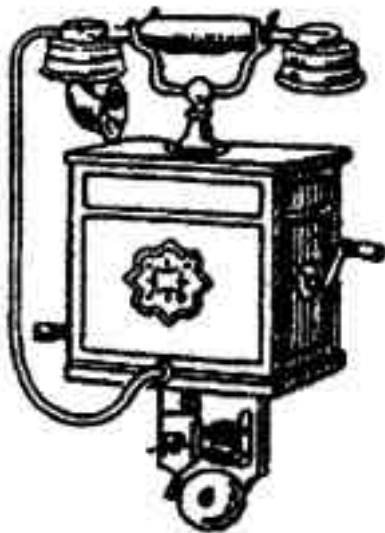

SPACE-AGE LITERACY UNLIMITED

An electronic newsletter dedicated to universal, accelerated, advanced literacy. Contributions invited. Wendell Hall, Editor

Consider the phrase "universal, accelerated, advanced literacy." Does the term "universal" seem too pretentious? After all, we are dealing with English spelling reform and there are many other languages out there. But consider what would happen if speakers of English finally rebelled at being the inglorious possessors of the world's worst non-system of spelling and at long last did something about it. This stupendous achievement, spearheaded by the world's one superpower, would be sensational enough to inspire others to muster up the gumption and determination to do likewise, to the benefit of just about everyone on earth.

Base-50 Dialing

The telephone illustrated below, a wonder in its day, has no value now except as an antique. Today, as the 21st century has begun and we continue on with the same old obsolete alphabet and spelling, progress in other areas of communication has been fantastic. The marriage of phones and computers constitutes one of the world's greatest wonders. Our inherited orthography constitutes one of the world's greatest blunders.



Once upon a time, telephone numbers had alphabetical prefixes and names. I recall that our prefix was EXport. The moment is propitious for going alphabetical again, but with each letter functioning on an equal basis with numbers as an operative dialing unit.

In a world of over five billion inhabitants, a base-10 numerical system is woefully inadequate. Global satellite-wireless initiatives are already on their way to becoming a world-wide reality. Utilizing an alpha-numerical base of 50, every inhabitant of Planet Earth could be reached by dialing a mere nine or ten digits. Optimally selected base-50 sequences for subscriber, telephone central, area and satellite sector codes would leave many combinations available for other assignment (911, 411, etc.). Typical base-50 sequential units: x- (50 possibilities), xx- (2,500), xxx- (125,000). Theoretically, xx-xxx yields 312,500,000 possibilities; in base-10 a hopeless 100,000. (Actually, 99,999, etc., subtracting 1 in each instance.) Combinations of x-, xx-, xxx-, etc. quickly yield billions of potential codes.

A look at today's slim, trim cell phones and TV remote controls shows that a similar configuration with one more row across and the same number down (5 x 12) could readily accommodate the 50 numbers and letters plus REDIAL, STORE, etc. This would be for hunt-and-peck dialing, but full-size keyboards for telephoning will soon be available everywhere (including an ingenious compact folding one), inasmuch as TCI (Telephone-Computer Integration) is advancing so rapidly. "Touch-voice" (speech recognition) systems, of course, bypass buttons and keys.

With a base-10 system of dialing, the potential to meet projected demand does not exist. With an alphanumeric base-50 system (0-9 plus 40 letters) all of earth's inhabitants could easily have their own relatively short and snappy numbers. Local calls would not have to exceed five digits: **Ḑḁ-ΛḐ1** (The Best Awesome Amazin' Thinker One), **#1-G1Z** (Number One Guys or Golf Ice Cream Zulu), **ʃḁ-LOM** (Shalom or Shadow Awesome Lima Ocean Mike), **RJ-AT2** (Romeo Juliet Alpha Tango Two), for example. (See The NuSpel Power Alphabet under Settle for Less, Get a Humongous Mess for "Seaspeak" designations from Eight Ball to Zsa Zsa.)

A Power Alphabet Frees us up from the Great Freeze-Up

A a at ḁ ḁ ah Λ Λ up ε ε mate ð ə open E e let l l it l i kilo ī ī ice O o cot O o old
 U u glue Ū ū book Ū ū use C c cello Đ đ the Ŋ ŋ sin(g) ʃ ʃ show θ θ think ʒ ʒ azure

The NuSpel power alphabet frees us up from the big freeze-up of our present ice-age one. It gives everyone a vote—not limited to voices but extended also to fingers—as they write or type. With a power alphabet, preferences may be expressed visually as well as vocally—for example by writing **īḑər** and **nīḑər** rather than **īḑər** and **nīḑər**; **tomḁto** instead of **toməto**; **bag** or **bəg** in place of **bag**. After her first visit to British

shops in Canterbury, our daughter Carolyn began inquiring whenever possible, "Would you care for a small **bag**?" When our son John moved to Fargo, ND, his kids' new friends made fun of them for barbarously pledging allegiance to the flag rather than the **fleg**. At the check-out counter of a Fargo store a clerk inquired. "Do ya wanta **bæg** for it?" — "Do I wanta beg for it?" was the astonished response. "Is this some kinda joke? I already paid you!" Our names are special to us and it usually irks us when they are mispronounced or misspelled. The name JuJuan struck me as very striking in print but until hearing it on television I had no idea how its possessor liked to hear it pronounced: J'wahn. Alice dislikes hearing her name as **aləs** insisting that it is **alɪs**. My own name is almost always misspelled as Wendall. I am not (strictly speaking) a doll, but flattery of this sort (probably subliminal) does not go unnoticed and offsets somewhat a vague annoyance. NuSpel totally eliminates all such difficulties and complications. For any kind of writing, formal or informal, the NuSpel Power Alphabet captures many times better than OldSpel the vivacity and variety of speech. NuSpel would greatly simplify indications of preferred and alternate pronunciations in standard English dictionaries, which employ Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain and General American (GA) in the U.S. The representation of pronunciations in colloquial fiction and dialectical dictionaries would also profit from this, of course.

A Supposedly Rational Defense of Irrational Spelling

Wendell H. Hall

The article reprinted below recently appeared in a publication which welcomes attacks on spelling reform but never publishes rebuttals or statements that are pro-reform. The heading of the article—in bold type across a full page—blares out: "**Coming to the defense of supposedly irrational spelling**". What has set off an alarm? Certainly nothing in that particular publication's pages has ever referred to our traditional spelling as irrational, or printed a single unfavorable word against it. Like a shill selling an Edsel (automotive history's most disastrous lemon), is someone extolling merits as ephemeral and without substance as the emperor's new clothes in Hans Christian Andersen's revealing tale? Or is a knight in white armour charging to the rescue of a supposedly pitiful old hag "in reality" so beautiful and innocently vulnerable in his eyes that she seems in desperate need of his noble protection against doers of evil?

The Article

(Unattributed, though the author is welcome to respond if he desires)

The inconsistency of English spelling is hard for native speakers, but it can drive those who learn English as a second language to tears or to drink. Both native and non-native speakers ask why English cannot be phonetic (fonetic). Spanish and Italian are quite phonetic [sic]*, and I am told that Korean is so phonetic that with a few hours of instruction you can read Korean aloud to Koreans and be understood. You won't understand it yourself but your listeners will. But written Chinese has no relationship at all to spoken Chinese. So obviously not everyone believes words should be written like they are spoken.

If we made English phonetic, would we make it phonetic for the British aristocracy or for London cockneys—for Australians, Mississippians, Texas, Bostonians, Brooklynites, or Utahns? If we made it phonetic for one of those groups, it would be unphonetic for the rest. And if each wrote phonetically, spelling would be a worse mess than it is now.

The English spelling mess resulted from how the language grew. It started as a language spoken by Germanic tribes who invaded England more than 2,000 years ago and it was closer to German than to present-day English. Subsequent invaders, the Romans, Norse, and French, added their words to the language. Further, since the English were a seafaring and trading nation, they met all peoples of the world and borrowed those peoples' words for all the new things they found. As a result, nearly every major or minor language in the world has contributed words to our language.

Words that entered the language sometimes entered with the same spelling they had in the original language—IF the original language used our alphabet, and many didn't. If the language used a different alphabet, or if it had no written form, whoever first used the word in English tried to make it sound as much as possible like the writer heard it and spelled it accordingly. Often the writer did not hear it very well—or at least not like we hear it.

As a result, the spelling of the word may contain the history of the word, and give the flavor of its original language. It would be a shame to phoneticize all such borrowings and strip the original Italian flavor from pizza and spaghetti, the original Hindi color from khaki, and the wilderness from the Tupi jaguar and piranha.

A good many nouns we borrowed from Arabic contain the article "al" which in Arabic preceded the nouns. So we get alcohol, alchemy, and algebra. Spanish has a letter "ll" (considered one letter) [sic] that is pronounced as y. So we get tortilla, Lladro, and

llama. (Remember Ogden Nash's lines, The one-l lama, he's a priest / The two-ll llama, he's a beast.) Spanish also has the n with a squiggly line called a tilde over it. It is pronounced like ny. As a result, when Spanish words containing that letter are written in English, they may be written with the tilde or as ny, as in canyon.

French has a special c that has a tail on it and marks that go over vowels in some words. These and the double dots that go over the o in some German words, may or may not have those marks in English text—depending on whether the typesetter has the type or inclination to reproduce them. Hence facade, resume, and ingenue sometimes have marks and sometimes do not. Book typesetters usually include such marks. Newspaper typesetters usually omit them.

A Rebuttal

Coming to the defense of rationality, let's throw the author's heading right back at him: Can a supposedly rational person (Seriously, with a straight face!) come to our spelling's defense? Rationally, every sound (technically, every *phoneme*) of a decent spelling system should be represented by one letter only (technically, one *grapheme* only). With our existing spelling, the 40 or so phonemes of English (depending on which dialect and the nature of the analysis employed) can be spelled in 561 different ways. The vowel of “seat,” for example, can be spelled in a very confusing, unpredictable, treacherous number of ways (scheme, be, see, eat, key, lazy, people, chief, weird, amoeba, kilo, etc.). In his first sentence, the author as much as acknowledges that his assessment is totally at variance with that of speakers of other languages world-wide, where our hopelessly antiquated spelling is scorned, ridiculed, and rated as the worst on earth.

The distinguished American linguist Archibald A. Hill has stated, “A speaker of a language should be able to pronounce correctly any sequence of letters that he may encounter, even if previously unknown, and secondarily, be able to spell any phonemic sequence he may hear, again even if previously unknown.” (Slightly paraphrased.)

Our current spelling departs disastrously from this standard. How else explain (other factors relatively equal) why there are an estimated 40 million functional illiterates in our great nation while, in terms of literacy, “third-world” countries like Bolivia and Cuba are leaving us in the dust? Shouldn't this mortify us to the very core?

Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein (with dialectical differences greater

than found in Brooklynese vs. Bostonese) have recently joined together to reform the spelling of German, a process expected to be irreversible by the year 2002. Even without reform, their system is far superior to our English non-system, but they want to do every single thing in their power—right down to perfecting every last “jot and tittle”—to make the acquisition of reading and writing skills as efficient, rapid, and painless as possible for their precious little ones (and as a consequence, with much more time available for other subjects, significantly speed up and broaden their education in general, from kindergarten through high school). Are we so much less caring, concerned and capable, that we can't do the same?

Just a few days ago a 12-year-old girl from Jamaica won the Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee by spelling "chiaroscurist" correctly—a word that any first grader could handle with spelling reform. She is highly deserving of commendation, of course; nevertheless, if we had a decent way to spell, the countless hours she spent on spelling could have been devoted instead to math, science, literature, art, history, geography, foreign languages, economics, technical and fine writing, word processing, computer science, home economics, home and auto repair, physical education, or folk and ballroom dancing, not to mention numerous other valuable studies and pursuits. Yes, newspapers should be commended for reporting her success, but couldn't they also just once print something on spelling reform and write a neutral or even a positive word on the pro side of it?

Setting up a ridiculously unreal straw man, the same author asks, “If we made English phonetic [sic], would we make it phonetic for the British aristocracy or for London cockneys—for Australians, Mississippians, Texans, Bostonians, Brooklynites, or Utahns?” Doesn't he know as a professor of English with a Ph.D. that in civilized nations world-wide it is a common practice to adopt national linguistic standards for purposes of uniformity and unity? For dictionary entries in the United States, General American English (GA) is employed. In Great Britain, the entries are in RP (Received Pronunciation), as their preferred standard is called.

Incredible as it may seem, whether for GA or for RP, the pronunciation of every single word in English dictionaries is indicated by means of keys and guides. What could be more irrational? Why not spell each word rationally to begin with? Of course we wouldn't want to make words like "cough," "rough," "bough" "though" and "through" *phonetic* in order to ease the learning task for little children! It might take the “flavor” out of them! In languages with spelling systems far superior to our own archaic disreputable non-system, words are spelled as most commonly pronounced and pronounced as spelled, with significant regional or social variants also given in the same manner. As a

result, a **fabulous** flavor can be associated with the spelling of every single word, variously describable as **terrific, cool, the best, the way it ought to be, sensible, logical, sane, regular, easy, simple, scientific, up-to-date** and **rational**.

How can a defense of a hopelessly irregular, embarrassingly obsolete spelling be considered rational when the defender for starters—in his own words—considers the flavor of a word like "jaguar" more important than coming to the rescue of native speakers and foreigners "driven to tears or to drink by the inconsistency of English spelling"? Which flavors does he prefer? **Jagyuwar, rezoom, peran-hah**? To cite only a couple of the innumerable gratifying "flavors" (which he must really savor) created when little children, foreigners or unwary adult speakers of English try to decipher how words new to them should be pronounced.

We like to think of ourselves as a very advanced, progressive nation. So how (as generally is the case) can our elite molders of public opinion be so unbelievably unknowledgeable, unenlightened and backward when it comes to spelling?

*Spoken language is "phonetic"? A stupefying solecism. "Phonetic" denotes analysis and transcription of speech sounds. "Phonemic," an ancillary term, refers to phonetically similar sounds heard as identical by native speakers. The *phonemes* of a given language contrast with each other sufficiently so that a change in basic sound effects a change in meaning: English *pin* vs. *bin*, for example. The p and the b are similar in that both are bilabial—the lips come together. P, unlike b, is pronounced without vibration of the vocal cords and may be aspirated. This contrast in sound is associated with a change of meaning. In *pin* vs. *spin*, though the first p is aspirated and the second is not, both are taken to be the same, so there is no need to differentiate them in writing. These two variants of phoneme /p/, referred to as allophones, are phonetically written [p^h] and [p]. Check this out by pronouncing *pin* and *spin* into the flame of a candle or against the back of your hand. In some languages, /p/ and /p^h/ are separate phonemes. and consequently require distinct symbols.

An invitation to contribute to the newsletter

Robert R. McCormick, one of the better-known proponents of English spelling reform, attempted to popularize certain simplified spellings by consistently employing them in the Chicago Tribune, of which he was publisher and editor. He favored "frate" over "freight," for example, and a rather limited number of other simplifications such as

"nite" for "night" and "lite" for "light". Despite the superficiality of his attempt, he nonetheless deserves commendation for keeping the idea of reform before the public. Perhaps if he had had a large chain of newspapers, his effort might have been more successful. Today we have in the Internet the equivalent of an enormous chain of newspapers and much more. As expressed in **You Are the Solution**, unless there is a groundswell of support for reform at the grassroots level, not much can be expected to happen. So the question of reform must be brought to the attention of the public as widely as possible and a forum established for input, feedback and discussion.

Above all, great numbers of individuals must not only become familiar with a reformed system but fluent in its use. The proof is in the pudding. When numerous persons, young and old, discover through actual use the simplicity, consistency and total regularity of the new spelling, they may be expected to become avid advocates for its general adoption.

A parallel approach, of equal importance, must focus on children. Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein are currently going forward with a reform of German spelling expected to become irreversible by the year 2002. Inasmuch as its use is obligatory in the schools, publishers have already realized that they must begin to phase it into their publications. It has been reported that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, perhaps Germany's most important newspaper, is already planning to make the switch.

The basic goal of this newsletter is to provide a great variety of NuSpel texts for individuals of all ages and interests (jokes, riddles, stories, quotations, common sayings, recipes, comments, suggestions, cartoons...). When numerous persons, young and old, discover through actual use the simplicity, consistency and total regularity of the new spelling, they may be expected to become avid advocates for its general adoption.

You are invited to e-mail or snail-mail items falling in the categories listed or in any others of special interest. At this point, of course, e-mail basically handles only OldSpel, so the best solution is to download a NuSpel font, print out and snail mail or fax your contribution. (975 E. Main Canyon Rd., Wallsburg, UT 84082; Fax# 435-654-4429). See **The NuSpel Keyboard** (under *Do It Yourself*) for information on fonts. Please don't let this complication deter you. If it's simpler for you, just e-mail your texts to us in OldSpel and we'll do the conversion. And if you don't have access to a scanner, send your graphics too—illustrations, posters, cartoons, whatever—and we'll scan them for you. A couple of examples follow:

A a at A a ah Λ λ up E e mate Ə ə open E e let I i it I i kilo T t ice O o cot O o old
U u glue U u book U u use C c cello Ð ð the N n sin(g) ʃ ʃ show θ θ think ʒ ʒ azure

Wλn, tʊ, bʌkel mī ʃu,
θri, fɔʊr, ʃʌt ðə dor,
Fīv, sɪx, pɪk ʌp stɪks,
Sevən, eɪt, lɛ ðem strɛt,
Nīn, ten, ʌ bɪg fat hen.

Litel bɔɪ blu, kʌm blo yʊr horn;
Ðə ʃɪp's ɪn ðə medo, ðe kaʊ'z ɪn ðə korn.
Hwer'z ðə litəl bɔɪ ðat lʊks aftər ðe ʃɪp?
Hi'z ʌndər ðə hɛstak, fast əslɪp.

Jak Sprat kʊd ɪt no fat,
Hiz wɪf kʊd ɪt no lɪn;
And so bɪtwɪxt ðe tʊu ɔv ðem,
Ðɛ lɪkt ðə plətər klɪn.

Litəl Jak Hornər
Sat ɪn ʌ kɔrner
ɪtɪŋ hɪz Krɪsməs pɪ;
Hi pʊt ɪn hɪz θʌm
And pʌld aʊt ʌ plʌm,
And sed, "Hwʌt ʌ gʊd bɔɪ am ɪ!

Not: <ə> reprəzents "schwa," ðə most kɔmən vaʊl ɔv ɪŋglɪʃ. ɪn forməl, kerfəl spɪk, ɪt mɛ bi prenaʊnst <ʌ>. Spɪk mɛ kənve ʌ grɛt welθ ɔv nuansɛz hwɪç NuSpel ɪz mʌç mɔr kɛpəbəl ɔv rɪflɛktɪŋ ðan OldSpel. Spɛʃəl nuansɛz əsɪd, ðə norməl spɛlɪŋ ɪn sʌç ɪnstənsɛz wʊd bi "əslɪp," "əlɔŋ," etc., so stɛtəd az ə (or ʌ) jɛnrəl rul ɪn ɛni gʊd dɪkʃənəri.

A a at a ah ʌ ʌ up ɛ ɛ mate ə ə open E e let I i it I i kilo ī ī ice O o cot O o old
U u glue Ū ū book U u use C c cello ð ð the Ŋ ŋ sin(g) ʃ ʃ show θ θ think ʒ ʒ azure

Jak Sprat kʊd it no fat,
Hɪz wɪf kʊd it no lɪn;
And so bɪtwɪxt ðə tuː əv ðem,
ðe lɪkt ðə plætər klɪn.

.....

Sɪŋ ʌ sɔːŋ əv sɪkspens,
ʌ pəkət fɔːl əv rɪ;
Four and twenti blakbærdz
Bekt ɪn a paɪ!

Hwen ðə paɪ wəz opənd
ðə bʊrdz bɪɡən tu sɪŋ;
Wəzn't ðat ʌ dɛntɪ dɪʃ
Tu set bɪfɔːr ðə kɪŋ?

ðə meɪd wəz ɪn ðə ɡɑːdən,
Hæŋɪŋ aʊt ðə kloːz (kloːz),
Hwen ʌlɔːŋ kɛm ʌ blakbærd
And snɪpt əf hɜːr noz!

Litəl Jak Hornər
Sat in ʌ kornər
Itiŋ hiʒ Krisməs pī;
Hi pʊt in hiʒ θʌm
And pʌld aʊt ʌ plʌm,
And sed, “Hwʌt ʌ gʊd bɔɪ am ī!”

Hom ɔn ðe Rɛŋj

Oh, giv mi ʌ hom hwɛr ðə bafəlo rom,
Hwɛr ðə diir and ðə antəloʊ plɛ;
Hwɛr seldəm iz hʊrd ʌ dɪskʊrɛjɪŋ wɜrd
And ðə skɪz ar nɔt klaudi al dɛ.

Korəs: Hom, hom ɔn ðə rɛŋj,
Hwɛr ðə diir and ðə antəloʊ plɛ
Hwɛr seldəm iz hʊrd ʌ dɪskʊrɛjɪŋ wɜrd
And ðə skɪz ar nɔt klaudi al dɛ.

Hwɛr ðə ɛr iz so pur, ðə zɛfɪrz so fri
Ðə brizɛz so balmi and lɪt,
Ðat ī wʊd nɔt ɪxcɛŋj mɪ hom ɔn ðə rɛŋj
For al ɔv ðə sɪtɪs so brɪt.

Ðe lɪndɪz wɜr prest frɔm ðɪs part ɔv ðə West,
Ðɛ bɪlɔŋ and ðɛ lɔŋ tu rɪtɜrn
Tu ðə bʌŋks ɔv Rɛd Rɪvɛr hwɛr seldəm ɪf ɛvɛr
Ðɛr flɪkɛrɪŋ kʌmpfɪrz yet bɜrn.*

Hʌv ɔfən at nɪt hwɛn ðə hevənz ar brɪt
Bɪ ðə lɪt ɔv ðə glɪtɛrɪŋ stʌrz
Hʌv ɪ sʊd ðɛr ʌmɛzd ʌbd ʌsɪt ʌz ī gɛzd
ɪf dɛr glɔri ɪksɪdz ðat ɔv ʌʊrz.

*Ðɪs vɜrs hʌz bɪn rɪvɪzd ɪn ʌn ɛfɛrt tu du
Nɛtɪv ʌmɛrɪkənz grɛtɛr ɪʌstɪs.