

**SS17.**

***simpl spelling* March 2002**  
**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)

**Final issue?**

With the publication of this issue Allan Campbell resigns as editor of *Simpl Spelling*. At publication date no replacement had come forward. (Anyone interested should contact Chris Jolly.) It is therefore likely this is the final issue of *Simpl Spelling*.

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## 1. SSS AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Simplified Spelling Society will be held at 10:45am, Saturday, April 27, 2002

Guest speaker — Richard Wade: *Freespeling.com* and [the world vote to elekt new standard spelings](#)

A committee meeting, open to all members, will follow. All members are invited to attend

### Planning to attend US spelling bee

In a move new in the Society's history, some United States members, along with representatives from the American Literacy Council (ALC), are likely to attend the 75th annual National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC, on May 29 and 30.

ALC members plan to be active. SSS members will probably only observe this year, and consider [action for next year](#).

Committee member Elizabeth Kuizenga, US representative Alan Mole, Tim Travis, and Pete Boardman expect to be there. Other SSS members who would like to meet colleagues at the event should contact Elizabeth.

The National Spelling Bee, sponsored by the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, is a well established US event, and usually has good media coverage.

While many see the spelling bee as an affirmation of spelling as an important educational project, others, including some past participants, think it glorifies an illogical spelling structure.

### Resignation after 20 years as chair

Chris Jolly has announced that he is to step down from the position of chair of the Society. At the new year he issued the following statement:

'I have been chairman of the SSS for just over 20 years now, and I think it is time for a change. As a result I have decided not to stand for re-election at the next AGM in April. However, I will be willing to continue as a member of the committee, if re-elected.

'At the time that I took on this role there were only three active committee members (Stanley Gibbs, Mona Cross and myself), no emails but the occasional letter, and a homely newsletter from Mona.

'Time has moved on and we are a much more active society now. There are more of us on the committee, with a wider range of experience, and many who are overseas who play an active part. I look forward with confidence to our finding a new chair who has new ideas and energy to take the Society forward.'

See: [Reflections of the outgoing chairman](#)

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

### **Finland tops OECD survey of 15-year-olds' reading ability**

Finland, on its own, was top literacy nation in the results of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), published in December. It was also the one with the smallest gap between top and bottom achievers.

The study looked at the reading, maths, and science standards of a quarter of a million 15-year-old high school students in 32 countries. Finland, 546 points, was followed in the reading section by Canada (534), New Zealand (529), Australia (528), Ireland (527), and then followed Korea, the United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden, and Austria. The United States was 15th. In the Canadian score, Alberta topped Finland's tally at 550.

Politicians and educators in the top-scoring countries raved about their placings, particularly in the UK and New Zealand, where other recent surveys have returned poor results for learners and adults. But the US Secretary of Education did not mince his words: 'An average score is not good enough!'

Other critics saw the downside. For example, in New Zealand, one critic noted that 20% were in the top bracket, and this above-average achievement dragged the country's placing up from what it might have been because of its large tail: 8% of girls and 18% of boys in the bottom bracket.

Some suggested a country's performance should be judged on how well its lowest achievers did. Korea had 90% of its students in the middle levels, compared with 66% in New Zealand.

It was noticeable that English-speaking nations, with the notable exception of the US, scored well. Some put this down to effective teaching and remedial work.

### **Peter Gzowski, literacy advocate**

#### **Isobel Raven, Canada**

Peter Gzowski, 67, a nationally known and well-loved Canadian broadcaster and writer, died in Toronto in January.

He was the host for many years of a nationwide broadcast called Morningside. He had a deep interest in all things Canadian, from 'sea to sea to sea', and he gathered his audience into a community of shared information, concerns, and humor.

One of his passions was literacy, aroused when he interviewed a representative of Frontier College, a Toronto-based school for latecomers to literacy. In 1986 he founded the Peter Gzowski Invitational golf tournament (PGI) to raise money for adult literacy programs. His original goal was to raise a million dollars for literacy. PGIs are now held all over the country. They have raised more than \$6.5 million.

## Snippets

- A Guatemalan program requiring high school students to teach at least one person to read in order to graduate led to student rioting. Protesters in one area claimed the education minister was not listening to their concerns about the program. A third of Guatemalans cannot read. Human rights groups say the literacy-or-military-service plan is 'forced-voluntary military service,' especially in the country, where many students lack skills needed to fulfil the program.
- Cambridge University research has suggested British reading tests for 11-year-olds have become easier, and rising scores could be disguising a fall in standards. Stage 2 English scores have improved sharply since 1998. In 2000, 75% of children reached the expected level. David Blunkett, the then education minister, said he would resign if an 80% target is not met by this year. (He is no longer the education minister.)
- The State Education Agency for Adult Education at the University of the District of Columbia and the Washington Literacy Council have both reported that 62% of Washington, DC, residents are in the lowest levels of reading proficiency, a figure putting them at the lowest level of literacy proficiency 'in the United States.
- South Africa's constitution gives equality to 11 official languages. Of 200 countries that use about 6000 languages between them, only five others officially recognize three or more languages. The Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb) says it was created to 'enable South Africans to free themselves from all forms of linguistic discrimination, domination and division'. Only 12% of people it interviewed preferred English as the medium of instruction, whereas 42% thought learners should have the opportunity to learn both their mother tongues and English equally well.  
— *The Teacher*, Johannesburg
- The November 18 London Sunday Express crossword answers for the previous week included *r e a l i s / z e*. Jean Hutchins asks if this is evidence of increasing tolerance.

[Jean Hutchins: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 3. What one member has been doing

### Sowing the seed with special educational needs people

#### Jean Hutchins, England

I belong to several SEN (Special Educational Needs) and dyslexia emailing discussion forums. Dyslexia forum has about 400 members and senco-forum about 900 who are all education professionals. I am well-known and respected as a spokesperson for the British Dyslexia Association, as a retired specialist dyslexia teacher, and as an ex-BDA computer committee member re software, etc, for dyslexics.

It would not be suitable for me to send unsolicited messages advocating spelling reform, so I have looked for opportunities to mention it in responses to discussion. It has seemed to be seed sown on stony ground, but now and then a shoot grows!

There was a flurry of interest in year 2000, which resulted in one short-lived new SS S membership. One adult dyslexic wrote, 'I really dislike the spellings that sound the same but are spelt differently, e.g., *sum* and *some*, or the spellings that are spelt the same but pronounced differently, like *read* and *red*, why not read and red? I would really like it if we did write it the way we say it; it would make life so much the easier. My dad always said it was not his spelling that was the problem, it was the English language.'

Another wrote, 'Don't believe in spelling reforms. Would it not be better if we all spelt as we felt; after all, we speak in different dialects and accents, with some degree of mutual intelligibility. So why not drop this pedantry altogether, there is no natural correct spelling any more than there is correct universal pronunciation.'

Members brought up ITA and German spelling reform, the well-known spoof about a European Union ruling, Shaw's *ghoti*, etc. Questions about US spellings in spellcheckers and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority recommendation for standard science spellings (which just happened to be US spellings) gave me another opportunity to mention SSS. And so did the Italian research showing irregularly spelt literacy was harder for children to learn.

Then last October, there was a little break-thru. Out of the blue, a senco-forum member wrote, 'I know it's a correct spelling, but until I saw *hiccough*, it hadn't dawned on me that *-ough* can make the sound 'up'. Now if that isn't ammunition for Jean and the Simplified Spelling Society, I don't know what is. With that clue, I offered *chaitSchough* as a poor man's *ghoti*-word. What does it say and why/how?' (Someone else suggested *tiardo*.) (\*Answers below.)

The writer thought up all the pros and cons and was absolutely amazed when he went to SSS web, read items and followed links and discovered the welth of ideas. 'I never cease to marvel at the depth and breadth of my own ignorance. Altho ITA rang a distant bell, I didn't know quite what it was. But I do now. I've also been introduced to: Saundspel, the Phonology Forum; Truespel; AKSES; the Index to Applied Grapho-Phonology; RES (Restored English Spelling); TO (Traditional Orthography); New Spelling (Ellis, 1932); SAMPA (Speech Assessment Methods Phonetic Alphabet); ESP (English Spelling Priorities); RITE (Reduced Irregularities in Traditional English spelling); and Unifon ('an augmented-alfubet reform group').

'A whole new world awaits me. Sorry for wasting good email space, suggesting that this was somehow a novel idea, when loads of people already do as I was suggesting. On the other hand, having discovered that there are multiple systems, media, methods, orthographies and approaches to simplified spelling, I can see why change hasn't swept across the nation. I'm sure we need a commission ...'

Another member wrote, 'All I'm suggesting is that, when people rite, they allter spellings if they so wish. They can be torking on enny subject (this is harder than u think!). I have been the only one to take up her suggestion, simplifying a few words in most of the messages that I send, not enuff to offend, maybe not enuff for them to notice as there has been no response (or maybe they just think I am getting dyslexic in my old age).

Altho predominantly UK, senco-forum has international members. 'In The Netherlands we regularly simplify spelling each, say, 50 years. The effect is insecurity among all spellers.... And indeed: with Dutch spelling there are only two countries involved.'

The cream was when an absentee returned to the forum, asked what he had missed, and was told, 'Oh, and another strand has been talking about making spelling easier and more logical. Don't these people realize that this would lead to 50% redundancy within our collective ranks?'

The thread had already died by then. It is about time I had another go!

\* *chaitSchough* ketchup: ch = k, as in chemist, ai as in said, tsch = ch, as in kitsch; ough = up.  
*tiardo* = shudder: ti = sh, as in station; ard = udd, as in standard, o = er, as in mother.

## 4. Letters

### 'Not a language, a speech impediment'

Colin Davies, England

I lived and worked in Sweden during the 1950s, and became reasonably fluent in Swedish. Later, I traveled in Norway, and found that the Norwegians understood my Swedish, and that by and large I understood them when they replied in Norwegian. Written Norwegian was fairly easy to understand as well.

In Denmark, the written Danish language looked the same (to me) as written Norwegian. It was just as easy to read, and I have never been able to distinguish between written Norwegian and written Danish.

However, spoken Danish is totally incomprehensible to me. I once had to sit thru a 30-minute speech in Danish, and I understood not one word.

A Swedish man told me that 'Danish is the most difficult language in Europe'. Other Swedes and Norwegians have explained that 'Danish is not a language; it is a speech impediment'.

Having read what has been said in earlier issues of *Simpl Spelling*, I suspect that if the spelling of Danish were modernized, I for one would no longer be able to read it. I have met a few foreigners who could read English, but not speak it or understand it spoken. Modernizing English spelling might not suit such people.

### Start with best current spellings

Robert Craig, England

A good place to start reform would be to use the best spellings currently in use.

The so-called 'American' spellings are, on the whole, better than the so-called 'British' spellings. So, that is decided.

There is another source of better spellings. They are to be found in word-processing spelling checkers. If we assume, for example, that *ware*, *wear*, and *where* are homophones, then one is the best spelling.

If *bar* can have a number of meanings, so can *ware* (most reform systems, eg New Spelling, assume this).

Thus 'Ware are u going?', 'He will ware a shirt', etc.

This principle can be expanded — 'A pare of cuff links', 'Peel an apple and a pare', 'The bare growled', 'She combed her hare', 'Witch do u choose?' 'Wen are u coming?' 'Watt time is it?' 'They red there books', 'We here singing', 'We herd a noise.'

[Chris Jolly: see [Bulletins](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Media](#), [Books](#).]

## 5. Reflections of the outgoing Chairman

### What has changed

#### Christopher Jolly, England

Looking back over the past 20 years, as Allan Campbell has asked me to do, there has been a mix of huge changes in the Society in some areas, and almost none in others.

The greatest change has been in the way we communicate. The occasional letter has given way to a flood of emails, so much so that it is almost impossible to read all the emails on each of the Society's discussion groups, tho Jean Hutchins does manage it!

Back in 1981 Mona Cross produced a homely newsletter. The *Journal* that followed is a much more professional publication thanks to the efforts of Chris Upward, and it has become highly respected. In addition we have had this lively publication, *Simpl Speling*, and also *Personal Views*, produced by Paul Fletcher, which allows members to publish their own schemes and ideas. The Society also has its own web site, recently updated by Fred Swartz.

With all this extra activity, has anything been lost on the way? Well, yes it has.

We had a series of conferences, starting in Northampton in 1979 (my first encounter with the Society), Edinburgh in 1981 (when I was elected chairman), Southampton in 1985, and Birmingham in 1987.

They were residential, over a weekend, and gave a wonderful opportunity to meet and discuss reform issues. I remember that the delegates ranged from Vic Paulsen (a taxi driver from San Francisco, who had his own scheme) to Patrick Hanks (chief editor of Collins English Dictionaries).

When I joined the Society it was clear there had been some friction between committee members. Indeed at one meeting a member, who shall remain nameless, objecting to the initial teaching alfabet, emptied a jug of water over its founder, Sir James Pitman! It soon became clear to me that almost every member of the Society has their own ideas on spelling reform and that the Society needs to respect these differences if it is to survive.

So what has not really changed?

Sadly, little progress has been made in bringing about reform. The subject is still considered an obscure minority interest, and indeed our membership numbers have not changed much over the years.

However this static position hides a major change internationally. Some 20 years ago there were two spelling reform groups in Australia and two in the US. *Spelling Progress Bulletin* (later *Spelling Progress Quarterly*) was published in the US until 1985. Today effectively it is the SSS that is the focus of the English spelling reform movement in the world, and the only one with a publishing program. Globalization and emails have led us to have the one forum.

The benefits of spelling reform, in improved literacy, are, if anything, better understood today (as shown in Professor Prais's *Social Disparities and the Teaching of Reading*), but 'pressing the right buttons' has eluded us.

Recent submissions to both the UK and NZ parliamentary Select Committee investigations were not used, while the use of the initial teaching alfabet came to an end in the mid-1990s. Some good articles and letters have been published, but they have not led to more.

Like other members I have no doubt this change will come, and somehow we will find the way to achieve it!

## 6. Analyzing spelling reform options

Ian Hunter, New Zealand

Progress on getting reform implemented over the past 93 years has been modest.

If we can't persuade governments to do a decent analysis of spelling reform options, we should find someone who can, or do a pilot study ourselves.

I visualize the following:

Select a few options, eg CutSpel, a phonemic digraph system, Ritespel, and the status quo.

Take a nominal sample of, say, 1000 people and split them into peer groups born in the same year. Not sure about representative countries, because different systems might have different impacts on different countries.

From the reform's start-year, estimate the average net benefits and costs for each of the following 50 or 100 years, and compute the weighted average Net Present Value (NPV) of each, at current costs and a discount rate of, say, 3%. For each system, there would be some 90 x 50 numbers, easily processed by a spreadsheet, or similar. For non-economists, NPV converts a series of future payments into a single equivalent present value, allowing for interest charges. See NPV() on your Spreadsheet Help.

Differences would indicate the relative merits of each system. With luck, and good management, it should reveal the best all-round system.

The hard part is getting the numbers. Ideally we could test a few groups of children and adults to test the learning and usage process, but this would be tricky, because the testees would be living in an unreformed environment. Perhaps we could estimate some effects by extrapolating simpler tests and ITA results, and using foreign data.

Few, if any SSS members would have all the skills required, but we might be able to conjure up enough skills in sociology, pedagogics, statistics and economics.

So, what about democracy? I have done some polling of lay people and ex-teachers and taken note of others' polls. I found that asking simple questions gave simple answers. Most had difficulty thinking beyond their own accent, and suggested piecemeal changes which would not add up to a workable system. I also found that if I could persuade people to answer more complex questions, they started to search for patterns, such as using the same digraph for a given diphthong irrespective of where it occurred in a word, eg, try, trydent.

My suggested strategy is to do an analysis good enough to convince open-minded professionals, such as teachers, sociologists, psychologists and economists, that there may well be a reform system which is workable and economic.

Then we would have something to wave at the public and politicians. And if the analysis says no, don't even ask.

(TS, rather than SS style, used at Ian's request. — Editor)

## 7. Some rules of English spelling! Add, double, drop, change

Jean Hutchins, England

That is the name of a card game for suffixing that many dyslexia tutors use with learners. We complain about the great number of irregular words, but at least they are always the same every time you use them. *However, root words vary according to the suffix!*

1. We add some suffixes without changing the root, eg, to vowel digraf words, *plain/ plainer/ plainly*; to final two-consonant words, *rest/ resting/ restless*; to final long vowels, *go/ going, low/ lowest/ lowly*.
2. We double final consonants before vowel suffixes but not before consonant suffixes, eg, *thin/ thinner* but *thinly*.
3. We drop final *e* before vowel suffixes, but not before consonant suffixes, eg, *hope/ hoping* but *hopeful, love/ loving* but *lovely*.

We drop final softening *e* before *e, i* but do not change it before *a, o*, eg, *manage/ managed* but *manageable, service/ serviceable, courage* but *courageous*. Exception: *singel/ singeing*.

4. We change final *y* before vowel suffixes and before consonant suffixes but do not change *y* before *i* suffixes, eg, *duty/ duties/ dutiful, busy/ busily/business, try/ tried* but *trying*.

Exceptions: *tie/ tying, die/ dying, dye/ dyeing, ski/ skiing*.

We do not change 'vowel-y', eg, *play/ playing/ playful, key/ keyed, boy/ boyish, buy/ buying*.

Exceptions: eg, *day/ daily, say/ said*.

Some suffix words are confused with other words, eg, *mined/ mind, passed/ past*.

An article in *JSSS29 2001/1, The optimality of English spelling*, pointed out the consistency of suffixed words. However, dyslexics who do not remember what the words look like, find it impossible to learn, remember and apply these rules.

### In history

110 years ago: 1892. The Modern Language Association endorsed reform ideas of the Spelling Reform Association. A bill was introduced into the US Congress to establish an experimental program teaching children to spell using simplified spelling. 100 years ago: 1902 Melvil Dewey first discussed spelling reform with Andrew Carnegie.

#### — Editor

All truth passes thru three stages. First, it is ridiculed. It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in being self-evident.

#### — Arthur Schopenhauer, pioneer German philosopher

It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds.

#### — Samuel Adams, US statesman

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

## 8. Jean Wilkinson US writes,

### D: Icon to a Teutonic god

One of my favorite targets for spelling reform is *Wednesday*. I always knew it came from *Woden's Day*, but I didn't know that Woden, the top Teutonic god, may have been compared to Mercury.

The Spanish name for Wednesday is *miércoles*.

Behold below, the English history of Wednesday, preserved in old writings:

Year (AD)	spelling
1123	Wodnes dei
1275	wendesdei
14th–15th centuries	Wednesday! Also Wodenesday, Wedonesday, <u>Wensdaye</u> [ <i>d</i> omitted]
1400	wedenisdai
1425	<u>Wenessday</u>
1450	<u>Wenysday</u> , wedenday, <u>wonysday</u>
1457	<u>Wenstay</u> (pronounced
1470	Wednysday (both ways
1485	weddysday
1490	Wedynnisdai (Scots)
1529	<u>wenesday</u> [Three more spellings with d]
1544	<u>Wennysday</u>
1558	<u>Wensdaie</u> [Two more ds]
1574	<u>wensdaie</u>
1579	Wednesday!
1607 (Shakespeare!)	<u>Wensday</u>
1808	<u>Wensday</u> , Wednesday!

After 1808 the spellings are consistently *Wednesday*. Samuel Johnson's monumental dictionary (1755) preferred the oldest spellings, especially Latin spellings. Nowadays dictionaries are not intended to petrify spellings but follow the people. But the people are following the dictionaries. So round and round we go.... Want to do something about it? Try *Wensday*. Shakespeare did. [Researched from *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1988 edition.]

[Cornell Kimball: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

## 9. It ain't necessarily so

### Cornell Kimball, USA

When talking to others about reforming spelling, we often hear a response that 'English spellings can't be changed because they reflect the histories of the words.' There are at least a couple of main points countering that idea.

One is, how does a spelling's reflecting its history really affect or come into play when using a word day-to-day? Even in learned matters, how is a spelling's history really a part of what someone is communicating?

Second, if we do go with the idea that our current spellings reflect the words' histories, we find that it doesn't 'work' all the time — because English spellings don't always show the exact histories.

The Society's leaflet *Modernizing English Spelling: Principles & Practicalities* shows some examples of spellings with such historical inaccuracies. A couple of the other places in SSS

literature with such examples are in the *SSS Journal* 27, 2000/1, one on pages 8–9 (reprint of a pamphlet by early SSS member William Archer about etymology), and another on page 21 (information from a web site which counters the usual arguments against English spelling reform).

The *s* in *island* was not in the original spelling, but was inserted later — and is etymologically incorrect. The *b*'s in *crumb*, *thumb*, and *numb* were intentionally added a few centuries ago as silent letters. So were the *g*'s in *foreign* and *sovereign* (two words unrelated to reign), the *c* in *scythe*, and the *p* in *ptarmigan* (of Gaelic, not Greek, origin).

The *h*'s in *ghost*, *aghast*, and *ghastly*, the *h* and the *y* in *rhyme*, and the use of *ch* in *ache* and *anchor* are similarly false. The *c* in *anchor* has a long history (and one could also make a case for the *c* in *ache*), but the use of *h* is purely after-the-fact.

*lland*, *crum*, *thum*, *num*, *forein* and *soverein* (or even *foran* and *soveran*), *sythe*, *tarmigan*, *gost*, *agast*, *gastly*, *rime*, *ake*, and *ancor* are spellings that not only reflect the words' pronunciations more closely, but also reflect their origins more closely.

Looking further, we find the *c* in *cinder* was originally an *s*, and the *o*'s in *some* and *tongue* were *u*'s. *Sinder*, *sum*, and *tunge* were spellings usually used in Old English. Then *could* was often *coude* in Middle English — until a silent *l* was inserted.

Does *glamour* look like a word that came from French right into English? Indirectly it does come from French, but not in that form or with that meaning. The original word from French, from Old French, was *gramaire* — which is the word *grammar*, and which came into English as a linguistic term. In a Scottish English dialect, this word was altered so that the *r* became an *l*, and the meaning altered and specialized to become associated with magic. This was extended to an association with charm and enchantment, and then thru another association or two to today's meaning. And this comes from a Scottish English dialect, not the Parisian world of haute couture. The *-our* is quite spurious.

The *gh*'s in *delight*, *haughty*, and *sprightly* were added a few centuries ago and have no historical basis. These three terms come from French words which never had that letter combination.

*Sprightly* is directly related to the word *sprite*, both originally coming from the same word. Both further are related to French (and English) *esprit*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives over a dozen ways that *through* has been spelt in the past. *Thurh* was common, *thruh* was one of the forms used, and the spellings for this in Old and Middle English often bear a closer resemblance to *thru* than they do to *through*.

And there are the 'half-justified' examples of *debt* and *doubt*. It's true that the Latin words that these originally came from had *b*'s. However, these spellings came into English as French words which didn't have the *b*'s, dropped earlier in French. At first, in English they didn't have *b*'s; but the *b*'s were later intentionally added as silent letters.

It's a similar case with *receipt*. It came from a French word which didn't have a *p*. But the Latin word from which it's derived did, so a redundant *p* was later added in English.

And there are other examples.

Yes, there are many words whose spellings do accurately reflect their histories — many more do than don't. But there are also many words where the spelling's origins have been altered, and what we're 'preserving' in the current spelling still isn't a completely true-to-form historical record.

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

## 10. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett, USA

### Augmenting the alfabet

If you could add one new letter to the alfabet, what would it be?

In an article for *JSSS30* ([www.unifon.org/jsss30.html](http://www.unifon.org/jsss30.html)), Michael Avinor presents a case for replacing digrafs such as *ch* and *sh* with unigrafs. *Ch* is already a compound foneme (*tsh*) so with a unigraf for *sh* it could be represented as *tS*.

There is certainly no logical problem with representing combined fonemes as combined symbols — in fact it is probably more fonemic to do so. The question is rather, which way is more convenient for the reader and writer? I doubt many would want to give up *j* in favor of *dZ*. As the next anecdote illustrates, tradition is hard to change.

### Fonemic spelling advocates choose tradition

[URL no longer available]

Those who worked on the Shaw alfabet project in the 1960s were probably nearly finished with their transcription of *Androcles and the Lion* when someone noticed a typo in the translation key. The decision was made to not correct the transposition error. The cover-up almost worked. It would be 50 years before someone else noticed the error. Those in the Shavian discussion group quickly conceded that an error had been made primarily because Kingsley Read had corrected it about ten years later when he brought out *QuickScript*.

The Shavian group decided not to fix transposition error reversing *@@r* and *eir* at this late date because the fix would be inconsistent with the usage in *Androcles and the Lion* — the only book set in Shavian. *Her* would continue to be spelled *heir* and vice versa.

Isn't it ironic that the promoters of a fonemic script would be willing to let a standard be set by tradition rather than logic? Purists who want to eliminate all digrafs, such as Dr Avinor, have a hard sell ahead of them.

### Should TS be classified as logografic?

Traditional written English (TS) is standardized not at the foneme or syllable level but at the whole word level. It has been classified as morfo-fonemic but an equal case could be made for classifying it as a logografic writing system. This would place it the same category as another mixed logografic system — Chinese. A purer logografic system is the Hindu-Arabic number system. This system is totally devoid of fonemic cues altho some people use it for texting: *4-sale*, *gr8*.

[www.unifon.org/texting](http://www.unifon.org/texting)

If an alfabet is a 'uni-bet' (both unigrafic and unifonic) then the foundation of the traditional writing system is a multi-bet: based on more than one code. The principal codes are Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, and Latin. To this mix one must add shifted long vowel pronunciations and the morfemic principle whereby plurals and past tenses are standardized.

An ITA should be viewed as a uni-bet backbone on which multi-bet orthografic options are added. The pronunciation guide spelling found in an ITA does not have to be transitional. It can remain as the dictionary pronunciation guide.

[URL no longer available]

## Relaxed standards and intentional ambiguity

Pronunciation guide spelling systems will change *is* to *iz* and *the* to *dhe*.

A good argument can be made for relaxing standardized unfonetic spellings in such cases and allowing fonemically spelled variants.

[URL no longer available]

A good case can also be made for allowing the substitution of an unvoiced for a voiced consonant (*the*, *is*, *of*) since this kind of switch, while not fonemic, is rarely critical. That is, using *th* instead of *dh* or *s* instead of *z* will not result in a pronunciation that cannot be understood in context.

Well placed ambiguity can make it possible for otherwise fonemic notations to work for both BBC English (RP) and NBC English (GA).

The fonograms *o* and *er* can be defined as ambiguous.

*o* = *q* or *Q* *q* = *ah* or *Q* = short *awe* and *er* = *@r* or *@* where *@* is the mid lax vowel (schwa).

*Bother* could now be spelled the same in both dialects but interpreted differently.

BBC English: *bQth@*; NBC English: *bqth@r*.

With these localized concessions, one of the alleged advantages of TS and standardized unfonemic spelling would be eliminated. 'The two major dialects of English could be spelled the same.

## Franklin Fonetic

[URL no longer available]

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) proposed an augmented alfabet for English. One of the more interesting new fonograms was the rotated *h* for schwa — represented below as *ay*. Franklin discarded *y* so this becomes an easy substitution. Sample: Huer iz iur kyit? Myi kyit iz styk in thy trie.

Schwa is my candidate for the most needed new letter. What is yours?

## Talepeace

The early settlers in Ptarmigan, Alaska, could not agree on the spelling of the name of their town, so they settled on Chicken, and Chicken, Alaska, it remains to this day.

# 11. simpl speling March 2002 members' supplement

Editor: Allan Campbell

## January committee meeting

### Previous discussion, voting improves procedures

The non-fysical committee members and some attendees had contributed to email discussions and had recorded their votes on agenda items. Reports were also circulated before the meeting. This arrangement is improving but is not yet satisfactory and will be further refined. The prior discussion and receipt of reports enabled the meeting to deal with a very long agenda.

- The arrangement with business secretary/treasurer David Stockton was confirmed as satisfactory to all. David had investigated PayPal for payment of subscriptions via email. He feels it would be more trouble than it would be worth but is prepared to continue exploring options. The the committee would like to hear from any members who use PayPal.
- The chair, Chris Jolly, asks members to notify him of successful media appearances, ie, letters and articles published (not those submitted but unused), radio, TV, etc, to help him present an annual audit of member activities.
- Jean Hutchins holds the literature archive and available stock and can supply a list/order form.
- Steve Bett is in urgent need of help with soliciting and editing articles for further issues of SSS Journal.
- Elizabeth Kuizenga and Allan Campbell are willing to form a media subcommittee and would like a UK member to work with them.
- The new SSS web continues to grow and improve thanks to Fred Swartz.  
Web: [www.spellingsociety.org](http://www.spellingsociety.org)
- Instead of bulk copying of SSS leaflets, members can contact John Gledhill for permission to spend up to the current subscription amount on copying, saying how they intend to use them and reporting back afterwards on the outcome. They may reclaim that amount if they wish. *Why English spelling should be reformed* is on the web as a pdf file fitting four pages. The introductory/joining leaflet is available by email. John could send single master copies to non-emailers.

**Attendance.** Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Jean Hutchins, John Gledhill, Gwen Thorstad, David Stockton (minutes). Member: Edward Marchant. Apologies: Nicholas Kerr, Jack Bovill, Masha Bell, Paul Fletcher. Non-fysical committee members: Elizabeth Kuizenga, Zé do Rock. Guy Otten has left the committee.

### Note from John Gledhill, membership secretary

If there is an 'e' at the bottom right of your address label it means that we have not yet received your membership subscription, and your membership will lapse at the end of February.

### Kiwi members meet and chat

Auckland SSS member Chris Kiwi's November visit to fancily in Christchurch was seized on as an opportunity for him to meet with the three local 'Simplies' — Chrissy Parker, Ian Hunter, and Allan Campbell. After this had been arranged, another member, Tom Shanks, of Oamaru, got word of it and made a point of traveling to Christchurch to attend.

So five of the seven New Zealand members were able to meet informally to air pet ideas on, and generally discuss the matter of, reforming spelling.

Topics varied. The need to maximize recognition of the cost of traditional spelling (TS), by a benefit-cost analysis in comparison with other systems, was seen by Ian as a important option, but he doubted that the Society had resources to do this. ([See article, page 5](#)).

Political strategies were looked at by Tom, a one-time political activist. He saw the Government as being too busy to be receptive to ideas of spelling change. Opposition parties were probably a better bet. Convince them to espouse the idea, and then hold them to that if and when they become the government. Having, a prominent person to promote the cause was also desirable.

Chris reported on the changing language mix in New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, which was now only 62% Pakeha (European extraction). Increasing numbers of Polynesians and Asians were affecting the New Zealand English spoken there, and to a lesser extent, thruout the nation. We should be proud of our unique evolving English, and if necessary, be prepared to go ahead with spelling reform even if other nations did not follow.

Selling spelling change was addressed by two members. A book, *The Tipping Point* (Malcolm Gladwell) was recommended by Chrissy for reading, with attention being paid to the suggestions on ways to sell ideas.

Proactivity to match present reactivity was proposed by Allan. Addressing meetings such as PTAS, and being willing to take part in talkback radio could be important in raising awareness at grass roots level.

## **Editorials**

### **The times, they are a'changing**

Change is inevitable.

Sometimes it comes in little bites; sometimes all at once. In the life of the Society, this is one of these latter times. After 20 years as chair, [during many changes](#), Chris Jolly is calling it a day; illness has forced Chris Upward, one of our linguistic stalwarts and prolific writers, to relinquish his roles as Journal editor and committee member; Masha Bell, a bundle of energy in her short time as secretary, has withdrawn her services; Paul Fletcher, editor of *Personal Views*, is standing down from the committee, tho not from PV editing; vice-chair Jean Hutchins, a tiger for work, plans to lighten her load; *Simpl Speling* may not continue.

T'he changes are, however, not all of letting go; some are the accepting of new challenges. Masha is using her quiet time to write a book on spelling; for the first time, some American members hope to attend the National Spelling Bee; and Kiwis may do the same with the Reading Association of New Zealand's conference.

With the new world of internet communication, the Society is no longer a crusty old London-based — and largely southern England — association, but a worldwide group having to front up to a savvy, street-wise, email clientele.

We want the world to change some of its ways. We are in the midst of learning to change some of our own.

### **Is a newsletter really necessary?**

#### **Allan Campbell**

This is the last issue of *Simpl Speling* with me as editor. Since Cornell Kimball and I in 1996 revived the newsletter, I have mostly enjoyed producing it every four months, with Cornell as publisher for the first three issues, and Jean Wilkinson and Steve Bett as regular contributors.

But with age one wearies of the task (particularly when not always agreeing with committee decisions, or with what, in fairness, has to be published), and seeks other avenues.

Unless a member comes forward to take on the task, there will not be a newsletter. Is this a disaster?

Not necessarily. In pre-internet days it would have been, but now most of our members are online, and the proportion will increase until all are connected. News travels fast this way, quickly dating many items Simpl Spelling carries or may have otherwise carried.

Some members are in Society email groups, moderated very efficiently by vice-chair, Jean Hutchins. One of these is an announcement group. In it, Jean keeps members informed of anything of importance in the life of the Society. This group may be the nucleus of an electronic replacement for Simpl Spelling. And our new, attractive web site, set up by Fred Swartz, may eventually have a news page.

In the meantime, unless a new editor is forthcoming, non-emailers will be at a disadvantage, and to keep in touch, will have to rely on enclosures with their copy of the Journal or with the annual subscription renewal notice.

### **Costs group winds up**

Reporting to the committee on the progress of the costs group (see SSJune01) the co-ordinator, Jack Bovill, said there had been no activity in the last three months of its appointed nine-months life.

The aim had been to test, on selected groups or people, the idea that costs were an important consideration in the negative effect of TS on pupils and adults learning to read.

‘Where we had difficulty was the systematic selection and testing of groups and people. We started with employers, but they had already eliminated poor spellers from their prospective list of possible employees,’ Jack wrote. ‘it may be that working at a distance via email was also an added difficulty, in spite of the enthusiasm and energy put into this initiative’.

In announcing the winding up of the group, he recommended that the committee revert to its original work on identifying barriers to reform, and after preliminary work it look for a group that could work together physically.

### **Teaming up with text messaging?**

With the continuing publication of text messaging spelling booklets, are we looking at another avenue to promote spelling simplification? asks committee member Jack Bovill.

‘It cuts across the generation gap. Will people be ready to use their simplified text message spelling in ordinary communications — emails, letters, etc.? The Society might wish to lend its name to a dictionary of these new spellings now at booksellers.’

Richard Wade, the speaker at the coming AGM, is promoting this approach in his work on his web site [www.freespelling.com](http://www.freespelling.com), There may be other web sites also looking at this aspect. ‘Can members advise us of any other sites doing the same and their views, practised or thought about?’, he asks.

**Guidelines** for presentation of members’ schemes as *Personal Views* are available from Paul Fletcher.