# Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society, 1988/2. J8

## Contents

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## The Society

Founded in 1908, the Simplified Spelling Society has included among its officers: Daniel Jones, Horace King, Gilbert Murray, William Temple, H G Wells, Sir James Pitman, A C Gimson and John Downing. Its aim is to "bring about a reform of the spelling of English in the interests of ease of learning and economy of writing". Its present officers are:

## The Journal

*The Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society* appears three times a year.
Editor and Membership Secretary: Chris Upward,

# 1. Editorial
## Chris Upward

## THIS ISSUE

Nearly half of this issue is devoted to the second instalment of papers from the **Society's 5th International Conference**, held in July 1987. Preceding that, however, we give a profile of, and welcome to, the Society's new President, Dr Donald Scragg, who has done perhaps more than anyone to explain in readable and concise terms just how the monster that is English spelling evolved.

But as readers will see (Item 8), some of our most influential linguistic householders persist in regarding the monster as a well-behaved domestic pet — regardless of the fact that it is forever biting the children, the visitors, and occasionally even the householders themselves.

One householder under no such illusions is Patrick Hanks, Chief Editor of Collins English Dictionaries, who writes (Item 4) about the conventions of English spelling, and in particular about the use of the hyphen. This feature of written English has hitherto attracted little attention because it scarcely troubles the average user. The lack of firm rules for its use allows most people to apply it fairly indiscriminately — and unlike misspellings, its misuse probably never entailed corporal punishment in school.

Patrick Hanks' article is also important because of the perspective from which he writes. He represents not the major constituency of those struggling to teach English spelling to learners, but the other major constituency, that of professional text-producers struggling, to standardise the appearance of print. Here lexicographers have a special role: from Johnson and Webster, they have been in effect arbiters of spelling rectitude in the English-speaking world, yet paradoxically they see their role as reflecting rather than forming public opinion. They thus confront spelling reformers with a chicken-and-egg impasse.

As for public opinion, our chairman Chris Jolly (Item 6) presents encouraging findings on the open-mindedness of citizens towards spelling reform, showing how wrong it is to assume that judicious improvements to English spelling would lack support. There is a certain yearning for reform, on which the SSS must build.

Frank Knowles' account of Slavonic orthographies (Item 5) surveys what is for many of us unknown territory. The applications of the roman alphabet we are familiar with in Western European languages are not the only possible models: Eastern Europe offers another set. But as readers will see, a feature that may appear at first sight peculiar to Slavonic languages is in fact none other than that old dilemma of English spelling: are fixed morphophonemic inflexions better than variable phonemic forms? Is it easier to learn *cats and dogs or cats and dogz, leaped or leapt?*

This issue is also strong on debate, which must be a chief function of the Society's *Journal:* We respond to the Kingman Report, Patrick Hanks argues his doubts about reform with the editor, Valerie Yule answers Sue Palmer's letter in the last *Journal,* and the book reviews challenge the complacency and passivity with which the present spelling of English is widely regarded.

## SPELLING RULES?

As readers will see from our response to the Kingman Report and from Ed Rondthaler's review, confusion about the role of rules in English spelling is widespread. The result can too easily be a sterile exchange of claim and counter-claim, as when traditionalists state that, exceptions apart, English spelling is essentially rule-governed, to be contradicted by spelling reformers reluctant to admit the existence of any patterns and regularities at all. So what can we effectively say about rules in English spelling?

To begin with, rules surely have to be simple enough for people to master. Otherwise, though they may be of linguistic interest or acceptable to the computer, they hardly serve a useful purpose.

Secondly, we have to go back to basics: the alphabet is a system of symbols for representing speech-sounds. In a fully rule-governed system we would expect sounds to match symbols, and the representation of whole words to be built up on this basis. If this can be done so that the can deduce the spelling from the pronunciation and pronunciation from the spelling, we can say the system is based on rules of phonographic correspondence.

Additionally there can be predictable rules for the representation of morphemes. So the plural of most English nouns requires the addition of <s>, whether the pronunciation is /s/, or, as is most often the case, /z/.

As far as the alphabet is concerned, we tend to associate most letters, taken in isolation, with a certain sound, and most sounds, taken in isolation, with a certain spelling. But in practice the alphabetic system breaks down in English almost before it starts, because the 26 letters have to be used to represent some 40 distinct sounds, and many letters therefore inevitably have to represent more than one sound. But at the same time, single sounds are represented by many different letters or groups of letters. In fact a conservative count gives several hundred different sound-symbol equivalences in English, and one count even goes up to a couple of thousand (roughly the number of kanji characters that Japanese schoolchildren have to learn).

Nor are the morphemic rules reliable. Plural <-s> may be <-es> and sometimes it requires a preceding letter to be doubled (how is the plural of *gas or fez* spelt?). Likewise the <-ing> ending sometimes requires preceding <-e> to be dropped (compare *singing, singeing, hinging)* or a preceding consonant to be doubled (are *traveling, benefiting* correct?).

Learners (and even experienced users) need simple rules, but English has very few. Instead it has a plethora of competing patterns whose application completely defeats many learners, and occasionally trips us all. But the problem, at least in its present magnitude, is not inherent in the language. Much could be done to resolve it by strengthening and simplifying the rules that already exist.

# 2. Correspondence

## Reform Strategies

From **Bill Herbert,** Advocates of Simplified Spelling Australia (A.S.S.A.):-

The Style Council Meeting in 1986 organized by Macquarie University was good, but would be better if coordinated with similar meetings in other English speaking countries.
(**SSS Journal 1988/1**, *Item 10. Yes, indeed, but we haven't the clout to organize one at present. Eventually we ought to, tho —Ed.)*

We were interested in the article by Thomas Hofmann *(1988/1, Item 7)* He suggested a short list of about 10 words obviously in need of reform which would be agreed to in Britain and the USA, Canada and Australia and New Zealand.  (This is very like the 'foot in the door' strategy suggested in my paper to your **1985 conference**). As Hofmann says, with one small success the pent-up pressure for reform will rise.

Our suggestion for a list of 10 would be as follows (leaving the horrible <gh> lot for Stage 2):

*10 highly unphonetic words* tongue — tung, yacht-yot, queue-ku (or q), quay-kee, foreign-foren, one-wun, once-wuns, people-peepl, says-sez, said-sed.

Also included should be though-tho, through-thru, as they are already approved by the Concise Oxford.
*(What about backwards compatibility? i.e., if you learnt* kee*, could you then read* quay?—Ed.)


From **Elaine Miles**, Uned Dyslecsia, Coleg Prifysgol Gogledd Cymru (Dyslexia Unit, University College of North Wales), Bangor:-
I think that the emendation of some of the most tiresome irregularities, like the <-ough> words, would be the best start. I felt no sentimental feelings for the old currency, which was purely utilitarian, but I do about our literary heritage. So proceed gradually and see how it goes (as with seat belts, helmets?).


From **Eric H Kenneth,** Grimsby, South Humberside:-
My new microcomputer came up with the following examples of the German-style 'lengthening-H':
*shah, Utah, Allah, mynah, Rajah, Sarah, hookah, howdah, hurrah, pariah, cheetah, Jehovah, Messiah, chutzpah, savannah, verandah, Ayatollah, Maharajah, Hallelujah.* Hebrew is the main source, but Indian and Arabic are also strongly represented.

Hungarian and Finnish are exalted as phonetically perfect and to a lesser extent Spanish. But I think that Italian is even more phonetically 'true' than Spanish. German is not too far behind in the phonetic stakes, but of course the times when <ä> was pronounced differently from <e> are 100 years gone. I know that in Bavaria and Austria in my youth there were still comics mocking the old fuddy-duddies who said Vääääter *for* Väter (instead of the modern *'veter'),* and they made it sound like a sheep crying out.

Finnish and Hungarian are 'constructed' languages. Roman monks were commissioned by the Pope to write the dialect of wild heathen tribes (previously only spoken), in order to spread the gospel, so they invented the written form of Hungarian, Finnish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, according to a Latin system.

To compete with that logic, the mixture-languages such as French, English, even Spanish (Moorish and Visigothic influence) and Italian (Roman-Gothic-Lombardic mixture) do not stand a chance.

Any systematisation of those must come by organisation and logical reform. I often think that Spelling reform doesn't stand a chance until the language itself is systematised more. But that will be thought even more heretical!


From **Roger Gleaves,** London:-
Should we worry about spelling so much? A problem arises of what to do about the varieties of pronouncing the same word *(garrij or garahje?)* It might be simpler first to standardise the pronouncing of our language, and then the spelling will possibly get itself sorted out in consequence — or is that gross heresy?


# Motley Reforms in Action

From **Elizabeth Wardle,** Seaford, East Sussex (see **_SSS Journal_ 1987/3**, Item 2):-

Mie oenli nue karəktər iz dhe shwā (Ǝə), and dhee aksənts <´> and <¯>, which, az ie səjest in *Inglish Speling* cood be akómədaeted on ə QWERTY keebord, instéd ov <x> or <q>.

Ue kweeri mie ues ov shwā — in fər for *for,* etc., but ie woz rieting informəli). For ə dəsizhən on dhə forrnəl form ov ə werd, wee need ən əkádəmi.

*(Does that mean two spelling systems, a formal and an informal one?—Ed.)*


From **Pwe-Lin Lee & Fan Lee**, Ganzou Jiang-Yi Province, People's Republic of China:-

In our reform system *what* would be reformed to *wot* for Britain, but to *whaat* for the US. I'm sorry to say thatto preserve the unity of every spelling around the world would render any feasible English spelling-reform *eternally* impossible — not only for another four centuries.

*(Which spellings would foreign students of English then learn? —Ed.)*

A practicable universal English language might be spelled with five long-sound capital letters.

DhE short sound of /u/ is <u> as in *put, pull.* In *bus* dhE <u> is /a:/, so it's rezeneble tu riform *bus* to *bars,* tu bE distingwishd from TO *bars* wich is tu bE riformd tu *barrs.*

For obtAning mor definit as wel as distinkt artilkulAshens, let *alter* bE riformd tu *olter, result* tu *rizolt, sully* tu *sale, moustache* tu *mostash, etc.*

Let man be riformd tu *men* and *men* to *mens,* dhArbI simplifling dhE gramar.

An aksent mark shudn't bE omited in dhE speling riform and shud bE put in its rit plAs. For ikzampl, *standing* shud bE riformd tu *st'nding,* and *extend* tu *ikst'end.*

DhE vouel of *moon* is 'diferent from dhat of *June*, so *moon* mA bE riformd tu *'muun, wIl June* to *Jiun.*

From **Robert Craig,**  Weston-super-Mare, Avon:- '

Koments on Kut Speling:

1. Ij kan see no real reazon for retaininc *too*. It seemz tu me dhat *too* beloncz widh dhe odher emfatik spellincz *mee, wee, shee* ets. German seemz tu manage kuite well widh zu for both *to* and *too.*

2. Palatalz are still kauzinc jou problemz. Ij don't think dhat *casul, plesur* are acseptabel. Eidher spell dhem az *casual, plesure,* or introduse a palatalizinc simbol, e.g. *casjl, plesjr.*

3. Onli elderli peopel pronounse *suit* as /sju:t/. Dhe modern pronynsiaxion iz /su:t/. Nordhernerz, Ij cuess, pronounse both *soot* and *suit* as /su:t/.  Dhe sound /ju:/ iz veri restricted. Ij kan onli see a case for retaininc it at the becinninc ov wordz. Ij think dhat NU TUN xhould be dhe preferred spellincz, pronounsed eidher az /nu: tu:n/ or az /nju: tju:n/. Dhe spellinc pronynsiaxion would prevail eventualli. Som ecsampelz:- nu, tun, fud, gud, wud, hud, buk, luk, tru, stu, studio (buck→byk, luck→lyk, study→stydi), revenu, kontinu.

# Japanese 'Spelling'

From Thomas R. Hofmann, Hokuliku University, Kanazawa, Japan 920–11 (*see <u>Journal 1988/1</u>, Item7 for an introduction to Japanese writing*):-

A note about Japanese orthography.
The kanji ideograms exist for only some nouns but most adjectives & verbs.  Adjectives & verbs have inflections, however, that require phonetic additions.  The two parallel kana alphabets evolved with simple symbols — 1 to 3 strokes for a syllable.  They are sort of like our difference between Roman and italic type faces.  The angular kata-kana were used for telegrams and early computers, as well as foreign words and to indicate emphasis, while the almost cursive hiragana (hira-kana) are used for most other purposes.

Several curious facts tend to shock foreigners on mixing these systems.  Except for a rule that you can't change between the 2 kana systems in a word (such a change serves to mark the beginning or end of the word, like our word-space does), just about every word can be written in at least several ways.  Foreign words are almost always in katakana, but for decorative purposes they occasionally appear in hiragana.  Native words may be written in katakana for emphasis (as we use italics), hiragana, kanji or a mixture of kanji & hiragana.  It took me several years to finally accept that a word has no 'proper way' to be written. Although printing has been around in Japan since before Guttenberg, they never bothered with standardising the written form of words! However they do have some concept of orthography, as fairly strong feelings can sometimes be called forth if you write a kanji in an unapproved way.  But generally, writing is left to the choice of the writer, which the printer faithfully follows.  t

# 3. Donald Scragg, the Society's new President

## Profile

The Simplified Spelling Society was extremely gratified when at its AGM on 23 Apr 1988 Dr Donald G Scragg accepted the office of the Society's President.  He follows in the long and illustrious line of W W Skeat (1908–11), Gilbert Murray (1911–46), Daniel Jones (1946–68), said James Pitman (1968–72) and John Downing (1972–87). Each of these Presidents has brought his own area of expertise and authority to the Society, whether philology, phonetics, politics, or psychology, and with Donald Scragg the wheel has turned full circle: Walter Skeat, the Society's first President, was Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Cambridge, and Donald Scragg is Director of the Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies at the University of Manchester. Whereas previous Presidencies have corresponded to periods of major advance in, for instance, the understanding of sound-symbol relationships in English and the experimental application of rationalised orthographies in education, perhaps we may now look forward to renewed emphasis on the historical dimension of English spelling. Certainly that is an aspect that is widely ignored in current debate on the subject; yet it is indispensable for a proper appreciation of the orthographic status quo and of possibilities for its future.

Donald Scragg was born in Liverpool in 1936 and after some years in commerce and on military service in the RAF graduated in English at Liverpool University in 1962. His interest in English spelling already manifested itself in his undergraduate days with a thesis on Initial h in Old English which demonstrated the instability of the aspirate in the earliest recorded periods of English and gave him his first real insight into the relationship between speech and writing. His Manchester PhD thesis extended this theme of the detailed study of the language of a tenth-century manuscript of English sermons; it offered a considered reappraisal of the information that written records from a remote period can give us of the speech of that period. In 1965 he published a thorough revision of G H Vallin's Spelling in the Andre Deutsch Language Library. Along with Sir James Pitman, former SSS President, he was amongst the first speakers in the initial series of lectures on spelling at Manchester under the auspices of the Mont Follick Trust, and his lecture then formed the basis of his book A *History of English Spelling*, which was published in 1974. This work has become a classic source of information and ideas on the development of English spelling, and has been an inspiration to members of the Society over the years since its appearance. It is most regrettable that is that it is now out of print, as it is a key introductory work that should stand alongside An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English by A C Gimson (a former SSS Vice-President) on the reading list of anyone first approaching the question of English spelling reform. However Donald Scragg tells us that always at the back of his mind has been the determination that one day he should begin to document the complete history of spelling that English so sadly lacks.

Most importantly for the Society, Donald Scragg's purview extends beyond the British Isles. He has taught in the USA, travels a great deal, and spend some time every year in North America in his role as Executive Secretary of an international research project. We look forward to many years under his Presidency, in which we shall be working to try and put the notion of English spelling reform 'on the map' as a practical proposition in a way that, one must admit, it has scarcely been in recent times. Members of the Society will have the opportunity to meet Donald Scragg and consider his ideas when he addresses an SSS meeting on the subject of *English Spelling and its Reform: a Historical Perspective* in the early autumn (see p. 36 for details).

# 4. Conventionality and Efficiency in Written English: the Hyphen.
# Patrick Hanks

Patrick Hanks is Chief Editor of Collins English Dictionaries and a Research Fellow in the University of Birmingham. He edited *Collins English Dictionary* (1979) and is managing editor of the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (1987). The Cobuild Project is a research project in the University of Birmingham in which 18 million words of contemporary English have been analysed for a learners' dictionary. Current work includes preparation of an English grammar on the basis of this data and designing computational tools for linguistic analysis.

This article is based on a paper given at the Society's **Fifth International Conference** held in July 1987.

## Abstract

To start with, the notion of the convention in written forms is examined, and some examples are given of variations and inconsistencies that occur in traditional orthography. Conventions of spelling are contrasted with the relative freedom of punctuation in British English. The hyphen is taken as an example of inconsistency in written forms. It is argued that inconsistencies, in the form of competing conventions, lead to inefficiencies, and competing conventions in the use of the hyphen are an extreme example of this.

Use of the hyphen in English contrasts with spelling, in that the rules for its use are *not* clearly conventionalized. This in itself is a source of inefficiency. Evidence will be given of the major current inconsistencies in the use of hyphens and some resulting inefficiencies.

A few simple rules for standardizing the use of hyphens in English could be associated with proposals for simplifying spelling, leading to greater communicative efficiency.

## Conventionality and Spelling

The title of this paper is 'Conventionality and Efficiency', but it might well have been 'A Case Study in Orthographic Inefficiency', since it is the orthographic inefficiency of English punctuation, and in particular of the use of such marks as the hyphen, to which I wish to draw your attention.

I would like to start with a brief discussion of conventionality, using examples from English orthography by way of illustrative material. I shall then go on to contrast the state of conventionality in English orthography with the state of conventionality in English punctuation.

In British English in particular, we have a situation in which orthography is highly conventionalized. Whatever we may think of the queer old conventions of English spelling, one can at least say that there is a wide measure of agreement as to what they are. It is important to draw a distinction between a situation in which conventions exist, even though individual members of the community may not know them, and a situation in which conventions do not exist at all, or are so little known that they might as well not exist. I think the latter situation is more fertile soil for reform than the former.

To the extent that conventions exist at all, they can lay claim to a modicum of efficiency, however weak their foundations in logic or their connections with other modes, such as phonology, may be. Members of the Simplified Spelling Society will surely have considered the potential difficulties of a

situation in which different segments of the writing and publishing community are aspiring to different conventions.

In modern English, published texts such as books and newspapers do not, as a general rule, cause their readers to spend time puzzling over a written form and wondering what word might be represented. Book and newspaper publishers employ copyeditors and proofreaders who have the specific duty, inter alia, of ensuring that the conventions are adhered to. In less formal situations, too, users of written English have ways of agreeing among themselves what the conventional spellings are, and of ironing out disagreements in such a way as to preserve the convention rather than allowing the continued co-existence of more than one orthographic form .

To take a more or less random example, there is widespread agreement that the conventional spelling of *consensus* is with the three <s>s and one <c>, rather than with two of each. However, many people outside the world of printed and published texts spell the word with two <c>s. In my experience, when users of the spelling *concensus,* with two <c>s, discover that their practice is at odds with that of other members of the English-writing world, and that the others are supported by weighty tomes such as dictionaries, they surrender. They do not continue to insist that their form is as good as or better than the other one (as well they might); instead they fall meekly into line, confessing the error of their ways. That is, they themselves will agree that the spelling they have used is erroneous. How is this decided? The appeal to the authority of a dictionary is usually taken as sufficient to clinch the matter, even though most respectable lexicographers devote quite a lot of energy to disclaiming any authoritarian status. Within the dictionary, the etymology is often consulted and is regarded as a source of evidence for correctness. The fact that *consensus* is derived from *sentire* 'to feel' is regarded as conclusive evidence in favour of the 3-<s> spelling. However, the appeal to etymology is not in fact sufficient evidence by itself of conventionality in matter of spelling. The <-ant> ending of the noun *descendant,* for example, is etymologically indefensible, although it is undeniably conventional. Latinists will be able to think of many other examples. I do not know whether, etymologically speaking, the word *address* should have one <d> or two <d>s, but English has two and French has one: surely they can't both rely on the appeal to etymology to support their different conventions? At moments like these anyone can sympathize with those who feel exasperation with the discrepancies in the conventions.

Here, of course, I am preaching to the converted. Spelling reformers have long been pointing out the discrepancies in English spelling conventions; my purpose in mentioning them is merely to draw your attention to the distinction between discrepancies in established conventions on the one hand and discrepancies in practice, where no strong conventions exist, on the other.

Are there any examples in English of genuine discrepancies of belief and practice as to what the spelling convention actually is?

There are several, of course. The most striking is the more or less free choice in British English between <-ize> and <-ise> spellings for verbs such as *conventionalize. The* form <-ise> is not in common use in American English, and there is a belief among some British users of <-ise> that <-ize> is American. This is in line with the general British belief that any unfamiliar bit of language must be American. In fact, of course, there is plenty of evidence that <-ize> is in conventional use in British English.

This particular case of competing conventions is irritating, time-wasting, and costly for publishers. In dictionaries, it can also be very costly in terms of precious space. In the case of the Cobuild dictionary, for example, the first drafts of the explanations were written freely in the researchers' own preferred spellings. Time and effort then had to be expended on normalizing all uses of <-ise> to the <-ize> that eventually came to be preferred. In the case of dictionaries, of course, there is a

need to practice what one preaches: since one or other form must be entered first in the dictionary and be the main entry, the assumption arises among users that the form carrying the main entry is the preferred form for some principled reason.

I am not sure why it is considered undesirable to have free variation within the same book, but consistency in such matters seems to matter to many people, especially publishers and reviewers. Perhaps there is a fear that some distinction will be perceived where none is intended. Support for this hypothesis can be gleaned from the case of *program(me),* where, in British English, the <-mme> spelling has become specialized for programmes of music and broadcasting, while the single <-m> spelling has become specialized for computing uses. I leave you to ponder the confusion that has resulted in inflected forms of the verb: just how many <m>s do you use in *program(m)ed* and *program(m)ing,* and do you associate a distinction in meaning with a distinction in spelling here too? As far as I can see, the trend in British English, which is towards doubling the <m> in all cases, is matched by a trend in the opposite direction in American English. However, the evidence is by no means clear.

Regional differences can, of course, provide many examples of coexisting conventions in spelling: British *colour* vs. American *color,* and so on. But regional differences are not competing conventions in the sense under discussion here; they represent rather a signal as to which segment of the speech community a writer belongs to.

More interesting, for present purposes, are competing plurals. Consider first words such as *index and appendix, cactus and corpus.* What is the conventional plural of these words? As a committed user of the morphologically English plurals *indexes and appendixes, I* would like to believe that there really are competing conventions here. Unfortunately, the facts do not support this hope.

One of the advantages for a committed descriptivist of working with a large body of evidence such as the computerized Birmingham Corpus of English Texts is that one can actually interrogate the corpus and get answers that help in judging the state of conventionality, The corpus is constantly growing and being improved. The version that was used for research on the dictionary consisted of 18 million words of running English text, taken from a wide variety of sources.

This corpus, then, contains 9 cases of *appendices,* but only 2 of *appendixes,* both from the same writer. It seems that this writer and I are in a minority in our preferences: when it comes to deciding what is most conventional, there is no contest. The story is much the same with *index.* There are 29 cases of *indices,* from 15 or 16 different sources; there are only 5 cases of *indexes,* and these are from just 2 sources.

The corpus does not contain enough evidence to enable one to judge what the conventional plural of *corpus* is*;* there is only one example of *corpora* and there are none at all for *corpuses.* The evidence from general English texts is not sufficiently specialized to shed light on an abstruse problem with a rather technical word.

More interesting is the plural of *cactus. Pace the* Cobuild dictionary, there is no evidence at all in the corpus for *cactuses;* this was clearly put into the dictionary by an editor who shares my own prejudices. Perhaps it will be taken out in the next edition. The corpus contains 7 cases of *cacti,* which should clinch the matter. However, careful examination of the 36 lines for *cactus* itself reveals some that are indisputably plural: for example,

> Some cactus only open their blossoms at night.

There are other lines where cactus seems to be being used as a mass noun: for example, large

growths of palm and cactus.

In still other cases, there is no way of telling whether the writer intended to use a mass noun or a plural noun, e.g.,

> giant tortoises lumber through the cactus.

Thus there does appear to be some doubt as to what the conventional plural of *cactus* is, but it is not the doubt that we were hoping for. It is more a grammatical doubt than a choice between two morphologically established forms.

This brings me to my final orthographic example in the search for genuine uncertainty as to what the conventions of English spelling might be. It concerns the word *diocese.* For etymological and other reasons, the singular noun is conventionally spelled ending in <-ese>, although ignorant persons such as myself may believe (until shown evidence to the contrary) that it is spelled in <-is>, on the analogy of such words as *thesis* and *basis.* The Cobuild corpus shows 23 examples of the spelling *diocese* and none at all for *diocis.* OK, we were wrong, then. So far so good: the convention survives, unscathed by our ignorance.

But what about the plural?

The fact that *diocese* is a count noun, supported by the real-world observation that episcopal churches have more than one bishop and therefore presumably more than one diocese, leads us to expect realistically that there will be a plural.

The Cobuild corpus shows not a single example of any morphologically plural form — neither *dioceses,* which is presumably what the dictionaries predict, since they are silent on the issue, nor *diocos,* which users of the <-sis> spelling might expect by analogy with *bases* and *theses.*

Morphologically, there is no orthographic evidence in the Cobuild corpus for a separate plural form of this word. However, if we examine all the lines for the type *diocese* carefully, we find that two of them appear to be plural.
They are:
> the diocese of Gibraltar and London...

and
> We're much closer connected with diocese and Christians outside than we were.

This evidence is supported by evidence from straw-polling and comparison of intuitions (a time-honoured lexicographical technique, first mentioned explicitly by Noah Webster in his 1828 preface, in which he comments that he "fortified his opinion with that of some gentlemen in whose opinion he had confidence").

I have confidence in the intuitions of my colleagues, at any rate as a way of supplementing corpus evidence, so I asked them (orally) what is the plural of *diocese.* Eight out of twelve members of the COBUILD team offered /daɪəsiːz/. They were quite uncertain about how this might be spelled, although all of them were quite sure about the conventional spelling of the singular. In particular, one colleague who was in this majority had what she describes as 'an ecclesiastical childhood' (she is a vicar's daughter); the word, in both singular and plural forms, is therefore in her active vocabulary. The other team members gave answers which may be summarized as ranging from 'don't know' to wrestling with the tongue-twisting *dioceses* in ways that raised the suspicion that they had never had occasion to use the word, let alone the plural.

I think, then, that the plural of *diocese* may be a case where the convention of written English is unclear. There are very few such, and I am arguing that this is probably a good thing. More competing conventions may introduce more inefficiency and wasteful expense.

**Conventionality and Punctuation**
English punctuation, by contrast, is much less trammelled by conventionality. I do not know whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. In some ways, I think it is probably a bad thing.

To take a fairly obvious example, the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses is regularly and unconsciously made in the intonation pattern of English. How useful and efficient it would be if the same distinction were made by the conventional use of commas in written English.

There is a vital distinction between, say,
    To my daughter Judith I leave my collection of gold coins, which are in my bank vault.
and
    To my daughter Judith I leave my collection of gold coins which are in my bank vault.

Suppose that at some time before his death the testator removed some but not all of the coins from the bank vault and left them in his son Peter's room. Presence or absence of the comma could make all the difference if the will were contested. Peter's claim to the gold coins would be much stronger if the will did not contain a comma after gold. The relative clause would be restrictive, and Judith would be entitled to only the gold coins which were in the bank vault and no others. The restrictive status of the relative clause allows or encourages the implication that the testator may have other collections of gold coins which are not in the bank vault. If the comma is present, however, the relative clause is nonrestrictive, and can be read merely as helpful guidance to the legatee as to where to find her bequest. Judith's case would be strengthened by presence of the comma.

Of course, no self-respecting lawyer would allow a client to write such a clause in a will, but it is the occurrence of such clauses in home-made wills that can result in lawsuits. No doubt this is one reason why the legal profession in Britain some years ago took to writing all its legal documents without any punctuation in them at all. This draconian solution could hardly be called helpful, and in fact of course even more ambiguities arise in totally unpunctuated text.

Examination of a large body of published texts supports the view that even professional copyeditors and proofreaders in Britain have a rather hazy view of punctuation, let alone lawyers and the general public. There are such widespread discrepancies in the use of punctuation such as the comma in English published usage that it would be hard if not impossible to describe in detail what the conventions are. Usage is highly idiosyncratic. The situation for literate texts in the U.S.A. seems to be different: American punctuation in published texts is recognizably more consistent and logical. This, then, may be an example of an area in which linguistic prescriptivism in Britain is desirable.

The best that can be said of British punctuation at present is that at least the rather random use of commas does not seem to be costing anyone very much in terms of money or wasted effort.

I shall be arguing that associated with any proposals for spelling reform and more efficient use of written English should be proposals for more efficient use of punctuation. I use for illustrative purposes the hyphen.

**The stopped Hyphen**
Three uses of the hyphen may be distinguished: orthographic, grammatical, and end-of-line. Principles for each kind of use are discussed. Within the context of simplified spelling, the principle is proposed that the hyphen should not be used at all, except when there is some clear justification for its existence.

Orthographic hyphens are those sometimes seen in the middle of lexical items that could equally well be regarded as single words or as two independent words, eg *sign-writer.* We may compare current usage (as observed in the Cobuild corpus) with principles of efficiency and consistency. This entails an examination of the relationship between the two or more morphemes making up a 'word' such as *farm-hand, farm-house, far-reaching, far-off,* and so on. Orthographic criteria must also be considered, as in *fire-engine* and *fire-eater,* where the co-occurrence of the letter <e> inhibits coalescence. Also discussed under the heading of the orthographic hyphen are hyphens which represent some phonological point, for example those in *co-operate* and *re-enter.* It will readily be seen that omission of hyphens between consonants should not present a problem within Cut Spelling. They may indeed be among the few cases where a doubled consonant survives.

The grammatical hyphen, as in expressions such as *an easy-to-master language,* may well have a function in promoting efficiency of understanding in complex syntactic units. Compare a *machine-tool minder* with a *machine tool-minder.* Is the hyphen sufficient to indicate that in one case the referent is human and animate, while in the other it is inanimate?

**End of line hyphenation**
End-of-line hyphenation is probably the source of more wasted effort than anything else in the typesetting industry. Printers' readers are very fond of objecting to compositors' break points. There are conflicting principles at work in current practice. For example, should we hyphenate etymologically (eg *speedo-meter)* or should we hyphenate phonologically (eg *spee-dom-eter)?* Does it matter? If not, why do master printers allow their readers to make so many expensive alterations in this area? But where should the line be drawn? Can we really accept a hyphen in a word such as *mo-re?* Is it any more objectionable than *id-ol?*

The question arises, could the hyphen be abolished completely? Would we actually be better off without it? To simplify the symbol inventory by removing one of the symbols would certainly be a step in the direction of greater efficiency from the point of view of text producers; would it lead to difficulties of comprehension, and therefore inefficiency, from the point of view of readers? If there are good reasons to keep the hyphen, what are they? What rules for conventional use of the hyphen can be proposed that would maximize efficiency and minimize waste?

Let us look in more detail at the end-of-line hyphen. Hyphens are used at the end of lines in printed texts in order to keep the right-hand margin straight (known as 'right justification'), without increasing the amount of inter-word spacing in any given line beyond acceptable limits. One clear way of avoiding the need for end-of-line hyphenation is to abandon right justification, accepting a ragged right margin. This is the solution, I see, adopted on the second page of your conference programme: on the page headed 'Background'. The main objection to an unjustified right margin is that it is quite wasteful of space.

**BACKGROUND**

It was long thought English spelling reform just meant of writing words by their sound. But the obstacles to this procedure are now clear: above all the variations in pronunciation and the need to ensure continuity of literacy. Instead of phonographic representation, the principle now proposed is efficiency, i.e. the convenience of all categories of user. The task facing orthographers is thus to determine what kind of spelling best meets this criterion.

*Space wasted by unjustified right margin: excerpt from the Simplified Spelling Society's conference programme*

For example, the first paragraph of the 'Background' section could well have been one line shorter if right justification, with end-of-line hyphen, had been used. Over the extent of a whole book, the difference can amount to several pages. In a book such as a dictionary, where space is at a premium, a ragged right margin is not normally an acceptable option. Double-column setting, which of course is standard in dictionaries, increases the need for end-of-line hyphenation; many more words get hyphenated in a narrow column than in a wide one. Space is also the main reason why double-column setting is standard in dictionaries: it allows the publisher to adopt a smaller typesize on a large page without losing readability, and it reduces the amount of space lost through short lines at the end of paragraphs. This is even more true of newspaper setting, where the use of several columns on a very large page greatly increases editorial flexibility.

It seems unlikely, therefore, that we could abolish end-of-line hyphenation completely. What principles can be recommended for those who are forced to use it?

Proofreaders both in printing houses and publisher, houses have traditionally always devoted a great deal of energy to trying to ensure that end-of-line hyphenation is 'correct'. It is worth noting just how costly this obsession can be. In order to move a single letter forwards or backwards from one line to the next or to the preceding, both lines have to be reset (with the possibility of further errors arising within them), the original lines have to be cut out of the text (with the possibility of accidentally damaging the lines above and below the cut), and the new lines have to be stripped in (with the possibility of poor alignment and, if the material being used is film, the possibility of a nasty thin black line being visible in the published text). Wise printers and wise publishers brief their readers to be very conservative before insisting on a change in the end-of-line hyphenation. It is, perhaps, hardly surprising that in at least one printing house a compositor and a printer's reader actually came to blows over the reader's persistent objections to the compositor's chosen break points in what was otherwise a very clean text!

End-of-line hyphenation has long been a steady source of wasteful expenditure in the typesetting industry, although with the growing use of computers in typesetting, some of them with quite sophisticated look-up tables for hyphenation points, the problem is no longer as widespread as it was.

If, as I am suggesting, there are circumstances in which end-of-line hyphenation is unavoidable, what suggestions should we make for conventionalizing the circumstances in which it is used? Perhaps the best starting principle, from the point of view of efficiency, would be that end-of-line hyphenation should be as liberal as possible. Printers and publishers should accept any break point unless there is a good reason not to. They should discourage their proofreaders from altering any end-of-line hyphenation point that comes out of the typesetter without very good reasons. The good sense of this is supported by the fact that there are at least two competing principled systems

of end-of-line hyphenation in operation in British English: one which is phonologically based, adopted for example by Collins, and one which is etymologically based, promulgated by Oxford among others. The former would opt for *spee-dom-eter,* while the latter would prefer *speed-o-meter.* My suggestion is that any of six possible break points in this word should be regarded as acceptable: *spee-d-o-m-e-t-er.*

What constraints, then, should be placed on this liberal proposal?

We might wish to say that 'obvious' syllable boundaries should count as preferred break points. The question then arises, what counts as an 'obvious' syllable boundary? *Keyw-ord and mainfr-ame* are unacceptable to everyone, since the composition of the compound in each case is transparent. But should we accept *disg-usted, di-stress, and distr-ess? The* liberal proposal depends in part on acknowledging that syllable boundaries are unclear, but some seem clearer than others.

Another commonsensical suggestion might be that there should be no hyphenation within, say, 2 characters of the end of a word. Obviously, this means that no four-letter word would be hyphenated. I did once see an English book typeset in Czechoslovakia in which the word *mo-re had* been hyphenated after the <o>. This is absurd because the word is a monosyllable. But from a typographical point of view it would be equally pointless to hyphenate *idol* or *idle;* the space saved does not justify the effort involved. But then, what about the *-ed* of *disgusted?* In traditional typography, the only other acceptable break point is after dis-. However, under the more liberal policy being suggested here, *disgus-ted,* for example, would be acceptable.

A less controversial suggestion would be that there should be at least one full syllable both before and after the hyphen: this would rule out *mo-re,* but it would also rule out *strai-ght and str-aight.*

Without prejudice to what might be decided about syllable boundaries, it might be possible to identify certain clusters where it would clearly be undesirable to introduce a hyphen and line break. For example, presumably everyone would agree that it is undesirable by any standard to introduce a break in the middle of an orthographic cluster representing a single phoneme: <ph>, <sh>, and <th> are cases in point. An adaptation of the same rule would discourage hyphenation in the middle of a diphthong, ruling *out stra-ight and proce-ed.* In fact, *straight* is probably about the longest word which, under these proposals, would not be hyphenated at all at the end of a line.

There are many other modifications to the set of liberal guidelines being proposed here that should be considered. For example, it is often said that one should not break a line in such a way that a misleading first element of a word appears at the end of a line: after the <d> in *read-just or* after the <e> in *arse-nic,* for example. But how serious is this as a source of potential problems for a reader reading sequential text? The objection seems to based on a notion that people read texts letter by letter and word by word. But do they? If they read in larger units — for example clause by clause, phrase by phrase, or tone unit by tone unit-the objection falls. In addition, the desirability of keeping things simple is worth bearing in mind: the more complex a set of rules is, the less likely it is to be implemented efficiently.

Enough has been said to illustrate the dimensions of the problem of the end-of-line hyphen.

**The Orthographic Hyphen**
At a rough estimate, there are between 800 and 1000 words in the Cobuild dictionary for which, if we go back to the corpus, we can observe variation, for no very clear reasons of principle, in the written form. Some people write these lexemes as one word, some as two words, and some compromise with a hyphen. For example, there are 5 occurrences of *sledge hammer* written as two words, 7 where it is written solid (i.e. as one word), and 6 where it has a hyphen. In considering spelling and.efficiency, this seems to be an area where some recommendations in the direction of

standardization of usage might be appropriate. In most (though not all) cases, no meaning distinction is at stake. Where a meaning distinction is at stake, especially where what is in question is some grammatical point, which I shall discuss under the heading of 'the grammatical hyphen', the distinction is often obliterated by the random variations in the base form.

Let us again start with the proposal that the hyphen should not be used at all, in order to test whether it does in fact have any useful function.

It is possible to distinguish 3 main classes of words in which the possibility of a mid-word hyphen is at issue. These are: noun-noun compounds, nominal derivatives of phrasal verbs, and words containing prefixes. There are a number of less frequent classes around the edges, such as verbs from noun+verb compounds (e.g. *gatecrash),* and oddities such as *offlicence* and *unputdownable.* I shall concentrate on examples from the three main classes, starting with words containing a prefix.

As Tom McArthur has pointed out, the orthographic hyphen seems to be doing a very useful job in making a written distinction between two quite distinct words: *reform* and *re-form.* Another example is *recreation* and *re-creation.* This is analogous to the useful function of the apostrophe in distinguishing between well and we'll, as opposed to all the rather pointless uses objected to by George Bernard Shaw amongst others.

I am much less convinced by arguments in favour of the orthographic hyphen to make some phonological point, as in the case of *microorganism, cooperate, antiimmigration, readjust* and even *nonnuclear. I* would be glad to see this particular hyphen abolished in any spelling system. I wonder whether the hyphen in these words really does aid phonological recognition and realization? In testing this, it would of course be important to rule out the influence of familiarity of one form rather than other. No doubt every spelling reformer would agree that it takes a short while to get used to a new system.

We must, however, recognize that the balance of usage is against us, at any rate in British English. *Microorganism,* for example, is spelled 21 times with a hyphen and only 11 times as one word in the Cobuild corpus. Well, at least this is evidence of competing conventions — a clear case for resolution by prescription, even if the balance of usage is siding (as usual in English, it seems) with the least efficient convention. We should also note in passing that this proposal, which would lead to abandonment of the hyphen in *cooperative,* would create an anomaly with its short form *co-op,* which would retain its hyphen under the *reform/re-form* rule mentioned above.

Less defensible, in my opinion, is the widespread use of the hyphen in words such as *coexist, reuse, antisemitic, panamerican:* no real ambiguity or phonological difficulty is at stake. *Nonnuclear* falls into this class: it is generally hyphenated in current written English, although the doubled <n> presents no more difficulty than that in *unnatural,* which is apparently never written with a hyphen.

At the far end of this particular cline lie words such as *subcategory, subhuman, antihero, antimatter* and *postwar.* Here, the only justification for the widespread use of the hyphen is that people do not seem willing to give up the notion that the bound morpheme *(sub-, anti-, or post-)* has some independent status as a meaningful element. The cases of *pseudo* and *quasi* are interesting in this respect: in British English they fall into this class, although in American English, for some writers at least, they apparently count as independent words.

**Noun compounds**
The chaotic state of British English as regards hyphenation of noun compounds may be judged from the following tiny random selection from a list of more than 500 words in the Cobuild corpus where the choice of orthographic form in English seems to be more or less arbitrary.

| WORD | SOLID | HYPHENATED | 2 WORDS |
|------|-------|------------|---------|
| sledgehammer | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| stepping stones | 2 | 7 | 3 |
| saddlebag | 17 | 7 | 3 |
| test tube | 5 | 17 | 4 |
| treetops | 12 | 13 | 6 |
| videotape | 14 | 9 | 13 |
| windowbox | 5 | 8 | 7 |
| windowpane | 7 | 15 | 4 |
| passerby | 12 | 71 | 5 |

In the context of spelling reform, total abolition of the orthographic hyphen for noun compounds might be desirable. Writers would simply have to choose between writing one or two words. The choice would depend on several factors, not least the writer's perception of whether the lexeme was functioning as a single unit at the word rank, or whether it could be satisfactorily accepted as a word + word group. So, for example, a writer might spell *sledgehammer* as one word since very few people think of *sledge* as a semantically independent unit modifying hammer, whereas *gas fire* might be more satisfactory as two words, since it falls neatly into the well-known English pattern of noun modifier + noun.

A similar view might be taken of nouns and adjectives derived from phrasal verbs *(pickup, makeup, ripoff, getaway, takeoff* and so on). It is important to distinguish these from the phrasal verb itself, which (if I may be permitted a momentary prescriptive outburst) SHOULD *NEVER* BE SPELLED WITH A HYPHEN. The noun and adjective derivatives could, in my view, always be written as one word.

**The Grammatical Hyphen**
This process of noun derivation from phrasal verbs brings me to what I call the grammatical hyphen. This category overlaps to some extent with the category of orthographic hyphens just discussed.

Many writers, myself included, like to use hyphens to indicate a certain kind of rank shift, where a group of words has been assigned the grammatical function of a single word. Examples are:
>a never-to-be-forgotten experience
>end-of-line hyphen
>an easy-to-read text *vs*. This text is easy to read.

The question arises whether any genuine ambiguity or difficulty of understanding would arise from omitting these hyphens. I think we would be hard put to it to show that it would, but I would be glad to have the views of others. Earlier, I invented a case where some genuine meaningful consequences might follow from placement of a hyphen in different positions in a phrase *(machine-tool minder* vs. *machine tool-minder).* I have to confess that in browsing through the hyphens in the Cobuild corpus I have not come across one case of such a distinction in actual language use. It seems that, no doubt wisely, people rarely rely on punctuation to make such subtle points of meaning.

Some conventional uses of grammatical hyphens seem both hard to learn and singularly pointless: for example the attributive/predicative distinction made in: *a well- intentioned gesture* vs. *the gesture was well-intentioned.*

In British English, as I have tried to show, I think we are suffering — or at any rate, suffered in the past — from creeping hyphen-mania. My recommendation is that most of them should be avoided. I close with a widespread but, to me, particularly irksome example of what might be called a pseudo-hyphen that seems to be becoming increasingly widespread. It is the hyphen that joins a submodifier to a modifier, as in *highly-strung* — or *increasingly-widespread.* Here again, I think we have a circumstance in which HYPHEN SHOULD NEVER BE USED.

[Francis Knowles: see **Journals**]

# 5. Morphology versus Phonology
# in the Spelling of Slavonic Languages
## Francis Knowles

Professor Knowles is Professor of Language and Head of the Department of Modern Languages at Aston University, Birmingham, and his interests lie particularly in the application of computers to translation and lexicography and in the family of Slavonic languages. We here print with his pemiission an edited transcript of his address at the Society's **Fifth International Conference** in July 1987.

## 0 ABSTRACT

A brief synopsis is first given of the 'size and shape' of the Slavonic languages. This is followed by a description of the Cyrillic and (modified) Roman alphabetic systems used by these languages. Consideration is given to the way in which certain structural characteristics in these languages are or are not reflected in the various orthographic systems used by them. In this paper particular attention is devoted to Russian and some attention is given to Byelorussian, .*issh and Serbo-Croat.

## I THE SLAVONIC LANGUAGES
### 1.1 Branches and orthographic origins

The Slavonic languages are a major branch (in the so-called Isatem' cluster) of the Indo-European family of languages: today their most important representative is Russian (technically known as 'Great Russian', 'velikorusskij jazyk', which belongs to the East Slavonic group, together with Ukrainian and Byelorussian. Byelorussian is sometimes known as White Russian — its literal meaning — and, historically, Ukrainian was also known as 'Little Russian' in Tsarist times. The other two branches of the Slavonic languages are: the Western branch, today comprising Polish, Czech, Slovak, Upper and Lower Lusatian — also known as Sorbian — and Kashubian (Polabian became extinct in the eighteenth century); and ivre is South Slavonic, represented today by Bulgarian, Serbian, Croat, Slovenian and Macedonian.

Some of these languages are reasonably well documented over the last millennium, but for others written monuments are, sparse. Mention must, however, be made of Old Church Slavonic, the language into which Saints Cyril and Methodius, active in the territory of modem-day Bulgaria 1100 years ago, translated the Gospels and other Biblical and liturgical texts. Old Church Slavonic was, effectively, created as a 'superstructure' on the South Slavonic speech used in that area at that time, but it has played a central role, cultural as well as religious, in Eastern and South-Eastem Europe since those days. Saint Cyril was responsible, of course, for creating an appropriate alphabet for Old Church Slavonic, choosing a good set of correspondences between phoneme and grapheme. It is not clear which of the two ancient alphabets St. Cyril actually invented, Glagolitic or Cyrillic, even though the latter bears his name! One thing is, however, in no doubt at all: the Orthodox Church's faith and teaching were brought to and took firm root among the Slavs of the Balkans and Eastern Europe via the medium of the vernacular Slavonic speech and of the scriptural and liturgical texts recorded in the Slavonic alphabets, initially in both of them but ultimately in Cyrillic alone.

**1.2 The USSR**
Let us now move to modem times and present the chief statistics and salient characteristics appertaining to certain Slavonic languages.

The USSR, acknowledged as one of the two so-called super-powers, has a growing population already within sffiking distance of 300 million people, inhabiting territory which amounts to one sixth of the globe's land surface. It is a multinational state with the Russians themselves enjoying only a slender absolute majority (approx. 52%) among the total population. The largest 'minority', the Ukrainians, are over forty million strong and represent 14% of the USSR's population. The Byelorussians number over seven and a half million, representing a further 3% of Slavs in the country. As for the rest, approximately 130 different languages (including, incidentally, Polish, Slovak and Bulgarian) are spoken in the USSR: belletristic writing is published in 77 of them', newspapers come out in 55 different languages, and magazines in 46; and 52 different languages are used in Soviet educational establishments. It is clear, therefore, that there is a multi-lingual ambience in the USSR that cannot be ignored in spite of the pre-eminent position of Russian as a language of communication between the ethnic minorities of the country.

**1.3 Other Slavonic languages**
A brief review of certain other Slavonic languages will now be given, together with summary statistics from 1985.
In the case of Poland, 36.5 million people live in the Polish state, the vast majority speaking Polish. This is quite unlike the pre-war period where three out of every ten people who had Polish passports, were not actually Polish at all. Today Ukrainian and Byelorussian constitute very small minorities and they do not impinge on the life of the Polish state to any extent. Polish is also spoken by up to 8 million speakers in diaspora, notably in the USA.

Czechoslovakia, with 15.5 million people, has two major languages, Czech and Slovak, but there are also about 3 million speakers of Hungarian, and a residual number of speakers of German.

Bulgaria has nearly 9 million people, 90% of them speaking Bulgarian, but there is also a sizeable Turkish minority.

Finally, in Yugoslavia Serbo-Croat accounts for 15 million of the 23 million inhabitants, while Slovenia has 7% of the population, Macedonia about 6%. There is also a considerable Albanian minority, and a number of other languages are spoken, such as Hungarian, Turkish, Romanian, Greek, Italian and Romany, thereby making up a 'rump' containing a large group of people. The ratio of alphabet usage within Serbo-Croat is that for every five people using the Cyrillic alphabet, three use the Latin alphabet, although those figures are reportedly changing. Sociolinguists have in fact commented on a shift towards the Latin alphabet even in some of the strongly Serbian areas.

**2 DEFICIENCIES OF ORTHOGRAPHIES**
**2.1 Tasks of orthography**
One may say it is the primary duty of orthography to lay down the representation of sounds by letters. It should also lay down whether words are to be written solid, hyphenated or separately. It has to regulate upper and lower case usage, line-breaks, soft versus hard hyphens, the use of other symbols, the apostrophe, punctuation marks and so on. Especially in a language like Russian the representation of foreign borrowings and in particular the representation of foreign proper names can cause considerable problems.

**2.2 Common deficiences**
As is well known, orthographic systems tend to have a number of deficiencies that appear to crop up disappointingly often. Seven contingencies are listed here:

1. various letters represent the same sound
2. the same letter represents various sounds
3. a letter-combination represents one sound
4. one letter represents a combination of sounds
5. *acoustic peculiarities are represented obliquely:*
thus in the phrase for *I love*

      (1*), l'ubl'u* — in Russian orthography (1) л ю б л ю

It is obvious where the grapheme boundaries are, but they do not in fact precisely correspond to the phoneme boundaries. The repeated vowel-letter is split down the middle, so to speak, because it performs two functions: it indicates a vowel, but it also indicates the precise timbre of the preceding consonant. Dennis Ward, in his excellent monograph *The Russian language today* (Hutchinson, 1965) sums up these salient features thus: "The value of most of the consonant letters is not known unless what follows them is also known. ... Apart from that, the full value of most of the consonant letters followed by a vowel letter is known only if we also know what that vowel letter is. ... The vowel letters and most of the consonant letters, therefore, are used in what might be called a syllabic mode."

What this means is that one cannot read Russian by a purely sequential, phonic method: it requires a combination of the phonic and 'look-and-say' methods. This is the case with almost all the Slavonic orthographies.

6. Acoustic peculiarities can remain unrepresented, as in the case of these two Russian words
    *svalka* (2) meaning a *rubbish-dump* or *tip, and s'v'az'* (3) meaning *communication.*
    The first two consonant-letters are identical:
      (2) с в а л к а (3) с в я з ь
and there is no indication whatsoever that in (3) the /s'/ is palatal. The spelling simply does not
    transmit that information.
7. Certain letters are written which do not represent any sound whatsoever. The following two
    examples (4) terminate in the so-called soft sign, which in both of these words is completely
    redundant and does not affect the pronunciation one jot. They are purely historical.
      (4) м ы ш ь р о ж ь (m y š, r o ž — *mouse, rye)*
Similarly there is relaxation in the case of some consonant cornbination: thus the /d/ in the word for
    *heart* (5)*,* and the /l/ in the word for *sun* (6), are not pronounced (the silent letter is bracketed):
      (5) с е р ( д ) ц е (6) с о ( л ) н ц е
In general, Russian is not affected at all by case 3, it has one instance, <щ>, of case 4, and it is affected by case 1 only in a positional sense. Case 2 is, however, ubiquitous but — in Russian — case 2 is virtually subsumed under case 5**.**

## 3 PHONEMES AND GRAPHEMES
### 3.1 How many phonemes?
A general feature of Slavonic orthographies, as of many others, is that there are not enough letters for all the phonemes. An additional problem in the case of nearly all Slavonic languages is that there is no agreement even among professional scholars of linguistics about how many phonemes there actually are in the language. Very reputable and authoritative writers are in print as saying that Russian possesses somewhere between 37 and 41 different phonemes, and that of those phonemes either 5 or 6 are vowels. (To see this disagreement about the number of phonemes in perspective, one should remember that there is no agreement for English either.) The number of phonemes identified and 'claimed' can depend, in part, on which of the different styles of Russian pronunciation is being used, although it must be immediately pointed out that in spite of the vastness of the Soviet Union, there is no major dialect problem on the level of the national

standard language. There is a clearly defined national standard which is accepted throughout the country and which is of course enjoined and enforced by the education system and the mass media as well. In this respect the USSR is remarkably unlike German-speaking areas, where dialect problems obtrude quite seriously.

## 3.2 How many graphemes?

Rather more surprising than the uncertainty about the number of phonemes is the uncertainty about the number of graphemes in Russian. Two signs, the soft sign we have already noted and the hard sign are not regarded as graphemes proper. They are not letters of the alphabet in the sense that they represent sounds — they are only used as auxiliary symbols to resolve spelling cruces. In the case of the symbol <ё>, the two dots are hardly ever used, except by learners of the language and in cases where disambiguation is highly desirable. A standard example is the word *vs'o* (7) which can be an adverb meaning *all the time* or *increasingly,* as opposed to *vs'e* (8) with the meaning of *all,* and it is sometimes quite important contextually to make that distinction.

(7) в с ё (8) в с є

But even then there is no guarantee the dots will actually be used. There is hence a number of problems.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| а | a | р | r | и | i | ш | *š or* sh |
| б | b | с | s | к | k | ъ | *" or* " |
| в | v | т | t | л | l | ы | y |
| г | g | у | u | м | m | ь | *' or* ' |
| д | d | ф | f | н | n | э | *e or* é |
| е (ё) | e (ё) | х | *h or* kh | о | o | ю | *ju or* yu |
| ж | *ž or* zh | ц | *c or* ts | п | p | я | *ja or* ya |
| з | z | ч | *č or* ch | й | j or ĭ | щ | *šč or* shch |

Transliterating Russian into English

## 3.3 Vowel symbols

One surprising feature of Russian orthography is that there are 10 vowel symbols, even though there are only 5 actual vowel phonemes. That is because vowel symbols are used to indicate the correct pronunciation of the preceding consonant. That is the fundamental feature of Russian commented on above.

## 4 SOUNDS AND SYMBOLS IN RUSSIAN

### 4.1 Shifting stress

Two further points have to be made about Russian spelling. The first is that the stress in words is mobile, and to pronounce any written form correctly, one has to know exactly where the stress falls. This may need to be determined contextually. A slightly outrageous example of an utterance pronounceable in two totally different ways and yielding two totally different meanings (with its transliteration) would be:

```
с т р е л к и   н а   б а ш е н н ы х   ч а с а х   с т о я л и   н е л о д в и ж н о
s t r e l k I   n a   b a š e n n y x   č a s a x   s t o j l i   n e p o d v i ž n o
```

If the pronunciation of the first word is *strelki,* the sentence means *the hands on the tower-clock were motionless;* but if the stress on the first word moves to the last syllable, *strelki,* it now means *the riflemen on sentry duty at the tower were standing motionless.* A far-fetched example certainly, but it does show the importance of stress. The essential point is the concept of Russian as a stress-controlled language: this means in practice that speakers of the language must place enormous emphasis on the stressed vowel — and mumble everything else in the word! This leads on to the concept of strong and weak positions in words, the latter producing in their train a whole

set of vowel-reductions which complicate sound-symbol correspondences very considerably.

We all know *vodka* (9), a word in which the <o> clearly carries the stress. Like the word *whisky,* *vodka* is the diminutive of the word voda (10) meaning water.

      (9) в о д к а (10) в о д а

However in voda the stress has shifted from the /o/ in *vodka* to the final /a/, and in the process the sound-value of the <o> has changed to /a/, so that the word is now pronounced /vada/. However, in certain unstressed or weak positions, as in the polysyllabic word *navodnenie* (11) meaning *flood*

      (11) н а о д н е н и е

that same /o/ is reduced to just shwa. That is a fundamental feature of Russian phonology which is not reflected by the spelling system, either directly or obliquely.

There are also weak positions for consonants, chiefly in word-endings and when juxtaposed with other consonants. Thus we have a word meaning an *oak-tree* (12), spelt *dub.*

      (12) д у б

Because that <b> is final, the realised pronunciation is /dup/, but as soon as the word is declined, as say in the genitive singular, the <b> is voiced, /duba/. Then we have a verb, *otbit'* (13), meaning *to beat off*

      (13) о т б и т ь

The spelling of the first syllable, which is a clearly defined verbal prefix meaning *off*, is <ot>, but because of its position, its phonetic realisation is as /od/.

There is a word meaning *area, oblast'* (14),

      (14) о б л а с т ь

but because the letter <s> precedes the palatalised /t'/ it too acquires palatalisation and is pronounced as /s't'/.

We have the word for *dark* (15), *tëmny*, with its first syllable stressed:

      (15) т ё м н ы й

But the word for *to go dark* is *temnet'* with the second syllable stressed, and the word for darkness is *temnota,* with the third syllable stressed and the first syllable's vowel 'reduced' in pronunciation to /i/.

These examples show very clearly that such shifts represent a major system in Russian which — ideally — would need to be captured somehow or other by the spelling, but is not captured at all in actuality. There are thus a number of phonological features of Russian, some of which virtually play a key role counter to the way the spelling system works.

When it comes to putting a language down on paper by means of an alphabetic script, there are two basic methods, plus the antithesis of a method. Firstly, a phonetic-phonemic principle can be applied; in this system the less allophonic variation there is, the better. Secondly, a morphemic principle can be applied, in the sense that the spelling system makes an attempt to freeze the appearance of morphemes on paper, whatever their pronunciation is. Finally and regrettably, of course, it is possible to use an 'anti-system' — what English possesses to excess — a traditional or historical conglomeration of sui generis idiosyncrasies. Russian opts for the second, the morphemic principle, but also betrays some allegiance to the phonemic approach; it does, admittedly, have some asymmetries of a historical and traditional kind, but they do not burden the system as whole to any great extent.

Russian has its own history of spelling reforms, the most illustrious being immediately after the October Revolution, when the hard sign was removed from the alphabet, along with a number of other letters. Prior to that time all consonants had to be marked for either hardness or softness; the position today is that they are marked for softness only, although two consonants are admittedly

'innately' soft. After the hard sign disappeared one particular edition of *Anna Karenina* became 35 pages shorter in consequence, it is reported!

### 4.2 System of vowel-letters in Russian
The ten vowel signs (five pairs) with their approximate phonemic representations are:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | а | /a/ | я | /j a/ |
| 2 | э | /ɛ/ | е | /j ɛ/ |
| 3 | ы | /ə i/ | и | /j i/ |
| 4 | о | /ɒ/ | ё | /j ɒ/ |
| 5 | у | /uː/ | ю | /j uː/ |

The five second members of these pairs represent either an added preceding yot or the secondary articulation of palatalisation 'imposed' on a preceding consonant, followed by the appropriate vowel. There is some slight potential confusion in this pattern, but in general it is quite an efficient system. To observe it in operation, consider the two Russian words, mat' (16) meaning *mother,* and m'at' (17), meaning *to crumple.*

(16) м а т ь (17) м я т ь

We can see that the phonemic difference lies in the palatalisation feature of the initial consonant, yet graphemically it is the vowel letter that differs.

The hard and soft signs **<ъ ь>** are merely auxiliary signs which are also used as separators, because in a spelling system such as has just been described it may be necessary to protect the preceding consonant from being pronounced palatally.

### 4.3 Morphemic stability
To appreciate the importance of the morphological principle in Russian, we may take the Russian root *kaz* (18) as an example. It means *to point* or *to show.* There are a number of derivatives, such as one that is occasionally used in English, where it is sometimes spelt *ukase* (19), meaning a government directive. The verb *ukazat'* (20) means to *indicate, point out.*

(18) к а з (19) у к а з (20) у к а з а т ь (21) (22) с к а з а т ь
(23) с к а з о ч н ы й (24) р а с с к а з ы в а т ь
(25) р а с с к а з ч и к (26) р а с с к а ж

The verb *skazat'* (21) logically means *to point out by saying,* in other words, just *to say,* while *skazka* (22) means a fairy-tale and *skazočny* (23) is an adjective referring to a fairy-tale. The verb *rasskazyvat' (24)* means *to relate, to recount,* while *rasskazčik* (25) is a person who recounts, in other words a *raconteur, story-teller.* So far, the spelling of this morpheme, *kaz,* has been preserved intact whatever its pronunciation: the /z/ in (25) is, in fact, phonetical palatalised, devoiced and merged with the following consonantal sound. On the other hand the morphophonemic system comes into play in the form *I will say* which is *rasskažu* (26): here Russian changes the grapheme <z> into the grapheme for /ž/, as a result of phonemic laws once active but now fossilised on the level of grammatical and word-derivational morphology. Even if it cannot achieve it in this circumstance, Russian tries via its spelling system to protect the integrity of the morpheme: that is its primary aim.

It cannot be said that there are no spelling problems at all in Russian. One problem is the use of geminated (doubled) consonants in foreign words. The occurrence and pronunciation of geminated consonants in native Russian words is very rare, but in borrowed words geminate spellings are very frequent. In almost every case pronunciation norms ignore such spellings and mentally convert geminates to singletons.

## 4.4 Russification of foreign words

Another major crux is the incorporation and russification of foreign words. In a word like *kodeks* (27) the <d> ought, according to spelling rules, to be pronounced palatally, but it is in fact pronounced without any palatalisation.

      (27) к о д е к с

A good deal of uncertainty exists with regard to the pronunciation of many words in this category: spelling pronunciations are gradually gaining the upper hand, ousting the 'alien' phonetic practices retained by the older generations of Russian speakers, partly in deference to such foreign borrowings and certainly in defiance of the normal rules of sound-symbol correspondence. Hence in these cases a russification process is being carried through. There are very full statistics, collected by sociolinguists, about words like these, giving a snapshot of what stage they are at on the cline towards complete russification.

## 4.5 Non-morphemic spellings

There is one situation where Russian departs from its morphemic spelling principle and descends — if one may use that word — to the phonemic principle, and that is in the use of verbal prefixes. The verbal prefect *ras-/raz-* (28) is equivalent to the English *dis-* or *de-*. There is a verb *razvivat'* (29) meaning *to develop,* and another verb *raspustit'* (30), meaning *to disperse.*

      (28) р а с - / р а з - (29) р а з в и в а ь (30) р а с л у с т и т ь

We can see here that the root in (29) begins with the voiced /v/ and in (30) with unvoiced /p/, and that an accommodation has taken place, with the spelling of the sibilant in the prefix indicating voicing before a voiced consonant, and non-voicing before an unvoiced consonant. The same accommodation occurs with most prefixes, and it must therefore be regarded as a subsystem that slightly blurs the integrity of the larger system, in which the morphemic principle of spelling prevails.

## 4.6 Acronyms

Russian is a language that abounds in acronyms: there are many thousands of them alive and kicking in normal discourse. It often happens in 'stump words', or in concatenated initials which are pronounced as words, rather than as single letters, that unusual or misleading juxtapositions of vowels and consonants appear: some counterintuitive pronunciations appear as a result. *Detyasli* (31) means a *creche,* a junior kindergarten, and it is a blend of two words (32) *deti* and *yasli* put together rather like *smog* in English, made up from *smoke* and *fog.*

      (31) д е т я с л и (32) д е т и, я с л и

According to spelling conventions the compound ought to be pronounced with a palatal /t/, but in fact the /t/ is retained as hard, and theme is almost a distinct juncture in the pronunciation as a result.

## 4.7 Problems and their reform in Russian

There is a number of other small problems which conspire to create a spelling black list in Russian: these items are always adduced as 'warts' whenever the question of spelling reform rears its head in the USSR, but none of them has yet fallen prey to the zeal of reformers.

There are traditional spellings, the most common one being the use of the letters <-ogo>, which is the genitive singular inflection of masculine and neuter adjectives and which is pronounced as though it were <-ovo>.

By and large the Russians are quite satisfied with their spelling system. Although there are occasional proposals for reforming it, they are intended to clear out a ragbag of minor inconsistencies rather than to attack fundamentals.

## 5 OTHER SLAVONIC LANGUAGES
### 5.1 Byelorussian
We will now turn to Byelorussian, which, although very similar to Russian, is nevertheless a separate language, having experienced a different evolution. Here the major systems of morphology, syntax, semantics and lexis are exactly the same as in Russian. The same can be said to all intents and purposes of Byelorussian phonology. However in their spelling the Byelorussians have adopted a system which does *not* fully protect the integrity of morphemes, but rather partly overrides them with the help of a system that spells according to pronunciation.

Let us now look below at a little table of words: on the left are three Russian words — their English translation appears on the right. In the middle are the Byelorussian equivalents of these words. The Byelorussian orthographic system prescribes, by spelling alone, that in Byelorussian an /o/ is pronounced only where it is written. When it loses its stress and is pronounced /a/, then, unlike the pattern in Russian, the spelling changes to /a/ too.

> (34) ґ о р о д ґ о р а д town
> (35) ґ о р о д о к ґ а р а д о к townlet
> (36) ґ о р о д с к о й ґ а р а д с к і municipal

Yet Byelorussian has only adopted this principle for vowels, not consonants.

This is an interesting contrast between Russian and Byelorussian, and it is claimed that this particular spelling system has helped to improve literacy in Byelorussia. Before we leave Byelorussian, it is worth mentioning that there are the same sorts of disagreements as in Russian about numbers. Experts are clear that there are 39 consonant phonemes and 5 vowel phonemes, but there is argument about how many graphemes there are, because Byelorussian, among the East Slavonic languages, 'descends' to the use of the digraphs <dz> and <dž>. There is further ambiguity because the former digraph may be soft, but this can be decided only by inspection of the following grapheme, either vowel or soft sign.

### 5.2 Polish
Polish uses the Roman alphabet which it modifies either by the addition of diacritics, by the introduction of modified letters, or by the use of letter combinations. Polish, like all the West Slavonic languages, has a fixed word-stress — in this case on the penultimate syllable. Whereas Russian is isochronous (phrases rather than syllables tend to be of equal duration), Polish is isosyllabic (syllables tend to have a fixed duration), and as a result there are no weak or strong syllables and, obviously, no vowel reductions. Nonetheless Polish has the same problem as Russian, i.e. how to represent the palatal consonants, which incidentally occur in a positionally more restricted way than in Russian. Their representation is achieved by two methods. If a palatal consonant occurs before a consonant or at the end of the word, it acquires a diacritic, as in *a request* (37) or *to take* (38).

> (37) prośba (38) brač

If it occurs before any vowel except /i/, the ordinary hard equivalent of the letter is used, with an /i/ after it, as in *small* (39) v. *they (f.) had (40).*

> (39) mały (40) miały

If it occurs before /i/, the ordinary hard consonant letter is used, as in *to beat* (4 1) v. *to be* (42).

> (41) bić (42) być

There is not the space here to do full justice to Polish, but the comment should be added that there are cases of orthographic dilemma in Polish and learners have to consult mental black lists. For instance the pronunciations of <h> and <ch> are absolutely equivalent in standard Polish (though not in certain dialects); and <ż> and <rz> are also absolutely indistinguishable in pronunciation. Etymologically it is very easy for a scholarly linguist to distinguish them, but Polish layfolk cannot do that. The word for *heating, ogrzewanie,* for instance is quite commonly spelt as (43) below. The

letters <ó> and <u> have exactly the same value, but in some cases they cause difficulty. Words like *wieczny* (*eternal*) and *wietrzny* (windy) have identical pronunciations. The protection of morphemic integrity in Polish grammatical or derivational families does not extend to quite the same extent as in Russian, and some odd cases occur: there is no integrity between the word for *to cut off* (44) in Polish and the word for *I will cut off* (45) — not a single letter is the same. That is, of course, a very awkward case, but it is by no means untypical.

(43) ogżewanie (44) ściąć (45) zetnę

## 5.3 Serbo-Croat

There are two alphabets in use in Serbo-Croat, the Cyrillic alphabet and the Roman alphabet — unusually, they have a one-to-one correspondence table but this is the result of the work of Vuk Karadžić a century ago. Admittedly, the corresponding letters in the two alphabets occur in a different order, so words are found in different positions in the dictionary, depending on the alphabet. In Serbo-Croat the phonetic principle reigns supreme and there is hence no such concept as the integrity of the morpheme. The word for *sweet* is *sladek* in the singular, with a medial /d/, but in the plural, *slatki,* the /d/ has become a /t/. Alternations of this type are very common and are therefore clearly indicated in the spelling. The word for a *Serb,* which is *Srbin,* has a <b>, but the adjective *Serbian* has a <p>, *srpski.* This system blurs morphologically important information, so that in a form like *dovesti* it is not clear from spelling which of two verbs, *dovoditi (to conduct),* or *dovoziti (to convey),* is actually being used — only the context can resolve the ambiguity.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

It is evident, then, that in the Slavonic languages a spectrum of spelling systems exists, from the predominantly morphemic (Russian) to the predominantly phonemic (Serbo-Croat); there is no representative of the English 'anti-system'! Each of these systems is the result of its own linguistic environment, its own problems, its own struggles, even internecine warfare.

There are muted proposals for spelling reform in a few Slavonic languages but opinions are agreed that, although Russian spelling may well be further systematised, Polish spelling stands virtually no chance of being reformed. There are some lessons to be learned perhaps in the English-speaking world, in the sense that there is a virtual obsession with what is known as 'speech culture', or the cultivation of educated speech accompanied by a war of prescription and proscription on substandard usage. This is very firmly part and parcel of the sociolinguistic environment, and has sociological and even political origins. It was, to begin with, part of the battle against the influx of foreign words and concepts which have permeated these languages to varying extents. But there is a still a strong view that a cohesive national language is helpful to the body politic, creating feelings of solidarity among the populace. The prospects for spelling reform on linguistic grounds alone are very meagre, not least because no reliable indices have yet been elaborated and implemented for testing the efficiency of orthographies. The prospects for spelling reform based on socio-political considerations are less easy to judge — no proposals are really topical at the present time, but one must always remember that spelling reforms have taken place in Eastern Europe in the past and that appeals have been made to just such socio-political grounds in the process.

| а | a | ј | j | с | s | ђ | đ | н | n | х | h |
| б | b | к | k | т | t | е | e | њ | nj | - | c |
| в | v | л | l | ћ | ć | ж | ž | о | o | ч | č |
| г | g | љ | lj | у | u | з | z | п | p | ц | dz |
| д | d | м | m | ф | f | и | i | р | r | ш | š |

Serbo-Croatian Transliteration

[Chris Jolly: see **Bulletins**, **Journals**, **Newsletters**, **Media**, **Books**.]

# 6. The Marketability of Spelling Reform
## C J H Jolly

Chris Jolly has been Chairman of the Simplified Spelling Society since 1982 and has extensive professional experience in marketing. He has started a company developing learning products which is publishing and marketing innovatory reading materials. The following paper was presented at the Society's **Fifth International Conference** in July 1987.

**The Survey**
For spelling reform to take place it must be what people want. If not, it will simply be rejected. To find out what people want we must ask them, and this paper reports on some research that was carried out with that in mind. It set out to find if spelling reform could appeal to a majority of the population, and if so on what basis.

The survey took the form of street interviews using a questionnaire. (The questionnaire, showing the exact wording used, is given at the end of this article.) It represents only the views of 50 people in one London suburb (Loughton) on a day in July 1987. With such a small sample, the results should be taken only as a useful guide rather than any kind of definitive assessment.

However the results were both encouraging and had some surprises. Important among the findings was that:

- Most people expected spelling reforms to take place — even those who did not support the idea themselves.
- The main fear of spelling reform was that it would produce enormous confusion. Respondents thought there would be chaos if different systems were in use at the same time, or if, say, adults and children spelt differently.
- People recognised that English spellings were 'a mess' and yet had never really thought about reform.

**The Respondents**
Among the 50 people interviewed a high proportion was younger, female and in clerical/administrative work, all of which may have biased the results against spelling reform.

**The Respondents** (figures in %)

| *Sex* | Men | 32 | Women | 68 |
|-------|-----|----|-------|-----|

| *Age* | 16–25 | 24 | 26–35 | 20 |
|-------|-------|----|-------|-----|
| | 36–45 | 20 | 46–55 | 22 |
| | 56–65 | 10 | 66+ | 4 |

| *Class* | AB | 26 | Management/Professional |
|---------|----|----|--------------------------|
| | C1 | 34 | Clerical/Administrative |
| | C2 | 30 | Skilled Manual |
| | DE | 10 | Semi-skilled/Unskilled |

**The Results**
Most people considered themselves average spellers, but with more women than men claiming to be good spellers:

### Self-assessment of spelling proficiency (figures in %)

|                  | Total | Men | Women |
|------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| Good spellers    | 22    | 6   | 29    |
| Average spellers | 60    | 75  | 53    |
| Poor spellers    | 18    | 19  | 18    |

However most people thought it was very important to spell correctly. If anything, such views were held more strongly by women and those over 45:

### Importance attached to correct spelling (figures in %)

|                | Total | Men | Women | 16–45 | 46+ |
|----------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| Very important | 60    | 56  | 62    | 56    | 67  |
| Quite important| 36    | 38  | 35    | 38    | 33  |
| Not important  | 4     | 6   | 3     | 6     | -   |

Both good spellers and average spellers saw correct spelling as important in the same proportion. Only poor spellers were inclined to see it as not important.

Most people (68%) had seen spellings that were deliberately different. The most common were advertising and product names (32%) and American spellings (30%).

Surprisingly perhaps, most people did not think that spelling should never be changed:

### Should spelling ever be changed? (figures in %)

|                                        | Total | Men | Women |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| Should never be changed                | 40    | 31  | 47    |
| Could be changed in certain circumstances | 60 | 69  | 53    |

Men were more prepared to see change than women. Those who were good spellers were just as ready to see change as those who were average or poor spellers. Similarly, those who thought correct spelling was very important were just as ready to see change as those who thought correct spelling was only quite important or not important.

Surprisingly it was the younger people who were the most resistant to change. Similarly it was the higher socio-economic classes, particularly as we shall see later the clerical and administrative Cl class, that did not wish to have spelling changed:

Should spelling ever be changed? (figures in %)

| By age                                    | Total | 16–25 | 26–35 | 36–45 | 56+ |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Should never be changed                   | 40    | 58    | 40    | 38    | 14  |
| Could be changed in certain circumstances | 60    | 42    | 60    | 62    | 86  |

| By class                                  | Total | AB | C1 | C2 | DE |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|----|----|----|----|
| Should never be changed                   | 40    | 46 | 47 | 33 | 20 |
| Could be changed in certain circumstances | 60    | 54 | 53 | 67 | 80 |

When asked *why* they did not want to see change, there was no simple answer. Indeed a questionnaire of this sort is not the best way of exploring this point. However there was an overriding fear of *confusion,* a belief that different schemes would cause chaos, nobody would know where they were and everything would get very complicated. Above all, while they would be prepared to change their spelling to help children and immigrants it would have to be a change they were part of. They did not wish to have different spellings for different people.

Respondents were prepared to see spellings that were deliberately different, more so in personal letters or notes than in, say, reading schemes for children:

**Deliberately different spellings acceptable** (figures in %)

| | |
|---|---|
| In advertisements | 52 |
| In a letter from a friend | 52 |
| In notes a friend makes for himself | 70 |
| In special reading schemes for children | 38 |
| In an ordinary novel | 18 |

One of the objections to different spelling in advertisements was that it would encourage children to spelling incorrectly.  The figures suggest that spelling reform might be most readily accepted for use in personal notes.

Asked whether it would be a good idea to reform *illogical* spellings, only half the people thought so:

**Changing illogical spellings desirable** (figures in %)

| By sex & age | Total | Men | Women | 16–25 | 26–35 | 36–45 | 56+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 52 | 56 | 50 | 42 | 60 | 48 | 72 |
| No | 48 | 44 | 50 | 58 | 40 | 52 | 28 |

| By class | Total | AB | C1 | C2 | DE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 52 | 54 | 24 | 73 | 80 |
| No | 48 | 46 | 76 | 27 | 20 |

Again it is the younger, and particularly the clerical C1 class, that is not in favour of change.

However respondents' view of people who set out to reform English spelling was mostly favourable when asked whether they were:

**Speling reformers** (figures in %)

| | |
|---|---|
| Misguided | 42 |
| On the right lines | 58 |

It was put to respondents that decimalisation had come and that metrication was well under way. Against this background most thought there would be some change in spelling in their lifetime, though not very much:

**Spelling reform in our lifetime?**

| (figures in %) | Total | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 18 | 31 | 12 |
| Possibly a few words | 64 | 50 | 70 |
| Some significant changes | 18 | 19 | 18 |
| A wholesale reform | - | - | - |

Women were more prepared to believe that there will be some change than men (despite the fact they would welcome it less).

Those who were good spellers, and those who believed correct spelling to be very important, thought that spelling reform was only likely to stretch to 'possibly a few words'. It was the average/poor spellers, and those who saw correct spelling as quite important/not important, who thought that spelling reform was likely to include 'some significant changes'. In other words it was those who were less happy with spelling who expected greatest change:

**Spelling reform in our lifetime?** (figures in %)

| By spelling proficiency | Total | Good | Average/poor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Possibly a few words | 64 | 73 | 62 |
| Some significant changes | 18 | 9 | 20 |
| A wholesale reform | - | - | - |
| *By importance attached to correct spelling* | Total | V.irnp'tnt | Quite/not imp'tnt |
| Not at all | 18 | 20 | 15 |
| Possibly a few words | 64 | 70 | 55 |
| Some significant changes | 18 | 10 | 30 |
| A wholesale reform | - | - | - |

Some of the potential benefits of spelling reform were welcomed much more than others. We have already seen than reforming illogical spelling was thought to be a good idea by 52%.

**Conditions for welcoming spelling reform** (figures in %)

| | |
|---|---|
| If words needed fewer letters | 32 |
| If words were spelt more like they sound | 64 |
| If some of the confusing spellings were made less confusing | 74 |

So a system based simply on reducing the number of letters (an abbreviation system) would not have the same support as one based on more phonetic spelling. Note again that the avoidance of confusion appears the strongest motivator.

However it should be noted that these replies were from street interviews with people who did not have much time to think it through, and no examples to work with. The results should be considered only as an outline guide and one that could help in future research.

With these reservations in mind, consider the figures more closely. The welcome for spelling reform is maintained, at much the same level, even among those who had least support for spelling reform:

**Conditions for welcoming spelling reform** (figures in %)

| By various indicators | Total | Women | Age 16–25 | Class C1 | Good spellers | Correctness v.imp'tnt |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| If words needed fewer letters | 32 | 26 | 33 | 6 | 9 | 43 |
| If words were spelt more like they sound | 64 | 59 | 58 | 47 | 55 | 67 |
| If confusing spellings less confusing | 74 | 74 | 83 | 59 | 73 | 77 |

It is in the clerical, C1 class that there are fewest people who would welcome spelling reform. However even in this group a majority would welcome reforms that would make confusing spellings less confusing.

Earlier in the questionnaire, many respondents thought spelling 'should never be changed'. Even so, a surprising number of them would welcome some of the possible benefits of spelling reform when it was put to them later on:

**Conclusion**

Some of the results of spelling reform would attract a wide level of support, others less so. These preferences have only been broadly indicated in this research but should be taken into account in the development and promotion of spelling reform schemes.

# QUESTIONNAIRE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Could I ask you some questions about spelling of? | |
| Q.1 | Do you consider yourself a | |
| | Good speller | A |
| | Average speller | B |
| | Poor speller | C |
| Q.2 | How important do you think it is to spell correctly? | |
| | Very important | D |
| | Quite important | E |
| | Not important | F |
| Q.3 | Forgetting for a moment the mistakes at children or the newspapers make, have you ever seen words deliberately spelt in a different way? | |
| | Yes | Y |
| | No | N |
| | If Yes, where? | |
| | In advertisements | G |
| | In product names | H |
| | In books teaching children to read | I |
| | Used to help show the pronunciation | J |
| Q.4 | In general, and do you think that spellings: | |
| | Should never be changed | K |
| | Could be changed in certain circumstances | L |
| Q.5 | If never, why? | |
| | Like it as it is | M |
| | Spoils the language | N |
| | Taken so long to learn no wish to change | O |
| | Other | P |
| Q.6 | Would you be prepared to see spellings that are deliberately different: | |
| | In advertisements | Q |
| | In a letter from a friend | R |
| | In the notes a friend makes for himself | S |
| | In special reading schemes for children | T |
| | In an ordinary novel | U |
| Q.7 | Do you think it is a good idea to reform some of the more illogical English spellings? | |
| | Yes | Y |
| | No | N |
| Q.8 | What is your view of people who set out to reform English spelling? Are they: | |
| | Misguided | A |
| | On the right lines | B |
| Q.9 | Now that decimalization has come, and metrication is well under way, how much do you think spelling will be reformed in your lifetime? | |
| | Not at all | |
| | Possibly a few words | |
| | Some significant changes | |
| | A wholesale reform | |
| Q.10 | Would you welcome spelling reform if, as a result | |
| | Words would be written with fewer letters | Y/N |
| | Words were spelt more like they sound | Y/N |
| | Some of the confusing spellings were made less confusing | Y/N |

# 7. The Implications of Spelling Reform for Skilled Readers
## John S Kerr

Dr Kerr is a cognitive psychologist by training and a researcher in various fields by necessity. At present completing a project on the optimum design of traffic signals at Aston University in Birmingham, he will shortly be taking up the post of research fellow in the Human Psychopharmacology unit at Leeds University. The following contains some of the ideas he presented at the Society's Fifth International Conference in July 1987.

**Introduction**
Simplified spelling is not of obvious benefit to the reader already skilled at using traditional orthography. In fact it must be expected to be detrimental, at least initially. What might be the effects of reformed spelling on the reading process? This short article consists of the initial reactions of a psycholinguist to the implications of simplified spelling. Some of the ideas presented here are hypotheses rather than facts, and remain to be tested empirically.

**Concepts, not letters**
Most of the time spent during reading is taken up by the processes involved in understanding the text rather than simply decoding the symbols: cognition rather than perception. This is the case with text which presents both simple and complex ideas. In one common view of the reading process, the readers create a mental model of what the text is about from their own knowledge and experience, and use this model in conjunction with the information contained in the text to build an accurate representation of the discourse. This is rather slow compared with the tasks 'downline' involved in recognising the actual words. Alternatively the 'autonomy' position argues that the reading process consists of discrete operations: recognising patterns, retrieving meanings, parsing, integrating and understanding: again, decoding the symbols and recognising words is only a small, if essential, part of the process.

Word recognition can occur with or without phonological mediation (turning the word into its sound). Skilled readers will tend to by-pass this stage whereas learners and poor readers can be seen to be 'sounding out' the words, even using sub-vocal speech (the reason why *Sun* readers' lips are said to move). When confronted with new or lengthy words, skilled readers will revert to this strategy and use the grapheme to phoneme conversion rules (although this procedure will not necessarily yield the correct answer – a fact that is the raison d'être of the Simplified Spelling Society). This effect will probably account for most of any detriment that readers have initially with revised spelling; they will be unable to use the faster access mode. Disruption of smooth reading will occur with new forms which look like old ones e.g. the Cut Spelling form *add* (added). Other CS forms may present problems in that they become very short (e.g. *qy* for *quay*) and can therefore be 'missed', although this will be countered to an extent related to their importance in the text.

Changing the spelling will have different effects depending on where the change occurs: certain parts of words, notably the beginnings and ends, are more important than others. In general changes here are more detrimental to reading than alterations of medial letters. An implication of this is that information from peripheral vision will not contribute: readers use information to the right of what they are looking at to 'prime' the upcoming words, so that when seen they are already part processed. The information is mostly based on the shape of the words and the initial and final letters. The changes in word shape themselves may be disruptive. Any differences in reading speed that these effects cause however will be small compared with the process of conceptual

understanding, which will not change with spelling: a rose is a roze is a rohz. Conversely readers of a system like CS which economises on letters may not read faster, for the same reasons.

**Polysemy & Context**
When spelling is simplified, there will probably be an increase in the number of words with two or more meanings: words which sound alike (presumably in a standard pronunciation) would be spelt alike in any phonographic system (with exceptions for special cases perhaps). This will result in an increase in lexical ambiguity, though this will not be a problem, at least for skilled readers, since polysemous words already abound in English e.g. *rose* has over a hundred distinct meanings.

One reason why lexical ambiguity is not a problem is the way that context influences the interpretation of words at a number of levels, even in unstructured lists such as *knitters, seamstresses & sewers* versus *drainpipes, gutters & sewers*. The effect of information contained in the text and in the reader's memory about what to expect in the discourse can be very constraining, and is a major aspect of understanding written language. *The skier was buried by the sudden*... raspberry or avalanche? In fact readers are rarely aware of the alternative possibilities of what they are reading. *The Smiths saw the Rocky Mountains flying to California* is straightforward until it is pointed out that the sentence could be part of a science fiction story about aliens rearranging the geography of North America using anti-gravity machines. (Note also the assumption that the Smiths were flying in an aeroplane and not by flapping their arms.) Language is rarely used without some context, and context will rarely fail to disambiguate the language.

**Conclusion**
Revised spelling (depending on the nature of the revisions) will have little effect on the reader who is already familiar with traditional orthography: a conclusion which is supported empirically by some of the work of Valerie Yule. It is not yet clear whether reformed spelling will confer any advantage on the reader who becomes familiar with it. The advantages of simplified spelling are more clearly in language learning, with certain systems also economising on production and storage.

**Useful Readings**

Clark, H H & Clark E V (1977) *Psychology and Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics,* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Garnham A (1985) *Psycholinguistics: Central Topics*, London: Methuen

Johnson-Laird P N (1983) *Mental Models: Towards a Cognitive Science of Language, Inference and Consciousness,* Cambridge: CUP

Kennedy R A (1985) *The Psychology of Reading,* London: Methuen

Sanford A I & Garrod S C (1981) *Understanding Written Language: Explorations in Comprehension beyond the Sentence,* London: Wiley

# 8. Points of Debate: Commenting on Kingman
## Chris Upward

In the autumn of 1986 the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, MP, set up a Committee of Inquiry into English Language Teaching, chaired by Sir John Kingman, Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University. In the Society's **1987 No.3 *Journal*** (Item 5) we printed the Committee's terms of reference, along with the Society's submission to it. **The Committee's Report** was published in March 1988 (obtainable from HMSO bookshops for £4.50) and the Society was invited to submit comments, which we now print below together with the accompanying letter.

**Accompanying Letter**

HMI Mr Peter Gannon
Secretary to the Committee of Inquiry in English Language Teaching
Department of Education and Science

Dear Mr Gannon

We were glad to receive the Report of the Committee of inquiry into the Teaching of English Language and would like to comment on the aspect with which we as a Society are chiefly concerned.

We are pleased to see that the Report reflects some of the recommendations made in our submission. However we find that it overstates the regularity of English spelling and ignores the serious concomitant educational problems. What the Report says may apply to a language like Spanish, but it is inadequate for English, which is recognised as having the most irregular writing system of all languages that use the Roman alphabet. While we agree that teachers should be aware of and exploit such regularities as do occur in English, we think it essential for them also to be aware of the irregularities. It is above all important to understand that it is neither the stupidity and laziness of pupils nor the incompetence of teachers that are to blame for poor spelling in English. Poor spelling is the inevitable result of the antiquated, unplanned writing system we now have.

We attach a paper giving more detailed comments of the Report's statements on spelling, which we hope can be taken into account in future deliberations. We would add that we are informed by representatives of the i.t.a. Federation and the British Dyslexia Association that they generally share our view of the inadequacy of the Report's treatment of English spelling.

Since we also hope we may be able to make some useful contributions to the English Working Group for the National Curriculum, we would be glad to receive a copy of the relevant Press Notice which gives details of it and any other information that we may require for that purpose.

Yours sincerely,
For the Simplified Spelling Society
    Christopher Jolly, Chairman
    Christopher Upward, Journal Editor

**Detailed Comments from the Simplified Spelling Society
on the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Language**

On pp.55–56 the Report recommends attainment targets for spelling at age 7 as follows:
"1. Understand main correspondences between letters and speech-sounds, 5. Spell common
words correctly, Understand that spelling obeys rules." This view of English spelling as essentially
regular pervades the whole Report, but unfortunately it reflects neither the systemic nor the
psychological realities of the writing system.

The systemic realities are as follows: there is no agreement on how many speech-sounds the
English language should be described as possessing; over 10% of the letters used in English
spelling have no corresponding speech-sound or are arbitrarily superfluous to its representation
(e.g. <b> in *debt,* <c, m> in *accommodate*); not all English speech-sounds have a recognised
spelling correspondence (/ʒ/ does not); most vowels and some consonants have numerous
unpredictably competing spelling correspondences (one listing gives over 600 spellings for 38
speech-sounds, but even larger numbers have been claimed); not only the letters but also many
graphemic combinations (e.g. <ough>) have to be mastered; and overall the system is
characterised by a high degree of irregularity that affects common words especially (e.g. *one, two,
who).*

To tell 7 year olds that spelling obeys rules and at the same time to expect them to spell common
words correctly is psychologically far too sophisticated an approach for that age group, indeed
perhaps for any age group. How are 7 year olds to reconcile the spellings of common words with
the notion that spelling is governed by rules? The i.t.a. experience shows that it is perfectly
possible, indeed psychologically highly beneficial, to teach beginners to write by spelling rules. But
this cannot be combined with teaching 'correct' spellings, as the term is conventionally understood.

The truth is that the system is antiquated and not designed in accordance with rules that learners
can readily grasp. There is only one spelling rule applicable to alphabetic orthographies: it is that
there should be predictable correspondences between letters and sounds; but in the infinitely rich
tapestry that is the English writing system, that basic rule is only sporadically apparent.

The Report's implication that English spelling can be mastered simply by learning rules is at
variance with centuries of experience and with a proper analysis of how the system operates.
While sets of spelling patterns can be helpful, they frequently contradict each other (as the
Report's own examples demonstrate) and are rarely reliable, so that ultimately a very large number
of spellings have to be learnt individually. Even Margaret Donaldson's warning on p.67 of the
Report that it "will inevitably take a child some time to learn all the sets of correspondences"
misses the point. Even if the child learns the 600 or so correspondences, that will be of little help in
spelling real words. The result is that very large numbers of children never achieve an acceptable
level of competence and even university graduates are mostly prone to quite frequent errors. Quite
simply, the system is unsuitable for the aim of universal literacy.

An important reason why the Report does not face up to this problem is that it never defines
orthographic "regularity". As a result it becomes involved in the kind of confusion exemplified on
p.34, §5, where it is stated that the pupil Ann's "spelling errors show that she has begun to
comprehend the patterns of English spelling". The context suggests that the author of this
statement was unaware of the profound truth it contains: when Ann writes *gardon*, she is showing

she knows that this pattern is perfectly possible in English (e.g. *pardon),* but that there is no rule saying that in this word it is inappropriate, so that unless she has learnt the individual spelling, she has to make a random guess. Just how inadequate such patterns are as a guide to English spelling we shall now show by closer analysis of some of the Report's more detailed statements on spelling.

On p.20, §7 calls for "A systematic appreciation of the writing system of English" as "an informed basis for considering such matters as: ... how much regularity there is in English spelling: sound-spelling relations in English *(e.g. hop/hope, rat/rate, sit/site)...*". But while appreciation of such patterns as *hop/hope* is very important, it has to be seen alongside the use of <o> in such forms as *come, gone, soap, toes, go, holy, yolk, gross, patrol* where the pattern does not apply. Furthermore, teachers at least should be aware that the spelling pattern of *hope* is psychologically problematic, especially for beginners, because although English is normally written from left to right, the reader here has to register the extreme right-hand letter before the pronunciation of the main vowel two letters to its left can be determined; in other words the reader has to operate simultaneously from left to right and from right to left. This pattern is a source of real difficulty for beginners, and has widespread disruptive effects elsewhere in the writing system that cause publishers and printers inconvenience and expense.

P.20, §7, also points to "word-pattern spellings in English (e.g. electric, electricity, electrician, where the spelling of the stem *electric* remains the same, though c is pronounced differently in each word)". However in terms of regular sound-symbol correspondence these patterns are instances of irregularity, not regularity, and if pupils are taught, as the Report recommends, the "main correspondences between letters and speech-sounds", their first instinct should be to write perhaps *electrik, electrisity, electrishn.* And if it does occur to pupils to apply the word-pattern technique, they also have to know of the pitfalls: that in many cases the technique breaks down *(technical, technician* are no guide to *technique, speech* is no guide to *speak, comparative* is no guide to *comparison* etc), and indeed that <c> in general is a particularly volatile letter, with word-patterns failing to operate in such cases as *mouse/mice, defence/defensive, advice/advise, mechanic/mechanism,* and with even subtler distinctions necessary *between practice/practise.* Furthermore, the word-pattern of *electric, electricity* is merely one possible alternative to sound-symbol correspondence for determining the spelling *of electrician* (and its logic might even be taken too far if it led to *electrify* being spelt *electricy).* Pupils can also resort to the technique of matching the sound in different words, in which case there is a choice of for instance *electricean, electrician, electricion, electrishion, electrission, electrisian, electrition.* Worse still, there are many cases where even a combination of word-pattern and sound-pattern techniques breaks down: *face/facial, race/racial* are no guide to *space/spatial, palace/palatial.* In short pupils have no way of knowing which technique, if any, can be used.

The word-pattern *electric, electricity, electrician* not merely exemplifies an irregularity. It also offers an object lesson in language change, showing how a writing system becomes more irregular over time unless it is periodically modernised. (And here we regret that more attention was not paid in the Report to the historical development of English spelling, since it is here rather than in "rules" that the secrets of the system are to be explained.) Thus formerly the pronunciation of the second <c> in *electric* was distinguished from that in *electricity* by an additional <k>, giving *electrick;* but under American influence the <k> dropped out of use in the nineteenth century. And originally the <c> in the ending <-ician> would have had the same value as it has in *electricity,* but in the course of time most post-accentual <ci> sequences have been assimilated into the palatalised

pronunciation we most commonly hear today (as in *special,* but only partially or sometimes not at all in *speciality).*

But that is not the end of the complications inherent in this particular group of words. The consonant patterns exemplified in *electric, electricity, electrician* are merely a small section of a much longer string of ambiguous, overlapping sound-symbol correspondences in English, stretching from <q> at one extreme, through <k, c, s> in the middle, and arriving at <z> at the other extreme, but including an even larger variety of di- and trigraphs such as <qu, ch, sh, cz, sch> etc. as well. Considering just <c> here, we note a few of its different functions in *cat, cell, cello, musician, child, acquire,* and there is a similar bewildering variety of ways in which the sound of the second <c> in *electrician* can be spelt: <c, ce, ch, chs, ci, s, sc, sch, sh, si, ss, su, ti> and, in conjunction with the sound /k/, by <x>.

All this, and much much more, we currently expect learners to master. It is inevitably a time-consuming, frustrating process crowned with limited success. Many of the difficulties could in fact be quite simply removed, but until such time as they are, it is important that teachers at least have a sound appreciation of the system as it now is.

Overemphasis on rules on the other hand will encourage a shallow, simplistic approach that does not begin to take account of the real complexity of the system.

We will now briefly explain why we think some of the Report's other references to spelling are similarly inadequate.

On p.20 the Report says "the way grammatical words in English tend to have shorter spelling patterns than full lexical words which sound the same *(but/butt, by/bye, in/inn, no/know, nor/gnaw, not/knot, so/sew, to/two,* etc.)". Such an observation is no more useful than to remark that insects are smaller than mammals; and there are exceptions: with the pairs *some/sum, whether/wether* for instance the grammatical word is the longer of the two. Whether this 'rule' is of any help to the learner must be very doubtful, since the difference between grammatical and lexical words is by no means always clear. Furthermore there is an earlier and simpler explanation for these spelling patterns which a child could more readily apply: commoner words are usually shorter.

P.20, §8 refers to "the *regular* patterning of word forms in English (so that one recognises that *tsetse* is a relatively recent borrowing from another language since it does not fit into the regular patterns)". Presumably it is the spelling of *tsetse* that is here being alluded to; but in that case, as we have already seen, the idea of the *regular* patterning of English word forms does beg some fundamental questions. However if it is here being suggested that common spelling patterns acquired from other languages are worth studying, then, priorities permitting, we would agree.

P.20, §8: "the way in which regular plurals and past tenses are formed in English, and the patterning among the so-called irregular forms (e.g. *drink/drank/drunk* ... )". Again, it is not clear whether it is the written or spoken forms that are being referred to here, but it should be pointed out that the spellings of the "irregular" *drink/drank/drunk* are entirely regular, whereas the rules for spelling the "regular" <-ed> past tense forms are unnecessarily complex, or even uncertain (what is the past tense of *to benefit* or *to bias?),* (and a source of frequent error.

-—— "regular patterns of spelling ... among derived words which contain the same stem (e.g.

*declaim-declamation)*". This pattern directly conflicts with the word-pattern 'rule', which would require the spelling *declaimation* . Again, how can children learn which rule to apply? Misspellings such *as pronounciation* are a common result of this confusion.

P.20: "the ways in which compound words are formed in English (e.g. *sunrise, birth control, window-cleaner) and* the conventions applying to writing them as one word or two, and whether or not to use a hyphen". This is perhaps the area in which fewest conventions exist, to the great chagrin of publishers and lexicographers. Usage also changes, so that the form *to day* then became *to-day* and except among the oldest writers is now normally *today.*

P.30, Fig.4: "Children gradually acquire the forms of language... Whereas some aspects of acquisition are fairly rapid (most children have acquired a full range of vowels and consonants by the time they are 6 or 7), other aspects develop much later (for example, control of spelling patterns and conventions of punctuation)". We would stress that this statement relates to learning *English* spelling, and not to more regular writing systems which are quickly acquired. We would also question the analogy between learning English spelling and learning speech-sounds: the latter will be fully achieved in all normal cases, whereas the former will only be imperfectly mastered in most cases. Mastery of English spelling is not part of the natural process of maturation, but depends on a great deal of conscious learning and a good memory, and in all too many cases fails to produce "control".

P.37, §13: "Through the use of word-processors pupils ... will begin to talk about the appropriate... spelling." We wonder what the evidence for this expectation is. When a spelling corrector is available, word-processors discourage concern for correct spelling, just as the use of calculators discourages proficiency in mental arithmetic. For other reasons too we would expect computers if anything to accelerate the abandonment of traditional spelling: they encourage the use of abbreviations, acronyms, neologisms and more regular American spellings (they have not however yet resolved the question of how to *spell disc/disk).*

P.52, p.55: We think it is only realistic that correct English spelling should be an attainment target for both age 16 and age I 1, but we think that if the Report had considered why failure at age I I is taken for granted, some of its basic assumptions would have had to be called into question.

**We recognise that the Committee was hardly likely to consider our preferred solution to the problem (simplifying spellings) as falling within its remit. However, we were surprised that the Committee's Report did not even acknowledge that a problem exists, suggesting instead that regularity is a useful feature of the English spelling system. We therefore felt it necessary to write and correct some of the misconceptions that appeared to underlie this view. If the Report is to serve as an effective foundation for the work of the English Working Group for the National Curriculum with regard to spelling, it must recognise the difficulties that children and teachers face in real life. We therefore hope that our comments will be communicated to the Working Group.**

Finally, to put our comments in a fuller context, we will close with an analogy: an unnecessary educational burden was removed by the reform of the British currency and Imperial weights and measures; a much greater burden could be lifted by judiciously simplifying English spelling. We urge the Working Party to reflect on this and take appropriate advice.

# 9. Feasibility of Spelling Reform
## Patrick Hanks & Chris Upward

In introducing his paper at the Society's 1987 conference, Patrick Hanks explained his doubts about the feasibility of spelling reform. They are here set out in the form of a dialogue with Chris Upward, who tries to suggest ways in which such doubts could be overcome and whose remarks are here printed in Cut Spelling (mainly omission of redundant letters).

### *Hanks*

I have to start by confessing a deep scepticism about spelling reform. It is not that I hold any brief for the absurd and anomalous conventions of English spelling. My scepticism is purely pragmatic: it is the one that is based on expectations of difficulties that would arise during implementation of any system of spelling reform. Spelling reform, if it happens at all, will happen either gradually or at a single stroke. I find it hard to visualize either of these possibilities as a realistic scenario. Look first at what a gradualist reform might be like. Gradualism necessarily implies the continued coexistence over a period of time of a number of competing conventions. What is more, by definition a gradualist approach implies that at least one set of these competing conventions would be in a state of flux: continually changing in the direction of an ideal as the notion of improving the conventions won increasingly widespread social approval. Members of the Simplified Spelling Society will, I am sure, have considered more deeply than I have been able to the pragmatic implications of such a situation. I should be very happy to be reassured, but I think the chaos during any transitional period would most probably confuse many of the very people who spelling reform is most intended to help: those who have difficulties in coming to terms with an arbitrary and irrational set of conventions.

### *Upward*

These fears of confusion caused by shifting speling norms are ofn herd and must be taken seriusly. But for sevrl reasns I think confusion is not inevitbl, and one can be reassured if one envisajs reform in practice and relativistic terms. We hav to considr such things as th experience of othr languajs, th competing speling forms we alredy have in traditionl orthografy (TO), th kind of reform to be introduced, and th way it wud probbly hav to be implementd and used.
Speling reform is th rule rathr than th exception in th developmnt of riting systms. English is th only major languaj using th roman alfabet that has not reformd or made som jestur towards reforming its speling this century. Th experience of othr languajs shos that reform is perfectly feasbl, altho natrly at first ther ar competing conventions – at th very least, for som decades most oldr peple spel som words difrntly from yungr peple ho hav been taut th new forms. But th experience of othr languajs also shos that reform can be fairly smooth, as with spanish, or it can be fraut with passionat controversy and confusion, as with norwejan. Speling reform can be carid out eithr wisely or unwisely, and speling reformrs must sho that they hav a wise procedur to ofr for english.

Th next point is th amount of variation within TO. At a world levl, we note diverjnces in th conventions folod in Britn and th USA, with Canada and Australia likely to fal somwher in between; and even in th USA 'british' spelings ar somtimes encountrd, as ar 'americn' forms in Britn. On th levl of publishing, we find that publishrs usuly hav ther own styl sheets, hose conventions ar ofn not folod by authrs in ther riting, wich then has to be laboriusly 'corectd'. On th levl of singl words, it is surprising how many of th less comn words in english hav even today stil not aquired an agreed speling (perhaps th Cobuild corpus cud provide data on this); two exampls ar th variant forms *gibe, gybe, jibe* and *lichi, litchi, lichee, lychee*, al listd in Collins English Dictionry. Finaly, and by far th

most serius manifestation of th inadequacy of TO, is th infinit variety found in th speling of ordnry peple, especialy but not exclusivly those hose education has stopd short of th most sofisticated levls of litracy.

### Hanks
Yes, it is certainly true, for example, that competing conventions for the spelling of several words – for instance *judg(e)ment, acknowledg(e)ment*, and all the *-ise/-ize* words are found regularly in print, while professional users of the written word — journalists – can be observed equally regularly using three or four different spellings of, say, *gove(r)(n)ment*, before the post-editors get to work!

### Upward
That's ryt, and these competing conventions ar a sorce of endless trubl, both for th most authoritativ of publishrs, and for th educationly disadvantajd struglling for th rudimnts of litracy. Th most modest kind of speling reform wud simply recomend acceptnce, from amongst th competing forms found in TO, of those that wer fonograficly most regulr. Thus *gaol* cud be banishd in favor of *jail*, and most americn forms cud be adoptd worldwide. Far from giving rise to competing conventions, such a reform wud remove existing variants. Publishrs wud save themselvs time and expense if they agreed on a comn styl on these lines. Howevr, a Stage I reform cud aford to go furthr, and even if it wer not imediatly or universly acceptd, th competing conventions it produced need be no mor confusing, and wud probbly be less confusing, than those we se today in TO.

A word about gradulism: just as TO alredy contains competing conventions, so th term gradulism alredy describes how english speling evolvs at presnt. Th problm with this gradulism, as we no it, is that only a few isolated words ar  simplifyd or regulrised (e.g. in th past century or so *shew* has becom *show*, *phantasy* has becom *fantasy*, and *mediaeval* has becom *medieval*. Wile these sporadic chanjes ar al clear improvemnts, they ar not systmatic, and ther impact on th riting systm as a hole is minute. Systmatic speling reform (howevr limitd) on the othr hand wud proceed, I imajn, not so much graduly in that way as by jerks, as new genrations of children (evry 10 or 15 years?) wer successivly taut mor and mor regulrised spelings. I wud think th intrvl between reforms shudn't be laid down beforhand: a secnd reform wud only be launchd wen it was jujd that society had suficiently digestd th first. Furthrmor, ther wud undoutdly be lesns from th first reform that wud need to be bilt into th planning of th secnd.

### Hanks
Well, I think you have a very optimistic view of the flexibilty of primary school teachers, if you believe that every ten or fifteen years they will be willing to overhaul voluntarily the spelling systems that they teach. I believe that if it is left to voluntary action a situation could arise where some teachers are teaching reformed spelling of one sort or another, while others are insisting on the 'correctness of TO. This of course would have potentially damaging effects on some children, for example chose who had to change schools. Is it not the case that competition between TO and the Initial Teaching Alphabet had precisely this sort of adverse side effect? Are we agreed that i.t.a. must now be judged a heroic failure? If so, perhaps one of the lessons for its failure was that some children got caught in the cross-fire. You of course will say that i.t.a. was the wrong sort of reform; I will say that this is a probable consequence of any attempt at spelling reform.

### Upward
The i.t.a. was not a speling reform, but a special alfabet desynd as a medium for teaching basic litracy skils. It can only be cald a failur in th sense that in recent years it has been less and less used. In fact th Simplified Spelling Society's late Presidnt, John Downing, carid out th definitiv reserch on th efects of i.t.a., and he showd that th tales of adverse results ar unfoundd: not merely do children reard on i.t.a. aquire litracy skils fastr, mor soundly, and with far hyr motivation (as i.t.a.

teachrs confirm), but ther superir skils ar transferd to TO wen they chanje over. Th i.t.a. experience also demnstrated how speling reform cud be orgnised (as wel as shoing som pitfals). Obviusly speling reform cant be left just to th initiativ of each teachr, ther wud hav to be ful coordination on th improved forms that wer to be taut, and ther wud hav to be reading material that used th new forms. Howevr, th i.t.a. experience tels us abov al that teachrs ar positivly keen to use systms that make ther teaching mor successful and mor rewarding. Not to hav to force children to memrise difrnt speling patrns as in *are:bar:bare, much:hutch:touch, when:went, have:shave* releves teachrs of a considrbl but unecesry burdn.

### Hanks

Of course, if the government introduced regulations for spelling reform, the chances of success would improve immeasurably. But it would have to be a national decision: the 'confusion' argument still applies if regional authorizes are free to choose their own spelling system. I just can't see that spelling reform is going to come very high on the agenda of any political party in the foreseeable future.

### Upward

I hav to admit I find these things equaly hard to imajn in presnt circumstnces. But I wud also say that I beleve one reasn wy they ar so hard to imajn is that no realistic sceme for a first-staje reform has yet been aird in public debate or by th authoritis concernd. Such a sceme is of corse a prerequisit for reform even to be seriusly considrd. The aim of th Simplified Spelling Society is firstly to devise such a sceme, and secndly to get it discussd – and not just nationly, but intrnationly. A sceme that wud not be equaly advantajeus world-wide wud, I sujest, be positivly danjerus, in that it cud thretn th world-wide standrd of ritn English.

### Hanks

Let's consider now the issue of prescriptivism. As a lexicographer, I have been steeped all my working life in a tradition that sees the lexicographer's role as firmly descriptive. Lexicographers in the mainstream British and American tradition have always vigorously rejected the occasional attempts by journalists and others to thrust a prescriptivist role on them. We see our role as being to describe the facts, not to create them. If spelling reform necessarily involved some person or group in *prescribing* what the new conventional spellings are to be, that to me as a lexicographer is anathema. This doesn't mean we don't want to help make English easy to learn; rather the reverse.

### Upward

These attitudes ar of corse an importnt part of th prevailing orthografic ethos, and perhaps this is th only stance that lexicografrs can adopt in th face of th protean monstr than is TO. But altho lexicografrs may dislike prescriptivism, teachrs and publishrs ar of necesity hyly prescriptivist, and tho lexicografrs' self-imaj may be anti-prescriptivist, they ar objectivly reinforcing th prescriptivism that othrwise domnates our litracy-cultur: dictnris ar th sorce of orthografic law – ask any Scrabble freak. Th problm is, to prescribe obscure ilojicalitis is an unedifying task to perform.

### Hanks

As a matter of fact, one of the main aims of the COBUILD Dictionary, of which I am managing editor, is to help learners to write English naturally, idiomatically, and inconspicuously (not merely to read and understand). I am therefore naturally strongly interested in any device that will help learners, whether they are foreign learners, second-language learners, or first-language students who are acquiring literacy skills.

So the Cobuild approach has been to devote great attention to finding out just what the conventions of English are, and then reporting these as reliably and clearly as possible to the user.

Our principles are totally descriptive. The introduction of spelling reform, of course, implies a strong element of prescriptivism. Would this help a learner, and if so, how could it be achieved in practice? Only if the new conventions were clearly prescribed and adherence to them enforced, it seems.

### Upward

If specific reforms to TO wer agreed, we must asume they wud be chanjes in th direction of fonografic regularity and ecomny. Thus *debt* wud be ritn *det* in keeping with th fonografic forms *bet, get, let, set* etc. (rathr than alyning the latr with *debt* as *bebt, gebt, lebt, sebt*); and *apple, chapel* would merj as *apl, chapl* rathr than ambiguusly as *apel* (contrast *compel*, or cumbrsmly as *chapple*; and *abbreviation* wud be ritn as *abreviation*, in keeping with its cognate *abridge* and with french *abreviation* and spanish *abreviación* (one wud not alyn *abridge* with *abbreviaton* as *abbridge*). Ther is no question that reducing th numbr of variations in th speling of a givn foneme or a sylabl like this makes th task of lerning esir for students and teachrs alike. Evry teachr nos that it is th iregularitis wich cause th gretst dificltis by far, and teachrs ho hav used i.t.a. (as wel as teachrs of such languajs as spanish, hungarian, finish) wil confirm that these dificltis hardly arise wen children ar taut a larjly fonografic orthografy.

But as u point out, such chanjes imply a prescriptivist aproach to english speling, for wich ther is at presnt no authority. How cud one envisaj such a reform being introduced? In th pluralist societis that domnate th english-speaking world, th idea of speling-reform by diktat wud be unacceptbl, hence impracticl, indeed virtuly inconcevebl. But it is not inconcevebl that educationists (i.e. teachrs, academics, administrators and politicians) and publishrs from th main english-speaking cuntris cud confer, as hapnd at th 1986 Australian Styl Council, and agree to recomend certn conventions for use aftr a givn date with futur intakes to scools, and for use by publishrs. For educationists, th quality of regularity wud be a prime desidratum, wile for publishrs econmy wud be an esential incentive. If th reform wer fairly modest it wud not matr unduly if not al cuntris or publishrs acceptd th reform, but if th benefits wer substantial and self-evidnt, th incentiv to its adoption wud probbly ensure that th new styl spred rapidly. Such a senario is of corse necesrly stil very vage, but if it apears sycolojicly and economicly convincing, then it may sujest a practicl stratejy wich reformrs cud pursu. Inevitbly, tho, chanjes in th stratejy wud ocur and compromises wud be needd, as each step in th process took concrete shape.

### Hanks

The gains of learning a writing system in which there is some fairly straightforward relationship between sound and symbol in at least one of the standard accents of the language are, I suspect, short-term. It is very clear that simplified spelling helps some students to achieve speedy fluency. My Japanese friends tell me that the aim for a Japanese child is to be able to read and write around 2,000 Japanese words in kanji by the early teens. The aim for an English-speaking child, of course, along with those who use more logically alphabetic systems, is to be able in principle to write the whole language by that age – at any rate to be able to write as much of it as he or she knows. The value of simplified spelling in terms of gaining immediate fluency is undeniable. Equally undeniable is that not all students need such help: some are more willing than others to accept deep-rooted arbitrariness. The problems (if problems they be) for learners of simplified spelling in a gradualistic world arise when they come to a second learning stage, in which the student who has reached a degree of fluency in reading and writing one set of conventions has to go back to the drawing board in order to learn a whole new set of conventions. It would be even more complicated if one set of conventions was shifting.

The difficulties of a student faced with a number of different written and printed representations of the same phonological form would actually be increased by their multiplicity. Uncertainty as to what

word is actually meant by a written form could arise from the existence of competing conventions; the student would need to take the extra steps of working out which set of conventions was being used in any given text. There would also come a stage when the student would have to learn to write in more than one set of conventions, and to know a set of procedures for choosing between them.

I therefore think that gradualism is out as a means of achieving widespread spelling reform.

### Upward
I wud only se th gains of speling reform as short-term in a very restrictd context: th able child wud lern a simplr orthografy fastr, but having lernt it, wud then use it in much th same way as TO. But in evry othr respect, th gains of reform wud be permnnt and long-term. Th enormus problm of ilitracy cud be gretly reduced, to th long-term benefit of th individuls concernd and of society as a hole. Al riting, wethr day-to-day jotings by privat persns such as shoping lists, or th inumerabl pajes of script produced by professionl riters (academics, authrs, jurnlists, secretris) wud be jenrated significntly fastr and with fewr errs. Children in scool wud need less time for al tasks involving riting, wich wud eithr enable them to rite mor in th same time, or else fre them to devote mor time to othr educationl activitis. In a world wher english has becom th prime medium of comunication, al steps to enable non-nativ speakrs to mastr it mor esily wil be of benefit to mankind as a hole, diseminating nolej mor efectivly and improving undrstanding between nations. In a world wher th ecologicl concern for resorces is becoming evr more urjnt, a significnt reduction in th demand for paper is also a long-term gain not to be despised.

In terms of student sycolojy, it is tru that th most able students can mostly mastr TO to a reasnbl degree, despite its deep-rootd arbitrriness. But I dont think th problm is one of *wilingness* to mastr TO, but of th *ability* to do so: wile most peple can mastr a regulr, simpl systm, mastry of TO requires a hyly developd visul-aural memry wich most peple just do not hav. Furthrmor ther is even som reserch evidnce (quoted in Downings *Evaluating the Initial Teaching Alphabet*) sujesting that being forced to mastr a non-lojicl systm like TO may damaj th capacity of th developing mind to disern and exploit lojicl patrns wher they do exist. We also hav to considr prioritis: can an advanced industrial (or post-industrl) society aford to accept a systm wich prevents th majority of its population acheving ther ful potential in litracy? But even that élite wich dos functionly mastr TO sufrs from th experience, in terms of time wasted, as wel as in residul uncertnty as wel th speling of uncomn words. I can vouch for this from my persnl experience.

Th fear that peple wud hav to go bak to th drawing bord and relern to read if th speling wer reformd is in fact sycolojicly unfoundd. Lerning to read is a seprat skil from lerning th speling systm of a givn languaj. Thus adults soon becom acustmd to reading even such a radicly difrnt riting systm as i.t.a. Similrly a jenration that had been reard on a Staje 1 reform wud hav no dificlty in reading a mor radicly reformd Staje 2. Staje 2 wud not introduce a "whole new set of conventions", it wud be just one mor step in th direction that Staje 1 had alredy taken. Thus if a child lernt to rite *acomodation*, it wud hav no dificlty reading TO *accommodation* or th "competing convention" so frequently found today *accomodation*; nor wud any adult ho had been taut *accommodation* be puzld by *acomodation*; and if then in a Staje 2 th word wer spelt *acomodashon*, that 'child' (by now adult) wud hav no dificlty reading it eithr, tho it myt not choose to rite th new form. Th ke to the way in wich stajes cud folo successivly on from one anothr is compatblity: new forms must be compatbl with th old forms, in th sense of being imediatly decodebl by peple ho hav previusly only evr encountrd th preexisting conventions.

Nor do I think students wud hav dificlty choosing between conventions: if students ar taut *det, api, chapl, acomodation* insted of ther mor cumbrsrn, unpredictbl TO equivlnts, they wud scarcely

hesitate as to wich to use, any mor than we hesitate today between *music* and *musick*: as wel as being conventionl, th shortr form is selfevidntly mor convenient. Th discardd TO forms wud rapidly aquire an oldfashnd aura, and people wud no mor think of riting *debt* for *det* than today they think of riting *shew* for *show*.

Nevrthless it is clearly importnt, tacticly, to demnstrate to th public that a useful speling reform cud be introduced in english that wud intrfere minimly with ther establishd reading habits, and this is a major reasn for proposing reform by stajes: it is then posbl to ensure that no staje entails serius visul disturbnce to th readr. Th rationale behind Cut Speling is based on th same considration: omiting redundnt letrs has a far less disruptiv efect on th apearance of words than dos actuly substituting letrs.

One must also distinguish between reading and riting. Since re-educating th mass of english-reading adults thruout th world is obviusly impracticl, a Staje I reform must be desynd so that al adults can read th new forms without instruction and with th minimm of dificlty and practice. On th othr hand few adults wud need to chanje a lifetimes riting habits. Only those professionl text-producers ho had to produce text in th reformd orthografy wud evr need to lern it. And for them th new speling rules wud hav to be simpl, such as *dont dubl consnnts unless they ar pronounced twice* (hence *acomodation* but *accept*, *maximm*).

### Hanks
The notion of reform 'at a single stroke' is, in my view, much more attractive in theory. I think that adopting a set of conventions for language use is not like going shopping, an activity in which an individual is free to choose this or that item as fancy or need may prompt. It is more like adopting a set of conventions for road use. Everyone has to agree to use the same set of conventions at the same time. An analogy may be drawn with the experience of Sweden in deciding to drive on the right, like the rest of Europe, instead of on the left like the British, Australians, Hong Kong Chinese, and a few others. The whole of Sweden came to an abrupt standstill for a weekend, and a strict speedlimit was enforced while people got used to the new conventions. It would of course have been unthinkable to introduce this change gradually.

### Upward
I think th way forwrd for english speling has to lie somwher between these two analojis of th fredom of choice wen going shoping and th compulsion of driving on one side of th road. At presnt we hav somthing of th shoping situation, in that because most peple ar frequently at a loss for th convention speling, they spel words unconventionly, as they think fit on th spur of th moment (impulse bying, as it wer); and as we hav alredy observd, ther ar also uncertntis and altemativs among th conventions themselvs. This is an undesirebl situation, because it means ordnry peple lak confidnce in riting, since they no that wat they rite wil be al too esly stigmatised, and because profession text-producers incur extra trubl and expense. Idealy a reformd orthografy shud be esy for ordnry peple to use, and not confront professionl users with quandris. If english speling wer reformd on th modl of *det, apl/chapl, acomodation*, we wud be much nearr to that ideal situation. But as is shown by th experience of othr languajs, ther is no need for draconian chanjeover regulations as ther was with drivers in Sweden. With speling reform we do not hav to insist that al oldr peple lern th new spelings – we shud expect most of them to continu riting as they hav always don. Wat publishrs do wud probbly mainly depend on ther own compny decisions and policis, but if they wer ofrd th oportunity on a plate of making considrbl econmis, and som of ther competitrs wer enjoying those gains, comercial pressur wud be wel and truly on them to folo suit.

### Hanks

The question is, who would instigate such a change? We are all aware that the English language is no longer the property of any one nation; it is a widespread medium of international communication in every kind of social and technical field of activity. The minimum requirements, as I see them, for effective spelling reform are:
1. universal agreement among users of English as to what set of conventions are to be used, and
2. effective simultaneous introduction of the reforms on a worldwide basis.

For this to become a reality, I think it would require a scenario in which there is considerable weakening of sectional national interests (which might be no bad thing) and a Secretary General of the United Nations (or some similar body) combining the powers and personality of the Pope and Kemal Ataturk. Even then, we would probably be faced with a conservative rump rather like the die-hard users of the Latin rite in the Roman Catholic Church after the vernacular was officially adopted. I find it hard to imagine that such a scenario would ever become a reality, but I commend to the Society the notions of global agreement and worldwide simultaneous introduction of spelling reform, as a contrast to gradualism.

### Upward

Undoutdly a senario of global agreemnt and worldwide simltaneus introduction has a powrful lojic to it. Howevr, as u also sujest ("combining the powers of Kemal Ataturk and the Pope"), one has to admit that th very idea of "universal agreement" and "simultaneous introduction worldwide" dos hav a certn utopian flavor to it. Here I think th necesry quality of compatbility between TO and th Staje 1 reform coms into play: if th old and new systms ar mutuly compatbl, then it wud be no mor necesry (tho it wud of corse be desirebl) for al cuntris to agree simltaneusly, any mor than it was necesry for th rest of th world to agree to introduce Websters reforms simltaneusly with th USA. But mytnt ther then be a danjer of ritn english disintegrating and radicly difrnt forms being introduced in varius parts of th world? One factr that shud prevent this is that it wud very obviusly not be in th intrests of any one cuntry to cut itself off from english as a medium of world comunication. Howevr such selfintrest need not only play a negative profylactic role like that: it cud com into its own as a crucial motivating force in favor of reform. Th invisbl hand of th market place cud oprate: if th reform ofrs selfevidnt, imediat, inherent advantajs to users, then precisely th same selfintrest cud overcom th intransijnce of th conservativly mindd worldwide.

### Hanks

Yes. You will have noticed that I have not advanced the argument, which is sometimes heard, that spelling reform threatens to cut us off from our heritage. Some people say that we should keep the two <m>s in *immediate* to remind us that, etymologically, the first element is an assimilated negative prefix. They think we should prefer the spelling *logic* to *lojic* because of the etymological connection with Greek *logos*, and so on. I do not accept this argument. Anyone who has tried to learn Irish will know how thoroughly distracting and irrelevant spellings based on etymological considerations can be. The point is highlighted by the contrast with Welsh, a related language with similar features of phonological variation at the start of words, such that *moel* may be realized as *voel*, and so on. Welsh is spelled more or less phonetically, unlike Irish, and for that reason alone seems much more approachable to the foreign learner.

If only Ben Franklin and Noah Webster had carried the day in America a couple of centuries ago! Franklin's remark, quoted on the back of Dr Rondthaler's intriguing and fascinating new *Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling*, is relevant: "Whatever the difficulties and inconvenience [of reformed spelling] now are, they will be more easily surmounted now than hereafter..."

I'm sure Franklin was right, and I fear that that missed opportunity in America at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries will turn out to be an opportunity missed for ever.

### Upward

One may indeed wish that Franklin and Webster had carid th day two hundred years ago, tho it is intrsting to speculate wethr conservativ Britn, then at th begining of its period of imperial powr, wud hav lept to adopt such newfangld ideas from th upstart americns. If th yung USA alone had optd holehartdly for Websters mor daring proposals, th result myt hav been a far mor radicl division of english into a british and americn orthografic styl than we hav today.

Nevrthless, most of those few websterian spelings wich hav survived and ar now conventionl in th USA ofr a synpost for those othr parts of th world wich remain transfixd by british spelings. Most of th distinctiv americn forms ar mor fonografic, mor economicl and mor rationl than ther british equivlnts, and those that are clearly superir by these criteria cud be adoptd worldwide as a miniml reform. Such ar: *adz, ax, carcass, catalog, defense, esthetic, harbor, jewelry, mold, molt, mustache, plow, practise, program, orthopedic, skeptic, smolder, sulfur, traveled, traveling, wagon, woolen, worshiped*, and al th othr words that conform to these patrns. Ther ar howevr also a few americn forms wich ar not unequivocly superir, and in these cases th americn modl shud not autmaticly be adoptd: *centre, grey, tyre* for instnce may perhaps be felt to represent betr speling modls for a futur reform than th arnericn *center, gray, tire* (cf th CS forms *centr, tyr* ); and a few americn forms ar mor cumbrsm than th british equivlnts, and here th USA cud wel be invited adopt th mor economicl non-websterian forms. Such ar: *benefited, biased, centred, skilful, fulfil*, as oposed to americn *benefitted, biassed, centered, skillful, fulfill.*

### Hanks

I think this discussion demonstrates that Spelling Reform has some very powerful arguments in its favour. The main arguments in favour of continuing TO are the difficulties of introducing change in such a well-established convention, and the danger of depriving the global community of a world-wide asset on whose conventions, with few variations, everyone is agreed. Arbitrariness and eccentricity seem a small price to pay for such widespread and deep-rooted agreement

There are also some more sinister aspects: for example, those who happen to find it easy to master the quirks of TO are able to use their facility as a means of discriminating against fellow-citizens whose audio-visual associative powers do not happen to be biased in this way. Perhaps in years to come, we shall be able to set *spellingism* against *racism*, *sexism* and *ageism* as an unacceptable social sin.

The main enemy of reform is probably simple inertia, not logical argumentation. It seems to me that reform, if it comes, is more likely to originate in Australia than in Britain or America, which are now both deeply conservative and conventional societies. The Australians have both the nerve and the energy to do something about it, and the economic and cultural power for their innovations to have an impact beyond their own shores. Let's see what comes of the 1986 Australian Style Council initiative.

### Upward

Patrick Hanks, thank you for this discussion.

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

# 10. The Importance of Spelling for English Culture
## Valerie Yule replies to Sue Palmer

Sue Palmer, Information Officer and Newsletter Editor of the United Kingdom Reading Association and Language Consultant, explained her objections to spelling reform in the **1988 No.1 *Journal*** (Item 2), and Valerie Yule, of Monash University, Victoria 3168, Australia, here takes up our invitation to respond.

There are 'last ditch' defences of the present state of English spelling, to fall back on when old arguments have failed — such as aesthetics or etymology or problems for printers. Such defences are a paradoxical delight in all that is defective in our spelling, and Sue Palmer has set it out clearly. The essence of the English cultural heritage is set out in the 'inconsistencies and irrelevancies' of English spelling, and its 'weird, wonderful and totally irrational form'. If it should be improved, this essence is lost.

I am an admirer of Sue's work in the reading field, and so I ask her to bear with me as I set out to say that, really, the case is nothing of the sort. The questions to ask are about our priorities, about the real nature of our heritage of culture, and about the psychological and social factors behind our attitudes to spelling. The issue of priorities is whether it is better to have bread for the many or icing for the few. Is the nature of present spelling a barrier against any literacy for many, and against full literacy for most of the population, nationally and internationally?

Let us, however, start at the point of detail, and examine the features of English spelling that 'petrifiers' wish to retain but reformers most object to.

First there are the twin beliefs that English spelling is quite irrational but that this irrationality is desirable. The assumption that the spelling is quite irrational leads to the further assumption that any improvement must require total upheaval, great disturbance, and access lost to all our past heritage of print and manuscript. The assumption of irrationality also means that teaching methods may rely on rote or cute mnemonics for learners to memorise individual words or spelling patterns. This rote process delays most learners' acquisition of independent literacy, and can affect their whole introduction to education. Boys, rebellious against perceived nonsense, are even more likely to have problems of backward learning for literacy in English than in most other orthographies, while girls, who are more docile in developing rote-learning strategies for literacy, can be upset when they try to apply the same strategies for learning maths. Present English spelling and literacy teaching methods are a poor introduction to education for potential thinkers and innovators, and add to the difficulties of all those who have no special abilities or diligence. Where they can find more reason, they can have more hope.

*But English spelling is not completely irrational. There is a basic structure for English spelling, underlying its elaborations and accretions.*

The task of cleaning it up may be more like keeping a tidy ship than sinking the fleet to build a new one. The basic set of sound-symbol relationships for consonants can be easily discerned despite the exceptions, and there is a basic underlying system for deploying the five vowel letters to represent the 19–20 English vowel phonemes, even though there are some hundreds of other 'spelling patterns' that disguise it.

When any assertions are made about spelling, a good practical rule is to look at actual texts. For example, the text of Sue's own letter consists of around 436 words. Over 70% of these words (around 359) are spelled according to a consistent, simple and logical system that represents both speech and meaning (morphemes) perfectly well. They require no improvement. Then the remaining words (around 77) either have surplus letters which are dobbed in as more to learn and a waste of time and paper, or they have the 'wrong' letters to complicate or confuse the system. Here are the spellings for these words that a spelling conservative apparently claims are 'interwoven into her personality', grouped somewhat haphazardly by vowels:

<a> have shall fascinating manageable language material
<e> many any said jealous retention especially mechanics seductive
<i> English system sympathy linguistic literacy give imagine since impression inconsistencies
    written irrelevancies heritage
<o>  what wrong qualified conference society opportunity of
<u>  some come one wonderful cultural suggest
<A>  greater native change
<E>  weird people teacher speak reasons
<I>  might high primary find write
<O> soul though know whole notion only
<U> to do you who moved lose review pursuit pupils future superficial
<ah>are argument
<er >work word learn heard refer surgery further
<air>there share various
<aw>wart all your more before
<u> would could

There was an argument that spelling is necessary to show the history of English, but it is not valid today. It can only show the history to those who know English history in the first place, and even then, it does not show it very well. The only safe place to look for derivations is in a dictionary, and although this is an interesting pursuit, it is not vital for everyday communication. Often the derivations do not accord with the present spelling. For example, take the Old English origins of some of the words that were used in Sue's letter (diacritics omitted):

| TO | Old English | TO | Old English | TO | Old English | TO | Old English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| you | eow | *your* | *eower* | *soul* | *sawol* | *there* | *thaer* |
| sopw | sum | *who* | *hwa* | *give* | *giefan* | *wrong* | *wrang* |
| *know* | *gecnawen* | *might* | *maeg* | *though* | *theah* | *great* | *great* |
| *share* | *scearue* | *high* | *heah* | | | | |

*People* is from Old French *pople,* while Latin is responsible for *suggest, fascinating* and *vary*.

Dictionaries can vary in the etymologies they give, and a relevant side-issue emerges on looking them up. On almost every page of a dictionary such as *Collins English Dictionary* (1979), one or more entries will be given alternative spellings which are acceptable. Often the more difficult spelling is already becoming obsolete — for example:- *shanty/shantey/chanty/chantey; facia/fascia;  whiz/whizz; shako/shacko; sobriquet/soubriquet; lackey/lacquey*

This is one route towards spelling improvement — dictionaries' acceptance and inclusion of alternative spellings that are more efficient.

Middle English or even First Folio Shakespeare are difficult to understand on first reading more

through the unfamiliar vocabulary and inflections than through the old spellings. Indeed, improving present English spelling would often bring it closer to what the old spellings were like before the scholars got to work on them. *There is an etymological argument for removing many of the present changes and accretions* (e.g. Yule 1981).

The 'last ditch' appeal calls on native pride in English muddle and eccentricity to be extended to spelling too — a Luddite attitude when it is found in modern British industry or other communications technology. The claim is that life would be less colorful and interesting if spelling were straitforward. This reminds me of a charming children's book on *People.* The final pages show a terrible contrast: we see a totalitarian cityscape where all the people and all the buildings look alike and are all colored gray — then, over the page! There is exuberant life in the same scene, because everyone and everything is different, and all are bright with different colours. However, the roads are smooth and planned, the cars are obeying traffic rules, the streets and shops have clear sips, and doors can open. *That is, even eccentricity has its time and place, and wisdom is knowing what applies where and when.*

The exuberance, individuality and delight of the English language lies in its vocabulary and forms of speech that enrich communication and make it more accurate, rather than in spellings that make it more difficult.

And the English language is living. It changes. No English-language lover dare suggest outright that the language must be pinned down, and never grow or change. Why then, should the spelling be dead?

Sue Palmer is an English owner of the English language. She has a native right to it and to its spelling. However, I write as an Australian of Scots-Irish-English-Danish origin, with relatives of 17 different nationalities, and with cousins, nephews and nieces of eight races — Western and Eastern European, black as well as white American, Caribbean, Australian aboriginal, Vietnamese, Papuan and Tongan — all English-speaking. Estimates of users of the English language in the world today range from 400 million to 600 million, and white native speakers are now a minority. English languages are developing-not just one English language — as the preface and entries of the Collins Dictionary make clear for their 270,000 entries. An immigrant to Australia told me that while the English have a right to keep their own spelling, everyone else has a right to an international English spelling that they could all use, and that was not a barrier to communication. He has a case.

Sue is emotionally attached to her native language. To her it is 'more than a tool of communication or the raw material one plays with in composition: it is the embodiment of my cultural heritage — it is part of me and I am part of what it represents. To some extent, the English language is interwoven with my identity, and that makes me very jealous of (sic) it.'

Two points should be made clear here. First, a spelling system is not to be identified with 'the language' or even with the written language. Spelling is only a tool to write down the language so that it may be read. To identify it with the written language is like equating a system of music notation with the forms of music that it can be used to represent. English written language has shapes and forms and styles that make it different in many ways from the spoken language — and one objection to present English spelling is that learners have to have beginners' books limited by vocabulary control or restricted phonics to a very dull writing style, and they cannot have the freedom possible with the more orderly orthographies of most other languages. So people absorb this very dull writing style themselves.

More important still, *what is English culture that it should be cherished?* How could removing the

difficulties of present English spelling mean that we 'could lose our closest tie with the past'? England's closest ties with her past are in her literature, her landscapes and buildings, her traditions, institutions, values, history books, and the oral traditions of the older generation. I shall write emotionally too.

'Cherished' by Sue and who else? What is the point of having about two million fully literate English cherishers, full of culture and spelling, if the price is that the rest of Britain and the world have little or no knowledge of either? For me, English/British/world culture is for sharing, and what desperately needs to be shared most today are the old British civilised ideals of tolerance, justice, fair play, honesty, kindness, courtesy, courage, intellectual curiosity, enterprise, diligence, and the ideal of the 'gentleman' who is gentle as well as 'gentil', and the woman to match.

These are the 'basics' for education, since they are the bases for civilisation, and this is what schools and homes should be teaching the young, rather than irrational spelling patterns.

But how can the young assimilate our civilisation unless they are literate? Watch almost any TV show about school life, such as *Grange Hill or Two of Us* and you must be struck by the violence, loutishness, destructive relationships and ignorance of the poor youngsters portrayed there, caught in a trap of a limited and unkind subculture. Reading can give a chance to learn about different civilisations and cultures, past and present, as they themselves have presented them, not reinterpreted on telly in terms of current assumptions and constraints of TV presentation.

Surely it would be better that say six working boys or six adult foreigners could read and write fluently in English, than that any number of middle-class children knew when to use *-ise* and *-ize* according to the distinctions that 'require an intimate knowledge of English, Greek, Latin and French etymology.' (Gowers, revised by Greenbaum and VVhitcut, 1986.)

In fact, this authority states that 'most modern authorities' say in effect, hang it all and stick to <s> 'but don't condemn those who use a <z> in its right place'.

Why, then, shud som English peple feel that to change a few spellings cud risk th loss of 'th cor'? Perhaps Northcote Parkinson diagnosed th psycology of it in his observations of how comitees operate — for example, spending hours arguing about th cost of a litr bin, because that is smal enough to cope with, and passing estimats of thousands of pounds for bildings in five minuts because th matr is too big for them. Th letrs in words ar smal and visibl, like £5 to spend on a litr bin; th esential elements of our civilisation ar invisibl, huge, and tax too much our thinking and our imaginations — like spending f.50 milion a bilding complex. So we let that budget pass, and we fasten on what is smal enough for us.

Social valus hav changed radicly in th past three decades. Most cherishd customs hav becom unrecognisabl or vanishd, whole landscapes hav been replaced, and comunications tecnology itself has been revolutionised — apart from spelling. Th individual who feels helpless in th midst of al this change, can stil try to insist that th telly is in *colour,* even if it coms in a Japanese or American box labeld *color.*

So 'anti-changers' try to disregard or fight against th fact that English spelling has always changed, howevr slowly, even since Samuel Johnson, and that it is stil changing — through new words, brand-labels on shelvs, and even by th dificultis of our semilitrat masses. Th problem is that changes which ar uncoordinated or unreserchd may only ad furthr to our colections of inconsistencis.

Jonathan Swift observd what tiny things human beings wil fight and die for. These tiny things can

include smal habits they are acustomd to, or details of apearance such as color or clothes — while evry virtu is lost in th fight. Details can be vital, and batls can be lost for want of a nail — but we need to know th difrence between what shud be cared about, and what is not to be cared about. 'Teach us to care and not to care.' Th makers of th Australian *Macquarie-Dictionary* point out that this principl shud aply to language rnatrs too.

So many othr factrs ar involvd that no form of spelling can be a panacea for illitracy. But there is plenty of evidence of how much help easier spelling can be, in reducing dificultis for lernrs (e.g. J H Martin's initial lerning spelling for IBM's current *Writing to Read* program) and I think it wud be shown for readrs as wel as writers too. In adition, a spelling system that is so unreliabl a guide to th spoken language reduces th valu of English as an intemationl means of comunication despite its many othr advantages. A reliabl spelling can help to keep th shape of th spoken language from continual degrading and dialectisation, with th tendency to slur away from th printed word.

Th main purpose of language is to comunicate. But it is also used to distinguish and protect in-groups. English spelling has had a rathr inglorious history in th way it has been used to screen out th 'hav-nots' who aspire to join th 'havs'. So th 'havs' may hav som reason to feel that English spelling is asociated with their identity — but th question is, if th 'hav-nots' wer alowd easier access to litracy, wud th country lose out, and wud th present 'havs' lose out or benefit? It shud be noted that only th 'havs' who hav word-processors can use spelling software to ensure perfect spelling — and it is a reflection on both English spelling and British litracy that hardly an ofice in th country can be without a wel-thumbd dictionary or computer asistance in ordr to spel.

What then is th 'whole soul' that Sue Palmer fears might be damaged by 'cosmetic surgery' to a writing tool? It surely cannot be her Englishness, with its historic tradition of reform rathr than revolution, of compromise rathr than polarised confrontation, of libral conscience rathr than bureaucratic intransigence.

Even her vested intrest as a teachr of reading is not a clinching argument. Sue the Teachr is candid in stating that she feels that she cannot bite th hand that feeds her — yet that hand is feeding her from th public purse on th suposition of educating th nation's children. Th mor time and troubl and failure spent on spelling, th less time and oportunity for book lerning and for real teaching. Th mor time Sue spends writing mor books on teaching spelling to add to th vast yet stil inadequat mountains of books on teaching spelling, th less time she has to transmit th real cor of our culture to th next generation.

I hav met many teachrs who fear loss of jobs if litracy cud be easily aquired by individuals — perhaps by a home video such as TYTR *(Teach Yourself to Read).* Yet there is so much mor that needs to be taught and lernt — and so litl time for schooling!

What does it profit a culture if it retains outward forms and loses its real valus? So many religions and othr idealistic movements have in th course of time treasured their shels at th cost of their spirit. Manrs becom manrd and becom forms of cruelty rather than of courtesy. And in language too, it becoms tru that 'th letr kils, but th spirit givs life'.

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# 11. The Society's 1984 Proposals
## Stanley Gibbs

Following his note in the **1988/1 *Journal*** (Item 14) concerning amendments agreed by the Society in 1971–72 to the 1948 and 1956 versions of *Nue Speling,* Stanley Gibbs now outlines the 5 reform proposals approved in 1984.

The Minutes of the 1984 AGM stated the following:
"Stage I shall consist of the reforms as printed in the **November 1983 Newsletter**, Item 2. Stage 1 shall be the approved house-style for the Society and members are encouraged to use it within the Society and, where possible in their own privat correspondence. That the proposals listed now above shall be adopted as the Society's policy. This set of proposals shall be named Stage 1."

The Society issued an introductory leaflet entitled *Tough Though Thought,* listing the Stage I proposals as follows:

**SR1** Developed by Harry Lindgren in Australia, SR1 (Spelling Reform One) calls for the sound 'e' as in bet to be spelt with 'e'. Hence: eny meny frend alredy ses tred jelous hed.

**SR:ph** This is probably the least controversial of all reforms, the change of 'ph' to 'f' when it is sounded as 'f'. Hence: foto telefone fysical elefant safire.

**SR in the:augh** Words with 'gh' include some of the most absurd spellings in English. In this reform 'augh' is changed in one of two ways:
1. Delete 'gh' when there is the sound of 'au' as in caught. Hence: caut fraut dauter nauty
2. Replace 'ugh' with 'f' when there is the sound of 'f'. Hence: laf draft.

**SR:ough** There ar so meny different pronunciations of 'ough' that it is changed in one of five different ways, depending on the word:
1. Delete 'gh' when there is the sound of 'ou' as in bough. Hence: bou drout plou.
2. Change 'ough' as in bought to 'au'. Hence: baut aut thaut faut saut.
3. Change 'ough' to 'of' or 'uf' (depending on the pronunciation). Hence: cof trof enuf tuf.
4. Cut back 'ough' to 'o' (or 'oe') as in though. Hence: tho altho (but doh for dough and thurra for thorough).
5. Change 'ough' to 'u'. Hence: thru

**SR:DUE** Meny words end with an 'e' that is not only useless but misleading. This is corrected with SR:DUE (Spelling Reform: Drop Useless E's). The situation arises when the *preceding* vowel is short and it includes meny common words. Hence ar hav wer serv giv liv opposit negativ massiv activ involv curv (but not the adjectiv live)."

*Wer serv curv* aut not to be there; as the Minutes clearly state, April 1984: short vowelled syllabls. Obviously we erred and broke our own rules. There have been no changes. Wer, ar, serv, curv, nurs although quite satisfactory, could not be included.

# 12. Traugott Rohner asks 5 questions about Cut Spelling

Traugott Rohner, a new American member of the Society, raises the following queries about the spelling-patterns used in Cut Spelling, to which the editor attempts to reply.

**TR:** Recently the Society has worked on a revision of English spelling called Cut Spelling. I am anxious that it will succeed, but must point out a few of its weaknesses.

1. Its greatest weakness is that it is trying to change too many flags. CS recommends *th* for *the* and *ar* for *are.* If these turn readers against CS, its advantages will be lost. These two words are among the most used in the language. They should not be changed.

**CU:** *Ther ar two kinds of change: one substitutes letrs, th othr merely omits them; th latr is far less disturbing. Th form 'th' is a gret econmy and removes th misleading paralel with 'he', etc; but it is not vital. 'Ar' for 'are' is mor fundarnentl: it removes th misleading paralel with 'bare' and creates a tru paralel with 'bar', etc.*

**TR:** 2. P. 25–27 of the 1987 No.3 *Journal* presents 4 pages all in CS, showing both its advantages and disadvantages. It begins "A study of patrns of misprint...". What is *patrns?* Probably *patterns.* Could it not also be *patrons?*

**CU:** *In CS vowl-letrs ar normly short unless othrwise indicated, and a foloing vowl-letr ofn indicates th long valu in CS, as in TO. So th foloing <a> in :fatal' tels us th first <a> is long (contrast 'catl'). 'Patrn' and 'patron' sho th same difrnce. A secnd reasn wy 'patron' keeps its <o> is fonografotactic, and paralels th difrnce between 'barren/ barn', 'modrn/children'. Th avraj user remains unaware of these sutltis, but gets used to th distinction in practice.*

**TR:** 3. Now how does one pronounce *sujests?* According to Webster ther is a g befor th j.

**CU:** *Webster has th /g/ as optionl; neithr Oxford nor Collins sho it at al. Speakrs cud rlte 'sugjest' if they wishd.*

**TR.** 4. Two words have 3 vowels but only one is written, *promnnt* for *prominent,* and *difrnt for different.*

**CU:** *Th vowl-sounds in 'prominent' can also be spelt as in 'dominant, permanent, consonant' and with sylabic <n> in, 'hadn't'. CS harmnises al these variations by consistntly riting sylabic <n>: 'domnnt, permnnt, consnnt, promnnt'. In norml speech 'different' has only two vowl-sounds; th first <e> is silent. 'Difrnt' is a suficient and unambiguus representation of th sound, maching 'cormrnt, ignrnt'.*

**TR:** 5. A more glaring mistake takes place when all the words with <er> are spelled with just <r>. We are strongly against swallowing vowels even tho they are unaccented. As long as they are spoken, they should be spelled out.

**CU:** *Only sounds can be swalod, but CS dos not afect th sound. TO has many alternativ spelings for that ending, as in 'burglar, teacher, doctor, neighbour, murmur, injure, martyr' etc, wile th <-er> ending can also hav a quite difrnt pronunciation as in 'defer', and confusion results for both riters and readrs. Th sylabic <r> in 'acre, centre' provides th ansr, by shoing that no vowl letr is needd at al; so we get 'burglr, teachr, doctr, neibr, murmr, martr' — omiting th unpredictbl vowl-letr acheves regularity and econmy at a stroke; but th sound remains intact.*

# 13. Recent Writing on Spelling
## reviewed by Chris Upward: ALBSU, Comrie/Hawkins, Crystal, Mason

### ALBSU: Literacy, Numeracy and Adults
London: The Adult Literary and Basic Skills Unit November 1987, pp.85, £3.95, ISBN 0 906509 93 9

When this report appeared last autumn, it aroused much publicity, with headlines quoting the "illiterate 6 million". What relevance does it have for spelling reformers?

What was hitherto known about adults lacking adequate literacy skills in Britain had been confined mainly to those who sought help. This report by Mary Hamilton (Lancaster University) casts the net far wider, covering a sample of all those born in England, Scotland and Wales in one week in 1958. Altogether 12,500 were interviewed and 13% reported difficulties with either reading, writing or numeracy. The      project's aim was to identify 1. the problems such people face, 2. who is receiving no help, and 3. the lessons for education. The need for the study is shown by the steady demand for adult literacy tuition, and by the existence of the problem across the industrialised world. Illiteracy is hard to define, being sometimes based on reading and not writing ability; but here it is defined by people's self-reporting of their problems. Ethnic minorities were underrepresented.

Under 10% of those with problems had had special tuition. The breakdown: 2% had problems with reading only, 19% with reading and writing/spelling, 40% with only writing/spelling, 5.5% with writing/spelling and maths, 7% with reading, writing/spelling and maths, and 26% with only maths. This means, over 70% had problems with writing/spelling, which caused most difficulty by far, more for men than for women, especially at work, though in many other spheres of life too. 93% left school at 16, the minimum leaving age, and 58% had no qualifications at 23. An average number went to comprehensive schools, more went to secondary moderns, only 2% went to grammar schools. School attendance was rather below average, and 36% got special help at school. More than average experienced problems of poverty and in the family
while at school, and their motivation was below average.

*The key point to note is that writing/spelling was overwhelmingly the area of greatest difficulty.*

### ed. Bernard Comrie *The World's Major Languages* (John A Hawkins on English)
Beckenham (UK): Croorn Helm Ltd, 1987, ISBN 0-7099-3423-8

This 1,000-Page tome describes 50 main languages of the world and includes 33 pages on English contributed by John A Hawkins. Substantial sections treat the status of English, its structure, history and modern variations; but orthography is accorded just two paragraphs. The first observes that "modern English orthographical practice is . out of harmony with the spoken language", mentions Caxton, Webster, Shaw, and concludes that "English spelling holds the distinction of being the most chaotic in the world." However, advantages are seen in its international uniformity, and in the fact that readers see a connexion between *nation, national* despite the phoneme-shift of the <a> (a shift which presumably therefore prevents us appreciating the connexion in speech, and which must totally obscure the parallel connexion between another noun-adjective pair, *long, length,* whose spelling changes to match the pronunciation.)

Spelling reformers will doubtless be disappointed, if not surprised, at the priorities implied when more than double the space is given to tables of Anglo-Saxon inflexions than to modern written English. Is there no more to be said than that it is "chaotic"? Is it even generally agreed that "chaotic" is an adequate description? Are there no patterns amid the chaos? Is any sound-symbol correspondence discernible? Are the difficulties of learning and using the system not worthy of

comment?

But such lack of interest in the written language is no rarity today. It shows how much has to be done to create awareness of the fact that our present antiquated writing system is a serious social, psychological, educational and economic burden to mankind that ought not to be tolerated — and need not be.

**David Crystal *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language***
Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.472, £25, ISBN 0 521 26438 3

At £25 this almost 500-page volume is excellent value, and will attract both amateur and professional linguists. It surveys the main areas of linguistics comprehensively, describing current as well as millennia-old controversies on the nature of language, and divides into eminently browsable, self-contained units. It is richly illustrated with photographs, drawings, diagrams, maps, charts, tables and quotable anecdotes. And it takes spelling seriously.

Spelling reformers will be particularly drawn to the 40-page section entitled 'The medium of language: writing and reading', although there is also relevant information elsewhere, under such headings as 'The statistical structure of language', 'Language development at school', 'Language handicap' and 'Language planning'. A sample of the headings in the main section 'Writing and reading' gives an idea of the coverage: *Written and spoken language; portraying the sound of speech; graphic expression; handwriting; palaeography; graphology; print; electronic media; graphemes; the history of writing; types of writing system; non-phonological systems-pictographic, ideographic, cuneiform, hieroglyphic, logographic; phonological systems-syllabic, alphabetic; graphological contrasts; punctuation; shorthand; the processes of reading and writing; theories of how we read; writing; spelling; how irregular is English spelling?; the pros and cons of spelling reform; some specific proposals.*

While all these fields at least impinge upon spelling reform, it is what the encyclopedia has to say under the last few headings that is most central to our concerns. It is immediately apparent (and characteristic of the whole book) that complex issues are presented thoughtfully and judiciously, and there are no dogmatic answers to questions where the evidence is contradictory or incomplete.

As for spelling reform itself the pros and cons are scrupulously listed-and it is a sign of Crystal's judiciousness that he allows almost as many pros as cons. But it is not the function of an encyclopedia to advocate currently eccentric views, and so the cons predictably beat the pros — by a score of 5 to 4. As a survey of ideas on spelling reform up to about twenty years ago, one must say the treatment is fair enough.

However neither Harry Lindgren, Valerie Yule nor John Downing are mentioned, and recent ideas (Stages, SR 1, Cut Spelling, etc) emanating particularly from Australia are not reflected in the arguments (nor in the samples of reformed spelling shown). In consequence the 'cons' appear a somewhat jaded set of objections. They are as follows:

— Spelling reform would mean a major break in continuity between old and new, with major problems during the period of transition. But modern reform proposals, unlike earlier ones, are specifically designed to ensure compatibility and so minimise such problems.

— People would be unwilling to learn an alternative system. But modem proposals merely develop the present system and would require few people to learn new forms.

— It would be necessary to reprint important works in new spelling. But if the new spellings are compatible with the old, there would be no such need-and in any case today's technology can provide cheap and rapid conversion of computer-readable text from one orthography to another.

— The phonetic principle might promote diversity of spellings between accents. But that is

precisely why Cut Spelling is not primarily based on the phonetic principle.

— Lack of agreement between reformers and their often unappealing, evangelistic manner. To this we must say 'touché', and resolve to mend our ways!

The Encyclopedia's view of spelling generally appears to be unwarrantedly TO-centric. Thus, learning to read is a "struggle", sound-symbol correspondences are imperfect, and writing requires a good visual memory to handle exceptions. This may all be fair comment on TO, but it hardly applies to many other systems, and not at all to i.t.a.

However, we should be grateful for the detailed coverage the Encyclopedia gives to the issue of spelling reform which will help to raise public awareness of the question. Perhaps future editions will take more recent thinking into account — and extend the advanced spelling of the word *Encyclopedia* more widely. If *geography* provided the spelling-model for *paleography* (as the Americans already write it), we might begin to relegate the form *palaeography* to the role of a synonym for TO.

## Mary Mason *Language Awareness*
Printed by Wigan College of Technology, 1985, £5

In the last few years Mary Mason has been developing a 3-part course for the first 3 years of secondary education, and has been trying the first part out on 12 year olds in Wigan, with marked success in raising their ability to cope with formal written language. The 3 parts are entitled 1. *Language Awareness, 2. Reading school textbooks, 3. Writing examination answers.* The perspective of the course is not confined to English, but is worldwide, and students are set to puzzling out meanings, sounds and writing in short samples of Chinese, Greek, Russian, and several languages of the Indian subcontinent, as well as of Europe.

The course aims to reverse the rejection of formal grammar which has done such harm to the linguistic understanding of able students in the past 20 years, but without returning to the 'dry-as-dust' inculcation of the subject remembered by so many alumni of the old English grammar schools. Instead, language is presented in a lively way, constantly related to the real-life experience and needs of children, capitalising on the new multi-cultural environment, and task-oriented, so that the students spend their time actively wrestling with real linguistic problems.

English spelling as such figures only spasmodically, and who can be surprised at that, when for all its academic fascination it is such an stultifying field of study for the would-be literate. Some idea is given as to the origin particularly of the Latin and Greek spelling patterns in English, but the central issue of sound-symbol correspondence in TO is almost entirely ignored. On the other hand the more abstruse morphemic aspect is touched on, insofar as it helps explain patterns of consonant doubling *(unneeded* but *unironed, rubbed* but *invaded, bigger* but *cleverer, succeed* but *precede).* The odd hint on heterophone distinction is also given *(here* cf. *there, where; hear* cf. *ear).* Some work on punctuation is included, notably on the apostrophe and on sentence-markers. Inevitably in a work for such an age-group there has to be much simplification, but it is a pity to see the invention of written English picturesquely attributed to Alfred, rather than to, say, Bede some 150 years earlier (c.735AD).

The whole approach of this course must nevertheless be welcomed, as encouraging a better informed view of the nature of written English as we now know it. Spelling reformers will especially warm to the following exercise which is set midway through the course: "Make up a new writing system for English — you can use either an alphabet or ideographs. (Since no one will understand it, it will be a secret code)." But we may question the assumption that a new writing system is necessarily incomprehensible.

# 13. Michael Stubbs The Synchronic Organization
# of English Spelling
## Review by Edward Rondthaler

Professor Michael Stubbs *The Synchronic Organization of English Spelling,* Working Paper No.10 of the Committee for Linguistics in Education (Linguistics Association of Great Britain/British Association for Applied Linguistics), 1986.

Dr Edward Rondthaler is a long-time typographic designer and author of *Life with Letters — as they turned photogenic* (1981), coeditor of the *Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling* (1986), and President of the American Language Academy, the successor to the American *Simplified Spelling Association.*

Spelling reformers looking for a half-hour of absorbing reading will find no more revealing pages than those in *Working Paper No.10, The Synchronic Organization of English Spelling* by Michael Stubbs. It is well written from beginning to end, and contains some surprises.

The action takes place at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, where a group of linguistic scholars from the Universities of London, Essex, Manchester, Nottingham, Sussex, Leeds, York, Aston and elsewhere assembled in April 1986 to discuss English spelling's synchronic organization. Professor Stubbs chaired the meeting and gives a brilliant summary of the give-and-take.

At the outset he maps the perimeters beyond which comments would be considered off bounds. The playing field covered "the nature of the English spelling system: that is, what the relation is between letters and phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax, and semantics." Off bounds were, in the main, any major discussion of spelling reform, punctuation and, most surprisingly, the spelling systems of other languages — surprising because the synchronic organization of English spelling has much to learn from the synchronic organization of spelling in other languages.

For the participants it turned out to be a tough assignment, yet if there is any group qualified to discuss English spelling patterns, certainly it is these scholars — the cream of the crop. One has every reason to expect from them sound insight and guidance.

The participants did nobly. Even so, they were put to it to show the rightness of our orthography. There was a great deal of grasping of straws to find consistent patterns.

One of the straws — of such importance, it seems, that it was cited twice — was that, except for foreign borrowings, "no words in English are written with <v> in final position". Where terminal <v> would be logical, as in *give/have/love,* our spelling tacks on a silent <e>, apparently to avoid making an exception to the no-terminal <v> rule. Likewise, except for foreign borrowings, no words in English terminate in <z>. (Did the panelists overlook *adz, quizz, whizz?)* Another straw firmly grasped was the regularity of <'s> to indicate possession; and <s> for plurals. It was recognized, of course, that *mouse/mice* represents an entirely different category of plurals.

The participants moved on to make as good a case as possible for traditional spelling, pointing out that familiarity with Latin and Greek is helpful in deciding whether, for example, <ch> in *chore* is pronounced /k/ or /tsh/. They wisely shied away from supporting such rules as '<i> before <e> except after <c>', and decided that the less precise term "preference rating" be used rather than

"rule". The proposal is a good one, since "rule" implies a consistency not common in English spelling except in the case of terminal <v>.

A respected author, K H Albrow, was cited as having classified words ending in <-ow> as "basic", and those ending in <o> as "exotic". The speller "would then have to be aware that *arrow/elbow/window* were basic while *bravo/bronco/hero* were in some sense exotic".

To quote further — "Possibly the most widespread belief about English spelling, amongst non-linguists, is that it is 'illogical'. The published linguistic descriptions, on the other hand, argue that it is not illogical, but complex. It is a system which has more regularities than are apparent on the surface, and in which inconsistencies are the result of conflicting principles rather than perversity." Just a minute! What sort of glib rationalization is that? — A spelling that has greater regularity deep down where we cannot see it than on the surface where we see and use it. — A spelling that is not really illogical but just complex. — A spelling that is inconsistent only because of its conflicting principles. Any one of those hollow vindications is reason enough to be dissatisfied with the status quo of English spelling. Taken together they are a wide open indictment.

More and more the meeting seemed to be getting uneasy about finding a consistent thread in our spelling. Perhaps it felt akin to the Roman scholar who is said to have written a thesis defending Roman numerals against the harrowing possibility of a takeover by Arabic numerals.

In conclusion it must be pointed out that the Working Paper brings little comfort or help to those deeply concerned about the economic and social consequences of illiteracy among our English-speaking minorities, the poor, the high school dropouts, delinquents, immigrants, those in penal institutions, the hard-core unemployed, and others who are far from being able to master "inconsistencies that are the result of conflicting principles rather than perversity". That it is possible for such highly respected linguists to find as little in the way of rules, consistent patterns, or other attributes that would aid in solving the illiteracy crisis is truly frightening.

If the Working Paper, rewritten in less academic fashion, were widely circulated it is just possible that its shock, like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring,* would stimulate a public awakening, and with it the realization that our leaders themselves are at sea when it comes to justifying the irregularities of English spelling.