

SS12.

simpl speling July 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

Contents

1. [Further representations to Commons](#). Gwenllian Thorstad
[Teachers receptive to member's talk](#). Barbara Harrison
 2. This 'n' that from here 'n' there
[The search is on for RITE](#)
[Literacy a high priority](#)
[Talk to Thai TESOL teachers](#). Ian Martin
[2000 spelling bee champion](#)
 3. What one member has been doing:
[Spelling confusion aired in the mess](#). Ron Footer
 4. Letters:
[In defense of New Spelling](#). Edward Rondthaler
[Non-redundant, easy symbol set](#). George Lahey
[Welsh w a nonstarter?](#) Robert Craig
[C and g the 'root of all evil'?](#) Ted Relton
[Proactive consensus](#). Chris Kiwi
[Severe implications for braille people](#). Janet Reynolds
[David B Guralnik, Noted lexicografer, dies](#).
[An approach to Chambers](#). Tom Lang
 5. Jean Wilkinson, writes:
[Watch your tongue](#)
 6. [International Spelling Day. October 9 2000](#)
 7. [Most illiterate children would succeed in other languages](#). Ken Spencer
 8. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett:
[Roman letter names?](#)
[Near enuff is good enuff](#)
[The mother tongue is Slurvian, not English](#)
[A quick history of spelling](#)
[How alfabetic or fonemic is traditional spelling?](#)
- [Talepeace](#): A Pharmacy
9. [Members' supplement](#)

Just doing it

Are members becoming more active? Submissions to parliaments, seeking a new RITE form, organizing ISD, approaching a dictionary, addressing regular and TESOL teachers all indicate they may be. We welcome more news of member activity.

[Gwenllian Thorstad: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Paper](#)]

1. Further representations to Commons

Gwenllian Thorstad, a Society committee member, has attended meetings of the Education Subcommittee of the House of Commons as an observer, and has made written representations to it.

She reported to the Society's AGM that the subcommittee had so far invited oral evidence relating only to the provision of preschool education, since the setting up of nursery classes at primary schools was making survival difficult for many nursery schools, and there was a shortage of properly trained nursery teachers. The subcommittee had not yet called for any evidence on the content of early years education, the area in which the Society's submission could be expected to be discussed.

Since the AGM she has reported she had attended a further meeting, at which the chairman said the MPs had been to Denmark, where formal education starts at 7, but where there is a 20% illiteracy problem. This, Gwen said, was because of the inconsistent spelling, as in English.

In letters Gwen has told the subcommittee that the irregularity of English orthography retards the acquisition of literacy skills in children and adults.

She said difficulty in reading English was already apparent at age 7 years, when at least 15% have been found to be retarded. Even good readers could not read all words at once, and it took the average child 10 years — age 5 to 15 — to attain an average standard of literacy in English in order to read all newspapers, longer than in other European languages.

Nine-year-old English children, particularly the good readers, were aware of the problems with spelling. When asked their opinions on the spelling of the first 100 key words, they all agreed with predictable invariant spellings (eg, *had*), but disagreed with most short predictable variant words (eg, wanting *woz* for *was*), and with all unpredictable words (eg, wanting *ov* for *of*).

Gwen has also asked that attention be given to the provision of remedial teaching for those with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), and said a reading curriculum that is too advanced for 5-year-olds should not be used with 4-year-olds, as has been suggested.

The New Zealand parliamentary select committee on education and science is not expected to begin hearings for its inquiry into the teaching of reading until later this month at the earliest.

Teachers receptive to member's talk

After overcoming initial nervousness, southernmost SSS member Barbara Harrison enjoyed the chance last month to talk about spelling reform to a group of 15 fellow teachers in Invercargill, New Zealand.

She found they were very interested in the work of the Society, tho most had not heard of it. She explained the need for reform and gave some examples. The audience agreed about the need to change *they* to *thay*.

She showed them copies of the *Journal* and *Simpl Speling*, and quoted some paragraphs from the original pamphlets new members receive. She wrote on a board all the various ways of spelling the

ee sound, and talked about surplus letters and silent letters. 'I guess I had a willing audience because they all have the same frustrations,' she says.

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

The search is on for RITE

Dominating the Society's email group discussions for the past half year has been RITE (Reducing Irregularities in Traditional English) spelling. The idea takes on board the decision of Society members in 1999 to support gradual rather than wholesale change. The aim is to develop a system based on traditional spelling (TS) but gradually improving it.

Masha Bell says she got the idea that has led to RITE (or RITEspel as some prefer) from the way other languages have been improved. Suggestions for a radical transformation of English spelling 'seemed a bit over the top' to her. After the membership ballot that favored a staged change, Zé do Rock contacted her to ask: What next? They exchanged some long emails and found they agreed on an overall reform strategy.

While Masha wanted to establish the extent to which core English vocabulary was regular and irregular before formulating any reform proposals, Zé was keen to keep the momentum going. They decided he should organize the ballots in the email group for the reform proposals.

Since then the group has been talking, putting forward proposals for change, and voting, with Zé counting the results. Ze has been compiling options for voting, while Masha has tried to provide word lists of both regular and irregular spellings for each change under consideration.

An aim is for the group, and then the Society, to eventually adopt RITE as its in-house style, to show that members can agree on a system, and also to give the world one system that will not be too far from what they are used to, but which reduces many of the present spelling problems.

Using RITE, Zé wrote: 'The mane advantage of RITE is its legibility (and so its salability), the fact that u can rite in it evryday and u dont make peeple angry. If we cant sho that, the RITE apeel wil be gon.'

Ron Footer, another proponent, says: 'If we spel RITE heer and for all SSS corespondence and giv examples with our submissions thair is a chance we wil get sumwhere.'

Masha added: 'Peeple can be reassured that the English spelling sistem, as it is taut tu children now, the sistem that addults alreddy no, wil not be interfeerd with.'

Some possible measures for making English spelling more regular which the group has considered are: 1) Cutting redundant letters; 2) consistent use of the short vowels *a e, i, o, u*, and also long *ee* and *oo*; 3) using 'magic e' consistently with long *a, i, o, u* before a single consonant; 4) spelling unstressed final *i* consistently as *-y*; 5) consistent use of *f* for */ff/*, *x* for */ks/* and *z* for */z/*; 6) consistent consonant doubling.

Pete Boardman concludes: 'We hav much work tu du befor we hav a sistem of spelling tu offer the public. But we now hav an aproach that continnues tu motivate that work by the prommis it offers of suxess in the long run, where there was nun in the past. The best part of RITE is that it welcums the contributions of douting Thomases.'

Literacy a high priority

The New South Wales State Government had made literacy one of its highest priorities and the effort was showing in improved results, according to John Aquilina, the state's Minister for Education and Training. 'NSW is doing more than any other state to improve basic skills thru a comprehensive \$A280m assistance and testing program,' he said. A national survey in March showed the literacy results of young people in NSW were the best in the country, he said.

Opponents said NSW was top because it was the richest state, and reading ability often paralleled economic wellbeing. They also pointed out the lower socioeconomic groups and indigenous people in NSW, as elsewhere, were still not doing well in literacy.

Federal Education Minister David Kemp said the survey results showed that 86.9% of Australian year 3 pupils achieved the agreed minimum national standard. They also showed between 9% and 28% of year 3 students across Australia below the standard.

Teachers warned against complacency. Orange High School Teachers Federation said literacy continues to be a problem. One school had lost 30% of the time of a teacher specializing in remedial programs because its results had improved. So it has banned English language and literacy testing.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister John Howard announced a \$A27m strategy to improve literacy, numeracy, and school attendance among the nation's Aborigines.

Talk to Thai TESOL teachers

Society member **Ian Martin** gave a presentation titled *Spelling Reform — Implications for teachers of English as a foreign language* to the 20th annual Thailand TFSOL international conference in January.

He hopes to create a greater awareness of spelling reform among TESOLNEFL teachers and will give another presentation at the next Thai TESOL conference in Bangkok next January.

2000 spelling bee champion

George Abraham Thampy of Maryland Heights, Mo, has won the 2000 championship trophy after correctly spelling *demarche* in Round 15 of the 73rd annual Scripps Howard US National Spelling Bee.

3. What one member has been doing

Spelling confusion aired in the mess.

Ron Footer, UK

I do not remember having much trouble with spelling at school except for the regular spelling tests. In these, out of 20 or so words, I normally got only one or two right.

In this, I had the company of most of the class. The words tested were ones I rarely used. At the time I thought nothing was wrong except my school mates and me. However, looking back, I realize the words were carefully chosen because of their confused spelling.

My next encounters with spelling were with the local staff at various places thruout the world where I worked. The pronunciation and spelling I encountered brought home to me the confusion caused by English spelling.

It was a frequent topic at the mess meals. Someone would ask something like: 'Do you know what Francois said today?' or 'Do you know how Abdullah spelt [say] *lose*?' A discussion would follow on how we should handle these mistakes. Should we say nothing or should we point out the errors? Many thought it unkind to do anything. I used to say I thought we should tell but point out the fault was the spelling and not theirs. Some thought this was close to sacrilege.

I could fill this publication with examples. Here is one from my laundry list in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: *Under Wear, Under Shirt, Handkerchief, Pejama, Cocks*.

Can the writer be blamed? I think not. I spent many hours apologizing for English spelling.

My other association with spelling whilst working overseas was with cut spelling. Yes, cut spelling. We called it telegrafese. We used it because there was a shortage of line capacity. Often only one cable, working at speeds slower than 50 words a minute, existed between some continents.

So all service telegrams and service notes were sent in cut spelling. Valerie Yule and Chris Upward were not the first!

The manager often spent most of his day working out a good way of shortening words for a service telegram to head office. This went on until that wonderful day in 1968 when the first communications satellite was launched. Suddenly we had all the capacity we wanted. Not long after this a service telegram from head office instructed that because of the odd error in translating telegrafese, its use was no longer permitted.

My next encounter with spelling was in my local public library. I was looking for reference books for my daughter's school projects. I came across a mention of the SSS. My thoughts immediately went back to my encounters with spelling difficulties overseas. What a good idea, I thought.

I wrote to them. I received a reply from Chris Upward. I became a member. This was in 1991. The talented Bob Brown was secretary. It was also the year the Society published *New Spelling 90*. I read this from cover to cover. I thought it was the answer. How could it fail? Here was a simple but logical and consistent way of spelling English. It had to work. It would be so much easier for learners. I started to promote it.

As I did so I met the resistance to losing touch with traditional spelling that I had read about. Add the fact the SSS had no official scheme, and that no two members seemed to agree, and I believed I was wasting valuable time.

Then, at his last meeting, in May 1996, Bob mentioned email. He said: 'I suggest for consideration a radical option to dematerialize the Society as an organization holding meetings and to reconvene as an internet-based pressure and expertise group.'

This made me decide to give email a try. Certainly it was an improvement. It was possible to exchange ideas about spelling. However, it did not alter the fact that generally the world thought: Traditional spelling is bad, but reformed spelling is worse.

About to give up, I received an email communication that made me change my mind. It suggested improving spelling without moving too far from traditional spelling. It did not take long to realize that, first, this was possible and, second, it stood a good chance. Other members were seeing it too.

So things began to change. A spelling system was being developed by the members instead of by an individual. This system, called RITF, Spelling, was more logical and consistent than traditional spelling but was not too far from it to cause instant rejection.

I hope stage 1 of RITE spelling will be finalized and used exclusively in-house and then to promote spelling reform. I hope that by having such a system the SSS membership will grow by hundreds and then by thousands.

Then it will only be a matter of time before RITE spelling will be accepted officially throughout the world. Learners of English will be able to read their first books without encountering any spelling confusion. No longer will kids come home crying and saying to their parents: Why is it *p-l-a-y* and *d-a-y* but *t-h-e-y*? Why isn't it *t-h-a-y*? Because it will be *t-h-a-y*.

4. Letters

[Edward Rondthaler: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal View 8](#)]

In defense of New Spelling

Edward Rondthaler. USA. (Abridged)

One wonders why spelling reformers keep striving to 'reinvent the wheel' when we've been making an excellent one since 1910.

Most contributors to *Simpl Speling* — certainly to PVs and to email discussion — seem to feel a reformed spelling still needs to be invented.

A worthy foundation was laid by William Archer and others 90 years ago and published as an 18,000-word *Dictionary of New Spelling* (NS) by Walter Ripman in 1941. It was an excellent basic 'wheel' but some of its letter combinations gave us a bumpy ride. Any new spelling must be reasonably comfortable to present readers: it should look as much like TO as possible without sacrificing fonetic integrity. The 1941 wheel needed more rubber on its tire.

The merits of what we might call NS41 are impressive. Its crowning strength is the consistent use of the e-marker for long vowels: *ae ee ie oe ue*. Another strength — often overlooked — is its retention of letters that promote *distinct* pronunciation. It encourages distinct enunciation by preserving the vowels of unstressed syllables.

NS41 probably provides as good a basic wheel' for reform as we're likely to get without adding new letters. Thru the years it has undergone modifications to make it look more like TO without sacrificing the concept.

After a British-American meeting in 1955 James Pitman developed ITA, an NS derivative for learners but unfortunately embodying 16 unprofessionally designed ligatures. Godfrey Dewey in America published an 8000-word simplified dictionary representing improvements in NS. In 1986 a 44,000-word dictionary was published by what is now the American Literacy Council (ALC). In Britain further refinements, some quite valid, were proposed in the booklet *NS90* but, regrettably, the major recommendation is a radical departure from the underlying tenet of consistency.

The longevity of the NS principle attests to its validity as a front runner on which a satisfactory spelling reform can be built.

[See also [JSSS 27](#), Item 5. — Ed.]

'It is the generations of children to come who appeal to us to save them from the affliction which we have endured and forgotten'.

Breaking the Spell, published by Pitman & Son (on behalf of SSS), 1912.

Non-redundant, easy symbol set

George Lahey, USA

The membership seems to agree on getting rid of silent letters, doubled consonants, and redundant symbols, and having the remaining symbols represent only one sound to the extent that's possible.

The *a, b, ch, d, e, f g, k i, j, l, m, n, ng, o, p, r, s, sh, t, u, v, w, y,* and *z* symbols establish a basic symbol set, to which must be added the *aa* of *compaarison*, et al, and the *zh* of *vizhun*, et al. Then, letting *a* represent the two sounds in *abet* and *cat*, *th* the two sounds in *this* and *thin*, and using *ae, ee, ie, oe, ue* for the long vowels, the only sounds missing are those now represented by *c/k/q*, the *au, oi, oo, ou, x*, and the schwa. Because the public will find *c* more acceptable than either *k-* or *q*, let's drop *k-* and *q*, then replace *x* with either *cs* or *gz*, depending on the sound. We need *oo* for the sound in *fool*, et al, and need a replacement for its sound in *good*, et al, ergo, *uu*. Then, for consistency, we should replace *au, oi,* and *ou* with *aw, oy,* and *ow* thruout the lexicon. I then suggest using *e* for the schwa where it will not create ambiguities, *u* where it is more fitting, and *uu* where those two don't work.

This gives us a symbol set with no redundant symbols, in which only *a e, th;* and *u* represent more than one speech sound, a symbol set as easily acquired by 5-year-olds as by 50-year-olds, and one that will fit a publisher's needs as well. Please comment.

[Robert Craig: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

Welsh *w* a nonstarter?

Robert Craig, England. (Abridged)

In reply to Nicholas Kerr ([SSMar00](#) Item 4), I too like *w* as in Welsh, but I think that it is a nonstarter for English. I find *uo* the least bad alternative (better than *uu* and *oo*, which also suggest a long vowel). Also, some dialects do pronounce this as a difthong, eg, *guod* (cf, *guid* in Scots).

I like Peter Gilet's proposals *oo > u, ee > i, sh > s, ch > c, th > t* (anoter skul ticer, ticing Inglis, hu rids and rids til it soks tru ter skins).

I take issue with Valerie Yule over short, frequently occurring words — *du, tu, thru* are readily acceptable and *ov, wos, wot* are redeemable. And why not *wil, shal* (but *all*), *dol* (but *roll, hul* (but *pul*)?)

Robert also asks that *Simpl Speling* publish charts of alternative spellings. We will do this if it becomes news, the primary concern of a newsletter.

[Ted Relton: see [Newsletters](#)]

C and g the 'root of all evil'?

Ted Relton, England.

I think that the dual functions of *c* and *g* could be considered as a root of all evil in English spelling. They cause frightful complications.

C is soft before the soft vowels *e,i,y*, and hard before the hard vowels *a,o,u*, — similarly with *g*. But there are many exceptions.

Hard *c* before soft vowel, with a modifying letter: *chemist*.

Hard *g* before soft vowel, with no modification: *gear, geld, get, geyser gibbon, giddy, gift, gig, giggle, gild, gills, girl, girth give, gynaecology* (soft and hard *gy*'s!!).

Hard *g* before soft vowel, with a modifying letter: *gherkin, guerilla, guess, guest, guide, guild, guile, guilt, guinea-pig, guy*.

Complications come when a word needs a letter added before a hard vowel to make *g* soft: *George* and its many derivatives — especially *georgette*!

Some words, for no reason, have a hard or soft additive: *chaos, character, chlorine, choir, chord, chrome, chronic, chrysalis, school, technical, ghastly, ghost, ghoul, guarantee, guard*.

What a shambles! All because of the pointless dual-purpose role of two letters! What a major advance the scrapping of the dual-functions of *c* and *g* would be for spelling. Putting aside the debate over whether hard *c* should be replaced by *k* or not, we could replace all soft-*c* spellings by *s*, and all soft-*g* spellings by *j*. We would achieve a great step forward, which, I suggest would gain popular support.

I note there is already uncertainty over some words, which are accordingly 'misspelt' frequently: *supersede/ supercede, congestion/conjestion*. This change would regularize these.

I was surprised Masha Bell's excellent research project ([SSJuly99sup](#)) did not make more of this: it has passing references in the findings 'surplus letters all over the place' and items 20 and 24 in the table of faults by type of errors.

Catching up with the world

Who said some things just never change? In September the New York Stock Exchange will begin quoting stocks in cents, as part of a move towards decimalization. Unlike other stock markets, the US still quotes and trades stocks in fractions rather than decimals.

Proactive consensus

Chris Kiwi, NZ

I was asked what I ment by 'consensus and proactivity' on my SSS enrolment form. Consensus means SSS members agreeing amongst ourselves what we would like the rest of the world to agree upon in English language reform. I say 'world' because every part of the world uses English, whether at airports or as its first language.

Proactivity means SSS promoting the reform it has agreed by consensus.

I, as a newcomer, suggest a survey of members to decide what would be our priorities in a reform campaign (forgive me if I am reinventing the wheel). This survey could be a list of proposals which we could tick if we feel they are desirable.

Here is a sample survey for 2000:

1. PH: affects *sulfur* but not *pumphouse*
2. GH: *enough* is *enuf*
3. OUR: *humour* is *humor*
4. DG and G: *judg(e)ment* is *jujment* — would Judge Judy approve? *Give* and *get*: *jin* and *jem*.
Trajectory, therefore *trajedy*
5. CC: *axept*, *axident*, *aclaim*, *acrue*
6. BT: no *dout* about *det*.

The list is far from complete.

Severe implications for braille people

'Any simplification of English spelling is indeed going to have severe implications for people using braille,' according to Janet Reynolds, secretary of the Braille Authority of New Zealand.

She was answering a query from the Society, in relation to the submission it was putting before the NZ parliamentary select committee.

'This is because the braille code has dot symbols not only for individual letters, but also for common letter groups, such as *ing* and *tion*. The definition of these braille contractions varies from language to language, and is heavily dependent on spelling patterns,' she said.

Noted lexicographer dies

David B Guralnik, at one time editor-in-chief of the Webster's New World series of dictionaries who included the word ain't in his first Webster's New World Dictionary in 1951, died in May.

Legitimizing the slang term for isn't caused a furore: it 'was a revolution at the time,' he said later. But he believed lexicographers should record, not dictate, custom.

An approach to Chambers

Tom Lang

After discussing American spellings with Cornell Kimball, I wrote to *Chambers Dictionary*, saying I was interested in American spellings.

I quoted a number of words in *Chambers* (1993 edition) as US or North American spellings or, in a few cases, as colloquial, eg, advertize, donut, tho, thru, etc. 'However,' I added, 'there are a few American spellings which are not shown in Chambers dictionary, namely

altho, brusks, cancelation, cigaret, comingle, comprize, curet, decalog, demagog, drive-thru, duolog, enterprize, hifalutin, hight (for height), ideolog, liquify, monolog, pedagog, penlite, prolog, putrify, see-thru, sluff, subpena, surprize, synagog, thoro, thruout, unmixt

'I feel there is strong justification for these spellings, as confirmed in the enclosed lists of words appearing in a number of reputable American dictionaries (American Heritage, Merriam-Webster Collegiate, etc). I have underlined the relative words.

'I think it would be helpful if the above standard US spellings were to be shown in the next edition of your dictionary. Many people need to look up American spellings for recreational or other reasons. I would be pleased to know your reaction to this suggestion. I

I received the following reply from Penny Hands, senior editor: '. . . Your suggestions have been noted and your comprehensive list will be taken into consideration when work starts on the next edition of *The Chambers Dictionary*. In the meantime, thank you very much for your time and trouble.'

[Jean Wilkinson: see [Newsletters](#)]

5. Jean Wilkinson, USA, writes

Watch your tongue

Watch it grow — not longer, but older.

Thru the centuries we tried *toung*, *tong*, *tonge*, ah, and *tunge*. Yes, that's more like we say it now! The u is in the right place! How did we get it in the wrong place after it was once right?

In Latin it was *lingua*. With the *u* following the *ng*. Are we moving backward instead of forward?

There's another angle. *Tongue* in modern French is *langue*. French influence introduced *catalogue* and *league* into English spelling. Might it not have helped to get *tongue's* foot in the door?

We have not been entirely asleep. In the early 1900s the Simplified Spelling Board endorsed a list of words for simplification. It included dropping the *u* in *colour*, *labour*, and *honour*. *Tongue* was also on the list, to be adjusted to *tung*. But we slept thru that one. We can wake up any time we wish.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed, 1989) seems to agree. 'The natural modern English representation of OE *tunge* would be *tung*, as in *lung*, *rung*, *sung*.... The spelling *tongue* is ... neither etymological nor fonetic, and is only in a very small degree historical.'

Let's garbage it.

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

6. International Spelling Day

October 9 2000

Valerie Yule, Australia

This year's competition:

- Write an essay of up to 500 words on writing system reforms in another country or countries

or

- Collect spellings on the internet and in emails which strike you as being more sensible than the spellings we regard as correct now

Closing date June 1 2001

Prizes for individual collections: Booklets of Spelling Games and Spelling Cartoon memo booklets

Prize for the best school collection: A take-home *Teach Yourself to Read and Spell* video kit

The usual competition rules apply, subject to a minimum of 10 entries in each section.

Contributions without prior copyright may be included in publications in aid of literacy innovations, unless entrants express a negative preference.

Send your contribution to the International English Spelling Competition,

7. Most illiterate children would succeed in other languages.

After extensive study **Ken Spencer, England**, a lecturer in educational technology and media at the University of Hull, believes many children who fail to become literate in English would succeed in other languages.

The complex code of English makes a simple skill difficult to learn, and prevents access to information and, hence, to power, he says. English spelling ensures higher rates of illiteracy than in many other languages. It also absorbs larger amounts of time than literacy teaching in other languages and so leaves less time for other subjects.

Ken, a Society member, was speaking at the Society's AGM on the topic *Is English a Dyslexic Language?* His lecture answered the question with a clear Yes.

According to McLuhan [\[1\]](#) (1964) the advantage of an alphabetic writing system over others, e.g., pictographic or syllabic ones, was that it could be learned in a few hours, but this is clearly not the case with English.

Ken had devised a computer program which could teach children to read and write the 50 most common English words effectively. A boy with severe special needs took 6.4min per word for those in the program. When trying to master the next 40 most frequent words, he became much slower. For all 90 words he required 9.5min extra teaching time per word. He had mastered the first 50 words in a month, but needed two months more to master another 40.

When Ken tried to find a more efficient and effective computer program for teaching reading he discovered the main obstacles were the deficiencies of the language. He then started work on establishing deficiency ratings for individual words, predicting that the most deficient words would cause pupils to make most errors. He explored the extent to which word frequency, length and *foneticity* or *foneticness* had a bearing on deficiency.

Foneticity required calculating how frequently a particular foneme was represented by various grafemes. (eg, long O: o 50% *romantic*, o+e = 21% *note*, ow = 16% *snow*, oa = 5% *boat*, ou = 3% *soul*, oe = 1% *toe*). To rate the foneticity of individual words, frequency values for each foneme in a word had to be determined, summed, and then divided by the number of fonemes. For example, the foneticity rating for *because* works out at a low 42.84% (since /b/ as *b* = 99.43%, /i/ as *e* = 24.80%, /k/ as *c* = 69.80%, short /o/ as *au* = 0.32%, /z/ as *se* 19.85%). The foneme with the lowest

frequency value in a word can be said to represent the 'tricky' foneme in that word, ie, the *au* for short /o/ in *because*.

The correlation between the average foneticity of a word and the number of pupils spelling it correctly averaged 0.62. The less fonetic a word is, the more pupils misspell it.

With age and practise, pupils master increasing numbers of the unfbnetic words, but about 40% of children cannot learn to spell the 'tricky' fonemes in the 150 most common English words.

Hard words absorb much extra teaching time, Ken noted. The really hard words require between 3–4 years of extra teaching, but for the least able children the really difficult words are virtually impossible to master.

Ken described research by Oney and Goldman [2] (1984) who compared ease of reading English with that of Turkish, which has almost perfect orthografic transparency. They found that Turkish first-grade children could read long words just as easily as third-grade children, whereas both American third graders and first graders coped less well than Turkish first graders.

Landerl, Wimmer, and Frith [3] studied recognition of low frequency words with groups of German and English dyslexics and normal controls. The German controls made errors with just 0.5% of words, German dyslexics misread 7%; the English controls 8% and English dyslexics 50%.

Ken believes that English spelling must change because it is inferior to the writing technologies used by most other countries.

[1]. McLuhan, M (1964) *Understanding Media*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

[2]. Oney, B and Goldman, SR (1 984) *Decoding and comprehension skills in Turkish and English: effects of regularity of grapheme-phoneme correspondences*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(4),557–568.

[3]. Landerl, Vrimrner, and Frith (1 997) *The impact of orthographic consistency on dyslexia...* *Cognition*, 63,315–334; Frith, Wimmer, and Landerl (1 998) *Differences in phonological recoding .. Scientific studies of reading*, 2, 31–54.

[Steve Bett: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

8. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

Roman letter names?

The following was found on a new question and answer website.

Charles asked: What were the Roman names for individual letters (i.e., Could they say 'Is *Caesar* spelled *ae* or *ea*?' in Latin?)? Steve answered: *ae* as in *Caesar* /SEE-zer/ is pronounced /ah-eh/, making the Latin pronunciation of *Caesar* close to the German *Kaiser*. The diphthong *ai* is pronounced /ah-ee/ as in *aisle* or *eye*.

Check out Dr Wood's Latin course at [URL no longer available].

The Romans could certainly say 'Is *Caesar* spelled [ah eh] or [eh ah]?' It probably would never occur to them to ask such a question. Latin words are generally pronounced the way they are spelled and spelled the way they are pronounced. That is the way an alphabet is supposed to work.

English is almost the only language that has to have a pronunciation guide in the dictionary because there is almost always some ambiguity as to the relationship between spelling and pronunciation.

The problem is not with the language, it is with the illogical spelling system. If the English language were written in a Latin orthography such as Spanglish, the ambiguity would just about disappear.

This lack of a consistent relationship between phonemes of speech and the graphemes of the traditional writing system is what makes English difficult. The English letter names, particularly vowels such as *a* = /ei/ and *e* = /i:/ are very misleading and confusing because they no longer correspond to the Latin letter-sound correspondences that almost everyone else in the world continues to use.

Instead the letter *a* corresponds to about six different sounds and the vowel blend /ei/ can be spelled *a* or *ay* or *ey* or a dozen other ways. When there are not enough letters to represent all the vowels, it is not a good idea to have one of them represent a diphthong.

See how many ways can you spell *day*. [URL no longer available]

Near enough is good enough

Word spelling does not have to be any more precise than published pronunciation guides. Some of these guides are on the net:

[URL no longer available]

The mother tongue is Slurvian, not English

According to Bill Bryson, author of *Mother Tongue*, 'If there is one thing certain about English pronunciation it is that there is almost nothing certain about it.... We pronounce many words — perhaps most — in ways that are considerably at variance with the ways they are spelled, and

often more so with the ways we *think* we are saying them.' He recalled the term Slurvian (coined by John Davenport in a 1949 New Yorker article).

If we speak Slurvian and not English, should this be reflected in our spelling? Perhaps Cut Spelling has the right idea: *difference* = *difrnce*; *imagine* = *imajn*. Context is everything in Slurvian because homophones are rampant.

[URL no longer available]

A quick history of spelling

English (Anglo-Saxon) was first written with Latin letters around AD 700. By the 10th century, West Saxon had a highly consistent orthography based on an augmented Latin correspondence table not unlike the one adopted for Spanglish.

Over time, the pronunciation of words changed. But more than gradual change was involved in the evolution of English. There were a series of linguistic catastrophes following the Battle of Hastings. For a couple of hundred years, scribes spent most of the time writing in Norman French which unlike Saxon had an illogical spelling system. These scribes tended to write English in a French way. However, many of the old Saxon conventions survived, resulting in an unpredictable mix of three systems: Saxon, Latin, and French. For more on spelling history, and to see what English would look like if we restored the original old Saxon grafeme-foneme correspondence table check out

Source: D G Scragg, *A History of English Spelling*, Manchester, 1974.

[URL no longer available.]

How alphabetic or fonemic is traditional spelling?

Spell consistently and count the matches — this should answer the question.

'Forscor and seven yirz ago our fathers brot forth on this continent a nu nacion...' Using Spanglish notation 10 out of 15, or 66%, are regular in this passage. A 100% fonemic transcription would match only 40% of words in English.

[URL no longer available.]

A fuller version of this page can be found at [URL no longer available.]

Talepeace

A Tauranga, NZ, health shop can legally call itself a 'pharmacy', a district court judge has ruled. He threw out action taken by the Pharmaceutical Society, whose lawyer said the public could believe the shop was a legitimate chemist that dispensed drugs. The shop's lawyer said no one had been, or would be, duped into believing the Green Pharmacy was a chemist.

9. simpl speling July 2000 members' supplement

Annual meeting reports

Benefits to learners the focus

A major change in the SSS recently has been the greater interest in seeking out the benefits of reform to learners. This was the view of Chris Jolly, chairman of the Society, in his report to the annual meeting of the Society in May. The submissions to the UK and NZ parliamentary subcommittees emphasized the effect of different orthografies on literacy acquisition and the costs which lack of change incurred, but he believed that change would benefit not only early users.

He urged caution on members who expressed views is on reform publicly. They should separate their own opinions from official Society views. The Society welcomed diversity. He saw it as a forum where a range of views was valued. Members could actively promote a particular view as individuals, but as a group the Society promoted reform in general.

He thanked all members who had continued to work hard on behalf of the Society, particularly Jean Hutchins for her excellent work as membership secretary and for being a 'rock' for the Society. He commented on Chris Upward's high standard of scholarship; on Allan Campbell's sustained enthusiasm and usefulness to the committee. He believed Masha Bell, in her paid role, had become a new focal point for the Society, and expressed appreciation for her energy, and enthusiasm. He commended Paul Fletcher for his untiring work on Personal views.

Twelve members of the email discussion group supported the RITE spelling strategy, Masha reported. The meeting deferred discussion on this until the July meeting. Jean Hutchins circulated copies of Pete Boardman's summary of the RITE spelling principles for discussion then.

Retiring membership secretary Jean Hutchins said there were now 139 members, with 101 having paid for this year, and 33 subscriptions still due. No new members have joined since the January meeting. Jean will continue to moderate the 20-strong SSS email discussion group and SSSnews, a 40-member announcements list for the other emailing members.

Subscription fee to rise next year

In view of the great discrepancy shown in the treasurer's report between the Society's current income and expenditure, the annual general meeting decided unanimously to raise the membership fee to £15 (or US \$30, or 30 euros) per year, with effect from January 2001.

Before reaching this decision the meeting had discussed how long Society funds would last.

Income overall was down by £1068 compared to 1998, but the 1998 income was inflated by the receipt of dividend arrears from Ferguson. Bank interest income was less because of generally lower interest rates, and because the amount of money on deposit had also decreased.

Income was up from both subscriptions and publication sales. The major difference in expenditure between 1998 and 1999 was in secretarial fees. In 1998 these were for seven months only, and also for one day per week only, instead of the two days early in 1999 and 1.5 days per week ever since.

In 1998 newsletter printing cost nothing, but the Society now had to pay for this. Expenses for 2000 are likely to be similar to those for 1999.

The accounts had been audited by Harney & Co, Blandford, Dorset, who described them as 'absolutely fine'.

Masha was thanked for her work as secretary/treasurer.

Publishing of PVs to continue

The committee has agreed to continue publishing *Personal Views*. However, it also agreed that authors of spelling schemes were more likely to get a response to their ideas if they published them via email; and before submitting them, authors should look carefully at the summary of already published ones to ensure they were offering something substantially different. Publishing a second version of a *PV* was not ruled out in principle, as long as it offered something sufficiently new and interesting. Comparing different schemes was difficult and it was decided not to try and work out a system for evaluating them.

The cost of making 150 copies of a 12-page *PV* is about £100. The cost of posting them is currently £47. Paul Fletcher was thanked for processing 12 *PVs* and then making a compilation of the different spelling schemes which had been proposed; thanks were also expressed to Pete Boardman, who is working on producing an electronic version of this. Tony Burns said he could now copy and post *PVs* again. New *PVs* had been submitted by Paul Mitrevski and Thomas Lollar, and a revised version by George Lahey.

Guidelines for presentation of members' schemes as *Personal Views* are available from Paul Fletcher, UK

Chris Upward reported two *Journals* and three *Simpl Spelings* had been published in 1999. The *Principles and Practicalities* leaflet had been reprinted poorly, and would need to be redone. The meeting thanked Chris, and Allan Campbell, for their dedicated hard work and praised them for the reliably high standard of both publications.

The submission to the inquiry into early years education by the House of Commons subcommittee and the Society's application for charitable status (which was unsuccessful) had taken up substantial amounts of her time in addition to routine tasks, Masha Bell said in her secretarial report. Beyond that she had worked to advance the cause of reform by

1. Trying to establish the regularity and irregularity of the core English vocabulary of approximately 4000 words in order to be able to show clearly (a) the amount of rote learning that literacy acquisition in English requires; and (b) which areas of spelling are most in need of reform and most amenable to reform.
 2. Compiling evidence of which words give children most trouble and what kinds of spelling errors they make.
 3. Regularly discussing reform issues in the SSS email discussion group.
- She found it difficult to separate her paid duties from her personal interest in reform, especially when answering email inquiries from members, particularly those asking about the research she was doing. The meeting agreed it was important she make this separation, and felt that points 1–3 were not part of her paid duties.

[Masha Bell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Pamphlet](#), [Leaflet](#), [Media](#). [PV13](#), [Book](#),

Meanwhile, back at the office . . .

Adopting an agreed strategy

Masha Bell

Shortly after I took on the job of SSS secretary two years ago and had worked hard at finding out what the SSS stood for I wrote, 'Everyone in the SSS appears to agree only that TO should be reformed. On how to reform it there are nearly as many ideas as SSS members. This explains to me why the SSS has so far not managed to advance the cause of simplifying TO in any way since its foundation'.



This state of affairs immediately suggested to me that the cause of reform could perhaps be advanced substantially if the Society started to work towards adopting an agreed SSS reform strategy. I have used nearly all of my spare time during the past two years towards that end and the advance of RITEspel in the discussion group even led me to believe that my efforts had had some positive effects.

Until the AGM. In the minutes I had to report our chairman as stating: 'The Society welcomes diversity. He saw it as a forum where a range of views was valued. Members can be active in promoting a particular view as individuals, but as a group we promote reform in general.' I have been fairly depressed ever since.

In July 1 intend to find out what the committee as a whole feels about this. I will also urge that we should at least consult the whole SSS membership about this policy. I have a notion that the majority of members are not happy for the SSS to remain what is essentially a talking shop and publishing company.

My initial impression — that lack of agreement among would-be reformers on how English spelling should be reformed explains why reform has made no headway — has often been reinforced for me over the last two years. I came across it in nearly every book that mentioned spelling reform, as well as many JSSS articles and communications from members. Since lack of an agreed reform strategy is such a widely perceived shortcoming of the spelling reform movement, it seems quite illogical and perverse to me not to try to remedy the situation.

In the same vein, I find it hard to understand why SSS reform strategy cannot simply be the reduction of irregularity in English spelling, since nearly everyone agrees that lack of consistency is the main fault of the English spelling system.

New membership secretary

John M Gledhill is the new membership secretary. All membership inquiries should be directed to John: all other inquiries to the general secretary, Masha Bell.

Officers and committee for 2000–01 are:

Chair, Chris Jolly; vice-chair, Jean Hutchins; membership secretary, John Gledhill; editor-in-chief, Chris Upward; secretary/treasurer (paid), Masha Bell; Committee — Tony Bums, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, Nick Kerr, Guy Otten, Gerald Palmer, Gwenllian Thorstad.

Attendance: Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Masha Bell (minutes), Tony Bums, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, John Gledhill, Jean Hutchins, Nicholas Kerr, Gerald Palmer, Gwenllian Thorstad, Chris Upward.

Members: Edward Marchant, Guy Otten, Ken Spencer.

Apologies: Frank Garnet, Carol Saxby