A Survey of English Spelling
Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xv

PREFACE xvi

CONVENTIONS, SYMBOLS AND TECHNICAL TERMS xx

1 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO DESCRIBING ENGLISH SPELLING 1

1.1 A philological approach 1
   How did the present system come about? 1

1.2 A functional approach 3
   How does the present system work? 3

2 LITERACY AND ENGLISH SPELLING: METHODS AND PROBLEMS 5

2.1 Writing without speech 5
   Can the written forms of English be described systematically without linking them to spoken forms? 5

2.2 Linking speech to writing: sounds and letters 6
   Points of view 6
   Classroom units 7
   Finding symbols for phonemes 8
   Sounds and letters: the misuse of ‘vowel’ and ‘consonant’ 9
   Making spelling an authority for pronunciation 11
   ‘Learning the alphabet’ 14

2.3 Divergence 15
   Departures from one-to-one correspondence 15
   The temptation to overstate irregularities 16
2.4 **Lexical spelling**
- Keeping the spelling of a morpheme constant...
- Processes and underlying forms...
- An optimal orthography? The views of Venezky and Chomsky and Halle...
- An untidy alphabetic system?

2.5 **Reading**
- What does a reader read?
- Should spelling be taught deliberately or should it seep in?
- Phonological awareness and taught spelling
- What if you look, but cannot say?

2.6 **Finding correspondences**
- Splitting the string of letters into units to match up with phonemes

2.6.1 **Segmentation**
- Where to chop. The size of units

2.6.2 **Simplicity**
- How many units of correspondence?
- Complex phonemes

2.6.3 **Exhaustiveness and discreteness**
- Remainders, overlaps and morpheme boundaries

2.6.4 **Distinctiveness and appropriateness**
- Take it to the left, or take it to the right?

2.6.5 **Auxiliary, inert and empty letters**
- All letters are ‘silent’, but some are more silent than others
- Auxiliary letters: making do with the Roman alphabet
- Inert letters: now you hear them, now you don’t
- Empty letters and special markers
- Phonetic transparency and functional load
- Transferability: using what you’ve got
- Some hard cases

2.6.6 **The punctuation of words**
- Spaces and hyphens
- The flight from the apostrophe
- Capital letters

2.7 **ACCENT AND DIALECT: LITERACY IS HARDER FOR SOME**
2.7.1 Differences between accents
Four types of difference between accents (Wells 1982) 52
Differences of phonetic realization 54
Differences of phonotactic distribution 55
Differences of phonological system 56
Differences of lexical distribution 58

2.7.2 Recognizing problems due to phonological interference 60

2.7.3 Phonological interference in Black American English 61

2.7.4 An orthography to cope with dialect variation 62

2.7.5 Stage dialect: spelling out the intentions of the playwright 63

2.8 RULES AND ERRORS 66

2.8.1 Types of rule 66
Correspondence, adaptation, graphotactic and reference rules 66

2.8.2 Classroom spelling rules 69
Reference rules used by teachers 69

2.8.3 Syllabification rules: splitting words 76
Variation in usage 76
Phonetic syllable boundaries 77
General principles and usual practice 78

2.8.4 Types of spelling error 79
Social penalties 79
Competence errors and performance errors.
Variant errors. Slips 81
Lexical errors. Malapropisms 82
Analogy errors. Jumbling. Splits 84
Articulation or interference errors 84

2.8.5 ‘Phoneme-grapheme correspondences as cues to spelling improvement’ (Hanna et al. 1966) 86
The Hanna speech-to-text algorithm 86
Spelling rules based on the ‘syllable’ 87
Spelling pronunciations as a mnemonic device 88
Is English spelling ‘50% regular’? 89
The case for understatement: is it better than 50%? 89
The case for overstatement: is it worse than 50%? 92
An unjustified counterclaim? Simon and Simon (1973) 95
A futuristic algorithm for ‘word recognition’ 95
2.9 SPELLING SUBSYSTEMS AND LITERACY 96

2.9.1 Native and foreign 96
English spelling as a system of subsystems 96

2.9.2 Subsystem markers 97
   Albrow's (1972) three-system model 97
   Observable markers 100

2.9.3 Awareness 102
   Phonological awareness, system awareness and lexical awareness 102

3 SPEECH-TO-TEXT CORRESPONDENCES: ENCODING 104

3.1 A corpus-based study 104

3.1.1 The database 104

3.1.2 Analysis of correspondences 107

3.1.3 Text frequency and lexical frequency 109

3.2 GENERAL FACTORS IN SPEECH-TO-TEXT RULES 112

3.2.1 Common features of spelling correspondences 112

3.2.2 Consonant-letter doubling 112
   Marking short vowels: matting-mating 114
   §Latinate prefixes: approve, immerse, offend 119
   Consonant letters that double 120
   Marking stressed short vowels 121
   <C>-doubling after vowels lacking primary stress 121
   Absence of <C>-doubling before a word boundary 123
   Absence of <C>-doubling in three-syllable words 123
   Absence of <C>-doubling before certain endings 123
   <C>-doubling and the constant morpheme shape 124
   <C>-doubling before inverted <le> in §Basic words: mettle, meddle 124
   <C>-doubling after ‘new’ long vowels: /a:/, /ɔ:/ and /ɜ:/ 124
   Graphotactic restrictions on <C>-doubling 124
   A trial run: instances of <bb> 125

3.2.3 <e>-marking functions 129
   Marking long vowels 129
   Marking stem-final /s/, /z/ and /ð/ 129
3.2.4 Deletion of the final <e> marker in derived forms  
3.2.5 The 'short word rule'  
Lexical words usually have a minimum of three letters

3.3 Speech-to-text correspondences phoneme by phoneme

3.3.1 Short vowels: \( \text{h e æ u A d} \)
.1 /\text{h}/ as in \( \text{bit} \) ('short <i>′)  
.2 /\text{e}/ as in \( \text{bet} \) ('short <e>′)  
.3 /\text{æ}/ as in \( \text{bat} \) ('short <a>′)  
.4 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{put} \) ('short <u>′)  
.5 /\text{o}/ as in \( \text{putt} \) ('low short <u>′)  
.6 /\text{a}/ as in \( \text{pot} \) ('short <o>′)

3.3.2 Long phonological counterparts of the short vowels:  
/\text{ai}: \text{ei} \text{au au} /
.1 /\text{ai}/ as in \( \text{like} \) ('long <i>′)  
.2 /\text{e}/ as in \( \text{leak} \) ('long <e>′)  
.3 /\text{æ}/ as in \( \text{lake} \) ('long <a>′)  
.4 /\text{au}/ as in \( \text{clown} \)  
.5 /\text{æ}/ as in \( \text{clone} \) ('long <o>′)

3.3.3 Long vowels associated with /\text{u}u/ /\text{u}: \text{e}: /\text{u}/: /\text{e}/ /\text{a}/ /\text{æ}/: /\text{a}/:
.1 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{cart}, \text{calm} \)  
.2 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{court}, \text{caught} \)  
.3 /\text{e}/ as in \( \text{cut} \)  
.4 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{leer}, \text{idea} \)  
.5 /\text{e}/ as in \( \text{lair} \)  
.6 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{lude}, /\text{ju}/ \text{u} / \text{a} / \text{as in cure} \)

3.3.4 Other long vowels: /\text{u}u: /\text{u}: /\text{a}/
.1 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{booty} \) ('simple long <u>′)  
.2 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{beauty} \) ('complex long <u>′)  
.3 /\text{u}/ as in \( \text{boy} \)

3.3.5 /\text{a}/ and vowel reduction

3.3.6 Stop consonants: /\text{p b t d k g f} /
.1 /\text{p}/ as in \( \text{pan} \)  
.2 /\text{b}/ as in \( \text{ban} \)  
.3 /\text{t}/ as in \( \text{tame} \)  
.4 /\text{d}/ as in \( \text{dame} \)  
.5 /\text{k}/ as in \( \text{came} \)  
.6 /\text{g}/ as in \( \text{game} \)
.7 /ʃ/ as in *chest*  226
.8 /ʒ/ as in *jest*  227

3.3.7 Fricative consonants: /f v θ ð s z ʃ h/  228
.1 /f/ as in *ferry*  228
.2 /v/ as in *very*  231
.3 /θ/ as in *thigh*, and /ð/ as in *thy*  232
.4 /s/ as in *seal*  232
.5 /z/ as in *zeal*  238
.6 /ʃ/ as in *shop*  240
.7 /ʒ/ as in *measure*  242
.8 /h/ as in *head*  243

3.3.8 Nasal consonants: /m n ɳ/  244
.1 /m/ as in *sum*  244
.2 /n/ as in *sun*  246
.3 /ɳ/ as in *sung*  248

3.3.9 Liquids: /l r/  249
.1 /l/ as in *lamp*  249
.2 /r/ as in *ramp*  251

3.3.10 Semivowels: /w j/  253
.1 /w/ as in *well*  253
.2 /j/ as in *yell*  254

4 TEXT-TO-SPEECH CORRESPONDENCES: DECODING  256

4.1 Scale and complexity in text-to-speech spelling rules  256
Text-to-speech technology  256

4.1.1 Modelling human cognitive ability in spelling  257
The MITalk system (Allen, J., Hunnicutt, M. S. and Klatt, D. 1987)  257

4.1.2 Two early miniature systems with ‘readable’ rules  258
Mcllroy (1974)  258
The smallest practicable text-to-speech algorithm?
Ainsworth (1973)  263

4.2 GENERAL FACTORS IN TEXT-TO-SPEECH RULES  267

4.2.1 Letter-to-phoneme correspondences  267

4.2.2 Rule evaluation  270

4.2.3 Problems in correspondence matching  273
4.2.4 Long values of single vowel letters 275
4.2.5 Suffix-marked short vowels 280

4.3 TEXT-TO-SPEECH SPELLING RULES 280

<a>-rules 280
<b>-rules 300
<c>-rules 301
<d>-rules 306
<e>-rules 307
<f>-rules 322
<g>-rules 322
<h>-rules 328
<i>-rules 329
<j>-rules 337
<k>-rules 337
<l>-rules 338
<m>-rules 339
<n>-rules 339
<o>-rules 341
<p>-rules 356
<q>-rules 357
<r>-rules 358
<s>-rules 359
<t>-rules 364
<u>-rules 370
<v>-rules 376
<w>-rules 376
<x>-rules 377
<y>-rules 378
<z>-rules 380
Summary list of text-to-speech spelling rules 381

5 IDENTICAL FORMS: HOMOGRAPHS AND HOMOPHONES 395

5.1 Homographs and homophones 395
Sharing a written or spoken shape or even both 395

5.2 Types of homograph 401
Sharing the same spelling: ‘if a year is short, a minute is minute’ 398

5.3 Types of homophone 401
Sharing the same pronunciation: rite, right and write 401
5.4 **New words from variant spellings**

Many pairs of homophones developed out of variant spellings of the same word: *flower* and *flour*

Some archaic specialized spellings

Variants which retain a semantic link

Variants where the semantic link has been eroded

5.5 **Homophonous affixes**

Identifying affixes

1. /-sion/, /-tion/, /-cion/ as in <-sion>, <-tion>, <-cion>
2. /-ious/, /-tious/ as in <-ious>, <-tious>
3. /-ent/, /-ents/ as in <-a/ent>, <-a/ence>, <-a/ency>
4. /-able/ as <-able>, <-ible> in adjectives
5. /-er/ as <-er>, <-or> in agentive nouns
6. /-or/ as <-or>, <-our>, <-ure> in mass nouns
7. /-ar/ in adjectives
8. /-e(r)/ in <-eer>, <-ier> in agentive nouns
9. stressed /-et/ as <-ette>, <-et>
10. /-et/ in French loans as <-e>, <-ee>, <-er>, <-et>
11. /-id/ as <-ied>, <-id>
12. /-is/ as <-ice>, <-is> in nouns
13. /-(AmE /i/)/ in nouns as <-y>, <-ey>, <-ie>
14. /-ary/ as <-ary>, <-ery>, <-ory>, <-ury> in nouns
15. /-en/ in nouns as <-ene>, <-ine>
16. /-iz/ in nouns as <-ese>, <-ise>
17. /-arz/ in verbs as <-ise>, <-ize>
18. /-al/ as <-le>, <-al>, <-el>, <-il>, <-ol>
19. /-om/ as <-am>, <-em>, <-om>, <-um> in nouns
20. variation in /e/ /i/ spellings at suffix boundaries
21. miscellaneous suffix problems
22. miscellaneous prefix problems

6 **CONVENTIONS USED IN THE SPELLING OF NAMES**

6.1 The spelling of names

Names have a wider range of spelling correspondences

6.2 Manipulated spellings in trade-names

‘Klean Shyne’ for ‘clean shine’, ‘Tracc-Tac’ for ‘track tack’

6.3 Variants and totems

*Allsopp, Alsopp, Alisop, or Also?*

The prestige value of archaic spelling

The sensitivity factor
## Contents

The phonetic erosion of place-names. Spelling pronunciations 452

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Padding</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empty letters in names. Unusual final &lt;-CC&gt; and &lt;-e&gt;</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Variability in vowel correspondences</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘How do you pronounce your name, Miss er Batho’?</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;a&gt; spellings</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;e&gt; spellings</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;i&gt; and &lt;y&gt; spellings</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;o&gt; spellings</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;u&gt; spellings</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Stress placement and vowel reduction</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Is Dominica stressed on the &lt;min&gt; or on the &lt;nic&gt;?</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Variability in consonant correspondences</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Is it with an /s/ or a /z/, Miss er Besant’?</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7  STANDARDIZATION AND SPELLING REFORM 467

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Sixteenth and seventeenth century standardizations</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Etymology: familiarity and respectability</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘The desire to avoid certain vulgar associations’ (OED on ‘coney’)</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Spelling reform in Britain and the USA</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
<td>American spelling: the influence of Webster</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.2</td>
<td>‘New Spelling’ Ripman and Archer (1948)</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.3</td>
<td>‘Cut Spelling’ Upward (1992)</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.4</td>
<td>‘Regularized Inglish’ Wijk (1959)</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.5</td>
<td>The Shaw alphabet and the Initial Teaching Alphabet</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES 489

GENERAL INDEX 494

SELECTIVE WORD INDEX 512

INDEX OF SPELLING CORRESPONDENCES 522

INDEX OF INITIAL AND FINAL LETTER STRINGS IN WORDS 527

INDEX OF SPELLING ERRORS AND RE-SPELLINGS 530
Here at Manchester, I am surrounded by colleagues who know more about the English writing system than I do. William Haas, founder of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Manchester, first interested me in writing systems. Of the many other colleagues who have helped me very generously with their time and patience, I wish to single out Martin and Sue Barry, Dennis Bradley, Neville Collinge, Katharine Perera and the present Mont Follick professor, Nigel Vincent. If they and other long suffering colleagues have failed to save me from error, the fault can only be mine. I am also indebted to Eunice Baker and Irene Pickford for data preparation and secretarial help in the book’s early stages.

I had the privilege of presenting some of the theoretical sections of the book in three of the annual Mont Follick Lectures at the University of Manchester. I am grateful to the Mont Follick Trust for defraying some of the data preparation costs of the research.
Page for page, most of what has been written about English spelling has had a particular and often practical aim in view – to show how the writing system has evolved over the centuries as an integral part of the history of the English language, to advocate some reform of the writing system, to lay down a framework for the teaching of literacy or to provide the foreign learner with a guide to pronunciation. Few people have set out to describe the English writing system in its present state as a working system. Yet there does seem to be a need for more insight into how our writing system actually manages to function. Unhappily, the spelling literature is beset with disagreements based on ignorance and with controversies fuelled by prejudice.

If we take a radical reformist standpoint, the present English writing system is simply not worth describing:

Our present spelling is just a chaotic concoction of oddities without order and cohesion.

(Follick 1965: 1)

Present-day reformers are equally insistent:

proper analysis of the synchronic and diachronic evidence shows rather that [English spelling] is unplanned, phonographically highly inconsistent, and historically, pragmatically and geographically fluid. Its lack of coherent system and its unpredictable deviations from the spelling of other languages are detrimental to its role as a medium of international communication, while to native speakers of English it has proved a serious obstacle to the acquisition of literacy.

(Upward 1988: 3)

Such a view has been frequently stated. Ever since English spelling settled down in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the consensus seems to have been that the conventions we have inherited are ill-suited:

Such indeed is the state of our written language, that the darkest hieroglyphics, or most difficult cyphers which the art of man has hitherto
invented, were not better calculated to conceal the sentiments of those who used them from all who had not the key, than the state of our spelling is to conceal the true pronunciation of our words, from all except a few well educated natives.

(Sheridan 1780: 13)

Happily, rather more than a few well-educated natives seem to cope with the present system, though after a heavy investment of time and effort. Linguists today are even prepared to concede that, in spite of its imperfections, the English writing system has some virtue:

our orthography is possibly not the least valuable of the institutions our ancestors have bequeathed to us.

(Sampson 1985: 213)

The extreme statement of this point of view is the provocative declaration by Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle that:

English orthography turns out to be rather close to an optimal system for spelling English.

(1968: 184)

Nor does a linguistic analysis of the writing system necessarily end in a pessimistic outlook for the educational task of teaching literacy:

most English speakers learn our writing system, to one degree or other, without much explicit analysis of it to guide them. They do not do this by learning each item separately, but by making some sort of analysis themselves. If they can do so well without much explicit description, the system need not be beyond anyone when understood and presented systematically.

(Albrow 1972: 51)

It is part of the recently established national curriculum for British schools that ‘the rules of spelling’ in traditional orthography should, and presumably can, be learnt. What these rules might be and how they should be taught is another matter.

Public concern about falling standards of literacy is reinforced by the national press. In the educational debate, spelling mistakes provide powerful ammunition:

She had spent ‘houres’ over her essay but she had no ‘apptitude’ and no ‘flare’ for spelling. Even after a ‘brake’ for lunch, it was still ‘suprisingly’ bad, though you could see what she ‘ment’. An ‘independant’ girl, she did not find it ‘forefilling’. Despite ‘baring’ a good ‘refrence’ and a respectable ‘adress’, her hopes of college ‘enterance’ were dashed because she was not ‘apreciated’.

(All those spelling mistakes were taken from an essay written by an
18-year-old student of English literature and reassembled in this concentrated form by Peter Wilby as copy for an article in the *Sunday Times* 3 February 1985.)

Faced with frequent statements that there are no rules for traditional English spelling and with curricula which require that the rules should be learnt, we may conclude that there must still be scope for neutral explorative studies of the English writing system. We still do not seem to know enough about it. This present study tries to deal equally with the problems of the writer and the reader, which are rather different.

Computer analysis has provided some statistical insights, especially on the interrelationship of text frequency and lexical frequency. The present account is also different in that it covers in some detail the spelling of names. I have not made excursions into the general theory of writing systems, but I have made some comparisons with the Swedish writing system to show the workings of spelling reform in a more 'managed' system and a different approach to the spelling of loan-words. I have drawn attention to differences between British and American spelling. I have taken Southern British Standard pronunciation as the basis for analysing spelling correspondences with selective cross-reference to American English and other accents.

I am shy of calling this study 'a survey', since some aspects of the English writing system deserve a far more detailed treatment than I have been able to give them. It is, however, something of a survey in the sense that I have trawled through a fairly large database to find what regularities I could in the English writing system and to see how they might best be described. This is a strictly functional approach. My main object has been to see how traditional orthography works, or fails to work. I have not been concerned with tracing the development of the present system over the centuries. Only occasionally have I referred to the past to explain the present.

To make the book more accessible as a work of reference, I have provided a detailed list of contents and five different indexes. I have also tended to repeat brief glosses of technical terms in the text to save the reader from interruptions. There is also some repetition of data, where variant pronunciations are logged under different phonemes and spellings. In quotation, I have preserved the writer's idiosyncratic spellings, such as Shaw's spelling of *<Shakespear>*. This does not, of course, imply any recommendation.

Occasionally, I have strayed from my descriptive brief to make prescriptive comments on features of traditional orthography that seem inconsistent or undesirable. Spelling reform as it has been implemented in the United States and as it has been variously planned in Britain has been dealt with selectively in §7.3. Detailed proposals for spelling reform in Britain have been discussed for many years through the publications of the Simplified Spelling Society and it is to them, or to their American and
Canadian counterparts, that anyone interested in that aspect of literacy should turn.

The current addresses of some active associations, to which any enquiries should be made, are as follows:

1 The Simplified Spelling Society, 39 Chepstow Rise, Croydon CR0 5LX, England
2 American Literacy Council, 106 Morningside Drive, New York City 10027, USA
3 BETSS, 24034 Bingham Pointe Drive, Birmingham, Michigan 48010, USA (BETSS = 'Better Education thru Simplified Spelling')
4 The Internasional Union For The Kanadian Langwaje, 94 Glenholm Avenue, Toronto ONT M6H 3B1, Canada

I have tried to leave a few warning signs on entrenched heresies that still thrive in works on reading, writing and spelling. In §2 particularly, I have sought out some examples of how not to describe English spelling. My excuse for this missionary zeal is that all too often the literature of literacy is taken up by non-arguments about non-problems.
Conventions, symbols and technical terms

**SBS** stands for *'Southern British Standard'* and refers to the speech of educated English speakers from London and the surrounding counties and across southern Britain generally (Wells 1982: 117). This is the accent of standard British English used here as the basis of the description of spelling correspondences. Other accents are referred to when there are differences that affect spelling.

I have used the term ‘Southern British Standard’ in preference to ‘**RP**’ (or ‘**Received Pronunciation**’) for several good reasons. It is not merely that the term ‘Received Pronunciation’ has a Victorian stuffiness. SBS is a much wider concept. I wish to prevent an assumption that all the phonetic detail of the pronunciation of RP, or of any other accent, is relevant in tracing the correspondences between spellings and phonemes. What is important for literacy is the number of contrasting phonemes in the accent and their distribution, not the minutiae of how they are pronounced (their phonetic realization).

However, RP is simply a socially defined subsystem within SBS. Readers used to the term ‘RP’ may, for our purposes, regard them as equivalent. The two terms refer to speakers who have the same number of phonemes with essentially the same distribution. To refer restrictively to RP in describing English spelling, rather than the wider notion of SBS, would be to accept a narrow social irrelevance:

Socially, [RP] is characteristic of the upper and upper middle class . . . Occupations perhaps most typically associated with RP are barrister, stockbroker, and diplomat . . . Typically [RP speakers] belong to families whose menfolk were or are pupils at one of the ‘public schools’ (exclusive private schools standing outside the state education system)

(Wells 1982: 117)

**AmE** stands somewhat naively for ‘**American English**’. I have used this as a loose cover term for general features which distinguish the speech of most Americans from Southern British Standard in phoneme contrasts and in the distribution of phonemes in words. These are the main factors that
affect the description of spelling correspondences. It would have been unwise to use the term ‘General American’, claiming it to be a standard American accent, since its definition, and indeed existence, is a matter of some controversy. What is here taken to be ‘American’ may well not be valid for Eastern or Southern accents of American English. For instance, AmE is here taken to be ‘rhotic’ speech which has not lost //r// before a consonant in words such as farm. So, AmE does not here refer to any strictly definable accent of American English, but to features of pronunciation shared by many Americans.

The bearing of accent and dialect on spelling is discussed in §2.7.

IPA stands for The International Phonetic Association, particularly with reference to their system of phonetic symbols.

**Phoneme symbols**

The phoneme symbols here used for representing Southern British Standard are the IPA symbols used in Gimson’s *Pronunciation of English* (Cruttenden 1994). They are shown in table 1 below. Alongside I have given the spelling-based letter symbols of Cummings *American English Spelling* (1988), which are derived from the symbols used in the Webster dictionaries (W3NID).

### Table 1 Vowel phoneme symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Cummings symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short vowels</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. bit</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i ('short i ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. bet</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e ('short e ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. bat</td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>a ('short a ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. full</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u ('high short u ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. dull</td>
<td>ə</td>
<td>u ('low short u ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. bomb</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>ɑ ('low short o ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long counterparts of the short vowels</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. bite</td>
<td>aɪ</td>
<td>i ('long i ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. beet</td>
<td>ɪ</td>
<td>e ('long e ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. baɪt</td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>ɑ ('long a ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. bout</td>
<td>aʊ</td>
<td>aʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. boat</td>
<td>oʊ</td>
<td>ɔ ('long o ')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long vowels and diphthongs wholly or partly associated with //tr//</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. bard</td>
<td>ɑː</td>
<td>(see note 2 below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. board</td>
<td>ɔː</td>
<td>ɑː (see note 3 below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. bird</td>
<td>ə</td>
<td>ər</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. beard</td>
<td>ɪə</td>
<td>ɛr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. bear</td>
<td>æə</td>
<td>ər</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. boor</td>
<td>ʊə</td>
<td>ʊr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. fire</td>
<td>æə</td>
<td>ɪr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes on the vowel phonemes and their symbols

1 The group of short vowels, (1) to (6) in Table 1, are sometimes called ‘checked’ vowels, because of their distribution. They do not occur in final open syllables, so /kæt/ cat is a possible English word, but there can be no English word */kæ/. Long vowels and diphthongs have no such restriction and are in consequence ‘free’ (/kaʊl/ cowl, /kau/ cow). Since the length difference between ‘short’ and ‘long’ is less marked in some accents of English, the terms ‘lax’ and ‘tense’ may also be used. The short vowels vary with their long counterparts in some morphemes:

/æ/ – /a/ sign – signal mine – mimic line – linear
/i:/ – /i/ redeem – redemption plenary – replenish serene – serenity
/eu/ – /œ/ vain – vanity mania – manic inflame – inflammatory
/æu/ – /œu/ renounce – renunciation South – Southern
abound – abundance

2 In SBS the vowel /ə/ occurs not only before /r/, but also in words such as after, bath, cast, dance, where many other speakers, including AmE, would have /æ/. (See §3.3.3.1 pp. 177ff.) In AmE the vowel /ə/ also takes in the vowel of bomb (= balm), box, dodge, stop, watch, which in SBS is 6 above, the short low back rounded /oʊ/.

3 In SBS, the vowel /ɔ/ occurs in both caught and court as /kɔt/, since /r/ has been lost before a consonant. In rhotic accents, as in most AmE, they will differ as /kɔt/ and /kɔt/. A halfway stage may keep caught and court distinct as /kɔt/ and /kɔt/.

4 In SBS and some other British accents unstressed /ə/ can end a word such as city, happy, where other accents including AmE have /ɪə/.

5 Some writers on AmE merge the stressed vowel [ʌ] of dull together with the unstressed schwa [ə] of about in a single phoneme, using /ə/ as the symbol for both, since they are phonetically very similar.

6 Cummings (1988), uses W3NID symbols, slightly modified. This system tries to help the reader by choosing phoneme symbols which mirror the most common spelling. In the vowel symbols, there may be some
advantage in using terms and symbols such as ‘long /i/’ and ‘short /i/' for the /ai/ and /i/ of *mime* and *mimic*. It draws attention to the phonological relationship. It cannot, however, entirely free the reader from the task of remembering different phoneme symbols. (See pp. 8f.)

There are minor differences of phonetic detail between SBS and other accents which are reflected in the SBS phoneme symbols, but which have little bearing on spelling. For instance, the /æʊ/ vowel (11 above) starts without lip rounding in SBS: *coat* is [kəʊt], but before a dark [t] SBS does have rounding as in *coat* [kɒt]. In other accents lip rounding remains as [ʌʊ], or as a pure vowel [ɔʊ]. Similarly the vowel length marker [i] for /iː/, /ɪː/, /ɜː/ and /(j)uː/ may be inappropriate for accents in which the difference between ‘short’ and ‘long’ vowels is more a matter of vowel quality than length. The quality differences are indicated by the vowel symbol itself - /u:/, /ɪː/, /ɜːr/ and /(j)uː/, etc. However, I have kept Gimson’s redundant and sometimes misleading length marks for a practical reason: simply to make the symbols appear different to the rapid reader.

More detailed comments will be found under each vowel phoneme in §3.3.

### Table 2 Consonant phoneme symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stops</th>
<th>p pan</th>
<th>t ten</th>
<th>k cap</th>
<th>j choke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B nasals</td>
<td>b ban</td>
<td>d den</td>
<td>g gap</td>
<td>d joke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricatives</td>
<td>f ferry</td>
<td>ð thin</td>
<td>s sat</td>
<td>j ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasals</td>
<td>m met</td>
<td>n net</td>
<td>ð̆ long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquids</td>
<td>l late</td>
<td>r rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glides</td>
<td>h hat</td>
<td>w wet</td>
<td>j yet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes on the consonant phonemes and their symbols

Unlike the vowels, the system of consonant phonemes shows little difference across accents. SBS and AmE, for instance, are here identical. Usually the symbol reflects a common spelling, as in the case of /p b t d k g f v s z h m n l r w/.

The symbol /ŋ/ does not include a following /ɡ/: in SBS *finger* and *singer* differ as /fɪŋɡə/ and /ˈsɪŋɡər/; in Northern British English they may both have /ˈfɪŋɡə/. The glide /ŋ/ is traditionally classed as as ninth member of the set of fricatives (as in §3.3.7), though unlike them it does not enter into a voicing contrast (/θ/ - /ð/, /s/ - /z/, etc.). The glides /w/ and /j/ are traditionally referred to as ‘semivowels’ (as in §3.3.10).

Some alternative symbols in common use for English consonants are shown below in Table 3. The standard IPA use of /j/ for the semivowel in *yet* (not the affricate in *jet*) needs noting.
Table 3 Alternatives to the IPA consonant symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Non-IPA</th>
<th>Cummings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thin – then</td>
<td>ð ð</td>
<td>thin th</td>
<td>th th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choke – joke</td>
<td>ʧ ʧ</td>
<td>ʧ ʧ</td>
<td>ch j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ship – measure</td>
<td>ʃ ʒ</td>
<td>ʃ ʒ</td>
<td>sh zh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yet</td>
<td>ʝ ʝ</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other phonetic symbols used

[ ] is sometimes used to show a syllable boundary, as /u-ɪ/ in fruition.

[?] is the symbol for a glottal stop sound.

[] placed before a symbol indicates that the following syllable is stressed, as in /təˈmorəʊ/.

[.] placed underneath a symbol indicates that a consonant is syllabic, as in [litl].

Other phonetic symbols found occasionally in the text are briefly explained where they occur.

Types of bracketing

[ ] – square brackets with phonetic symbols enclose sounds or strings of sounds without necessarily assigning them to any particular English phoneme (thus, [?] represents a glottal stop sound and [] represents the voiceless variant of the /l/ phoneme found after voiceless /p/ in /plot/). For ‘phoneme’ see p. xxvii.

/ / – single diagonal slashes with phonetic symbols enclose phonemes or strings of phonemes (thus, box ends in /ks/ and seraph ends in /ʃə/). These are traditional ‘surface’ phonemes, which are directly represented by a sound.

// // – double slashes enclose a more abstract ‘underlying’ phoneme. Thus //r// does not necessarily refer to present-day SBS /r/, but effectively to the /r/ of early Modern English, which in SBS and many other dialects does not now survive finally (far), or before a consonant (farm). In SBS the word far has an ‘underlying’ final //r// but no actual ‘surface’ /r/ unless a vowel follows immediately (far away). In AmE and other ‘rhotic’ accents //r// has not been lost in these contexts, so, as captured in the spellings, far is /far/ and farm is /fəm/.< > – angled brackets enclose letters or strings of letters (thus, box ends in <x> and seraph ends in <ph>).

/ /. – indicates a spelling correspondence between a string of one or more phonemes and a string of one or more letters: at the end of box we have /ks//=<x> and at the end of seraph we have /ʃə//=<ph>. The order of
the two sides depends on the topic: speech-to-text /ks/=<x> or text-to-
speech <x>=/ks/. Often the order is not critical. These are often referred
to as ‘phoneme-grapheme correspondences’.

- curly brackets enclose morphemes (minimal units of word structure)
cited in ordinary spelling. Thus the word *photograph* contains the
morphemes [<photo>] and [<graph], *unreliably* contains the morphemes [<un-],
[rely], [able] and [-ly]. [<photo>] and [<graph] are free morphemes: they can
form a word on their own. [<im-] and [-ly] are bound morphemes: they do
not appear on their own, but are always attached to other morphemes.
The phonetic form of a morpheme often varies from context to context:
[photo] varies as /foʊˈtoʊ/, /foʊˈtoʊ/, /foʊˈtoʊ/ in *telephoto*, *photographer*, *photo-
graphic*. The English writing system contains spelling correspondences
with whole morphemes such as [-ed]=<ed>, where [-ed] varies phoneti-
cally as /ɪd/ (wanted), /ɪd/ (begged), or /ɪ/ (washed).

Notational symbols

- ‘is not equal to’, ‘contrasts with’.
- an asterisk attached to a written form, may denote either a wrong,
  unconventional, reformed, hypothetical or dialect spelling, such as
  *<stoopid>, *<sed>, *<woz>. An asterisk is also used in formulae to
  indicate some specific restriction which is indicated in the following text
  (e.g. *<C>* may exclude some letters specified ir a note).
- zero, as in <h>=0 for the initial spelling in *hour*, where <h> has no pho-
netic counterpart.
- a word boundary, possibly followed by suffixes that can attach to free
  forms (see pp. 269ff). So the context ‘<e> #’ would apply not only to
care. but also to carer, caring, careful, careless, carelessly, carelessness.
The text-to-speech rules of §4 include a 'compound-guesser', which tries
to find a boundary in compounds such as carefree, careworn, by using
possible letter sequences.

The following capital letters will be found in rule formulae with particu-
lar uses:

/I/ any vowel phoneme.
/V/ any vowel letter, any letter from the set: <a, e, i, o, u, y>.
/C/ any consonant phoneme (including glides /h, j, w/ and liquids /l, r/).
<C> any consonant letter, any letter from the set: <b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m,
        n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z>.

The letter <y> belongs to both the <C> and <V> sets.

<C₀> zero or more consonant letters.
<C₁> one or more consonant letters.
The asterisk indicates some specific restriction which is indicated in the explanation that follows.

- **Doubling** refers to the doubling of a consonant letter as in *matting* compared with *mat*.

TF, LF refer to the text frequency and lexical frequency of words in the database described in §3.1.1. The percentage figures quoted for word frequency in §3 exclude grammatical words such as pronouns, auxiliaries, articles, and only refer to the frequency of lexical words.

F+, F- are used in the description of speech-to-text correspondences in §3 to draw attention to a difference between the text frequency and lexical frequency of a particular spelling. ‘F-’ indicates a tendency to occur in low frequency words, where the per cent share of lexical frequency for a particular spelling is notably higher than the per cent share of text frequency. ‘F+’ shows a tendency to occur in high frequency words, where the per cent share of text frequency for a particular spelling is notably higher than the per cent share of lexical frequency.

**Some technical terms**

- **Affix, prefix, suffix** – these terms are normally applied to bound morphemes added to other morphemes in the process of word-formation: the added units have a distinct function or meaning. For example, the suffix <-ness> does not occur on its own, but only when bound to a stem, as in *goodness*, where it turns the adjective into a noun. In describing English spelling, it is sometimes convenient to refer to initial and final strings of letters that do not have an add-on meaning or a clear marking function. So, <-tion> in *suggestion* is often referred to as a unit, even though the division is then <sugges>+<tion>, with the <t> arbitrarily separated from <suggest>. The string <-ant> may be dealt with as a unit not only in *accountant*, but also in *covenant, elephant*. I have used the general terms ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ when the letter strings referred to are not strictly affixes.

- **Auxiliary, inert, empty letters** refer to different functional types of letter. See §2.6.5 pp. 40ff.

- **Bias, workload** refer to the performance of text-to-speech rules in §4 and are explained in §4.2.2 pp. 270ff.

- **Consonant, vowel** refer only to sounds, not letters. A statement such as: ‘the stressed vowel is followed by a single consonant’ would apply to both *lemon* and *common*. There is a double consonant letter in *common*, but not a double consonant. See §2.2 pp. 9ff.

- **Diphthong, digraph** – ‘diphthong’ is a purely phonetic term and refers to a vowel glide, as distinct from a relatively ‘pure’ vowel, within a single syllable. The words *cycle, omen, mouse, mice,* all contain diphthongs. The words *react, poet,* (with two vowels) and *head, brawn,* (with a single
'pure' vowel) do not contain diphthongs. 'Digraph' refers to a string of two letters: in head the digraph <ea> represents the vowel /ɛ/; in react it represents the vowels /iːæ/.

**divergence** — a lack of one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and spellings shows divergence from the alphabetic principle of one symbol per phoneme and one phoneme per symbol (Haas 1970: 51). There may be divergence on the phonetic side of a correspondence: <th>=/θ/ and <th>=/ð/; or on the graphic side: /f/=<f>, /f/=<ff> and /v/=<ph>. More often than not we find divergence on both sides: /iː/=<ea>, /iː/=<ee>, and <ea>=/ii/, <ea>=/e/, etc.

**grapheme** — this term has a number of different meanings in the study of writing systems. It is not used here as an abstraction of ‘letter’ (the set of different written shapes of ‘the same’ letter), but for any minimal letter string used in correspondences. So, <ea> in head may be referred to as a single (but complex) grapheme.

**phoneme** — this term is used in the traditional sense for contrasting units of sound. The words exit and seraph are each pronounced with three consonant phonemes and two vowel phonemes. Readers unused to phonetics will probably find that their notion of ‘speech sound’ is effectively the same as ‘phoneme’. A phoneme may be realized by a range of slightly different sounds with different speakers and in different contexts.

**lexeme** — a word defined semantically. Gaol and jail represent the same lexeme.

**long, short** — vowels are referred to as ‘long’ and ‘short’, rather than ‘tense’ and ‘lax’. The shortening of the vowel in words such as sanity (from sane), is here referred to as ‘third-syllable shortening’. It is otherwise known as ‘trisyllabic laxing’.

**rhotic, non-rhotic** — a rhotic accent is one, such as AmE, Scottish or Irish English, in which underlying /r/ survives in all contexts, so a firm offer is pronounced with two instances of /r/. A non-rhotic accent is one, such as SBS, in which /r/ is lost before a consonant and in final position, so a firm offer has no instances of /r/ in SBS.

§Basic, §Greek, §Latinate, etc. refer to subsystems of spelling conventions in the English writing system, but not directly or by definition to the historical origin of words. The symbol ‘§’ attached to such a label indicates ‘subsystem’. The word deacon (of Greek origin) has the characteristics of a §Basic word as does beacon (of Germanic origin). See §2.9.
Chapter 1

Alternative approaches to describing English spelling

1.1 A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH

How did the present system come about?

English spelling, like most of our institutions, has a history. So, in matters of spelling, the past can help us to explain the present. We can see that loan-words acquired from particular languages at particular times have brought with them their own spelling conventions. The words village and entourage are both borrowed into English from French. Village was borrowed in the Middle Ages, but entourage seems to have been first used in written English in the 1830s. The final French stress has shifted to the front in the early borrowings, making them more like other English words and the <-age> of village has become an unstressed /-ids/. In a late borrowing such as entourage the <-age> is usually unchanged as /-ary/. Studying the changing relationships between written and spoken English through time is the business of philology.

Philology studies language as part of cultural history. Its viewpoint is diachronic, looking at language evolution, showing how the present-day state of the language has developed over the centuries. A study of English spelling that is primarily philological, such as Cummings (1988), will consequently focus on the writing system as a transmission of culture. This will include material which, though interesting in itself, need have no relevance at all to the purely synchronic problems of achieving literacy in the language as it is today.

The philological approach can dig out an interesting antiquarian diversity often unsuspected by the common reader. Cummings (1988: 332), for instance, points out that the double <bb> spellings of chubby and shabby come before a word boundary: 'apparently the adjective came from chub, a fattish fish'; 'shub reflects an obsolete word used to refer to a skin disease of sheep and to a low fellow'. But for all practical spelling purposes, chubby and shabby are to be treated as simple forms on a par with the nouns hobby, lobby, tabby or the adjectives silly, merry, happy. Similarly,
it has no bearing on the problems of literacy to know that: 'The only
known Romance instance of /\u0103l/ = oo is the monosyllabic rook “chess
piece”'. The word did indeed come into English via French. Before that,
along with the game of chess itself, it came into French by way of Arabic
and beyond that from Persian. Yet, in spite of this chequered history, it is
spelt by §Basic spelling conventions and is identical to rook 'type of crow',
a purely Germanic word.

On the other hand, it would be useful to keep apart (unlike Cummings
1988: 356) instances of <cc>/k/ with §Latinate prefixes in words such as
accumulate, occasion, occupy, from the <cc> of §Italianate words such as
peccadillo, staccato, toccata. The <cc> of accumulate has to be linked to the
double letters found with other prefixes, as in affiliate, alleviate, annihilate,
appreciate. The staccato-type words have the common feature of penulti­
mate stress and a final vowel. These two groups of words with the spelling
<cc>/k/ belong to different subsystems for practical spelling.

In a philological approach, the concept of 'rule' may be rather different
from the kind of rules (or generalizations) that might underlie competence
in spelling (see §2.8.1). For instance, Cummings has a 'Stress Frontshift
Rule' (ibid.: 127), which simply reflects the fact that the final stress of
French loan-words, as we saw in village, tended to shift to the first syllable.
This has happened in cover, honest, gravel, lemon, model, refuge, river,
scholar. The importance for present-day spellers in this group of words is
that a short vowel followed by a single consonant then became stressed in
a spelling context where you would expect a long vowel — cf. over, navel,
demon, modal, polar. This stress shift was a ‘rule’ in that the historical
process affected most of the early French loan-words. It is not a rule in any
synchronic sense, since there are no criteria for identifying these early loan­
words by their present-day pronunciation or any other marker of
'Frenchness'. They are simply a group of exceptions. The consequences,
too, are different for reader and writer: the writer must avoid putting a
<CC> spelling after the short vowel (*<lemmon>); the reader must avoid
'saying' a long vowel */l\i\m\an/.

Framing such rules as active processes may be slightly misleading in a
philological framework. This is so of the rules which account for the short
vowel before the suffix <-ity> (ibid.: 112) and before the suffix <-ic>
(ibid.: 115). The underlying form is taken to be the vowel of the base form.
So the long vowels of sane and mime are 'shortened' in the derived forms
sanity and mimic. The rule is explicitly framed as a process: 'instances of
/i/ = i in VCV strings whose head vowels have been shortened (sic) by the
Suffix -ic Rule', 'head vowels have been shortened by the Suffix -ity Rule' (ibid.: 224). Many of the words given as examples of the 'shortening'
process did not have a long vowel to shorten, either in their etymology or
in related forms in English: critic, monolithic, prolific; acidity, humidify,
ability; logic, symbolic, topic. The process of 'shortening' means, of course,
that the vowel 'ends up as' short. So, here the historical difference between the stressed vowels of *mimic* and *topic* is lost sight of by the descriptive device.

### 1.2 A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

**How does the present system work?**

A philological approach is very much concerned with asking: How did these spellings come about? The present study is primarily concerned with the question: How does our spelling system work? The two approaches are not at odds; they are complementary.

The difference between the two approaches can be shown by comparing what they would say about one particular spelling problem: the difference between final <-o> in words such as *bingo, fresco, limbo*, and words with final <-ow> such as *billow, farrow, follow*. The philological approach would tell you that *halo* is one of some old adoptions from French and Latin, that *photo* is one of a number of back-formations or 'clippings', that *motto* is one of several similar loans from Italian, that *mango* is from Portuguese, and that there are several words, such as *jumbo*, of obscure origin. The <-ow> words, such as *follow*, got their <-ow> spelling in Middle English as a regularization of a number of Old English word endings: <we>, <rg>, <lg>, <rh> and <u>.

On the other hand, the present study is concerned with how spellers can distinguish between the two groups of words as they are today, so that they do not make errors such as *<sallo>, *<mangow> for *sallow* and *mango*. If we look at the structure of the two groups of words, we find a pattern which could be exploited to provide teaching material. None of the disyllabic <-ow> words has stress on the second syllable as does *hello*, or a long vowel in the first syllable as does *photo*, or medial consonants outside the range /d, n(d), l, r/, as does *mango* (see §3.3.2.5, pp.173f.). This approach to the description of spelling conventions is best described as functional.

Since exceptions do invite comment, it may be of occasional interest to mention the historical reason for an exception even in a strictly functional approach. For instance, *pickerel* has an exceptional 'doubled' <ck> in the third syllable from the end (see #D6 p.123). The word means 'a young pike', so there is a hidden boundary after the first syllable, which makes the word rather like *shrubbery* in structure, where the <CC> is regular. *Frippery, gallery* and *scullery* are similar exceptions to the doubling rules, compared with *celery, misery*, but to add that *frippery* comes from Old French *fripe*, meaning 'rag', would not help. The <frip(p)> has no claim to be an English morpheme. The reverse is the case in *shabby* and *chubby* (see p. 1), where there is a hidden boundary that need not be known to explain the doubling.
If we are to focus on the problems of literacy in English, we are not primarily concerned with how the writing system came to be in its present state. We shall try to look at the system as it functions today for a normal literate adult and uncover those regularities that appear to be exploitable by a competent speller. These will not usually be in the form of recallable and explicit 'spelling rules' to be chanted in moments of insecurity. They will often be letter patterns which correlate well with speech patterns, with types of word-formation or with the various subsystems of foreign loan-words. In trying to describe the system by exploring the awareness of an average literate adult, we shall not assume knowledge outside the adult's competence as a speaker and reader of English.
References


References 491


