

SS16.

***simpl speling* November 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

Acting locally

Think globally, act locally. This call of conservationists has its place in our spelling campaign. In the past three months four members, in England, Australia, and New Zealand, have put the case locally in the media. Report in Members' Supplement.

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1. Reading report seeks better decoding skills

According to the media, teaching by phonics was the winner in the New Zealand Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Science's unanimous report on the teaching of reading.

Spelling change was not.

The committee believed schools must give priority to achievement in literacy and numeracy in years 1 to 4: 'We must get it right in the initial years'.

Though included in only a few of the 51 recommendations, phonics was the issue seized on by reporters, commentators, and editorial writers. The last-named were almost unanimous in welcoming what they saw as a return to basics, and an end to the 'reading wars'. Teachers responded that they were already using phonics.

The committee stressed the importance of phonetic word-level decoding skills in a balanced reading program. It asked for more emphasis on teaching by phonics, without undermining reading for meaning.

Committee members rejected the media's interpretation of its report, which it said focused on teachers' skills rather than the merits of different approaches.

The recommendations barely mentioned spelling (twice in one paragraph, and once listing the Society's submission) but they did ask that teacher education programs incorporate greater emphasis on understanding perceptual difficulties that might impede literacy learning.

They also asked the education ministry to adopt a warmer relationship with SPELD, the special learning disabilities group whose supporters wrote almost half of the 360 submissions.

The primary teachers' union said additional money should target 'the most-at-risk groups', rather than the whole system.

'Not averse to ... simplified spelling'

Asked why the Society's submission had not affected its findings, committee chair Liz Gordon wrote: Thank you for your letter about the reading report. The committee did not dismiss your ideas but felt that a focus on the language itself, rather than reading, was beyond its brief.

The committee also felt that no planned change in the English language could commence in one of the smallest outposts of the English-speaking world.

While not averse to the notion of simplified spelling, it would be true to say that the committee members were united in the view that we are unable to recommend such a strategy to the Government.

I am sorry all that work, your dedication to the cause and your commitment have not led to a better outcome.

New secretary-treasurer

David Stockton, a Society member from near Chester, England, has been appointed business secretary and treasurer of the Society. He will deal only with administrative matters and will be paid on an hourly basis. Time taken to deal with members' queries will be a charge on the Society.

Masha Bell, the previous secretary-treasurer, resigned in July. Jean Hutchins has been acting secretary until David's appointment. John Gledhill remains as membership secretary.

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

Learning literacy slower in English

A team of researchers from different European countries has found British children take up to two years more than their Continental counterparts to learn to read and write their language. Professor Philip Seymour, University of Dundee, Scotland, presented the team's findings to the British Festival of Science in Glasgow in September.

The team compared the literacy skills of children in 15 countries. Scottish children from an 'advantaged background' and reading very well for their age according to UK norms, represented English-speakers. There were three components to the study: letter sounds, reading aloud very familiar words, and reading aloud simple nonsense words.

Letter sound learning was approximately equivalent across the languages, tho speed was a little slower in the Scottish group.

There were large differences in reading familiar words. In most languages 90% were read correctly, but in English the score was 34% in primary 1 and 64% in primary 2. It was much the same for the nonsense words: 85%+ for the majority of languages; 29% (primary 1) and 64% (primary 2) in English.

The researchers put the better performance of the non-English-speakers to 'difficulties created by the complex syllable structure and inconsistent spelling system of English.' French, Portuguese, and Danish children also had problems, but not to the same extent as the British.

Professor Seymour was wary of suggesting spelling change. He said teaching methods could be important, but they probably needed to be different for 'shallow' and 'deep' orthographies.

Of commas, apostrofes, spelling

Mid-year, New Zealand was agog with an employment court case in which Ms Christine Rankin, hi-profile CEO of the Department of Work and Income (previously Work and Income New Zealand - Winz), unsuccessfully sought \$1.2m from the Government for its failure to renew her contract *The Press* (Christchurch) reporter Elinore Wellwood wrote of the proceedings:

Yesterday, as she lept to the defense of [Minister of Social Services] Mr Maharey, the worst behavior Ms Ruth Dyson [Associate Minister of Social Services] would admit to was telling off Winz staff for spelling mistakes and late reports.

Ms Dyson said she did not get angry, just forceful. 'I think I can be challenging to work with. I am not tolerant of poor work. I am very direct. I don't let things drop that could be challenging.'

Ms Rankin's lawyer, Michael Quigg QC, asked whether she accepted that Winz staff avoided using commas at all times because she was so pernickety and critical as to where they were placed, and that she would spend a quarter of an hour debating with them over the position of a comma.

'That may have been why I got so many even more poorly drafted letters, because they didn't have any commas at all.'

Ms Dyson said she had discussed commas with the National Commissioner, who asked why she worried about them when his child was no longer taught the use of apostrofes at school, but she had never debated the subject with Winz staff.

Up to 30 per cent of some reports contained spelling mistakes, she said.

‘Abolish illiteracy altogether’

Scotland has known for some time that something needed to be done [about illiteracy] and the news that the Executive is to give £22 million to local councils to combat the problem is to be welcomed.

But Executive largesse must yield clear results. Illiteracy is a much easier deficiency to remedy than most. In a country of five million it must be possible to abolish illiteracy altogether - but only if government money is not wasted in asking point-less questions rather than providing solutions.

It will not surprise many Scots, therefore, that nearly a century after compulsory basic education was introduced, a quarter of our number can neither read nor write properly.

- *The Times*

Archer ‘a creative speller’

Disgraced English author Jeffrey Archer is a creative speller.

Richard Cohen, editor of his manuscripts, said alterations often were as long as the original manuscript.

Archer’s spelling was erratic - *surgeon* became *sergeon*, *bargain* became *bargin*, and *coarse*, as in unrefined, became *course*, as in golf.

The *Independent* commented editorially: Mr Cohen missed an opportunity for an obvious wisecrack - that Jeffrey Archer couldn’t spell the word *truth*, let alone understand its meaning.

Britain is the only European country not making foreign language lessons compulsory.

- *The Independent*

An idealist sees things in terms of how they must be rather than how they could be. [They have] decided their analysis of the problem is the correct one, and must now pursue the solution they have decided will fix it. Visionaries are not driven by how things must be, but inspired by how they could be. There is no right solution, but a range of possibilities.

- *Philip McConkey, The Dominion (NZ)*

3. What one member has been doing

Practising wot we preech

Ted Relton, England

It must be admitted from the start that Ted Relton and Rapid Transit Publications are one and the same entity, altho it is convenient to use ‘we’ in RTP’s correspondence. I founded RTP as a publishing house but, as is often the way, it went off in other directions. The number of books published today it had been few, altho successful.

I have long believed that one way to achieve spelling reform is to use improved spellings oneself.

Dictionaries record language and spelling usage: to their credit, their publishers do not set themselves up as arbiters of correct/ incorrect usage. The use of improved spellings in published books is therefore likely to be noticed in dictionaries in due course, and in that way they will become established.

The first author to submit a work for RTP to publish was a German, who happened to favour German spelling reform. He immediately accepted my suggestion that certain improved spellings be used in his books, which were actually three parts of a set of four (the publisher of the first part had declined to continue). There was not a lot of text in *Part 2*, so spelling questions hardly arose. In *Part 3*, *thru* was used, and this did not elicit any unfavourable comment. *Part 4** covered North America, and contained a good deal of text. Numerous chances to use improved spellings arose, in particular, *aline*, *alinement*, *altho*, *conjestion*, *gage*, *program*, *stait*, *tho*, *thoro*, *thoroly*, *thru*, *thruout*.

I declined to use *fotograf*, although it is probably one of the words most in need of reform!

I needed to sound out the acceptability of publishing these spellings: there was no point publishing an expensive book and having it rubbished by reviewers because of them. I showed a visiting friend from Chicago some proof pages; he quickly spotted and objected to *thru*, saying it was all right to use it in timetables for brevity (e.g., Americans use the term 'Monday thru Friday'), but he did not consider it should be used in a serious book. An English friend I consulted, an author and editor, had just reviewed a book on Singapore, and included the criticism 'some words are regularly misspelled... grit your teeth when you read them'. He was strongly opposed to any deviation from traditional spelling, however illogical and unhelpful it might be.

My next step was to put the idea to Chris Upward. Chris was immediately supportive, and responded with good reasons why some of these **should** be used. I was heartened by his advice that *aline*, *alinement* were the preferred spellings in the 1928 *OED*, and that *align*, *alignment*, altho already in use were corruptions, which have, unfortunately, since been accepted. Chris also made contacts for me in Britain and the USA, all of whom gave support and encouragement. The single note of caution came from Cornell Kimball, who did not favour *conjestion*. My reply was that this version was often used in Britain, many people believing it to be the correct spelling, and it had become acceptable.

Part 4, published in 1998, was widely reviewed in the transport press. There was not a single complaint or criticism of the modernised spellings. At this time, the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* was published. It aroused some controversy because of its inclusion of modern slang expressions. The introduction confirms it is the task of the compilers to record usage. It also includes this comment on spelling: 'Many idiosyncrasies and anomalies have been preserved'. Most of the improved spellings which RTP had used are not listed, but *tho* is given as informal, and *thru* is shown as US informal; *gage* is shown as US, and *program* is given as 'US, and for computers'.

I wrote to the chief editor, sending a copy of *Part 4*, pointing out the improved spellings used, and requesting these be recorded in future editions of the dictionary. He replied he would draw attention of the book and letter to his staff, but 'we would require more evidence that these spellings have become accepted more widely before we could make any alteration to the dictionary. We shall continue ... to monitor this aspect'

A more recent opportunity to discuss *thru* with Oxford University press arose in December 2000 when that spelling was used in *The Guardian*, a broadsheet tending to be conservative in adopting modern forms. I wrote again to OUP about this, and received a more encouraging reply from the project editor, who wrote: 'One of the criteria for inclusion is that evidence should be seen in a range and variety of sources ... Use of *thru* does indeed appear to be on the increase in British English ... we shall be keeping an eye on it'.

This vindicates my view that the way to get improved spelling into dictionaries is to have them appear in published works: RTP's small step forward has been justified. All members who write for publication should not hesitate to use improved spellings in their work, and should insist that the publishers follow their wishes.

* *World Gazetteer of Tram, Trolleybus, and Rapid Transit Systems: Part 4, North America*. ISBN 0 948619 06 6. 1998. £14.50.

4. Letters

Invitation to view Interglish

Paul Duerr, USA

We wish to make Interglish known to any interested members of the Simplified Spelling Society. It is not available as a Personal View, but is available on the internet at www.interglisch.com

Those members who wish to review Interglish, but do not have a computer, may have a relative or friend who will let them see it on the web. In the USA, many libraries have computers with internet availability for the public to use.

For those who already know English, the ability to be able to spell correctly is very easy to learn with Interglish spelling. The conversion has one main rule, and there is a total of only 21 new things to remember, including the fonemes which may have different spellings than the traditional English fonemes. These Interglish rules have very few exceptions. Many words are the same in traditional English spelling and Interglish.

Interglish does employ one special character, but this character is readily available on your keyboard, and it is no harder to reach this key than it is to reach the letter a.

Interglish has recently been updated, so anyone who has previously seen Interglish may wish to view it again.

We thank the people who have made comments regarding Interglish. We especially wish to thank Dr Mark Newbrook, a British linguist, for his help and comments.

Some littil matters

Chris Kiwi. New Zealand

What do *anvil*, *April*, *Cecil*, *council*, *Cyril*, *fulfil*, *peril*, *pupil* and *until* have in common? Simple: they all are words of two syllables ending in *-il*. So how about *simple* itself - *simpil*?

Now that we are in the 21st century, perhaps this is the ideal time to update the name of our Society's newsletter: could it be renamed *Simpil Speling*?

I am proposing capital initials - that *Simpil Speling* be the newsletter and *simpil speling* be what we advocate.

Another littil matter, in response to Robert Craig's latest letter: '...there would need to be a decision between the shedule and skedule pronunciations' - surely it can be either? It just depends on what school you went to.

Getting ongoing dialog started

Cornell Kimball, USA

I think taking public surveys about spelling, as mentioned at the AGM (SSJune01), might be the best activity for the SSS to focus on over the next several years.

Not only will such surveys start to give us an idea of what kinds of reforms the general public might want, but, as noted at the AGM, surveys can also raise public awareness.

I find that not many people think about reforming spelling unless somehow made aware.

So imagine 100 or more people who get fone calls one evening with questions about the irregularity of English spelling and the difficulties this can cause.

After the call some will likely discuss it with others in their household. Then the next day those people go to work, school, etc, and some will discuss this with others there.

One survey might not have too much lasting effect, but if we could conduct such surveys on a recurring basis, we might get some real, ongoing dialog started among the general public.

Revolutionary approach, subversive movement, acts of violence?

Peter Gilet, Australia

The question must have often occurred to us that reform is not happening, in spite of its being urgent, logical (in spelling) and obvious. Why?

I think it is because spelling is a means of keeping provincials and proles in their place. Like the exam system in China, one can rise to power or welth by passing lots of meaningless tests, and the first of these is spelling. A special writing, a special language has always been used to protect and perpetuate elites thruout the world. Tell someone who has spent half their childhood teaming the absurdities of English spelling and they will turn on u savagely, because u are denying them even their first rung of advancement.

I therefore suggest a revolutionary approach. We should form a subversive movement dedicated to the overthrow of the current spelling system and should perform systematic acts of violence on it by writing to each other first of all using the basic reforms about which we all agree. We should use these also in writing to frends and relatives and in the SSS publications. To arms! Let us form a pen-pal club! Any takers?

The state of Danish

Isobel Raven (Mrs), Canada

I was puzzled to read (SSJune01) conflicting statements regarding the modernization of the Danish spelling system. Masha Bell's article states that no serious attempt at modernization has taken place. Jean Wilkinson lists Danish among the writing systems that have been modernized in the 20th century.

I went straight to the Danes to discover the truth of the matter. The Danish Embassy in Canada referred me to Dansk Sprognaevn, the Danish Literacy Council. My email to the council received a prompt reply in Danish, of which I know not a word. With the help of a German-speaking frend and an online Danish dictionary, I decifered the email. They wanted my mailing address and telephone number. Upon furnishing the same, I received, in English, a reply to my query. It is signed by Soren Beltoft.

The gist of the reply is as follows: The writer who states that 'neither England nor Denmark has made a serious attempt to modernize its ... spelling system' is closest to the truth. There is a notorious lack of correspondence between written and spoken forms, as is the case with English.

Mr Beltoft also lists three changes that were made in 1948: Capital letters for nouns; the abolition of double *a*; and a simplification of the words for *could*, *would*, and *should*.

I would be glad to forward the Danish email to anyone wishing to read the full text.

5. Jean Wilkinson USA writes

Voices from Oregon

I bear good news.

For fun, I did a neighbor survey, asking what spelling of *people* they would feel most comfortable changing to.

I met a grandma who had been Oregon state champion speller when she was in third grade, and in the next apartment house, but unknown to each other, was a Washington state-wide spelling winner of fourth place when she was a sixth-grader.

Only two persons out of 29 neighbors held fast to the TS spelling. The group was middle class or almost, teens thru senior citizens.

They were given five options to choose from (votes on right):

A. <i>peepI</i> (from Tony Burns' Intermediate Orthography; Edward Rondthaler's Soundspel)	5
B. <i>peple</i> (from Valerie Yule's Surplus-Cut)	3
C. <i>pepl</i> (from Interspel)	2
D. <i>peepal</i> (from Zé do Rock's Zinglish)	7
E. <i>peepIe</i> (from Masha Bell)	10
'No change from TS is acceptable'	2

Conclusions?

E contains the smallest change from TS; its voters might have been more visually oriented.

D's voters may have been more kinesthetic or auditory; two of these, interviewed separately, sounded it out slowly, pronouncing a gap (schwa) between the mouth positions of the p and the l.

C, as its author already knew, was apparently too big an initial leap, requiring a change in the current short/long-vowel rule. Yet, two voters preferred the leap!

Again, A has a more familiar look than B. Many US adults were taut 'look-say' reading rather than fonics.

It appears that on our street minimal, inconspicuous changes may actually be acceptable.

The best news is that only two neighbors refused to consider alternate spelling. Yippee!

My purpose: to give citizens a voice regarding change. They will have participated. They will be better prepared for change, more receptive.

6. Submission excerpts sent to Gates Foundation

Excerpts of the Society's submission to the New Zealand parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Science (JSSS28) have been sent to Dr Paige, the US Secretary of Education, and Mr Gates Snr (father of Bill Gates), head of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is concerned about betterment in health and education.

SSS member **Paul Duerr, USA**, the sender, comments:

'I closed each letter with a repeat of the statement: "Future generations will thank us".'

7. Logical spelling not impossible for readers

Edward Rondthaler, USA

It is clear, in *Personal View 13*, that Masha Bell has done her homework - a worthy contribution to the cause by one whose zeal for reform is a model for all. Her research reflects, on a smaller scale, the thoroughness found in Godfrey Dewey's *Relative Frequencies of English Spelling*, published by Columbia University in 1970. Her conclusions, however, would disappoint Dr Dewey.

It has long been recognized that while present readers are annoyed at reading an illogical spelling, they rarely find it impossible. But when present writers are called on to write an unfamiliar spelling - ah! There's the rub! They find it intolerable.

Ms Bell seems to take it for granted that any change in our spelling must be implemented in the same way as previous reforms in other languages - with the burden of change borne by the **writer**. So her softening of the impact on writers is certainly in order.

But this is the 21st century. Today the burden of change will be lifted from the shoulders of the writer by our new writing tool - the unemotional, methodical, mechanical computer. Computers can be made to transliterate into a logical spelling whatever is typed in TO. In 2001 that is a given.

Our concern, then, should focus on a spelling that is easily read - easily **read** - and, on a wider reach, has good *lingua franca* potential. For children and other learners, it must be so closely related to the sounds of speech there need be few rules.

What notation comes close to meeting this criterion? We will search hard and long to find anything better than that first proposed in 1910, published as a dictionary of 18,000 words by Walter Ripman in 1941, used in principle by Pitman in ITA, by Godfrey Dewey in WES, changed little by the revisions of NS90, and expanded to a dictionary of 44,000 words by the American Literacy Council. The key to this notation places the e-marker for long vowels immediately after the vowel - *ae ee ie oe ue* - rather than, as in TO, having the marker leapfrogged beyond a consonant. Except for *ee*, this is a radical change. But is it not a change that can be grasped readily by the reader? Does not automatic computer transliteration make it unnecessary to beat around the bush with little snippets of change?

The answer to those questions seems to be Yes. Over the years we have conducted tests by explaining the *ae ee ie oe ue* principle to scores of different people, then asking them to read aloud, often before an audience, an unfamiliar page spelled in that logical manner. In no case has any difficulty in reading been experienced after the first two or three lines. It appears that when the long vowels are taken care of in this systematic, straightforward but seemingly radical way, other spelling changes - even the infrequent *uu* in *wuud*, *guud*, etc - become clear enough, thanks in part to context, not to cause reader confusion.

The net result of this is that present writers wishing to simplify their spelling will let the computer bear the burden until they feel comfortable writing the logical notation.

The task of introducing a simpler spelling is thus reduced to having a notation matching speech well enough to be learned easily by children and foreigners, and not asking too much of present **readers**.

As we come to expect words to be written as they sound, we may well begin to voice our schwas with less of a neutral *u*-sound and more of a sound in keeping with their spelling. Clarity of communication will be gained by so doing. Susan Anthony in her book of instructions for teachers points out again and again the importance of what she calls 'overpronunciation'. Ideal speech should be as clear to the ear as written words are to the eye, and a spelling that reliably represents sound should be helpful in encouraging such distinct, careful speech. We will have better communication if *pencil* is not pronounced

pensul, *lemon* is not *lemun*, and *author* is not *auther* - or its disturbing derivative: *autherit*y. Foreigners learning English would be helped greatly if we diluted our unstressed vowels less.

Mario Pei, in his authoritative book *History of the English Language*, points out that British speech has a far greater tendency to dilute and even elide unstressed short vowels than does American.

But good signs are emerging. Pronunciations in the current Oxford American Dictionary represent the unstressed short vowel not with an indefinite and noncommittal inverted e, but with a return to the earlier practise of placing a diluting breve above the short vowel.

And in the sacrosanct towers of British broadcasting, Philip Hayton, the anchor for *BBC World News* and undoubtedly a model for British speech today, not only does not elide the schwas, but tends to pronounce them with a hint of their written form.

It may be an audacious comparison, but perhaps the time will come when we see the 1910 concept of *ae ee ie oe ue* was as effective in giving us full literacy - and in giving humanity a *lingua franca* - as was the Arabic concept of zero in giving the world a rational mathematics.

This is 2001.

8. A word from the Chair

What is the role of the Society?

Chris Jolly, England

What kind of a society should we be? Do we promote spelling reform in general, or should we promote a specific scheme? These issues have been discussed in the past, of course. Several of us did so again at the end of the July committee meeting. Jean Hutchins asked if I would put down my thoughts on this issue. Others may wish to add their contributions, too.

As a society, it seems to me essential that we meet the needs and wishes of the members as best we can. A high proportion of the members have their own ideas about how spelling should be reformed. Indeed, someone once remarked that every member has their own scheme. It is not quite so, but we all do have some firm views, and all the better for it.

Since the ideas for spelling reform differ, they do, inevitably, have features that are incompatible. As a society we like to discuss the merits of different ideas, and select those that are more effective. We are constantly striving for the best way to reform spelling. It follows that for some of us the objective of the Society should be to develop the most effective reform of spelling, and with the strength of a unified approach, go out and promote it.

Such a view is compelling but has shortcomings. Firstly, I have never found agreement on the best way to reform spelling. That is one of the reasons why discussions on spelling reform can be so interesting. And secondly, reform of spelling has never been dependent on the development of the perfect reform. Most people find reformed spellings very odd and recoil from them. The alternative, therefore, is that we are 'pluralistic', that we accept and promote different ways of reforming spelling. In that sense, we do not seek to be the arbiter of which reforms are chosen or used. That decision is made elsewhere. Instead of expecting governments to come and ask us what reform should be made, we invite them to set up a commission to decide. This, after all, has been the recommendation of Allan Campbell to the New Zealand parliamentary select committee. The alternative is that the market place decides, as people make individual choices about using spelling reforms.

As a society there are various advantages for being pluralistic. The first is that it keeps us from falling out with each other! Over the years the Society has had times when members have had severe arguments. Disagreements are fine, but these have been much more, and undermined the Society itself. When I look at the background to these they have invariably come from irreconcilable differences on schemes for spelling reform. By implying that the choice of spelling reform is made outside the Society we remove the need for one scheme to vanquish another, at least internally.

Even more important perhaps, a pluralistic approach allows for everyone's ideas to be heard, and hence a reason for people with different views to be members. Who knows, there might even be a place for different spelling reforms. What works in teaching reading might not necessarily be the most appealing for writing personal notes. At least in the immediate future there might be a role for several reforms to start being used at once.

The pluralistic approach leaves open one question. How does a particular reform get promoted if the Society will not do it? The answer has to be that the developers and promoters have to do it themselves. In time they will need to set up their own organization to do so. The promotion of ITA was not undertaken by the SSS but by James Pitman himself. Similarly the RITE group has a life of its own, which has allowed it to constructively develop ideas, within the Society, without undermining the ideas of others.

I have heard of prospective new members of the Society feeling that they had to subscribe to a specific spelling reform. Similarly, I fear that many journalists writing about the Society feel that our ideas only come in one pre-conceived form, rather than the more interesting subject of what reform might be like, and what benefits might follow.

The end result, odd as it may seem, is that allowing many ideas to flourish might allow us to achieve reform more effectively than by just championing one scheme alone.

9. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett, USA

Wade adds polling software

Richard Wade www.freespeling.com is taking the initiative to deploy automated online polling software to research spelling preferences. This is something that is long overdue. All new spelling proposals struggle to get more than a dozen people to look at them.

RITE has been getting 50 reviews but Wade's initiative can result in over 10,000 reviews. His site continues to receive over 1000 hits per day. When in the news he received over 10,000 hits per day.

The initial poll examines how people feel about 10 respellings. The number is being kept small to encourage voting. Readers will be shown the traditional spelling and the four most popular respellings along with the percentage of respondents favoring each. The poll will be automated so each new vote is immediately added to the tally. Only one vote per email address is allowed. Respondents will be invited to join a discussion group and give the reasons for their particular preferences.

Most of the critics of Wade's website assume that he is advocating total anarchy with respect to spelling. He is advocating a break with tradition and a redefinition of what counts as correct spelling. There may have to be a period of chaos before a new standard can be achieved. The new standard would be one closer to the way we speak today rather than the way we spoke in days of yore.

[URL no longer available]

Progress on new SSS website

While the SSS will continue to have a presence at Aston University all of the new pages will be posted on a new website. This expanded website with its own domain name is currently under development at www.spellingsociety.org (check it out!).

Fred Swartz has been busy copying and editing the old pages and adding new links. There are already over 20 spelling-related information pages at the new site.

Disagreement stops development

Joe Orr, a programmer and entrepreneur from New York City who owns the language training and translation site www.evisa.com, was interested in enhancing the Truespel converter and using the 60,000-word dictionary in some other projects. Orr, however, wanted the dictionary to be consistent with the pronunciation guide in at least one major dictionary.

Tom Zurinkas, inventor of the Truespel notation and developer of the dictionary, did not want any of the words in his dictionary changed. The dictionary was based on the American Heritage Talking Dictionary on CD and Tom's interpretation of the announcer's pronunciation.

The person on the CD pronounced *won't* as *wuent* (wu:nt in IPA), so Tom wrote it that way in his dictionary. Orr wanted to change this to *woent* (*wount* or *w@unt* in IPA) because that is the way every dictionary has it in their pronunciation guide.

Because of the resistance, Joe took another route to developing his language software. The orphaned converter can be found.

[URLs no longer available]

Orthograpy and dyslexia

'Is English a dyslexic language?' Do numerous irregularities in the pronunciation and spelling of English make some students dyslexic?

As preposterous as this sounds, several researchers confirmed that something like that does happen. Dr Esther Geva of Toronto argues 'many children are born with fonological processing deficits [meaning they don't hear and process sound very accurately]; however, if they are born into languages which are highly regular in sound/symbol association (as Italian), they practise the fonology of their languages so much in learning to read and write that the deficits are compensated for.' [See also *Learning literacy slower in English*]

BBC on ITA 40th anniversary

<http://www.unifon.org/ita-comments.html>

The page on the initial teaching alfabet includes a transcript of a BBC radio interview with SSS membership secretary John Gledhill on the 40th anniversary of the government-sponsored ITA experiment (September 1961).

The interviewer asked 'The Society ... doesn't seem to have made much progress, does it?' Read John's excellent response to this and other provocative questions.

Talepeace

A letter in The Times May 11 2001. Dizzy spell

Sir

I received this morning a catalogue which included a spellchecker. The sales spiel reads:
No more embarrassing mistakes: just type in suspect words and you get an immediate correct answer.
Enter ELIFANT, it becomes ELEFANT.

10. simpl speling November 2001 members' supplement

Editor: Allan Campbell

Message from the president

Donald Scragg

First, I would like to apologize for this message being sent so late. I was out of the country when the terrible events of last week occurred, and when I, like the rest of the world, watched horrified as they unfolded.

But late as the message comes, it is no less heartfelt. I should like on behalf of the Society to extend my deepest sympathy to all of our American members and their friends and families, and indeed to all of so many nationalities who are caught up in this tragic event. Quite apart from the question of simple humanity, which must unite us all in condemnation of this outrage, we who are users of the English language have an extra bond to link us and to make us too feel the pain which America is at present suffering. In all grief, there is some consolation in knowing that others feel it too. To our American friends I would say simply that u are not alone.

[Editor's note: This message was first sent to email members shortly after the events.]

A new editor, a new format?

The editor of Simpl Speling, Allan Campbell, has resigned, effective from March 2002.

The SSS committee welcomes suggestions for the format of future newsletters and offers to take on or share the production.

Email accessibility is desirable for the position, but non-emailers will be considered. Any who are interested should contact Jean Hutchins.

Confidence in committee

The Society's president, Professor Donald Scragg, at the October committee meeting expressed his confidence in the executive officers of the committee.

In order to help the chairman, Chris Jolly, to present an audit report at the AGM on SSS progress towards its aims and objectives, members are asked to keep a note of their articles and letters published in the media (since April), and to let him know of any personal website they have on spelling reform.

Thanks to webmasters

The committee expressed thanks to Chris Upward and Tim Hooton, of Aston University, for managing and editing the Society's website for seven years.

Hook debate or bait de hook

Jerry Dicker, UK

After years as a teacher and parent, I think reform would be good because it would help learners. But what first got me interested was spotting spelling patterns in my early teens when trying to solve simple codes. I tried devising my own simple spelling system but never managed to crack it satisfactorily.

Recently I thaut that if we could find out what **first** got current members interested in spelling reform, we could use that information to fish for new potential members. I asked the email group what had got them started. From the responses so far it appears there are several different species to be lured by varying the bait.

Three mentioned childhood experiences:

'When I was a kid I thaut it absurd that letters did not always say what they were supposed to say.'

'My accent did not fit the teacher's. Not having seen *bread* written I wrote *braird*.'

'I sat in class at the age of five and a half and tried to make sense of a chart with the words *could*, *would* and *should* on. At one stage we were working with this chart nearly every day.'

One cited learning English as an adult: 'I wanted to learn other languages but had to learn their spelling absurdities. Of course, English was the worst.' One claimed logic and tidiness as a motivator. 'It's another clumsy information system like non-metric measures.'

Personal approaches from engaged reformers hooked two more. Four came to it as teachers who observed pupils' frustrations - 'the tremendous effort some children made with such piddling returns.'

And three actually felt embarrassed by the inconsequentiality of the spelling of their mother tongue. One of these, Ron Footer, quotes his laundry list when working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. 'I think these direct quotes sum it up,' he says.

BLOOSE, UNDER WEAR, UNDER SHIRT, PEJAMA, COCKS

In the past few months four Society members have been thinking globally, acting locally, in taking the cause to the media. Summaries are given below, with fuller versions available.

'Grin and bear' a general hint?

Silent letters, foreign students of English, the Society's search for uniformity and regularity in spelling, the effects of the introduction and use of ITA as a teaching tool, 'grinning and bearing' TS, and a more active Society were among the topics covered by the Society's membership secretary, John Gledhill, in an interview on BBC Radio West Midlands in September.

The program marked the 40th anniversary of the introduction of ITA.

Answering a suggestion that we should learn TS from an early age, 'develop an intuition for how words should look', and 'grin and bear what we have', John said we could learn just the word shapes, and be in the same realm as road signs or pictograms or Chinese. This would say that letters meant nothing, or at best were a very general hint.

'U are saying: Let us make up some very nice-looking words that show all the etymologies, and so on. I think people learning to read want to be able to look at a word and work out what it says if it's one they haven't come across before,' he said.

Doug's letter brings fierce reply

In a letter to *The Satellite*, a suburban Brisbane weekly newspaper, in late September Doug Everingham echoed some of the points made by Jerry Dicker (below), including time wasted on remedial groups and adult literacy classes.

His letter drew an immediate fierce reply from a reader accusing Doug of wanting to 'bastardize the language more than is being done at present' with American and colloquial slang. 'Let's face it, people are getting lazier by the minute.' If Continental children were becoming literate earlier, as Doug had claimed, 'why is it they use so many English words these days?'

Doug replied: No spelling is more bastardized than ours, imported from Anglo-Saxon (*wrought*), French (*beauty*), Latin (*receipt*), Greek (*psychology*) with updated sounds but fossilized spellings.

'Other languages import English words for their clarity', he wrote. 'What they don't import is our spelling for its rigidity and confusion. Spaniards play *futbol* and French gourmets eat *rosbif*, but they pronounce them according to their languages' more consistent spelling rules'.

A test of employability

'Instead of an enabling skill it has become a test of employability.'

This is one of the statements on spelling made in an article in the Thornbury Gazette in August by Jerry Dicker, an SSS member from Thornbury, in the west of England. 'What a lot of time and energy is wasted on teaching this archaic system to generations of people in mainstream classes, remedial groups and adult literacy classes,' he said.

Jerry told of his involvement with the costs inquiry. 'A small group, of which I am the only English member, has been asking employers if poor spelling is causing them cost implications.' He had interviewed two employers and would like to talk to more. (This request did not bring any response.)

He also explained how the RITE group, of which he is a member, was testing its limited reform proposal against public opinion. The report quoted from the RITE website, and gave examples of proposed changes.

Outburst triggers TV interview

An outburst in October on the illiteracy of some of his graduate employees by the prominent founder of a successful local electronics business led to Allan Campbell being interviewed by a local TV channel.

In the first half of the 5min item a local principal decried the literacy standard of teacher trainees. In Allan's section, points that made the air included: spelling as a cause of low literacy; other languages upgrading, notably German and Swedish, along with Swedish's hi literacy rate, and English not since Dr Johnson; not wanting to change the language, just the spelling - a tool; the select committee's explanations of why it didn't recommend our proposal; and making life easier for learners.

The interview finished with a full-screen shot of the slogan 'Enuff is enuff. Enough is too much,' prepared beforehand, 72pt on an A4 page. What Allan found pleasing was how the young reporter, who obviously had never thaut much about spelling change, took a while to realize we were not trying to change the language, but then began to warm to the idea of changing the spelling.

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