

[Later designated Journal 3]

## The Simplified Spelling Society

President: Professor John Downing  
Chairman: Chris Jolly  
Secretary: Stanley Gibbs

Treasurer: Laurence Fennelly  
Public Relations Officer: Mona Cross

### The Newsletter – 1986/2 (Summer)

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## 1. Editorial Chris Upward

### THIS ISSUE

This issue features John Wells' talk on the problems of divergent accents in English for a reformed orthography. It is profoundly important both tactically and strategically.

It is tactically important in that it points to specific phonemes which cannot be given a fully satisfactory spelling for all speakers of English alike, and where criteria other than straightforward phonographic correspondence may need to be applied. Two examples from Cut Spelling: the cut form *thot* for *thought* seems weird to most RP-speakers, yet considering the major accents in which *thought* roughly rhymes with *hot*, it may indeed be the most generally acceptable form. Then, RP suggests *your* be cut to *yor*, but Americans object that *yur* better represents the sound; the word-sign abbreviation *yr* therefore appears a good compromise.

The strategic importance of [John Wells' article](#) is that it highlights the question of whether alternative spellings are desirable for divergent accents. There are powerful objections to any trend towards diversity in written English. If a reformed orthography is proposed for one accent only (cf. United States in [Item 4](#), AMERICAN), then we are on the slippery slope towards undermining the role of English as a world language — ultimately it might even fragment into mutually unintelligible

separate languages. Not merely might the British, for instance, find it as difficult to read American publications as, say, the written form of Scots, but non-English speakers would have to learn more than one form of English in order to communicate internationally. Spelling reformers have a responsibility not only to the schoolchildren of their own country, but to the international, adult community as well.

Interestingly, David Stark's article (['Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation', Item 9](#)) suggests how such a single reformed world orthography could nevertheless be used far more effectively than t.o. in teaching children.

### **LITERATURE REVIEWERS SOUGHT**

The Society needs to maintain and develop links with workers in related fields. One task for the *Newsletter* should be to report on relevant publications, for which purpose reviewers and abstractors of current literature are sought. Some works that could be valuably surveyed for the Society are: Michael Stubbs *Language and Literacy*, Andrew Ellis *Reading, Writing and Dyslexia*, Margaret Peters *Spelling Caught or Taught* (1985 edition), Geoffrey Sampson *Writing Systems*. Readers who would like to undertake such work should contact the editor.

### **OBITUARIES**

Readers will be aware of the death a year ago of the Society's fourth President, Sir James Pitman. His contribution to the Society is outlined in Maurice Harrison's history of the Society ([Item 6](#)), but we may note he was elected to the committee in 1936 and became President in 1968, to be succeeded in the early 1970's by our present President, Professor John Downing. A quite lengthy obituary was published in *The Times* on 3 September 1985, highlighting his development of i.ta., but not mentioning its indebtedness to *New Spelling*.

We sadly have to report the death at 74 of George O'Halloran. [see [Bulletins & Newsletters](#)] The *Daily Telegraph* carried an obituary on 5 August 1986, referring to his educational work in the Gambia and for the Initial Teaching Alphabet Foundation, whose general secretary he was from 1967 to 1972. Within the Society he will be remembered for his tremendous drive in the service of spelling reform. He was secretary in the mid-1970s, then chairman, and was responsible for the Society's 1975 constitution and new financial regulations. He produced *Teach Yourself i.t.a.* and edited a series of News Sheets for the Society, of which he recently sent the Editor [No.5 \(January 1976\)](#), along with No.1 of his [Reading & Spelling](#) magazine, and Books 1 and 8 of his *i.t.a speech readers* series. Do any readers have any others of his publications?

### **DATA PROTECTION ACT EXEMPTION**

Readers receiving the *Newsletter* through the mail may be aware that the address-labels are computer-printed, which means the names and addresses are stored as data. Such data is subject to the new Data Protection Act and normally has to be registered (for which a fee is then payable). Societies like the SSS can claim exemption however, provided they only use the addresses for circulation purposes and give recipients the opportunity to object to their details being so recorded. Any readers unhappy at being mechanically addressed are therefore hereby invited to object, so that in future their envelopes can, at some extra trouble, be addressed by hand instead.

### **NEXT ISSUE**

Among items planned for the autumn issue of the *Newsletter* is a feature on Dr David Brazil's address to the Society on dictionary transcription of pronunciation and its implications for spelling. It is also hoped that the next issue can include a comprehensive, analytical catalogue of English homophones.

## 2. Correspondence

### **Alun Bye, Campaigns Secretary of the Society:**

The bi-annual conference of the International Reading Association was held this year in London, and was combined with the United Kingdom Reading Association Annual Conference. This Eleventh World Congress on Reading represented a multinational survey of the problems, research and methodology relating to the teaching of literacy. It was encouraging to see so much world-wide interest being devoted to the difficulties of teaching and learning spelling, that children throughout the world seem to encounter the same sorts of problems in alphabetic spelling no matter what their particular language or spelling system happens to be.

This was one of the messages presented by Charlene E Gill and J Thomas Gill of the University of Virginia, USA, who reported on their research on Invented Spellings and provided developmental and international perspectives on spelling progress. They suggested that a child's spelling system is a theory of spelling which has to be modified continually with increasing understanding of the system. The use of 'letter name spelling', e.g. BT for Betty, or K for cat seems to be a universal first stage in acquiring spelling ability in both English and French children. Similarly, adult Chinese literates who have learned only the ideographic form of writing, experience the same kinds of spelling difficulties when learning to write English or French as do English or French children in their own language.

The use of morphemes as an aid to increasing mastery of spelling seems to develop quite late in a child's linguistic development, again whatever the mother tongue. It may be linearly correlated to Piaget's theories concerning the later development of formal or abstract operations in cognitive functioning.

A similar observation was made by Eva M Magnusson and Kerstin Naucler of Sweden in their consideration of linguistic level in reading and spelling performance. They pointed out that phonetic awareness was fundamental to the acquisition of reading ability, and that most poor readers typically made phonemic errors, whilst the errors made by good readers were characteristically morphemic. However, when good readers were presented with very difficult texts they tended to make phonemic errors typical of poor readers. The best spellers are those, evidently, who, like good readers, realize that English spelling is more morphemically based than phonetically based, and are able to use this information to derive for example the spelling of *competition* out of *compete*.

Heather Fehring and Valerie Thomas of Australia presented a brilliant study entitled 'Understanding Children's Spelling: Implications for Teaching Practice'. They suggested that one of the greatest obstacles to children's progress was a lack of linguistic awareness, especially of morphological structures. They demonstrated that while many children were able to spell common words like *birthday* or *newspaper*, 66% could not spell *birth* or *news*. They showed evidence of similar difficulty with children able to spell such words as *soft* and *climb* but not *soften* or *climber*. These researchers emphasised again the need for learners to study the morphemic dimensions of words if progress beyond mere phonemic competence in spelling is to be achieved.

Reflecting on these observations made at this year's World Congress of the International Reading Association leads me to wonder if the approaches to spelling reform characterised in both Nue Speling and Cut Spelling perhaps concentrate too much on the phonemic elements of spelling difficulty and too little on the linguistic and morphemic components of English orthography. Perhaps this question could be given further consideration at our own bi-annual conference to be held in Birmingham next year.

**from Peter H Young, Director of Corporate Relations, British Telecom:**

... I must point out that our decision, some years ago, to use the word Freefone was not motivated by a decision to adopt a simplified spelling but by our desire to register a meaningful trade name to identify and promote the increasing number of ... services... In this instance, there is an audible and visual affinity between 'f for 'free' and 'f for 'fone', when the two words are linked, but to generally adopt at a stroke the 'f rather than the 'ph' spelling in the word telephone appears to us to represent a much more radical change of policy and style, with wider implications for the country and the English speaking world as a whole.

I am not sure that we would feel at all comfortable in being the trend setter in this particular respect! In continuing to spell telephone thus, we are at least being faithful to the original Greek, even though we may be out of step with our more phonetically-mindful European contemporaries.

Your suggestion is nevertheless a fascinating one and I am making it known to our appropriate marketing people, so that they can give further thought to the implications.

**From Robert Craig, Weston-super-Mare**

One feature of kut spelling which you do not make enough of, is that it enables us to keep our options open for longer.

Thus,

Stage 1. CS with some diacritics

Stage 2. CS with more diacritics

Stage 3. Merger of Latin and Kirillik alphabets.

An example of how keeping our options open might work at stage three: let <r> = 'hard' <g>, let <g> = 'soft' <g> (Russian <d> is written <g>), let <j> = <y>, thus *get* -> *ret*, *jet* - *get*, *yet* = *jet*. Also once <k> has been adopted for 'hard' <c>, we might wish to use <c> for 'hard' <s> (because Russian <s> is written <c>) and use <s> for 'soft' <s>. The Yugoslavs have already adopted some symbols from the Latin alphabet into their form of Kirillik.

Perhaps the SSS should consider staging an international conference to recommend how the three European alphabets, Latin, Kirillik (in its various forms) and Greek, might best be combined. (14 February 1986)

>> Altho it is getting away from the ideal of Cut Spelling, have you considered the advantages of extending the use of <k> (and restricting <c>? E.g. *chest/kemist spektakl/specpl*, *amerikn/politicn*. The same applies to <Z>: *his/hiz*, *mas/waz*, *mising/rizeing*, *Hans/panz*, *Berks/sokz*. (5 August 1986).

**Stanley Gibbs, Secretary of the Society, sends the following excerpts from his postbag:-**

**>> from the Society's President, Professor John Downing.**

...my feeling for some time has been that we made a mistake in using i.t.a. in the 1960 experiment. We should have used New Spelling. When we get the revised New Spelling, I think we ought to be trying to get a new experiment started with the same kind of support that the i.t.a. experiment attracted.

**>> from Chris Jolly, chairman of the Society, (*Language Monthly*, June 1986):**

Consider for a moment the influences that have helped bring about spelling reform in various languages. While certain individuals may have influenced public opinion, it is an Academy or a government that has decreed or accepted a change.

**>> from Ray Higson (*Yorkshire Post*, 29 November 85):**

Surely a thorough reform of our obsolete system of spelling could only be beneficial to children and adults who are slow learners, whatever the reasons?

>> **from Valerie Yule (A Roman Script as an Alternative Script for Indian Languages):**

It would be advisable for all languages on the Indian subcontinent to use the same system of roman alphabet sound-symbol representation.

**From Tom McArthur, General Editor, *English Today*, Cambridge:**

... In view of the fact that you are now up-dating your *New Spelling* of 1948, it might be a good idea for me to hang on until it is ready, and then consider it as a centrepiece for a presentation of the whole issue of reformed spelling... Cut Spelling seems to be the same as the journalistic speedhand I learned in my early twenties.

**From David Moseley, Newcastle upon Tyne:**

... at long last the Aurally Coded English Spelling Dictionary is now published... If the dictionary gets to be widely used it should have a marked effect on standards of spelling. The DES Assessment of Performance Unit have national samples of children's writing at different age levels. It would be nice to analyse this corpus for spelling errors and use it as a baseline in an evaluation study of the A.C.E. dictionary.

*(The ACE Spelling Dictionary is available at £4.50, or as a free inspection copy, from LDA, Cambridgeshire — Editor)*

**From Edward Rondthaler, Typographic Council for Spelling Reform, New York:**

... I have no trouble reading Cut Spelling... but it wouldn't do anything to help our illiteracy problem. Or am I wrong?

... I'm sending you an abstract of the forthcoming American Spelling dictionary. (See p.16 — Editor) It will be published shortly and then I'll get a complete copy to you.

... We are moving right ahead with reform on this side of the Atlantic. IBM's *Writing to Read*, which is the first step towards reformed spelling, is presently being taught to 150,000 children... since it uses the regular 26 letters, it will be compatible with traditional spelling. The very slight differences between the orthography in *Writing to Read* and American are in process of being ironed out... So we think we're really making progress... thanks to IBM's support... If you are interested in IBM's *Writing to Read*, there is a book published by Warner Books (666 Fifth Avenue), *Writing to Read* by J H Martin... published in February.

**From Valerie Yule, Australia:**

... my research will be published soon: 'The Design of Spelling', Harvard Educational Review... Currently I am doing research on The Effects of Practice in Cut Spelling with a wide variety of subjects — I have an Aberdeen University grant to pay subjects... I don't think stages will be the answer for cut spelling, except perhaps General Cut 1 (rather like mine) and General Cut 2 (including some of Chris Upward's).

*Scottish spelling in 1685:* even then the Scottish people were economical. The following are 'cut' spellings from a letter by Janett Linton, a prisoner in Dunottar Castle: *thes, strenth, cam, wer, therfor, folow, mor, ar, bles, rejoic, wil, wors, troubl, separate hav, cros, canot, leav, non, lov, sinc, tim, grac, disiples, bewar, nativ, al*. Some other interesting spellings: *lyf trueth, desyr, tryalls*.

**Correspondence has also been received from**

**Harvie Barnard (Washington State),**

**Mary Cooper (Swindon),**

**Madhukar Gogate (Bombay),**

**Edgar Gregersen (New York),**

**Bill Herbert (Queensland),**

**Benno Jost-Westendorf (West Germany),**

**Richard Lung (Scarborough),**

**Gilbert Rae (London),**

**Arnold Rupert (Ontario),**

**Edward Smith (San Francisco).**

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[John Wells: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#) [Media](#)]

## 3. English Accents and their Implications for Spelling Reform

### J C Wells

Dr John Wells is Reader in Phonetics in the Department of Phonetics & Linguistics, University College London and former Secretary of the International Phonetic Association. His 3-volume study *Accents of English* (Cambridge University Press) underlies his talk to the Society on 25.1.1986, of which we here publish an edited version with his permission.

#### 1. SOME BASIC PROBLEMS

##### 1.1 The alphabet

An ideal spelling system, we all know, will have one symbol for one sound, one grapheme for one phoneme, and it is with the difficulties associated with this principle that we are concerned here. One major difficulty, if we confine ourselves to the Latin alphabet, is that it is an arbitrary list of 26 letters which don't necessarily correspond to the sound-systems of the languages which have to use it; in particular they don't correspond to English.

##### 1.2 Danger of parochialism: *any*

However another problem arises from diversity of pronunciation. There is a great danger of insularity or parochialism, of assuming that everybody makes the same particular set of contrasts that we ourselves make and take for granted: unfortunately what is obvious and normal to one speaker may be exotic, unusual, subtle and strange to another. There are thus all sorts of little facts about how English is pronounced round the world by native speakers which may give us pause in our reforming zeal. We all know the word *any* for example ought to be written with <e> because it rhymes with *penny*; we learn *any*, *many* as exceptions. But they are typically not exceptions for the southern Irish who say /ani/ rather than /eni/; for them *any* and *penny* don't rhyme, and they would see nothing strange about writing *any* with <a>. Maybe they would want to write <nn>, but that is another matter.

#### 2. CONSONANT VARIATIONS

##### 2.1 Morphophonemic past tense <-d>?

Ought *mist* and *missed* to be spelt identically because they are pronounced identically, or should we give the past-tense a regular appearance with <d>, even when, as in *missed*, it is pronounced /t/. In deciding this, we should consider the Nigerians, who either say /misd/, with the difficult sequence /sd/, or more usually assimilate it as /mizd/, with voicing throughout. For them past-tense /d/ is always voiced, and any assimilation changes the stem, so the past of *kick* tends to be /kigd/. I mention this because one should be aware of it and not because it should necessarily influence spelling reform.

##### 2.2 Spell or omit <r>?

From *New Spelling* onwards the importance of catering for accents other than Received Pronunciation has been clear from the treatment of historical <r>. In my speech I don't distinguish *source*:*sauce*, and if spelling reform proposals do so, the reason is historical: historically *source* had <r>, and *sauce* did not. But other varieties of English (Scottish, Irish, west of England, most American, Canadian) make the distinction in speech. Similarly the homophones *rotor*:*rota* are

distinct in rhotic accents which retain historical <r>, which could justify keeping the distinction in spelling. However people who pronounce intrusive /r/, saying perhaps *rotar of duties*, will have to remember not to write <r> in some positions where they pronounce it but conversely to write it sometimes when they don't pronounce it as in *rotor*, where such speakers only pronounce it before a vowel. Faced with such discrepancies, spelling reform has two alternatives: either speakers of non-rhotic accents must learn by rote when to write historical <r> and when not; or those who pronounce historical <r> must ignore every a> not preceding a vowel; and that of course might be difficult.

### 2.3 Problem words with <r>

There are some problem words in this area, too. One is the colour-name *khaki*, which is written without <r> as it had none in its source-language Hindustani. Nevertheless in the west of England and in Canada people say /ka:rki/. I don't know what the Scots do, but the Americans on the other hand are at least consistent and say /kæki/. Similarly *char*, tea, another word with no historical /r/ (it is cognate with Russian чай). So one would perhaps have to allow different spellings in such words. Then there is *gormless*, nowadays written with <r>, which is etymologically wrong, and some people therefore advocate writing <gaumless>.

### 2.4 Distinguish <ng:ngg>?

A similar problem arises with <ng>. Consider the pair *singer:finger*, whose endings most speakers distinguish, so that it seems logical to write *singer:fingger*. There could be other such pairs, like *kinglet* (a little king): *singlet*. The trouble is, people in the trapezium linking Birmingham-Manchester-Liverpool rhyme *singer:finger*, so they would have to learn an extra arbitrary distinction if one were shown in spelling. It is therefore a distinction we might well decide to ignore — so also simplifying the comparison of a word like *long*, whose irregularly pronounced forms *longer*, *longest* we maybe don't need to reflect in writing.

## 3. VOWEL VARIATIONS

### 3.1 Greater problems with vowels

Such variations in pronunciation mean we may have to violate the principle of one sound per letter and one letter per sound in quite obvious ways, ways that probably everyone can accept. Greater difficulties perhaps arise with vowel-sounds and sets of vowel-contrasts, where I think the danger is particularly strong of wrongly assuming everybody makes the same contrasts.

### 3.2 *Sam:psalm* contrast

Thus *New Spelling* provides specially for the words I shall refer to as the lexical set BATH, like *pass*, *path*, etc., by allowing either <a> or <aa>, according to the pronunciations /baθ, ba:θ/ — a permissive solution which assumes everyone distinguishes the vowels in *gather.father*, and allows everyone to spell them according to their own pronunciation. The trouble is, not everybody makes this *pam:palmsam:psalm* contrast in the first place; even in the west of England and certainly in Scotland and Northern Ireland some people have the same vowel in *sam:psalm*, saying approximately /sæm/ for both. It would actually have been consistent with this fact for *New Spelling* to ignore the <a:aa> distinction, because it has very low functional load, in other words there are very few word-pairs that are distinguished as *sam:psalm* are. That is why Scots and others can ignore the distinction without suffering disaster (or /dizæstər/). We can thus perhaps ignore the contrast RP makes between *mass:pass*. It is not only northerners who don't distinguish them, but also Scots, who have no choice anyhow between the two possibilities and may say either /mæs, pæs/ or /ma:s, pa:s/. On the one hand we may ignore that distinction, but on the other hand RP speakers must remember to distinguish *pass:farce* (which I rhyme perfectly), reflecting historical <r> in *farce* but not in *pass*. However by thus taking accent variability into account one lies open to

the objection of ignoring the principle of one letter per sound: the southern English know that *mass:pass* differ in sound, while *pass:farce* do not yet we are proposing the same spelling for the first pair and different spelling for the second. That is quite a well-known problem.

### 3.3 Cloth:lot:thought

Less well known is the very similar situation affecting the set of words exemplified by *cloth*, such as *cross*, *cough* etc., where even within RP in this century we had a rival pronunciation which might be spelt *clawth*, *crawss*, *cawf*. RP resolved this by turning them from majority RP forms into very strange minority forms, which people now laugh at. But the problem here is that American pronunciation really corresponds to *crawss*, *cawf*, *clawth* rather than *cross*, *cof*, *cloth*, inasmuch as Americans give *cross* etc., the vowel of *thought* rather than of *lot*. Amongst all these different phonetic realizations, the important thing is to see what the contrasts are. Taking *lot* as a typical /o/ word, and *thought* as a typical 'aw' word, my point is that most people in this country speak *cloth* and other words like it with the same vowel as *lot*, and we therefore feel they all ought to be spelt with <o>, and not <aw> (unlike *thought*); but Americans (with very few exceptions) pair *cloth* with *thought*, and not with *lot*. So Americans might logically want to write *cloth* as *clawth*, and incidentally *long* as *lawng*, since for them it also belongs with *thought*, not with *lot*.

### 3.4 Ignore such contrasts?

If pressed, I would propose the same radical solution here as with TRAP:BATH:PALM, namely to ignore the whole set of contrasts and write them identically, all with <o> or whatever. This would suit Scottish and Northern Irish pronunciation, many Scots having the same vowel for all of *lot:thought:cloth*, so that a distinction might seem unnecessary. We would then have to forget the *cot:caught* distinction, which most Scots, Northern Irish, Canadians and many Americans (particularly in the far west, in California) don't make. In fact the *lot:thought* contrast is declining in the United States, so we who make a sharp difference between *lot:thought* are perhaps becoming a minority; we may not be a minority yet but there are many people who make no such distinction and who would have to learn an arbitrary distinction between *hock:hawk*, if reformed spelling distinguished them. On the other hand RP speakers would face the same problem here again with <r>, since there are words with historical <r>, like *court*, which are presumably going to reflect the distinction still, and logically one should write *kot* for t.o. *cot*, *caught*, but *kort* for *court*. Again, some people would have to accept no spelling-distinction for some words they pronounce differently, but a distinction for other words they pronounce the same.

### 3.5 Misconceptions about accents leading to spelling errors?

There might be a danger of misspelling because of mistaken impressions of other accents. RP speakers today have such problems if they try imitating American or Scottish accents — even talented English actors or impressionists attempting American or Scottish speech quite often make mistakes. Peter Sellers, in his *Balham gateway to the south*, talks lyrically about morning coming and says '*and now at last we see the dorn approaches*' But Americans don't say /dorn/, they say /da:n/. Similarly RP speakers might think words like *dawn* ought to be spelt with <r> in reformed spelling, because they mistakenly think rhotic speakers pronounce an /r/. Clearly even for highly literate people sound in a sense dominates spelling in their mental picture of words, so when imitating another accent, they set up correspondences between sounds in their own accent and what they imagine are the equivalents in the other accent, rather than by reference to the spelling, even though the <r> wud give them a true indication in this case. English actors playing Scottish parts likewise make many errors with /r/, pronouncing *comma* and *China* with final <r>: they feel English shwa ought to correspond to Scottish /r/, as in *father*, but in many other words there is no such correspondence.

## 4. <a> SETS AND <o> SETS

### 4.1 Merging <a> sets, <o> sets

I suggested it might be useful to use just <a> in the lexical sets TRAP:BATH:PALM (I use such key-words in my book to represent the many words that have the same vowel, we hope for everybody) and just <o> in LOT:CLOTH:THOUGHT, reflecting the fact that Scots for example may not make those distinctions, while others may send BATH in the direction of either TRAP or PALM, and CLOTH in the direction of either LOT or THOUGHT.

### 4.2 American <o>-/a/ crossovers

A difficulty with this simplification is that most Americans pronounce PALM:LOT with the same vowel. Thus *father:bother* rhyme perfectly in typical American pronunciation, and Americans make puns that don't work for the British: the Swedish car called a *Saab* sounds like *sob*, and the Americans put up posters for the painter Salvador Dali saying 'Hello Dali', which to them sounds like 'Hello Dolly'. This means that the Americans, an important influential part of the English-speaking community, are confronted with a further uncertainty here, namely how to spell words in which they use the /a:/ sound: they are going to have to write it <o> like *lot* in most words, but presumably <a> in *father* and *palm*.

### 4.3 Anglo-American inversions

Then, although RP says *bath* with /a:/ and American says it with /æ/, there are other words in which the reverse distinction obtains: the first vowel in *pasta* is /a:/ in the States, and Americans might therefore want to spell it with <o>. Competing spellings might have to be allowed in this area too, according to pronunciation. But perhaps <pasta> is tolerable because foreign borrowings are always problematic and a source of exceptions.

### 4.4 Merging NORTH:FORCE

Another contrast that *New Spelling* is inclined to allow for is one which used to be made in England and still is in Scotland and to some extent in the United States, between for example *horse:hoarse*. Many Scots distinguish them, and a broad Jamaican accent (really down-market creole) has for example *me ride an an arss* and *me vice oorss*. Slightly posher Jamaican has *harss/hoorss* for the two words, reflecting an historical contrast which we have mostly lost in England, but which may persist in living memory (that is why *New Spelling* allows it), and is still well found in Scotland. Common sense may tell us to ignore this sort of contrast, because many people don't make it. But if we ignore it, Scots would risk misspelling words like *story*, because for Scots *story* begins as *stow*: for them it is logical to write it with the vowel of *goat*, and it may seem perverse with another vowel; but maybe they will just have to endure that. Not only these two sets *horse:hoarse*, which in my sets are NORTH:FORCE) have merged: all the <oor> words (my set CURE) have done so too. Many English people now pronounce *Shaw*, *shore*, *sure* as homophones, but for other speakers they may all be distinct. There are people who can make a 3-way contrast in an old-fashioned kind of RP, and certainly many still make a 2-way distinction. Many accents would merge *shore:sure*, but keep *Shaw* distinct. So I would suggest all the forms with <r> could merge, and we ignore the Scottish or Irish distinction between *war*, *shore*, *sure*, writing them all perhaps with <or>. When I once made an effort to learn Jamaican, NORTH:FORCE was the contrast I found most difficult: I had to remember to say *poork* for the meat, but *fark* for the implement you might eat it with, although *pork* and *fork* rhyme for me. It is striking, but historically quite right that the Scottish and Jamaican contrast are the same, and in just the same words. FORCE had a long vowel, while NORTH had a short vowel, which accounts for the t.o. of *hoarse* and *horse*.

## 5. SPELL TO SHOW ALL CONTRASTS?

### 5.1 Maximalism and minimalist

Logically there are two extreme positions one can adopt towards these contrasts. The maximalist position would say our orthography must reflect all the contrasts that anyone makes, and the minimalist position would say we should reflect only those that everyone makes.

### 5.2 Problems of maximal contrast

The maximalist position would lead to very undesirable consequences, as the following examples show. Many southern English make a longer vowel in *bad* than in *lad* and may even have minimal pairs between the name *Sally* and the verb *to sally*, or between *shandy* the long drink and *brandy* the short drink; obviously spelling should ignore this distinction. Likewise some Scots distinguish *tide:tied*, the point being not the quality of the vowel itself, but whether contrasts are made between vowels in different sets of words. In fact Scots here reflect a grammatical boundary, <d> in *tied* being a suffix on *tie*; in *Fife:five* on the other hand the unvoiced or voiced final consonant distinguishes the environment; but insofar as the distinction is predictable, it can be ignored because it is allophonic. In Northern Ireland and a few other places they distinguish *days:daze*; we are obviously going to have to ignore that. Also in that area is the contrast between *late:eight* made in many parts of England, where the local accent has /le:t, eit/, essentially reflecting the historical fricative <gh>. If the distinctions are allophones, we can ignore them; but for some people they may not be allophones.

### 5.3 Who needs the distinctions?

Then there is a contrast among words like *nurse*, where English and Americans make no distinction; but Scots and Irish may distinguish *pearl:curl* for example, contrasting them in the same way as *perry:curry*; and *Hertz:hurts*, *fir:fur* may similarly differ. That is a kind of justification for present spellings, which accurately reflect this distinction. Even so, t.o. sometimes spells the first vowel <ear> as in *pearl*, sometimes <er> as in *defer*. But if, like *New Spelling*, we abolish that distinction, then we are removing that contrast. English or Americans will typically say these distinctions are subtleties they can't possibly cope with. The only point I would make is that for those who make the distinction, it is one that logically ought to be retained in a reformed spelling, and they are going to have to be convinced otherwise if it is to be abolished.

### 5.4 Contrasts matter, not sounds

The point is again, it doesn't matter what the actual phonetic realization is; what is important is the network of contrasts, because that is what the orthography must reflect. If we take, say, the word *soap* where we all use our 0 vowel, it doesn't matter what precise quality of vowel we use, provided we use the same vowel in *rope*, *goat*, *coat* and all other words in the same set.

## 6 PROBLEMS OF MINIMAL CONTRAST

### 6.1 Jamaican <a:o> merger

The minimalist position, spelling only the contrasts everybody makes, has difficulties too. One might think everybody contrasts *pat:pot*, but they don't. Jamaicans for example typically say /pat/ for both. Now people may object that there are not many Jamaicans, so they can be ignored; but as a group they have very special problems with English spelling. Whereas other English-speakers mainly follow their pronunciation in spelling the <a:o> contrast (with one or two exceptions like *wash*), for Jamaicans it is hard to decide which spelling is right and what therefore is also the posh pronunciation. Ordinary Jamaicans say /rat/ both for the animal and for putrefaction, and have to learn which to spell <rat> and which <rot>. A social factor is also involved: to speak educated Jamaican, they have to learn to distinguish *rat:rot* as other English-speakers do. But if we are

aiming to lighten the burden of arbitrary spelling distinctions, no reform project I have ever seen solves this difficulty for West Indians.

## 6.2 Southern US <a:o> merger

*Farm:form* are similar, but not only Jamaicans say /fa:(r)m/ for both: many Americans speaking popular accents in the south also do. They have a test phrase about being *born in a barn*, and it is well known that some people reverse the two: country bumpkins in the southern states are ridiculed as being *barn in a born*, with the typical confusion of people trying to introduce a contrast into their speech that they don't natively have. Again, I think on balance we must retain the <a:o> distinction in those sets of words. But it is difficult.

## 6.3 Southern US <i:e> merger

Likewise many American Southerners, of all social classes, don't distinguish the vowels in KIT:DRESS before nasals, and make no difference between *pin:pen* (hence the terms *writing-pen* and *stick-pin*, to make the distinction clear). Listen to Jim Reeves singing *Lord give me stringth* (*like string*), not distinguishing /i, e/ before the nasal <ng>. And when these American Southerners look at the spelling <England>, they think we ought to say it with /e/ as it is written. It would be rather drastic, I think, to abolish this contrast and write *pin:pen* identically, but unless we did, it would cause many American Southerners a big spelling problem. When I say Southerners, I should include California, whose speech is a mixture because it is in many respects northern rather than southern, in United States terms, but has certain southern features, such as not distinguishing /i, e/ before nasals.

## 7. FEASIBLE MERGERS

### 7.1 Fool:goose merger

*New Spelling* was criticized for distinguishing the vowels of *foot:goose*, and this distinction, I think, could be dropped. Consider the pair *good:mood*, which English people don't rhyme (we could spend hours discussing whether we pronounce *room* with the vowel of *good* or the vowel of *mood*). However in Scotland *good:mood* rhyme perfectly, and also in Ulster. Forcing a contrast of spelling with <oo:uu>, as *New Spelling* does, is therefore an arbitrary extra distinction. As there are very few word-pairs distinguished in this way (*pull:pool*, *full:fool*, and a few pairs including inflected forms, such as *wood:wooded*, *could:cooed*), I think we won't suffer too seriously if we ignore the distinction; we would soon learn to cope with the homophony of *you fool*, *you've pulled me into the pool* and *it's full*, because after all the words are homophones in Scottish and some Irish speech.

### 7.2 Functional load of <sh:zh>

What is involved here is the important question of what is known technically as functional load, that is, the number of words that are distinguished by a given contrast. When functional load is low, then a contrast can be ignored, whereas when functional load is rather high, then presumably it ought to be reflected in the spelling. Using this criterion, one might well decide not to distinguish <sh:zh> as consonants, because there are very few word-pairs in which they actually represent a minimal pair. There are non-rhyming pairs like *pressure:measure*, *mission:vision*, but in no everyday words at least does the <sh:zh> contrast carry the power to distinguish two words. (We can safely overlook such rarities as *Aleutian:allusion*, *Confucian:confusion*.) Rather than impose the rebarbative <zh>, we might write <sh> for both.

### 7.3 STRUT:FOOT:GOOSE chain

There is another contrast with very low functional load which nobody has proposed abolishing as far as I know: that exemplified by my lexical set STRUT:FOOT, which contains pairs like *cut:put*.

However we are really considering three sets here, STRUT:FOOT:GOOSE, because Scots, as we have seen, don't contrast foot:goose, while northerners don't contrast *strut:foot*, though they do distinguish these from *goose*. So we face a kind of chain, on which everybody contrasts the extreme points, but not everybody contrasts both extremes and the middle. The situation with the BATH words is parallel to this. I suppose the logical solution is again to allow the intermediate group, in this case FOOT (just as BATH and CLOTH represented intermediate groups), to be written with either vowel. So words like *put*, *foot* could be spelt either like *strut*, *cut*, which would seem logical for people in northern England, or like *goose*, which would seem logical for people probably in southern England and certainly for Scots and Irish.

#### 7.4 A fourth contrast?

The Scots do have an extra possibility of contrast here that RP doesn't between for example /brud, bru:d/, for *brood* and *brewed*, which are identical for me but tend to be distinct in Scottish pronunciation. Distinctions like this may just have to be ignored: *brood:brewed* is a grammatical distinction like *tide:tied* that reflects a suffix in one case and not in the other, and again there are very few pairs of words involved.

#### 7.5 Small lexical set FOOT

A factor to bear in mind here is that the lexical set FOOT is very small, containing only about 40 words (see p. 132 in my book), and although some are quite common words like *good*, *should*, *foot*, *put* and so on, there are not many of them, and so it is only a small number of words we might decide to allow to be spelt in two competing ways. If diacritics were used, a solution might be to spell all the vowels in the STRUT:FOOT:GOOSE chain with <u>, but to minimize the visual differences by perhaps optional use of diacritics according to pronunciation.

## 8. SOCIAL FACTORS

### 8.1 Accents as social labels

A complication with the northern pronunciation which merges *cut:put* is that it bears considerable sociolinguistic value, in that it is well known to distinguish social class, or educated versus uneducated speech, in northern England. Even that is perhaps not quite exact because there are educated northerners particularly in the Northumberland area who don't make this distinction at all.

### 8.2 Hypercorrection

Even people elsewhere may be uncertain and reverse the vowel sounds — you hear northerners pronouncing *sugar* like RP *rugger*, and *pudding* like RP *budding*, in a mistaken attempt to make the distinction. Or they may stumble over the vowels in *good luck*: if you grow up as a northerner giving *luck* the same vowel as *good*, and you then try to speak RP, no longer giving *cut* and *love* the vowel of *put*, then the temptation is to say /gAd lAk/ (despite the <oo>), or if you know thavs a danger, you may even get it the wrong way round and say /gʌd lʌk/. The pair *gas:mask* gives rise to the same problem: if you first learn to say /gas mask/, and you later discover it's posh to say /gra:s/ instead of /gras/, you might say /ga:s ma:sk/ or even /ga:s mask/.

### 8.3 Accent prejudice and spelling reform

Spelling reformers have to confront sociolinguistic facts of the following kind. Most of the features of Scottish pronunciation as heard in the speech of somebody like David Steel are regarded as entirely educated and beautiful and just different. But some other divergences from RP are associated with particular regions, or with lower social class, and they tend to be condemned as ugly and nasty and not to be encouraged. If the first type is catered for in a spelling reform, it is not going to raise any contrary voices, but the second type may well do so, because the reform may be seen as bolstering undesirable pronunciations. The objective, scientific observer of course

discounts these social views and refuses to make such value judgments, but a reforming movement does have to take such prejudices into account. And I think these prejudices might well say that we must retain the difference between the *strut* and *foot* spellings, and therefore we must spell the FOOT words with <oo> or whatever, rather than with <u> or whatever. In other words we must retain the contrasts that everybody makes except northerners. This is hard on the northerners, but maybe that's life as it is — unless we can reform these prejudices about accents.

#### **8.4 The nurse:square contrast**

Thus there are contrasts which some people don't make, though there may be a widespread feeling that they ought to make them and therefore that they ought to be catered for in a spelling reform. Another example is the *nurse:square* vowel contrast which many Liverpudlians for example don't make, so *that fur:fair* are not distinguished, and the name *Mary* is pronounced like *furry*, or conversely you have *cairtains* hanging in the room rather than *curtains*. It is going to be difficult for speakers of such accents to remember the spellings if we keep the distinction in a reformed orthography. But these accents are widely condemned as ugly, etc., and that may be a reason for ignoring this problem of the Liverpudlians.

#### **8.5 H-dropping**

The case of <h> is obviously similar. Millions of English people do not pronounce it, so it might seem logical to write *harm:arm* identically, in line with that pronunciation. But that would go against the social attitude that it's incorrect to drop /h/ and therefore the spelling ought to reflect its presence. Obviously we shan't go on writing <h> in *honest* and *hour*, but no doubt people would say we ought to go on writing it in *harm* to reflect the prestige pronunciation that does distinguish *harm:arm*.

#### **8.6 The <ing> ending**

Similarly with the ending <-ing>: almost wherever English is spoken there is a rivalry between a relatively high-status pronunciation with <-ing> as in *sing*, thus *running*, *wailing*, *eating*, and a relatively low-status pronunciation with final <n> as in *tin*, thus *runnin* or *run'n*, *eatn*, *walk'n*. I suppose again the feeling would be that we have to keep the <ng> spelling to reflect the prestige pronunciation. Nevertheless it is a source of uncertainty for many people, who may produce hypercorrections like *a brazing hussy* rather than *a brazen hussy*, or *chicking*, *kitching* instead of *chicken*, *kitchen*.

### **9 OTHER PRONUNCIATION VARIABLES**

#### **9.1 Declining status of RP**

I have the impression that reform proposals this century have been very firmly based upon RP, together with some nods in the direction of archaizing tendencies (which is why historical <r> is reflected). It's clear that in the last quarter of a century in England the position of RP has been very seriously eroded, in that RP no longer enjoys the unquestioned status that it previously did. There are now many people who not only don't speak it — that was always so — but who don't aspire to it any more, and who would regard it as quite unrealistic to aspire towards it. In fact I think what has changed is the perceived model of beautiful or ideal speech, which is for many people no longer RP. This can be seen in all sorts of ways. Teachers of English as a foreign language for example get increasingly dissatisfied with the transcriptions the phoneticians offer them as the models for foreigners to imitate — one thing that has aroused particular complaint is pronouncing *happy* with a final /i/, because the many people who say /hæpi:/ with a final long vowel feel that it's unreasonable that they should be expected to change; they don't feel the lack of prestige that once attached to saying /hæpi:, siti:/ and so on, and don't feel it in any way reprehensible to use the formerly non-RP pronunciation /i:/ in such words.

## 9.2 Allophonic variation

I have yet to discuss various technical phonological questions like the phonemic principle. It's clear that where we have allophonic differences, that is, realizational differences, we can ignore them. This means that essentially where any two sounds are used in such a way that we can predict from the surrounding sounds which will be used, then we can ignore any such difference. This is why we can ignore the difference between /t/ and glottal stop: many people in a word like *department* have a glottal stop before the <m> ([dipa:ʔmənt] rather than [dipa:tmənt]). To say [dipa:tmənt] is a really careful, special pronunciation for most people nowadays. But we can ignore that distinction because we can set up a simple rule that <t> before nasals is pronounced as glottal stop. *Atmosphere* is another example ([æʔməsfɪ:ə]), and indeed the fact that it's a variable rule is another reason why it needn't affect spelling. Or again many people feel there is really a rather sharp difference between the O they use in most cases and the O they use before /l/, so that *goal:go* may be [gɒl, gəʊ]. Students often complain when I expect them to use the same transcription symbol for these two different vowels, as they feel them to be; but as long as we can set up a rule that <o> before <l> has a special pronunciation, there is no problem: they are just allophonic variants of the same phoneme. They may sound a bit different but the difference is predictable, and so it may be ignored in an orthography. The problem with *goal:go* is that the // is now being lost and once people drop the final // in *goal*, then it's a non-rhyme of *go*, although both of them end in vowels (that is virtually the situation for some speakers already). Here I think in our spelling reform we had better be very carefully archaizing or conservative and retain written <l> wherever an // occurred and RP still pronounces it.

## 9.3 American intervocalic <t>

American intervocalic <t> is an interesting case, because it's moving from being allophonic to involving a neutralization and therefore becoming phonemic. Once the minimal pair *Adam:atom* becomes identical, then <t> in *atom* is no longer allophonic. But they are not yet necessarily identical: Americans may say *atom* with voiced <t>, which goes with /ə'tɑ:mɪk/, but /ædəm/ the first man, maybe a subtle distinction, but many Americans insist they are different and felt to be so. Another pair is *latter:ladder*. But my impression is that increasingly Americans not only make no difference, but don't even claim to make one. Up to about 1960 many Americans may have made no difference, but they *could* make one if they tried, and they would certainly claim to do so if they were naive and phonetically untrained; whereas now some people don't even claim to make a difference. In 1961 Webster's Third International was the first American dictionary to transcribe these words with /d/, and came into considerable criticism for this: it was said to be slovenly speech which shouldn't appear in the dictionary. But I think that criticism is passing now. I have even encountered reverse spellings: I read an American novel in which somebody gave an 'involuntary shutter', *shutter:shudder* for the author clearly not being distinct. So maybe Americans will have to learn by rote which words are written with <t> and which with <d>. That would accord with their prejudices in many cases anyhow, so it's not yet a problem, but it may be so in the next century, particularly if this sound-change spreads, as seems likely, to all other accents of English. Already it occurs in Australia, South Africa and England, even in RP. RP speakers talking fast will often use expressions like /ged of/, flapping or tapping and voicing the <t>. The <t d> contrast may still survive, but its disappearance is the logical next step, now we've started on the same path as the Americans. Americans keep the <t d> distinction in *ten:den*, even if they lose it in *atom:Adam*. Word-finally they keep *wait:wade* apart, but the <-ing> form is ambiguous: '*they were /weɪdɪŋ/ in the river*' — did they wait or did they wade? We don't know in American speech, but one can always determine from the base form of the word whether it should be spelt with <t> or <d>. Only a few words like *atom* lack a base form for reference, and even there the adjective *atomic* reminds Americans to spell with <t>. I don't see a major problem. A similar neutralization occurs after /s/ in words like *spot*, *stop*, *Scot*. Here the voiced:unvoiced contrast, as between <p, t, k> and <b, d, g>, is neutralized. For spelling this is no great problem: we just have to decide arbitrarily to write them all either with <p, t, k> or with <b, d, g>.

## 10. CONCLUSION

What I hope I have done is to highlight the dangers of parochialism in designing a reformed orthography for English, of being unaware of the varying patterns of contrast in different accents. But even with this awareness, it is impossible to satisfy all of the speakers all of the time; the best that can be hoped is that a proposed reform will satisfy most of the speakers most of the time.

## 11. POINTS RAISED IN DISCUSSION

### 11.1 Jamaica

The linguistic situation in Jamaica is fairly homogenous, though there is sharp social distinction, just as there is in London. At the top of the scale is the local variety of standard English, quite different from RP, but having the same status as say General American. The worry about taking that standard as the basis for spelling is that it will not help poor children struggling to learn reading and writing in school.

### 11.2 Historical /a/ to /e/ change?

There is no evidence to suggest that the spelling vs. pronunciation discrepancy observed in *any*, *many* is linked to the special case of *catch* pronounced /ket?/, nor that there is a general law describing any such regular sound-shift, in fact there are many other frequently used words that have not undergone such a change. *Catch* is a well-known special case, where the preceding velar may play a part, just as in parts of the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland they don't distinguish *ketch:catch*, *kettle:cattle*. Each word really has its own history here, and you can't set up general principles unless they are applied pretty widely.

### 11.3 Functional load of <r>

A major obstacle to the omission of <r> is that it affects preceding vowels, even when it is not itself pronounced. The pattern *day:dare* for example has quite a high functional load. Historically it was the same vowel, with or without <r>, as it still is in Scottish English, /de:; de:r/. RP has lost the <r> but very sensibly made a vowel difference beforehand, so we still keep the contrast. Similarly between *cat:cart* the contrast is a vowel contrast, and if we omitted <r>, we should suffer quite a high loss of functional load. In any case, we should remember that world-wide the speakers with rhotic accents which pronounce this /r/ are probably in a majority. So the <r> has an effect for all speakers (except possibly the Africans and the Trinidadians): one can usually say, either the <r> changes the sound of the preceding vowel, or it is itself pronounced. Furthermore, speakers of non-rhotic accents will frequently sound the <r> if there is a following vowel, even if not otherwise; and even in words where such speakers make no distinction in vowel-quality before <r>, as in the pairs *father:farther*, *calve:carve*, rhotic speakers will pronounce the -r> where it is present.

### 11.4 Changes in RP

As well as losing its status in Britain in recent years, RP has also changed, as one immediately recognizes if one listens to pre-war newsreels. However there is a problem of definition here. What is RP? Is it forever that particular form that was codified by Daniel Jones? If so, it has disappeared, it is something we associate with the 1930s. Or has it like every other language, and every other way of pronouncing a language, undergone changes? Maybe to define RP today, we merely need to examine the present usage of upper-class English people, and that will give us present-day RP. That seems a more sensible way of defining it. But RP has unquestionably undergone various changes.

### 11.5 Dictionaries

A number of dictionaries give phonemic transcriptions. Daniel Jones of course is very thorough and exhaustive in his treatment of derivatives and so on, which general dictionaries tend not to show. Collins *English Dictionary* has IPA transcriptions. In the past year or so two cheap paper-back dictionaries with IPA notation have appeared: the *Penguin Dictionary 85–86*, and the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, which have phonetic transcriptions. And there are also dictionaries that have careful attempts to show pronunciation. Let me refer to the dictionary I worked on: the Readers Digest *Great Illustrated Dictionary*. This is the first dictionary that explicitly in its phonetic notation tries to cater for other accents than RP: for example I made an attempt to reflect the Scottish <er, ur> contrast in the notation we used, and *hoarse:horse*, so you might find it worth consulting. I am myself working on a new pronouncing dictionary which I hope will displace Jones-Gimson as the standard, but that remains to be seen.

### 11.6 Needs of teachers and pupils

I agree that spelling-reform proposals so far tend to have been conceived from the top down, rather than from the point of view of someone trying to learn to read and write, and that we need to look for a common denominator among the accents, which will serve as a standard for tying the lexicon to the spelling system; for this the starting point can't be RP or any dialect: the written word needs to represent a standard spelling-pronunciation in a logical, simplified way. I have been describing the difficulties of establishing such a common denominator, especially in respect of the chains of word-sets.

### 11.7 Types of orthography

The alphabetic principle seems a very sound one that has proved successful in many parts of the world, though there are of course other systems like Chinese and the Japanese and Hindi syllabaries; Vietnamese is an example of a far eastern language written alphabetically. Whether the Roman alphabet is necessarily the best for a reformed English orthography is another question; it has the advantage that it is widely used and familiar, but the Shaw alphabet was one attempt to get away from it. Word-boundaries are not normally a problem in writing a language; even illiterate peoples, like Amazonian Indians, are conscious of them and a computer programmed to detect long plosives can register the difference between <gg> as spoken in *bigger* and in *big girl*; but there may be curious parts of a language where word-divisions are not so self-evident as in English compound nouns, or French pronouns with verbs.

### 11.8 Pronunciation standards?

The difficulty with determining spelling by reference to some sort of standard pronunciation lies in the choice of accent, if it isn't to be RP or General American. Foreign learners regularly learn either RP or American English. There was an experiment in Holland to teach Scottish English, which has certain very definite phonetic advantages, but it foundered essentially on social grounds: people felt they were learning something that wasn't genuine English — it was ultimately a question of the metropolis versus the provinces, most unfair, but that is how life is, and the pupils would have nothing else. As to whether one could reform pronunciation and impose, say, a mid-Atlantic accent there are enormous problems, such as that no one would natively speak it and it would have to be learnt as a kind of foreign accent. In the 3rd edition of his *Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* Gimson added a Chapter 12, in which he made a proposal of this kind. In reviewing the book, I pointed out that the only people who come anywhere near to pronouncing English in the way he suggested were the Barbadians, who have historical /r/, pronounce *face* with /e:/ rather than /ei/ (this being in a sense easier than a diphthong), and have /o:/ in *coat* and *court*, in fact their pronunciation corresponds in many respects to the existing spelling. The trouble is that the quarter of a million Barbadians are not held in particularly high prestige throughout the English-speaking world, which would be necessary if we were thinking of adopting their pronunciation as standard. The prestige of the speakers is the reason why RP has played the role that it has: as long as the products of English public schools set the tone, their pronunciation was regarded as the ideal. It is

because social attitudes have changed that attitudes towards RP have changed too: accents deriving from a public school education may now be regarded as pompous and ridiculously posh, and so no longer any kind of ideal. It used to be widely thought that people with non-standard accents were thereby prevented from discussing any technical, specialist subject in a sophisticated way, which is quite wrong: you can discuss anything in any language, indeed English itself has ransacked the languages of classical antiquity for its scientific terminology, and any language or dialect can do the same. Dialectologists like Ellis back in the nineteenth century had no such prejudices about accents, being fired with an interest not in something thought to be wrong and regrettable, but in something valid and worth studying for its own sake. Bidialectalism, the ability which some people have to speak two different accents of English, does have interesting implications for this question of a standard spelling-pronunciation.

### 11.9 <z> as standard inflection?

A difficulty with adopting <z> in place of <s> as the standard inflection is that it looks strange. Nevertheless, on the whole it might be best to write both *cats* and *dogs* with <z>, as *katz*, *dogz*. One reason for doing so is that presumably we are going to write words like *hence* with <s>, and would need to keep the difference between *hence:hens*, so the latter word would have to become *henz*. An alternative would be to write *hence* as *hents*, because that is how many people pronounce it. Writing both words with <s> is going to produce homograph clashes between words that are pronounced differently, whereas <z> will not produce any such unfortunate consequences.

### 11.10 General American

The nearest we come to an American standard is what is known as General American, sometimes called network English. It is a kind of American accent that is not noticeably eastern (e.g. Boston and New York) and not noticeably southern. It covers quite a range of different phonetic possibilities, but it is what is spoken westwards from Philadelphia or Baltimore right across to California. Webster's Ninth gives it very nicely.

### 11.11 Foreign borrowings

What account should spelling reform take of the spelling systems of other languages which impinge on English whenever a word is borrowed, and should perhaps some kind of internationally standard values of letters (such as in the IPA) be adopted in a reformed English orthography to minimize this problem of compatibility? There are essentially two approaches to the spelling of foreign words: one is to retain the orthography of the foreign language, and the other is to adapt it. Swedish and Welsh for example very readily change the spelling of foreign words in accordance with their own conventions. The word *emotion* in Welsh is written *emosiwn*, which is regular Welsh spelling for the way they pronounce the word; it would not occur to the Welsh to keep the English spelling. Similarly Swedish spelling for *restaurant* is *restorång* with no attempt to reflect the French. The word *bureau* in German reflects the pronunciation as *Büro*. This I think is the right approach, because otherwise you have to learn the reading rules for the source language. At present English adopts the other approach however, and normally retains the spelling of the source language. The broad representation of IPA is phonemic and therefore language-specific, so would not seem to lend itself to this purpose. To take the word *science* as an example: it has international currency, but is variously pronounced, indeed it is even variously written — the Spanish spell it *ciencia* without <s>. More generally, I think that if one were designing an English orthography from scratch, one would obviously prefer to write *team* as <tiim>, *tame* as <teim>, or the like, and so on: the only argument in favour of <ee> in *team* is the transitional one of familiarity to those brought up on t.o.

### 11.12 Basic English

I believe Basic English is a misguided system which reduces the vocabulary but has nothing to do with spelling. The British government bought the copyright of it for £30,000 in 1946, but the British Council didn't feel it could accept it for teaching English as a foreign language, and the idea was dropped.

### 11.13 Pronunciation in connected speech

In connected speech, as opposed to the citation forms of words, we observe competing weak and strong forms. We say *saint* as /seɪnt/, but in *St Pauls* we say /sɛnt/; we say *I can* but *I cn do it*. There are a number of words in English which are well-known for having two, or sometimes more than two, different pronunciations, and the general feeling is that we should base the spelling on the strong form *and, from, was* and not on the weak form *nd, frm, wz*. In connected speech one can then apply a simple rule of obscuring certain vowel-contrasts. Similarly with elision: there are certain sounds we tend to leave out in connected speech, thus we say *stand*, but in *stand back* we don't pronounce the <d>. Similarly we typically say *wind* with /d/, but we pronounce *windmill* in connected speech without /d/. I think everybody would agree that we should spell them with <d>, which reflects the careful or slow form, though we all understand that when we are speaking faster, in connected speech, we can omit them, just as we can omit the vowels <o, a> in *temporary*. Likewise we assimilate in connected speech: we say *ten* with final /n/, but in *ten minutes* we pronounce it with a final /m/, and we tend to say *unpopular* rather than *unpopular*. This is a well-known and well-described process of assimilation of place of articulation, and we can ignore it because we can always recover the unassimilated form: we know that *tem* is really the word *ten*, and *um-* is really the prefix *un-*. There are certain illogicalities of course, in that we change the spelling in *impossible* (compare *indifferent*), although we don't change it in *unpopular* (compare *undecided*), though this may or may not correspond to a difference in pronunciation. It is true that we don't have to assimilate in *unpopular*, whereas we would never try to say /in/ with *possible*; but it is nevertheless an oddity about the present system. Then there is the matter of linking /r/ we referred to earlier: non-rhotic accents pronounce no /r/ at the end of *father* by itself, but in the phrase *father and mother*, they do pronounce /r/; this however leads to the pronunciation of intrusive /r/, as if we were to write *Africar and Asia*.

### 11.14 Syllabic consonants

Cut Spelling uses the concept of post-accentual schwa in words like *station, seven*, although many people do not pronounce a schwa in that position, going straight to the following consonant instead. This doesn't matter, because the presence or absence of schwa is a realizational question, the option of saying schwa plus one of the consonants concerned, or that consonant on its own with syllabic value. Which choice is made is irrelevant. A complication however arises from the tendency to lose the syllabicity of the final consonant in certain contexts, such as with following <-ing>. With the verb *struggle*, for instance, the schwa preceding the <1> (or alternatively the syllabicity of the <1> itself) is lost in the form *struggling*. The word *tunneling* on the other hand is subtly different because the schwa (or the syllabicity of the <1>) in *tunnel* is not lost in the <-ing> form. Or compare the <bl> sequence in *bleed, table*: the <1> in *table* is syllabic, so the word has two syllables, whereas in *bleed* it is not syllabic, and the word has only one syllable; but if you say *tabling a motion*, you lose the syllabicity, and *tabling* still has only two syllables, rather than three as one might expect.

### 11.15 A different history of English?

If English had never been written or used for literary purposes until around, say, 1800, then it might have resembled Finnish or Czech or the various kinds of Yugoslav language. If then a great literary figure had arisen, Charles Dickens perhaps, and he had designed his own logical orthography reflecting essentially his own pronunciation, then the power of his example might have established his orthography, and we might feel that it was the only correct form of English, and that we must all imitate it. But further than that: a logical orthography acquires a power of its own, and people feel they must make their pronunciation conform to it; thus standard Finnish or Serbo-Croat is Finnish or Serbo-Croat that is pronounced in accordance with the spelling. Standard German is in many respects a kind of artificial creation, but it had the prestige of Luther behind it, and although there is some variability in the pronunciation, basically it has got to conform to the spelling which is laid

down and fixed. In English we have got a standard spelling system, but because it is irregular, there has been no such close association between spelling and pronunciation which could have given a standard for pronunciation. Instead, we have seen a number of important sound changes over the past 500 years which have had very far-reaching effects. If Dickens had been the one to codify English spelling, he would probably not have shown historical <r> at all, in which case we would perhaps have adopted the attitude that Scots and Americans and so on have a provincial pronunciation which must be disregarded and treated as wrong. It is an interesting question whether English spelling could be taught by reference to a standard spelling pronunciation that was in fact independent of any particular accent perhaps an archaizing pronunciation that would distinguish *calve:carve* and aim to rationalize traditional orthography, rather than represent any one accent.

### 11.16 The case of Spanish

Spanish has at least two pronunciation standards which are reflected in the different treatment of the letter <c> before <e, i> and of <z>. In metropolitan Spain the pronunciation /koθer/ for the verb *cocer* (to cook) is regarded as correct but in South America they say /koser/. On both sides of the Atlantic the other pronunciation exists as a minority one, which is generally regarded as provincial and wrong. There are also many social differences, and in general the upper class pronunciation corresponds to the spelling (and is therefore held in prestige), while the lower class pronunciation can be condemned for leaving out letters that ought to be there. Thus lower class pronunciation tends to omit final <d> in *ciudad* (*city*) — which is indeed also how it is pronounced in a lot of South America — and the ending <-ado> would be pronounced /ao/. But these omissions are regarded as wrong: because there is a <d> in the spelling, it is felt it ought to be pronounced. The orthography is therefore a powerful unifying force, but regrettably it doesn't remove the social factors which result in many people's pronunciation being condemned. Spanish spelling may be much more regular than English, but the sound-symbol correspondence isn't one for one, and people do complain about it. There is ambiguity for instance between <ll, y> for the sound /j/, the words *rallo* (meaning *file, rasp*) and *rayo* (meaning *ray, beam*) being homophones, and there are strange rules for deciding between <qu, c>. Nevertheless, anyone who grows up in a country that has a standard pronunciation generally conforming to the spelling, and learns it right through school, will be able to spell on the whole without much problem.

### 11.17 Minimizing visual change

The question is asked whether a spelling reform might mean that those people who can already read and write would have to give up that advantage and learn something new, and whether for that reason the fewer deviations there were from the familiar spelling, the more acceptable the reform would probably be. This consideration is part of the rationale behind Cut Spelling.

### 11.18 Speech recognition by machine

The present state of the art is that we can get machines to recognize the speech of one speaker and a limited set of vocabulary, and if you train the machine to recognize one speaker's contrast between double and single consonants (the example *big girl* comes to mind), it can make the distinction. Anything the human ear can distinguish, in principle the machine can distinguish too. The problem is to move from one speaker with a limited vocabulary to an infinite range of speakers and an unlimited vocabulary. It is not a matter of recognizing phonemes, but of parameters: the machine will need to respond to frequencies in the sound-wave at particular intensities with particular durations. However there are tremendous difficulties. For example imagine you have a printer attached to your word-processor, and you want to tell it *start printing*; to interpret the phrase correctly, the machine would have to know whether you were English or American, because the English *start printing* could be phonetically identical with the American *stop printing*.

## 4. From around the World

### Edited by Chris Upward

#### AUSTRALIA

We have now received copies of *Spelling Action* for July–October 1985 and the first issue for 1986.

The front cover of the 1985 issue is dominated by a cartoon of a signpost on the edge of a cliff, with one arm labelled SAS (Spelling Action Society) pointing away from the cliff, and 6 arms pointing towards it, labelled SSSC (Canada), SSS (us), BETSS (Abe Citron) + 'eny other spelling reformists', while suspended in mid-air over the void is a car representing SR1 overloaded with suitcases labelled 'ph->f', 'drop useless E's', 'SR:ough' etc. It leaves us in no doubt that the Spelling Action Society is committed to one scheme and one scheme only: SR1, the spelling of all occurrences of /e/ by <e>.

The issue features illiteracy in Australia and reproduces a number of items published elsewhere, especially in the press, but also includes the SAS submission to the Simplified Spelling Society's 1985 conference in Southampton which we published on p.22–23 of our [Spring 1986 Newsletter](#). The only original study of spelling systems as such was part 2 of C. Upward *Cut Spelling and its Relation to Harry Lindgren's Spelling Reform*. Part I had appeared previously and provoked an outraged reaction from one reader, who described some Cut Spelling forms as 'obscenities'!

*Spelling Action* 86/1 is less than half the size (15 pages) of the previous issue, and announces the resignation of the editor Garry Jimmieson, who is to be temporarily replaced by Dr Doug Everingham, recently retired as an Australian Labour M.P. It reproduces various newspaper cuttings, contains local spelling news, and includes a reply to C. Upward's criticism of those SR1 forms like *et* for *ate* which conflict with widespread pronunciation. A critique of Cut Spelling is promised for a future number.

*Spelling Action* also reports that Harry Lindgren, who must surely rank as one of the world's leading orthographers at present and to whose energy much of the Australian movement owes its existence, has been seriously ill, but is now recovering.

A snippet from Geoffrey Sampson's recent book *Writing Systems* (p.197): SR1 'has been adopted widely by Australians. Many general interest paperbacks and the like are printed in SR1; under Gough Whitlam's Labour Government the Australian Ministry of Helth was officially so spelled (though, when Whitlam was replaced by a liberal administration, it reintroduced orthographic conservatism).'

#### GERMANY

We last reported on spelling reform in Germany in the [Summer 1985 Newsletter](#) (Item 7), also giving some of the historical background. Herr Schmitz op der Beek has now sent a cutting from the Kö1nische Rundschau of 29 November 1985, quoting an assessment by Wolfgang Teubert of the Institut für deutsche Sprache, with whom the Society is also in touch, of the present state of play (or non-play) regarding spelling reform in the four German-speaking countries.

The past 25 years have seen agreement reached by linguists and educationists from Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic and Switzerland, on reforms that would be desirable and feasible — but their implementation is for the moment blocked by the conservative attitude of some West German politicians, who fear reform will cause cultural decline (and perhaps loss of votes?).

The chief reform which in its essentials was worked out as long ago as 1958, concerns capitalization. Instead of all nouns as now, only the following words would be written with an initial capital letter: words at the start of a sentence, proper names, some personal pronouns, and some abbreviations. However there is uncertainty as to what constitutes a 'proper name' — would it for example include makes of car (Volkswagen or Volkswagen)? God, it is generally agreed, should still be dignified with a capital, though there are some radical reformers who would abolish capital letters totally.

Additionally, the present complex rules governing the use of the comma, the hyphenation of words at line-ends and the joining of words together would be simplified. The great advantage of the reforms, it is said, would be to make it easier for German-speakers and foreign learners alike to write correct German — after all, not even the experts have a perfect mastery of the present 78 rules governing the use of capital letters. Opponents claim that if nouns were no longer capitalized, reading would be more difficult, but the reformers see any such problems as being confined to a transitional period.

When considered beside the problems of English spelling, we may feel this concern (which is perhaps more a matter of punctuation than of spelling) is a case of extreme perfectionism. But if we can't perhaps learn very much from the individual reforms proposed for German, we can certainly learn something from the reform-strategies that have been developed. Let us note particularly the international collaboration that was entailed, the realistic acceptance that older people will not significantly change their ingrained habits, the concentration on schools as the places where the reform will primarily take place, and the recognition of foreign words as constituting a special category.

## INDIA

Madhukar Gogate, Director of Roman Lipi Parishad, the movement for a common romanized script for Indian languages, keeps us posted on its progress. In December 1985 it had 40 members, predominantly in Bombay, but with individuals in New Delhi and elsewhere in India, as well as in Canada, London and the USA.

The movement's December 1985 pamphlet lists the sound-symbol relations proposed, and we now give selected extracts, particularly those that may have some relevance for English spelling reform:

'1. The script should be phonetic, but absolute perfection is not feasible...

3. ... Vowel in English word *at* is quite frequent in English but hardly required for Indian languages.

4. Exact transliteration need not be made... Orthography may be simplified by removing duality of short-long vowels altogether.

5. Respell ... as given in brackets:— Cambridge (Kembrij), Gogate (Gogte removing silent <a>), Victory (Vhiktari), Bombay (Bawmbe, or preferably local name Mumbai), cement (siment), injection (injekshan), table (tebal) while writing them within Indian languages.

6. No new symbols or diacritical marks... better to adopt an available suffix symbol to differentiate sounds... Apostrophe clashes with quotation mark and with comma in upper line. Colon ... advisable, as it is kept on middle row of a keyboard and suits both capitals and lower case letters. This symbol may be omitted in routine writing but shown when precision is desired.

7. Following relations may be used.

<a> - first <a> in *America*, <aa> - last <a> in *America*, <ae> - <a> in *at*, <aw> - *law*, <b> - *boy*, <bh> - <b> aspirated, <ch> - *church*, <chh> - <ch> aspirated, <d> - <th> in *they*, <d:> - *dog*, <dh> - <d> aspirated, <dh:>- <d:> aspirated, <e> - *egg*, <g> - *girl*, <gh> - <g> aspirated, <h> - *he*, <i> - *it*, <j> - *jam*, <jh> - <j> aspirated like <s> in *measure*, <k> *king*, <kh> - <k> aspirated, <1> -*lamp*, <1:> - <1> retroflex, <m> - *man*, <n> - *no*, <n:> - <n> retroflex, <o> - *open*, <p> - *pin*, <ph> - <p> aspirated as in *phone*, <r> - *run*, <s> - *sit*, <sh> - *she*, <t> - dental, not in English, <t:> - *toy*, <th> - <t> aspirated as <th> in *thin*, <th:> - <t:> aspirated, <u> - *put*, <v> - <w> in *woman*, <y> - *yes*, <z> - *zebra*.

As regards <dh:, t:, th:>, symbol <:> may always be omitted. If long vowels must be shown, use <:>... English convention <ee> (long <i>), <oo> (long <u>) is inconvenient for dictionary placement (*Hindee* is distantly placed while *Hindi*, *Hindi*: are adjacent words. Note that <ai, au> are respectively <a> followed by <i>, <a> followed by <u>.'

An August 1986 circular illustrates the system by translating some English sentences into Romanized Marathi, of which two read: 1. Doctor gave me an injection = dawktame malaa ek injekshan dile, 2. Salt consists of sodium and chlorine = sodiyam va klorin yaapaasun raith bante.'

It would be interesting to know whether the Cut Spelling device of syllabic <1, m, n, r> could be usefully applied in Romanized Indian script giving the forms *vhiktri, tebl, dawktrne, injekshn* for the above examples.

In February 1986 a sheet entitled *Clarifications on Roman Script* was produced from which we have space to reproduce only this vivid account of the problems that the absence of a common script now gives rise to:

'We have adopted common international forms of numerals 0123456789, and that has helped national integration... Due to this uniformity, all watches, telephone dials, thermometers, footrules etc are understandable and usable everywhere. If every linguistic state starts using local script for phone books, or car number plates... we shall lose communicability and mobility. If I write a letter to Germany, I get reply in German and ... I can understand substantial meaning by referring to German-English dictionary. But when I write to Karnatak Govt (I have experienced) I get reply in Kannad script. I do not know their symbols and sequence and so I cannot refer to a Kannad-English dictionary, even if it were to exist. Similarly, non-Devnagri people find it difficult to comprehend Devnagri complex words. Why are Tamilians against Hindi? It is not just politics. There are real reasons. Is it fair to expect a Tamilian to buy three typewriters, one for Tamil, one for Devnagri Hindi and one for Roman (English)? Thus, on basis of experience of uniform numerals, let us have uniform alphabets. It will help integration. Hindi will rapidly spread if it accepts Roman script.'

## NETHERLANDS

A D H Simonsz, Counsellor for Press and Cultural Affairs at the Royal Netherlands Embassy in London has written to Chris Jolly, Chairman of the Society, as follows:

'The statutory regulations for the spelling of the Dutch language are based on the Spelling Act of 14 February 1947, Statute-book 1947, no. H52.

In 1947 a Netherlands-Belgium Commission was founded to make an official wordlist of the Dutch language, based on the Belgian Spelling decree of 1946 and the Dutch Spelling Act of 1947. This Wordlist Commission continued the work of the Netherlands-Belgium Spelling Commission of 1945. In 1952 the wordlist was ready and was accepted by both governments in 1954. By Royal Decree the preference spelling of the wordlist became official in the Netherlands on 1 September 1955 and is until now the legal spelling in the Netherlands. However, due to the fact that large concessions were made by each party in making up this wordlist the discussion continued. In 1972 a conference took place between the Netherlands and Belgium which resulted in the erection of a working-group charged with the composition of a note on spelling. Due to various circumstances this note was never accepted by the Netherlands nor the Belgian government.

If you would like some more information on this matter I suggest you contact the Dutch Language Union: Nederlandse Taalunie, R J Schinunelpennincklaan.'

Readers will find a more detailed account of the Nederlandse Taalunie in *Modern Languages*, March 1986, p.17–21, in an article by Christopher Bissel.

## UNITED STATES

Harvie Barnard's article in the [Spring Newsletter](#) referred to AMERICAN Alternative Spelling. Edward Rondthaler, of the Typographic Council for Spelling Reform (New York) and editor of the forthcoming *Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling*, has now sent us the abstract of the work, of which we here give some superficial first impressions.

The system traces its descent from New Spelling through i.t.a. Its aim is thus phonemic representation, though it retains many of the New Spelling's unphonemic vowel-digraphs (but with the long-standing American <oo, uu> inversion). Thus the /i:/ in *mosquito* is respelt *moskeeto* (though *been* becomes *bin*, with *been* accepted as a different British form), the /ei/ in *veiled* becomes *vaeld*, and the /ai/ in *aisle* becomes *iel*. We find vowel strings like *caeos*, *yeloesh*, *triead*, *veeement* and presumably even foursomes like *coeeeval* and ambiguous forms like *poeeet*. The New Spelling <i, y> confusion is not resolved, so we get *alibi*, *bibliografical*, *emporium* still, but *biblyografy*, *millyon*. Many internationally current forms have their vowels radically changed: *ingenue* becomes *anzhenoo*, *ballet* becomes *balae*, *genre* becomes *zhaanra*, *chauffeur* becomes *shoefer*. Certain distinctions are kept that other orthographers have thought better to abandon, such as *caam* but *haf*, and *yot* but *baut*.

The presumed pronunciation underlying the spelling is sometimes curious to British ears, thus *buoy* appears as *booy*, though often it is recognizably American, as *doos* for *deuce* and *persoo* for *pursue*. Perhaps the most difficult correspondence for British speakers to accept is stressed <ur> in *lurn*, *stur* etc., and similarly <u> for some post-accentual shwas, as *penshun*.

In general AMERICAN follows New Spelling on post-accentual shwa, that most troublesome feature of present spelling, although Harry Lindgren showed how it can be regularized. The potential of syllabic /l, m, n, r/ is not exploited beyond present use, and many inconsistencies are retained from New Spelling. Thus syllabic <l> is kept in *litl*, *peepI*, *murtl*, *puzl*, but not exploited in *speshal*, *curnel*, *turminal*; syllabic <m> is kept in *rithm*, *sizm*, but not exploited in *ausum*, *hansum*; syllabic <r> is introduced in two words, *dror*, *qondry* (though its parallel use in *freer*, *mishnry* is explicitly rejected), but it is not exploited in *faather*, *shoefer*, *manooover*, *murmer*, *murderer*, *gurder*, *lurner*, *chatering*, *lieer*, *auger*, *elixser*, *naecher*, *oeger*, *marter*, *aukward*, *dager*, *soeljer*, *exajeraet*, *granjer*, *laker*, *likor*, *hamer*, *runer*, *controeler*, *sizor*, *strukcher*, *azher*, *plesher*, *braezher*. Syllabic

/n/ is perhaps the most inconsistently rendered, being variously <an, en, on, un> in *sarjent, wimen, diamond, reejon, lisen, oeshan, conshens, penshun, mishun, naeshun, vizhun, resizhon, eqaezhun*. Both Harry Lindgren and Cut Spelling suggest the far more regular plain <1, m n, r> in these cases, giving: with syllabic <1> *speshl, curnl, turminl*; with syllabic <m> *ausm, hans?n*; with syllabic <n> *sarjnt, wimn, diamnd, reejn, lish, oeshn, conshns, penshn, mishn, naeshn, vishn, resizhn, eqaezhn*; and with syllabic <r> *faathr, shoefr, manoovr, murmr, murdr, gurdr, lurnr, hurdr, chatring, freer, lier, augr, elixsr, naechr, oegr, martr, aukwrdr, dagr, soeljr, exajraet, granjr, lakr, likr, hamr, runr, controelr, sizr, strukchr, azhr, plezhr, braezhr*. In this connection, we also note that AMERICAN leaves the <-able, -ible> dilemma unresolved (*posibl, unthinkabl* — see Lindgren *Spelling Reform a New Approach*, p.48).

The syllabic forms have two further advantages, in addition to consistency for the writer. Firstly, the reader cannot mispronounce them (AMERICAN gives *dienosor, likor* the same final letters, which must suggest the same pronunciation for that syllable). Secondly, the syllabic forms are economical, which means they save time, trouble and memory, whereas it is notable that a number of the AMERICAN forms are actually longer than present spellings (*chaember, faather, lieer, ievy, oever, foecus, uenit, charrity, akchooal*).

Most consonants are conventional, though <w, wh> and <sh, zh> are kept apart, and we find advanced rather than conservative pronunciation reflected in *granjer, strukcher, ishoo, negoeshyaet.*, etc. The forms *cat, kit* show that <c, k> are not distinguished — they are regarded as different forms of the same letter and kept for the sake of visual familiarity (although visual familiarity was clearly not a criterion for the form *akchooal.*). Unlike New Spelling, but like Cut Spelling, AMERICAN keeps <q, x>, dropping the <u> after <q>. Doubled consonants, except sometimes <1, r>, are simplified. The present <s, d> inflections cease to be morphophonemic, and are split according to pronunciation between <s, z; d, t>, thus *cat's, dogz, frinjd, friskt*.

The abstract is prefaced by a catalogue of some 450 English spelling variants, which have the advantage over the nearly 3,000 listed on the cover of the *Newsletter* that they are helpfully tabulated, along with proposed AMERICAN alternative forms. Some 65 of the new alternative forms are those proposed for Cut Spelling too, thus *plad, haf, hav, dalia* (though British pronunciation would have required the spelling *daelia*), *harang, hart, gardian, bazar, ar, starv, catar, bizar, doctinaire hed, frend, gest, bel, siv, gild, exhibit, giv, mischif, onest, ho, glo, tho, stor, flor, por, qorum, ror, rapor, loos, yung, bur, blurd, curv, jurny, exhaust, taut, hous, muffin, tuf, caf, geto, bak, klik, teling, must, colum, lam, nok, nat, nemonic, rist, cor, blesing, convales, litl, det, zar, nich, mach*, to which one can add *laf, nolej, juj, grafic, brij, majic, larj*, if Cut Spelling includes the rules <gh, ph> = /f/ = <f>, and <dg> etc. = <j>.

The rationale behind AMERICAN is that i.t.a. succeeded in giving children the rudiments of literacy, but failed in the switch to conventional orthography. AMERICAN now builds on the success of i.t.a. but seeks to avoid its failure by not using new characters and by being 'compatible' with t.o. It hopes that if its use is widespread in schools, it will continue to be used by the children into adulthood as an alternative to t.o. The nature of its 'compatibility' was however not clear from a brief perusal of the abstract — most (not all) of the new forms are readily identifiable from their t.o. equivalents — but whether the reverse will be as true for children educated in AMERICAN remains to be seen. The international compatibility of a number of the AMERICAN patterns must however be questioned. Although not notable for innovation and somewhat reliant on intuitive judgment, the *Dictionary of simplified American Spellings* will clearly be an important document for the SSS Working Party to study, and we hope future *Newsletters* will be able to give a more considered account of it.

## 5. The Chaos

### Author Unknown, edited by Chris Upward

This poem was found in a girls' High School in Germany in 1945 by a British soldier, who gave it to Tom Hazelwood, who gave it to Terry De'Ath, who gave it to the Editor, who has since also received a rather different version of it from Benno Jost-Westendorf of Recklinghausen. (It seems it has also been used in English teaching at universities in South Germany.)

No information on the author was available from any source. Both versions received appeared carelessly copied from an original, but it was often possible to correct errors in one by reference to the other.

The version given here is therefore hopefully an improved conflation of the two. Though it still contains certain oddities, overall this compendium of cacography is composed with some skill, with alternating feminine and masculine rhyming couplets. Two features that make it a slightly less than ideal catalogue for present use are the rather archaic vocabulary and sometimes curious implied pronunciation.

Can any reader name the author or supply any further details about the poem?

It is here given on the left in traditional orthography, and on the right in Cut Spelling with no letter-changes and doubtful forms italicized. The economy of the Cut Spelling version is immediately apparent from the most casual comparison of the two columns, and on closer inspection it will be seen how often Cut Spelling distinguishes the heterophonic spelling-rhymes of traditional orthography.

*The Chaos* is a most demanding test-bed for reformed spelling, and readers are invited to comment on the Cut Spelling forms or to re-write some or all of the poem using a different reformed orthography.

[The author's family was later traced and the original version of *The Chaos* is in Journal 17 and [on its own](#), with an introduction by Chris Upward.]

#### The Chaos

Dearest creature in creation  
Studying English pronunciation,  
I will teach you in my verse  
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse and words.  
I will keep you, Susy, busy,  
Make your head with heat grow dizzy;  
Tear in eye, your dress you'll tear;  
Queer, fair seer, hear my prayer.  
Pray, console your loving poet,  
Make my coat look new, dear, sew it! 10

Just compare, dear, beard and heard,  
Dies and diet, lord and word,  
Sword and sward, retain and Britain

#### Th Caos

Dearst creatur in creatn  
Studying english pronunciati<sup>n</sup>,  
I wil teach u in my vers  
Sounds like corps, cor, hors and words.  
I wil keep u, Susy, busy,  
Make yr hed with heat gro dizzy;  
Tear in y, yr dres u l ter;  
Qeer, fair seer, hear my prayr.  
Pray, console yr loving poet,  
Make my coat look new, dear, sew it!

Just compare, dear, beard and herd,  
Dies and diet, lord and word,  
Sord and sward, retain and Britn

(Mind the latter how it's written);  
Made has not the sound of bade,  
Say said, pay paid, laid but plaid.  
Now I surely will not plague you  
With such words as vague and ague,  
But be careful how you speak,  
Say: gush, bush, steak, streak, break, bleak, 20  
Previous, precious, fuchsia, via,  
Recipe, pipe, studding-sail, choir,  
Woven, oven, how and low,  
Script, receipt, shoe, poem, toe.

Hear me say, devoid of trickery,  
Daughter, laughter, and Terpsichore,  
Typhoid, measles, topsails, aisles,  
Exiles, similes, reviles,  
Wholly, holly, signal, signing,  
Same, examining, but mining, 30  
Scholar, vicar but cigar,  
Solar, mica, war and far,  
From "desire" desirable, admirable from  
"admire",  
Lumber, plumber, bier, but brier,  
Topsham brougham renown, but known,  
Knowledge, done, lone, gone, none, tone,  
One, anemone, Balmoral,  
Kitchen, lichen, laundry, laurel,  
Gertrude, German, wind and mind,  
Scene, Melpomene, mankind, 40  
Tortoise, turquoise, chamois-leather,  
Reading, Reading, heathen, heather.  
This phonetic labyrinth  
Gives moss, gross, brook, brooch, ninth, plinth.  
Billet does not end like ballet  
Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.  
Banquet is not nearly parquet,  
Which exactly rhymes with khaki.

Blood and flood are not like wood,  
Nor is mould like should or could. 50  
Discount, viscount, load and broad,  
Toward, to forward, to reward,  
Ricocheted and crocheting, croquet?  
Right! Your pronunciation is O.K.

Rounded, wounded, grieve and sieve,  
Friend and fiend, alive and live.  
Is your "r" correct in higher?  
Keats asserts its rhymes Thalia.  
Hugh, but hug, and hood, but hoot,  
Buoyant, minute, but minute. 60

(Mind th latr how it s ritn);  
Made has not th sound of bad,  
Say said, pay paid, laid but plad.  
Now I surely wil not plage u  
With such words as vage and agu,  
But be carefl how u speak,  
Say: gush, bush, stek, streak, brek, bleak,  
Previus, precius, fucia, via,  
Recipe, pipe, studing-sail, *coir*,  
Woven, ovn, how and lo,  
Script, receit, shoe, poem, *to*.

Hear me say, devoid of trikry,  
Dautr, laughtr, and Terpsicre,  
Typhoid, measls, topsls, iles,  
Exiles, similes, reviles,  
Holy, *holy*, signl, signing,  
Same, examining but mining,  
Scolr, vicr but cigar,  
Solar, mica, war and far,  
From 'desire' desirebl, admrbl from  
'admire',  
Lumbr, plumr, bir, but brier,  
Topsham, bruam, renown but nown,  
Noledg, don, lone, gon, non, tone,  
One, anemone, Balmoral,  
Kichn, *licen*, laundry, laurl,  
Gertrude, germn, wind and mind,  
Sene, Melpomne, mankind,  
Tortos, turquoise, chami-lethr,  
Reading, Reding, heathn, hethr.  
This phonetic labyrinth  
Givs mos, gros, brook, brooch, ninth, plinth.  
Bilet dos not end like balet,  
Bouquet, walet, malet, chalet.  
Banqet is not nearly parqet,  
Wich exactly ryms with kaki.

Blod and flod ar not like wood,  
Nor is mold like shud or cud.  
Discount vicount, load and brod,  
Toward, to forwrđ, to reward,  
Ricochetđ and crocheting, croqet?  
Riht! Yr pronunciatiñ is OK.

Roundđ, wunđđ, greve and siv,  
Fiend and fiend, alive and liv.  
Is yr 'r' corect in *hihr*?  
Keats aserts it ryms Thalia.  
Hu, but hug, and hood, but hoot,  
Boynt, minut, but minute.

Do you know the book of Joshua?  
Are you fond of it? Of course you are.  
Would it tally with my rhyme  
If I mentioned paradigm?  
Twopence, threepence, tease and easy,  
But cease, crease, grease and greasy.  
Venice, nice, valise, revise,  
Rabies, but lullabies.

Would you like some more? You'll have it!  
David, affidavit, davit. 70  
Calico, but caliph, Sheik  
Has the sound of Czech cake.  
Liberty, library, heave and heaven,  
Rachel, ache, moustache, eleven.  
We say hallowed, but allowed,  
People, leopard, towed and vowed.  
Mark the difference, moreover,  
Between mover, plover, Dover,  
Leeches, breeches, wise, precise,  
Chalice, but police, and lice, 80  
Camel, constable, unstable,  
Principle, disciple, label,  
Petal, penal, and canal,  
Wait, surmise, plait, promise, pal,  
Suit, suite, ruin; circuit, conduit  
Rym with "shirk it" and "beyond it".

But it is not hard to tell  
Why it's pall, mall, but Pall Mall.  
Muscle, muscular, gaol, iron,  
Timber, climber, bullion, lion, 90  
Worm, and storm, chaise, chaos, chair,  
Senator, spectator, mayor,  
Ivy, privy, famous; clamour  
Has the "a" of drachm and hammer.  
Pussy, hussy, and possess,  
Desert but dessert, address.  
Golf, wolf, countenance, lieutenants  
Hoist, in lieu of flags, left pennants.  
Courier, courtier, tomb, bomb, comb,  
Cow, but Cowper, some and home. 100  
Stranger does not rhyme with anger,  
Neither does devour with clangour.  
Soul, but foul, and gaunt but aunt,  
Font, front, won't, want, grand and grant.  
Arsenic, specific, scenic,  
Relic, rhetoric, hygienic,  
Gooseberry, goose, and close, but close,  
Paradise, rise, rose, and dose.  
Say inveigh, neigh but inveigle,  
Make the latter rhyme with eagle; 120

Do u no th book of Joshua?  
Ar u fond of it? Of cors u ar.  
Wud it taly with my rym  
If I mentnd paradigm?  
Twopence, threepence, tease and easy,  
But cese, crese, *grese* and greasy.  
Venice, nice, valise, revise,  
Rabis, but lulabys.

Wud u like som mor? U I hav it!  
David, afidavit, davit.  
Calico, but caliph, Sheik  
Has th sound of czech cake.  
Librty, library, heve and hevvn,  
Rachel, *ace*, mustache, elevn.  
We say *halod*, but alowd,  
Peple, leprd, *towd*, and vowd.  
Mark th difrnce, morover,  
Between mover, plovr, Dover,  
Leechs, breechs, wise, precise,  
Chalice, but police, and lice,  
Caml, constbl, unstable,  
Principl, disiple, label,  
Petl, penal, and canal,  
Wait, surmise, plat, promis, pal,  
Suit, suite, ruin; *circit*, condit  
Rym with 'shirk it' and 'beyond it'.

But it is not hard to tel  
Wy it s pal, mal, but Pal Mal.  
Musl, musculr, gaol, iron,  
Timbr, *climer*, bulion, lion,  
Worm and storm, *chase*, caos, chair,  
Senatr, spectator, mayr,  
Ivy, privy, famus; clamr  
Has th 'a' of dram and hamr.  
Pusy, busy, and *poses*,  
Desrt, but desert, adres.  
Golf, wolf, countnnce, leutennts  
Hoist, in lu of flags, left pennts.  
Curir, cortir, *tomb*, bom, *comb*,  
Cow, but Cowpr, som and home.  
Stranger dos not rym with angr,  
Neithr dos devour with clangr.  
*Sol*, but foul, and gaunt, but *ant*,  
Font from wont, want, grand and grant.  
Arnsic, specific, senic,  
Relic, retric, hygenic,  
Goosebery, goos, and close, but close,  
Paradise, rise, rose, and dose.  
Say invei, nei but invegle,  
Make th latr rym with egle;

Mind, meandering but mean,  
Serpentine but magazine.

And I bet you, dear, a penny,  
You say mani-(fold) like many,  
Which is wrong. Say rapier, pier,  
Tier (one who ties), but tier.  
Arch, archangel; pray, does erring  
Rhyme with herring or with stirring?  
Prison, bison, treasure-trove,  
Treason, hover, cover, cove, 120  
Perseverance, severance. Ribald  
Rhymes with (but piebald doesn't) nibbled.  
Phaeton, paeon, gnat, ghat, gnaw,  
Lien, phthisic, shone, bone, pshaw.  
Don't be down, my own, but rough it,  
And distinguish buffet, buffet.  
Brood, stood, roof, rook, school, wool, stool,  
Worcester, Boleyn, foul and ghoul.

With an accent pure and sterling  
You say year, but some say yearling. 130  
Evil, devil, mezzotint,  
Mind the "z" — a gentle hint.

Now you need not pay attention  
To such sounds as I don't mention,  
Sounds like pores, pause, pours and paws,  
Rhyming with the pronoun yours;  
Nor are the proper names included,  
Though I often heard, as you did,  
Funny rhymes to unicorn,  
Yes, you know them Vaughan and Strachan.  
140  
No, my maiden, fair and comely,  
I don't want to speak of Cholmondeley.  
No. Yet Froude compared with proud  
Is no better than McLeod.  
But mind trivial and vial,  
Tripod, menial and denial,  
Troll and trolley, realm and ream,  
Schedule, mischief, schism, and scheme.  
Argil, gill, Argyll, gill. Surely  
May be made to rhyme with Raleigh, 150  
But you surely must not say  
Piquet rhymes with soubriquet.  
Had this invalid invalid  
Worthless documents? How pallid,  
How uncouth he couchant looked,  
When for Portsmouth I had booked!

Mind, meandring but mean,  
Serpentine but magazine.

And I bet u, dear, a peny,  
U say mani-(fold) like many,  
Wich is rong. Say rapir, pir,  
Tier (one ho ties), but tir.  
Arch, arcangel; pray, dos ering  
Rym with hering or with stiring?  
Prisn, bison, tresur-trove,  
Treasn, hovr, covr, cove,  
Perseverance, sevrnce. Ribld  
Ryms with (but piebald dosnt) nibld.  
Phaetn, paeon, nat, gat, naw,  
Lien, thisic, shon, bone, pshaw.  
Dont be down, my own, but rug it,  
And disfinguish bufet, bufet.  
Brood, stood, roof, rook, scool, wool, stool,  
Worstr, Bolyn, foul and *gul*.

With an accent pure and sterling  
U say year, but som say *yerling*.  
Evil, devl, mezotint,  
Mind th 'z' — a gentl hint.

Now u need not pay atentn  
To such sounds as I dont mentn,  
Sounds like pors, pause, pors and paws,  
Ryrning with th pronoun yrs;  
Nor ar th propr names included,  
Tho I ofn herd, as u did,  
Funy ryms to unicorn,  
Yes, u no them Vaun and *Straan*.  
No, my maidn, fair and comly,  
I dont want to speak of Chomly.  
No. Yet Frude compared with proud  
Is no betr than McLeod.  
But mind trivial and vial,  
Tripod, menial and denial,  
Trol and troy, relm and ream,  
*Schedule*, mischif, sism and sceme.  
Argil, gil, Argyl, gil. Surely  
May be made to rym with Rali,  
But u surely must not say  
Piqet ryms with sobriquet.  
Had this invalid invalid  
Worthles documnts? How palid,  
How uncuth he couchnt lookd,  
Wen for Portsmth I had bookd!

Zeus, Thebes, Thales, Aphrodite,  
Paramour, enamoured, flighty,  
Episodes, antipodes,  
Acquiesce, and obsequies. 160  
Pious, impious, limb, climb, comely,  
Worsted, worsted, crumbly, dumbly,  
Conquer, conquest, breathed, breath, fan,  
Wan, sedan and artisan.  
The "th" will surely trouble you  
More than "r", "ch" or "w",  
Say then these phonetic gems:  
Thomas, thyme, Theresa, Thames,  
Thompson, Chatham, Waltham, Streatham,  
There are more but I forget 'em — 170  
Wait! I've got it: Anthony,  
Lighten your anxiety.

The archaic word albeit  
Doesn't rhyme with eight — you see it.  
With and forthwith, one has voice,  
One has not, you make your choice.  
Shoes, goes, does. — Now first say: finger,  
Then say: singer, ginger, linger;  
Real, zeal, mauve, gauze, and gauge,  
Marriage, foliage, mirage, age, 180  
Hero, heron, query, very,  
Parry, tarry, furry, bury,  
Dost, lost, post and doth, cloth, loth,  
Job, Job, blossom, bosom, oath,  
Faugh, oppugnant, keen oppugners,  
Bowling, bowing, banjo-tuners...

Yachts you know, but nose, canoes,  
Puisne, truism, use, to use?  
Though the difference seems little,  
We say actual, but victual, 190  
Seat, sweat, chaste, caste, light, eight, height,  
Put, nut, granite, and unite.  
Reefer does not rhyme with deafer,  
Feoffer not with zephyr, heifer.  
Dull, bull, Geoffrey, George, ate, late,  
Hint, pint, senate, but sedate,  
Gaelic, Arabic, Pacific,  
Science, conscience, scientific;  
Tour, but hour, and succour, four,  
Gas, alas, and Arkansas. 200  
Sea, ideal, guinea, area,  
Psalm, Maria, but malaria,  
Youth, south, southern, cleanse and clean,  
Doctrine, turpentine, marine.

Zeus, Thebes, Thales, Aphrodite,  
Paramor, enamrd, flihty,  
Episodes, antipodes,  
Aqies and obseqis.  
Pius, impius, lim climb, comly,  
Worsted, worstd, crumbly, dumly,  
Conqr, conqest, brethed, breth, fan,  
Wan, sedan and artisan.  
Th 'th' wil surely trubl u  
Mor than 'r', 'ch' or 'w'.  
Say then these phonetic gems:  
Tomas, tym, Teresa, *Tams*,  
Tompsn, Chatm, Walthm, Stretm,  
Ther ar mor but I forget m —  
Wait! I v got it: Antny,  
Lihtn yr anxiety.

Th arcaic word albeit  
Dosnt rym with eit, u see it.  
With and forthwith, one has voice,  
One has not, u make yr choice.  
Shoes, *gos*, dos. Now first say: fingr,  
Then say: singr, ginger, lingr;  
Real, zeal, mauve, gauz, and gage,  
*Marige*, foliage, mirage, age,  
Hero, heron, qery, very,  
Pary, tary, *fury*, bury,  
Dost, lost, post, and doth, cloth, loth,  
Job, Job, blosrn, bosm, oath,  
Fau, opugnnt, keen opuners,  
Boing, bowing, banjo-tuners...

Yats u no, but nose, *canos*,  
*Pune*, truism, use, to use?  
Tho th difmce seems litl,  
We say actul, but vitl,  
Seat, swet, chaste, cast, liht, eit, hiht,  
Put, nut, granit, and unite.  
Reefr dos not rym with defr,  
Fefer not with zephr, hefr.  
Dul, bul, Gefry, George, ate, late,  
Hint, pint, senat, but sedate,  
Galic, Arabic, Pacific,  
Sience, concnce, sientific;  
Tur, but our, and sucr, *four*,  
Gas, alas, and Arkansa.  
Sea, ideal, ginea, area,  
*Sam*, Maria, but malaria,  
Yuth, south, suthrn, clense and clean,  
Doctrin, turpentine, marine.

Compare alien with Italian,  
Dandelion with battalion,  
Rally with ally, yea, ye,  
Eye, I, ay, aye, whey, key, quay.  
Say aver, but ever, fever,  
Neither, leisure, skein, receiver. 210

Never guess, it is not safe,  
We say calves, valves, half, but Ralph,  
Starry, granary, canary,  
Crevice, but device, and eyrie,  
Face, but preface and grimace,  
Phlegm, phlegmatic, ass, glass, bass,  
Bass, large, target, gin, give, verging,  
Ought, oust, joust, and scour, but scouring;  
Ear, but earn, and wear and tear  
Do not rhyme with "here" but "ere". 220  
"A" of valour, vapid vapour,  
"S" of news (compare newspaper),  
"G" of gibbet, gibbon, gist,  
"I" of antichrist and grist,  
Differ like diverse and divers,  
Rivers, strivers, shivers, fevers,  
Once, but nonce, toll, roll, but doll,  
Polish, Polish, poll and poll.  
Seven is right, but so is even,  
Hyphen, roughen, nephew, Stephen, 230  
Monkey, donkey, clerk and jerk,  
Asp, grasp, wasp, demesne, cork, work.

Pronunciation — think of Psyche —  
Is a paling, stout and spikey.  
Won't it make you lose your wits  
Writing "groats" and saying groats?  
It's a dark abyss or tunnel  
Strewn with stones like rowlock, gunwhale,  
Islington, and the Isle of Wight,  
Housewife, verdict and indict. 240  
Don't you think so, reader, rather,  
Saying lather, bather, father?  
Finally, which rhymes with "enough"?  
Though, through, plough, cough, hough, or  
tough?  
Hiccough has the sound of "cup".  
My advice is — GIVE IT UP!

Compare alien with italian,  
Dandelion with batalion,  
Raly with aly, yea, ye,  
Y, I, y, y, wey, ke, qy.  
Say aver, but evr, fever,  
Neithr, lesur, sken, recever.

Nevr ges, it is not safe,  
We say cavs, valvs, haf, but *Ralph*,  
Stary, granry, canary,  
Crevice, but device, and *eri*,  
Face, but preface and grimace,  
Phlem, phlegmatic, *as*, *glas*, *bas*,  
Bas, large, target, gin, giv, verging,  
Ot, oust, joust, and scour, but scouring;  
Ear, but ern, and wer and ter  
Do not rym with 'here' but 'er'.  
'A' of valr, vapid vapor,  
'S' of news (compare newspaper),  
'G' of gibet, gibn, gist,  
'I' of anticrist and grist,  
Difr like *divers* and divers,  
Rivrs, strivers, shivrs, fivers,  
Once, but nonce, tol, rol, but dol,  
Polish, polish, pol and pol.  
Sevn is riht, but so is even,  
Hyphn, rughn, nephew, Steven,  
Monky, donky, clerk and jerk,  
Asp, grasp, wasp, demene, cork, work.

Pronunciatn — think of Syce —  
Is a paling, stout and spikey.  
Wont it make u lose yr wits  
Riting 'groats' and saying 'groats'?  
It s a dark abys or tunl  
Strewn with stones like rolok, gunl,  
Islingtn, and the Ile of Wiht,  
Husif, verdict and *indit*.  
Dont u think so, readr, rathr,  
Saying lathr, bather, fathr?  
Finaly, wich ryms with enough'?  
Tho, thru, plou, cogh, hogh, or  
tugh?  
*Hicugh* has th sound of 'cup'.  
My advice is — GIV IT UP!

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[Maurice Harrison: see [Bulletins](#), [Pamphlet 9](#), [Pamphlet 1946 A Teachers' Manual](#) ]

## 6. A History of the Society up to 1970

### Maurice Harrison

Originally put out by the Society as its [Pamphlet No.11](#) in 1971 entitled *A Short Account of Simplified Spelling and the Simplified Spelling Society*, this publication has been hard to obtain for several years, and is republished here, with subheadings and notes added. Its author, Maurice Harrison, BA, BSe, MEd, was already a member of the Society's committee in 1953 and succeeded Sir James Pitman as treasurer of the Society in 1968, holding that office for several years. He was a strong advocate of the Initial Teaching Alphabet and as Director of Education for Oldham he saw to its introduction in all primary schools there. Within the Society he took the view that i.t.a. offered the most promising route to full spelling reform of English, but he also produced a beginners' reader in *New Spelling, Dhe Litl Red Hen*; 'on behaaf ov dhe Simplified Speling Society', which was published by W. Heffer & Sons, Cambridge.

#### ORIGIN OF THE SOCIETY

The Simplified Spelling Society was founded in 1908 'to recommend simpler spellings of English words...' and it was later laid down that 'no simplification can be of much practical value which is not systematic' and 'the utilitarian aim being economy of the time and labour of learners'. (Introduction to *New Spelling*.) Its first president was Dr Walter W. Skeat, Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, and in 1911 he was followed by Dr Gilbert Murray, O.M., Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford. In 1946, he was succeeded by Professor Daniel Jones, Professor of Phonetics at University College, London, who in turn was succeeded by Sir James Pitman in 1968. [\[1\]](#)

#### SIR ISAAC PITMAN

English history is studded with spelling reformers from the 16th century onwards, but it is enough to mention the last of these — and probably the most successful and outstanding — whose work the Society in a very real sense continued. Sir Isaac Pitman, the grandfather of our present President, died in 1897, and he had spent a lifetime in trying to persuade the English-speaking peoples to systematise their spelling. Sir Isaac began his work before the day of universal education when illiteracy was widespread in Britain. It is hard now to understand how he and his followers were truly crusaders, moved by an enthusiasm 'born of the conviction of the importance of the phonetic principle as a factor in education and general progress'. Isaac Pitman's Phonography (Shorthand) met at the outset a personal need for faster communication (the business need had not yet developed), and won world-wide acceptance. He himself had little money out of it (his sons later built up the firm which bore his name). In his time the profits from Phonography were used to subsidize his Phonotypy (Spelling Reform), which had the greater need and was, if anything, his greater love. Always, in Isaac Pitman's time, there were lectures on Spelling Reform after the classes in Shorthand and we have reports of classes in reading — and of great success under appalling conditions — at Manchester, Glasgow, Sheffield and other places. Imagine having no school-reader except the New Testament, deprived children, and no fire in the middle of December. These were the conditions reported at Dumfries. Yet we are told that children learnt to read in six months and it was always being reported that after learning in reformed script the reading of traditional print caused no difficulty. One of Sir Isaac's brothers took his alphabet to America, and school books were printed and put to use in schools. About the year 1870, we have a number of reports from American teachers and educational administrators in several States — New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Iowa, etc. The tremendous gain in speed of learning to read traditionally and in reading at all, the great improvement in traditional spelling are all mentioned, as are the huge output of written work at an early age, the growth in general knowledge and poise, the great improvement in conduct both in and out of school.

The enterprise of Sir Isaac Pitman in the educational field was repeated by the Society. Around 1914 school books were produced by the Society and supplied to head teachers, who would put them to use in their schools. Not all head teachers dared, even when they wanted, to use the books, but a number were found from Dundee and Stirling in Scotland, through Durham, Hull, Leeds, Manchester and Hereford to London, who tried them out during the next ten years or so. We have the reports of those teachers still and, in some cases, of His Majesty's Inspectors. The books were by modern standards dull, without colour or illustration, but the reports said precisely what had been said by the American teachers a half-century before. (See SS. Pamphlet No. 7) [\[2\]](#)

## **SPELLING AND EDUCATION**

From 1875, when the parliamentary report said that only one in twenty-five school children was able to read a short paragraph from a newspaper with fair accuracy, until 1963, when the Central Advisory Committee for Education reported that nearly a fifth of the Secondary School population aged 15 had a Reading Age of 12 *or less*, the government body responsible for education (Board, Ministry, Department etc.) had continually deplored the failure of the schools to teach reading in many cases. Teachers will tell of bright children who do not learn to read properly because the task is too difficult in the early stages and a child often becomes frustrated before a book has the chance to become interesting. This failure to learn to read has been a constant theme of educationists over the years. About 1966, the head of the Department of Humanities of one of our biggest technical colleges did a research into the reading ability of 800 Technical College students (not the street corner loungers), in two of our northern cities and he came to the conclusion that 22% had such problems in reading that they were unlikely to have success in written examinations and that 28% exhibited ignorance of 13-year-old vocabulary.

Since 1877, many recommendations have been made to the Government of the day by the Society and its predecessors. In that year a determined effort to interest the Government was made by the London School Board with the support of many other School Boards in Britain. That effort, like those that followed, was in vain, but at least it brought into being the Spelling Reform Association (a forerunner of the Simplified Spelling Society), and into the movement men like Professor Skeat and Sir George Hunter, who were later to play an important part in the affairs of the Society.

The Society had been encouraged by the reports from schools about the use of its 'Simplifyd Spelling' between 1914 and 1920, and after the First World War an attempt was made to have spelling reform included in the 1920 Education Act. That attempt came to nought. In July, 1923, a deputation from the Society waited upon Sir Charles Trevelyan, when he was President of the Board of Education. In 1926, Lord Eustace Percy was approached *when* he held this post and, in 1933, Viscount Irwin (later the Earl of Halifax), when he was President of the Board, received [a memorial supported by more than 900 university officials, vice-chancellors, professors and lecturers \(and 900 meant then just about everyone who mattered in the university world\), by 250 members of the House of Commons, 20 bishops, 30 mayors of cities and towns, 10 peers and no less than 10 teachers' organisations, including the N.U.T., N.U.W.T., N.A.S., A.M.A., and E.I.S.](#) Lord Irwin was asked nothing more than to set up a representative committee to consider whether English spelling could and should be simplified, and if so, what amendments should be recommended. Lord Irwin was as obdurate as his predecessors. He 'could not recommend the expenditure of the time and money which the proposed enquiry would involve.' In the words of one national editor, 'The matter, unfortunately, is one that would win no votes for any political party.'

## **'NEW SPELLING'**

It was in connection with the memorial to Lord Irwin that the Society evolved what came to be known as [New Spelling](#). It set out to show what could be done by a rearrangement of existing

letters. The Society was well aware that certain matters, e.g. the treatment of unstressed vowels, could not be adequately dealt with by this means, but it believed that greater changes, even if desirable, would give the system even less appeal. It put forward the scheme as a basis for discussion. The Society has never claimed that New Spelling was the best system and asked only that a Government Commission be established to decide on a system.

During the 1930's, the mainspring of the Society was without doubt Sir George Hunter of the Swan Hunter shipyards at Wallsend-on-Tyne. Even the office of the Society moved to Wallsend. Sir George left to the Society a legacy of £20,000 and, although the Income Tax Commissioners have refused to recognise the Society's income as that of an educational charity, the income and capital from Sir George's legacy have, to this day, constituted the greater part of the Society's money. The members of the Society were grievously disappointed in 1933. As Sir George wrote to Lord Irwin, the Society had complied with every stipulation laid down by him and his predecessors. They could but carry on with their work, hoping that some day in the future a Minister might be impressed with its value. Sir George died in 1937.

The Society was largely inactive for a time after the disappointment of 1933, but one member of its Committee was Professor Lloyd James, Professor of Phonetics at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. A meeting on board ship in mid-Atlantic between him and Mr I. J. Pitman (now Sir James) may be said to mark the starting up again of the movement for spelling reform. Sir James knew his grandfather's work thoroughly and he burned with the same enthusiasm for spelling reform. As head of the publishing firm of Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, he was in a special position to be of great value to the Society, and in May 1936 Sir James was elected to the Committee.

The book, to be later named *New Spelling*, was produced. Earlier editions of the *Proposals for Spelling Reform* had been largely the work of Mr Walter Ripman and Mr William Archer. The Proposals were completely revised and issued as the book, *New Spelling*. The book, together with a dictionary, was prepared over a considerable period of time and after deep consideration of all available research on its subject matter by a committee consisting of Professor Gilbert Murray in the chair, Professor Lloyd James, Professor Daniel Jones, Mr Harold Orton (then of Sheffield University but later Professor of English Language at Leeds), and Mr I. J. Pitman and Mr Walter Ripman (the only surviving author of the earlier editions). Its publication was undertaken by Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, and in the words of Professor Lloyd James, 'It is one of the most remarkable statistical investigations into English spelling ever undertaken.'

The Second World War was almost upon us but the Society continued its work. It was proposed, as soon as times were again propitious, to launch another school experiment and to prepare for it modern colourful school books. The provision of these books was held up by the acute paper shortage which followed the war, and by the time that printing was again possible on any scale, the University of London and the National Foundation for Educational Research had tentatively begun the enquiry into the effect of learning to read by a systematic spelling, which the Society had been urging upon them. The Society had covenanted to pay to the University of London Institute of Education £300 net for each of the years 1950 to 1957.

### **PARLIAMENTARY PRESSURE**

In 1949, and again in 1953, Dr. Mont Follick, M.P. for Loughborough, had been successful in the parliamentary lottery for the right to promote a **Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons**. He was a keen spelling reformer and naturally his two bills were concerned with spelling reform. The first Spelling Reform Bill was lost by only three votes, despite the opposition of the whole of the Front Bench. As one M.P. said at the time, 'There was no doubt who carried the honours of the day. The second bill was drafted and introduced by Mr I. J. Pitman (as he then was), M.P. for

Bath, and the charges of the parliamentary draftsman were later paid by the Society.

This bill proposed that research be undertaken into the value of a systematic system of spelling in teaching children to read English. In spite of Government opposition, the arguments in favour of systematizing English spelling swayed the members of the House of Commons and the bill received its second reading and passed the committee stage. This degree of success, however, put both sides in a quandary. On the one hand, the Minister, Miss Florence Horsbrugh, could not ignore the expressed view of the House of Commons and on the other hand, Mr Pitman knew perfectly well that the bill had no chance of passing in the House of Lords. Accordingly, he and his friends, including Mr Gordon Walker, advised Dr Follick to conclude a bargain with the Minister, which Mr Pitman had negotiated. He withdrew the bill and she, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, undertook to approve and facilitate the actions of a competent body, if one could be found, in carrying out the research, which the bill would have imposed upon the National Foundation for Educational Research if it had become law. The undertaking was given by the Minister in the answer to a question on May 7, 1953.

### **SCHOOL EXPERIMENTS**

In June 1953, while the bill was in the public eye, Sir Graham Savage, Education Officer for London, and Mr Maurice Harrison, Director of Education for Oldham, both members of the Committee of the Society, persuaded the Association of Education Committees to accept a motion tabled by the Oldham Education Committee and moved by Mr Harrison at the Association's summer meeting, that research be undertaken on methods of teaching reading, including enquiry whether the use of simplified spelling would be an aid to the teaching of reading. It was necessary that local education authorities should be ready to provide schools for any future experiment.

As early as 1949 the Society's officers had first approached London University about further school experiments. The University had agreed and appointed a research officer. The research was, however, so ineffectively designed that no conclusions could be drawn from the report. For instance, the children tested were not those in the first stages of learning to read, but those who had achieved a significant degree of success in reading words in the traditional orthography.

### **INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET**

Little more was done for some time, but meanwhile Sir James Pitman had evolved the Initial Teaching Alphabet, using the Society's system as a base, and had been largely instrumental — he was a founder of the Committee of the University — in persuading the University and the National Foundation for Educational Research jointly to undertake the research into the question of whether the unsystematic spelling of English caused difficulty in learning to read and write it, which had been envisaged in the bill. The first research using the Initial Teaching Alphabet was launched in English schools in 1961, and others in America and elsewhere in 1963 and later. Twenty-one schools, which were all that could be found, in 1961, to try the new systematic spelling, did not provide the minimal number of children estimated to be required for the first British research. Today, there are more than 4,000 schools [3] in Britain alone using the Initial Teaching Alphabet to teach reading, and more than 17,000 outside Britain in America and the rest of the English-speaking world. This is an indication of the initial difficulty which had to be overcome in finding co-operation in the use of a different spelling and also an indication of the progress made since 1961. Of course, to members of the Society, the difficulty was no new experience and the results no surprise. They knew what was going to happen. It had all happened at least twice before in entirely different places and under entirely different conditions. But the educational world had to again be convinced and so, London University and the National Foundation for Educational Research, two highly respected research bodies, were chosen to undertake the research into the effect of traditional spelling in school.

## PROGRESS IN PERSPECTIVE

Many members of the Committee of the Simplified Spelling Society have given many lectures on simplified spelling to many different kinds of audience, in universities and colleges of education, to Women's Institutes and Rotary Clubs, etc. We have, all of us, been called 'cranks' by the uninformed. The present writer has been accused in a newspaper of 'tampering with the language that Shakespeare wrote' by a reporter, who obviously did not know that Shakespeare did not use the spelling in modern school books. The editor of a well-known national newspaper once wrote that, if Shakespeare saw 'cough' spelt with an 'f', he would turn in his grave. When Sir George Hunter wrote, pointing out that that exactly how the word is spelt in early Shakespearean folios, his letter was ignored. George Tomlinson was a great Minister of Education, unafraid of innovation, but even he, when approached, wanted to see a wide demand for spelling reform before he would consider it. In order to work up a demand for reform, one must prove that something is lost without it. How does one persuade others to read the proof, particularly as those with the greatest need are the very ones who cannot read easily and easily understand? It is difficult to realise how opposed to spelling reform are those who have never thought about it in this country, which has laid such great stress on correct spelling, probably because of the difficulties involved.

Today, for the first time ever, the old picture has changed and the subject of spelling reform is no longer regarded as the aim of cranks. The conviction of Parliament and the press reports of the period of the Simplified Spelling Bills saw to that. For the first time an official document, a Report from the Schools Council, has said that the best way to learn to read in traditional orthography is to learn in a simplified system. That report was referring to the Initial Teaching Alphabet. 'This particular simplified spelling system has made it easier for the majority of children to master the beginnings of reading and writing.' The Initial Teaching Alphabet while a simplified system of spelling, is not the digraphic system of 'New Spelling' but is a monographic one based on that system. Thus, the augmentations of the Initial Teaching Alphabet may very obviously and very easily be turned from their i.t.a. monographs into the corresponding S.S.S digraphs. As a result of i.t.a., many English-speaking children, their parents and their teachers, have come to realise that traditional spelling is far from perfect and not in any way sacrosanct. Helping children to read and to write more easily by the adoption of a systematic simplification has been one of the aims of the Society and greater progress towards this aim has been achieved during these last ten years than during all the preceding years of the Society's activities. That is a tremendous achievement — and it is the opinion of the present writer that the growing lumbers who have been brought more easily and rapidly to read traditional English by means of i.t.a. will also, as a result, be more willing than previous generations to bring about further applications of the principles for which the Society stands.

In the meantime the Society has in February, 1971, sent to the present Secretary of State for Education and Science, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, a fresh letter urging once more an enquiry into 'the educational, financial and international advantages likely to result from modernizing our out-of-date spelling conventions.'

## NOTES from the Editor

[1] Sir James Pitman was succeeded by the Society's present president Professor John Downing, in the early 1970's, and his death in 1985 is noted under the heading *Obituaries* in the editorial of this issue of the *Simplified Spelling Society Newsletter*.

[2] The Simplified Spelling Society's [Pamphlet No.7](#), first published in 1924 and re-issued in 1942, was entitled *The Best Method of Teaching Children to Read and Write*, and reports on experiments conducted in 16 schools.

[3] With the retirement of teachers trained in i.t.a. and difficulties with the supply of books, the number has since dwindled substantially, and is estimated by the i.t.a. Federation at below 100 in the summer of 1986.

## 7. The Cut Spelling (CS) Debate: points arising

### Chris Upward

Tom McArthur's and Edward Rondthaler's queries about CS (p.4) reflect widespread uncertainty. This reply uses CS (omission of superfluous letters with no letter-changes) to remind readers of the forms that are at issue — and save space. [See [Cut Spelling book](#)]

#### IS CS SHORTHAND?

CS is not shorthand. Ideally, a writing system should be symmetrical, being as easy for the reader to derive the sound of words from the written form as for the writer to derive the spelling from the spoken form. Shorthand however is asymmetrical, in that it sacrifices easy reading to easy writing. Thus alphabetic shorthands commonly exploit the fact that English written without vowel-letters is still usually comprehensible, and *put* may therefore conveniently be written *pt*. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the system (*pt* could equally represent *pat*, *pet*, *pit*, *pot* etc.) hampers the uninitiated reader, whether child-learner, non-native speaker, or just someone unfamiliar with the context in a way that a phonographically unambiguous system does not. Hebrew offers an object lesson in this difficulty.

CS on the other hand only omits letters superfluous for the phonemic representation of words, relieving the reader of much clutter that makes both reading and writing more difficult than need be. Being 10–15% shorter, CS offers something of the advantage of shorthand for the writer, but without the disadvantage for the reader. If CS resembles shorthand at first sight, one should not be deceived: the cut forms represent the full phonemic structure of the words in question, though the novel use of syllabographic consonants may conceal the fact. Although on the one hand CS proceeds by serendipity, cutting rogue letters where it can, it is also highly systematic, gaining as much in regularity as in economy.

#### WILL CUT SPELLING HELP POOR READERS?

By 'poor readers', we mean children in the first stage of learning, or making below-average progress, adult illiterates and semi-illiterates, and non-native speakers with limited proficiency in the language; and we take account of writing as well as reading.

It is taken as axiomatic that all learners, children and adults, native and non-native speakers, will achieve literacy more easily if words have few letters, and the letters that words contain reflect their pronunciation more accurately than do the original. CS drastically reduces the variations of the original, and in particular regularizes such unpredictable, error-prone patterns as post-accentual schwa. The research to prove that poor readers would benefit has yet to be done (though see Valerie Yule), but one notes many present spelling-errors corresponding to CS patterns.

#### POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS OF CS

CS is not perfect orthography, leaving many outrageous original forms untouched. Rather, it is a technique combining several desiderata in a uniquely attractive way: it is a simple, rule-based procedure; it does not risk making the original incomprehensible to a generation educated in the new spelling, nor would the older generation need reeducating; by regularizing many present variations, it targets some very troublesome features of the original; by shortening, it makes all text-processing quicker and cheaper; and by its flexibility it can respect the differences between accents. In other words, it offers immediate benefits to all users.

*Letters from page 4 which are referred to above.*

**From Tom McArthur, General Editor, *English*.**

... In view of the fact that you are now up-dating your *New Spelling* of 1948, it might be a good idea for me to hang on until it is ready, and then consider it as a centrepiece for a presentation of the whole issue of reformed spelling... Cut Spelling seems to be the same as the journalistic speedhand I learned in my early twenties.

**From Edward Rondthaler, Typographic Council for Spelling Reform.**

... I have no trouble reading Cut Spelling... but it wouldn't do anything to help our illiteracy problem. Or am I wrong?

... I'm sending you an abstract of the forthcoming American Spelling dictionary. It will be published shortly and then I'll get a complete copy to you.

... We are moving right ahead with reform on this side of the Atlantic. IBM's *Writing to Read*, which is the first step towards reformed spelling, is presently being taught to 150,000 children... since it uses the regular 26 letters, it will be compatible with traditional spelling. The very slight differences between the orthography in *Writing to Read* and American are in process of being ironed out... So we think we're really making progress... thanks to IBM's support... If you are interested in IBM's *Writing to Read*, there is a book published by Warner Books (666 Fifth Avenue), *Writing to Read* by J H Martin... published in February.

*[SSS Newsletter (Summer) 1986/2. Later designated Journal 3. p26 in the printed version.]*

## **8. A Sartorial-Orthographical Parable**

### **Robert Craig**

Robert Craig is notable for his prolific invention of novel sound-symbol correspondences to cope with the inadequacies of the Roman alphabet. His interest in spelling reform dates from his early schooling, when he was first taught to read and write in the Society's *New Spelling*.

Bakk at dhe turn ov dhe century a group ov notablez whu were concerned by unhealthy Viktorian klodhing got tuggedber tu form dhe Sensible Klodhing Society.

Twu memberz ov dhe society were given dhe task ov designing a sensible form ov dress. Dheir solucion was dhe kilt for men and dhe jimslip for women made from plain material. Somehow noone, not even memberz ov dhe society, koud be perswaded tu wear dhem. A number ov aproachez were made tu dhe government tu implement healthier klodhing. Dhe Minister for Health looked at dhe kilt and said dhat it was not his job tu chanje dhe way people dressed and dismissed dhe whole idea.

In dhe 1960'z one ov dhe early memberz left money tu furdher dhe kause ov klodhing reform. His exekutorz offered a prize for a new klodhing. Dhe prize was won by a design for a toga made from new materialz. Everyone viewed it with amazement. An independent worker launched a radikally modified kilt for use by children, which had government bakking, but dhe public didn't buy it.

Recently, dhe society has reviewed dhe situacion. Dhey vowed to uze dhe 'big five' which konsisted ov wearing a sweater radher dhan shirt and tie, trouserz widhout tum-upz, no hat, no glovez and a belt instead ov bracez. Dhe efekt was minimal: noone noticed. Dhen it was felt dhat

dhey shoud took again at dhe kilt. Perhapz if it was fitted widh pokketz and made tu look more like trouserz?

In dhe outside world dhe klodhing industry had proceeded much as before in komplette ignorance ov dhe Sensible Klodhing Society, and klodhez had evolved tu some extent.

Now ontu dhe cene kame a new fenomenon — punkz. Dhey wore exaktly dhe same klodhez as everyone else, but dhey kut gashez in dhem, dhey sewed on zipz, dhey dyed dheir hair outrajeos kolorz, dhey stukk it up in spikez.

An unlooked for konsekwence ov dhe punkz was dhat businessmen felt emboldened tu wear kasual klodhez tu dhe office and housewives turned out in trakk suitz. Som people bought shawtogaz and pitmansmokkz. Even memberz ov dhe society felt less embarassed in dheir kiltz and jimslipz.

Dhe lessonz ov dhis story are

1. Dhe punkz set out tu shokk, not tu influence dress, and even dho dheir klodhez wer not sensible, dhe efekt was tu alow odherz tu feel less radikal in sensible klodhing.

2. Dhe trend was tuwardz trakk suitz for both men and women, which was something which dhe SKS koud not hav envisaged when it was founded. Had dhe government interfered by imposing kiltz and jimslipz dhe trend tu trakksuitz koud not hav happened.

3. Dhe punkz did not employ anything unusual or expensiv tu obtain dheir efekt. All dhey needed were ordinary klodhez, cissorz, pinz and zip fastenerz.

4. Perhapz dhe trakk suit will prove tu be a more suitable form ov dress dhan dhe kilt and jimslip, which have so long been society policy.

Dhe moral is not, ourselvz, tu introduce better spellingz or try tu make thingz better for children in dhe first instance. Dhe job ov dhe society is tu break dhe mould. I sujest dhat dhis kan be done by being shokking widhout altering dhe underlying spellingz. Uze <k> where t.o. uzez <c> and dhis bringz people up widh a start. Write *kat*, and whu kan say dhat *cat* is better? People in a better position dhan we are kan bring about dhe chanjez — printerz, edukacionalistz, linguistz, and young people whu want tu parade dheir modernity.

Dhe lesson from dhe punkz is tu take what is at hand and tu du what is simple yet dramatic. Substitute <f> for <ph>, <k> for <c>, <j> for soft <g>: dhat's simple and dramatic. Odher chanjez such as SR1, DUE, respelling <ough> and <augh> ar not simple, as has been illustrated by our atemptz to uze dhem in our house style. We kan be as radikal as we like in chanjing dhe apearance ov dhe paje so long as we leave dhe underlying strukture intakt. I might kall dhis dhe principle ov maximum disturbance, bekause it disturbz dhe visual apearance but leavez dhe underlying strukture undisturbed, in kontrast tu dhe principle ov minimum disturbance which seekz tu leave dhe apearance ov dhe paje undisturbed but disturbz dhe underlying strukture.

In order tu break dhe mould dhe house style must apear radikal but be konservativ. It must be simple. <f> for <ph>, <dh> for voiced <th>, <k> for <c>, <j> for soft <g>: what koud be simpler or more shokking?

Spelling is subjekt tu fashion, so our house style must be a fashionable trend setter widh a rekognizable imaje.

[SSS Newsletter (Summer) 1986/2. Later designated Journal 3. pp27,28 in the printed version.]

[David Stark: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 9. Standardised Spelling — Pronunciation 1

### David Stark

This is the third in a series of articles (the first two appeared in the [Summer 1985](#) and [Spring 1986](#) issues). It will be seen that the theme of this article builds on John Wells' analysis of the implications of different accents for a reformed world-standard for English spelling, and relates to the rationale of the 1987 conference.

Among the many reasons spelling reform has never been adopted in English, two are, for me, dominant. Perhaps if practical strategies could be developed for both, spelling reform might again be considered seriously, not just by a few enthusiasts, but by the education establishment and society as a whole.

One reason for not adopting a revised orthography is that people who are at present literate would require to learn to read and write a second time. I believe that this can only be overcome by making the new orthography as close as possible to traditional orthography, and I will develop arguments and strategy in a future series of articles.

The present series of articles deals with another problem. If a revised, more alphabetically consistent orthography requires a phonetic standard, what should it be? In the past, spelling reformers have usually assumed that a standard dialect should be defined, but in the last two articles I argued towards the following conclusions.

1. It is impractical to choose and fix a standard, living dialect of English.
2. Normal speech in such an accent would not be consistent enough to translate directly into written text.
3. People do not possess the ability to define individual phonemes accurately, having found that allying roughly perceived words with highly developed comprehension skills to be the most satisfactory way of interpreting spoken messages.

Many reformers would have us believe that people will pick up the definitive pronunciation of all the words in the lexicon from a specified prestigious accent, or have the ability to deduce, by some process of phonetic averaging, a standardised and authoritative form of speech. Phonetic study does not bear this out. Even highly educated people, and certainly children learning to read, will be predominantly influenced by their own local speech patterns, or at least the forms of them which they perceive to be 'proper' or 'correct'.

To Abe Citron, writing in the Summer 1985 Newsletter, it is obvious that the schwa in <ar, -er, -or> endings, or the first sound in *aside* is close to the vowel sound in *cut*. I would hesitate to accept this, as the /ʌ/ sound in such schwa situations is a mark of my local, working class accent which has low prestige and could not be thought of as a respectable standard. Given such prejudices by all parties, one might despair of a phonetic standard ever being possible.

However, there already exists the basis of such a standard, a standard which is already defined, although far from perfectly, and which is widespread and readily available to all who seek to read and write English throughout the world. The equivalent standard works effectively in a country like Germany where there is no socially or culturally dominant accent in the way RP is in England, or in a language like Spanish which has many adherents in various parts of the world with different accents, somewhat like English.

These languages have simpler orthographies than English, not because the graphemes correspond exactly with the phonemes of any particular accent but because there is a simplicity and consistency about the way words are spelled. The authoritative pronunciation of any word is

defined by the way one sees it written. One then learns this pronunciation. This 'Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation' is not determined by the way one might have heard the word pronounced by one particular individual or group of people, but by the spelling itself.

My premise is that it is a mistake to believe that the reference for an alphabetic orthography is the actual spoken word; instead it is the pronunciation derived and learned from the standard spelling. This concept of Standardised Spelling Pronunciations holds the key to how an alphabetic orthography works, and offers an escape route from problems which have beset English spelling reforms.

The sounds which literate people perceive being heard in a word are largely influenced by the actual spelling of the word. For example, in normal speech, the first sound in the word *aside* would be analysed by phonetic experts as schwa. However, most laymen would tend to think of it as /ae/ because this is how it is spelled, and the word *aside* is recognised as having a regular spelling. Let us consider how someone would learn the spelling of a word. By the age of five, when most children begin writing, they will only possess a wide knowledge of the lexicon in their own accent, having learned this from their parents and friends. They will not have been significantly influenced by adherents of a standard accent other than their own, such as that from BBC newsreaders (assuming they all spoke 'perfect' RP), which to them will merely be one of a vast number of ways of pronouncing words heard via the mass media. Even teachers will display the local accent, no matter how 'proper' they might try to speak in front of their young students.

As children learn to write, they work out or are taught a strategy for spelling each word they come across. A child might guess a spelling of <filfy> for the word *filthy* from the way he thought it was pronounced. However, when he sees it written with a <th> instead of an <f>, this Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation will be learned. Eventually, the child may assume that he hears the <th> sound in *filthy* no matter what he actually hears. (This relates to the influence of Spelling-Pronunciation. See Wells p.107 for the definition of Spelling-Pronunciation and compare this with my concept of Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation).

A theoretical Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation standard is built up for the lexicon, based on the spelling of words as they are met. In learning to spell, using alphabetic methods, we neither possess, nor do we need, an objective assessment of individual phonemes. It is no handicap, indeed it is a positive benefit for our judgement to be coloured by the end result of the phonetic realisation of a word, that is, the established spelling.

The validity of Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations as the basis of an alphabetic orthography is substantiated by the fact that Spanish speaking people of varying accents can still enjoy the alphabetic advantages of Spanish orthography, i.e. can be used to teach children of different English dialects, and people can learn to speak Latin when there is no living dialect standard as reference. What is required for a revised English orthography is not revised spelling derived from one or perhaps two particular English accents, but a set of phonemes which people of all English accents can recognise, and a straightforward and logical way of both identifying these from the standard spellings, and reconverting Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations back into spellings at a later date.

An alphabetic writing system in use among a divergent language community, like Spanish, is only easier than a morphographic or ideographic orthography like Chinese, among similarly divergent adherents, because most people memorise pronunciations of words more easily than their abstract visual patterns. Or to put it another way, there are two ways of getting the spelling of a word correct in an alphabetic orthography: by remembering the word's Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation; and by remembering what the word looks like. The chances of spelling failure for the same amount of teaching will be dramatically less than in a non-alphabetic orthography.

Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations fine-tune our present knowledge of the pronunciation of words, and set a standard which is not totally reliant on any individual, so-called 'prestigious' accent. In theory, some Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations need not relate to the actual

pronunciation in any English accent. At present, I remember the spelling of the word *meringue* by remembering a Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation of mer+ing+gyu. Such an approach may work for a few oddball words, but it would be better if the Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation were closely related to common living accents Re RP or General American. One could then compare the authoritative pronunciation of a word as defined by the Standardised Spelling-Pronunciation with the actual pronunciation heard (or at least perceived). The practice of this by a literate person in an alphabetic orthography reinforces the memorised Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations.

However, our ability to do this is limited by the relationship between the phonetic elements in our own accent and the phonetic rules used to form the spelling of words in an orthography. For example, my accent does not recognise any difference between the vowels in the words *pull* and *pool*, and hence I do not possess the ability to identify the two opposing phonemes. If this distinction were incorporated into a revised orthography, I would be unable to use alphabetic methods to remember the spelling of the vowels in such words. Instead I would have to rely on my ability to memorise their individual appearances as I do just now with traditional orthography.

We have seen the dangers of using too pure a phonetic analysis as the basis of a revised orthography, because the limited phonetic skill of ordinary people will not be a match for this. Any such phonetic standard should be directed more at the needs of spellers, and less at the linguistic accuracy of the phonetician. I am only interested in phonetics to the extent it can help me teach literacy, whether in the present orthography or in a revised one.

English speaking people will know that there are 26 letters used in writing, but they will have no idea how many phonemes there are in their speech. They will not automatically recognise a difference between the initial sounds in *this* and *thin*, as the same letters are used to write them. The schwa sound will not exist for most people since there is no letter to represent it, and another vowel will normally be imagined where schwa is heard. These two examples illustrate two problems facing reformers when trying to match a lexicon to a revised orthography based on alphabetic relationships.

Firstly, there will be pairs of sounds which many people will not be able to distinguish as separate, either because of their accent or, in the case of existing literates, because of the lesser phonetic demands of traditional orthography. Received Pronunciation has 46 phonemes, but most other English accents, and practically all foreign languages, have less than this. There is no sense in revising English orthography to a form which is of limited use to all but RP speakers. And if a distinction is made between, for example, the initial sounds in the words *this* and *thin*, the revised orthography will not only be difficult for foreigners who do not possess one or both of these phonemes, but it will also be more difficult for existing literates who will have to make this distinction for the first time.

Secondly, a strategy must be developed for dealing with schwa. Schwa seems to stem from the fact that, in normal English speech, it is enough in most situations to clearly pronounce one or two vowels in each word in order to identify it. This leaves a number of unstressed vowels, which, although audible, are difficult to identify as a weak form of a normally stressed vowel. A knowledge of the lexicon may help us, for example, the <-or> in *author can* be remembered from the word *authoritative* where the vowel is stressed. However, one cannot use this method to confirm that the word *writer* is written <-er> as opposed to <-or>, which in a final position would sound the same.

To solve these and other problems associated with the formation and assessment of a revised orthography, further exploration is required of the relationship between spoken pronunciations and Standardised Spelling-Pronunciations.

## REFERENCE

J. C. Wells, *Accents of English*, Cambridge University Press, 1982 (3 vols.): Section 1, 'Aspects of Accent'

# 10. Simplified Spelling Society Fifth International Conference Spelling for Efficiency

## First Announcement and Call for Papers

**VENUE:** Aston University, Birmingham: James Gracie Conference Centre, Birmingham.

**DATES:** Friday – Sunday 24 – 26 July 1987

**PROVISIONAL COST:** £60

**ORGANIZERS:** Chris Upward, Chris Jolly

**ENQUIRIES TO:** Chris Upward.

### BACKGROUND

Simplified Spelling Society [Fifth International Conference](#)

It was long assumed that English spelling reform simply meant writing words as they were spoken. But the obstacles to this apparently straightforward procedure are now clear: above all the lack of a standard pronunciation and the need to ensure continuity of literacy.

Instead of phonographic representation, the guiding principle now proposed is efficiency, or the convenience of all categories of user. The task facing orthographers is thus to determine what kind of spelling best meets that criterion.

The requirements are complex and often conflicting. How can the needs of children and adults, native speakers and foreign learners, backward readers and skilled professionals, keyboard operators and sign-writers, poets and journalists, graphic designers and secretaries, scholars and publishers all be reconciled?

The conference therefore seeks contributions to the development of such an orthography from many sources, from linguists and psychologists, from educationists and typographers, from theorists and practitioners. Its starting point will be the findings of the Simplified Spelling Society's working party which since 1984 has been updating the Society's *New Spelling*, revised by Daniel Jones and Harold Orton in 1948. The working party's report will be made available before the conference.

### Spelling for Efficiency

24 – 26 July 1987. Aston University, Birmingham

I am interested in attending the conference. Please send me further details as they become available.

Name & Title, Address & Institution, .....Tel.....

(Complete if appropriate) I intend to offer a paper entitled and will submit an abstract by 1.3.1987.  
I shall probably require accommodation: YES/NO

It is hoped the 1987 conference will give fresh impetus to the pressure for the modernization of written English. The demands on written English are now greater than ever: for individuals to achieve maximum personal effectiveness, for societies to achieve maximum literacy, for the world to master its most truly international language. In many ways English is well-suited to meet these demands, yet its spelling remains a major, though remediable, defect. It is time to turn our attention to ways of improving it in the light of present knowledge and circumstances.

Please also send details of the conference to:

Name & Title, Address & Institution

Detach and return to Chris Upward.