

<p>THE PHONETIC ASPECT OF SPELLING REFORM</p> <p>by PROFESSOR DANIEL JONES, M.A., D.Phil., LL.D.</p> <p>Published by THE SIMPLIFIED SPELLING SOCIETY. 1961</p> <p>Many people will no doubt take it for granted that anyone who has made phonetics his profession will, as a matter of course, be in favour of spelling English (and indeed all languages) phonetically. It is therefore worth while pointing out two notable facts - (i) that many phoneticians are not spelling reformers, and (ii) that a good orthography cannot be rigorously phonetic.</p> <p>Several English phoneticians have, it is true, been spelling reformers, notable among them being the two great pioneers, Alexander Ellis (whose <i>Essentials of Phonetics</i>, published in 1848, was written entirely in a reformed orthography) and Henry Sweet. We must not forget, too, Walter Ripman, who did nearly all the spade-work for the Simplified Spelling Society in its early days, and without whose genius and untiring efforts our "New Spelling" would never have seen the light. It is noteworthy, however, that with the solitary exception of Paul Passy, the phoneticians of the Continent have shown little or no interest in the subject of spelling. And even among the American phoneticians of today, apart from our friend Godfrey Dewey, there seems to be little in the way of enthusiasm for any thorough-going reform. The majority of the supporters of spelling reform have in fact not come from the ranks of those whose profession demands a knowledge of phonetic science; they have been rather people in various walks of life whose common sense tells them that a rational way of writing would be for the general good. I hope and believe that this common sense is also to be found in abundance among phoneticians, for their specialized knowledge can be of great service in coming to conclusions as to how good systems of orthography can be constructed.</p>	<p>DHE FONETIK ASPEKT OV SPELING REFORM</p> <p>BIE DANIEL JONES, MA., Dr.Fil., <i>Profesor ov Fonetiks, Uenivursity Kolej, Lunden.</i></p> <p>PUBLISHT ON BEHAAF OV DHE SIMPLIFIED SPELING SOSIETY BIE SUR IEZAK PITMAN & SUNZ, LTD. LONDON 1944</p> <p>MENY peepl wil noe dout taek it for graanted dhat eniwun huu haz maed fonetiks hiz profeshon wil, az a mater ov kors, be in faevor ov speling English (and indeed aul langgwejez) fonetikaly. It iz dhaerfor wurth whiel pointing out tuu noetabl fakts, (1) dhat meny foenetishanz ar not speling reformers, and (2) dhat a good orthografy kanot be rigorusly fonetik.</p> <p>Several Inglish foenetishanz hav, it iz truu, been speling reformers, noetabl amung dhem being dhe tuu graet pioneerz Alexander Ellis (huuz <i>Esenshalz ov Fonetiks</i>, publisht in 1848, woz riten entierly in a reformd orthografy) and Henry Sweet. We must not forget tuu Walter Ripman, huu did neerly aul dhe spaed-wurk for dhe Simplified Speling Sosiëty in its urlly daez, and widhout huuz jeenyus and untiengg eforts our prezent "Nue Speling" wood never hav seen dhe liet. It iz noetwurdhy, houeever, dhat widh dhe solitary eksepschon ov Paul Passy dhe foenetishanz ov dhe Kontinent hav shoent litl or noe interest in dhe subjekt ov speling. And eeven amung dhe Amerikan foenetishanz ov todae, apart from our frend Godfrey Dewey, dhaer seemz to be litl in dhe wae ov enthuezyazm for eny thurro-going reform. Dhe majorrity ov dhe suporterz ov speling reform hav in fakt not kum from dhe ranks ov dhoetz huuz profeshon demaandz a nolej ov fonetik siëns; dhae hav been raadher peepl in vaeryus wauks ov lief huuz komon sens telz dhem dhat a rashonal wae ov rieting wood be for dhe jeneral good. I hoep and beleev dhat dhis komon sens iz aulsoe to be found in abundans amung foenetishanz, for dhaer speshaliezd nolej kan be ov graet survis in kuming to konkluuzhonz az to hou good sistemz ov orthografy kan be konstruktet.</p>
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<p>The reasons for the comparative lack of attention bestowed on problems of spelling by those whose main interests lie in phonetic studies are not far to seek. One is that many of the languages of Europe are spelt fairly phonetically, so that in the countries where those languages are spoken no great need for orthographic changes obtrudes itself. Another is that phonetics has so many ramifications that the specialists can only concentrate on certain aspects of the subject, and spelling often happens not to be one of these. It is among those whose main interests lie in the pedagogical applications of phonetics that spelling reformers are to be found.</p>	<p>Dhe reezonz for dhe komparrativ lak ov atenshon bestoed on problemz ov speling bie dhoez huuz maen interests lie in fonetik studiz ar not far to seek. Wun iz dhat meny ov dhe langgwejez ov Uerop ar spelt faerly fonetikaly, soe dhat in dhe kuntriz whaer dhoez langgwejez ar spoeken noe graet need for orthografik chaenjez obtruudz itself. Anudher iz dhat fonetiks haz soe meny ramifikaeshonz dhat dhe speshalists kan oenly konsentraet on surten aspekts ov dhe subjekt, and speling ofen hapenz not to be wun ov dheez. It iz amung dhoez huuz maen interests lie in dhe pedagogikal aplikaeshonz ov fonetiks dhat speling reformerz ar to be found.</p>
<p>They see, as do workers in other fields, that general education could be considerably improved if consistent systems of writing language were introduced. And it is no wonder that when their interest has been aroused they become particularly enthusiastic, for they have the knowledge that it is within their power to be of material assistance in the task of elaborating the systems needed.</p>	<p>Dhae see, az duu wurkerz in udher feeldz, dhat jeneral eduekaeshon kood be konsiderably impruuvd if konsistent sistemz ov rieting langgwejez wer introduest. And it iz noe wunder dhat when dhaer interest haz been arouzd dhae bekum partikuelarly enthuezyastik, for dhae hav dhe nolej dhat it iz widhin dhaer pour to be ov mateeryal asistans in dhe taask ov elaboraeting dhe sistemz needed.</p>
<p>That the collaboration of specialists in phonetics in this task is desirable is evident from the fact that alphabetic writing is and always has been founded on speech; it has or should have a phonetic basis. It should be emphasized, however, that this does not mean writing languages in phonetic transcription, i.e. in strictly phonetic manner, following the principle of one letter per "phoneme" or "essential sound." In every language special considerations have to be taken into account, and it is always found that an "orthography," or system designed for the current purposes of reading and writing, must differ in several respects from a "phonetic transcription," or exact representation of pronunciation.</p>	<p>Dhat dhe kolaboraeshon ov speshalists in fonetiks in dhis taask iz dezierabl iz evident from dhe fakt dhat alfabetik rieting iz and aulwaez haz been founded on speech; it haz or shood hav a fonetik baesis. It shood be emfasiezd, houeever, dhat dhis duz not meen rieting langgwejez in fonetik transkripshon, i.e. in a strikty fonetik maner foloing dhe prinsipl ov wun leter per "foeneem" or "esenshal sound." In evry langgwej speshal konsideraeshonz hav to be taeken into akount, and it iz aulwaez found dhat an "orthografy," or sistem deziend for dhe kurrent purposez ov reeding and rieting, must difer in several respekts from a "fonetik transkripshon," or egzakt reprezentaeshon ov pronunsaeshon.</p>
<p>The chief cause of difference for English, and indeed for most languages, is that people in different parts of the country speak differently, and that what is a phonetic representation of a word for one person is not necessarily phonetic for another. <i>Stork</i> is not phonetic for those who pronounce the word like <i>stauk</i> (Old Spelling <i>stalk</i>); neither is <i>uerz</i> (O.S. <i>yours</i>) phonetic for the numerous people in the South of England who say the word as if it were written <i>yauz</i>; the vowel</p>	<p>Dhe cheef kauz ov diferens for Inglish, and indeed for moest langgwejez, iz dhat peepl in diferent parts ov dhe kuntry speek diferently, and dhat whot iz a fonetik reprezentaeshon ov a wurd for wun purson iz not nesesarily fonetik for anudher. <i>Stork</i> iz not fonetik for dhoez huu pronouns dhe wurd liek <i>stauk</i> (Oeld Speling <i>stalk</i>); niedher iz <i>uerz</i> (O.S. <i>yours</i>) fonetik for dhe nuemerus peepl in dhe South ov Ingland huu sae dhe wurd az if it wer riten <i>yauz</i>; dhe vouel distribueshon</p>

<p>distribution exemplified in <i>buut</i> and <i>foot</i> (O.S. <i>boot</i> and <i>foot</i>) is unknown to most Scotsmen; the spelling <i>wun</i> (O.S. <i>one</i>) is unphonetic for many Northern speakers who say <i>won</i>; the spellings <i>lingger</i> and <i>singer</i> show a distinction of consonant unknown to many in the Midlands, and so forth. It must be recognized that a written language has to have a much greater degree of uniformity than spoken language. It would be inconvenient, and lead to difficulties both in reading and in writing, if any large number of common words were to be spelt in more than one way. In speech, on the other hand, there is always much latitude; people speak with all manner of "accents," and special pronunciations without any difficulty of comprehension being caused thereby.</p>	<p>egzemplified in <i>buat</i> and <i>foot</i> iz unnoen to moest Skotsmen; dhe speling <i>wun</i> (O.S. <i>one</i>) iz unfonetik for meny Northern speakerz huu sae <i>won</i>; dhe spelingz <i>lingger</i> and <i>singer</i> shoe a distinkshon ov konsonant unnoen to meny in dhe Midlandz, and soe forth. It must be rekogniezd dhat a riten langgwej haz to hav a much graeter degree ov ueniformity dhan spoeken langgwej. It wood be inkonveenyent, and leed to difikultiz boeth in reeding and in rieting, if eny larj number ov komon wurdz wer to be spelt in mor dhan <i>wun</i> wae. In speech, on dhe udher hand, dhaer iz aulwaez much latitued; peepl speek widh aul maner ov "aksents" and speshal pronunnyaeshonz widhout eny difikulty ov komprehenshon being kauzd dhaerbie.</p>
<p>Another cause of divergence between a good spelling and a strictly phonetic transcription is illustrated by the peculiarity in English pronunciation that many weakly stressed syllables are pronounced with an obscure vowel (either a kind of weak short <i>i</i> or the "neutral" vowel commonly represented in phonetic transcription by the letter (ə) or with no vowel sound at all. Often the pronunciation of such syllables is variable and differs from person to person or from context to context. It is usual, for instance, to pronounce the second syllable of the word <i>statement</i> with an obscure vowel like that in the final syllable of <i>dormant</i> or <i>diamond</i>, but there are people who sound it with a full vowel like that in <i>meant</i>. To take another example, the <i>e</i> of the superlative <i>-est</i>, as in <i>hardest</i>, is variously pronounced by different people; some sound it as <i>i</i> (<i>hardist</i>), others use the "neutral" vowel and there are doubtless intermediate pronunciations. Noteworthy, too, is the distinction of two or more pronunciations of many common words such as <i>and</i>, <i>have</i>, <i>of</i>, <i>was</i>. We pronounce <i>was</i> with a full vowel in <i>He thought it was</i>, but with an obscure vowel in <i>He thought he was wrong</i>. One speaker may even vary his pronunciation of words, especially words like those just mentioned, according to the circumstances under which he is speaking; in lecturing to a large audience he may use full vowels in sentences where in ordinary conversation he would use obscure vowels or no vowels at all.</p>	<p>Anudher kauz ov dievurjens between a good speling and a strikty fonetik transkripshon iz ilustraeted bie dhe pekuelyarrity in Inglish pronunnyaeshon dhat meny weekly strest silablz ar pronounst widh an obskuer vouël (iedher a kiend ov week short <i>i</i> or dhe "nueutral" vouël komonly represented in fonetik transkripshonz bie dhe leter ə) or widh noe vouël sound at aul. Ofen dhe pronunnyaeshon ov such silablz iz vaeryabl and diferz from purson to purson or from kontekst to kontekst. It iz uezhueal, for instans, to pronouns dhe sekond silabl ov dhe wurd <i>staetment</i> widh an obskuer vouël liek dhat in dhe fienal silablz ov <i>dormant</i> or <i>diamond</i>, but dhaer ar peepl huu sound it widh a fool vouël liek dhat in <i>ment</i>. To taek anudher egzaampl, dhe <i>e</i> ov dhe suepurlativ <i>-est</i>, as in <i>hardest</i>, iz vaeryusly pronounst bie diferent peepl; sum sound it as <i>i</i> (<i>hardist</i>), udherz uez dhe "nueutral" vouël and dhaer ar doutles intermeedyet pronunnyaeshonz. Noetwurdhy tuu iz dhe distinkshon ov tuu or mor pronunnyaeshonz ov meny komon wurdz such <i>az and hav, ov, woz</i>. We pronouns <i>woz</i> widh a fool vouël in <i>He thaut it woz</i>, but widh an obskuer wun in <i>He thaut he woz rong</i>. Wun speaker mae eeven vaery hiz pronunnyaeshon ov wurdz, espeshaly wurdz liek dhoez just menshond, akording to dhe surkumstanzes under which he iz speaking; in lektuering to a larj audyens he mae uez fool vouëlz in sentensesz whaer in ordinary konversaeshon he wood uez obskuer vouëlz or noe vouël at aul.</p>
<p>To indicate all such variations of pronunciation in spelling, phonetically correct</p>	<p>To indikaet aul such vaeryaeshonz ov pronunnyaeshon in speling, fonetikaly korekt</p>

though such transcriptions may be, would be inconvenient for the current purposes for which orthographies are designed. Such indications could hardly be given without introducing an extra letter into the alphabet, and they would involve a great deal of erratic spelling. A better plan for orthography is, I believe, to ignore the obscure vowels and to write them as if full vowels were used in their places. The phonetic inaccuracy caused thereby would be compensated for by economy of letters and by the convenience of adopting as a general principle that a word shall be denoted by only one written form; in the case of most monosyllables the best policy is no doubt to spell them as they would be pronounced when standing alone.

The fact that in English the position of strong stress in words of more than one syllable is an important part of the pronunciation, and may at times distinguish words, also makes for divergence between spelling and phonetic transcription. It is inconvenient to indicate stress in writing. It has never been shown in any conventional spelling of English, nor is it proposed to show it in New Spelling except in the one case of *ur*, *er*. In Old Spelling the written forms, *torment* and *import* each stand for two words with distinct pronunciation. They *could* be distinguished by introducing a stress-mark, but the absence of such a mark can rarely lead to any confusion, since the words are different parts of speech (nouns and verbs) and the context practically always shows which is meant. Even in the case of words which according to present practice are written alike, though differing in sound as well as in stress, the identical spellings do not lead to any serious difficulty. Such words are those written in Old Spelling *protest*, *permit*, *present*. It is worth noting, however, that in New Spelling some of these would be distinguished; the two *protest*'s would be distinguished as *proetest* and *protest*, and the two *permit*'s as *purmit* and *permit*.

It is clear that the best type of spelling is a system based on the principle of one letter for each essential sound. It is not difficult to devise with the aid of International Phonetic symbols an orthography of this kind for English; an alphabet of 31 letters suffices.* Many reformers feel, however, that the introduction of new letters would clash with so many vested interests that it is useless to

dhoe such transkripshonz mae be, wood be inkonveenyent for dhe kurrent purposez for which orthografiz ar deziend. Such indikaeshonz kood hardly be given widout introduesing an ekstra leter into dhe alfabet, and dhae wood involv a good deel ov eratic speling. A beter plan for orthografy iz, I beleev, to ignor dhe obskuer vouëlz and to riet dhem az if fool vouëlz wer uezd in dhaer plaes. Dhe fonetik inakuerasy kauzd dhaerbie wood be kompensaeted for bie ekonomy ov leterz and bie dhe konveenyens ov adopting az a jeneral prinsipl dhat a wurd shal be denoeted bie oenly wun riten form; in dhe kaes ov moest monosilablz dhe best polisy iz noe dout to spel dhem az dhae wood be pronounst when standing aloen.

Dhe fakt dhat in English dhe pozishon ov strong stres in wurdz ov mor dhan wun silabl iz an important part ov dhe pronunsaeshon, and mae at tiemz distinggwish wurdz, aulsoe maeks for dievurjens between speling and fonetik transkripshon. It iz inkonveenyent to indikaet stres in rieting. It haz never been shoen in eny konvenshonal speling ov English, nor iz it propoezd to shoe it in Nue Speling eksept in dhe wun kaes ov *ur*, *er*. In Oeld Speling dhe riten formz *increase*, *torment* and *import* eech stand for tuu wurdz widh distinkt pronunsaeshon. Dhae *kood* be distinggwisht bie introduesing a stres-mark, but dhe absens ov such a mark kan raerly leed to eny konfuezhon, sins dhe wurdz ar diferent parts ov speech (nounz and vurbz) and dhe kontekst praktikaly aulwaez shoez which iz ment. Eeven in dhe kaes ov wurdz which akording to prezent praktis ar riten aliek dhoe difereng in sound az wel az in stres dhe iedentikal spelingz duu not leed to eny seeryus difikulty. Such wurdz ar dhoez riten in Oeld Speling *protest*, *permit*, *present*. It iz wurth noeting, houeever, dhat in Nue Speling sum ov dheez wood be distinggwisht; dhe tuu *protest*'s wood be distinggwisht az *proetest* and *protest*, and dhe tuu *permit*'s as *purmit* and *permit*.

It iz kleeer dhat dhe best tiep ov speling iz a sistem baest on dhe prinsipl ov wun leter for eech esenshal sound. It iz not difikult to deviez widh dhe aed ov Internashonal Fonetik simbolz an orthografy ov dhis kiend for English; an alfabet ov 31 leterz sufiesez. [1] Meny reformerz feel, houeever, dhat dhe introdukshon ov nue leterz wood klash widh soe meny vested interests dhat it

put forward any scheme of this nature. As it happens, it is found possible to compensate for the absence of the extra letters by means of a system of digraphs (sequences of two letters denoting single sounds). The plan involves yet another deviation from the phonetic ideal, but, although a little cumbersome at times, it does not lead to any serious difficulties. The expedient of the digraph is already very familiar to us. In Old Spelling, *sh*, *ph*, *ea*, *ie*, and many other digraphs are used to represent single sounds, though most of them are used for more than one purpose and in inconsistent ways. What is needed is that the use of digraphs should be systematized. The Simplified Spelling Society has wrestled with this problem for many years, and has in its "New Spelling" produced a remarkably good solution - the best possible, I think, which is consistent with the limitations the Society has imposed upon itself. †

It will be seen from what has been said that a phonetician may support the idea of reforming our spelling not merely on account of the particular interest he takes in phonetic science, but on general educational, economical and social grounds. If he has a clear general outlook, he will see that the principle of writing phonetically should not be slavishly adhered to, and that the processes of understanding spoken words and of recognizing written words are so different that an orthography for current purposes cannot be a completely accurate reflection of the way in which people speak. Strictly phonetic writing has its uses, especially in connection with the teaching of foreign languages, but enthusiasm for it must be tempered by common sense and by a realization of the various special requirements that an orthography must fulfil.

* Including a letter for the Scottish *ch* of *loch*.
 † See the Society's book, *New Spelling*, pp. 12-15.

iz uestles to poot forward eny skeem ov dhis naetuer. Az it hapenz, it iz found posibl to kompensae for dhe absens ov dhe ekstra leterz bie meenz ov a sistem ov diegraafs (seekwensez ov tuu leterz denoeting singgl soundz). Dhe plan involvz yet anudher deevyaeshon from dhe fonetik iedeel, but, dhoe a litl kumbrus at tiemz, it duz not leed to eny seeryus difikultiz. Dhe ekspeedyent ov dhe diegraaf iz aulredy very familiar to us. In Oeld Speling *sh*, *ph*, *ea*, *ie* and meny udher diegraafs ar uezd to reprezent singgl soundz, dhoe moest ov dhem ar uezd for mor dhan wun purpos and in inkonsistent waez. Whot iz needed iz dhat dhe ues ov diegraafs shood be sistematiezd. Dhe Simplified Speling Sosiëty haz resld widh dhis problem for meny yeez and haz in its "Nue Speling" produet a remarkably good solueshon - dhe best posibl, I think, which iz konsistent widh dhe limitaeshonz dhe Sosiëty haz impoezd upon itself. [2]

It wil be seen from whot haz been sed dhat a foenetishan mae suport dhe ieeda ov reforming our speling not meerly on akount ov dhe partikuelar interest he taeks in fonetik siëns, but on jeneral eduekaeshonal, eekonomik and soeshal groundz. If he haz a kleeer jeneral outlook, he wil see dhat dhe prinsipl ov rieting fonetikaly shood not be slaevishly ad-heerd to, and dhat dhe proesesez ov understanding spoeken wurdz and ov rekogniezing riten wurdz ar soe diferent dhat an orthografy for kurrent purposez kanot be a kompleetly akueret reflekshon ov dhe wae in which peepl speak. Striktly fonetik rieting haz its uestez, espeshaly in konekshon widh dhe teeching ov forren langgwejez, but enthuezyazm for it must be temperd bie komon sens and bie a realiezaeshon ov dhe vaeryus speshal rekwierments dhat an orthografy must foolfil.

[1] Inkluding a leter for dhe Skotish *ch* ov *loch*.
 [2] See dhe Sosiëty'z book "New Spelling," pp. 12 -15.