

## SS15.

### *simpl speling* June 2001 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](http://www.spellingsociety.org)

#### Email members

New members elected to the committee at April's AGM included two email-only members, Zé do Rock (Munich) and Elizabeth Kuizenga (San Francisco). How this new arrangement will operate is likely to be watched with interest.

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#### 1. Strategy group to study cost savings

Following a presentation by Jack Bovill to the January committee meeting, and a request in the March issue of *Simpl Speling*, five members - Allan Campbell, Jerry Dicker, Ian Hunter, Chrissie Parker, Valerie Yule - have joined Jack in a strategy group to look at which cost savings would motivate or trigger a change in people to move from traditional spelling to a reformed spelling. Three email groups were sought - the other two being communicating and benefits -but only sufficient members volunteered for one. Jack will co-ordinate it, and report to the committee.

## 2. Chris Jolly pays tribute to key member: Chris Upward

At the Society's annual general meeting in April the chair, Chris Jolly, paid this tribute (edited) to Chris Upward:

Chris Upward has had to resign his position on the Simplified Spelling Society committee thru ill-health, and it seems right that we should pay tribute to what he has achieved to date. As an MS sufferer he has long had difficulty in getting about, the increased difficulties must be very frustrating for him.

Chris joined the Society in 1983 and brought considerable experience with him from his position as lecturer in modern languages (especially German) at Aston University, and, as we were to discover, a profound understanding of English spelling.

Chris became editor of the newsletter from late 1985, transforming it from a fotocopied members' newsletter to an authoritative journal on spelling reform. He has published this for just over 15 years, typically with two issues a year. It has been a huge task, performed with great scholarship, drawing in articles from around the world, and including spelling issues in languages other than English.

He has also developed Cut Spelling, a well reasoned scheme based on cutting out redundant letters. This was drawn from an idea by Valerie Yule. At the time of its development Chris involved Laurie Fennelly and myself in a working party and I remember the detailed discussion we used to have. The Society published the *Cut Spelling Handbook*, which was launched at a press conference in London. The publicity and interest surrounding it was substantial and it has become, in my view, the most well known scheme since ita. Alongside his work on this scheme Chris has also been generous in encouraging others developing spelling reform schemes.

A major part of Chris's work with the Society has been his PR work. He has spoken on radio, both here and by telephone overseas. He has written articles, notably for the Times Educational Supplement and for English Today. He has cultivated contacts with scholars and editors worldwide, and we hope he is able to continue developing these links.

Overall, I feel Chris has been the key person in raising the profile of spelling reform to a serious issue. His publications have helped us identify more clearly the benefits of spelling reform in improved literacy levels, including some measures of this benefit. We look forward to his continuing involvement in the Society as far as he is able to.

### 3. This 'n' that from here 'n' there

#### Confusion reigns over silent letters

##### Jean Hutchins, England

In the BBC 1 program *Room 101* host Paul Merton asks guests what they would like to send to Room 101 (a reference to the novel *1984*). In a repeated program in January, his guest was Sanjeev Bhaskar, an Indian actor in the sit-com *Goodness Gracious Me!*

Bhaskar's second choice was silent letters in words! He said that no one could pronounce the words, or remember how to spell them, eg, autum(n), crum(b). He read a short poem fonetically (but inaccurately). They quoted some freak names like Althorp and Featherstone Haugh.

People in the audience had cards with letters for words, eg, diaphragm. The card-holders were asked to sit down if they thought their letters were unnecessary.

Confusion reigned. The most interesting word was queue, for which all sat down except the holder of the first letter.

#### Scty askd 4 vw on txt msgng

Ian Hamilton, a student at Sussex University, England, has asked the Society if it has a view on the impact that spelling commonly adopted for mobile-fone text messaging (eg, 18r for later, b4 for before) could have on written English in other areas. He is researching this for his dissertation.

Short message service (SMS) on cellphones limits the total number of characters per message to 160, and so drastic abbreviations are common.

Are such abbreviated forms a step towards a more simplified system, or are they just going to lead to extra complications, and further decline in spelling standards? Mr Hamilton asked.

He also asked if the Society was aware of any other studies that were being done into this area of spelling.

Secretary Masha Bell replied that the Society had not discussed text messaging, tho it had been suggested as something it should look at. It was not aware of any other study. But it would be interested in his findings.

#### Fonetics better in dyslexia study

A study published in *Science* (March 16) showed that while the neurological cause of dyslexia is the same across the three nations' languages, the disorder appears to be twice as common in England and France as in Italy because English and French have more complex writing systems than Italian, which is more fonetic.

French, English and Italian adult dyslexics did equally poorly in tests that involved short-term memory, but Italian dyslexics did much better in reading tests.

The head of the researchers, Professor Eraldo Paulesu, of the University of Milan Bicocca and the Institute San Raffale, commented that English dyslexics would find reading easier if the English writing system was more regular.

*Dyslexia: Interaction of Genes with Culture* [www.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org)

## **Tuff on the NY Times**

Under the headline *All the mistakes that are fit to print* the Toronto Globe and Mail reports that New Yorker Ira Stoll each day spends an hour and a half looking for errors in The New York Times. He then logs on to his web site. [www.smartertimestimes.com](http://www.smartertimestimes.com) and posts his findings, which can include anything from simple spelling mistakes to perceived bias in news stories. When pressed, Stoll has trouble narrowing down his favorite mistakes, but spelling errors bother him. (Misspellings are at [www.smartertimestimes.com/archive\\_index.html#misspelling](http://www.smartertimestimes.com/archive_index.html#misspelling) )

In February he asked: What is it with *The New York Times* that it can't spell names correctly? *The Week in Review* section today, in an item on donations to Planned Parenthood, refers to "a White House spokesman, Scott McClennan." It's a pretty good bet the spokesman in question was Scott McClellan, who spells his name like that.'

The *Times* runs a daily corrections section.

## **The fight for literacy:**

### **S African reading campaign**

The South African Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, has called for 2001 to be a 'focus year on reading' with a 'Masifunde Sonke' (Building a nation of readers) reading promotion campaign.

It aims to engage the whole nation in an effort to 'build a culture of reading and writing that affirms the nation's languages, history, values, and development'.

At present at least three million South African adults are completely illiterate. There are an estimated five to eight million who are functionally illiterate (unable to function adequately in the modern world because of underdeveloped reading and writing skills). Also, there are millions of South Africans who are aliterate (can read, but don't).

## **Reform stalwart dies**

**Tom Lang, England**, a Society member from Barnsley, South Yorkshire, died in February. Tho a member of the Society since only February 1998, he had been interested in spelling reform for more than 50 years. He was a member of the Fonetik Alfabet Association, which focused mainly on the Shaw alfabet. In the 1960s he corresponded with Dr Godfrey Dewey, then secretary of the Simpler Spelling Association of New York.

He commented in 1999 that he felt any spelling system requiring extensive changes in spelling stood no chance of gaining general acceptance, and was pleased to see micro-reform coming on to the agenda of the Society.

## 4. An unteachable teacher

Tom Shanks, New Zealand

As I see it, the English world divides into excellent spellers, averagely good and rottenly hopeless spellers. The former boost their egos by putting down the latter and constructing the rules of society so they hold the power thru the written word. The struggling speller is cast aside to the manual world.

All my school reports and 28% for matriculation English pointed my future one way, but I found myself at teachers' training college. The English lecturers were appalled, then horrified when a spelling test recorded a spelling age of 10.5 years. Somehow I avoided expulsion.

Then began 42 years of covering up from being found out by the authorities and parents. My masterstroke was to marry the best speller I have ever found. From then on she checked all my drafts of long-term teaching plans, and all my written words in public life. That included being secretary of organizations, letters to editors, and business letters.

But day-to-day in the classroom I had to manage on my own. At hand were the usual dictionaries, spelling and grammar dictionaries, telephone directories (names), *Yellow Pages* (firms), and on the walls local and international maps. As I could use a pupil's name for months and then go blank when about to write it on the blackboard, I displayed them on a calendar frieze and with one glance could save humiliation.

When really stuck it was off to the next-door teacher, with a piece of paper in case I forgot the spelling while returning. Even when five-year-olds wanted a word they would bring their spelling dictionary and we would search together. With senior pupils at writing time I would appoint a spelling monitor for the day, explaining it gave me more time to help others with conferencing.

As I was alone as a principal in three one-teacher schools, I sometimes had to send out an urgent notice to parents. So a runner would be dispatched to the schoolhouse with the draft notice for editing. Because I was open to criticism I read widely on teaching spelling (but never found an answer for myself) and spent long hours thumbing thru dictionaries as I corrected children's work.

My struggles may have helped when I spent time as a specialist remedial reading teacher, because it gave me a better understanding of the struggle the pupils had in decoding written English.

Then I retired and discovered the Simplified Spelling Society and all the knowledgeable people trying to change things to help us who are handicapped. How different life would be without silent letters, double letters, and some of those unvoiced vowels. And now I am retired I am able to talk about my problem without fear of retribution. But, hey, it's not me that is dumb, it's the English spelling.

(Tom helped present the Society's submission to the NZ parliamentary select committee. - Ed.)

## 5. From the Society's AGM.

### How are we progressing?

Among the topics before the annual general meeting was the annual audit of progress in relation to the Society's aims and objectives, as listed inside the cover of the *Journal*.

To check on progress for objectives A, B and E, which aim to raise public awareness, a public survey was suggested. The Society could conduct one (perhaps once every five years) or commission one for around £1500, to question a sample of 1000 people, or buy into larger surveys for about £1000 - £3000, depending on requirements. Results would not be easy to quantify.

Chair Chris Jolly said objective A (publicizing the unnecessary difficulties of English spelling) could be achieved without having a set of reform proposals agreed by the Society. He feared that internal disagreements might arise if one set of proposals was promoted as the SSS official one.

Membership secretary John Gledhill had, however, begun consulting ex-members about their reasons for leaving and reported that the two most frequent reasons given were

1. The Society was not going anywhere
2. It had no agreed reform proposals.

The meeting felt the Society should debate its objectives and ways of achieving them. The formation of a strategy group was seen as a first step in that direction.

## 6. Letters

### Govts not to the FORE

#### Robert Craig, England

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Education about the use of American spellings in GCSE examinations.

The reply from the GCSE policy team said: The Government believes it is important that pupils learn the correct English spelling of words, rather than Americanisms. No doubt a similar approach is adopted by teachers in the USA when confronted with US/British differences in spellings.

The reply demonstrates the difficulties of expecting governments to tackle spelling reform. They prefer to take the easiest option, which, in the UK at least, is to say 'No'.

The Society's proposal in the New Zealand submission (JSSS 28) for an international body (perhaps called 'Forum for the Reform of English': FORE '?') is the way to go. However, the SSS will have to set the wheels in motion: I propose by direct approaches to English departments in universities worldwide. That is what governments would do, in any case, so cut out the middle man.

FORE could not restrict itself to spellings. To illustrate: Before a decision could be made about respelling *schedule*, there would need to be a decision between the *shedule* and *skedule* pronunciations.

## **Lobbying newspaper style editors**

### **Ted Relton, England.**

Following up Robert Craig's excellent action in writing to editors about *jail* rather than *gaol* (what a terrible spelling that was!), I have written to the Style Guide editor of The Guardian in London, recommending that that newspaper adopts the spellings *skeptic skeptical skepticism*. They appear frequently in the paper, because of the ongoing debate in its pages about European integration.

I stated that the *sc-* spelling suggested that the words were pronounced with a soft *sc-* sound, and were thus confused with the medical word *septic*, particularly by children. I said that I did not consider the *sk-* spelling to be American, but more logical. I was able to point out that his style guide already states '*jail*, NOT *gaol*', and that *jail* is an American re-spelling.

SSS members may download this style guide from [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk). U will not necessarily find that it accords with our own views, but it gives some useful tips on current usage.

## **Why is Welsh w 'a non-starter'?**

### **Jerry Dicker, England**

May I respond to the July 2000 edition of the much-loved Robert Craig column? Robert says Welsh *w* for the vowel in book 'is a non-starter.' Is there any reason against it except that it looks un-English and therefore should come in at a later stage of reform?

In its favor:

1. It works in Welsh

Part of national identity?

2. Articulation of consonantal *w* is almost identical to the *oo* sounds

3. It is similar to Soundspel's *uu* (PV 8), Singlish's *omega* (PV 12), and used in Menuspel (quoted in PV7) and Interspel (PV 10).

There is a brief mention of it in the Cut Spelling Handbook (pp 90 and 183-4). The sound occurs in a couple of dozen words and their derivatives. Words like *wwl* and *wwd* are initially surprising, but with *u* there are difficulties with inflections and derivatives like *cukery* and *buking*, not to mention the *cood/cud* and *put/putt* problem.

If u accept CS cutting of the vowel before velarized *l* as in *consul*, it is a short step to expressing the *book* vowel

sound by leaving it out, as in *carefl*, *bk*, *psh*, *padding*.

Or use Welsh *w*.

## **Part of national identity**

### **John Gledhill, England**

There is a movement in Belgium to give Flemish its own spelling and recognized grammar. The differences between Flemish and Dutch are of about the same extent as those between UK English and US English. What it does reinforce tho is the way that a spelling system is seen as an element of national identity. The Flemish movement arises from a feeling of being dominated (in linguistic terms) by 'standard Dutch' and denigrated as merely a dialect of the latter.

This is an important point about the psychology of spelling usage - 'Don't tinker with our national identity' is not just an English phenomenon.

## **RITEing a dictionary**

### **Timothy Travis, USA**

Some have suggested we RITE a dictionary. Doing a new dictionary from scratch would be a huge undertaking. We neither want nor need to do that. Our purpose is to present RITE spelling. My idea is to

- (1) Write a paper that explains the RITE system.
- (2) Contact the publishers of dictionaries to find one that agrees to publish one that explains the RITE system in the front and then in the body lists the words in RITE spelling, gives the TS spelling, and then the meaning spelled in RITE. The meanings would be those they already have in one of their dictionaries. That would save a vast amount of work.

I would think for those who have developed RITE, writing the paper to explain the system would be a labor of love.

A dictionary publisher may do our book if they think they can make money on it.

## **International Spelling Day**

### **Valerie Yule, Australia**

October 9 2001

(matching the date of Korean Hangeul 'Great Letters' Day)

See website for details, activities, and competitions:

[www.pnx.com/gator/Spelling\\_Day.htm](http://www.pnx.com/gator/Spelling_Day.htm)

Prizes for individual and school collections. Closing date for entries: September 9, 2001



## 7. Following up on Society's submission

Those who made submissions to the House of Commons Education Sub-committee inquiry on early years education have been invited to comment on the committee's report. Here is an edited version of the Society's comments, written by **Masha Bell, England**.

1. We congratulate the Education Committee on the many very sensible recommendations it made regarding staffing and the general environment for early years, but many of them are costly and not easy to implement. They would also entail sustained higher spending year after year.
2. It appears that the committee was very impressed by early years provision in Denmark and that this strongly influenced its recommendations for the UK.
3. We would like to point out that identical child-care provision during the early years can lead to very different results later on. Denmark's neighbor Sweden delays formal schooling until the age of 7, allowing children to team mainly thru play before then, exactly like Denmark.
4. Sweden has regularly been found to have the most literate adult population in the world. Denmark shares the UK's well-documented problem of poor adult literacy.
5. Swedish and Danish are very similar languages, but Sweden modernized its spelling in 1907. Neither Denmark nor England have made a serious attempt to modernize their antiquated, irregular, unpredictable and therefore very-hard-to-master spelling systems.
6. AR improvements in early years provision are aimed at better educational outcomes in later years. Modernizing our spelling would be a cheap, simple, long-lasting and certain way to raise educational achievement from infant to university level. Many countries accomplished this in the last century by the same method which Sweden chose in 1907.
7. Is it not obvious that learning to read with baffling spellings like *bread, dream, break - through, though, tough - call, shall - now know - do, go* has to be fiendishly difficult? Learning to spell identical sounds in umpteen different ways is even harder: *try, die, high - street, treat, metre, meteor - ceiling, thief - they, play - stole, coal, soul, roll - few, cue, queue - dizzy, busy - blood, mud - muddy, study*.
8. English has a minimum of 3456 words with some spelling unpredictability. Italian has at most 700 such words. As a result of this difference the majority of Italian children can spell virtually every word in their language after two years of primary school while large numbers of English-speaking children still cannot spell many common words at the age of 16, after 11 years in full-time education.
9. Our children need to start formal schooling very early because they have to learn so much more than many other nationals in order to become reasonably competent spellers by the age of 16. Simplifying our spelling system would free up time for play and creativity in the early years and guarantee higher educational standards as well as less frustration and disaffection all round, among boys in particular.

## What have u been doing?

Thinking globally and acting locally is a strategy for aspiring reformers. In our *What one member has been doing* series we would like to hear what u've been doing in your neck of the woods.

## 8. Jean Wilkinson USA writes:

### Dear President Bush

This is an edited version of a letter Jean sent to President George W Bush and his secretary of education, Dr Roderick Paige

I saw *Charlotte's Web* on the Disney Channel last night. I was heartsick. I had thought that children could at least watch the Disney Channel safely. Not so. No adult in the story was loving.

Moral: Don't look for love in adults. Lots of children watched that show.

Therefore: Raising your standards in education requires not only tightening up on discipline and demanding more of students (the cold adults of *Charlotte's Web*) but pressing your teachers to truly care about and encourage their struggling kids. Kids do look for love in adults.

Therefore: Along with your wonderful return to fonics (please - a good basis in fonics, not just a side dish), please recommend that praise be given for words a student writes with accurate fonics, even tho the traditional spelling is different. This spelling is always readable. [1]

Because it will make sense. Traditional spelling often does not. Of all current languages, English spelling is the most inconsistent. [2]

Case in point: How do u pronounce ea? *Eat, great, bread, heart, earth, and hear* - six different pronunciations - are all familiar words to first-graders. Plus *beautiful, realize, and create*, which they can expect to run into in the whole-language method of teaching reading. Not long after, they'll meet *sergeant beau, and meander* - 12 pronunciations of ea! We don't have to make it that hard for them! No other language does! [3]

The greatest contribution your administration can make to the long-term survival of the United States as a nation (beyond the economy and defense) is to put us on the road to an up-to-date English orthograpy. So more of our kids can become literate before they give up. Efforts are also being made in England, Australia, and New Zealand to make this world- wide. We need to get together and choose a single orthograpy.

English is also receiving criticism as the international trade language because it is too difficult to learn. But Chinese can now be written in the Roman alfabet, specifically to make it easier for foreigners to learn. And Germany, the financial center for the euro, is pushing German.

There are currently four new English orthographies in limited use: Cut Spelling (England), International English Spelling (Australia), RITE (international), and SoundSpel (New York). Cut Spelling fixes our main spelling problems in clever, creative way, but doesn't touch the rarer problems. International Spelling fixes everything, using some of the same ideas as Cut Spelling. The creators of the first two orthographies say not all of their suggestions need be employed; we can adopt part or all. So if we start with the parts where the two overlap we should be on solid ground.

The international Simplified Spelling Society advises that an on-going committee be appointed to oversee the appropriate evolution of future English spelling. They are needed yesterday (!), now that US tv personnel are required to say *goverment* and *perscription* and *Febuary*. David Gergen went out of his way one night to say *comf-ter-ble*. I wrote and asked him how these words were to be spelled now. I received no answer. If we don't adapt the spellings to match at the same time, we'll just be driving our kids crazy that much faster. Please give us a committee to up-date spelling quickly!

Theodore Roosevelt gave a shove to updating our spelling by encouraging a change from *colour*, *labour*, etc; *centre*, *theatre*, etc; *hiccough*, *plough*, and a few other words. Also on the list were *through/thru*, and *though/tho*. All, these two need is a little push. We still need to push *tongue/tung* and many more.

There are rules for the spelling of English. I've forgotten how many hundred. If the rules of basketball changed very few seconds, would u play?

Please!

[1] I once taught an eighth-grade student, of normal intelligence, who had to look in the dictionary to find how to spell as. As an adult he dropped in to see me. He said he could read okay, but he never wrote except to sign his name. But he could write fonetically and be understood. This should become socially acceptable. Our spelling traditions are not cast in stone.

[2] 'About half of all English words can be spelled correctly on fonologically bases alone'. Hanna, Paul, et al, *Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences as Clues to Spelling Improvement*, US Dept of Education and Welfare, 1966, p 122. So what are we going to do about the other half This is a phenomenal proportion!

[3] 'At least the following languages have, for educational reasons, modernized their writing systems during [the 20th] century (some more than once): Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Irish, Japanese, Malay/Indonesian, Malayalam, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish. English neglects this essential task to the inevitable detriment of its educational standards.' *Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, 1997/1, p 28.

## 9. Of authorities:

### Who will care about our 'optimum solution'?

Nelson Helm, USA

Changing how civilians dress does not much resemble changing how soldiers dress.

In the military, a centralized command orders a change; eg, a decade ago in the US, when US Marine Corps officers carried 'swagger sticks,' the commandant said that any officer who 'needed' one was free to carry one. 'That was the last anyone saw a swagger stick.

Civilians, not subject to a centralized authority or discipline, pay much to dress as they please, fight dress codes vigorously, as those of us with children can attest.

Only in countries like China under Mao and Iran, where morals police can fine and jail offenders, do we see broad conformity.

I judge that authority over English spelling is distributed over 450,000,000 or more persons, very decentralized. It's more like changing how civilians dress than like changing military uniforms.

If we arrive at what **we** consider an **optimum solution**, who will care? Who, outside our group of 20 or 200 will have any sense of ownership of it Or loyalty to it?

No publisher, politician, or university can long survive bucking public opinion. Publishers, democratic governments, universities must cater to the public.

Should publishers, politicians or academics lead, I doubt they'll influence many. Have you noticed how much persons respect the political opinions of Oxbridge and Ivy League political scientists? the religious teachings of church hierarchies? Teddy Roosevelt and Mark Twain (pretty big names)? and *The Chicago Tribune* (used some fonetic spelling for years).

I have. Not much.

Most everyone considers themselves competent in English, and has strong opinions.

I predict that like a legislative bill drafted by a select committee when it reaches the floor of Parliament or Congress, our **optimum solution** will be torn to shreds by newly threatened groups that proponents didn't know existed.

I reflected on these words:

'Some want absolute correspondence between spelling and talking. Some want one foneme for each grafeme. Some want one grafeme for each foneme. Some want the grafemes to match those in other languages. Some want the new spellings to look like the old. Some want to change minimally, to make changing easier. Some want all QWERTY characters. Some want all QWERTY characters on the bottom three rows, and no characters requiring the shift key where we do not already use a shift key. Some want a comprehensive, internally consistent system. Some want to grope along, one step at a time.'

To me, they mean that however persons spell, some will work less, others more. Will present readers who have already worked to learn traditional spelling work little, and new learners work more?

Who gets to vote? Not non-existent posterity! Not primary school students! I cannot imagine that those most likely to learn and benefit will have much influence on how and what they get taught.

I take judicial notice, ie, I assert without evidence, that most writers of English, ie, substantially all who get to vote, are too old to learn new languages easily. The window closes around age 12, does it not?

I have trouble imagining that the older, influential persons will spend years learning new ways to do what they believe they already do fluently.

I invite examples of similar revolutions that 'worked,' similar to the example of Dvorak key-boards, a revolution which did not work.

What do voters want? How much do they want it?

We might poll, asking many writers of English many detailed questions about what they like and dislike. Better yet, experiment with them, to learn how and what they choose. Then, we would know better not only what persons generally want, but how to group persons into interest groups or constituencies, and what different groups like and dislike.

If I despaired, I'd find another project.  
yet ...

## 10. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

### US-UK differences in audio files

Audio files show the difference between British and American accents at  
[URL no longer available.]

Building on the ascii-ipa notation of Evan Kishenbaum, Markus Laker built an introduction to the sounds of English and notations for fonemic transcription. Laker lists both IPA and ASCII-IPA notation and provides clickable audio files so the reader can hear sample words spoken by American and British speakers. This was a major accomplishment in 1998 when the page was created. Today we have easy ways to create MP3 audio files using free voice-mail utilities such as TalkSender.

The 50 sound signs of Englik X include both dominant accents  
[URL no longer available.]

David Kelley's Englik X, a new ascii-ipa notation, is one of the few that can distinguish between the American and English pronunciation of the word, HERDER. hxrdxr / hxxdx [where x = schwa and double letters indicate extended vowels]. Spanglish, for instance, merges /3:/ and /~/ when spelling *hurlder*. The double consonant indicates stress in Spanglish and RITE. upper/uppa, butter/butta.

### New Truespel fonetic converter

[www.foreignword.com/dictionary/truespel](http://www.foreignword.com/dictionary/truespel)

The BTRSPL on-line converters have been around for a couple of years. The first, developed by Alan Mole, had to be downloaded. Then Steven Bird, with some help from me, built an on-line converter using Mole's dictionaries for Cut Spelling, ALC Fonetic, and Truespel. Tom Zurinkas recently increased the size of the Truespel dictionary from 7000 words to 70,000 words. Stephan

Böhmg and Alberto Fontaneda at [www.foreignword.com](http://www.foreignword.com) then updated the conversion engine. Now up to 500 words at a time may be cut and pasted into the converter window. Almost immediately, the converted text appears in a second window. Most reform notations can be read with little difficulty.

Writing in a reform notation is another matter. The converter is both a quick solution to the problem of writing and a tool to learn how to write in the reform notation. Teachers wishing to use a reform notation as an ita can use the converter to convert any of the more than 10,000 stories that are available on-line.

At present on-line transcribers or converters are available for only three reform notations: Truespel, ALC Fonetic, and Cut Spelling. Others can be added to the list as soon as someone builds the dictionary for them. It takes about a week to create the 60,000-word comma delimited database. Tom built his dictionary in Excel. An .xls file can be saved in several different formats including a comma delimited text file.

### **The orthographic challenge**

[URL no longer available.]

I have proposed a series of studies that would vividly contrast reform notations and traditional orthography. One study is designed to highlight the speed with which a fonemic notation can be acquired by a non-English speaker. Few believe that someone can learn to read English in less than two hours. Many assume it takes four years. What can be learned in less than two hours is a symbol/sound correspondence table.

The task would be to read aloud a passage written in English in one or more fonemic scripts. The foreigner could create a sound file using TalkSender, which adds a sound file to email. A native speaker would attempt to transcribe the sound file back into a traditional written form.

The original message would then be compared with the transcribed message and errors tallied. The hypothesis is that attempts to read traditional English will fail while the attempt to read a fonemic script will be successful with over 90% of the meaning being conveyed compared to 50% when the notation is the traditional writing system (TS).

### **Are 70% solutions really easier to sell?**

[URL no longer available]

Fonemic solutions to the alphabet problem will respell 60% of the words in English. A 70% solution such as RITE and Fastrspel will respell 30%. Saxon Alphabet Spelling Pronunciation respells 15%.

It is clear that the general public will resist any attempt to respell 60% of the words in the dictionary. It is likely that they will resist a proposal to respell 30% or even 15%. The logic of a 70% solution is that resistance to it will be half that of a 100% solution. This is a hypothesis that needs to be tested.

### **Talepeace**

Over coffee we were discussing spelling. One said she was a 'creative speller.' They decided to classify me as a speller. 'Political,' suggested one. 'Efficient', said another. 'A thinker'. 'So,' came a response, 'a political, efficient, spelling thinker - PEST!'

- **Allan Campbell**

## **11. June 2001 members' supplement**

### **Reports from the AGM**

#### **Chair's round-up.**

#### **'Flurry of correspondence'.**

Allan Campbell deserves thanks for the flurry of correspondence about spelling reform in The Press in Christchurch, NZ, which was started by Joe Bennett, a columnist opposed to reform. Allan wrote several letters himself and encouraged many other members to get involved.

In January 2000 Masha Bell made a submission to House of Commons Education Select Committee's Inquiry into Early Years. The committee published its report in January 2001 without mentioning our submission, but it enabled us to gain some publicity in the press and on radio, and some new members, Jack Bovill among them.

Allan Campbell made a similar submission to an Inquiry into Reading by a NZ parliamentary select committee which has yet to report. This too provided several opportunities for publicity, one of them on television when writer and SSS member Ze do Rock from Munich visited NZ.

I was disappointed that some serious strains were experienced on the committee during the past year and I hope that these are now resolved.

I thank all members who have continued to work hard on behalf of the Society, including Jean Hutchins for setting up and moderating the different lists and John Gledhill for his excellent work as membership secretary. I am keenly aware of the gap which Chris Upward's retirement from the committee will cause.

#### **Informing new members.**

Among Chris Upward's tasks has been sending documentation to new members. Members at the meeting declined to take it on because of shortage of storage space.

Instead it was agreed for the interim at least to try to compile a few pages of information for new members which the membership secretary could keep on file for sending out. possibly as a small booklet titled *Welcome to the SSS*. Masha Bell suggested this might include topics like:

SSS aims and objectives, a list of committee members with profiles, the constitution, arrangements for meetings, what members can do to promote the cause, description of the different discussion groups, a brief history of efforts to reform English spelling, and of the SSS, a list of past and present famous people in favor of spelling reform and famous people with spelling problems. Jean Hutchins suggested including different versions of The Star as spelt in published PVs. John Gledhill wanted information on subscriptions included.

Masha, with John, was asked to devise a welcome package. She seeks input from members who have just joined.

#### **Sadness at news**

The meeting was sad to learn that due to deterioration of his health Chris Upward was could no longer attend committee meetings and will have to curtail his SSS activities for the time being. The meeting was united in wishing him well, and chair Chris Jolly gave a long tribute to Chris's work (see front page). In recognition of his long, dedicated and scholarly service to the Society he is being asked if he would accept a position of vice president.

An immediate problem facing the Society is the future of the Journal. Edward Marchant is willing to carry on with proofreading it, also the newsletter, tho he is not on email.

### **A simpler introduction**

The meeting agreed that the current introductory leaflet was aimed mainly at the fairly welleducated and was not an easy read.

It was felt that in producing a new leaflet, it was essential to be clear about its target audience and how it would be distributed or otherwise used.

A survey of members at the meeting revealed they had all joined the Society because they were already aware of the problems of English spelling. The most common trigger for joining had been a newspaper article, followed by wordof-mouth recom mendation.

A simpler *Introduction to the SSS* on the website, something more eye-catching for those who visit the site purely out of curiosity, was thought to be a good idea. A volunteer able and willing to produce this is sought. Can u help'?

The meeting supported Jack Bovill's idea for a guide to simplified spelling in text messages, with these simplifications possibly being used in ordinary emails, letters, etc, but it would need to be published by a commercial publisher rather than the Society.

**Attendance.** Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Jean Hutchins (vice-chair), Masha Bell (minutes), Tony Burns, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, John Gledhill, Guy Otten, Gerald Palmer, Gwenllian Thorstad.

Members: Jerry Dicker, Jane Mace, Edward Marchant.

Apologies: Allan Campbell, Robert Craig, Margaret Hirst, Marian Horner, Nicholas Kerr, Carol Saxby, Chris Upward.

### **Subscription unchanged.**

The meeting left the annual subscription unchanged at £15 for next year. It ratified the decision of the committee to offer the option of life membership at 10 times the annual fee.

John Gledhill, the membership secretary, was given permission to negotiate corporate membership if the opportunity arose.

If there is an 'e' in the bottom right of your address label, it means that u will receive no further newsletters or Journals until the Society receives your subscription for Januarv-December 2001.

Reports to the meeting:

### **Membership secretary - John Gledhill.**

We currently have 110 paid-up members, 4 vice presidents, 1 life member, and 29 potential renewals.

We send out 8 complimentary copies of the newsletter and 30 copies of the *Journal*, some of which are by subscription to libraries, editorial teams and similar.

Problems of spelling are the main concern of our members [62]. They are also interested in language in general [52]. Many have experience of teaching spelling in some form [95], be this in basic literacy [22]. English as a foreign language [22], remedial teaching [16] or adult literacy [16].



**NZ representative, SS editor - Allan Campbell.**

We still await the report of the NZ Parliamentary Select Committee into the teaching of reading. Whatever they say, we can hopefully get some publicity.

Since January Ian Hunter, Chrissy Parker and I have had an ongoing newspaper correspondence in the Christchurch Star, a twice-weekly, giveaway. This keeps the topic alive with a limited literate audience, tho it doesn't make it an issue.

I am sending a letter to SPELD, an NZ organization for dyslexics, drawing their attention to the recent study which showed Italian dyslexics have only half the reading problems of those in France and Britain. I am suggesting we have common ground in wanting English spelling improved, and can perhaps cooperate and support each other in some areas.

**Personal Views editor - Paul Fletcher.**

There are currently no new PIs in the pipeline. Pete Boardman has still not completed the overview of schemes published so far.

**Strategy group - Jack Bovill.**

Five members have volunteered to form such a group. Three are interested in publicizing the costs of English spelling and the benefits reform would bring. The group will therefore make this its main concern. It is likely to need further guidance from the committee.

The incoming committee was asked to draft a job description for a publicity officer.

**Election of new committee.**

The following eight members (in alphabetical order) were elected by postal ballot to serve on the committee for the coming year: Masha Bell, Jack Bovill, Jolm Gledhill, Jean Hutchins, Chris Jolly, Nicholas Kerr, Guv Otten, Zé do Rock.

Paul Fletcher, Gwen Thorstad, and Elizabeth Kuizenga were co-opted for the committee. The following office-bearers were elected: Chair, Chris Jolly; vice-chair, Jean Hutchins; membership secretary, John Gledhill.

Masha Bell was reappointed as paid secretary and treasurer for a further year. She made it clear that she was unlikely to accept reappointment to either post on present terms again.

[The Report on finances has been omitted.]