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simpl speling March 2000 newsletter of the simplified spelling society Editor: Alan Campbell

Society founded 1908

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

Web: www.spellingsociety.org

Taking off?

From reports on this and the next page, it could seem the arrival of the new millennium heralds a take-off point in our campaign. The item on possible newspaper demands should keep our feet firmly on the ground.

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AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Simplified Spelling Society will be held at 10:45am, Saturday, May 6, 2000

Ken Spencer, a member, and Lecturer in Educational Media and Technology at the Institute for Learning, University of Hull, will speak on *The Damage Done: orthografic transparency and literacy failure*. Subtitle: *Is English a Dyslexic Language?*

A committee meeting, open to all members, will follow.

1. Society engages MPs on two fronts

The advent of the new Millennium marked two different moves by the Society on opposite sides of the world to engage politicians in the campaign

In England secretary Masha Bell sent her well-researched 5000-word submission to the parliamentary select committee looking at reasons for low literacy rates at UK schools, when compared to continental scores.

New Zealand representative Allan Campbell wrote to the Minister of Education, and associate ministers, asking the new government to initiate international action for a review of spelling.

Masha's submission used as a reference point the 45 high-frequency words of List One in the Literacy Hour guidelines for English schools. Six official 'Early Learning Goals for Language and Literacy' are other bases.

The submission says English has a far greater number of simple essential high-frequency words with fonetically implausible spellings than virtually all other European languages.

Some points from the submission:

- Learners of other European languages do not have as much irregularity to cope with.
- English literacy teachers need far more specialized training than teachers in other languages.
- English literacy teaching comes down to having to suspend logic and to just remember.
- Literacy Hour so far has not produced any significant improvements in children's writing in national tests.
- It takes many years to attain competence in English spelling.
- Poor spelling standards in all English-speaking countries are due more to unpredictability of English spellings than to insufficient grasp of tonics, or inadequate teaching.
- English spelling ensures a high failure rate in teaching literacy and so needs much more remedial intervention.

The submission concludes: Are we happy to continue spending vast sums on remedial action and waste countless hours of children's lives year after year, forcing them to learn something which is really quite pointless, or can we be bold enough to fix the problem by spelling reform so that this need not be repeated *ad infinitum*? The latter would not be that hard or expensive to do.

NZ asked to take lead

The Society's New Zealand representative Allan Campbell has written to the Minister of Education in the new government Trevor Mallard, and his three associate ministers, and the education spokesman for the cross-bench Green Party.

He asked, with supporting argument, that New Zealand take the lead by inviting other English-speaking nations and international bodies to meet and begin to organize a spelling review.

As a short-term measure he suggested 'American spellings' be permitted in schools.

Coincidentally, the NZ Association for the Teaching of English - a group of high-school teachers - announced it was polling its members on a proposal to allow 'American spellings' in school work, and the Qualifications Authority, which oversees public examinations, said it would monitor the proposal. Allan has written to these two bodies, and enclosed copies of an article on 'American spellings' for British schools, from *JSSS* 97/1. The NZATE president was very appreciative of this. Primary reading teachers are also to debate the issue at their annual meeting in June.

Independently, a Society member, Tom Shanks, has been lobbying another government minister, who is his local MP and a fellow party member.

2. This 'n' that from here 'n' there

German changes taking hold

Zé do Rock

The German language reform is bedding in. The print media began to follow the new rules on August 1 last year. Most schools and government offices adopted them after the Constitutional Court rejected a legal challenge in 1998.

In June 1999 the newspaper Die Zeit, one of the big three, switched. But not in everything. It published a special supplement explaining it, and saying 'Take what u think is good and forget about the rest.'

The wire services, newspapers, and magazines switched to the new spelling jointly on August 1 1999. They published notices advising readers of the impending changes. Special courses were given to train journalists, and spell-checking programs in newsroom computers were modified. Book publishers are changing gradually, as they are afraid if they don't students and pupils, to avoid confusion, won't read their books.

So far the anti-reform campaigners have achieved only one real victory. The small, northern state of Schleswig-Holstein held a referendum, where the reform lost 45 % to 55 %. The local government tried to ignore the result, since it would mean extra costs (old books can't be found; publishers would charge to republish them). The anti-reformers tried unsuccessfully to have referendums in other states.

Schleswig-Holstein is slowly 'going back' to the new spelling, arguing that they have to spell as the rest of the republic, and the newspapers there are using the new spelling. Parents have stopped complaining; only the most fanatic anti-reformers are still trying to save what they can.

Opponents of change hoped that, once the public saw the new spellings and grammar in newspapers and magazines, they would resist them and join the campaign to revert to previous usage. Supporters hoped the public would adopt them.

The reform changes 0.6% of words. Most items wouldn't be discussed in English: reducing the 54 comma rules to nine, more regularity in writing together/separate (*Auto fahren, radfahren = to drive a car, to 'drive' a bike - now Auto fahren, Rad fahren*), capital/lower case - before *in bezug auf (in relation to)*, now *in Bezug auf*. The *ß* becomes *ss* in most cases. But on the internet everybody spells *ss* anyway.

Originally only lower case for nouns was sought, but protests were too loud. Most people want to eliminate capitals, but the authorities didn't poll the people; they just heard the protests. Among the protesting experts are many who don't want to lose status: if the old way is simplified, they'd lose their special knowledge.

Anti-reformers are convinced most Germans aren't interested in changing the way they write. A survey of 1100 Germans found 45% planning to ignore the changes, with only 16% planning to adopt them right away. The rest said they expected to do so eventually.

Zé is on Bavarian TV for four months at present in a series on the reform. He leads and finishes each 15min program. He criticizes the anti-reformers, but also some of the reform compromises.

3. What one member has been doing

Wide-ranging involvement over many years

Doug Everingham, Australia

I spent early school years in three schools that used vastly different methods. Phonics well applied at one stimulated my interest. At high school in the 1930s I came across spelling reform books in a library and thought reform would save much failure and frustration for learners.

A friend about 1942 showed me Hogben's *Interglossa*, an Esperanto substitute based on word roots already used as parts of technical terms. I eventually contributed articles to *The International Language Review*, edited by Floyd Hardin, of Denver, Colorado, discussing various auxiliary language projects, and helped a few contributors to develop their proposals (*Intersistemat*, *Unolok*, *Concorde*).

About that time I was attracted to Basic English and Neurath's *Isotype*, a system of pictorial symbols for simplifying graphs, public signs, and other communications. I became the chief collaborator in Sydney with Charles Bliss, inventor of Bliss symbols (an interlingual pictography), and his wife. They later published a spelling reform proposal of Walter Gassner which allowed a range of alternative spellings for some phonemes so that no new homographs needed to be created by using the reforms (eg, *bo boe boh* for *bo beau bow*).

In 1966 as Australia launched decimal coinage I published a pamphlet in a *66 Spellingz Skeem* under a penname like *Psychse T Cykhss*. It proposed 66 varieties of spellings for our 40-44 phonemes, a fuller coverage of the Gassner concept. Frank Laubach, founder of the Laubach Institute providing alphabets for languages, wrote 'U are a genius'. I soon realized why he was so impressed. He had proposed something very similar.

Harry Lindgren's *Spelling Reform: A New Approach* appeared in 1969. I saw it a few years later and abandoned my '66 project as too radical. I persuaded Harry to launch his Spelling Action Society on 'SR1 Day', September 1 'seventy-one. He chose the name to share the initials SAS with the airline of his ancestral Scandinavia. He became president. I was secretary and compiled an index to his book.

When his health declined Garry Jimmieson, a teacher in my then home city Rockhampton took over for a time as editor of our newsletter Spelling Action. When he found it too demanding I became editor. I stopped publication when the society was dwindling.

As a federal opposition backbencher about 1970 I asked the education minister about possibilities for spelling reform. He consulted some experts. Most of them advised only a minimal change like *f* for *ph* would be likely to succeed. I wrote often to editors and others.

I persevered with Lindgren's SR1 (e for the clear short vowel sound, as in *hemorrhage*, *led*) in private and much official correspondence, and in the first booklet published, on community health policy, by my department when I was Australian Minister for Health, 1972-75. Had I known a cabinet colleague had renamed his Department of Labour and Industry with *Labor* I would have dared rename mine Department of Health. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam knew of my interest and wrote to me once or twice as 'Dug', signing himself 'Gof'.

Chris Upward, pioneer of Cut Spelling, thought SR1 and CS could try to merge or compromise. I saw this as defeating the prime object of writing: to encode phonemes. After some arguments by Zé do Rock, Chris, Valerie Yule, and others I accepted that

1. morfemes, and some rules that may later be better replaced, are deeply ingrained in writing habits and should have some recognition in early reform stages; and
2. enuff grossly troublesome glyfs like *ough* should be tackled in a first stage to stir public concern.

In recent months I've shelved for a time my decades-long project of drafting a simplified interlingual English (taking leads from pidjins and Hogben's Essential World English) to concentrate on the RITE project of the SSS email group (Reducing Irregularities in Time-warped English is one version of RITE).

I've suggested there that we draft a law, preferably in more than one country, to set up an expert group to recommend a first stage RITE. This may be more successful than earlier attempts in Britain which narrowly failed to gain majority support, perhaps in part because they called for degrees of compulsion.

I agree with most proposals that have majority support of the SSS group. I see them moving towards

1. a lexicon which will include all 'WRONG' (currently dictionary- listed) words as well as one or more alternative versions which better follow spelling trends, distinguishing current from possible, and in each case differentiated from merely recognizable or tolerated versions by print style and size.
2. a commitment to recognize a wider range of spellings (like existing *aerie*, *aery*, *eyrie*, *eyry*, *manoeuvre*, *maneuver*) and let usage determine which among them prevail with no official compulsion but encouragement of public and private style guide manual and dictionary publishers to indicate preferences for RITE spellings, as Webster did in introducing most Americanisms.

Older people better spellers

A survey carried out in Britain by Oxford English Dictionaries has found that older people are significantly better at spelling 10 frequently misspelt words than those who had recently left school or university. Almost 20% of people contacted by the researchers said they didn't know how to spell.

Researchers found spelling ability improved little after 16, suggesting it is best learned at school.

'Linkwords and sounds'

A Massey University study commissioned by the New Zealand Education Ministry found the reading recovery program, designed by Marie Clay for children who have failed to benefit after a year's formal reading instruction, often resulted in low self-esteem and produced little long-term improvement in reading ability.

One of the researchers, Professor James Chapman, said the program should focus more on linking words and sounds rather than the meaning and the context of sentences.

4. Letters

Fonemic flexibility

Peter Gilet, Australia

I've just had a brainwave. One of the main stumbling blocks to a fonetic spelling reform is that there are all kinds of different sounds uttered, and if we try for absolute accuracy, we end up with a very complicated system. Yet many of these differences in sounds are not important to write because when, say, faced with *rid* and *reed* the context tells us immediately which pronunciation to give the word, even if they were spelt the same.

What I suggest then is that we incorporate into our spelling reforms a certain amount of fonemic flexibility and write all *oos* as *u*, *ee* as *i*, *sh* as *s*, *ch* as *c*, all *air* sounds as *eir*, all *o* sounds as *o*, and *th* as *t* or *d*.

We would have something as follows. 'I am anoder disgruntled skul ticer sik of wasting hours of my time, and yirs of my pupils' lives, ticing all de wurd speilgs of Englis. Ticers have various carts and drin and nmonics, but de slow kids never learn to spell anyway, and de oders simply rid and rid till it soks in tru deir skin.'

Place renaming is an ongoing process

Madhukar N Gogate, India

In India name changes for metropolitan cities (SSNov99) took unnecessarily long. The British Raj ended in 1947, and within the first 10 years the names of many smaller cities and towns were changed.

Thus, Poona became Pune (*pu-push, ne-net*), Sholapur became Solapur, Baroda became Vadodara, Cawnpore became Kanpur, Benares became Varanasi. Rivers Ganges and Tapti were renamed Ganga and Tapi. Many streets honoring British officers were renamed. Public statues of Queen Victoria, King George, etc, were transferred to museums. Only metropolitan cites such as Bombay, Madras, Delhi, Calcutta, Bangalore remained unchanged, but their renaming process started in 1995. Do not be surprised if one day Delhi and India are Dilh and Hindustan.

Why was all renaming not done at once? It would be convenient for maps, geografy books, encyclopedias, etc. India is a democracy, so any city renaming has to be approved by local municipality, state government, and central government.

That takes time. Special interests lobby against renaming. For example, many institutions carry the name Bombay, such as University of Bombay, Bombay Chamber of Commerce. They were reluctant for many years, and their opinion could not be ignored. Now, University of Bombay too is called University of Mumbai.

Renaming happens elsewhere, too. Dacca in Bangladesh is now Dhaka. Ceylon and Burma are Sri Lanka and Myanmar. The Japanese renamed Singapore as Shonan in World War 2. After recapture by the British, it reverted to Singapore. New York was once New Amsterdam. Renaming should not be seen as an absurdity. Peoples' sentiments must be respected.

Indians too give twists to foreign names. The English language is Angrezi in Hindi, Ingraji in Marathi.

Incremental, measurable

Robert Craig, England

The days of Oxford English being the only show in town are long past, which is why the pretense that language planning in the case of English will only affect spelling is untenable, and why reforms must be incremental.

Rengo - Rectified English

Rengo 1: Reconciliation of British English and American English.

Rengo 2: Introduction of better spellings, previously tested by the SSS in its house style.

Rengo 3: Regularized English

Rengo 4, etc, until the process is complete.

Rengo objectives should be measurable. Acceptance of American spellings is measurable. It can be measured in terms of recognition by ministers of education. It can be measured in terms of newspapers which adopt them.

No bellyaching, please, we know what's best

Nelson Helm, USA

I favor agreeing on a spelling scheme. I want everyone to use it. But, I do not believe we have the power either to agree or to convince everyone. I think trying to do so wastes our time.

I think that if we work very hard for a very long time and raise lots of money and hire advertising experts, then, and only then, we may lead many to dislike TO, and to want to spell differently.

Should that day come, the only way I know to create a working majority is to let the reformers select the reforms, to give them a sense of owning the reform.

Handing me a plate and directing me to 'Eat it all, and no bellyaching, please, because we know what's best for u' would not win me to any cause. How about u?

A bridge between TO, new spelling

Hosiba, Yasuyuki, Japan

English has some ways to represent sounds. One is 'fonetic symbols' or IPA, another is 'menuspell' (PV7.) I do not know much about menuspell but it seems to me neither systematic nor clear.

Anyway, it is too long!

IPA is, of course, systematic and clear. But it requires special fonts. So it is not likely to be used in emails or such.

We, users of English as a second language, are often embarrassed not only by proper names of persons or geographical names but also by ordinary words when we read them. How could we pronounce words not in dictionaries?

The problem is that the English language lacks appropriate means to represent its pronunciation accurately for use on the net. What we need is an alternative spelling to IPA.

For example, *Nu Folik Fo'netik* (PY7, Steve Bett) will almost suit. I also have some ideas, but at this time I leave it to other members. It can be, but need not be, a new candidate for new spelling.

First we should establish this convention, 'Spell to Read'. Next, spread it to the world by means of the net. Then we would have three ways to spell English: TO - Simplified Spelling - Spell to Read. The Simplified Spelling would be the bridge between TO and Spell to Read. This situation would lead a tendency to simplify English spelling.

Meind yaur perversifications

John Miles, England

I wrote a book some 40(?) years ago, maybe more, called *Meind Yaur Lanwij*. Have now nearly finished a further suggested design for ss called *Reitspel* in a book called *English Spelling Perversifications*.

Shall send a copy when it is finished. It might just help. Yoo nevr no, doo yoo? Noa dabual leturz and no doobl auntaundr!

Teachers a conservative lot

George Anderson, Scotland

Re *Disappointing response to advertising trial* (SSNov99): I wasn't surprised at the low uptake. My short article in *The Link* drew **no** response - not even hostile! When u consider *Link* is sent to every registered teacher and to all levels of the Scottish education system, from nursery to university, it is quite incredible.

We have to understand that teachers as a group are a conservative lot, maybe even ultraconservative, and are too concerned about 'getting thru the day' to be bothered about anything that smacks of reform. I firmly agree with Valerie Yule, who believes teachers are 'not as good a target as we may think.'

In fact anyone who dares to mess about with the status quo gets short shrift from the education establishment. Take Maria Montessori, A S Neil and Edward de Bono, all innovators who've been marginalized. If change is to come it will be imposed from above. We know that other countries have modernized so we should attempt to discover **how** they managed to do it and learn from them. Maybe SSS members in other countries can throw some light on the subject.

Superfluous and confusing

Nicholas Kerr, England

I would support Robert Craig (SSNov99) in his call to remove the superfluous and confusing *l* in *could, would, should*. However, I would go further, along with CS, and remove the *o* also, since otherwise u are left with the digraf *ou*, which in many cases is pronounced as *proud, cloud*.

Robert may not like *u* as the spelling for the second person, but it's there already in phrases like *While-U-Wait*, and any reform would be foolish to reject out of hand a better form that is already accepted by the public. While I agree with him in writing to keep the *oo* digraf for the long rounded front sound, as in *fool, boot, hoof, tooth*, I disagree with him when it comes to the short vowel in *good* and *book*. (Incidentally, I recognize that many people pronounce *hoof, tooth* with a short vowel.) Two letters in a word would seem to suggest a long vowel sound, and *uo* cannot fail to suggest a difthong.

I have long thought that we could take a leaf out of Welsh's book, and use *w* to represent the short rounded sound, as in *fwf, bwk, lwk, brwk, twk*. The only fly in this particular ointment would be *wwd*, which begins to look a bit too ziggy and zaggy.

5. Net chat:

Excerpts from a few of the posts in the SSS internet discussion group.

Acceptance

Valerie Yule, Australia



Changing the small frequent words is hardest to get any acceptance for from anyone who has learnt to read even slightly, because

1. It is what is most overlearnt, so people are most reluctant to change.
2. It makes most difference to the look of English text.
3. There are only about 100 of them and they do not cause the hassles the rest of the minefield does.
4. It has been an old custom in fiction to represent the speech of the vulgar and stupid as dialect in 'spelling reform', eg, *wos*, *wot*, so people laugh at it.

There is a similar difficulty about replacing plural *s* with *z* when pronounced /z/. Once the general principle is grasped, which is early, it is easier to slam *s* on all plurals than to have to listen and distinguish between the final plural for, say, *cats* and *cadz*.

Dutch

John Gledhill, England

Big official changes in Dutch were (very roughly, and from memory) in 1830, 1890, 1933, 1954, 1970, 1996. Before that, apart from some deliberations of the 17th century bible translation committee, most changes were gradual and unofficial in origin, often inspired by particular influential grammars.

Dutch simplified spellers had a field day: I read about 400 (sic) published proposals for simplified Dutch spelling for my research, covering the period 1580-1970. Nearly every grammar in that period included statements on how spelling should be changed; some were sensible, some were mad, all were different. Just imagine if they had had email! Phew! Compare that to English grammars which always include statements about how spelling should not be changed. That's why we may have to have a different approach.

Knowledge

Ron Footer, England

We know there are some changes which are normally acceptable. We know there are some changes which are normally not acceptable. We know there are some changes which are marginal. We know we cannot change *s* to *z*. We know we can change *ph* to *f*. This is why the idea of retaining the 'magic e' can work. This is why we have repeated that certain spellings cannot be used.

6. Jean Wilkinson, USA, writes: Of ladders and confusion

My husband asked me to fone around about buying orchard ladders for his farm. One store quoted a price list that had a longer ladder cheaper than a shorter ladder. When I called back I got a different man, who gave me an entirely different list of prices for the same items.

At another store two salespeople respectively told me their 10ft aluminum ladder weighed 25 pounds and 28 pounds - the same ladder!

We chose the first store and asked if we could pick up the ladder tomorrow. No, he said, it would be about a week. But he did mention where they were ordering it from. It was local, so I called and was told they had the ladders right there; with a purchase order number from the retail store, we could pick them up this afternoon. So I called the retail store, who said the wholesale store no longer had that personal pickup policy, and he would check it out.

I guess we all have our stories to tell of confusions such as these, but what I immediately thought of was our language. Every English-speaking child has to face just such inconsistencies as I did in buying ladders. Take *stove*: the *e* makes the *o* say its name, right? Good rule. Then take *love*, *above*, *come*, *some*, *other*, etc - a whole tribe of words where the *e* has lost its influence and *o* says *uh*. And then - the child finds *move* and *prove*, with a **third** sound for *o*! Shall we blame the *e* for being entirely out of control of the situation? Or shall we decide it's time to lasso English and tame it so children can ride without falling off?

We've been discussing only 'easy' words; we haven't mentioned *tongue* or *corps* or *chaos* or *phlegm* or *rendezvous*. U've probably got a favorite list, too.

I read (I intend present tense here, not past) that Spanish, Dutch, and Turkish children, to name some, typically have their spellings under their belt by the end of first grade. But it takes the average English-speaking child thru fifth grade to get a handle on the basic English spellings, with some still struggling long, long after that. Surely no other language has such mconsistent spelling.

It isn't the children's fault! With spellings matching spoken sounds, many or most spelling-disabled children wouldn't even know they had a disability! When spellings don't match sounds, we have to memorize each one like Chinese picture writing.

Do we really want to be doing this to our kids? And to be paying our teachers to continue to do it?

7. What newspapers may require to alter their spelling

Damian Bonsall, England

Damian Bonsall is a member of the Society, and works for *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. He is based at the *Manchester Evening News*

In the Society's discussion group I had this put to me: U know the environment better than any of us. Imagine u were editor of a big daily, and the government said to u: 'We want to simplify English spelling.

What would the practical implications be for your publications. Please advise us.'

An interesting question. Donning an imaginary editor's hat, I answered as follows:

Maximum freedom

1. No legal obligation to use the reform.

Everyone hates compulsion, especially when it is enshrined in law. This is particularly true of newspaper proprietors and editors, who are professional cynics and suspicious of everything governments do. Further, legal obligations even when there is a clear intention to follow them, imply a risk they may not be fully met, raising the specter of court action, large legal costs, and possibly protracted and complex insurance claims.

2. No threat to enforce the reform, eg, loss of copyright or taxation.

Following on from the above, it is conceivable other strong arm tactics could be used, without invoking the criminal law. I once thought this may be a wa yforward, but now am convinced persuasion is the only practical tool for advancing spelling reform, and any threat, or implied threat, would kill off any project.

Maximum motivation

3. Convincing evidence that the reform will be generally beneficial to society.

If persuasion is the only method available, the arguments in favor need to be carefully martialed, and supported by well defined and relevant evidence.

4. Convincing evidence that reforms in foreign languages have benefited them.

Other countries have cherished and nurtured their orthografies thru periodic spelling (or in some cases alfabetic) reforms. That this effort and cost has been worth while to them would need to be demonstrated if the English-speaking world is to follow suit.

Maximum reassurance

5. Reassurance that the reform is industry-wide, ie, all newspapers, wire services, and publishers (including government publications) are changing, and schools are teaching and will continue to teach the reform.

No publisher, especially after the Chicago Tribune's efforts, is going to go it alone. This implies a defined reform, and

in particular, not a degeneration into a free-for-all, where mutually exclusive schemes are used.

6. Reassurance that the reform is international, that all (or almost all) English-speaking countries and international organizations such as EU/Nato/UN are all reforming too.

Minimum grief

7. Defined reform in terms of

a) A list of old/new spellings, and new/old.

There will be available an alfabetic lookup, in both directions, so new spellings can be found, and an unrecognized new spelling can be referred back to its original.

b) A changeover date with six months' notice.

8. Early availability of a reformed dictionary (ie, six months in advance).

9. Minimal reform which is instantly and unambiguously readable by existing staff, customers, advertisers and readers (ie, TO trained readers).

There is no time or money to retrain staff, so the new spelling must be instantly readable.

Minimum cost

10. Free, idiot proof, integrated, easy-to-learn-and-use conversion software for all major platforms and programs, eg, Atex, Quark Express, MSWord, DTP, HTML, etc.

This means work prepared by a competent TO speller, unable or unwilling to learn the new regime, can be automatically converted by computer. Further, speech recognition programs would need to be able to output directly into the reformed spelling, and foreign language dictionaries and machine translation software updated.

11. The free conversion software mentioned in (10) to be format preserving, ie, will preserve size, color, font, etc, not just a text-to-text conversion.

12. Free, easy to install spellcheckers for all major programs.

This means spellcheck dictionaries and their auto-suggest features, and also the separate auto-correct lookup tables.

13. No extra newsprint cost because text is longer (eg, for *The Guardian*, a 9% increase in text length means a 3% increase in newsprint which equates to well over a million pounds a year).

Minimum flak

14. A body to whom all complaints, queries, and concerns regarding the reform can be directed, eg, 'Don't contact us about how we spell, but write to the Spelling Control Commission

Ombudsrnan, whose address is

Minimum period

15. A gold-plated cast-iron guarantee set in stone and concreted permanently in place that there will be no more changes for three years, and that those will meet the requirements here, including this one.

8. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

Resources for Y2K

[Most of the URLs given at the time are no longer available.]

Starting points:

JSSS assistant editor, John Reilly, USA, has developed one of the best starting points for those interested in spelling reform. He has a web ring which allows anyone to cross link their page with other related pages. All members of the reform ring include a link back to John's page. It is a kind of do-it-yourself Yahoo. If you have a page related to spelling reform, you are invited to join the ring.

On-line pronunciation dictionaries

Dr Ed Rondthaler, USA, remarked, 'All this English vs American pronunciation voting business surprises me when there's a highly authoritative source already available. The *Oxford American Dictionary* has an excellent pronunciation scheme satisfactory for both countries. On-line dictionaries also have excellent pronunciation guides:

Spelling and applied linguistics

OBI: The Online Book Initiative.

Literacy resource sites:

International directory

The First International Multilingualism and Dyslexia Conference, Manchester, England, June 1999
Several researchers at this conference reported that English spelling and lack of regularity in fonological patterns are indeed an obstacle to reading and spelling efficiently. One researcher contended that 'English is a dyslexic language.' With its many irregularities and vast vocabulary, he said, English causes greater numbers of dyslexics than other languages do. Two keynote speakers agreed.

ITA in a nutshell. There have been several requests for information on the Pitman's initial teaching alfabet

KidsSpel, a scheme by K W Rees: www.TutorU.com/PH.htm

Funetic spelling: John Fox does not present his solution to the alfabet problem until the reader wades thru a 30-page preamble. This link bypasses the long introduction and jumps to his proposed reform.

Crazy Spellings: www.TutorU.com/SpellType.htm

According to this web page there are 302 crazy spellings (of 38 fonemes): average 8-spells per foneme (!!). Thus, 264 contrived spellings (who did this crazy stuff?).'

Complaints from authors and publishers:

The problem with spelling: www.spellingsociety.org/

The history of spelling reform:

New spelling schemes, critiques of TO

Ugh-free spelling:

Ugh-free spelling is not substandard English. It's 'superstandard.' Ugh-free spelling is cleaner and more regular than standard English.

Ughish examples	ugh-free prototypes	alt ugh-free pattern
rough, tough	buff, cuff	ruf, tuf
cough, trough	off, scoff	cof, trof
though, borough	go, no; doe, floe	tho, boro
through	flu, gnu	thru
plough, bough	how, cow	plau, bau
thought, bought	taut, astronaut	thot, bot
caught, aught	taut, astronaut	cot, ot
draught	draft raft	draeft
laugh	staff, chaff	laef
sleigh, weigh	bay, day	slei, wei
eight, weight	bait, gait	eit, weit
sleight	bite, kite	slait, kait
sigh nigh	pie, tie	sai, nai
right, night	bite, kite	rait, nait/ryt, nyt

Talepeace

ValerieYule, Australia

Our family spelling joke is Patrick, just learning to read. The car arrives at a petrol station and Patrick reads the sign. 'Look! It says "oil" and it has two silent letters!'

(The sign said *Mobil*.)

9. *Simpl speling.* members' supplement. March 2000

October: Listing main patterns

Masha Bell had compiled what she felt was a fairly comprehensive basic English vocabulary without inflections (BEV) of just over 4700 words. With considerable help from Jean Hutchins, Zé do Rock, John Gledhill, and Elizabeth Kuizenga from the discussion group and Joe Little from the ALC, she had tried to divide these into words with fonemic spellings and words with unpredictable elements in them, but encountered a variety of problems.

She and Jean had compiled a list with the main spelling patterns and sub-patterns for all the English fonemes from which she would try to categorize BEV in order to get a clearer picture of English spelling regularity and irregularity. She hoped that this would prove useful for both reform and publicity purposes.

The leaflet *Modernizing English Spelling: Principles & Practicalities* needed updating. Chris Upward would do this in consultation with the committee.

The SSS Treasury deposit of £25,000 at Barclays Bank would not be reinvested when it matured in November 1999; f.5000 would be left in the High Interest Business account at Barclays; and £20,000 invested in a 90-day-notice deposit account with the Portman Building Society. Jean Hutchins and Chris Upward agreed to be signatories.

The new *Personal View* guidelines for authors would be made available on request as soon as Paul Fletcher had made minor amendments to his draft, following discussions at this meeting. Prospective new authors would be sent examples of spelling solutions from earlier *PVs* and a summary of grafernes previously proposed, so they could compare their own ideas.

Professor John Wells had interviewed Chris Upward about spelling and reform for the BBC world service in October 1999.

January: Press release is planned

Chairman Chris Jolly's suggestion to send a press release to major UK newspapers about the submission to the parliamentary committee on early years education was adopted. He would draft it. The submission made a powerful case for the need to consider reforming English spelling. It set the tone for a-rousing interest among recipients to whom the idea would be new. The Society now needed to arm itself with all available relevant facts and figures for an eventual appearance before the committee.

* The Society is seeking charitable status.

* Annual accounts will be circulated before the AGM. They will continue to be professionally audited, tho the Charity Commission would not require this with registration.

* John Gledhill has been co-opted to the committee with a view to taking over as membership secretary when Jean Hutchins retires this year.

* Allan Campbell asked the Society to set a target for its active campaigning. The committee decided it was not possible to specify a target audience, altho politicians and education correspondents were probably worth considering. Different countries had different power structures, some central (eg, UK and NZ), others federal (eg, US and Australia). Members in

different countries needed to tailor their strategies to local circumstances. They also needed to take account of members' talents in individual countries.

*The Society will not promote adoption of American spellings in Commonwealth countries, as this might provoke hostility to spelling reform in some quarters; but it recommends pupils not be penalized for using American spellings.

* Masha Bell sought a scanner for her work. She was asked to supply details of models and prices.

* The leaflet *Modernizing English Spelling: Principles & Practicalities* will be revised and reprinted.

* John Reilly, New Jersey, USA, is helping Chris Upward edit JSSS. Chris is considering making the next, first issue of the millennium a special edition in which two outstanding earlier publications will be reprinted, ie, W Archer's pamphlet *The Etymological Aspect of Spelling Reform* (written in *New Spelling*) and J Downing's article *The Transfer of Skills in Language Functions*. The Society's parliamentary submission will also appear.

* Chris Upward is preparing new material on heterographs and on American spellings for our website.

* Chris Jolly is piloting a remedial reading scheme for young learners in which all surplus letters are printed in a fainter font. He finds that allaying parental concerns is a major hurdle in introducing such a scheme, just as with ITA. When parents of children who have used it for a year can reassure newcomers, this becomes much easier.

* Membership was 140. In 1999 12 members left; 28 joined and one lapsed member renewed his membership.

Attendances

October Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Masha Bell (minutes), Tony Burns, Paul Fletcher, Leo Chapman (pm only), Jean Hutchins, Gwenllian Thorstad, Chris Upward.

Member: Edward Marchant

Apologies: Nicholas Kerr, Gerald Palmer.

January Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Masha Bell (minutes), Jean Hutchins, Gerald Palmer, Gwenllian Thorstad, Chris Upward.

Members: John Gledhill, Wilma Scott

Apologies: Nicholas Kerr, Leo Chapman, Tony Burns, Paul Fletcher, Mona Cross.

Meanwhile back at the office . . .

Preparing a submission

Masha Bell

During the last months of '99 I spent most of my time putting together a submission to the Inquiry into Early Years Education by the parliamentary select committee at Westminster. A newspaper article in July had alerted me that this was coming up and I began to plan for it, but the terms of reference did not appear until the end of October.



The closing date was 17 January. The Christmas and new millennium breaks intervened, and I was still researching some of the facts and figures that I wanted to include. I also wanted to give

committee members and members of the email discussion group a chance to put forward suggestions for amendments before sending off the final draft.

I decided not to include any suggestions for reform - just explain clearly why English-speaking children on average take several years longer to become literate than many other European nationals. I could not avoid drawing attention to the main areas of spelling difficulty. When setting out the many grafemes for spelling the ee-sound in English, for example, I pointed out that adopting just one spelling instead would save much school time. This can perhaps be construed as advocating a specific reform, but I could see no other way of explaining meaningfully what the costs of English spelling irregularity are, or what gains reform would bring.

It was suggested to me that one measure which we could perhaps advocate was to recommend the adoption of American spellings in the UK, but this did not fit easily into my argumentation. I also believe that the American changes that have been adopted have little to do with the kind of spelling reform that English needs.

Our constitution states 'a reform of the spelling of English in the interest of ease of learning and economy in writing' as our goal. Few American changes fall into that category. This is not surprising since one of Webster's avowed aims was to make US English different from UK English, rather than make spelling substantially easier for learners.

More time for the cause

At the end of '99 and at the start of this year membership subs have been coming in steadily, but I would put in a plea for everyone who has not yet paid to please do so now. Prompt payment will allow me to devote more time to the cause of reform and be less regularly distracted by administrative matters.

Free for the asking

1. Richard P Mudgett, author of *Donuts aren't UGHly eny mor, Simpler Speling for th' 2,000'z* (1997, 131pp), has generously donated 10 copies for distribution to members of the Society.

The book offers a light-hearted account of a variant on Nue Speling (NS), World English Spelling, and Soundspel (American Literacy Council), and is recommended as an easy introduction to the NS tradition of spelling reform.

2. *Faster Spelling for 2000* - Spelling design moves on from the usual range of proposals focused on sound-symbol correspondence. *Faster Spelling* takes account of the needs and abilities of users and learners internationally, the nature of English, and how literacy teaching could be improved - information useful for other reformers - and includes a two-page teachers' guide, games, answers to reform objections, the first step and the future. A 24pp expanded revision of *Personal View 10, International English Spelling*, which was too condensed and too minutely printed. Available email (Macintosh Word or within emails) from Valerie Yule, Australia at postage cost.

Congratulations to

Jenny Chew, until recently a member of the Society, who in the British New Year honors list was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) 'for services to literacy'.

Michael Bell, who has had a 1500-word article published in *LinguaSig* newsletter of Mensa, outlining his views on spelling and the aim and work of the Society.

Dates of the three committee meetings after the AGM are July 15 and October 7, 2000, and January 27, 2001.

Guidelines on presentation of members' schemes as *Personal Views* are available from Paul Fletcher, England.