

Spelling Reformers in Britain, 1834-1975: National and International Ambitions for English Orthography

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to summarise 'in English' my research on spelling reform previously published mostly in Japanese.¹ It outlines the history of spelling reform attempts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and discusses the social and cultural background of the time that directly and indirectly encouraged the reformers to pursue their cause – that is, to try to change the English orthography into a more phonetic one.

Although I use the phrase "spelling reform," most of the cases discussed here are failed attempts either in the short-term or long-term. The English orthography as known today had been largely fixed by the mid-eighteenth century, when Samuel Johnson compiled *A Dictionary of the English Language*. After the spelling was fixed, the only major change in the English orthography

was a set of changes introduced in America, such as <or> instead of <our> as in <color>.² Attempts in Britain have failed to bring about changes in the orthography in any noticeable way.

Spelling reformers have often been criticised as being impractical or unrealistic, if not completely ignored. Richard Chenevix Trench wrote in his *English Past and Present*:

Sciologists or scholars may sit down in their studies, and devise these new letters, and prove that we need them, and that the introduction of them would be a manifest gain; and this may be all very true: but if they imagine that they can persuade a people to adopt them, they know little of the extent to which its alphabet is entwined with the whole innermost life or a people.³

So what is the meaning of studying English spelling reform? My answer is as follows: Spelling reform proposals reflect the reformer's ideas about English and its orthography, their inferiority and superiority complexes about the language. By examining spelling reformers' discourses and other people's responses to them, we can shed new light on the linguistic attitudes of the society at the time. Spelling reform proposals reflect the prevailing ideologies about language, literacy, and education. Spelling reform has always been an extreme idea advocated by a small number of people, but still it reflects a certain aspect of the contemporary society in a unique way.

The questions I have asked in studying spelling reform are not only: "who proposed, what spelling reform scheme, when and where?" But also: "Why did they attempt to change spellings?" The latter is also related to such questions as "What motivated reformers? What were their purposes and ambitions? How did the contemporary socio-cultural conditions influence them?" These questions are closely related to the ideas and assumptions about spelling, language and literacy that were generally shared in contemporary society, and the analysis will help us better understand the social climate of the time.

The date of 1834 in the title of this paper refers to the publication year of Latham's spelling reform booklet, which is the earliest work I discussed in my research. The date of 1975 refers to the year in which the Bullock Report was published. The report gave a final blow to the initial teaching alphabet experiment, which I discussed as the most recent instance of spelling reform attempt in my research.

1.2 Research interests in spelling reform

In *Spelling and Society*, Mark Sebba writes, "In linguistics, orthography has certainly had its niche for a long time, but it is just that – a niche, a small preserve."⁴ If orthography has had just a small preserve, the research interest in spelling reform has been even smaller. Preceding research

on the history of spelling reform in English is generally found as a part of larger research topics, which can be divided into the following three groups: the study of English spelling itself; the study of ideas about language; and study of the social and cultural background of the reform. I will examine them in turn.

Firstly, the history of spelling reform has been discussed as part of research on English spelling, both in the diachronic study and the synchronic study. Bourcier (1978), for example, is a diachronic study of English orthography and Chapter 5 deals with spelling reform attempts since the fifteenth century. Carney (1994) is a synchronic study of English spelling, and Chapter 7 discusses notable spelling reform proposals since the nineteenth century. In both approaches, the main concern of the research is the representation of sounds with letters, in other words, the correspondence of phonemes and graphemes. The correspondence rules and exceptions to them are discussed, and the spelling reform proposals are examined as attempts at increasing the regularity.

Secondly, spelling reform attempts can be seen as an expression of ideas about language and have been discussed in the study of the history of linguistics. Robins (1997) and Morpurgo Davies (1998) are studies of the general history of linguistics and include references to spelling reform attempts. In the history of phonetics, spelling reform is likely to be seen as an essential aspect of the history of phonetic transcription, as in Collins and Mees (1999) and Kemp (1995), to name but a few. Michael McMahon's work on the history of phonetics and on individual phoneticians in the nineteenth century discusses spelling reform as an important concern for the phoneticians at the time.⁵

Thirdly, spelling reform can be studied in relation to the social and cultural background, both diachronically and synchronically. Richard Bailey's *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language* discusses the historical development of opinions about the English language, and Chapter 7, "English improved," examines spelling reform attempts together with other discourses on the improvement of English. An example of synchronic study is the above-quoted sociolinguistic study by Sebba, *Spelling and Society*, whose analysis is not confined to English but deals with a variety of languages. It devotes Chapter 6, "Reform or revolution: where angels fear to tread" to this topic, and discusses "the discourses of orthographic reform, exploring what they tell us about how orthography has been conceptualised and deployed for symbolic purposes in the debates over reform."⁶

My study of the history of spelling reform principally belongs to the second and third categories. In discussing individual spelling reformers, I have also referred to their biographical and social background, and discussed them in the contemporary socio-cultural context. The chronology in the Appendix includes the major events and publications discussed in the paper.

2 Spelling reform in the nineteenth century

2.1 Outline of the spelling reform movement in the nineteenth century

In the early nineteenth century, spelling reform proposals were published sporadically, but the height of the reform movement was in the latter half of the 1870s and early 1880s. The preceding individual activities culminated in a bigger movement. Educationists and linguists played an active part. Both elementary education and linguistic sciences developed greatly during the course of the nineteenth century. In both fields, spelling reform of English seemed, at least to some people, to give a good solution to the problems they were facing. For educationists, it was how to improve the efficiency of elementary education, while for linguists, it was how to record and analyse sounds of languages. I will discuss these two major groups of spelling reformers in the following Sections 2.2 and 2.3, but first let me summarise the history of the spelling reform movement in the nineteenth century.

In 1877 the Spelling Reform conference and public meeting was held “with the view of furthering the cause of Spelling Reform – first by demonstrating its necessity, and secondly by urging upon the Government the desirability of appointing a Royal Commission to examine the most feasible schemes, and report thereon.”⁷ Included in the conveners of the conference were educationists, linguists, politicians and shorthand reporters, the first two being larger groups.⁸

The memorial for a royal commission was drafted by the London School Board. The royal commission was not appointed, but the organizers of the conference and public meeting formed the English Spelling Reform Association in 1879.

2.2 Spelling reform for elementary education

Elementary education acts (1870, 1876) and revised code (1862)

During the nineteenth century, the elementary education system developed through a series of acts of legislation. Especially relevant for the spelling reform movement were the Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1876 and the Revised Code of 1862.

The Elementary Education Act of 1870 declared that the Board of Education should create school boards in the areas that show substantial shortfall in elementary education, and that school boards, with its members locally elected by rate-payers, should set up and run schools. Having left the nation's elementary education to the private sector and voluntary organizations for much longer than other European countries, the British government finally became responsible for the national education.

This Act was influential in the spelling reform movement because it created school boards, and some of them played an important role in the movement. It was the London School Board

that initiated the request for a royal commission on spelling reform. Spelling reformers also emphasized the governmental responsibility for the national education declared by the 1870 Elementary Education Act, and argued that the government should consider the necessity for simpler spelling to facilitate the learning of reading and writing.

The Revised Code of 1862 introduced the “payment by results” system, where the amount of government funding for schools was partially decided based on pupils’ performance in the exams that Her Majesty’s Inspectors carried out. Originally it was in reading, writing and arithmetic that the standards of the pupils were checked. Even after the Elementary Education Act of 1876, the reading and writing of English consisted of a large part of the examination. Spelling reformers addressed this strong control of the government over the standards of reading and writing.

Figure 1 below shows the interests of spelling reformers and the groups that they belonged to in the nineteenth century. The “education” and “linguistic” axes show their primary concerns. For example, J. H. Gladstone was very much concerned with elementary education but not much with linguistics. Figure 1, as well as Figure 3 in Section 3, shows the general concerns of each reformer’s spelling reform discourse, but is not based on any statistical data.

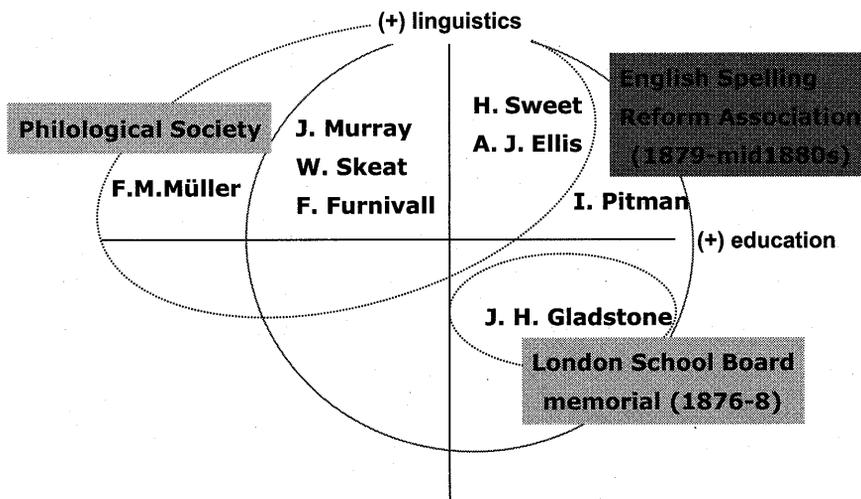


Figure 1 Spelling Reformers’ Interests in the Nineteenth Century

Isaac Pitman (1813-1897)

Isaac Pitman is the deviser of the successful phonetic shorthand and is arguably the most well-known spelling reformer of the nineteenth century. Pitman vigorously launched his phonetic reform in the 1840s with his shorthand and later collaborated with Alexander John Ellis to revise the alphabet. Figure 2 is an example of the 1847 version of Phonotypy.

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PHONOTYPIC JOURNAL:

PUBLISHED AT Æ

PHONETIC INSTITUTION, 5, NELSON PLACE, BATH.

[Nr. 62.

FEBRUARY, 1847.

VOL. 6.]

Æ INTRODUCTION OF PRINTING, AND Æ SPELLING REFORM.

Figure 2 Pitman's *Phonotypic Journal* in Phonotypy (Kelly 1981:261)

In Yamaguchi (2007a), (in press, Ch.1), I discussed the three characteristics of Pitman's spelling reform attempts. Firstly, he insisted on the importance of phonetic principles and pursued them, as a result, Pitman is regarded as one of the pioneers of phonetics in Britain as has been analysed by Abercrombie (1965), Kelly (1981) and Collins and Mees (1999).

Secondly, Pitman believed in the benefits of his "Reading and Writing Reform" for the society. His teacher training and teaching experiences at elementary schools in his younger days were influential in developing his phonetic reform ideas.

Thirdly, Pitman developed a network of shorthand reporters and spelling reformers through correspondence, journals and meetings. For example, George Withers and Edward Jones were active members of the network and published a number of booklets on spelling reform. Those who became familiar with Pitman's shorthand and later became advocates of spelling reform include John Hall Gladstone, who was the main force behind the spelling reform movement at the London School Board. Bernard Shaw also learnt Pitman's shorthand and became interested in related phonetic activities in the 1870s.

London School Board and the memorial for a royal commission

London School Board (LSB) was set up in 1870 according to the Education Act. It originally consisted of 50 members and was to provide the elementary education for more than 100,000 children in London. LSB's submission of a memorial on spelling reform means that a local educational administrative body was involved in spelling reform movement. Yamaguchi (2005), (in press, Ch.2) discussed the following four points concerning the spelling reform attempt at the LSB:

1. The responsibility of the government for elementary education was stressed.
2. Methods of teaching reading were discussed in relation with spelling reform.
3. John Hall Gladstone promoted the spelling reform movement at the LSB.
4. A larger network of spelling reformers was made through the support for the LSB's attempts and the English Spelling Reform Association was established.

The first point is especially important to understand the nature of the spelling reform attempts of the LSB. Clause 4 of the memorial directly addresses the government's responsibility for national education and explains the necessity of spelling reform:

The question more deeply concerns the Government. Education is now a national work, and it can hardly be supposed that the objects of Government have been accomplished unless children learn reading and writing sufficiently well to be able to continue the practice of them in after-life. About four millions of children ought to be in Inspected Schools; and a large part of the cost is to be provided from public sources. By the Education Act of 1876, moreover, children will not be allowed, as a rule, to work till they reach a certain standard of proficiency, which includes the mastery of very complex and contradictory modes of Spelling. It is, therefore, important on all grounds that factitious difficulties in the way of education should be removed.⁹

They argued that "factitious difficulties in the way of education should be removed." In other words, they insisted that the government should remove difficulties from English spelling so that children can learn reading and writing more sufficiently. The governmental responsibility for elementary education was emphasized again in Clause 5 as "The intimate relation that now subsists between the Government and the work of Education gives to Government a degree of power and of responsibility that are new in this country." It reflects the social background of the time, when it was of public interest whether the centralized compulsory elementary education was necessary, and whether it should be sponsored by the taxpayers.

In Yamaguchi (2005), (in press, Chapter 2) I discussed the second point above through the analysis of the reports of the LSB on methods of teaching reading. The LSB's memorial included no reference to actual reform plans or proposals, but it does not mean they were not interested in actual proposals for reformed spellings. On the contrary, they investigated various schemes as "methods of teaching reading" and experimented with certain schemes including Isaac Pitman's Phonotypy at some board schools. The investigation and experiments were documented in *Report on the Methods of Teaching Reading* published by the LSB in 1878 and *Report of the Sub-*

Committee on the Methods of Teaching Reading in 1882.

The third and fourth points above will be discussed in the following subsections on “John Hall Gladstone” and “English Spelling Reform Association,” respectively.

John Hall Gladstone (1827-1902)

The chemical-physicist John Hall Gladstone (1827-1902) served on the LSB from 1873 to 1894. It was Gladstone who promoted the spelling reform movement at the LSB. He made a motion for submitting the memorial for a royal commission on spelling reform, and served as the chair of the special committee for spelling reform within the LSB. In Yamaguchi (2005), a comparison between the first version and the revised final version of the memorial revealed that the former reflected the spelling reform ideas of Gladstone, who was in charge of making the draft,¹⁰ whereas the latter was modified to gain approval of the LSB.

Gladstone was the Fullerman Professor at the Royal Institution from 1874 to 1877, and he was also a devoted Christian and concerned with education for the poor. Spelling reform was supported by various people with a variety of social, educational and occupational backgrounds.

English Spelling Reform Association (1879-1880s)

The memorial of the LSB did not lead to the appointment of a royal commission but resulted in the establishment of the English Spelling Reform Association (ESRA), whose activities were outlined in Yamaguchi (in press, Ch.3). Its first meeting was held in May 1879, but the name of the association was informally used for the organizing body of the spelling reform conference in 1877.

The Oxford philologist Archibald Sayce was the president of the ESRA. The long list of vice presidents includes well-known figures such as Charles Darwin, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Lowe. However, the real activities of meetings, lectures and publication were supported by a small number of enthusiastic members. For example, James Murray, one of the less active Vice Presidents of the ESRA received a couple of letters from the active fellow phonetician James Lecky. Lecky was attending the ESRA meetings and apparently was reporting to Murray what was currently being discussed at the Association. Frederick Fleay was another active member and published the monthly journal for the ESRA, *The Spelling Reformer, and Journal of the English Spelling Reform Association*,¹¹ writing signed articles and editing as an anonymous editor at the same time.

The ESRA became dormant in the latter half of the 1880s partially because it could not reach an agreement on what system to promote as an association.

2.3 Spelling reform for linguistic sciences

In the nineteenth century, not a few linguists, or philologists as they were generally called at the time, supported spelling reform and proposed their schemes. The development of historical and comparative linguistics made them aware of the necessity of distinguishing the sounds of a language from its letters. At the same time, the discrepancy between the sound of a word and its spelling could be seen as an obstacle to the scientific study of languages.

For example, the Sanskritist and comparative philologist Friedrich Max Müller wrote in his *Lectures on the Science of Language*:

The pronunciation of languages changes according to fixed laws, the spelling has changed in the most arbitrary manner, so that if our spelling followed the pronunciation of words, it would in reality be of greater help to the critical student of language than the present uncertain and unscientific mode of writing.¹²

This view of phonetic spelling and language study must have been different to the one that was generally held by the public. For example, *The Times* editorial on the day after the submission of the memorial for a royal commission on spelling reform wrote:

Phonetic spelling, then, seems to us a craze to which it is difficult to understand how professional philologists, who, at least, ought to care for the history and growth of a language can give their adhesion.¹³

The Times had been critical of the spelling reform movement and this editorial could not have surprised the philologists. Rather, they would argue that phonetic spelling *is* essential to analyse the real "growth of a language," that is, how the sounds of the language developed. Henry Sweet strongly confirmed this in the first paragraph of *A Handbook of Phonetics*:

The importance of phonetics as the indispensable foundation of all study of language — whether that study be purely theoretical, or practical as well — is now generally admitted. Without a knowledge of the laws of sound-change, scientific philology — whether comparative or historical — is impossible, and without phonetics their study degenerates into a mere mechanical enumeration of letter-changes.¹⁴

Sweet laid the foundations of phonetics in Britain. At the same time, he regarded phonetic spelling as essential to his scientific philology. *A Handbook of Phonetics* has a lengthy Appendix, "The Principles of Spelling Reform" and its first sentence explicitly shows his belief in "phonetic

reform.” He wrote, “The absolute necessity of phonetic reform is now almost universally recognised, not only by practical teachers but also by scientific philologists.”¹⁵

Robert Gordon Latham (1812-1888)

Robert Gordon Latham was a linguist and ethnologist, and published a number of books in both fields, including *The English Language* (1841) and *Natural History of the Varieties of Man* (1850). His interests were wide-ranging, and spelling reform of English was one of them. Latham published three works on spelling reform: *An Address to the Authors of England and America on the Necessity and Practicability of Permanently Remodelling their Alphabet and Orthography* (1834), “Principles of Phonetic Spelling” (1859) and *A Defence of Phonetic Spelling* (1872). In Yamaguchi (2006), (in press, Ch.4) I have noted the following three points as characteristics of Latham’s spelling reform work.

First, Latham’s booklet published in 1834 was an early attempt at spelling reform in Britain written from a linguistic point of view. It was written under the influence of the Danish linguist Rasmus Rask. Latham explained this as follows (in the original spelling):

It would be doing great injustice to that giant in lingwistri, the late Erasmus [sic] Rask, to konceal the fakt, that it is to his last two works, viz. the *Kommentari on the Ten Silibants* [sic], and his *English Grammar for Danes*, that I owe, as I do to the first, the great truth of the necessiti of having as mani simpl seyns as sownds. . .¹⁶

Latham’s interest in comparative linguistics can be seen in occasional references to other European languages, although not in a systematic fashion. It is of interest to note that one of the earliest linguistic attempts at spelling reform in the nineteenth century was made under the influence of Rask, because Rask was fairly influential in the study of Anglo-Saxon at the time in Britain.

However, when Isaac Pitman edited this booklet and published it as Latham’s “Principles of Phonetic Spelling” in *Phonetic Journal* in 1859, all the references to Rask and other languages were deleted.¹⁷ Latham did not bring it back in his *Defence of Phonetic Spelling* published in 1872. When other linguists in the Philological Society proposed spelling reform in the 1870s, they started drawing more on phonetics.

The second point to note in Latham’s spelling reform is that he was the Professor of English Language and Literature at University College London, the author of the widely-read *The English Language*, and the revisor of Johnson’s *Dictionary*. But these qualifications did not mean that he was a prescriptive scholar of English, nor did they stop him supporting spelling reform ideas.

The third point is that Latham's interests in non-European languages encouraged his interest in spelling reform of English. It was "his belief in the system of metagraphy as applied to non-European alphabets that made him a very early advocate of phonetic spelling," as Theodore Watts wrote in his obituary.¹⁸ "Metagraphy" is not a word often seen these days, and means transcription.

Philological Society

The Philological Society (PS) was the main arena for the linguistic discussions of spelling reform in the nineteenth century. There were two main occasions when spelling reform became the Society's concern, first in 1869-70, and then in 1880-1. I have discussed the details of spelling reform attempts at the PS in Yamaguchi (2004), (in press, chapter 5).

The Philological Society was set up in 1842. In the 1840s, Pitman and Ellis were devising and revising Phonotypy, but the PS was not concerned with their phonetic alphabet. Spelling reform was discussed only in occasional papers.¹⁹ On the contrary, the discussion on spelling reform at the PS in 1869-70 and in 1880-81 was directly related to the spelling reform discourses outside the linguistic circle.

In 1867, Russell Martineau wrote a review of Edward Jones's *The Common Sense of English Orthography* in the *Transactions of the Philological Society* and suggested that a royal commission should be appointed on spelling reform. This was referred to by Her Majesty's Inspector Rice Byrn in the *Educational Blue Book* in 1869, which in turn was quoted by Danby Fry as the reason to take spelling reform seriously at the PS. Fry and Ellis proposed their own schemes and the Council discussed them but did not reach an agreement for further action. The plan Ellis proposed then was Glossik, an example of which is:

Wun keurrius filoaløjikel konsikwens ov dhees 'too propoazishens dizer'vz noatis. It iz dhis. Dhi feeling ov konek'shen bitwee'n sound and sein haz been soa thuroali broakn, dhat wee doo not seek too diter'min aurthog'rafi bei noaing dhi soundz, but bei river'ting too dhi histeriz ov werdz, and hens speek ov dhi etimoaløjikel valeu ov speling.²⁰

The discussion at the PS in the early 1880s was more directly related to spelling reform movement outside the linguistic circle. For example, Society's members were present at the spelling reform conference held in 1877 to support the LSB's memorial for a royal commission. The conference was presided over by A. H. Sayce, and those present included Henry Sweet and James Murray, the President and Vice-President of the PS at the time, and Richard Morris and Alexander Ellis, both 'ex-Presidents'.²¹ At the annual meeting of the PS in 1880, James Murray announced that the Society should produce its own spelling reform plan. Henry Sweet, who had

actually initiated the whole project, produced schemes to discuss at the committee meetings. The PS approved of *Partial Corections of English Spellings* in 1881. An example of the spelling is as follows:

Spelling Reform was at first a purely philanthropic moovement, opozed by nearly all filologists, both within the Society and outside of it, on etymological grounds.²²

This spelling was optionally used in some articles of the Society's *Proceedings* and the *Transactions* till 1887.²³

Henry Sweet (1845-1912)

Henry Sweet not only devised the Partial Corections for the PS, but also made efforts to persuade others to understand the necessity of the reform and to advertise the plan of the PS, which was discussed in Yamaguchi (2006). Sweet explained about the Partial Corection scheme of the PS at the meeting of English Spelling Reform Association in December 1880, which was before the scheme was officially approved of by the PS.²⁴ Another paper of Sweet, "Spelling reform and English literature" (1884) also shows that he was trying to advertise the scheme of the PS. It was originally read at the Cambridge Philological Society in May 1881, four months after the Partial Corections proposal was approved by the PS.

However, another paper of Sweet, "Spelling reform and the practical study of languages" (1885) reveals that he had started losing his interest in spelling reform by 1884. Sweet described the situation of spelling reform at the ESRA as follows:

When we [=the ESRA] first began our deliberations there was a general belief that the reform of English spelling was really a very simple matter, and that all that was wanted was a little common sense. When, however, common sense had gone on for years hatching one scheme after the other, it became necessary to try something else.²⁵

"Something else" for Sweet included devising a phonetic shorthand, which he later published as "Current." By the mid-1880s, the spelling reform movement had lost its impetus.

3 Spelling reform in the twentieth century

Spelling reform for an international language

One of the characteristics of spelling reform attempts in the twentieth century was that the reformers emphasized that English had become an international language, as was discussed in

Yamaguchi (2007c), (in press Ch. 7). Spelling reformers argued that simpler spellings would facilitate the learning of English, and would secure its position as an international language. One might argue that it may be more difficult for an international language to achieve any artificial change, but this point was scarcely made.

In spelling reformers' discourses, those who would benefit from spelling reform have changed over time, as discussed in Yamaguchi (2007b). In the 1870s and 1880s, it was especially the children of the working classes that the reformers thought would benefit from easier spelling. After the introduction of the Elementary Education Act in 1870, elementary education had become a national concern. Whereas in the twentieth century, the viewpoint of the spelling reform for foreigners was mentioned more frequently. For example:

The ultimate aim being economy of the time and labour of learners (whether children or foreigners) by the substitution of uniformity for confusion, the value of any simplification must be measured by the amount of time and labour which it is likely to save. . .²⁶

This point had been made in the nineteenth century reform discourses, too, but it was not treated as the most important feature. Of course, the twentieth century spelling reformers did not forget domestic elementary education, as can be seen clearly from the following quotation from the Foreword of *Simplified Spelling* published by the Simplified Spelling Society in 1912:

The majority of our own people never acquire mastery of the language. Even the educated man of business writes with a dictionary at his elbow. Correct spelling and pronunciation are the aristocratic privilege of the few.

The idea of spelling reform for an international language was emphasized together with the other reasons in the twentieth century.

Figure 3 below shows the interests of spelling reformers and the groups they belonged to in the twentieth century. As Figure 1 in the previous section, Figure 3 shows the general ideas of each reformer's spelling reform discourse, but is not based on any statistical data.

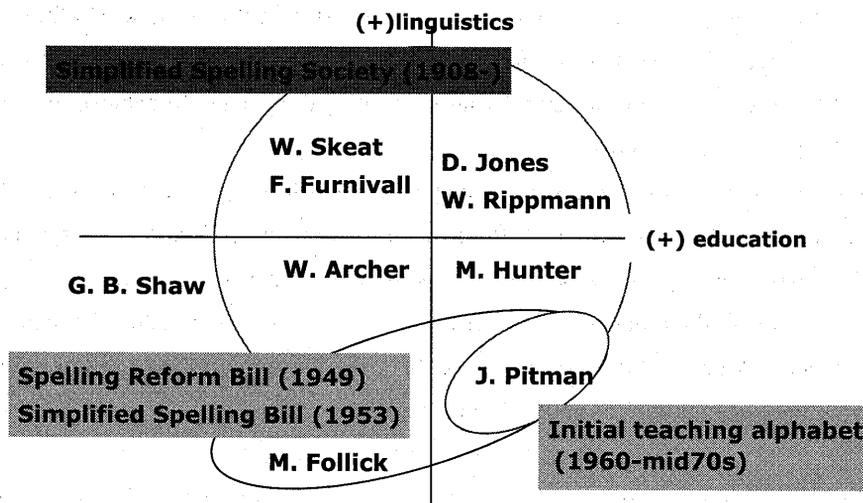


Figure 3 Spelling Reformers' Interests in the Twentieth Century

Simplified Spelling Society (1908-)

The Simplified Spelling Society (SSS) was established in London in 1908 and played a central role in the spelling reform attempts of the twentieth century. The members of the SSS were very much aware of the function and status of English as an international language. In Yamaguchi (2007b), (in press, chapter 7) I discussed the following five points:

1. The SSS and the Simplified Spelling Board (SSB) of America established in New York in 1906 were closely related.
2. At the First Imperial Education Conference, spelling reform for the British Empire was discussed.
3. The SSS had branches in South India and Canada.
4. Petitions of the SSS frequently referred to the international function of English.
5. The introduction of New Spelling of the SSS emphasized the English as an international language.

Firstly, when the SSS was established, cooperation with the SSB of America was part of the objective, because the former was set up:

to recommend simpler spellings of English words than those now in use, to further the general use of such simpler spellings by every means in its power, and to co-operate with the Simplified Spelling Board of the United States of America, founded and incorporated in New

York [in 1906].²⁷

Both the SSS and the SSB were sponsored by the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Two members of the SSB attended the first meeting of the SSS as the external committee. In 1911, representatives of the SSS and the SSB had a conference to discuss the possible co-operation, although nothing became of it.²⁸

First Imperial Education Conference (1911)

In the twentieth century, the spelling reformers arena was expanded throughout the British Empire. At the first Imperial Education Conference held in London in 1911, the SSS members succeeded in getting spelling reform on to the agenda.²⁹ Alexander Howard MacKay, the representative of the Nova Scotia government, Canada and E. R. Edwards, a secondary school inspector of the Board of Education of Britain, represented their cause. At the end of the session, the Conference unanimously adopted the following resolution:

That this Conference is of opinion that the simplification of spelling is a matter of urgent importance in all parts of the Empire, calling for such practical steps in every country as may appear most conducive to the ultimate attainment of the end in view — the creation, in connection with the subject, of an enlightened public opinion and the direction of it to the maintenance, in its purity and simplicity among all English-speaking peoples, of the common English tongue.³⁰

In fact this resolution did not have any official power, nor any actual impact on English spelling in the British Empire. But the fact that spelling reform was discussed at the first Imperial Education Conference itself shows that the movement had a certain momentum at that time. The SSS also set up the South Indian branch and the Canadian branch.³¹

Petitions of the Simplified Spelling Society

The SSS started discussing a petition to the Board of Education in 1913, and in 1916 they contacted a former President of the Board, Arthur Henderson and asked to include "spelling reform into the Bill which is in preparation for the reconstruction of education after the war."³² The SSS became more active in seeking the official support from the government in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1924, the Society sent a deputation to the President of the Board of Education, C. P. Trevelyan. In 1926, they submitted a petition to the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, and in 1933, another petition was submitted to the President of the Board of Education, Lord Irwin. However,

these petitions did not lead to any official or public action.

In 1926, the SSS sent a letter to all the Dominion Premiers and asked for their support for the petition, by emphasising:

Spelling and pronunciation are intimately related, and therefore an improved spelling and improved methods in teaching spelling, must make directly for the standardisation of the pronunciation of English throughout the Empire, and in the great English-speaking States beyond its confines³³.

It refers to the “standardisation of the pronunciation of English throughout the Empire,” which was another topic repeated in spelling reformers discourses.

New Spelling

One of the main differences between the ESRA in the 1880s and the SSS was that the latter succeeded in proposing a single spelling system as the Society's official recommendation within a couple years of the launch of the Society. It was Simplified Spelling devised in 1910 by the phonetician Walter Rippmann and the Society's secretary William Archer. Other phoneticians such as Daniel Jones also helped to improve the scheme.

In 1940, the fifth edition of Simplified Spelling was published as *New Spelling*, an example of which is as follows:

We instinktivly shrink from eny chaenj in whot iz familjar; and whot kan be mor familjar dhan dhe form ov wurdz dhat we hav seen and riten mor tiemz dhan we kan posibly estimaet?³⁴

The revision was carried out mainly by Daniel Jones and Harold Orton. In the Preface, A. Lloyd James wrote:

Our language is not only the mother tongue of millions scattered all over the globe, but it is rapidly becoming the second language of millions of others. It is no longer the prerogative of those who live in the narrow confines of these islands, as it was in the days when the general principles of its orthography were laid down. . . . To expect the hundreds of millions of English speakers, present and to come, in all parts of the world, to be burdened indefinitely with our traditional English spelling is to expect too much.³⁵

This preface typically illustrates the discourse of the twentieth century spelling reformers who

emphasized the international function of the English language.

Spelling reform bill, simplified spelling bill and Mont Follick

The spelling reform movement in the latter half of the twentieth century was marked by the attempts of enthusiastic individuals. In Yamaguchi (2002), (in press, Ch. 8, 9, 10) I have discussed the spelling reform attempts of the Labour MP Mont Follick, the playwright Bernard Shaw and the Conservative MP James Pitman.

Mont Follick introduced two private member bills concerning spelling reform. The first was the Spelling Reform Bill submitted in 1949, and the second was the Simplified Spelling Bill in 1953. In Yamaguchi (in press, Ch.8) I analysed the differences between the two bills. The Spelling Reform Bill drafted by Mont Follick was mainly concerned with legal enforcement of a reformed spelling, the full title of the bill being "A bill to set up a committee to introduce a rational system of spelling with a view to making English a world language and to eliminate unnecessary drudgery and waste of time at school." Although "a world language" was mentioned in the title, the bill was mainly concerned with domestic issues. The bill did not pass the second reading.

The Simplified Spelling Bill was drafted chiefly by James Pitman, a grandson of Isaac Pitman. The main purpose of the bill was to introduce a simplified spelling as an educational medium for school education. The full title of the bill is "A bill to make provision for the determination of a suitable system of simplified spelling and for the investigation of the improvements in the reading ability of children likely to result from the introduction of the system; to facilitate the subsequent introduction of the system in certain schools, and for purposes connected therewith." The bill passed the second reading and the committee, but was withdrawn before the third reading.

Apart from these bills, I also analysed in Yamaguchi (in press, Ch.8) the execution of the will of Mont Follick. Follick hoped that his legacy would be used to set up a professorial chair in comparative linguistics at a university in England or Wales. Despite the initial concern about the "spelling reform" requirement of the will, finally Manchester University successfully set up the chair. The professorship was not for the direct promotion of spelling reform, as Follick had hoped, but his legacy contributed to the promotion of a better understanding of alphabet, spelling and writing systems.

Bernard Shaw's will and the British Alphabet Contest

When Bernard Shaw died in 1950, he left a will that provided that the income of the residuary estate was to be used to choose a new British alphabet that would enable English "to be written without indicating single sounds by groups of letters or by diacritical marks, instead of by one symbol for each sound."³⁶ The will was legally challenged by some of the legatees, and the Public

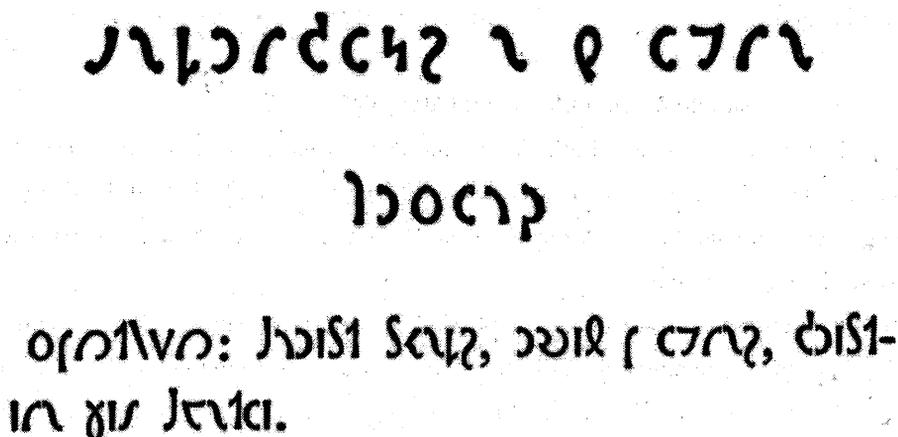


Figure 4 *Androcles and the Lion* in the Shaw alphabet (Shaw 1962:20)

Trustee finally settled for the sum of 8,300 pounds for choosing and propagating a new alphabet.³⁷ In 1957, the British Alphabet Contest was announced and 467 designs were submitted with some designs sent from outside Britain. Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* was transliterated into a new alphabet and published in 1962. Figure 4 shows the beginning of the play in the alphabet devised by Kingsley Read. Printed on the opposite page is:

ANDROCLES AND THE LION

PROLOGUE

Overture: forest sounds, roaring of lions, Christian hymn faintly.³⁸

Shaw's will dictated that the book should be sent to libraries:

to advertise and publish the transliteration with the original Dr. Johnson's lettering opposite the transliteration page by page and a glossary of the two alphabets at the end and to present copies to public libraries in the British Isles, the British Commonwealth, the American States North and South, and to national libraries everywhere in that order.³⁹

About 13,000 free copies were sent to libraries accordingly.⁴⁰

In Yamaguchi (2002), (in press, chapter 9) I outlined Shaw's interests in orthographical reform,⁴¹ and especially stressed the following two points. Firstly, I compared the introduction of the 1916 edition of *Pygmalion* with the 1941 edition, and pointed out that Shaw's interests had changed from phonetic spelling to alphabetic reform. Secondly, I discussed how the British Alphabet Contest was carried out by James Pitman in relation to the introduction of the initial

teaching alphabet into schools, which Pitman was preparing at the same time.

Initial Teaching Alphabet and James Pitman

The initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) is an extended alphabet with 44 letters devised by James Pitman (Figure 5) and was experimentally used at a number of schools in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1975, the influential *Bullock Report* on the teaching of English did not recommend the i.t.a. as its supporters had hoped. The number of supporters and schools using the alphabet declined in the 1970s and the i.t.a. foundation established in 1963 stopped its activities in 1982.

polietness

if pœpl ask mee,
ie aulwæx tell them:
“kwiet well, þanþk yow, ie'm very glad to sæ.”

Figure 5 *When We Were Very Young* transliterated in the i.t.a. (Milne 1966:32)

In my study of James Pitman, I discussed how closely the i.t.a. experiment was related to the previous spelling reform attempts in Yamaguchi (2002), (in press Ch.10), and outlined how the i.t.a. experiment was carried out in Yamaguchi (2004).

The i.t.a. experiment was the largest project concerning spelling reform in twentieth century Britain. It was promoted in other English-speaking countries such as America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Nigeria and Gambia, as I mentioned in Yamaguchi (in press, Ch.10). The scale of the experimental use of the i.t.a. at schools varied and the i.t.a. never became the mainstream teaching method of literacy in any country. After the i.t.a. experiment, there has been no large-scale educational experiment using a reformed alphabet or reformed spelling.

4 Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined the history of spelling reform attempts of English in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly based on the papers I have previously published.

Through the study on a series of spelling reform activities, I pointed out that those discourses on reform were closely related to the socio-cultural conditions at the time. The spelling reform attempts in the nineteenth century reflected the educationists' concern for national education to

achieve universal literacy. They also reflected the philologists' concern for "scientific study of languages." The twentieth century spelling reform attempts frequently referred to the international function of English.

Every spelling reformer had their own ambition and dilemma. Despite all the logical arguments and rational phonetic principles they would claim, spelling reform was often seen as a rather quixotic project, trying to change what most people are happy with, or at least had settled for. And what I have been finding out by studying the history of spelling reform is that these ambitions and dilemmas were not completely personal or individual but they also reflected the ideas that are influential in the society at the time.

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Notes

- 1 Yamaguchi (2002), (2004), (2005a), (2005b), (2006), (2007a), (2007b), (2007c), (2008) and (in press).
- 2 For the history of spelling reform in America, see Tauber (1958).
- 3 Trench (1889: 337). *English Past and Present* was first published in 1855, as a collection of eight lectures.
- 4 Sebba (2007: 5).
- 5 In studying the spelling reform movements in the Philological Society, I found MacMahon's paper on "James Murray and the phonetic notation in the New English Dictionary" very informative and inspiring.
- 6 Sebba (2007: 138).
- 7 *Spelling Reform. Report of the Conference and Public Meeting* (1877: 9).
- 8 *Report of the Conference*. Among the conveners I could identify on the list, 23 are people concerned with elementary education, either on school boards or the National Elementary Teachers Union, 11 are involved with study of languages, mostly the members of the Philological Society. See Yamaguchi (2005) and Yamaguchi (in press, Ch.2) for detailed discussions.
- 9 Gladstone (1879: 50).
- 10 Yamaguchi (2005: 95-100).
- 11 *The Spelling Reformer, and Journal of the English Spelling Reform Association* was edited by F. G. Fleay, who stayed anonymous in the journal. It was published by monthly from July 1880 to 1883

- (MacMahon 1985: 107).
- 12 Müller (1864: 100).
 - 13 *Times*, 19th January 1878.
 - 14 Sweet (1877: v).
 - 15 Sweet (1877: 169).
 - 16 Latham (1834: 49).
 - 17 Passages referring to comparative linguistic thoughts in Latham (1834) were omitted in Latham (1859): 19-23, 28-30, and 33-45.
 - 18 Watts (1888, 340).
 - 19 In the 1840s, three papers on spelling reform were read at the Society. James Yates and Danby Fry proposed their spelling reform schemes in Yates (1842-3) and Fry (1842-3), and Edwin Guest gave his reasons for objecting to the reform in Guest (1846-47/ 1847-48).
 - 20 Ellis (1870-2:91).
 - 21 *Spelling Reform. Report of the Conference and Public Meeting* (1877: 9).
 - 22 Philological Society (1881:4)
 - 23 For details of the use of the Partial Corections in the PS publications, see Yamaguchi (2004: 89-90).
 - 24 *Spelling Reformer*, 1 (7), 101-3.
 - 25 Sweet (1885: 10).
 - 26 Rippman and Archer (1911:1).
 - 27 "Minutes of the meeting held in the York Room, Holborn Restaurant, on Thursday 10th September, 1908." <http://www.spellingsociety.org/news/min1908.php>
 - 28 For the history of the society, see the website of the SSS at <http://www.spellingsociety.org/>.
 - 29 The Imperial Education Conference of 1911 was convened from 25 April to 1 May in London by the British Government, through the Board of Education, the Colonial Office and the India Office. 47 representatives of the Dominions were nominated and attended the conference. For the report of the conference, see *Imperial Educational Conference 1911*.
 - 30 *Imperial Education Conference 1911*: 18.
 - 31 For the South Indian Branch, see *The Pioneer of Simplified Spelling*, the Society's journal, I (1), 7. Canadian Branch was mentioned on the cover of *The Pyoneer ov Simplifyd Speling*, V (4).
 - 32 Harrison (1964: 53).
 - 33 *The Pioneer of Reformed Spelling*, I (4), 94-95.
 - 34 Ripman and Archer (1948: 92).
 - 35 Ripman and Archer (1948:5-6).
 - 36 Tauber (1963: 165-6). Quoted from Clause 35 of Shaw's will. For details of the execution of Shaw's will, see Holroyd (1998: 794-813).
 - 37 The circumstances concerning the will were detailed by Holroyd (1997). The new alphabet devised by Kingsley Read was analysed by Carney (1994, 483-6).
 - 38 Shaw (1962:21).
 - 39 Tauber (1963: 166-7).
 - 40 Holroyd (1998: 804).
 - 41 Over 400 proposals sent for the British Alphabet contest are stored in the Pitman Archive of the University of Bath.

Appendix

A chronology of the spelling reform movement in 19th and 20th century Britain

1834	Robert Gordon Latham's "An Address to the Authors of England and America."
1837	Isaac Pitman's phonetic shorthand "Stenographic Soundhand" (Phonography).
1842	Philological Society (PS) established.
1843	Isaac Pitman's Phonotypy.
1847	Isaac Pitman and Alexander John Ellis revise Phonotypy.
1854	Alphabet Conference in London by Christian Bunsen.
1857	Walter Trevelyan's Prize for essays on spelling reform.
1859	Latham's "Principles of Phonetic Spelling."
1862	Revised Code. "Payment by results" introduced.
1868	Her Majesty's Inspector Rice Byrn mentions the difficulties of English Spelling in his Report to Educational Committee.
1869	PS discusses spelling reform in the Committee.
1870	Elementary Education Act. London School Board (LSB) set up.
1876	LSB passed the resolution to submit a memorial for Royal Commission on spelling reform to the Council of Education Committee.
1876	International Conference of Spelling Reform held at Philadelphia. Revised Code of 1876.
1877	Conference and public meeting to support LSB.
1878	LSB submitted the memorial to Education Committee. <i>LSB's Report on the Methods of Teaching Reading.</i>
1879	English Spelling Reform Association (ESRA) established.
1880	PS sets up a committee to discuss spelling reform. ERSA starts publishing its monthly journal, <i>Spelling Reformer</i> (continued till 1883).
1881	PS's <i>Partial Corrections of English Spellings Approved of by the Philological Society</i> .
1884	PS starts the publication of <i>New English Dictionary</i> .
1887	Jubilee of Phonography.
1902	Education Act. School boards are abolished.
1906	The Simplified Spelling Board (SSB) is set up in New York.
1908	The Simplified Spelling Society (SSS) is set up in London.
1910	SSS's <i>Simplified Spelling</i> .
1911	First Imperial Education Conference.
1912	SSS journal, <i>The Pioneer</i> (suspended in 1918).
1912	Daniel Jones's trip to India partially sponsored by SSS.
1916	SSS contacted Reform Committee.
1925	SSS and SSB jointly published <i>Spelling</i> .
1926	SSS petition to PM Baldwin.
1933	SSS petition to Lord Irwin.

1940	SSS's <i>New Spelling</i> (5th edition of <i>Simplified Spelling</i>)
1944	Bernard Shaw's will appears in <i>Author</i> .
1945	Mont Follick refers to spelling reform in his first speech at the Parliament.
1948	<i>New Spelling</i> , revised.
1949	Spelling Reform Bill discussed.
1953	Simplified Spelling Bill discussed.
1957	Court case about Shaw's will's legal validity is settled. Contest for a new British Alphabet announced.
1960	The initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) experiment announced.
1961	The i.t.a. experiment starts.
1962	<i>Androcles and the Lion</i> transcribed in Shaw's alphabet is published.
1963	Manchester University sets up the chair of Mont Follick Professor.
1969	Inner London Education Authority publishes a report on the i.t.a.
1975	<i>Bullock Report</i> is published.
1977	An official report on the i.t.a. in South Africa.
1992	Christopher Upward's <i>Cut Spelling</i> .

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