

SS2.

the simplified spelling society

Founded 1908

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

newsletter March 1997

Editor: Allan Campbell, Publisher: Cornell Kimball

The Newsletter

Pressure of time has limited this issue to four pages.

We plan to publish three times a year: March (pre-AGM), July, and November. Deadlines for copy are the first of the preceding month; e.g., June 1 for July. Exceptions may be made for late-breaking news.

If you have a contribution — report, article, or letter — the message is: Get it in early!

Subs now due

SSS Subscriptions for 1997 (£10 or \$US20) are now due. Please send to Jean Hutchins, membership secretary.

With this issue

Enclosed with this issue are:-

- AGM Agenda and Annual Accounts of the Society
- The updated SSS 'Aim and Objectives', plus '6 Axioms of English Spelling'
- The updated *Introducing the SSS* leaflet
- The updated *Principles and Practicalities* leaflet

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

1. Funds needed for remedial research

Gwenllian Thorstad

After reporting to the Society the results of preliminary research I carried out at two London schools, I have proposed a full study using simplified spelling for a crash remedial reading course for 11-year-olds. It will need funding.

About 3 per cent of the child population in England have a severe specific learning difficulty and usually receive remedial teaching from a qualified teacher. However another 10 percent are retarded in reading by the age of 11 years.

The late Ron Threadgall, head of remedial departments in two comprehensive schools, was very successful in teaching such 11-year-old children to read in i.t.a. until they attained a reading age of 11 years in traditional orthography (TO) which took about two to three months of three short lessons each week. He then followed it by teaching them all the most necessary TO spelling rules for the remainder of the year.

As the degree of reading retardation in many schools is now much greater and urgent action is needed, it is proposed to use a form of simplified spelling (SS) instead of i.t.a. To choose the most suitable SS I undertook some research in two primary schools with 103 9–11 year-olds to discover which of three varieties of SS — NS96, Equal Plus or Dash Plus — they were able to read most accurately and which they said they preferred.

The results were illuminating, not only about which script is likely to be the easiest for children to read, but also because it revealed that they had their own modifications they would like to make to TO. These concerned changes to consonants, to be found in many forms of SS.

Now the SS script is selected, it is necessary to fund the research. A qualified teacher would be needed for a year and a psychologist for longer to evaluate and write it up. This would cost more than £30,000. Can anyone suggest where such funds could be obtained?

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Simplified Spelling Society will be held at 10.45pm, Saturday, 19 April 1997.

Allan Campbell, New Zealand, will talk on 'Promote — or Perish'. Then will follow a discussion on promoting spelling reform in an age of electronic communication, including the Internet. A committee meeting, open to members, will follow.

[Alan Mole: see [Newsletters](#)]

2. What one member has been doing

BTRSPL, a better spelling program

Alan Mole USA

I am working with Chris Upward to develop a program to transform documents in TO and CS and vice versa.

The project began rather suddenly. I had read Ogden's *Basic English*, Bodmer's *Loom of Language*, and other books that talked of the stupidity of English spelling and the need to fix it. Also, I had written a translator program for English to 13 languages (see www.diac/-entente).

As I thought about spelling it suddenly hit me that I could easily write a translator program to fix that problem. But how could I find anyone interested? Via the Internet of course — a 5 minute search on YAHOO found the SSS home page. An inquiry, a positive response, and then a lot of e-mail to Christopher Upward, 5000 miles away. Now e-mail to Allan Campbell in New Zealand, 10,000 miles away, for this article. The Internet certainly is a wonderful thing. If nothing else, it speeds up progress many fold.

The program is a success. We've already developed a version with a dictionary of the 1024 most common words, and it may be available by the time you read this. We also plan to do one with a huge 70,000-word dictionary, but that may take longer. The small program works beautifully, and translates ASCII at a brisk 240 pages a minute. From TO to CS it leaves only about three words per hundred in TO when they should be changed.

Rationale: One reason spelling reform never takes off is that there are no novels available in CS. Thus no one can settle in with a good book and get lost in the story, only to look up a hundred pages later and realize they've been practising reading Cut for the past three hours and it's come to seem so natural that it's not like work at all.

But now that's changed. There are literally thousands of classic works available free on the Internet. Practically any beloved book whose copyright is expired can be found, down-loaded in 3 minutes, and converted in 2 more. Thus you can have *The War of the Worlds* in CS 15 minutes after you start looking, and spend the evening reading how 'Th deth ray struk th battlship making it glo red By the time the Martians have finished their evil deeds you'll be comfortable with Cut, reading more easily than in TO. (It just has to be better to read 'Thru th blak nyt' than 'Through the black night'.)

Then you can give the story to a friend or a relative, and they can be converted. Perhaps there's a child of 8 you know, struggling with reading in the arcane contradictions of the TO system' and bored with the childish material their teachers give them. And maybe they'd like to read a really good story in a system that makes sense.... Othr uses (as transformed by BTRSPL): Journalists can rite articles about Cut in TO, and translate them almost instantly to CS, to run side by side to ad interest. U ho prefer to rite in CS for its logic and economy of effort can now do so — and translate in a moment to TO (so yr boss won't think u've gon bonkers). A few words won't translate, so run a spelchek on th results, and scan for errors.

BTRSPL and its descendants will make it posbl to read/red and rite interchangeably in evry system of spelng at th whim of th user.

Provided someone is interested enough to prepare the dictionary — and I'll help — you'll be able to write in CS and translate to ITA for use in a reading program, or TO for normal publication, or Shaw's alphabet or whatever new system may evolve for the reduction of letters per word. People will be able to choose their spelling system to suit themselves, and in the free market of ideas, reformed spelling will zap TO faster than a Martian Death Ray!*

Anyway, that's the idea and that's where we're working.

[* BTRSPL isn't perfect. This run was without the 'ending-changer' that guesses the CS form of words not in the dictionary. With that feature turned on, output is closer to CS but there are also more mistaken forms that are neither CS nor TO.]

[Allan Campbell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Spell4Literacy](#)]

3. Editorial

Let's start from where we are

It is normal for would-be revolutionaries to endure long the condition they seek to change.

For us spelling reformers it's traditional orthography (TO). To communicate with others — and ourselves — we need to use it.

But rather than treat this as an unavoidable penance to be tolerated on the way to the promised land, let's make it the start of the journey.

Was it not arch-revolutionary Mao Zedong who noted a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step? Our road is long. But we must take that first step.

Some say we've done so already, with new schemes and dialog with VIPs. Is this really stepping out? Or is it blind leaping and talking instead of walking?

Who notices these actions and concludes a revolution is on the way? If anyone notices at all, do they see us going anywhere?

Our first step needn't be a Great Leap Forward that is counterproductive. World English has an array of improved and approved spelling options available that are already familiar to readers.

Most are 'American'. So? Are we serious about change or not?

In our TO writing let's lead, rather than mark time.

The Society and its members need to step out and be seen to be stepping out. If we don't, who will? And who will take us seriously?

— *Allan Campbell*



Letters

4. Literacy could benefit from numeracy's example

[Editor's note: Mrs Gillian Shephard, British Secretary of State for Education and Employment was recently interviewed on literacy and numeracy by the BBC Radio 4's Today program. She was due to speak on the subject to a teachers' meeting. This letter is a response to the BBC.]

Good morning! I have just been listening to your discussion with the Secretary of State about literacy and numeracy. I am moved to contribute as a member of the committee of the Simplified Spelling Society, because in every discussion of the problems of literacy in the United Kingdom one factor is consistently and steadfastly ignored: our outmoded and indefensible orthography.

The plain fact is that the way we spell english militates violently against the ability of anyone to read and write it. No one would dream of teaching a child to sculpt wood with a damaged or blunt chisel! No one would expect a child to team to play the violin if the strings were always unpredictably out of tune! How could anyone learn to cook if the measures used were never the same?

Indeed, if we compare the problems of literacy with those of numeracy, we have, I'm convinced, benefited enormously from the transition 25 years ago to decimal currency. There maybe many of us now who can remember the old '12 pennies in a shilling, 20 shillings in a pound, 21 shillings in a guinea', but no one would seriously propose reintroducing that system today.

I can remember when I was at junior school in south London the problems my contemporaries had with the fact that 14 pence were 'one and twopence' and not 'one and fourpence'. My two daughters, 25 and 15, laugh at the very idea of it. And can any of us conceive of how the ancient Romans did arithmetic with their system of notation? The introduction of arabic notation must have been the biggest single advance in numeracy for civilized nations.

But the english-speaking nations continue to labor on, using a system of orthography which is as difficult to learn as roman arithmetic. If the Secretary of State (in particular) is serious about furthering literacy in this country, then let her look seriously at the very tools we are giving our children and others to do it with.

Nicholas Kerr England

PS: I have run this through my spellchecker, just to make sure that I haven't missed anything! Any variations from normal english or american practice are deliberate.

[George Anderson: see [Journal 26](#). Item 3, [Newsletters](#)]

5. 'Stirring it up'

The latest Newsletter prompted a thought or two.

UK membership: Can we have a breakdown? I've wondered if there are other members in Fife. Together we could maybe 'stir it up'!

Cornell Kimball suggests letters to editors. A good and cheap way of spreading the gospel so long as we use it wisely.

- (1) It shouldn't read like a puff (an advert for SSS). Editors usually like to be paid for ads.
- (2) It should be relevant; eg, a reply to a political statement about 'standards'.
- (3) Keep it short. Space is always critical, and the readership probably covers most social classes.

George Anderson, Scotland

6. Great opportunity

We have a great opportunity, here at the dawn of the new millennium when people are more open to utopian ideas, to get word out on the need and the various programs for English spelling reform. The Internet is a wonderful tool for this purpose.

I have a book out, *4000, the FIFTH MILENIUM, Six Revolooshunairy Iedeeas*.

One idea is spelling reform. I used the research and spelling program of the American Literacy Council. I will have a Website soon about the book. I will do a link to the SSS home-page.

Timothy Travis USA

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

7. Internet corner

Searching — and finding — is easier

Steve Bett USA

(This column continues the project started by the late Bob Brown ([Newsletter, April 1996](#) Item 6). Concepts that were defined in Bob's article, such as search engine, are not redefined here. Those who are unfamiliar with the Internet may want to reread the first article.)

About 1993 the World Wide Web had thousands of files that could be accessed but no easy way to find what you were looking for. Having a Web page was something like having a telephone number before there were any telephone directories.

In 1995, the first search engines for the Web began to appear. With a search engine it became possible to search and find something that might be of interest. The search routine wasn't perfect — 70 percent of what turned up in response to a key word was irrelevant — but going thru a hundred files to find the real hits was certainly better than going thru millions.

The search engines have located the Simplified Spelling Society's Web page. If you can't remember the web address, just access a search engine (e.g., <http://www.yahoo.com>) and enter the key word, *simplified spelling*.

URLs (Web site 'addresses') for spelling: Last year, none of the search engines were capturing very interesting pages on orthography and spelling reform. Today it is much better but there are still sites that don't always show up. If you can get to the first reference, it provides clickable links to the others on the list. There are about three pages of listings that contain the word spelling. Many are duplicates and about 70 percent are not relevant to reform.

o Spelling Link page: N/A.

An index page for links to eight articles related to orthography, constructed scripts, ancient scripts, hieroglyphics, and comments on alphabet design by George Bernard Shaw, Mark Twain, and Bishop John Wilkins. Includes graphic files of full letter sets for non-Roman scripts: Pitman, Wilkins, Read, S. Semitic, Phoenician, etc.

o Riggs Institute: <http://www.riggsinst.org/28rules.aspx>

o Valerie Yule's Spelling as a social invention: www.valeriyule.com.au

[Editor's note: Valerie is developing 'International English Spelling' as a handy spelling guide for faster Internet communication, with dropping surplus letters, keeping to consistent consonants and reducing 318 vowel spelling patterns to 40. Val will try to get a note about it on the SSS home page on the Net.]

o Mark Twain on spelling: <http://www.twainquotes.com/19071210.html>

o American Literacy Council: www.americanliteracy.com

8. Does illegibility go with shorter spelling?

Kate Gladstone, USA

Simpler-spelling proposals eliminate redundancies and shorten words. Thus, most plans envision changes like: 'through' > 'thru', 'though' > 'tho', 'cough' > 'cof', 'tough' > 'tuf', etc.

But shortening words makes illegibility more problematic. Why? With one illegible letter (represented by #) 'thermon#clear' remains unmistakable. Other letters contextualize the unreadable letter. But, what's 'h#t': 'hat', 'hit', 'hot' or 'hut'? Context won't do. Someone writing illegibly *once* likely does so *often*.

Also, one illegible letter can destroy context: 'It is no# time to trigger explosives.' 'Now'? 'Not'?

Lower redundancy and lose more to handwriting 'noise'.

Also, handwriting varies more than spelling, so reform should begin with handwriting, where current standards are least enforced. Fixing an easy problem (handwriting) can impel later action on the hard problem (spelling).

I've worked a decade to return handwriting to the simpler standards of its earliest textbooks (Renaissance Italy). I've been profiled in USA periodicals coast-to-coast (with Canadian TV coverage filmed as I type) for 'new' old ideas. I've also been called 'un-American' for noticing the un-reason in first teaching a difficult draftsman's alphabet — only to drop this for different, fancier, less legible letter-forms simply because the child is to begin using joins.

People interested in simpler handwriting (for its own sake, or in light of simpler spelling) may like to contact me to learn about many available resources on the subject.

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