SIMPLER RITEN ENGLISH IS POSSIBLE

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English speech has drifted away from correspondence to its spelling. Efforts to reform spelling have occurred since 1554, with only partial success. As a result, a recent study found over 500 spellings in use for the 41 common sounds in English words. Thus it is claimed there would be precedent for 613,975 different spellings of one particular word, one of which is *pphoughtlupsh*. This looks foolish -- and is, for it uses the spellings of sounds in sapphire, through, hustle, build & pshaw.

These inconsistencies in spelling are most acutely a problem for children learning to read & ryt, & for persons learning English as a foreign language. Thus a study in 1925 found that children in Porto Rico learning to read in Spanish were a year ahead in content of reading, compared to children in New York City learning to read in English. These problems probably affect rytting even more.

The concern in recent years about "why Johnny can't read" or ryt well has largely overlooked this basic problem. Similarly overlooked is the conflict aroused in school by efforts of teachers to authoritarianly impose present inconsistent spellings upon students, & to scold & humiliate them when they deviate from it, however logically & economically they spell. Present spelling provides an early & frequent lesson to children that the world is illogical, inconsistent, incomprehensible & unchangeable. It must therefore make some substantial but unknown contribution to student dropout & disruption rates, & to the extent of functional illiteracy.

Modern, organized efforts for spelling reform were begun in 1875 by the American Philological Association. The first specific recommendations were made by it & its London counterpart in 1883. Prominent supporters included Charles Darwin, Isaac Pitman, & Alfred Tennyson.

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When Theodore Roosevelt became President in 1901, he attempted to institute use of a list of 300 simplified spellings in government publications. Congress refused to pass the appropriation for the Government Printing Office until it was amended to prohibit this. Hence, official use was limited to correspondents by the executive branch of the government. However, the controversy, & the popularity of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party movement in 1912, doubtless contributed to widespread adoption. A majority of the 300 proposed changes have come into common use.

In 1906, the Simplified Spelling Board was formed, including editors of four dictionaries, representatives of educational organizations, philologists, & eminent people. This was supported from 1906 to 1919 by Andrew Carnegie to the extent of $250,000, in its efforts to secure adoption of changes in a few thousand words. It obtained 40,000 postcard pledges to use a limited number of simplifications, & a portion of these people did so for a while.

Around 1920, with the postwar reaction toward conservatism & isolationism, the NEA abandoned the movement, & Andrew Carnegie died without providing for further support. In 1931, however, the Chicago Tribune adopted an unsystematic list of 80 simplified spellings. This has since gone thru several reductions, but it & its evening affiliate, Chicago Today, still use many, including altho, tho, thru, analog, & even ameba.

In 1946, Godfrey Dewey, now secretary of the Simpler Spelling Association (successor to the Simpler Spelling Board), stressed to James Pitman (son of Isaac) the importance of a phonemic notation (based on sounds which are similar except for the effects of adjacent ones). This builds on the experience with the Pitman, Dewey & other shorthand systems. James Pitman then developed his Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) using 24 Roman letters (excluding q & x) in a consistent fashion, & an additional 20 characters, achieving the phonetic goal of each sound having its own character. Experiments from 1961 on, in teaching children to read, indicate that this ITA speeds the process considerably. However, it is not possible to use an ordinary typewriter or type case for it.

Hence the Simpler Spelling Association and its English counterpart have developed World English Spelling (WES), using the same 24 Roman letters & a set of digraphs (2 or 3 letter combinations) for the remaining sounds. This retains the advantages of consistent spelling for each sound, & can be used on any typewriter or set in gog, program, & prolog. In 1916, it added use of t in the past tense of verbs ending in -ed but pronouns it.
any printing plant. It offers easy transition from the full WES system in the learning phase to either traditional orthography or a less thorough reform thereafter. However, a full phonetic alphabet (one sound per sign & one sign per sound) would save about 17% of letters, but WES offers almost no savings.

A major problem in the introduction & acceptance of any reform is the amount of effort required to change the habits of those already used to the old ways. The WES system would change about 60% of words. The Simpler Spelling Association has apparently decided to concentrate its efforts on the use of WES as an initial teaching alphabet for children & adults, thus avoiding much of this problem, but reaching only a limited public.

Another approach, designed for progressively minded adults, is to divide changes into several stages, & concentrate at first on those simpler changes which save letters. This offers some writing economy to compensate for the problems of making changes. One result is World English Economy Spelling (WEE). This would affect about 14% of words & save nearly 4% of letters, apparently the maximum that can be achieved with present typewriters.

Substitution of a few keys on some typewriters can be done for about $3 a key. It might be possible to replace q, x, fractions, & # by symbols for hard th, ae-sound, & wordsigns for the & of. These substitutions, & use of & for and, permit saving of over 8% more letters, for a total of 12.5% (or 1 out of 8). These three added steps form a further stage (WEE-8). If this stage were universally adopted, printing & publishing expenses (now $6.5 billion a year) could be reduced by $800 million a year, or $4 per person, plus savings in handwriting of perhaps as much more.

The Economy (WEE) stage consists of 5 steps of increasing complexity: 1. delete silent final letters; 2. delete other silent letters, except initial; 3. change one or two letters (not initial) plus deletions; 4. change initial letter, plus deletions; 5. use y as a vowel for le sound (as in why, try). However, this requires nearly 50 sub-steps or rules, affects about 366 common words, & proves difficult to write, tho fairly easy to read.

The Economy stage does not make improvements in consistent rules for spelling. These apparently first become possible about halfway to the WES system, by carrying certain changes, made in some WES words, to their logical conclusion, applying them where they do not save letters as well as where they do. This stage is World English Tranzishonal Spelling (WETS), & it permits the following rules: 1. silent letters have been dropped; 2. doubled consonants for a
The difficulties in using these stages for fluent writing led to development of World English Dubl-Economy Spelling (WEDS), which only includes those words where two or more letters are saved. There are only about 55 common ones. They affect 1.60% of words on the average, saving 0.8% of letters. These changes are described in 15 sub-rules. Hence it is fairly possible to memorize the word-list, & each occasion of use produces a noticeable saving in space & writing effort. For those not prepared to go even this far, a triple-economy version (WE3S) consists of the five common words saving three letters or more: altho, tho, thru, thruout, nolij.

What are the prospects for adoption of some spelling reforms? These depend in part on whether the movement again secures financial support from foundation or other sources, such as Andrew Carnegie supplied before 1920. Also, it depends upon whether it can obtain the support of the leadership & followers of a major social movement, such as was supplied by President Theodore Roosevelt & his Progressive Party movement, from about 1901 through 1912.

The present Simpler Spelling Association has about 150 members, & appears to be primarily an elitist group (most board members are PhD's). This is appropriate for the research phase the organization has been going through, but is not a broad enough base for a popular mass movement, or even to become a semi-popular specialist group of teachers of reading & writing to children & of English to foreigners.

In addition to major efforts, some minor ones pave the way for the acceptance of reforms. Thus spelling reform (like calendar reform) may be adopted by some businesses, for their own purposes. The classified phone book lists "Fyr Fyter Co.", many "fot" companies, & one maker of "fonografs". It & other catalogs and directories also use some abbreviations of a simplified spelling kind, including word signs, especially &. These practices could be encouraged.

Of the various stages of Progressive Spelling, the Dubl-Economy one (WEDS) is best-adapted to early & wide adoption, & the Economy stage with word signs (WEES-8) for directory, catalog, fact-book & similar uses. The Tranzishonal stage (WETS) may be use-
able as a secondary learning medium & for international communication for people to whom English is a foreign language. It also provides an adequate vocabulary of common words for word games (a list of 600 is available).

But those who pioneer in this, as in other constructive social change, must expect a variety of reactions, mostly negative at first. Hence the advantages of the Dubl-Economy stage, with its few changes & noticeable savings. Using ampersand (&), already found on typewriters, for the word and affects 3.3% of words and saves 1.5% of letters. This was common in correspondents two centuries ago. This plus WEDS saves over 2% of letters on a page. This article has been written in that combination, so "the medium is the message" in part. Correspondence is invited on problems & uses of Simpler Spelling.

REFERENCES

World English Spelling (free sample of literature available from Simpler Spelling Association, Lake Placid Club, Lake Placid, New York 12946).