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the simplified spelling society

Founded 1908

Working for planned change in English spelling for the benefit of learners and users everywhere

newsletter December 1996

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Comments, Please

Chris Upward will be presenting a draft revised statement of the Society's "Aims and Objectives" (as itemized in the bold print in this report) to the SSS committee for consideration on 18 January 1997. He here provides a commentary on the underlying thinking, and would welcome comments from readers before 11 January.

1. Society to Redefine Aim, Objectives

The Society has decided to redefine its aim and objectives and has drawn up a draft for consideration by members. This and members' responses will be discussed at the January committee meeting.

The draft statement, in its preamble, notes ours is a changing Society in a changing world. Worldwide communication is being domesticated by the Internet (as this Newsletter testifies). This and other developments make us need to rethink aims, objectives, priorities.

Five years ago, thanks to Bob Brown, the Society produced a pink slip setting out explicitly its aim(s) and objectives. A new slip will be published soon setting out a new formulation and the thinking behind it, together with the Society's "Six axioms on English spelling."

Reform is the aim

In the new draft the aim is stated:

The reform of English spelling for the benefit of learners and users everywhere.

This suggests no radical change to the Society's overall aim, but reminds us the purpose of reform is not just tidying up irregularities but bringing to people's lives the benefits of enhanced powers of literacy. The final word 'everywhere' emphasizes English has to serve both native speakers and non-native speakers, who are the majority in the world today.

The two groups have different psychological needs in learning the language.

There are five objectives.

A. To publicize the unnecessary difficulties of English spelling today and the world-wide benefits that its reform would bring.

Claims made in recent decades belittling the irregularity of English spelling are not based on close analysis of copious evidence of irregularity. The Society has published much evidence to substantiate its case (including comparative studies of other writing systems) which members can draw on.

B. To raise awareness of the alphabetic principle, its historic corruption in English, and its more rational application in other languages.

One reason the public sometimes is not amenable to persuasion is its basic unawareness of the rationale of the alphabet, of the origins of today's spelling of English, and of the greater consistency in using the alphabet in other languages.

Publication of Society research findings in these areas helps raise understanding and helps the public see the dire state of English spelling today.

C. To promote research and debate on ways of reforming English spelling, and to prepare a graduated set of proposals for relating word-forms more predictably to speech-sounds.

Research of various kinds (eg, experiments with new spelling patterns, testing users and the public for their reactions) and discussion of the findings has to be central to the Society's work. The Society has accumulated nearly a century of experience with contrasting types of reform and can offer the public a varied menu of proposals. It recognizes it will probably never itself be able to determine how spelling will be reformed, but it is well placed to provide indispensable guidance.

D. To encourage and help co-ordinate proposals for English spelling reform across both English-speaking and non- English-speaking countries.

The Society's multinationalism is essential for developing re-form schemes for English as a world language, as well as to counteract any tendency of individual countries to consider their literacy problems in isolation. The Internet offers possibilities for day-to-day world-wide co-ordination of the Society's programs, and may prove an absolute prerequisite of reforming spelling.

E. To persuade all users of English (including opinion-formers and policy-makers who influence them) of the need and practical possibilities for reforming English spelling.

This objective is a matter of lobbying, a process that at most has achieved only temporary success previously. Concern about literacy standards, new understanding of the role of phonics, and perhaps some effect of the Society's publicity may open the ears of decision- makers afresh to our arguments.

Subscription rate unchanged

At the Society's annual general meeting last May the subscription rate for 1997 was retained at £10.

The October committee meeting reaffirmed that £10 or \$US20 would also remain the subscription rate for overseas members.

Jean Hutchins, membership secretary, suggests four options for payment by overseas members:

- £10 sterling check drawn on a UK bank.
- \$US20 check (or bills) which allows for transfer charges.
- £10 sterling note.
- Crossed sterling traveler's check for £10, made out to SSS, with two signatures by the sender.

She notes the SSS has no facilities for credit or charge card payments.

Privacy provisions

Jean also notes: "In accordance with the requirements of the UK Data Registration Act and similar laws in other countries, we are required to have permission from the members to keep their address details on computer file for our mailing purposes only. We assume that no members have any objection to this.

"We assure members that details will not be communicated to anyone apart from the committee and the Newsletter editors".

2. A New Newsletter

Editorial

Allan Campbell

Over a meal at a Los Angeles restaurant in September Cornell Kimball and I talked spelling and the state of the Society.

What struck us was that, since Bob Brown's untimely death, we had had little idea of what was happening in the SSS. We hadn't had a Journal for a while to keep us abreast of some of the thinking in matters of spelling and language.

But there was nothing on the everyday happenings and small talk of the Society, tho there had been individual posts, both e-mail and 'snailmail'. The *Newsletter*, under Bob's editorship, had performed this task well. Now there was a vacuum.

What could be done? We mulled it over, and somehow the idea emerged if we wanted something done we'd better do something.

What could we do? On Internet newsgroups and elsewhere Cornell has been a doughty protagonist for some spelling change. For seven years I have edited a small monthly newsletter for our residents' association.

So the idea was born: Maybe, if no one else was offering, we could produce the Newsletter. We both have computers, are on e-mail and Cornell has good printing facilities. The distances involved might not, in this electronic age, be insuperable. It was worth a try.

The committee gladly gave us the go-ahead. So here it is, jointly edited by two members separated by the world's largest ocean - and even further from the home turf of the Society.

In your hands you have our first effort. We hope you approve the result. If you do or if you do not, we'd like to hear from you - either by way of a letter or maybe a larger contribution.

We are particularly looking for stories on what members are doing to spread the word. Each of us has a talent for something.

On the back page Cornell tells of his successes using his. What is yours? What are your successes? What lessons can be learned from any failures? We'd like to hear. Chances are another member has a talent similar to yours and may take heart from your experience. Let's hear about it.

As new kids on the block but far from most readers, we will obviously need support from members elsewhere, particularly in Britain, to enable us to report on activities outside respective patches. To this end we have included our addresses. Don't hesitate to use them.

Describing different kinds of newsletters and the needs they fulfil, *The Newsletter Editor's Deskbook* (Newsletter Resources, St Louis, Missouri) says: "Newsletters that go to widely scattered readers who rarely see one another are crucial to the reader's perception of the publishing organization.... in a sense, such newsletters quite often *are* to readers the associations or businesses they represent - something they can hold in their hands, share with others."

The authors could have been writing about the SSS. We fit that scenario. We aim to make the *Newsletter* fit it, too.

Membership, listed by country, at the end of October stood at:

Australia 7, Belgium 1, Canada 3, France 1, Germany 1, Hong Kong 1, Ireland 1, Israel 1, Italy 1, Japan 1, New Zealand 2, Portugal 1, Saudi Arabia 1, Singapore 1, Spain 1, Sweden 1, United Kingdom 70, United States 14.

3. Bank Balance Up and Spending Down

Since the last Newsletter the Society has held its AGM and three committee meetings. A summary of some of the deliberations follows.

AGM, 11 May 1996

Treasurer Alun Bye reported the income and expenditure account was in credit £649, an increase. A decision by Barclays Bank to change the account resulted in considerable savings. Alun also outlined steps taken during the year to gain highest interest rates. Total funds were £33,000, with £25,000 on two months' notice, and £8000 on 14 days'. Expenditure was down. Alun asked to resign, but agreed to stay *pro tem*.

The subscription for 1997 was retained at £10.

The secretary, Bob Brown, reported a membership of 103.

Chris Upward, editor-in-chief, said during Ken Ives' editing of the Journal in America members of the American Literacy Council and Better Education thru Simplified Spelling had received copies, and wished this to continue.

Gwenllian Thorstad, research director, had finished writing up the pilot research project. It now needed professional production for approaching charitable trusts and others to seek funding for the main project.

Bob Brown said members had indicated no clear majority in favor of pursuing charitable status if that meant 'diluting' the Society's campaigning ability. There was a willingness to change the name to update the Society's image. He suggested a radical option to 'dematerialize' the society as an organization holding meetings, the better to reconvene as an Internet-based pressure and expertise group.

COMMITTEE, 11 May

Nick Atkinson, Nick Kerr and John Bryant were co-opted to serve on the committee.

Officers elected: Chair, Chris Jolly; vice-chair, Leo Chapman; general secretary (*pro tem*), Bob Brown; membership secretary, Jean Hutchins; treasurer (*pro tem*), Alun Bye; media relations officer, Leo Chapman; editor-in-chief, Chris Upward; research director, Gwenllian Thorstad.

COMMITTEE, 13 July

Bob Brown's death led to the reallocation of his responsibilities as follows: *Newsletters*, SSS publications, library - Chris Upward; schemes, *Personal Views* - Paul Fletcher, aided by Tony Burns; correspondence, archives - according to responsibilities. Still to be reallocated: Meetings; inquiries; phone book/directory inquiries/World Wide Web; charitable status; contacts.

Ron Footer was appointed meetings secretary, Chris Upward literature secretary, and Tony Burns was elected to the committee.

Gwenllian Thorstad reported good progress (helped by John Bryant) on the report "The response of children to spelling reform."

Chris Upward reported 500 SSS introduction leaflets were planned [now available - Ed].

COMMITTEE, 12 October

Jean Hutchins, membership secretary, reported all inquiries to her had been by e-mail.

Govind Deodhekar spoke on progress with the Lojikon spelling scheme in India. He sought, and received, a letter of introduction from the Society.

Dr Valerie Yule asked the Society to publish her book on international English spelling and share the profits. It was decided to seek a draft copy for study before making a decision.

Web server statistics showed visits to the Society's Internet pages were over 1000 in July. The pages gave information well, but there could also be eye-catching pages for young people. Nick Kerr agreed to organize an e-mail directory of members on the 'Net.

Paul Fletcher and Tony Burns summarized 15 spelling schemes as follows: Alphabet only, 8; alphabet plus other letters, 6; new alphabet entirely, 1. Tony reported finding some Personal View drafts among Bob Brown's papers. It was agreed to print and distribute one to members.

Officers

President: Professor Don Scragg

Vice Presidents: Lord Simon of Glaisdale, Professor John Wells, Dr Valerie Yule

Chairman: Chris Jolly

Vice-Chairman, Media Relations Officer: Leo Chapman

Treasurer: Alun Bye

Editor-in-Chief & Literature Secretary: Chris Upward

Meetings Secretary: Ron Footer

Membership Secretary: Jean Hutchins

Trustees: Stanley Gibbs, Elsie Oakensen Professor Don Scragg

Committee Members: Nick Atkinson, John Bryant, Tony Burns, Govind Deodhekar, Paul Fletcher, Revd Nick Kerr

E-mail addresses of SSS members who have given their permission have been put on Nick Kerr's Web page. If other SSS members have e-mail addresses, please inform Jean Hutchins making it quite clear whether the addresses are for committee use only, or whether they can be sent to Nick for inclusion on the Web page.

4. Inquiries Via The 'Net

Jean Hutchins

Since I became SSS membership secretary in May, all the inquiries I have received have been via e-mail, from people who have seen the SSS Web pages. The last four members to join have come via e-mail, and a fifth indirectly via a discussion forum on the Internet.

This suggests that the Internet is the way forward for the future, as Bob Brown suggested at the last meeting that he attended.

Several inquirers have asked about membership.

A couple have been quite scathing in their condemnation of the idea of simplifying spelling. Some seemed to think we were a source of spelling information, e.g., "Do you know of any records of children's photo- graphic memory for learning spellings rapidly?"; "I am trying to find the third word in the English language that ends in 'gry'. There is 'hungry' and there is 'angry'. Can you please help me with the third ??????" "Correct spelling and the meaning of the word, 'NATHERIOUS'?"; a student researching simple ways of representing a word phonetically.

I tried briefly to help these inquirers, but do not see this as part of my duties!

5. What One Member Has Been Doing

Each of us has a special talent or interest that can be used to further the cause of simplifying our spelling system. Here's how one member is using his.

Cornell Kimball

Over the past two years, I have been looking for examples of certain alternate spellings in articles in U.S. periodicals.

This has mostly been done by using a computer to search thru the back issues of newspapers and magazines. In a few cases, I've come across the spellings simply in the course of reading.

Spellings I Found

There are two simplified forms for *ough* words in particular which turned up many times, and those are *drive-thru* and *donut*. They are both spellings which have been used for several decades in commercial signs in the U.S. (and sometimes in other countries as well), and a number of journalists will use them as regular, generic words in their articles.

Searches found *thru* used in a number of hyphenated forms; others include *thru-hiker* and *pass-thru*. And I found a few cases where *thru* by itself was used in the text of newspaper articles. Here are three examples:

"We plan to operate it thru May 1,'....." - *Boston Globe*

"...capitalize on the town's thru traffic.." - *Memphis Commercial Appeal*

"The children, ages 7 thru 13, live" - *Detroit Free Press*

A few citations of *tho* came up, and a couple of dozen examples of *laff* or *laffs* were logged. I was unable to find any examples of *laf* or *lafs*; in looking at other *gh* words in this realm, searches turned up a citation each for *ruff* and *tuff*. Too, this found some writers using the phrase '*nuff said*'.

Letters to Newspapers

I sent letters to a few individual writers who had used, say, *thru* or *donut*, and noted that I enjoyed their article, and that I agreed with the use of whatever the particular spelling was.

I also wrote to the editors of a few of the newspapers which had used these spellings. I said that I approved of the use of those spellings, encouraged them to continue using them, and to consider a few more.

The managing editor of the *Miami Herald* wrote back, "we operate according to a style-book, and we do update that stylebook from time to time. I doubt we'll ever adopt the number of simplified spellings your letter suggests, but some of them will certainly appear increasingly in our newspaper and others."

I wrote to editors and writers at various other newspapers across the U.S., asking them to consider gradually adopting a few of these forms.

And yes, I've received a few unfavorable responses, but that's all part of promoting simpler spellings.

Citations to Dictionaries

For some words that I found several examples of, I typed up lists for each, listing citations by periodical, date, and article title.

Further, for several dozen of the citations, I have photocopies of the articles themselves.

(Incidentally, I've looked for a number of 'non-standard forms'. The photocopied articles also include citations of *biz*, *hi-tech*, *hijinks*, and *alright*, plus *seperate* and other 'derived forms' of it such as *seperately*.)

Recently, I sent the lists of article titles, and the photo-copies, to the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and to the editors of three American English dictionaries, *Merriam-Webster*, *American Heritage*, and *Random House*.

I have received responses from an editor at *Merriam-Webster* and an editor at *Random House*. The editors at both said that *drive-thru* was under consideration.

The response from *Random House* contained a further 'reward' for my efforts. Their editor replied, "The evidence you have compiled is impressive and will probably cause us to revise several entries."

Their editions currently label *thru* as 'informal'. The editor illustrated one revision based on my citations as he noted, "... and I have replaced the 'informal' description of *thru* with a short usage note explaining that some publications use it in standard contexts."