

## SS5

### ***simpl speling* March 1998** **newsletter of the simplified spelling society** **Editor: Allan Campbell**

Society founded 1908

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

#### **90 not out!**

The Society was (as noted above) founded 90 years ago. *Simpl Speling* would like to have run a special issue for the occasion. But we do offer food for thought: editorial. Your comments are invited.

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## 1. Dictionary alters thru entries

A major dictionary publisher, Random House, recently launched new editions of a couple of its dictionaries in which a few entries indicate the possible effect of evidence Society, member Cornell Kimball sent to it.

In the December 1996 *Newsletter* Cornell recounted (What one member has been doing) how he had sent to dictionary editors photocopies of newspaper and magazine articles which used had certain simpler spellings, such as thru, with a request they alter their entries accordingly.

*Random House* had previously listed *thru* as an 'informal' spelling. As noted in the article, an editor from Random House wrote back that he had "replaced the 'informal' description of thru with a short usage note explaining that some publications use it in standard contexts."

thru (throo). prep., adv., adj. THROUGH — Usage. The spelling THRU, advocated for over a century by various spelling-reform groups, is now used chiefly informally or in headlines or signs. However, some periodicals use THRU as a standard variant, regardless of context.  
© Random House Inc

In the second edition of its *Webster's College Dictionary*, 1997, *thru* is listed as a regular variant, and the entry contains a note which ends, "some periodicals use *thru* as a standard variant, regardless of context."

Cornell's evidence may have influenced other entries, including *drive-thru* (the Random House editor mentioned considering *drive-thru* as a variant spelling) and donut/donuts..

*Random House* had listed *drive-through* only in a previous edition, and had been listing *donut* as an 'unequal' variant. In this 1997 volume, *drive-thru* and *donut* are given as standard (equal) variant spellings.

[As the proverb says: A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. See also *We can help them now*, p. 6. — Ed.]

## AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Simplified Spelling Society will be held at .....at 10.45am, Saturday, 18 April 1998 Bernard Lamb, of the Queen's English Society, will talk on 'How to run English-related campaigns'

A committee meeting, open to all members, will follow. Please come if U can

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

### Six weeks' publicity

The significant, if temporary, attention the press can bring to the work of simplifying spelling was shown by the *San Jose Mercury News*' reporting of Cornell Kimball's campaign (SSNov97).

When it was over it had encompassed two articles in the newspaper's Sunday magazine (circulation 340,000 plus), and letters in six issues. The newspaper has not adopted any of Cornell's suggestions, but spelling awareness was raised.

One writer reiterated arguments often heard from Society members. He said English spelling makes it difficult for learners, some people always struggle with it, and some can't make it at all. He felt the author of the articles "is on to an incredibly important issue that deserves more attention than it receives". He saw an 'elitist attitude' of those able to cope with TO as a bar to change.

SSS members were among other writers.

### Seeks tsar for English

#### J Cowley, *The Times*, London

Professor John Honey — whose book, *Language is Power*, criticizes a liberal orthodoxy that opposes the teaching of standard English and grammar in schools — has renewed his call for the appointment of a language tsar to uphold standards.

His proposed model would operate like the Académie Française, created in 1634 to refine and watch over French. He sees an English academy with leading lexicographers and academics such as Robert Burchfield, former chief editor of the *OED*.

But Dr Burchfield opposes an academy. "I don't think it would work," he says. "U can't hold a language like a prisoner of war; language is constantly unstable. The English are too rebellious in their attitude to language; they will never conform."

But Maurice Druon, a writer and secretary of the Académie Française, supports the creation of an English academy. The académie, he says, "continually revises our Dictionnaire, by accepting or rejecting words newly introduced; by updating definitions, recording new meanings and indicating a register of language. It also issues cautions, warnings, and judgements. We do our best to induce a sense of sin in those who maltreat the French language."

### Webster's on-line anniversary

#### Mary H Meier, *Boston Globe*

Springfield printers George and Charles Merriam bought the rights to Noah Webster's dictionary in 1843. The Merriam-Webster Co. is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its first revision of Webster's work with a new web page at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Webster wanted to record English as spoken in America. He added 50 American words like *skunk* to his Compendious Dictionary and 5000 words used on both sides of the Atlantic but considered too ordinary for any dictionary, such as the seemingly harmless *lengthy*. "What are we coming to?" fumed a critic. If this were permitted, the next edition might authorize *strengthy*.

But Webster had realized language is irreversible. "The process of a living language," he wrote, "is like the motion of a broad river which flows with a slow, silent, irresistible current."

## **'Trivial task' to change**

### **Bruce Beach**

In the development of the Angel Tongue phonemic system for the Access project (SSNov97), we developed programs that would translate the 44,000-word Rondthaler and Lias American Spelling word list and the 116,000-entry Carnegie Mellon , Institute phonetic word list. It is now what programmers would call a trivial task to change the character equivalency tables to that of any phonetic system. Co-incidentally, the Access project has chosen NES as the bridge English from ANJEL to TO.

Some minor discrepancies between the translations arise from decisions made regarding the Angel standards for phonemes, schwas, allophone pronunciations and so forth. We are currently wrestling with these issues before republishing the ANJeL Translator and the ANJeL Tutorial on our World Language Program page linked from the Web Pal page at <http://www.webpal.org>

Using the translator, any machine-readable TO text is then translatable into the target phonetic spelling.

*It is a damned poor mind indeed that can't think of at least two ways of spelling any word.*

— President Andrew Jackson (1767– 1845)

## **Latin languages appeal to Finns**

### **Peter Chapman, *The European*, London**

The Finns are keen students of other European languages, but they find the Latin languages becoming more appealing than those of two closer neighbors, Germany and Russia. Only 3 percent of Finnish schoolchildren take Russian. And altho the figure of 53,000 upper school students studying German last year was higher than for any other language except English (100,000, of a 110,000 total) it appears to be the only major language experiencing a decline.

French had 23,000 and had a steady growth, but there was a surge in Spanish (2800) and Italian (1100), both up from zero in the previous year.

Sara Savan, of Finland's Spanish teachers' association, suggests: "Because U read Spanish as U see it, for Finnish people it's easier to pronounce." In the same way, Italian is also viewed as a natural winner.

[Harry Cookson: See [Journal 21](#). Item 7, [Newsletters](#)]

### **3. What one member has been doing and hearing**

#### **People find reasons to oppose change**

##### **Harry Cookson**

I first heard of spelling reform when I learnt French at school. "French boys have to learn spelling twice!" I exclaimed. But the first year was spent on reading and writing by a phonetic alphabet system, which was easy, and the changeover to normal spelling was easy.

Wells and Shaw publicized reform. I read Shaw's alphabet. It was on the right lines, but went too far. I showed it to others. Nobody liked it. "Baby spelling," said one. "When children do not know the right spelling of a word they spell by sound."

When I became a school manager, I supported i.t.a. Teachers turned against it because of the problem of changing over to standard spelling. Now I see that learning to read by phonics is coming back as teachers are overcoming the problems of changing to standard spelling.

When I went to Portugal I discovered how quickly children learnt to read and write. I became a spelling reformer.

But I had no contact with other English reformers. I filled exercise books with sound-symbol relationships.

I spoke to a fellow Briton. "U know how easy it is to read Portuguese. English needs reformed spelling. Agree?"

Reply: "I learnt to read and write once and I do not want to do it again." I later found this to be a normal attitude. Even in France and Portugal, where there are occasional adjustments, most people do not follow them or are slow to do so.

I spoke to a teacher of English to the Portuguese. "Reform would make it, easier to learn and teach." He replied angrily: "No! A-e! Crazy!" He had seen a reform method that advocated *graet*, *haet*, *waet*, and *hae*. He was put off. Perhaps not surprising. *Ae* is a rare spelling, usually technical, and frequently does not have the long a sound.

I returned to England and discovered the SSS. I became a committee member, but, I am afraid, did not enhance the Cause.

There were many teachers in the Society. They put on a reform exhibition at a school. Parents attended well and were entertained but not much persuaded. Teacher membership fell off because 'reform was not making progress.'

I spoke to a printer. "No!" he said. "It will make my work harder."

A journalist came to an SSS meeting, and said that he opposed reform because children learning it at school and entering journalism would have an advantage over him. A journalist I know also opposes reform, and could offer no means of persuading journalists to accept it, but a

computerized spelling check was hinted at. A newspaper was printed in reformed spelling but did not last long.

I spoke to a teacher outside the Society. “The past and present tenses of the verb to *read* are pronounced differently and have different meanings. Why not alter the past to r-e-d, as it is pronounced?”

Astonished reply: “R-e-d? But that is the color!”

I investigated and discovered that English had an exceptionally large number of homonyms, so it could not follow other countries which had reformed by sound. This led me to advocating reform by reading as a first stage. This would give only one way of pronouncing a particular letter group (subject to regional accent variations) but sometimes more than one way of spelling the same sound.

The latest edition of *New Spelling* was based on southern English pronunciation. I showed it to a Northerner. He pointed out that the words put/up had similar vowel sounds in the north, whereas the book spelt them differently. The same applied to has/fast. This would cause difficulties to Northerners, which was contrary to the whole purpose of spelling reform.

My first job was with the London office of an American company. It was suggested that we write to the head office in 'American' spelling. The typists exploded! “We would have to learn new spelling; use different spellings for British and American readers. We would be slower, make more mistakes.” Pause. “Of course, if U raise our salaries . . .”

Conclusion: After reform the two methods must run side by side as they do in reform countries. The changes must not be so great that people are distracted from the message they are reading or writing in order to concentrate on the spelling.

Reform is a nuisance to adults, so we must direct propaganda at parents and grandparents who are prepared to make some sacrifice for the children.

The problem at the moment is not in choosing the best reform, but in finding a good system that will persuade people to accept reform.

*Life is like arriving late for a movie, having to figure out what was going on without bothering everybody with a lot of questions, and being unexpectedly called away before U find out how it ends.*

— Joseph Campbell, *Creative Mythology*. [Not unlike spelling! — Ed.]

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

## 4. Editorial

### Learning for the future

Allan Campbell

This is the Society's 90th year!

It's a time to celebrate and take stock of our achievements, and to draw strength from them as we move to the centenary and the new millennium.

But wait! What achievements?

We have researched and published, held conferences, made representations. But how many spelling changes have been made thru our efforts? Few, at best!

We have constructed clever and logical designs for spelling systems; we have had spelling debated by politicians; we have spoken or made submissions to important people or groups.

But where's the beef?

Results, not Activity, measure success.

Our aim — simplification of English spelling — has not become, or shown signs of becoming, reality. To be blunt, we are failing.

But our failure is not irredeemable. The ultimate failure is not to learn from failure. What can we learn?

Being focused on orthography rather than people changes little. Devising spelling systems changes little. Cozy or heated discussion among ourselves, by whatever means, changes little. Button-holing politicians, educators, or other VIPs changes little. Each activity, of itself, does little to bring about change.

We have been working in an *ad hoc*, uncoordinated way and it is not bringing change. Do we continue this or do we adopt a game plan? If the former, well and good, but don't expect much to happen.

If the latter, what is the strategy? How do we formulate it? Where do we begin? What do we do? How do we do it? How do we discern what 'the traffic will allow'? How do we co-ordinate worldwide?

What resources do we need? What do we have? How do we make up the shortfall? How can U and I help? Do we want to?

It seems to me we are at the crossroads: a smooth ad hoc diversion or a ruf, hilly track ahead. Which? The committee has made a major change of direction by deciding to employ administrative help. With our support, maybe the Society will have reached a significant milestone by the time of its centenary.

— Allan Campbell

## Letters

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

### **5. A view from the chalk face** **George Anderson, Scotland**

As a retired primary teacher with 27 years' experience in Scotland and England (57 schools when supply work is included), I have seen the problems young children face with spelling.

On entering school many have acquired a considerable vocabulary, some fluent beyond their years. Speech communication is the first skill most master. Problems emerge with the written word, spelling proving to be particularly troublesome.

The attitude towards spelling errors matters to children. A page of red correction marks does nothing for confidence and leads to a 'switch-off'. Unlike adults, children's feelings of embarrassment are not obvious.

Directing them to desk dictionaries is not always the answer and can add to frustration: Try looking up once under W! Most take the short-cut and ask the teacher, even when the word poses no obvious difficulty, a sure sign confidence is damaged.

Sure, schools and individual teachers devise various, sometimes ingenious, strategies to improve spelling, even buying expensive material. But sooner or later these flounder, mainly because they fail to tackle the underlying chaos of the Spelling system in use.

The introduction of i.t.a. in the '60s was an attempt to overcome some of the difficulties. There were two negative responses I as a student, picked up in those days. Teachers saw it as an added chore and rarely felt confident using the alphabet, especially when they realized it would later be ditched further up the school. The positive side I saw was how quickly children took to it not only in reading but when writing, of ten months before this skill is usually acquired. I have no experience of teaching adult literacy but those who do tell me the problems are almost identical to those faced by children — plus a feeling of embarrassment. I was, therefore, disappointed after reading the BBC's booklet *Spelling it out* that there was no mention of the 'hotchpotch of contradictory mini-systems' that makes English spelling so difficult for some. The BBC's Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit booklet acknowledges its students may have 'problems' or may be 'unsure' of spelling but not to 'panic'. It offers some strategies to overcome their inadequacy, implying that the message is sound, pity about the messenger.

Until a modernized, simplified spelling system replaces the present antiquated model the same old problems will persist.



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

## **6. Overcoming the big hurdle to reform (Dr) Edward Rondthaler, USA**

Jean Wilkinson ([SSNov97](#) Item 7) asked 25 people how they would prefer to spell five awkwardly spelled English words. Result: No consensus — she received between four and seven different spellings for each word.

That is a problem with Dan MacLeod's suggestion (ibid) that spelling reformers should 'consult the user' in seeking guidance for the most acceptable form of simplified spelling. There will be wide disagreement.

Whenever I have a chance I give a little simplified reading test to literate adults and teenagers. I explain, in about 30sec, that an e after a vowel gives that vowel its 'long' or 'name' pronunciation. Then I ask the person to read aloud a 500-word story written in the WES (World English Spelling) version of New Spelling developed by scholars years ago, and now updated. After the first line or two all readers, without exception, have read the rest of the story smoothly and with no significant difficulty.

What one learns from this is that literate people can easily read a logical, simplified spelling if it is not too bizarre. We do not need a better system than we now have in WES.

But ask those same people to write that simple spelling! They can't do it. Jean Wilkinson's experiment confirms that simpler spelling is seen quite differently by different people — perhaps as different as are the many invented spellings of children. The big hurdle is not the public's inability to read a logical spelling, but to write it. How can that be delt with?

Today's PC compatible computers hear the call and come to the rescue. When U type in TO, a properly programmed PC can now convert your TO into a simple, updated WES spelling — automatically. It wil sho U, on the screen, how your werds wuud luuk if U'd tiept them in a speling that uthers can reed. That aplies to all com-werds (werds that ar not proper nouns) in our langgwej, and that wil maek our speling as reguelar, lojical, and as eezy to lern as ar the spelings of uther langgwejes.

Yur tieping mae then be printed in eether TO or simplified.

PS: This American Literacy Council (New York) program, as it now stands, is a working tool for implementing spelling reform. It is fully operable on 286 and up DOS-based PCs with color screen. A sister program automatically transliterates manuscripts of articles or books. Both programs need funding for improvements such as proportional spacing, typographic niceties, voice, enlargement of corpus, conversion to Macintosh, etc. But the software's uncanny ability to overcome reform's great weakness gives us the tool for moving simpler spelling from dream to reality.

## **7. An alternative to Cut Spelling**

### **George Lahey, USA**

Three things make English texts difficult: symbols that represent more than one sound, symbols that represent the same sound as other symbols, and silent letters. Suggestions that we eliminate silent letters are therefore right on target. If we did this in English words, the change would make reading and writing significantly easier for everyone. We cannot, however, go forward with this blindly, for there are dangers that must be taken into account

We can safely eliminate silent letters where they do not affect the pronunciations of words and where it will put an end to such aberrations as the bh, ck, dh, gh, kh, kn, lh, ll, mn, ph, ps symbols. We can also drop the c from the sc symbol as used in science, etc. There is, however, danger in eliminating the silent letters in doubled consonants that are used to key the pronunciation of short vowel sounds, and we cannot afford to eliminate the silent letters in vowel digraphs until we have decided how we are going to represent the long and short vowel sounds.

Eliminating silent letters from doubled consonants could make the preceding vowel appear to be the long vowel, as changing *spelling* to *spelng* does. This type of change should be avoided until such time as the vowel symbols can stand by themselves; ie, until such time as, for example, a, e, i, o, and u represent only the short vowel sounds, and other symbols, perhaps ae, ee, ie, oe, and ue represent the long vowel sounds.

The advantage of eliminating silent letters as a first step towards simplification is that it will not require changes in spelling rules, nor major alterations to the lexicon. While it will not eliminate the ambiguities of some symbols, or the redundancies of others, it will permit us to continue teaching the language we have been teaching, requiring very little change in the curricula.

In these respects, it is vastly superior to Cut Spelling, which departs significantly from current practise, and requires an entirely new set of spelling rules. It is therefore suggested that the committee the SSS recommend the elimination of silent letters as a positive step toward spelling simplification.

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

## 8. Jean Wilkinson, USA, writes: We can help them now!

First the bad news. U may remember it yourself U were little, and U struggled to tell the difference between *thought*, *though*, and *through*. And they were bears to spell.

Now — multiply your frustration by the number of English-speaking children in the world. Plus the number who haven't gone to school yet, or been born yet, down the generations. Every literate English-speaking child must learn to differentiate between those 'three bears'. No child can avoid them, and still learn to read. 'How many child-hours are wasted in that one small struggle? Can U remember your own confusion, anger, discouragement, self-blame? I can.

Now the good news. We — U and I — can set the next generation free. How? By using solutions now available to us in the dictionary. *Tho* and *thru* are now being listed **because** enuf people are using them. But publishers haven't switched over yet, because the majority of us haven't switched yet.

Why switch? We've finally got two of those words strait!

If *tho* and *thru* were adopted by a majority of people, publishers would follow, children's books would follow, and the *ough* spellings would be presented to the students as alternative spellings somewhere in the middle grades. As it is, *thought* and *through* are active first-grade vocabulary. Now, that's cruel.

If **we** don't change, the spellings probably won't change (most haven't, for centuries).

And there's something in it for us. It's faster.

I'm changing, for the sake of the kids. Do U think it's worth it? Want to come along? Why perpetuate needless suffering on our kids? Would U do it to your dog?

Don't wait for George. He's waiting for U!

## 'Heyday is now' to modernize spelling

*In the Chicago Tribune's 150th anniversary edition in June 1997 columnist ERIC ZORN wrote of the newspaper's involvement with simplified spelling. Later he learned of the existence of the Society and had email correspondence with our editor-in-chief Chris Upward. He wrote this follow-up in December.*

As we approach the conclusion of the *Tribune's* year-long 150th anniversary observance, duty compels me to issue a clarification on a matter formerly of some importance to this newspaper.

The simplified spelling movement is not dead. Contrary to the impression I may have left in my contribution to the massive commemorative edition June 8, the *Tribune's* 41-year experiment in spelling reform did not kill the idea once and for all when it concluded in 1975.

Indeed the 'heyday is now' for efforts to modernize and otherwise make sense of English spelling, according to a leader of the 89-year-old Simplified Spelling Society, a language professor with the fittingly optimistic name of Christopher Upward.

Tho the society has only about 100 members world-wide, Upward, with whom I was in touch only after my article appeared, said new scholarship as well as the growth of English as a world language has made the cause particularly vital.

You can read a transcript of my lengthy email interview with Upward at my web site, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/go/zorn>. It includes his description of the 'Cut Spelling' system with which he proposes publications experiment, perhaps just in one column once a week to start. "With its famus histry of involvmnt in th speing reform question," he wrote, using the system, "th *Chicago Tribune* myt be th ideal paper to start th trend."

Myt be. But its the *Sun-Tyms* tern.

(The *Sun-Times* is another Chicago newspaper. — Ed.)

## Harnessing Shakespeare to the cause

In a post to the SSS-email-group Dan MacLeod suggested we quote the Bard when we hear, as an objection to change, 'I like the beauty of the language the way Shakespeare wrote it'. Examples from the First Folio:

From *Hamlet*

... to dye, to fleepe —  
No more — and by a fleep to fay we end  
'The heart-ake, and the thouf and Naturall shockes  
That Flesh is heyre too!

From the Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet

Hift Romeo hift! 0 for a Falkners voice,  
To lure this Taffell-gentle backe againe!  
Bondage is hoarse, and may not fpeake aloud;  
Else would I Teare the Caue wher Echo lies,  
And make her ayrie more hoarse than mine.

## 9. From the committee meetings

### October

#### Meetings secretary resigns

Nick Atkinson resigned as meetings secretary and from the committee for personal reasons. No successor could be found immediately, and Chris Upward agreed to take minutes for the meeting. A longer-term solution was deferred.

Chris Gledhill has moved to St Andrews and also withdrew from the committee. He would continue to help as far as possible in producing the Journal. John Bryant is to fill one of the vacancies.

It was agreed there was no immediate need for the subcommittee for investment and charitable status to meet. Charitable status was seen as still being a desirable goal, but the committee was not in a position at present to pursue it.

Tribute was paid by chairman Chris Jolly to the Society's former vice-president, the late Govind Deodhekar. Chris also announced Dr Edward Rondthaler, president of the American Literacy Council, had agreed to be a vice-president of the Society.

A draft strategy paper suggesting the Society try to persuade Prime Minister Tony Blair, Microsoft's Bill Gates, and media proprietor Rupert Murdoch to support spelling reform was discussed.

Chris Upward reported he had delivered a paper on Cut Spelling to an international conference of typographers, who were enthusiastic about the economic and ergonomic benefits of CS.

Quotations were received for placing advertisements in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* newspapers seeking new members. It was decided to place one in *The Times* (see below).

Tony Burns reported Personal View No. 5, from Australian member Ken Goodwin, was ready for publication.

#### Society advertises in *The Times*

The Simplified Spelling Society

The society is dedicated to the modernisation of English spelling and welcomes new members. Details from the Secretary.

This, advertisement was placed by the Society in *The Times* education section on November 28 1997. One inquiry was received.

## January

### Paid help to be appointed

The committee decided to appoint a part-time, paid secretary-bookkeeper, amended from secretary-public relations officer in the proposal. This is in response to the vacuum in the Society's administration left by the meetings secretary's resignation and a failure to find a replacement from within the membership.

Five *Personal Views* have now been published, five are in the pipeline, and three in development. Spelling schemes are to be on the agenda in future.

It was agreed Coollist should be wound up as a Society email forum, and Nicholas Kerr was to investigate the possibility of a replacement.

Chairman Chris Jolly said he had attended a meeting of the Queen's English Society, organized by Dr Bernard Lamb, who told it that in his experience incorrect usage jarred with people more than incorrect spelling, grammar, or punctuation. [Dr Lamb is to be guest speaker at the Society's AGM. — Ed.]

Editor-in-chief Chris Upward reported on a number of matters: The website at Aston University was being reorganized; he suggested the Society needs to offer a public proposal, with three strands — adopt American spellings, drop *gh*, and select regularized forms of the 200 most common words; he had had an article on spelling reform published in the English Association's newsletter, and had been asked for a follow-up written in *Cut Spelling*; he also intended to present SSS views about the future of English to the British Council. He circulated a draft revision of *Introducing Cut Spelling* for comment.

A Society member, Dr Colin Davies, was interested in Finnish and had spent some time in Scandinavia. He told the meeting that, apart from the word alcohol, every Finnish word was spelled as it was sounded and pronounced as it was written. "U learn the sound each letter represents," he said, "and that's the end of it. U go and learn something else." As far as he could discover, there is no Finnish for *dyslexia*.

### A chance for influence?

As *Simpl Speling* went to press news came that a two-year *Langscape* project, devised by Cambridge University Press under the leadership of Pam Peters (Macquarie University, Australia) is being inaugurated to 'survey the world of English usage' over the next two years, focusing on points of uncertainty.

Langscape will be producing questionnaires. The first (relating to spelling) is in the January 1998 issue of *English Today*. The project is seen as an opportunity for the Society to intervene with a strong message.

## 10. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

### Best orthographic innovations for 1997

At the end of the year it is traditional to recognize significant contributions in various fields. From the discussions on the SSS internet mailing list, I have selected the following as most significant. These are technologies, concepts, orthographic options, and notational strategies.

1. BetterSpell (BTRSPL) conversion program (developers: Alan Mole, Bernard Sypniewski, John M Bryant, Chris Upward, Tom Zurinkas, the ALC). With this innovative software, any notational system can be converted into any other.
2. Broad vs narrow transcription: John Gledhill observed that in developing a phonemic system one does not have to mark the sounds created when people try to enunciate certain combinations.
3. Marking the schwa (unstressed central vowel) with a symbol or letter permits a significant simplification of the writing system.
4. Shwapostr'fi: Mark the schwa with an apostrophe — *'go, un'form, fiest' (ago, uniform, fiesta)*.
5. ShwA: Marking initial and terminal schwas with an a': *a'go, un'form, fiesta'*
6. Syllabic consonants: Marking the schwa by any two contiguous consonants. This would be an extension of the practise of using syllabic r, l, m, n and d in terminal syllables [*corroded/ca'ro'dd*].
7. Allophonic mergers: Broad transcriptions can sometimes be simplified by combining similar sounds and representing them with a single grapheme.
8. Systematic positional spelling: A writing system can be systematic and predictable without conforming to the phonemic idea of only one spelling per sound.
- 9 Base pronunciation: The dictionary pronunciation guides may be the model for a phonemic writing system but a single standard is needed. Ron Footer proposed Longman's Pronunciation Dictionary by J C Wells.

### Coollist a victim of own popularity

While the idea of a no-cost automated mailing list sounded great, we seem to have gotten what we paid for. Coollist has attracted more users than they can handle and now is experiencing frequent non-operational periods. The service is currently so unreliable that most of the active participants on the list have returned to maintaining their own mailing lists.

Commercial services are available for \$60 per year which appear to have more of a commitment to reliability and good support. One example is [www.eskimo.com](http://www.eskimo.com) . The \$60 allows the list manager to distribute mail to up to 300 people and also includes 5MB of web space. Free email accounts are available from Hot Mail and Juno.

## **URLs for spelling related websites [These are no longer available.]**

Craig Schoonmaker's Fanetiks — Welkam tu a nu wae uv rieting Ingglish — a raashanal wae:  
Spell Well — A variation on Truespel and New Spelling (mentioned before)

George Lahey's Inghlish — A well thought-out web page illustrating TO problems and offering a solution:

Steve's Simple Spelling Page — A link page with Valerie Yule's *Spelling Reform Bibliography*:

The Trouble with Spelling — The html version of an article on English orthography:

The Origins of the Alphabet — A short history of writing systems and letter shapes:

Michael Everson — Different character sets including Klingon, Celtic, Ogham, Coptic, hieroglyphics, etc.

BTRSPL —

## **Anniversary**

### **List of 12 adopted**

In 1898, the National Education Association (USA) adopted a list of 12 reformed spellings: program, *tho*, *altho*, *thoro*, *thorofare*, *thru*, *thruout*, *catalog*, *prolog*, *Decalog*, *demagog*, *pedagog*.

## **Tale-peace**

### **Choice — or cop-out?**

“For words like *colour/color*, which seem to generate more apoplexy than any others (particularly in British readers), we have adopted the happy compromise of *colo(u)r*. Americans should Tipp-Ex out the *u* thruout, and British readers should delete the brackets instead.”

— Ben and Jonathan Finn