn PH is preservd, a scatrng of words hav, in th corse of ther histry, aquired F insted (as *fantasy, frenzy* hav in english): thus french has *faisan* 'pheasant', *fantaisie, fantôme* 'phantom', *frénétique*. Natrly, *chiffre, neveu, sulfurique* do not hav PH. Overall, it is clear that it wud be beneficial for english, french and jermn to join in respelng al words containng greco-latn PH with F, as danish, duch, italian, norwejan, portugese, spanish, swedish and CS do.

CAPITL LETRS & APOSTROFES

Othr languajs jenrly hav clearr rules for th use of capitl letrs and apostrofes than TO dos. As wel as for propr names, TO rites capitls for languajs, nationls and nationalitis, months, days of th week, and somtimes for seasns and points of th compass too. Jermn uses capitls for nouns only (*deutsch* 'jermn', but *ein Deutscher* 'a jermn'), french only for nationls among th abov categris (*français* 'french', *un Français* 'a frenchman'), wile italian, portugese and spanish use capitls only for propr names. Duch follos th patr of french, exopt that it also capitlizes th names of languajs, wile danish, norwejan and swedish follo th patr of italian/portugese/spanish. Th latr is clearly th simplst procedur, and CS recmends it for english. French and duch too cud adopt it, but jermn has mor jenrl problms in determng wich words need capitls as nouns. Evidntly ther is scope for useful pan-european harmnization in this area.

Th use of apostrofes with S to indicate posession is a notorius complication of modrn english. Othr jermanic languajs avoid its hazrds by not normly using it, as indeed english formrly did not: *Danmarks* 'Denmark's', *Deutschlands* 'Germany's', *Stockholms stad* 'th city of Stockholm', *vaders boek* 'father's book' (duch), and from th first edition of Shakespears 'Hamlet': '*the Lawes delay*'. Despite th ambiguity of S-inflections in english (S markng th plural of nouns and th 3rd persn presnt singulr of verbs, as wel as posession), no serius problms of undrstandng hav been observd to arise wen th possessiv apostrofe is cut in CS, wich therfor recmends its omission. In this way, ritn english wud alyn with th othr jermanic languajs.

4 Concluding remarks

This paper has aproachd its theme from two directions, considrng first th problms, past, presnt and futur, of comunication between european languajs in particulr, and secnd, th Cut Spelng proposal for reducing th difictis of TO. It has demnstrated that altho CS, as a response to th problms of english, was not desynd to aleviate wider languaj problms in Europ, it has som potential for doing so.

This potential is seen on two levl. One concerns th suitability of english as a lingua franca, wich CS enhances in a numbr of ways. Visuly it increses th simlarity between many english spelngs and ther equivlnts in othr languajs, so making ritn texts mor accesbl to those with limitd nolej of th languaj. Pedagojicly, it simplifys th lernng process, removing arbitry complications, and enabling lernrs to derive th ritn form of english words mor relyably from th pronunciation and th pronunciation from th ritn form. And in terms of comunication, CS reduces th risk of mispronunciation and misspelng inherent in TO. In jenrl, by making th languaj mor user-frendly, CS cud help overcom th bad reputation ritn english curently has (english spelng as 'caos', [4] as 'one of th worlds most awsm messes', [5] as 'an insult to human intelijnce'), [6] and therby make it mor acceptbl as a lingua franca.

Th othr levl on wich CS myt, in principl, aid intrlingul comunication is as a modl for languaj planng in jenrl. CS has demnstrated th harmful effects of redundnt letrs, and th econmic and othr benefits of removing them. Apart from french, othr languajs tend not to hav redundnt letrs as english dos, but som do hav superfluus letrs: a particulrly extravagnt grafeme is th jermn SCH [7] -in this case english for once showd a gretr sense of econmy 500 and mor years ago wen it cut th C from SCH and graduly adoptd SH as its standrd spelng (eg, Midl English *schip* became *ship*).

Just as CS enhances th visbl simlaritis between english and othr languajs, so it implys that european languajs jenrly myt considr how ther ritn forms myt be harmnized. An prime candidat for harmnization is th spelng of /k/ across europ, with th initial consnnt of *chemistry* for instnce apearing as CH jermn and italian, but as QU in spanish and portugese, and K in danish, norwejan and swedish, wile th CH of TO *character* apears as CH in jermn, but as C in french, italian, portugese and spanish, and K in duch and again danish, norwejan and swedish. These difrnecs hav arisen from th uncoordinated orthografic developmnt of languajs across Europ. In th case of /k/, th letr K wud represent th sound econmicly and unambiguusly in evry languaj, and increse ther visbl comnalitis. One exampl of th efect of such harmnization: th form *komunikacion* cud represent TO *communication* equaly in english, french, jermn, spanish and th scandnavian languajs, and with the endng adaptd also in duch, italian and portugese. Howevr, wethr th benefits of such harmnization wud outwei th cost of chanje, even in th Babel of Brussels, must be open to question, as is th practicality of proposing such chanjes in languajs wich hav few spelng problms of ther own needng reslution.

No dout ther is a strong elemnt of linguistic utopianism in such ideas, wich is not to say they ar not worth exploring. Ther ultmat implication is perhaps that, just as th latn-derived languajs arose a thousnd and mor years ago from th disintegration of latn, ther myt one day be a kind of re-integration of th languajs of Europ, in othr words that ther myt be a gradul process of goeing togethr and reducing linguistic barirs. A mesur, howevr modest, of orthografic integration in th 21st century cud be a first step in that direction. One is remindd of th unity of th chinese languaj, hos ritn form enables chinese from difrnt dialect areas to comunicate in riting even wen ther speech is mutuly incomprehensibl, and how th chinese and japnese can to som degree read each othrs languajs, wich ar in orijn unrelated. Cud Europ one day becom a singl comunity in riting without being a singl comunity in speech?

Yet th orijns of modrn english may ofr a closer paralel. Modrn english evolvd by a process of integrating a jermanic substrate with a romance superstructur (bondd by a hefty flux of greek, with trace elemnts from many othr languajs). But english, alas, faild in that process to integrate th contrastng ingredients of its riting system. If now that failur cud be rectifyd, then, ho nos, english myt provide th ideal matrix for th linguistic integration of a futur Europ.

For wat is not in dout is th need for som rationalization of english spelng. In th past, proposals for english spelng reform hav tendd to treat english in isolation from othr languajs. Thus one recent proposal [8] sugestd respelng TO *opposition* as *opozishun*, wile anothr even sugestd *opxzishxn*, [9] regardless of its latn base and form in othr languajs. CS, on th othr hand, by severely restrictng letr substitutions (and with its F for PH swich anticipated long ago in sevr european languajs), respects traditionl comn european spelng patrn to a substantial extent, and thus moves towards th comn cor of european spelngs. A plesntly positiv vew of such posibilitis myt say: english speakrs ar not renwnd as lernrs and users of foren languajs, but tend to rely insted on th dilijnce of non-english speakrs in lernng english and making th efrt to use it in ordr to comunicate with th english-speakng world. English speakrs therfor o speakrs of othr languajs a det, wich can be partialy redeemd by alyng english mor with ther spelngs, by removing redundnt letrs. Not merely wud this asist litracy across frontirs, but it wud make english esir for english-speakrs too. English, with its multilingual roots and its presnt function as an intrnational languaj, but with antiquated spelngs causing al kinds of problms, shud be idealy placed to take such an initiativ. Yet because english shares so many featur with othr languajs, and because english wud itself chanje in th process, such a developmnt myt concevibly be pursud without any sense of linguistic domnation wich can so esily arouse antagnism in speakrs of othr languajs.

A revealing light is shed on these issues by a recent ISO publication, which explains the organization's name as follows: [\[10\]](#)

Many people will have noticed a seeming lack of correspondence between the official title when used in full, *International Organization for Standardization*, and the short form, *ISO*. Shouldn't the acronym be "IOS"? Yes, if it were an acronym — which it is not.

In fact, "ISO" is a word, derived from the Greek *isos*, meaning "equal", which is the root of the prefix "iso-" that occurs in a host of terms, such as "isometric" (of equal measure, or dimensions)...

From "equal" to "standard", the line of thinking that led to the choice of "ISO" is easy to follow.

In addition, the name has the advantage of being valid in each of the organization's three official languages... The confusion that would arise through the use of an acronym is thus avoided, e.g. "IOS" would not correspond to the official title of the organization in French — *Organisation internationale de normalisation*.

That spirit should perhaps inform the future development of spelling in a shrinking world.

Notes

- [1] Adrian ROOM (1986) *Dictionary of Translated Names and Titles*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- [2] However, the latest proposals for reforming French seem rather to move in the direction of doubling single consonants rather than simplifying doubled ones. Thus *Le Français dans le Monde* (No. 239, Feb.–March 1991) "Les Rectifications de l'Orthographe", §VIII, suggests *bonhommie*, *persifflage*, *sottie* for traditional *bonhomie*, *persiflage*, *sotie*, by analogy with *homme*, *siffler*, *sottise*.
- [3] Institut für deutsche Sprache *Sprachreport: ExtraAusgabe*, Dec. 1994.
- [4] Gerard NOLST TRENITÉ (1929), 'De Chaos' in appendix to *Drop your foreign accent: engelsche uitspraak oefeningen*, Haarlem: H D Tjeenk Willink and Zoon, pp117–121; see also 'The Classic Compendium to Cacographic Chaos' in [Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 1994/2](#), Items 6 & 7.
- [5] Mario PEI (1968) Preface to Abraham Tauber *Better English thru Simplified Spelling — a History of Spelling Reform*, reprinted July 1982 (second edition) in ed. Newell W. Tune [Spelling Reform, a comprehensive survey of the advantages, educational benefits, and obstacles to adoption](#) Item 10, North Hollywood, California: [Spelling Progress Bulletin 1968/1](#) Item 11.
- [6] Mario WANDRUSCHKA (1990) *Die europäische Sprachengemeinschaft*, UTB Francke: Tübingen: Francke Verlag, p.104: "Seine eigenartigen, britischen oder US-amerikanischen Lautgestalten haben sich von ihren meist unveränderlich beibehaltenen mittelalterlichen Schreibweisen so weit entfernt, daß die englische Orthographie dem gesunden Menschenverstand Hohn spricht."
- [7] Zé do ROCK (1995) *Fom winde ferfeelt*, Berlin: Edition Diá, proposes sweeping simplifications for ritn jermn, including reducing sch to sh.
- [8] eds. Edward RONDHALER and Edward J LIAS (1986) *Dictionary of American Spelling*, New York: The American Language Academy.
- [9] Ronald FOOTER (1996) *New Spelling 96* privately circulated within the Simplified Spelling Society.
- [10] International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (2nd edition, 1994) *Compatible technology worldwide*, Geneva, p3.

8. Can U spell OK? Absolutely Britannia

Tim Dowling

This article first appeared in *The Independent* on 21 July 1998, and is reprinted with permission. It gives an insight into the problems Americans have with British spellings, though American spellings give British readers few problems. For a plea for American spellings to be taught in British schools, see [JSSS 21–1997/1](#), Item 12.

For an American like myself, learning to spell the British way was a lot like learning to drive the British way. At first you believe it will require no more than a permanent shift in your thinking; then you realise that it requires you to do things you know to be wrong; finally you realise that to some extent it can't be done. You can start learning British spelling, but you can never finish

I'm not someone who believes that good spelling is unimportant, nor do I believe that modern American spelling is inherently superior to the British. American spellings are meant to be more economical and sensible, but the 19th-century American spelling reform movement that brought us innovations like *dialog* and *program* never actually got much farther than, well, *dialog* and *program*. I will not pretend that I was wholly unfamiliar with British spellings. In the States we often use them in crossword puzzles when the American spelling doesn't fit, so that "form of payment, to a Londoner" is "cheque" and "gold measure for Anglophiles" is "carat" not "karat". I'm also not going to maintain that my difficulty with British spelling has hampered my ability to communicate, although the first time I read *instil* I was like, helloooo...

The *instil* problem is just the tip of the iceberg. In Britain you do *instil* but then you do *install*, but then you make it *instalment*, even though you do *installation*. Whatever.

Forget the *instil* group. What about the -OUR bunch? We Americans have always known that you British like to render *labor* as *labour*, and I quickly picked up that the same went for *harbour*, *honour*, *rumour*, *vigour*, *rigour*, *neighbour* and *flavour*. In fact I took a perverse pleasure in writing these olde worlde spellings. But how was I supposed to know there wasn't also *majour* and *minour*? Or that while it was *honour* and *honourable*, it wasn't *honourary*, *humourous*, or *vigourous* and *rigourous*? British spelling began to seem like an exclusive club intent on black-balling me.

Along with this -OUR mess, you have the -ISE/-IZE puzzles and the -RE/-ER enigma. Then there's what I call the body/disease surplus vowel. In Britain, common diseases like *diarrhea*, *hemorrhoids* and *septicemia*, along with bodily parts like the *esophagus* are spelled by throwing in an unnecessary extra A or O, as if they weren't hard enough to spell in the first place. There doesn't seem to be any rule regarding which words are awarded this affectation, so I have to look up any word that might possibly qualify. Of course with words like *oedema* and *oesophagus*, I'm not even looking in the right part of the dictionary.

When two or more of these oddities are gathered together, you get a word like *manoeuvre*, which, pardon my French, is French. Where I come from, boys getz beaten up for spelling that way. And while we're here, let's talk about *gaol*. Of course I had come across this word before in English novels, and although I gathered from the context that it was a synonym for "prison", it never occurred to me that it was pronounced "jail". What sort of Britain do you want, a crusty old nation of ye olde tyre remould centres, ful of people making cuppes of taca and doing the hoeuvring? Or the shiny Nu Labor Brittan of 2-morrow?

I suppose we should be surprised that the British and American spelling is so similar, considering that they diverged at a time when the number of Es in *me* depended on how you felt when you got up. Actually, I have grown quite fond of British spelling, with its odd combination of formality and silliness, rigidity and licence ("driver's certificate", according to Professor Higgins). One thing, however, has always puzzled me. What's with the two Gs in *waggon*?

[*Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 25, 1999/1, pp24–30 in the printed version]
[John J Reilly: see [Journals](#)]

9. Richard Feynman & Isaac Asimov on Spelling Reform

John J. Reilly

John J. Reilly is a writer who lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, USA. He is an occasional contributor to *First Things* magazine and an associate member of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University. See links.

Feynman & Asimov

The subjects of this contribution were both American scientists who became major figures in popular culture. [1] The physicist Richard Feynman (1918–1988) is best known for the work in quantum electrodynamics that won him a Nobel Prize in 1965. His career extended from work on the Manhattan Project in the early 1940s to a conspicuous role on the official commission of inquiry into the causes of the space shuttle Challenger disaster of 1986. Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) was a biochemist who taught at Boston University for many years, but became famous as a prolific writer of science fiction and popular science. Estimates of the number of his books run to over 500; he himself lost count.

Both Feynman and Asimov became public sages of a sort. Many scientists, given a little encouragement, are willing to express opinions on anything under the sun, but these two belonged to the rather smaller class of such people whose opinions were actually sought by a wide audience. Considering the range of topics on which they commented, it is not really surprising that they touched on the reform of English spelling. While both advocated reform, neither had more than a passing interest in the subject. The few remarks I discuss here may be all they ever had to say on the matter.

Feynman's physic

While my research has not been exhaustive, the only recorded remarks by Richard Feynman on spelling reform I have been able to discover were made in the course of a talk entitled 'This Unscientific Age', one of the John Danz Lectures that Dr Feynman delivered at the University of Washington in April, 1963. [2] The burden of that talk is that social and scientific progress is inhibited by received opinions. In the course of his remarks, Feynman compares psychiatrists to witchdoctors and professors of English to medieval scholars who neither jettisoned old errors nor made useful innovations. Having disposed of literary scholarship, he went a step further: "Now let me get to a lower level still in this question. And that is, all the time you hear the question, 'Why can't Johnny read?' [3] And the answer is, because of the spelling."

After making a few allusions to the history and theory of alphabetic writing, Dr Feynman observes that "things have gotten out of whack in the English language", which leads him to ask, "[w]hy can't we change the spelling?" In what may be taken as an expression of exasperation with his colleagues in the liberal arts, he declares: "If the professors of English will complain to me that the students who come to the universities, after all those years of study, still cannot spell *friend*, I say to them that something's the matter with the way you spell *friend*."

So obvious does Dr Feynman find the need for improvements in English spelling that he has trouble seeing what arguments could be raised against such a project: "[I]t can be argued ... that [language reform is] a question of style and beauty in the language, and that to make new

words and new parts of speech might destroy that. But [the professors of English] cannot argue that respelling the words would have anything to do with the style. There's no form of art form or literary form, with the sole exception of crossword puzzles, in which the spelling makes a bit of difference to the style. And even crossword puzzles can be made with a different spelling."

This brings us to how a reform might be accomplished: "And if it's not the English professors that do it, and if we give them two years and nothing happens — and please don't invent three ways of doing it, just one way, that everybody [can get] used to — if we wait these two or three years and nothing happens, then we'll ask the philologists and the linguists and so on because they know how to do it. Did you know that they can write any language with an alphabet so that you can read how it sounds in another language when you hear it? [sic] That's really something. So they ought to be able to do it in English alone."

In some ways, Feynman's ideas are most illuminating for what they fail to consider. Even a cursory acquaintance with the history of attempts to reform English spelling shows that more than "two or three years" have been needed to devise a universally acceptable reformed system. Experience has also shown that, at any one time, there are likely to be far more than "three ways" under consideration as candidates for such a system. One interesting point is that Dr Feynman seems to regard the problem as purely technical. It should be entrusted to the "philologists and linguists", who at least use an abstruse symbology, rather than to those frowzy-minded professors of English.

Reading this, I was reminded of a critique I read some time back, entitled 'Higher Superstition' [\[4\]](#) that sought to explain the postmodern assault on the objectivity and institutional prestige of the natural sciences. According to the authors, the attempt to reduce science to a merely cultural phenomenon is revenge for the dismissive attitude taken by natural scientists toward the liberal arts during the late '50s and early '60s, when the hard sciences got all the grant money.

Of course, the most important element lacking in Dr Feynman's remarks is any consideration at all of how a reformed system would be implemented. The assumption seems to be that, once the linguists have cooked up a way to reproduce the phonetic precision of the IPA in the English version of the Latin alphabet, then the new spelling could be adopted simply by fiat. Again, history suggests otherwise.

Asimov's essays

As we turn to Isaac Asimov's thoughts on spelling reform, we will find more serious attention to the problem of how to get people to use a reformed system. There are, however, other conceptual problems with what this popular sage has to say.

In 1982, Asimov published two essays touching on spelling reform. In the later of the two, *A Question of Spelling*, [\[5\]](#) he followed Feynman in linking the deficiencies of English spelling with the problems of education. The particular occasion for the essay, he says, was a mail solicitation from an organization calling itself the 'Reading Reform Foundation'. The letter recited the usual complaints about the high level of functional illiteracy in the United States. However, Asimov was not much persuaded by the Foundation's argument that the key to alleviating the problem is better teaching methods. He was particularly unimpressed with the letter's claim that 87% of all English words are spelled phonetically. That left 13% that were not phonetically spelled, and those were likely to be the most commonly-used words in the language

Unlike Feynman, Asimov jumps right in and makes a stab at some suggested respellings. Consider *through*, *coo*, *do*, *true*, *knew* and *queue*, he asks. Why not just spell them *throo*, *koo*, *doo*, *troo*, *nyoo* and *kyoo*? These respellings would in fact fit within some familiar reform proposals, though perhaps few reform advocates would go along with his assertion that the obvious respelling of *night* should be *nite*. Then there is a larger problem.

Noting that the plural of *man* is *men*, but that young children will naturally assume that *mans* is the plural, he goes on to assert that the children are right. Thus, along with his advocacy of spelling reform, he includes an argument for a completely regularized grammar, though he does not elaborate on it as fully. The suggestion, "Why not reform grammar, too?" is a common retort made by people who have just been introduced to the idea of spelling reform. Why some people confuse these things is a mystery to people who don't confuse them. In any case, Asimov's essay is the first instance I have ever seen of someone who equated spelling and grammar and who also proposed to reform them both. [\[6\]](#)

Asimov does acknowledge that a great deal of trouble would be caused by implementing his reforms. However, he gives three reasons for why it would be worthwhile for everyone to take the trouble:

- 1 However much trouble the reforms would be to us, they would make the lives of our children and grandchildren immeasurably easier. This is the sort of sacrifice that parents should be willing to make for their children.
- 2 The reforms, once in place, would promote literacy. This would boost worker productivity and assist in enhancing national prosperity.
- 3 Earth is in need of a common second language, and English is the most widespread current candidate. Removing the idiosyncrasies of English would promote its spread, which would promote international understanding and world peace.

Spelling reform by software?

The gist of the article is the suggestion that computers, particularly word-processing dictionaries, could greatly facilitate a transition to reformed spelling. Certainly he did not think that much hope of change was offered from any other quarter: "...I think that the home computer industry won't be putting out reformed 'dictionaries' in response to an independent movement for spelling reform. I have no hope for an independent movement being powerful enough to achieve anything."

Nevertheless, history was on the side of spelling reform. We could expect to see modifications in the graphical representation of English in order to make it easier for machines to use: "...I think it is inevitable that computers [will] be designed to read the written word, and reproduce it; and even to hear the spoken word and put it into print or follow its orders. This can be done with the language as it is, but how much easier it would be if spelling is phonetic and grammar is regular." How much indeed.

In this essay, Asimov seems to have foreseen a great deal of software that had not been written yet. Still, despite his genuine prescience, the arrival of the technologies he anticipated has made little impact on the chaotic nature of English spelling. Neither is there much sign that anyone is about to take his suggestion to create an 'Academy of Spelling Reform', a body he hoped would be authorized to issue those new 'word-processing dictionaries'. (The term 'spell-checker' had perhaps not yet been coined at the time this essay was written.) History has taken a frustrating

turn. In 1900, it was common sense to many educated people that English spelling should be reformed, while the suggestion that machines might someday read texts aloud was inconceivable even to science fiction writers. Today, just shy of the year 2000, I have software that reads texts aloud, while it is spelling reform that has become inconceivable.

Conclusion

In closing, it should be emphasized again that neither Richard Feynman nor Isaac Asimov was greatly interested in spelling reform. To them, English spelling was just another inheritance from an irrational past that needed to be restructured. It is clear from what we have seen that their accomplishments in other areas gave them no special insight into the question. Nevertheless, it is worth considering their ideas in some detail and spreading awareness of them further. The substantial posthumous fame of Feynman and Asimov makes even their slight engagement with the subject a possible enticement for their many admirers to examine the question more closely.

Notes

- [1] Elaborate websites with eponymous URLs have been dedicated to each, a good indication that they have risen to at least subcultural significance. As of November 1998, the chief website relating to Feynman was at <http://www.feynman.com>. The most useful Asimov sites are at http://www.clark.net/pub/edseiler/WWW/asimov_home_page.html and <http://www.asimov.com>. All three links have extensive bibliographical information. The material on Asimov is particularly comprehensive.
- [2] Richard Phillips Feynman (1998) *The Meaning of It All: Thoughts of a Citizen Scientist*, Helix Books, p116.
- [3] After the best-selling book by Rudolf Flesch (first edition 1955) *Why Johnny can't read and what you can do about it*, New York: Harper & Row.
- [4] Paul R. Gross & Norman Levitt *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* The Johns Hopkins University Press (1994) p86.
- [5] 'Question of Spelling', in Isaac Asimov (1983) *The Roving Mind*, Prometheus Books, p340. First published in *Popular Computing* (July 1982). An earlier essay, which I have been unable to obtain, is 'Spell that Word!' in Isaac Asimov (1986) *The Dangers of Intelligence*, first published in *American Way* (March, 1982).
- [6] There are three conventional answers to the assertion that grammar reform and spelling reform are equivalent:
 - i Written alphabetic language is the servant of the spoken language. Alphabetic writing systems can be assessed by how well they represent speech. This is a fairly objective criterion. In contrast, there is no similarly objective way to assess which grammar is better than another.
 - ii English grammar is not particularly irregular compared to most European languages. The same cannot be said of the written form of English as compared to the written forms of those languages.
 - iii Shut up.

[Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 25, 1999/1 pp33,34 in the printed version]

10. Lobbying Literacy Authorities

We here publish recent SSS correspondence (slightly shortened) with literacy authorities in New Zealand. Earlier correspondence appeared in [JSSS 21 1997/1](#) Item 11; [JSSS 22 1997/2](#) Item 12; [JSSS 24 1998/2](#) Item 9.

Hon Wyatt Creech
Minister of Education
Parliament House, Wellington
October 21 1998

Dear Mr Creech

The Government's initiative to support the early acquisition of literacy ... by setting up a Literacy Taskforce is commendable, but if it is really serious about literacy improvement, it will have to do more.

The basic tool of reading and writing — spelling — is rusty, out-of-date, and most inefficient. Until something is done to modernize that tool, the problem of illiteracy is only being tinkered with. //...//

Ours is an alphabetical language, but the way we have to memorize words by shape ... gives us little advantage over ideographic languages such as Chinese.

The basis of an alphabetical language is that symbol and sound support each other. When this happens, as in many other European languages, learning to read and write is much simpler. In many European countries, phonics is used in the first year or two to teach reading. After that there is little formal teaching of spelling, but children can read and write much more easily, and can decipher unfamiliar words. [See page I have appended.] [\[1\]](#)

English's 44 sounds (phonemes) are represented so irregularly by about 600 spellings that children ... can't be sure of how a word sounds until they hear it; they can't be sure of its spelling until they see it.

English spelling is stuck in a time-warp. Until we modernize (as German, for instance, is being modernized at present) we will continue to have literacy problems, despite the best efforts of parents, teachers, communities, and governments.

At the moment, the literacy levels of all English-speaking countries rank near the bottom when compared with other developed ... nations. In a competitive world, this is not good for us.

I would suggest that the Government take a further initiative and consult with other governments, the United Nations (English is a global language), and various interested organizations on ways to systematically and slowly improve our orthography. We do not need to waste so much energy, money, and class time struggling to have our children master a user-unfriendly orthography that ... sours many of them off study altogether.

Yours sincerely
Allan Campbell, Simplified Spelling Society

[1] This reprinted letters in the Guardian from Prague and Wales telling how much better the writers' children coped with the regularly spelt local language than with English.

Ministry of Education
National Office, Private Box 1666
Wellington
27 November 1998

Dear Mr Campbell

Your letter of 21 October 1998 to the Minister of Education, Hon Wyatt Creech, concerning the recently announced literacy and numeracy initiative, has been referred to me for reply.

Achievement of the goal will depend not only on the work of good teachers but will also require commitment from parents and communities.

Part of the strategy involves setting up a Literacy Taskforce of experts and practitioners to identify effective practice, and what extra help and resources teachers need to improve reading literacy and written language standards, particularly in underachieving groups.

The Taskforce will advise on how the goal should be defined, and how progress towards ensuring all children attain the required skills in reading and writing should be measured. //...//

Your proposal for a complete overhaul of English spelling is radical and interesting but, at least in the short term, we will be obliged to work with the current system.

I will forward a copy of your letter to the task force on literacy for the information of members.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us on this important topic.

Yours sincerely
Frances Kelly
Senior Manager, Learning and Evaluation Policy

Convener, Literacy Taskforce
Department of Education
Private Bag 1666
Wellington
February 1, 1999

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of the Society, of which I am New Zealand spokesperson, I wish to make the following submission to your deliberations.

I note your terms of reference include the following:

Identifying and providing information on effective initiatives to improve reading literacy and written language.

I believe my submission falls into this category.

The Society's belief is that, while there are many causes of illiteracy — social and home conditions, teaching ability, lack of resources, among them — a major one for English speakers is the orthography of the language. It is the tool of literacy, but is dysfunctional.

In 1998 survey results released in the United States and England both showed about 20 percent of the population effectively illiterate — 40–44 million in the US, 8 million in Britain.^[2] Workbase, the New Zealand National Centre for Workplace Literacy and Language, claimed

almost half of staff in this nation's manufacturing, construction, and agricultural industries were unable to deal with written demands at work. [3]

Because English orthography has not kept pace with pronunciation changes over the past three or four centuries, it has become very erratic: the match between symbols and sounds has broken down. Even opponents of change acknowledge this.

As those of you who are teachers will know, this weak correlation is a major hurdle for young children to overcome when learning to read and write, and puts a premium on memorizing, rather than on decoding. Compare our experiences of having spelling as a taught subject thruout our primary school years (in my case it was also into my high school years) when most children in some other languages learn the connection between letters and sounds in the first few years and after that decode reading words by themselves and write new words unassisted. Finnish and Italian are two in which I have been told this happens.

The Secretary of our Society, Masha Bell, a Lithuanian living in England, learned to write and read her own language after a couple of afternoons with her grandmother instructing her on the alphabet. A year or two later she was able to learn to read and write Russian and German almost as easily. When she came to learn English, she struck trouble. The tried and proven decoding method no longer worked. (I enclose a copy of three newspaper letters with more anecdotal evidence of this kind.)

We could eventually have the tried and proven method in English, too. But for it to happen we need change. And for change to happen we need to start. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." It will not happen all at once. In other languages it has taken time. At present German, already better served by its spelling than we are by ours, is changing only about 185 words. //...//

If we are to contemplate change in our spelling, two points need to be borne in mind:

1 English is a global language, and any improvements in its spelling must be taken in concert with other nations using the language.

2 Change must be slow, so that both users of the old and users of the new can understand each other. Old and new must remain compatible.

Bearing these ... points in mind I ask the Taskforce to consider making two recommendations that, if acted on, could ease the road to literacy for future generations:

1 Long-term: That the Taskforce ask the Government to approach other nations where English is a major language, and international agencies using English (eg, UN, aviation, science), and urge that they meet and begin working towards modernizing English orthography in a way that is acceptable to users of the many varieties of the language.

2 Short-term: That the Taskforce, as a very small — but practical — gesture towards easing the difficulties children have at present with spelling, ask the Education Department to advise schools that what are known as American spellings are acceptable in children's written work. Children see these spellings around them, they are part of global English, and to have to add them to the 'no-nos' that abound in spelling is a further unwanted burden.

I appreciate that the Taskforce has many matters to consider in its search for ways to improve ... literacy. Taking an initiative, even a small one, to modernize the very tool of literacy is, I contend, a fairly basic matter to take into consideration.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Allan Campbell

for Simplified Spelling Society

[2] National Institute of Literacy study (USA); Basic Skills Agency survey (UK).

[3] Literacy Skills and the New Zealand Workforce

11. 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.

Why foreigners spell better

I open with anticipation every issue of the *JSSS* and am rewarded with well-written, informative and interesting articles, including the ones with which I disagree. A comment on two articles in [journal No.24](#).

In his 'The Spelling Standards of Undergraduates' Bernard Lamb makes a good point in stressing that some spelling errors can create confusion and even have lethal consequences in the medical field. Nevertheless, I felt that he made a fetish of correct spelling and showed a lack of understanding of pedagogical principles.

As an English teacher, my experience is that students whose brains aren't wired to retain the illogical spellings of English are *not* helped significantly by threats, by seeing misspelled words circled in red, by exposure to word etymologies, by drilling complicated rules with numerous exceptions or by being told to consult a dictionary. Such techniques are of limited value to those whose memories don't easily record and access illogical visual sequences. It is extremely difficult for those with good memories for written language to understand the difficulty of English spelling for those who may well have a high intelligence in other areas.

Lamb also laments the poor performance of British students in comparison with foreign students. I suspect there is something operating here other than the quality of education in the respective countries.

Having myself studied seven foreign languages, I find that my spelling in all of them is much better than in my mother tongue. Granted, all of them had much better sound/symbol correspondence than English. However, I found it much easier to remember unpredictable ambiguities in the foreign languages than in my native tongue. I attribute this to my having learned the written symbol of the foreign languages before or at the same time as I learned the pronunciation of the words, whereas I learned English orally first. I have less trouble remembering the peculiarities of the foreign words than do many native speakers of those languages, not because I am a good speller, but rather because I learned the languages visually (as well as orally) at a time when I already knew how to read and write. I suspect that a similar phenomenon is involved in the better spelling of Lamb's foreign students.

I do applaud Lamb for one thing: lowering the grades in genetics only for errors which resulted in wrong meanings.

Incidentally, I could read the article in *Cut Spelling* rapidly and with ease. The only word over which I stumbled was *ho*; however, the second time it occurred, I no longer found it a problem.

Carol Barrera Guatemala, Central America

Profit from spelling reform

It has been suggested that radical changes might annoy publishers. Especially of children's books.

I think any publisher with an eye to profit would leap at the chance of a new market, provided that there was growing demand for books in revised spelling. After all, it would mean that everybody would want to replace large sections of their books.

The nearest analogy I can think of (tho it's not exact) was the move from vinyl LPs to CDs. When they first came out, CDs were only available for best sellers. Then the mass market grew.

CDs became more normal and gradually overtook vinyl LPs. Then CDs became the only medium (ignoring tape) for decent recordings. Then (and this is where the analogy is probably strongest) the CD publishers realized the simply enormous market for reissuing their back catalogue and archive recordings in the new digital medium. As more and more users stopped using their record players and used only CD players, the demand for reissued 'old' recordings burgeoned. And millions of £ and \$ have been made in profit on recordings that the copyright holders thought were obsolete.

Surely that's similar to what would happen to books. If new spelling became accepted, the new books would be in new spelling, the best sellers would be reissued in new spelling, then the back-catalogue would gradually be covered. And people, as they got used to the new spelling, would replace their cherished old copies by smart new easy-to-read editions; just as many of us have both old (tatty, scratchy, but much loved) LP versions and new (shiny, clear) digital CDs of exactly the same recording.

It's taken about 10 years for a reasonable coverage of 'back catalogue' minority CDs to be readily available. I'd expect the same sort of changeover period for minority-interest back-catalogue books too. What publisher is going to turn their nose up at such an opportunity to make money from stuff that was thought past it?

John Gledhill Coventry, UK

Decimalize spelling?

In 1967 when we changed from imperial to decimal money, I was a primary school teacher.

One day for interest I compared the discarded maths texts with the new ones. As far as I could make out in my unscientific look at the matter, we were deleting from two years' texts lessons devoted to teaching the complications of working with £sd. The time for these lessons was spread over a term one year, a half term the following year, about 20 weeks all told. At an hour a day, five hours a week, that's 100 hours' less teaching needed. Under the new system it was just part of ordinary maths.

Think of the time being spent teaching spelling (my class had it in our last year at high school!) that could be devoted to other work, eg, mastering computer skills. In my time it was 15min a day = 1hr 15min a week = 50hr a year. For how many years?

Allan Campbell Christchurch, New Zealand

Double consonants valued

I agree with the point Zé do Rock makes (letter to JSSS 24-1998/2) about keeping double consonants after short stressed vowels. He's not alone in finding such double consonants beneficial rather than burdensome; I have found that many people prefer double consonants to show the previous vowel is a short stressed one. I heartily agree with Zé's statement that "the fact that TO shos wen a vowl is short in jermanic words, but fails to sho it in latn words shudnt be an excuse not to sho it at al anymor."

Perhaps a matter to consider is that reform thus far has met much resistance, and today we're trying to 'win the public over' to this whole idea as much as anything else. Again, much of the feeling that I get from non-reformers is in favor of having double consonants to indicate a previous short stressed vowel, and maybe our using of double consonants in these cases might make a difference in gaining wider acceptance for English spelling reform.

Cornell Kimball Los Angeles, California, USA

Collapse of 'Soviet' TO?

I suspect that we may be wrong to assume that reform will work in a linear fashion (that is, that the pairs at which no spellings are accepted will stay the same throughout the reform period).

Back in the '70s, I used to scandalize people with my predictions:

- (1) The Soviet system was not going to last many decades longer, and
- (2) it would not end gradually, but would disintegrate fairly quickly once the process started.

(Neither of these ideas was original with me, and at about the same time I made other predictions about the rising of Atlantis and other matters that need not detain us.) The basis for my prognostications was that the primary theoretical support for the USSR had always been that history was on its side. Once that faith was shaken, whether by a flare-up of the nationalities problem, or an attempt to introduce moderate market reforms, or even by the overthrow of a single Third World communist regime, then the USSR would have nothing going for it but its actual economic performance, which was pretty dismal.

Now TO, I suggest, is like the Soviet Union in 1980. While it has its unattractive features, it seems to be here to stay, and so we may well think that the best we can hope for is a few incremental changes. The reality may well be otherwise. TO rests on a failure of the imagination of the people who use it. When once the information gets out that our Georgian spelling system is not a law of nature, the problem may not be too much resistance to no spellings, but too much tolerance for unsystematic ones.

To put it another way, once you get it into people's heads that spelling is reformable, a fairly radical no system could be universally acceptable, if not universally employed, within a very few years.

John J Reilly Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Teachers' needs

I teach in a semi-rural primary school in Australia, and received this note from a 9-year-old aboriginal boy who is otherwise illiterate.

"Dear Pitu hiu is a pichu." (=Dear Peter, Here is a picture.) My name is Peter and the drawing was attached.

I suggested spelling reform to some of the teachers, and they agreed fervently that it was necessary, but cannot do anything till the central education authority (ruling with an iron hand here in Australia) gives its assent. It will not do so until the mass of the parents clamour for it. They themselves continue to be formed by traditional spelling and, having undergone that purgatory, do not really care about the next generation having a tough time.

I think the only way is to introduce reforms oneself and hope they will be taken up. I think Cut Spelling is the way to go, but would eventually like to use lots more abbreviations, ending up like unpointed Hebrew.

Peter Gilet Busselton, Western Australia

Phonetic naming

I think that everyone should be required to learn a phonemic script so they could attach a phonemic spelling of their name

This could start in primary school and by the time that most people entered college they would be bilingual (or whatever the word is for being proficient in two writing systems). Most teachers would appreciate the addition of such a pronunciation guide.

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12. JSSS 25 1999/1: Literature Received

In the past 6 months JSSS has received the following publications:

- 1 Basic Skills Agency (1998) *Adult Literacy in Britain* (Summary of key findings) by Siobhán Carey, Sampson Low, Jacqui Hansbro, 12pp.
- 2 Basic Skills Agency (1997) *It doesn't get any Better: the impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37 year olds*, 28pp, summary of the main findings of a report by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons.
- 3 Basic Skills Agency (1998) *Use it or lose it? the impact of time out of work on literacy and numeracy skills*, by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons, 16pp.
- 4 *English*, the Journal of the English Association, Spring 1999.
- 5 *English Association Newsletter*, No.159 Autumn/Winter 1998, Spring 1999.
- 6 *English Today*, No.57, January 1999; No.58, April 1999.
- 7 *QUEST*, the Journal of the Queen's English Society, No.70, November 1998; No.71, March 1999.
- 8 *Reading*, April 1999, Vol.33, No.1, from UK Reading Association.
- 9 *Rechtschreibung*, newsletter of the *Bund für vereinfachte rechtschreibung* (Federation for simplified spelling), Zürich, No.176, November 1998; No.177, February 1999..
- 10 from Mr H T Bryer of Oak Harbour, Ohio, USA, a bound copy of four 1917–18 issues of the SSS's first journal, *The Pyoneer ov simplifyd speling*, Vol.6, No.1 (March 1917), No.2 (Joon), No.3 (September).No.4 (February 1918).
- 11 *Sprachreport*, from the Institut für deutsche Sprache, Mannheim, Germany, 4/1998, 1/1999