

SS9.

simpl speling July 1999 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

Web: www.spellingsociety.org

Reps Appointed

At the Society's annual meeting in March Alan Mole was appointed its United States representative.

Allan Campbell was confirmed as the New Zealand representative.

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1. Members favor gradual change

More than half of respondents to the members' ballot on the type of reform the Society should pursue favored a gradual approach.

Sixty-five members (about half) returned their ballot papers. Forty-one favored option B — staged reform (24 in small steps, 15 in a few big stages; and two did not specify which). Sixteen favored A — a comprehensive, single-stage reform. Eight made other suggestions.

Comments with the votes indicated that B voters recognized idealism needed to be tempered by realistic appreciation of what was possible — that likely public reactions to reform proposals needed to be taken into account. They had voted for the B option because they saw it as the one most likely to succeed.

Six A-voters said they, too, appreciated reform would probably have to be introduced in stages, but wanted an agreed overall plan in place before this was attempted.

The need for clear overall aims before doing anything was also stressed by several B and C voters.

Another favored strategy was to educate the public on the harm of TO.

Secretary Masha Bell was pleased to find that her own overall views on reform were in agreement with the majority of voting members. This would enable her to launch herself into publicity on behalf of the Society with more confidence. It also indicated the general direction which more detailed proposals should take.

2. Research may lead to agreed first steps

At the Society's annual general meeting Masha Bell presented research she had undertaken with a view to getting some suggestions for the improvement of English spelling agreed to by members. She said she was keenly aware that lack of such agreed suggestions had repeatedly been cited as a reason for the Society's failure to make more headway with reform.

She presented a list of 32 main problem areas of TO she had found. She then outlined research she had done into establishing which problems were common and which less so among the 3000 most frequently used English words — She felt if our chief aim was to help learners, we needed to concentrate on making the spelling of the most common basic vocabulary as regular as possible. This would ensure more reliable success for the teaching of phonics, and make it less dependent on the excellence of teachers. It would remove current vocabulary restrictions on beginners' learning schemes.

She found doubled consonants and the variety of spellings for the long ee sound were the two greatest sources of possible confusion; followed by silent final -e; inconsistent short -u- (eg, nut) and short -e- sounds; and deviations from a+magic e spelling in medial position.

She has put her findings before the Society internet discussion group which is at present trying to reach consensus on some reform measures members could be asked to vote on.

The first seven or so favorite measures of the membership, depending on the final number which the discussion group agrees on, could then perhaps become agreed SSS strategy for improving English spelling in an initial reform.

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

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

Parents lodge lawsuit over basic skills exams

Jean Wilkinson

A group of Oregon parents of learning-disabled children, via Advocate for Special Kids (ASK), is suing the Boards of Education of the State of Oregon and of Portland City Schools. They claim the test for the new Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), now given to all tenth-graders in Oregon public schools, discriminates against their children, most of whom are dyslexic.

The test includes reading, writing (spelling, punctuation, etc) and math story problems. A passing score qualifies students to attend advanced classes leading via a second exam to a Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM). Graduates failing the CIM will get an ordinary diploma.

The parents are protesting that their children are neurologically incapable of correct spelling, but are otherwise intelligent. Failing the CIM limits their children's education, and could also make them ineligible for Oregon's public universities and community colleges.

The school district is responding by saying these students should have had (legally mandated) Individual Education Programs, whereby at the first of the school year the student's parents and teachers would have together set up a course of study that helps to deal with the disability. Presumably word processors with automatic spell-checkers would have been made available to these students thruout the year.

The parents are claiming that this prerequisite was not made clear to them at the first of the year, making the student ineligible at test time for the accommodation. The state is countering that the use of those helps during the test would invalidate the test. Using the accommodation will disqualify the user.

The case is to be heard in the US District Court in Portland, its date being determined on or after June 8.

Jean's comment: These students need a consistent orthography — Soundspel, for instance. So do low achievers and some immigrant students. Why can't the US have two simultaneous orthographies? I read in the *Journal* that Japan has four.

Winners, Spelling Day Competition 1998: Tom Lang 1, Jean Wilkinson 2.

1999 spelling jokes competition

The millennial international competition for Spelling Day (October 9) is for the best collection of spelling jokes. Collect cartoons, limericks, quips, riddles, anecdotes, drawings, or make up your own. Prizes: Individual collections — Booklets on spelling games, and spelling cartoon memo books. Best school collection: A take-home *Help Yourself To Read and Spell* half-hour cartoon video. The usual competition rules apply.

All contributions without a prior copyright may be included in a Spelling Joke Book being compiled in aid of literacy innovations. Send your entry to: **Valerie Yule, Australia**. Closing date: June 30, 2000.

'Scrabl' for reformers

In 'Scrabl' for reformers (for trademark reasons called BABL), double score is awarded for using Surplus-Cut spellings — that is, omitting letters that are really surplus to representing meaning or pronunciation. The score is not awarded if other players show that the omitted letters are really necessary to show meaning or pronunciation. This variation, invented by Society vice-president Valerie Yule, can also be played with extra tiles, as suggested by other SSS members, to represent phonemes ch, sh, th, zh, and ng, and even long vowels a, e, i, o, u.

'Loopy' In *The Herald*,

Glasgow, this from an article on Andrew Carnegie: 'He had some loopy schemes: he was, for instance, an ardent supporter of spelling reform.'

Literacy reports

In *The Guardian* (London) education section in March, Society member Ken Spencer discussed results of experiments carried out by Hull University's Institute for Learning, where he is a lecturer. After commenting on findings in comparative studies of literacy acquisition in some European languages, he asked why do we make reading so difficult, while other languages modernize their writing systems and do better in literacy.

Another report condemning the literacy level in an English-speaking country was made public in Britain two days after Ken's *Guardian* article. Declaring 23 % of British adults had low literacy and numeracy skills (only Poland and Ireland had larger proportions), the government sponsored Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills proposed trebling funds for adults basic skills courses. It suggested an army of salespeople call at people's homes to persuade them to take new programs.

In April, the NZ Literacy Task force reported to the Minister of Education on how to achieve the goal that 'By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success'. The report read much like those of similar commissions around the world. It focused on funding, teacher training, teaching practises and resources, emphasis on literacy in early school years, community support, and a description of knowledge skills. The only mention of spelling was in an appendix, which stated a nine-year-old 'writing for success' 'consistently makes informed attempts at spelling.'

[John Gledhill: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Media](#)]

4. What one member has been doing

A pre-Christmas office experiment

Dr John M Gledhill, England

Searching for something different for the office staff to do whilst relaxing in the week before Christmas, 1998, I decided to seek their views on a variety of spelling systems sent to me for this purpose by some members of the Society email group. The idea was to give the participants the same text spelled in several different ways, to see which they felt was the easiest to read.

The full text was about one side of A4 taken from a student handbook, so that the terminology would be familiar to the staff. The first version was current standard English spelling, followed by the same text in ANJEL Tug, three variants of Cut Spelling/ Surplus-Cut, and two variants of New Spelling.

Staff were asked two questions: 'How easy did you find it to understand?' and 'How acceptable would it be to use as the normal form of spelling?'

The texts were presented in the above order, which was deliberately chosen (a) to ensure that 'normal' spelling came first so they were presented with the context and the terminology, (b) to put similar proposals near to each other to see if they got the same score (ie, to eliminate the tendency to give a high score merely because it was easier than the preceding version).

The number of staff in the experiment was too low to be able to vary the order of the texts, which would have helped eliminate variation based on that order; instead they were deliberately given them in the same order so that this variation (if present) was a constant that could be ignored.

Sixteen staff were invited to take part and were given the texts; seven of them couldn't grasp what was intended and declined to take part.

The figures are therefore based on the nine who could understand the basic assumption that there was such a thing as alternative spelling. That in itself is an interesting figure: half the staff simply took English spelling as an unchanging constant, even as an axiom.

The sample chosen consisted of one male and eight females, all well educated (six to graduate level); age mid 20s to mid 50s. The results are shown in the box (marks out of 10).

ANJEL Tug was a complete shock to all those taking part and elicited several puzzled comments. The time taken to read Cut Spelling was notably close to the time taken for TO.

It is possibly discouraging that three of the nine respondents found all alternatives unacceptable, and that all gave 10/10 for the 'acceptability' of current normal spelling (only one gave 9 for 'ease of use of TO'; all the rest were 10/10).

As a further control respondents were asked whether they (a) knew shorthand, and (b) knew any foreign languages. This was to try to control for familiarity with different ways of writing sounds. There did not, however, appear to be any bias in the scores attributable to these other skills.

Conclusion: This was a very modest attempt to see how people totally untutored in the idea of spelling reform would react to a range of proposed changes, from the extreme to the straightforward. The outcomes probably reflect the extent to which each diverges from current TO. Reactions to more extreme proposals were strongly negative.

| Text | ease of use | acceptability | time (minutes) |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| TO | 9.9 | 10 | 2.3 |
| ANJeL Tug | 2.2 | 1.7 | 5.5 |
| Cut Spelling A | 8.6 | 5.3 | 2.4 |
| New English Spelling A | 6.3 | 3.0 | 3.1 |
| New English Spelling B | 6.4 | 3.1 | 3.3 |
| Cut Spelling B | 7.9 | 5.1 | 2.3 |
| Surplus-Cut | 7.9 | 5.1 | 2.3 |

5. Letters

Foneticism a second priority?

Peter Gilet. Australia

Time and again we are presented with various spelling reforms, and for a century now people have been seriously interested in reform, yet almost nothing has happened. I am starting to think, from my own efforts at changing my spelling (in letters to trends and so on) that we have in fact grossly underestimated the momentum of a system used by millions of people. Let me suggest

1. Change should be incremental. I agree with Robert Craig (SSMar99) that we need a strategy of change first and foremost.
2. Try to be fonetic, but only as a second priority.
3. After the age of about seven we read by sight recognition, ideographically like the Chinese, so the main priority should be to preserve the visual profile of the words, even if they are not fully fonetic. Much can be done therefore by using abbreviations (as in Cut Spelling).
4. We should start using these immediately. Even if we start writing one new spelling a year, on our own Spelling Reform Day, we can change something.

I wd be intrestd to read coments on these perhaps maverik ideas of mine. my own taste is to go veri hevili for abreviations, thus bypasng mani of th problems of fonetic acuraci. th end rsult wd lk a liti like ths, a sort of unpointd english (like unpointd hebrew).

Delighted at active stance

Ted Relton. England [Abridged]

I am delighted the Society is moving towards an active stance for advancing the cause, and away from endlessly debating possibilities. It is also apparent some members — and our opponents — have doubts about ever being able to make any progress. I suggest a gradual start is essential, and once the benefits can be demonstrated, we will achieve widespread support, and progress will then accelerate.

In Britain we used to suffer dreadful thick fogs. Manchester declared a clean-air zone in its eastern suburbs and coal-burning was banned. Many people scoffed, and the naysayers said nothing would be achieved. But the first zone brought small results, the zone was extended, and then neighboring towns joined in, until the whole conurbation became a clean-air zone.

Then there was the awful currency system we used to labor under. The naysayers said Britain never would — never could — switch to decimal currency. Now nobody would want to go back to the old system. Metrication of weights and measures is another area where great amounts of time are saved now we have (almost) ditched the old cumbersome methods, which few could understand. Just like English spelling, really!

This is the whole point — once we make a few changes people will wonder how we bumbled on in the old days, and why we did not make the change long before.

We must make a start, and I suggest a very small one, but one which will have a lot of effect and be popular with almost everyone. That is to replace all *ph* spellings with *f*. All of them, whether at the start, middle, or end of words (peoples' names excepted).

The only source of objection is likely to be from the cultural elitists, who will claim the old spelling is derived from ancient Greek. That is nonsense, for the ancient Greeks knew nothing of telephones or fotografy.

We can demonstrate their objections are absurd, and we can win the debate. Result: one small step forward for spelling reform.

LANGO example

Robert Craig, Great Britain [Abridged]

Ai em raiting zis in LANGO (Language Aspects Normalized Grammar, Orthography, etc). Ai hoop zet zs letar ken bi pablixid in *Simpl Speling* in zis orthografi. If ai rait a familiar nursari raim, it wil giv a fiil for hou it wurks.

Meri hed a lital lem

It fliis was wait es sno.

End evriwer zet Meri went

za lem was xur tu go.

It folod hur to skul wan dei

wic was agenst za rul.

Haw za cildran laft end pled

tu si a lem et skul.

(*Simpl Speling* is a newsletter in which we try to give news of happenings and views about spelling in the Society and beyond, and about the campaign. Normally, we do not devote space to various orthographies, the place for which is Personal Views. We suggest readers interested in learning more about LANGO should write to Robert. — Ed.)

Call for official SSS foneme statement

Patrick Groff, Professor Emeritus, USA [Abridged]

Answering his 'Can we pin down the number of fonemes in English?' (SSMar99), Steve Bett says 'probably not.' That appears to be overly pessimistic.

Better questions for us are: For the practical purposes of teaching students in English-speaking nations to read and spell competently, in the quickest way possible, can these nations (1) agree on a given number of fonemes and the different ways they are spelled? and (2) agree to identify the ways these fonemes are attached to letter clusters in words?

It is time to move away from endless arguments about the different number of fonemes. The history of linguistic dispute proves to be a dead end for proponents of simplified spelling. The controversy has become a barrier to the establishment of the united front the movement needs to present to still dubious publics and governments.

In dealing with those reluctant to accept its basic premise, the movement must follow Steve's dictum to 'pin down' the statistics on how many different ways a given set of fonemes can be

spelled, and the various ways fonemes can be attached to letters. The movement's reputation is sullied by members citing wildly disparate numbers of ways.

Steve found this number to range from 256, Cover' 500, 561, to 'almost' 600. My study of Paul Hanna's *Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences as Cues to Spelling Development* (US Dept of Education) resulted in yet another: 301 (schwa foneme-letter/ letter cluster correspondences omitted.)

The present confusion leads me to propose the Society call for reputable scholars in each of the English-speaking countries:

1. To name what they believe is the maximum set of fonemes to which students must become consciously aware to read and spell competently;
2. to determine the number of different ways each of these fonemes can be spelled; and
3. to determine the number of different fonemes that can be attached to each letter/ letter cluster.

These scholars would exchange information, identify common conclusions, and defend irreconcilable views. An issue of *JSSS* would be devoted to their comments. At last we would have official SSS figures for the ways fonemes are spelled, and how fonemes are attached to letters, to be broadcast for worldwide consumption.

SSS not using simplified spelling is 'absurd'

Zé do Rock, Germany [Abridged]

It's a great idea to ask members their opinion, but it's not clear to me what was ment by the questions. Is Cut Spelling considered a big or a small step? If U were asking the members, why not ask which is their favorite scheme? Maybe U wanted first to determine the type — the 'party' — and then the scheme — the 'politician'. If U do it again, maybe U should ask for their favorite scheme (apart from their own scheme).

My own scheme zinglish (which I have submitted as a PV) is my favorite, of course, because it's much nearer to TO than Nue Speling but still comprehensive, and that's quite important for us foreigners. We've never heard the pronunciation of many words that we know only by reading, and we'd like to know it by seeing it.

The problem is that zinglish, in my opinion, is not the scheme with the best chance of coming thru, because of the many rules. Foreigners might prefer it, but not native English speakers.

I think it's absolutely absurd to have a simplified spelling society that doesn't use a simplified spelling. How can we convince people? 'Use simplified spelling!' 'Which one?' I have two options: Tell people to use my scheme (if I have one), but add 'I'm the only user'; or tell them to use any SSS scheme. And they'll ask me what are we using in the Society, and I will tell them we generally use TO!

We have to vote for a scheme and the winner should be our flag. It doesn't mean we'll get religious about it, but we need something in the hand, and we need a direction. Our only direction till now has been away from TO! And that can be everywhere.

6. Net chat: Excerpts from a few of the posts in the SSS Internet discussion group

Returning to traditional structure.

John J Reilly, USA

Cut Spelling often simply reproduces Middle English forms. Even when respellings are novel, the schemes that produce them are generally just reasserting principles that were part of English orthography from its inception, but became obscured in early modern times.



I put it to the group, then, that we are engaged neither in simplifying English spelling, nor in reforming it, but returning it to its traditional structure. While this does not mean simply reproducing spellings today that existed in former times, it does mean that we are in a very real sense restoring the written language to its true form.

Neither fish nor fowl

Raymond Weisling, Jakarta

Chinese writing (and reading) has to be painstakingly learned, since every word is unique. Learning it occupies a significant amount of time. English is somewhat like this, since the parts of a word, oftentimes spelt inconsistently, bear some similarity to the strokes that make up a Chinese character.

U would think illiteracy would be high in China, but apparently it is not (I have no figures). Why? Perhaps because it is not at all a fonetic system. Thus, for centuries the learning process has been well-established, and vital for cultural growth. English is caught in the middle, not using brush strokes, but using what appear to be fonetic characters of a limited alphabet, but combined in a hopeless jumble of permutations that defy the fonetic value of each character. It is neither fish nor fowl, and thus it can't swim or fly well. It flounders.

Learning by heart

Jean Hutchins, UK

'Whole word' reading is learning each word by rote, by heart, without considering its constituent parts, and without relation to other similar words. 'This word is said. Remember, it.' It was thought that because competent readers look at a word and say it without apparently working out the sounds, children should learn that way. Automaticity is the aim, but able readers taught that way elicit the sounds of letters and apply them to other words. They do not learn thousands of words one by one. Less able readers need to be taught the sounds of letters for wordbuilding for reading and analysis for spelling.

Deciding by taste

Zé do Rock, Germany

We have differences: we are not clones. But we shouldn't forget we play in the same team, and our adversary is called Traditional Orthography. Except for the left wing, which has usually only one criterion for simplification (consistency), most of us have three: consistency, economy, and TO-similarity. If we put an order on it, say the consistency always having priority, we have something like Truespel. If we choose economy, there won't be much left after all. Even CS began fast but had to brake. If we choose TO-similarity, we just keep TO, the system that looks most like TO. There is no mathematic way to decide *a priori*. We put the three criteria on the scales but as they have different measuring systems, we finish up making the decision by taste.

7. Jean Wilkinson, USA writes: ...and as for PH...

'U know, it took me two, maybe even three years to learn how to spell *phone*. It was really hard for me.' My teen friend added, 'Because I'm stupid.'

Oh, is he now? Or is it the *ph* that's stupid?

Phone. From the Greek $\phi o \gamma \eta$, a sound. Notice: In Greek, *ph* is one letter, not two. Then why, why, why are we spelling it with two?

A library reference person read to me over the fone that classical Latin and Greek (c AD 200–600) differentiated between 'unaspirated *p*' and aspirated *p*'. *Apple* versus *Pow!* The aspirated became *ph*. In later Latin and Greek, *ph* became pronounced as *f*, but the *ph* spelling stuck.

'The spelling stuck.' Three words — I see them written in blood — the blood of the children who must wrestle with stuck spellings, for as long as three years at school. *Fenbutol*, but *phenobarbital*. *Fennur* and *fascia*, but *phlegm* and *phthiriasis*. Do I hear someone with horns and a red suit laughing?

I'm jubilant that there is no law against misspelling words. They may not even be misspelled — they may be Future Spelling! I can't wait forever for the dictionary. It's *fone* and *telefone* for me. The dictionary will catch up, provided the people lead.

Remember your young friends.

1. *Questions of English*, ed. Jeremy Marshall, Oxford University Press, 1994, p 140.
2. Only a little over 49% of the words in the English language can be spelled by sound. *Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences as Cues to Spelling Improvement*, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1966, p 122.

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

Member shows promotional badges to AGM

Alan Mole, USA, and his father have been designing full color badges to spread the word. Alan showed six designs to members at the AGM.

They included: "Write wrong! deformed english spelng". "Spell Different Difrent!"



8. Another view from India

David Crystal, in his *Encyclopedia of the English Language*, estimates almost 34 million people in India use English, and ranks the nation fourth in its number of English-speakers, after the US, Great Britain, and Nigeria. In LOJIKON (LOJIKal use of KONsonants) the late Govind N Deodhekar, an SSS member, said: 'it appears unlikely the English will reform their spelling in the near future. But the rest of the world cannot wait, and it is time to rebel:

[Madhukar Gogate: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

Madhukar N Gogate gives an alternative view.

A link language on a parallel route

My viewpoint on spelling reform is different from those whose mother tongue is English. I can understand their concern to make spelling reforms in English. I sympathize with them if the odd spellings hurt literacy programs.

For me, English is a second language. We in India, for obvious reasons, have no patriotic songs or prayers in English. Sentimentally, we are nearer to our mother tongues, which connect us to our societies. We have illiteracy problems, not because of odd English spellings. Our scripts are somewhat fonetic, but the population explosion beats every development.

Since English is not my mother tongue, I (and other Indians) use it usually in written form. When spelling reformers tell me that *of* is pronounced with *f* as *v* in *victory*, it beats me. Why is *f* not pronounced like *f* in *fee*? But we can't criticize each other.

Pronunciations change with distance and time. India is multilingual, and accepts English as a tool for development (technology, world contacts). I and many people in India (whom I contacted) do want current English spellings to continue. We have to acquire welth and helth. We have to communicate. My engineering business will be hurt if I use the terms *siment*, *brik*, *bilding*, *brij* instead of *cement*, *brick*, *building*, *bridge*.

I advocated an optional Roman script for 15 Indian languages written in 12 different scripts. I did not suggest canceling current scripts. Why destroy existing lines of communication? Why hurt sentiments? While English has spelling absurdities, Indian languages have gender absurdities. No language is perfect. The Roman option was proposed to harness all English-printing machines for Indian languages, and to ease reading unfamiliar languages. Computers now have solved many problems. With the flick of a button, one can change scripts! I failed to convince people. The Roman option (with proper syrnbol-sound relationships) did not click. A lesson is to be learnt. People don't discard their current writing systems.

Billions are spent on making books, signboards to conform with the current systems. So, let British and American spelling differences continue. A proper approach is to respect people and their spellings, and start a new language, a new script at an informal level. I call that Globish.

What is Globish? It is English, with reformed spellings, easy enuf for common people, using small symbols *a, b, c, d, e, f*, etc, no capitals, three dots at the end of a sentence, no diacritics, with grammar and vocabulary as in English. Capitals are used to start names, brand names, etc, which cannot be respelled. One can easily navigate from English to Globish. *hi iz e jauli gud felo...* = He is a jolly good fellow. It is easy to teach Globish. Danger, *denjar* — No entry, *no entri...*

Treat Globish as different from English just as we consider Russian and German different. Russian *P* equals *R* in English. German *J* equals English *Y*. Similarly, decide on certain symbol-sound relationships for Globish and follow them. English *u* has different sounds: *unit, push, up, busy*. Take one of the relation-ships in Globish. Others are bound to look funny, like Russian *P* = English *R*.

Why do this exercise? Globish would be easier to popularize in the world. Those who want to do serious work must learn English too. Laymen will be told that *siment, brik* in Globish are written in English as *cement, brick*. A poet may say that he would write a few poems in Globish. Some editor may encourage crossword puzzles in Globish. Globish would grow, as a route parallel to English.

We must take steps to promote an easy link language to foster world brotherhood. Globish is suggested.

I would like to keep away from reforms within English. That discussion becomes endless and fruitless. Millions of people will not accept changes. No airport will change *arrival* to *arival* simply because the redundant *r* is not acceptable to reformers.

English is a world language, which is its strength and paradoxically its weakness. The world is not interested in obliging England and America to reform spellings. However, a parallel Globish route may interest the whole of mankind. It would even show the English-speakers are willing to shed some ego, and accept a new world language.

PV scheme evaluation presented

At the Society's annual general meeting **Paul Fletcher** presented an evaluation of 11 spelling schemes being published as Personal Views. He noticed varying degrees of radicalism. None advocated a completely new alphabet, and there was a minimum of added letters and accents/diacritics. Because of this there was broad agreement many sounds, particularly among the vowels, must be digraphs; and also that *q* and *x* were redundant, tho some reassigned them. Most also wanted to replace hard *c* with *k*, and similarly soft *g* with *j*. It was presumed all schemes which did not specifically mention them for retention would not retain unpronounced consonants (eg, *gh*).

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

9. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett, USA

Hotlinks

URLs for spelling-related websites

A page with 50 spelling related links maintained by Steve Bett [No longer available]

The Sounds of English — A foneme inventory with graphemes from IPA and several fonemic alphabets including Shavian. This web page includes key words and click-and-listen audio files for every vowel sound. [No longer available]

George Bernard Shaw's 1941 26-page article on spelling reform:

<http://www.digitalcomposition.org/essays-and-articles/george-bernard-shaw>

Mark Twain's short article on simplified spelling and fonetic spelling:

<http://www.languagerealm.com/english/simplifiedspelling.php>

Latin 1 symbols, special characters, and diacritics. Cut and paste from this page into your HTML documents and HTML friendly email. [No longer available]

An introduction to the history of the English language [No longer available]

Free Shavian font and A M Callaway's Phonetic Translator (beta version) is available at [No longer available]

A web board (mailing list) for those interested in the Shaw alphabet: [No longer available]

The lettermatrix project — side by side foneme-grapheme correspondences for 10 reform orthographies. Includes key-word and click-and-listen to the foneme features for those unfamiliar with IPA. [No longer available]

A spelling corrector that guesses correct spelling 97% of the time. [No longer available]

Accessing special characters in MS Word

Altho most modern orthographies attempt to make do with the limited ASCII character set, creative orthographers might make use of an augmented symbol set if they could access it.

Fortunately, if U are using Word, WordPerfect or some other high-end word processor, U have access to a hidden extended keyboard. In the past, this was available only to Mac users, but is now also available to PC users.

[The guidelines given in this item are not relevant to all versions of Word, so are not reproduced here.]

Automated spelling converters

How can we convert electronic text to augmented alphabets?

Alan Mole's BTRSPEL is a converter that can be downloaded to run on your computer, taking about 20min the first time. The Perlscript converter runs on a remote server and requires no set-up. U simply cut and paste what U want converted into a window on the screen and click on the convert button.

[No longer available]

To convert to non-Roman notations, U need to convert to the ASCII version of the notation and then change to a special font.

Talepeace

A man is suing a tattoo artist for \$US25,000. He wanted *Villain* inscribed on his biceps, but neither he nor the proprietor knew how to spell it. They decided it was probably *Villian*.

10. *simpl spelling* members' supplement

July 1999

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Winning the children thru the Internet

If the Society made books aimed at children and adolescents available for downloading in reformed spelling, we might win them over to the cause of spelling reform.

Alan Mole, a member from Boulder, Colorado, said this when, as guest speaker at the AGM, he outlined his ideas for getting children and adolescents interested in spelling reform.

He believes that soon it will be possible to download nearly all books onto walkbooks. (A computer with a 1 GB hard drive can store 3 000 books. It is expected by next year about 40% of Americans will be connected to the internet.)

Alan also showed examples of designs for badges and transfers for t-shirts which children could also download.

They would need to understand that wearing them would mean they were in favor of spelling reform, and before doing so they would need to become informed about reform issues in order to be able to answer questions about it from school mates and teachers, and also to fend off common objections to spelling reform.

The Society would therefore need to produce a leaflet which they could download and which explained the issues involved in terms young people could understand. Mark Twain's essay on spelling should also be made available. The Society should also produce a downloadable letter addressed to educators explaining why the cause of spelling reform is a good one for young people to support.

The idea of a website aimed at young people was met with general approval at the meeting. A lengthy discussion followed on the difficulties that arose for producing books in reformed spelling or explaining reform issues to children in simple terms while the SSS still had no agreed reform strategy; also on what kinds of reading material should be chosen.

Alan was given approval to try to set up a website aimed at young people on the lines he had described. It was agreed that the Aston site should provide a link to it.

Guidelines on presentation of members' schemes as *Personal Views* are available from Paul Fletcher, 7 St Andrews Mansions, Dorset St, London W1H 3FD, England.

Reports from the AGM

Chairman Chris Jolly reiterated his belief that last year's decision to appoint a paid secretary/treasurer had been a good one. He thought that Masha's enthusiasm was beginning to change the Society in a positive way.

He expressed appreciation and thanked several members for the continued hard work they put in: Chris Upward on the *Journal*; Allan Campbell with *Simpl Speling*, Jean Hutchins as membership secretary; Paul Fletcher on *Personal Views*; John Bryant on photocopying and posting *Simpl Speling* and several PVs. He felt Chris and Allan's publications were invariably of a very high standard.

Treasurer retires after 12 years

Alun Bye has been the Society's treasurer since April 1987 but has now had to relinquish the post because of poor health. In appreciation of Alun's long service to the Society, Frank Garnett (who presented Alun's report) was presented with a commemorative scroll for Alun.

Alun reported that for 1998 income from subscriptions had been higher than in 1997. Overall income from investments had been good, apart from the Ferguson shares, which had produced no dividend for 1998. The main increase in outlay was the wages bill for the secretary at between £300–£400 per month. *Personal View* expenses had also increased, and perhaps the committee should consider asking for contributions from the authors.

The meeting agreed to Alun and Frank being made life members. Lord Simon and John Wells are also life members, and Pete Bleek is a free member, membership secretary Jean Hutchins reported. Ten new members had joined since the last meeting, one rejoined, one transferred from complimentary membership. Most inquiries came via the web and some via newspaper articles.

At the end of 1998, there were 126 members. Eighteen joined during 1998 and 11 left. On AGM day there were 138 members; 68 had paid (five are nonpaying).

Jean said she will retire as membership secretary at next year's AGM.

Some members had requested a list of all SSS members. After discussion on confidentiality and data protection it was decided a list as at December 31 each year, with only name, town, and country of members, be sent with the next regular mailing to all members. Further details about individuals could then be made available on request and with the consent of the person concerned.

Attendance.

Committee: Chris Jolly (chair), Masha Bell (minutes), David Barnsdale, John Bryant, Tony Burns, Leo Chapman, Jean Hutchins, Nicholas Kerr, Gwenllian Thorstad, Chris Upward.

Members: Colin Davies, Frank Garnett, Kath Greenland (Australia), Edward Marchant, Alan Mole (USA).

Guest: Professor Burke Shipley (USA), author JSSS articles on Chicago Tribune.

Apologies: Alun Bye, Gerald Palmer, Paul Fletcher.

[Masha Bell: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Pamphlet](#), [Leaflet](#), [Media](#). [PV13](#), [Book](#),

Back to the drawing board

As noted above, Masha wants members to study her research findings and come to a decision on first steps for reform. Here is an edited version of her findings. For the complete list of words, email her at Mashabell@aol.com



Back in 1908 the Society's secretary, Mr William Archer, complained he felt he 'could not throw himself into the work of propaganda with conviction unless a survey into the whole question (of members views on spelling) was carried out'.

It was a similar need on my part that eventually resulted 'in our recent ballot of members' views on the type of reform they favored. I was reassured in finding the majority who voted to help shape the future direction of the Society were also in favor of improving English by degrees (staged reform) rather than transforming it in one fell swoop. Nice to know that I am not alone in thinking that drastic changes to the look of TO have little chance of being accepted.

Now we have to tackle the biggest issue of all. What changes to TO should we propose as a first step? In 1910 the SSS discussed asking teacher organizations to support the reform cause, but it was felt that 'General acceptance of simplification would be ineffectual until the Society had a definite scheme of simplification to urge.' Or as Chris Upward wrote in the *Journal* in 1985: There are societies and groups of spelling reformers, not to mention individuals ... all producing lists of possible reforms, and while these lists often have words or patterns in common, they often demonstrate different views.... It is clear that these differences will have to be reconciled if spelling reformers are to mount an effective, united campaign.

Anyone who has read the *PVs* which have been published or has been taking part in the deliberations of the SSS internet discussion group must be aware that this problem has not been solved.

The comments which members sent in with their votes suggest that we have substantial agreement on various general aspects of reform.

1. *Only improvements to the current system are likely to succeed, not a complete overhaul*
2. *Small or big reform stages need to be part of an overall strategy.*
3. *Any new scheme must have minimal shock effect.*

Also, frequently stated views in the JSSS and *Simpl Speling* have been:

4. *Backwards and forwards compatibility is important.*
5. *Reform proposals must be easy to explain.*
- 6 *Benefits of proposed changes must be self-evident — they must indubitably help learners.*

But what changes should we recommend? There is so much wrong with TO it is difficult to decide what should be improved first of all.

It seems to me that getting a clear idea of the type and size of problems that make learning to spell English so difficult to master is an essential first step. There is little doubt the overall problem is irregularity. English has fonic patterns, rather than rules, and these often vary depending on a foneme's position in a word, but all this would still be quite manageable if these were regular. Having 132 reliable patterns would make English harder than languages with more, fonetic writing systems, but not nearly as hard as it is with the minimum of 250, often random, representations for

the 44 fonemes (give or take a few) that we have now. Idiosyncrasies like never doubling a v, not having a reliable representation for the *u* sound of *look* or *pull*, and using letters just for decoration do not help, but irregularity is the main problem.

The chances of improving our current system are not as hopeless as these figures might suggest.

32 TO spelling problems

The main problems amount to just about 32.

1. The doubling of consonants is largely just random.
2. There are surplus letters all over the place.
3. Most of the heterographs which children take so long to master are completely unnecessary. It is but a form of child abuse.
4. The rules for stem changes before suffixes are mostly just gratuitous, and often lack consistency.

And if a child asks how to spell the following 28, it is impossible to give a straightforward answer. (I see our long-term aim as being able to do so.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Ay</i> as in <i>play, they, ate, raid, or great?</i> | 15. <i>Oe</i> as in <i>toe, slow, shoulder, boat, or bold?</i> |
| 2. <i>Ar</i> as in <i>car, calm, or heart?</i> (Not quite same in US English) | 16. <i>Ow</i> as in <i>cow, bough, or house?</i> |
| 3. <i>Ah</i> as in <i>banana or verandah?</i> | 17. <i>Or</i> as in <i>for, door, board, more, or your?</i> |
| 4. <i>Air</i> as in <i>fair, dare, bear, there, or their?</i> | 18. <i>Oi</i> as in <i>oil, noise, or boy?</i> |
| 5. <i>Aw</i> as in <i>law, taut, caught, talk, or all?</i> | 19. <i>Our</i> as in <i>flour or flower?</i> |
| 6. Short <i>e</i> as in <i>bed, head, or many?</i> | 20. <i>S</i> as in <i>sad, cent, or science?</i> |
| 7. <i>Er</i> as in <i>her, fir, fur, or worm?</i> | 21. <i>Sk</i> as in <i>skip, school or scalp?</i> |
| 8. <i>Ee</i> as in <i>feet, meat, believe, receive, recede, or he?</i> | 22. <i>Sh</i> as in <i>shop, sugar, or assure?</i> |
| 9. <i>F</i> as in <i>fun, photo, or cough?</i> | 23. <i>U</i> as in <i>mud, young, blood, or some?</i> |
| 10. Short <i>i</i> as in <i>bit, pretty, or women?</i> | 24. <i>Uh</i> as in <i>good, push, or could?</i> |
| 11. <i>I</i> as in <i>die, mile, or fly?</i> | 25. <i>Ue</i> as in <i>due, duty, new, ewe, view, or you?</i> |
| 12. <i>J</i> as in <i>jet, germ, or edge?</i> | 26. <i>Z</i> as in <i>zip or advertise?</i> |
| 13. <i>Ks</i> as in <i>accept or ax?</i> | 27. <i>W</i> as in <i>wait or when?</i> |
| 14. <i>Oo</i> as in <i>food, move, group, blue, or do?</i> | 28. <i>H</i> as in <i>hat or whole?</i> |

Much as I would welcome a reform that removed the above uncertainties in one fell swoop, I don't believe such a wide-ranging reform has much hope of ever being introduced. I intend to educate people about the wrongs of English spelling, whenever and for however long I can.

But for the purpose of compiling a good initial reform package we need to establish what needs doing most, find clear and simple rules for implementing worthwhile changes, try to get a realistic assessment of how much is likely to be accepted, and then work out the best compromise.

My thinking is essentially that English dictionaries are full of errors, according to the fonic rules that English has.

Correct the dictionaries and children will no longer need to be corrected and castigated when they are doing nothing worse than trying to be logically consistent. To find out exactly which words need some correction I began by looking for 'misspellings' among the 3000 most frequently used English words.

Problems among 3000 most common words

Words with problems totaled 876/3000. Without derivatives this reduces to 658/2250 root words. If missing doubled consonants are included, the figures are 1008/ 3000 and 779/2250 (or even 1027/3000 and 798/2250 with missing doubled v).

I identified 24 separate faults. They are listed below, starting with the most pervasive and going down in order of words affected. The running totals show how much of the total would be reduced if those faults were tackled by reform.

The faults by type of errors in traditional orthography work out as in the box below. [The higher figure is for occurrences which I counted, the lower excludes derivatives.]

| | | [Run- ning totals] | | | | |
|--|-----|--------------------|-----|-----|--|--------------|
| 1. Surplus doubled consonants (eg, <i>accommodation, account</i>) (I have put this first because the 100+ missing doubled consonants more than double the weight of this problem eg, <i>bus, yes, habit, body, proper, study, very</i>) | 95 | 83 | 95 | 83 | | 12.6% |
| 2. Words with long ee sound [<i>cheap, even, key, agree</i>] | 207 | 143 | 302 | 226 | | 21.6% |
| 3. Silent final e [<i>are, imagine, simple</i>] | 72 | 70 | 374 | 296 | | 10.0% |
| 4. Misspelt short u [<i>above, brother</i>] | 83 | 43 | 457 | 339 | | 6.5% |
| 5. Misspelt Short e (<i>bread, any, every</i>) | 55 | 40 | 512 | 379 | | 6.0% |
| 6. Misspelt A + magic e [<i>afraid, eight, great</i>] | 51 | 33 | 563 | 412 | | 5.0% |
| 7. Misspelt l + magic e [<i>bright, blind, wild</i>] | 35 | 26 | 598 | 438 | | 4.0% |
| 8. Misspelt Air [<i>area, parents, wear</i>] | 26 | 21 | 624 | 459 | | less than 4% |
| 9. Misspelt Terminal o (<i>slow, show, though</i>) | 25 | 14 | 669 | 473 | | |
| 10. Misspelt Or [<i>board, door favourl</i>] | 21 | 16 | 670 | 489 | | |
| 11. Misspelt Short o [<i>what, was, watch</i>] | 19 | 13 | 689 | 502 | | |
| 12. Misspelt O + magic e (<i>boat, gold, only</i>) | 15 | 14 | 704 | 516 | | |
| 13. Misspelt Short i [<i>women, build, system</i>] | 18 | 12 | 722 | 528 | | |
| 14. Misspelt Terminal u [<i>to, you, shoe, who</i>] | 15 | 11 | 737 | 539 | | |
| 15. Misspelt S (<i>city, scene, listen, psychology</i>) | 22 | 17 | 759 | 556 | | |
| 16. Misspelt z [<i>has, please, visit</i>] | 20 | 17 | 779 | 573 | | |
| 17. Misspelt F [<i>phone, laugh, rough</i>] | 12 | 9 | 791 | 582 | | |
| 18. Misspelt Sh [<i>sure, social, issue</i>] | 11 | 9 | 802 | 591 | | |
| Lesser problems | | | | | | |
| 19. Use -re instead of -er (<i>centre, desire, fire</i>) | 9 | 8 | | | | |
| 20. Use g instead of j [<i>general, large, vegetables</i>] | 8 | 7 | | | | |
| 21. Random spellings for aw/au [<i>law, bought, taught</i>] | 11 | 10 | | | | |
| 22. Abused final -y in short word [<i>buy, die, guy, lie, high, tie</i>] | 6 | 6 | | | | |
| 23. Misspelt all [<i>already, also, almost, fault, quality</i>] | 6 | 6 | | | | |
| 24. H Surplus to c [<i>chemical, school, technical</i>] | 6 | 5 | | | | |
| Assorted silent letters [<i>answer, certain, except, know, whole</i>] (less than 5 of one kind) | 27 | 21 | | | | |
| Assorted misspellings [<i>water, accept, they</i>] | 15 | 14 | | | | |
| | 88 | 77 | 890 | 668 | | |

(Root words amount to 75% of occurrences.) Ten words had more than one problem (*psychology* has 4). The number of root words with problems was therefore 658 from an estimated 2250.

Get started with a KISS

The poll run by the outgoing committee to seek a direction for the Society's campaign resulted in 63% of respondents asking for staged reform, and 37% voting for other options.

Only half the membership bothered to vote. This casts a shadow over the result, but we cannot allow ourselves to be thwarted by members choosing not to have their say when the chance was offered.

We have procrastinated enuf for many reasons, including apathy, lack of resources, and long and often repetitious discussion.

The committee has now been given direction by those interested enuf to express their view. Proposals are being formulated .

The poll result does not mean that all support for orthographical schemes should cease. It does mean priority needs to be given to getting something started.

KISS is the catchword — Keep It Simple, Simon. Not too much, nor too difficult to understand, to explain, to remember.

The ball is in the committee's court to play as coached by the members. Their responsibility is to rally around and back it. It's time to take the game seriously and play hard.

Allan Campbell

At the post-AGM committee meeting

Poor spelling in the limelight

Poor spelling standards had received quite a lot of publicity in the press recently after various reports about the problem, editor-in-chief Chris Upward reported. Society members Ken Spencer and George Anderson had had articles published. NZ representative Allan Campbell had also had some successes with editors, and topped it all with a 10min national radio interview which SSS gained us one new member immediately.

Chris said two *Journals* and three *Simpl Spelings* had been published last year, and Bob Brown's pamphlet had been reissued. The next *Journal* should be out in a month or so, and he had plenty of submissions for the ensuing one.

He now had two sets of the American quarterly Spelling Progress Bulletin, 1961–68, predecessor of JSSS. He has offered one to the Mont Follick Library in Manchester.

He had been offered and had negotiated the Purchase of four issues, bound as volume 6 (1917), of the early SSS journal *The Pyoneer* for £30 for our archives. Its purchase was agreed to.

The publication *English Today* was carrying out its last Langscape survey, this one into double consonants, and the Society would again be making a submission.

Reorganizing SS, RV distribution

John Bryant confirmed he could no longer photocopy and post *Simpl Spellings* and *PVs* to UK and European members. Several committee members had found that commercial photocopying cost 10p per side of A3, making this 60p per PV and 50p per SS. Chris Upward undertook to see if he could get a better price from Aston University. Gerald Palmer, who had offered to help John with filling envelopes, would be asked if he might now take on all of that job.

The latest 12-page version of Valerie Yule's PV was acceptable to the committee if Paul Fletcher found it complied with guidelines and could be sent out with the other still outstanding ones as soon as possible.

The committee's view on International Spelling Day remains. At present it cannot promise to do more than give moral support to anyone willing to promote such a day.

Los Angeles Central Library had responded to Cornell Kimball's approach about carrying *Simpl Spelling* by requesting 10 copies. It was thought it could be sent one copy with the suggestion it make as many copies as it liked, since libraries usually have good copying facilities; but it was left to Allan Campbell to decide as he thought best. [He had suggested five, reviewed after a year, and has since decided on this course of action.]

Officers and committee

Officers and committee were elected and appointed as follows: Chairman, Chris Jolly; vice-chairman, Nick Kerr; editor-in-chief, Chris Upward; director of research, Gwenllian Thorstad; secretary and treasurer, Masha Bell; honorary membership secretary, Jean Hutchins; committee — Tony Burns, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, Gerald Palmer.

Minutes available on email

The committee decided to make available, as soon as possible after each meeting, the unconfirmed minutes of that meeting to all members with email.

Subscriptions go to Jean Hutchins

All membership matters go to the membership secretary Jean Hutchins. Credit card subscription payments have been considered, as requested, but are not feasible at present.

Next committee meeting: July 10