**Chapter Three**

**Spelling Reforms in England**

3.1 Introduction

3.2 The spelling reformers

3.2.1 Robert Orm (fl. C. 1200)

3.2.2 John Cheke (1514-1547)

3.2.3 Thomas Smith (1514 – 1577)

3.2.4 John Hart (†1574)

3.2.4.1 Hart’s phonetic system of 1551

3.2.4.2 Hart’s phonetic system of 1570

3.2.5 William Bullokar (1530-1609)

3.2.6 Richard Mulcaster (1530-1611)

3.2.7 Alexander Gill (1564 – 1635)

3.2.8 John Wilkins (1614-1672)

3.2.9 Charles Butler (1750- 1832)

3.2.10 Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

3.2.11 Isaac Pitman (1813-1897)

3.2.12 Alexander Ellis (1814 – 1890)

3.2.13 George B.Shaw (1856– 1950)

3.2.14 James Pitman (1901 – 1985)

3.2.15 Robert Zachrisson’s *Anglic*

3.2.16 Alex Wijk’s *Regularized Inglis*

3.2.16.1 Features of *Regularized Inglis*

3.2.16.2 Plan for carrying out the reform

3.2.17 Ripman–Archer’s *Nue Spelings*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2.17.1</td>
<td>Features of <em>Nue Spelings</em></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.17.2</td>
<td>Plan for carrying out the reform</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.18</td>
<td>Other reformers</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>The Simplified Spelling Society</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>Guiding principles of the society</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Other reform proposals</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Three

SPELLING REFORMS IN ENGLAND

3.1 Introduction

The literature on spelling reform is imbued with a revivalistic quality; it sees the prevailing orthography as the degenerate product of neglect, denseness, and lack of adaptability. It sees the future of the English speaking people, if this malignancy is allowed to remain, as continued degeneration: children failing to learn to read, adults falling prey to the corrupted speech of the lower classes, world trade falling off and business suffering throughout the land.

Venezsky 1970:30

Educators, philologists and spelling reformers from the darkest periods of the Middle Ages joined in the assault upon the "antiquated", "inconsistent", "illogical" spelling with which the English speaking world is burdened (Hart: 1551, Zachrisson: 1930 and Bloomfield: 1933). It is indeed a peculiar fact that though it has been widely recognized for hundreds of years that the spelling of the English language is extremely antiquated and confused, and numerous more or less comprehensive attempts have been made in the past to reform it, both by individuals and organizations, all these attempts have failed. Practically no results of any importance have been achieved. What then have been the reasons for this almost complete failure? It was believed that some of the principal reasons, among others, why so many attempts at spelling reform have failed were the deep-rooted conservatism of the English speaking people, practical difficulties in implementing the reforms and the force of inertia. In order to achieve a reform of English spelling it is essential that certain conditions should first be fulfilled: primarily a suitable new system of orthography must be devised. This system should on the one hand satisfy the demands of philological experts and on the other hand stand a reasonable chance of being accepted by the majority of the educated people or at least by a sufficient number, to permit it being put to the test on a comprehensive scale.
It was equally important to devise a method for overcoming the resistance of the adult population in general and to take care that a minimum of various transitional inconveniences take place. According to Venezsky,

Sixteenth and seventeenth century grammarians, aroused by the gros and disgrac'ful barbarismes' of the existing Orthography, laboured religiously to convert their countrymen to new spelling systems, but the ravages of conservatism and the relentless movement of time laid waste their proposals, leaving the banner for the Ben Franklins and the G. B. Shaws of the coming centuries.

(Venezsky 1976: 10)

In the first three centuries one can distinguish very roughly two main sub-categories of reform projects. In one group we find projects by reformers who wanted to make good for the obvious deficiency of the Latin alphabet by adding new symbols to it or by adding diacritical marks to the symbols already in use. In the other group we have projects by those who saw the difficulties connected with such a procedure, and so preferred to adopt a different course, based on established usage, but making this usage more systematic by abolishing as many of its irregularities as possible.

There were two periods in particular in the development of the language during which a keen interest was shown in the question of spelling reform. The first came as early as Shakespeare's time, that is, when the orthography of English was still in a state of flux. Thus, characteristic features of the present-day spelling, such as the distribution of the letters o, oa, ea and ie for the various Middle English long sound of the vowel letter e and of the letters o, oa, oo and oe for the various long sounds of the vowel letter o had not yet firmly become fixed in the language, the letters i and j and u and v were still used indifferently for the vowel and consonant in question. The use of the final double consonants and of the final silent e had not yet been definitely regulated.
From about the middle of the fifteenth century people had begun to voice criticism of the state of the orthography. Interest in spelling reform gathered momentum and several spelling reformers had begun to voice their criticism about the state of orthography as it existed then. An early spelling reformer called John Hart writing in 1551 argued that “vicious writing bringeth confusion and uncertainte in the reading”. He criticized among others things, the use of superfluos letters, as in stoppe (where stop would do), and additions made by etymologists such as b in doubt, g in eight, l in soldiers and o in people. Zachrisson a noted spelling reformer who devised a new orthographic script called Anglic wrote,

Everyone has to admit that of all languages of culture, English has the most antiquated, inconsistent, and illogical spelling.

Zachrisson 1930:10

However, by 1600 there was a trend towards uniformity in the spelling of printed matter and by 1650 it was largely complete. The reasons seem to be have been the desire of schoolmasters on the one hand for an accepted orthography which they could teach to their pupils and the desire of the printers on the other to meet the expectations of their readers. The period 1400 to 1600 referred to by scholars, as the Great Vowel Shift was a period of unusually rapid change in the pronunciation of English. For example, the words meet and meat were pronounced differently and their spellings were a reasonable representation of their pronunciation. During this period however the pronunciation of both vowels changed and also fell to their present pronunciation but the spelling remained fixed in their previous forms. Consonants were also affected in this period of change. The spelling of knight for instance was a fair representation of how it had been pronounced in 1400 but by 1600 the sounds to which the k and the gh corresponded had disappeared from this word. The spelling had become fixed by then but the lack of correspondence between sound and spelling became more pronounced and most of the irregularities still remain.
The problem was that not only was English spellings considered to be bad (it is still considered bad) but also that there was no generally accepted system that everybody could confirm to. It was neither phonetic nor fixed. In the Middle Ages it was fairly uniform as the spelling represented the pronunciation of words. The confusion was increased when certain spellings gradually became conventional while the pronunciation slowly changed. In some cases a further discrepancy between sound and symbol arose when letters were inserted in words where they were not pronounced (e.g. b in debt, doubt) because the corresponding word in Latin was so spelled (debitum, dubitare) or in other cases (e.g., gh in delight, tight) by analogy with words similarly pronounced (light, might) where the g had formerly represented an actual sound. Venezsky observes:

The majority of the reformers advocated phonetic systems and cited, to establish a need for reform the same worn out examples of scribal pedantry like debt, doubt and victuals.

Venezsky 1970:32

The second period of intense interest in reform began towards the middle of the 19th century and was probably connected to the rise of the new science of phonetics which seemed to offer such splendid opportunities for a solution to this long standing problem. Several academicians, scholars and spelling reformers suggested several reforms in the orthography. Their suggestions included introduction of new characters, deletion of some letters in some words, introducing some new digraphs, getting rid of certain digraphs, substituting some letters with others and various other ideas.

Some of the reforms were quite radical and generated a lot of interest. In the early 1840s the word Phonotypy was coined by Isaac pitman. According to the principle of phonotypy a language should be printed with a set of letters which in number, and where practicable, in shape have a direct relationship with the sound system of that language. Isaac Pitman’s shorthand, the Shaw alphabet designed by Kingsley Read and James Piwan’s The Initial Teaching Alphabet (to a certain extent) are examples of phonotypic alphabets.
The most highly organised attempt at revising English spelling occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, when spelling reform associations were formed. These spelling associations were as follows: the Spelling Reform Association founded in Philadelphia in 1876, the Anglic Association, the Simplified Spelling Society in England, the British Spelling Reform Association, the Simplified Spelling League and the Simplified Spelling Board in America.

3.2 The Spelling Reformers

The earliest sixteenth century reformers were Sir Thomas Smith, Sir John Cheke and John Hart who was the most competent phoneticians among the early reformers. Hart published three major works on spelling reform between 1551 and 1570. In the latter half of the sixteenth century two groups of projects were represented by outstanding figures: William Bullokar(*A Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech* of 1580, *Aesop's Fables*, 1584, *English Grammar*, 1586) and Richard Mulcaster(*The first Part of the Elementarie Which Entreateth Chefelie of the Right Writing of Our English Tung* of 1582). In the 16th century the question of orthography or “right writing” as Mulcaster called it was a matter of great importance and the subject of much discussion especially in schools. Edmond Coote a schoolmaster published *The English Schoole-Maister* in 1596. It was like a textbook and it evidently filled a need. It ran to over 40 editions and was still being printed in the early 18th century.

The variability of English spelling was an important part of the instability that people felt characterized the English language in the 16th century especially as compared with a language like Latin. To many it seemed that English spelling was chaotic. At this early period several other more or less learned works advocating comprehensive reform were published by statesmen and scholars like John Hart(*An Orthographie*, 1569, *A Methode to Read English*, 1570); Dr. Alexander Gill (*Logonomia Anglica* 1621) and Charles Butler (*English Grammar*, 1634). But nothing came out of these attempts very largely because the proposals made were too radical involving the introduction of many new characters or of numerous diacritical marks.
3.2.1 Robert Orm (fl. c. 1200)

Robert Orm is considered to be the pioneer in English spelling reforms. He was a versifier and an Augustinian monk. Orm (or Orm to use his own spelling) who flourished about the year 1200 A.D wrote a long poem called *Ormulum* which consists of versified homilies on stories in the four gospels. The orthography of Orm, preserved in a holograph manuscript written around 1200 (*The Ormulum*) is the earliest remaining example of English spelling reform. His orthographical rules are of more interest today than the poem itself. The chief one was of doubling the consonant and using accent marks to show that a preceding vowel in a closed syllable was short, and (more rarely) to indicate the length of certain vowels in ambiguous positions or according to their derivations in Old English. Orms’ views on the importance of ‘correct’ spellings are expressed in the following poem by Orm. An explanation of these lines written in the Medieval English script follows:

Annd whase wilen shall þiss boc efft ðöerrisiþe
writenn,
Himm bidde icc, þatt het write rihht, swassum þiss boc
himn tæcheþþ
All þwertut, afterr þatt itt iss uppo þiss firstte bisne,
Wiþþ all swillc rime, als her iss sett, wiþþ allse fele
wordes,
Annd tatt he loke wel, þatt he an bocstaff write
twizzess,
Ezzwaer þaer itt uppo þiss boc iss writenn ðøat wise.
Loke he wel þatt het write swa, forr he ne mazz noht
elless
Onn Ennglisssh writenn rihht te word; þatt wite he wel
to soþe.

(And whoso will wish to write this book over again, I command him that he write it correctly, just as this book teaches him all the way through, in the way that it is in this first example --- with all such rhymes as it is here given, and with just as many words; and that he take care that he write a letter twice, every where that it is so written in this book. Let him take care that he write so, for he may not otherwise write the word correctly in English; that he must truly know.)

Orm in Williams1975: 363
Orm’s innovations are important as a guide to medieval pronunciation and they are significant because Orm recognised the two principles that underlie the proposals of all reformers who have followed him: that consistency and the perfect correspondence of sound and symbol (the use of one symbol to represent one sound only) were the chief necessities. Orm’s doubled consonants, triple g symbols and accents are prophetic of what was to follow. In the realm of spelling he was a notable pioneer.

3.2.2 John Cheke (1514-1557)

The earliest Renaissance attempt at spelling reform was Sir John Cheke’s translations of the Gospel according to St. Matthew and St. Mark into a reformed English alphabet. It was a modest reform, at best, consisting of only doubling long vowels, plus one or two other minor changes. Cheke employed only Latin letters, using, among other devices, geminate vowels to show quantity and geminate consonants to show a preceding short vowel. He used English equivalents for classical terms whenever he could. For example, he used crossed for crucified and gainrising for resurrection. Cheke was a humanist and he was of the opinion that, English should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangeled with borrowing of other tongues. His ideas grew out of his reflections on the correct pronunciation of ancient Greek. His ideas were unacceptable by most scholars, as they did not seem to be well thought out. Although inconsistent in the employment of his orthography Cheke attempted to devise a phonetic transcription system which, however, failed to generate much interest among other academicians.

3.2.3 Sir Thomas Smith (1514 – 1577)

The introduction of printing was quite a major event in the history of English language and literature. Printing in fact is one of the reasons for a number of discrepancies between spelling and sound. It was believed that several printers added a letter or two at the end of the lines to make it regular and even and perhaps also for monetary gains as they were paid by the letter in those days. Several printers were of foreign origin hence it was believed that these printers introduced a few changes in the orthography of English.
William Caxton (1422-1491) an English businessman intrigued by the development of printing set up his own publishing house and in 1475 published *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy*. So rather ironically the oldest publication in English was not printed in England but in Flanders which was his adopted city. He set up the first printing press (a wooden press) in England in 1476. He deliberately adopted certain spellings (not always advisedly) in the interest of consistency and uniformity. About a century after the introduction of printing the spelling reformers began to get busy. It was in 1568 when Shakespeare was only four that the first of a series of discourses on spelling was published— a book in Latin called *De recta & emendata Lingvæ Anglicæ Scriptione, dialogues: Thoma Smitho Equestris ordinis Anglo authore*. (Figure 3.1) consisting of a dialogue between the secretary of state to Queen Elizabeth, Sir Thomas Smith and a youth called Quintus. In answer to various questions and remarks of Quintus, Sir Thomas held forth upon the absurdities and inconsistencies of English spellings. The outcome of it all was that Sir Thomas proposed an extended set of symbols which he called *Alphabctum Anglicum*. This alphabet which consists of thirty-four characters generated a lot of interest because of the diacritical marks like accents and other signs that were employed.

Sir Thomas Smith was a diplomat, lawyer, and influential academic and an ardent spelling reformer. Like Orm and all other reformers who followed him he wanted to leave no doubt about the length of the vowels. For this purpose he relied not on the doubling of consonants but on accents. According to Vallins,

Smith was not a highly scientific phonetician. He over-simplified his vowels taking little account of diphthongal sounds, and occasionally like many reformers after him seemed to hesitate between a conventional and a phonetic spelling.

Vallins 1973: 93

The invention of new letters is of considerable importance to phoneticians and spelling reformers. In 1568 Smith published *Dialogue Concerning the Correct and Amended Writing of the English Language*, in which he suggested changes in the orthography. In his spelling reforms, he suggested that the length of the
vowels should be shown not by the doubling of consonants, but by the use of accents. He increased the letters in the alphabet to 34 letters and marked the long vowels. His alphabet consisted of a few new consonant symbols: voiceless \( \text{th} - /\theta/ \) as in thank and voiced \( \text{th} - /\delta/ \) as in then. He introduced a special new character for \( \text{v} \) and \( \text{u} \), a rather awkward looking sign like an inverted \( \text{A} \). He suggested that the letter \( \text{c} \) should stand only for \( \text{ch} \) as in church; consequently \( \text{c} \) should never be used for /\ls/ or /\kl/ sounds as in city - /\lsi/ and cart - /\k\l\t/. He tried to oversimplify the vowels and took little account of diphthongal sounds. Like many reformers after him he seemed to hesitate between a conventional and a phonetic spelling. He fulminated against ‘silent’ letters and complained that the same sounds have different spellings and different sounds are spelled with the same letters. He believed that only a reformed alphabet with additional characters could bring the system to the ideal of a phonetic system. Smith’s reform did not win much favour. His work moreover was in Latin and this further limited its chance of popular influence.

Given below are specimen words from Thomas Smith’s book *Dialogue Concerning the Correct and Amended Writing of the English Language*, Paris 1568. From this illustration it becomes obvious that Smith has produced a new letter for the consonants letter \( \text{v} \) in the word *five*. He has also used the Anglo – Saxon \( \text{z} \) for the consonant letter \( \text{j} \).

\[
\begin{align*}
pip & \quad \text{bad} & \quad \text{get} & \quad \text{get} & \quad \text{bi-d} \\
\text{a) pith} & \quad \text{b) bathe} & \quad \text{c) get} & \quad \text{d) jet} & \quad \text{e) bide}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
dis & \quad \text{ceri} & \quad \text{fi-v} \\
\text{f) dish} & \quad \text{g) cherry} & \quad \text{h) five}
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 3.1. Specimen words in the extended alphabet of Sir Thomas Smith.
(Danielsson 1963 : 216)
3.2.4  John Hart (†1574)

Smith’s *Dialogue* was followed in the next year (1569) by a treatise in English on English orthography, by John Hart. It had an attractive title *An Orthographie conteyning the due order and reason, howe to write or paint thimage of mannes voice, most like to the life or nature*. Hart is regarded as the most important phonetician in 16th century England. His aim was an International Phonetic Alphabet which would make it easier for English speakers to read their mother tongue, for dialect speakers to acquire the standard and for anyone to learn a foreign language. He found English spellings deficient in many ways. In his *Orthographie* he began as Smith did and most spelling reformers have done after him, with a condemnation of the English spelling system.

He wrote,

> But in the moderne and present maner of writing (aswell of certaine other languages as of our English) there is such confusion and disorder, as it may be accounted rather a kind of ciphring, or such a darke kinde of writing ...

Hart in Vallins 1973:24

Though Hart’s proposal was the most consistent effort, it was too radical to be accepted. In *An Orthographie* elaborated in the following year in *A method or Comfortable Beginning for all Unlearned, Whereby They May bee Taught to Read English* (1570) Hart made use of new characters for *ch, sh, th*, etc, but his system was not accepted. He believed that the English orthography should ideally be simple, easy and phonetic and should represent as accurately as possible by means of letters or symbols, the sounds of the spoken language. The orthography should be one in which the pronunciation of the letters and the spelling of the word should have one to one correspondence i.e.; there should be as many letters as there are sounds. The more phonetic a letter is the better it will serve its purpose. According to him, the most ‘perfect’ phonetic system would be to regulate its spelling with the most frequent pronunciation to indicate strong and weak stress (in exceptional cases) by acute and grave accent marks and to indicate length by the circumflex.
An Orthography.

The vowel might be doubled to indicate length, a single consonant might be written after a strongly stressed vowel, and a double consonant might be written after a weakly stressed vowel. But spelling should still be regulated in accordance with the most frequent pronunciation.

According to Hart,

Hart 1551: 169-187
3.2.4.1 Hart’s phonetic system of 1551

The introduction of *The Unreasonable Writing of Our Inglish Young* (1551) provides us with the first truly scientific discussion of English spelling, and Hart’s arguments are still valid. Hart points out the twofold object of spelling:

> To make language serve as a means of communication both in print and writing and to indicate how words are to be pronounced.

Hart 1551:14

Hart wanted the name of each letter to correspond to its sound; the letter i for instance should be called /i/. He was particularly critical about etymological spellings, the insufficient number of graphemes, and the writing of letters (in some words) that had no equivalent pronunciation. He did not approve of unnecessary distinctions in the writing of homophones, where the context should be enough to prevent misunderstandings (as it did in spoken discourse). Hart believed that the number of graphemes should be enlarged but objected to the use of digraphs for single phonemes. He therefore argued that the digraphs ai, ei, ea, ee, eo, oo and the use of final -e to mark the preceding vowel as long ought to be avoided. However the use of digraphs to represent diphthongs was considered legitimate, for example, time for /taim/. Hart made no use of the letters c, q, nor of y and w, since he classified /j/ and /w/ as vowels. He used a system of dots and accents to indicate the length and quality of vowels and devised new symbols for certain consonant sounds. He was very critical of the use of superfluous letters. His plan was:

> To frame our commune writen hand (used of the best writers and secretaries) in souch a just uniformite, as it mought be easili prynted, hable to be swiftly writen, and the same kind onli used universalli over the realme.

Hart 1551: 183
According to Hart the shortcomings of the English orthography are as follows:

1. There are 44 phonemes in English but only 26 letters in the Roman alphabet.

2. There is no correspondence between the sounds and the letters used to represent those sounds. Thus the letter c in cat and cease are pronounced differently. On the other hand the sound /k/ is represented by the letter k as well as c as in keep and medical respectively.

3. To know the pronunciation of certain words, one has to look at the end of the word, for example, pin = /pin/ but pine = /pain/, tap = /tæp/ but tape = /teɪp/. The addition of the letter e makes a lot of difference to the way in which a word is pronounced.

According to Hart,

A writing may be corrupted by misplacing of letters and that most in the final syllables ending in r or l, aspired in pronunciation, here we write the e after we pronounce it before or no e is sounded as in trifle and buckle.

Hart 1551:121

4. Several sounds are not represented properly as there are fewer letters. To combat this, digraphs like ch, sh, ee are used. John Hart argued that an inconsistent orthography brings confusion and uncertainty in the reading. He criticized among others things, the use of superfluous letters, as in stoppe (where stop would do), and additions made by etymologists such as b in doubt, g in eight, l in soldiers and o in people. According to Hart,

A writing may be corrupted foure wayes. The first is by diminution.
The seconde by superfluitie, and that three wayes, videlicet, for time, deriuation, and difference.
The third is by vsurpation of one letter for another.
And the fourth and last, is by misplacing and disordering of them.

Hart 1551: 47-54
By diminution he meant that when an alphabet has inadequate symbols to represent certain sounds the writer is forced to use the same symbol for two or more sounds, thus a vowel can represent two or more different sounds and the same with consonants. According to him the vowel letters of English are hopelessly inadequate to express the various sounds that they stand for. Each of the vowel letters represent more than one sound and this is one of the major causes for spelling errors among learners of English.

By superfluities he meant letters which are not pronounced or are silent but are represented in the word e.g., the letter b in doubt. He believed that it was not necessary except to fill up the paper with writing and thus enable the printers to make profits. He suggested that the silent letters in certain words should be removed and that would also include certain vowels like the silent e which was not necessary.

Hart wrote that the third vice of English orthographie was the usurpation of one letter for another e.g., give and gentle in which the letter g is pronounced as /ɡ/ and /ʤ/ respectively. He wrote.

Is there any knowledge in the writing to give a man to understand when to sound the g as we use it before e and l and when as before a, o and u?

Hart 1551: 116

It is these corruptions that he sets out to abolish by certain reforms of his own. Hart’s Orthographie (1569) is the mature result of nearly twenty years of devoted study of all the problems connected with the reformation of English spelling. He propagated a strictly phonetic alphabet. The aim of his treatise was: to enable native speakers to read and write with ease, to make it easier for non-native learners to learn English and to save time and cost. Hart made it quite clear that he had devised his new orthography to serve both as a reformed spelling of English and as a general phonetic alphabet, not only to be read easily but also to write cursively and to be printed.
3.2.4.2  Hart's phonetic system of 1570

Hart's *Method* introduces certain changes in the phonetic alphabet mainly simplifications. Hart gives up the acute accent marks to indicate shortness. The subscript dot still indicates length when there is more than one syllable and the consonant that follows is doubled to show a short vowel unless the vowel is followed by two different consonants. He wrote,

In monosyllabic words without a subscript dot the vowel is short; when there is more than one syllable, the following consonant is doubled to show a short vowel unless the vowel is followed by two different consonants.

Hart 1570: 2b & II a

He did not use any special sign for the consonant letter *l* aspirated (syllabic). Hart assigned to the letters virtually the same values that they have in modern phonetic transcriptions. The consonants are treated in the same way as the vowels. The voiced and voiceless pairs of consonants are described in detail. He rejects from his alphabet the letters *c, j, q, r* in the final position *long s, w, x* (except as an abbreviation of *ten*) and *w*. The sounds */j* and */w/* are written as *i* and *u* because they are regarded as vowels. Hart's phonetic alphabet consisted of twenty-five symbols: five vowels *a, e, i, o, u* (long and short; a subscript dot indicated length) and twenty consonants: 11 voiced consonants *b, v, g, dʒ, d, z, l, m, n, ð and r*, and; nine voiceless consonants *p, t, k, ts, f, s, h, p* and *f*. He also mentions thirteen rising and three falling diphthongs. He also used five triphthongs (*eau, ieu, uau, uei, and uoa*). In his phonetic transcription of 1569, Hart had refused to use capital letters on the grounds that though different in form from small letters they represent the same sounds. In place he puts a slanting line before the word. But now (1570) capital letters were used. Hart had stressed in his *Method* that it was necessary for the common people to first learn to read before they should learn to write. He was convinced that when all the people saw his proposals for spelling reform and how easy it was to read and
write in the new orthography they would learn to read and write and use it in preference to the existing orthography.

3.2.5 William Bullokar - (1530-1609)

William Bullokar was a schoolmaster and grammarian. He wrote and published in 1580 his own book on spelling reform. It was called *Bullokar's Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech: Wherein, a Most Perfect Supplie is Made, for the Wantes and Double Sounde of Letters in the Olde Orthographie, with Examples for the Same, with the Easie Conference and Vse of Both Orthographies* (fig 3.2). In this book he opposed the introduction of new graphemes as proposed by Hart. He believed that his proposed spelling reforms would be more acceptable as he did not propose the introduction of any new letters. The following is a short extract from the doggerel verse *Prologue* in which Bullokar comments on his proposals for a spelling reform:

Yet doth not this new work of mine, make strange the old to know,  
But that the same conferd may be, to saue charge that might grow.  
For no new letter is brought in, nor any old left out,  
The double sounded haue a strike, to put you out of doubt.

Bullokar 1580:27

He is troubled by that basic defect which troubles many people, “the want of concord in the eye, vouce and eare” (Bullokar 1580:111). Bullokar agreed with all the spelling reformers that reform was necessary, but he could not agree with their methods. He believed that their works were not accepted because there was too much of a difference between the new and the old orthography. Bullokar concentrated on following the figures of the old and used them as much as possible. His new alphabet has several interesting characteristics though it is by no means simple and straightforward as Bullokar makes it out to be. In fact the system that he proposed was also quite complicated. Realising the importance of the “conference of old and new” (Bullokar 1589: 29) he resolved to use only the existing alphabet (that is our modern alphabet) minus the symbols j and v.
that vowels: a, e, i, y, o, u, w, y: are two sounds: except: a, e, i, y: be double thus: as, ee, iy, iy: or that on of that: accent point: " : : be set over: a: e: y: o: so then be that of longer sound, wyth thus: a: a: a: a: and so of the rest: so help in equiocy.


And that, e, w, v, w: are two sounds: ad to that: w: and also the half vowels: e, u, i, e: of longer sound, then any vowel of short sound.

When two vowels (or half vowels) come together in on syllable, they are called a diphthong: then of their be in number: bi, ai, au, ei, ou, ow, oy: ad in har-ynowe: ni: seldom in be.

So ading that feint mixt sound: (called diphthong:) be for two: wyth this: then in English speech: ly, iy, erin: this sound: in vowel: under than in: English word: and syllable: are founded and spoke: ad in har-ynowe: the rar diphthong: oy.

That diphthong: has pair: in sound: and then be as other diphthong: but they have the sound of on of the vowels: be for said: at which half be wyth to together in sharp next under: but for the tym in al that, every diphthong is of a long tym 02 longer: then any long vowel: ad har-ynowe that half vowel: may mak a diphthong after a, o2 o, e: ad pair to the syllable: in their sharz following.

And har-ynowe to be noted: that for learning: there is & hat be a Pamphlet imprinted: containing briefly the effect of this book: scrutiny also for conference with the old orthography hereafter.

Figure 3.3. The use of black letter font for an extended alphabet. A page (enlarged) from Bullokar’s Booke at large for the Amendment of Orthographie for English speech, London 1580 (Daniellson 1963:217)

Black letter fonts originally contained numerous abbreviations and contractions used for printing Latin but not employed in English. William Bullokar made black letter font and not Roman the basis of his new system; he was thus able to draw extensively on these disused sorts for new letters. He consulted his printer constantly an abandoned several innovations on his advice. He believed that if the printer and workmen are English they can help the reformer in fulfilling his aims.

89
Bullokar’s problem was to assign to each sound its own symbol without increasing the number of characters in the alphabet; and this he proposed to solve by using what he called marks, strikes and accents. Moreover he anticipated modern phonetic methods of teaching by relating symbol and sound. The vowels have various marks to indicate their length and quality. He invented a few special characters but made liberal use of accents, apostrophes and numerous hooks above and below the letters, both vowels and consonants. For the necessary distinctions of the 44 sounds he used several ligatures—ee = æ and certain combinations with h for ph, th, ch, wh, sh. For ph he has a character that seems to combine the features of f and p; this is also used where normal spelling has f, e.g., half. Syllabic l, m, n, r and s he calls half-vowels and uses diacritics to distinguish them from the straightforward consonant l. Thus the letter l has a turn near the top of it for the sound as in in able, m has a strike over it for the sound in bottom, n has an accent over it for the sound as in button and r too has an accent over it for the sound as in entering (though in practice he uses er in preference to the accented r, as he says, they are ‘sounded’ the same). He however could not seem to be able to free himself from traditional spelling and rendering all the phonemic and allophonic distinctions. His own alphabet differs from it only in the use of what we call diacritics. He believed that spelling reform was necessary and the sooner it was implemented the better it would be for everyone especially the younger generation.

Bullokar’s remark on superfluous letters is interesting. He is hard upon the mute e especially after a doubled or double consonant, or in general it is not used to give length to a preceding vowel. So he says that the sentence ‘I shotte at a butte and hit the pinne, and fell flatte upon the bottome of a tubbe’ should be written ‘I shot at a but, and hit the pin and fell flat upon the botom of a tub’. (Bullokar 1589:73) His amended sentence anticipates modern spelling—the final e was already beginning to disappear in Bullokar’s time. But it also illustrates some of the inconsistencies with double consonants that remain to plague us still. Not unnaturally he can see no use for the o in people, the i in priest, or the u in guide. He was against etymological spelling. There should be, he says, no b in doubt and debt. It is an ironical fact that, though many writers in that eminently
classical and academic age agreed with him and wrote such words phonetically, the silent b and g is still with us. At the end of this book, Bullokar disarmingly and frankly admits that his system may seem peculiar to the reader. He also hastens to add that it is certainly an improvement on the existing one.

Though these figures unto your sight at first seem strange, Ye may soon find by little heed, they do no far away range From the old use orthography, great gain is in the change.

Bullokar 1580: 99

3.2.6 Richard Mulcaster (1530-1611)

Richard Mulcaster was a scholar, schoolmaster, headmaster, author, liberal educational theorist and poet Spencer’s Headmaster at school. In 1582 he wrote The first Part of the Elementarie Which Entreath Chiefly of the Right Writing of our English Tongue, a disposition on language and grammar generally, in the first part of which he “entreated chefitie of the right writing of our English tung”, which he said, was “yet in question”. It was an influential book on the teaching of reading and writing. It was one of the most significant works on English language. It took an innovative stand on reforms in spelling. It issued the first call for a comprehensive dictionary of English and defended the right of borrowed words from other languages to be a part of the English language and exhibited unlimited pride in English. He was against spelling reform in the sense that he rejected wholesale reform as unnecessary and impractical. He however encouraged the adoption of certain of the variant spellings then in use in preference to others and devoted the last fifty-five pages of his book to an alphabetical list of recommended spellings. His book was a learned work for the instruction of teachers.

His Elementarie (1582) is the most extensive and the most important treatise on English spellings in the 16th century. Mulcaster was quite moderate. He saw the futility of trying to make English spelling phonetic in the scientific sense. He did not believe that the faults of English spelling were so desperate that they could be removed only by desperate remedies. The way to correct an existing difficulty
was not to substitute it with a new and greater one. This seemed to him to be the effect of all those proposals that took into consideration only the sound of words. He did not think that spellings could ever perfectly represent sound. The differences between one sound and another were often too subtle.

It was inevitable that he thought that the same letter must sometimes be used for different sounds but this was no worse than to use the same word as we often do in very different senses. Another difficulty that he saw was that pronunciation constantly changes. These were his theoretical reasons for refusing to go along with the spelling reformers. His practical reason was that their system was too cumbersome ever to be accepted. The basis of his reform therefore was custom or usage. This he defines not as the practice of the ignorant but that “wherein the skilful and best learned do gree”. In making usage his point of departure he does not ignore sounds. He merely insists that they should not be given an undue share of attention. He believed that common sense must be used and defects in the existing system must be removed and not substituted by new ones. He thought that ease and convenience in writing should be considered for popular approval as it is the final authority. Only a general goodness, not perfection in each detail can be expected. No set of rules can cover all points; some things must be left to observation and daily practice.

He wanted to get rid of superfluous letters. According to him, there was no use in writing *putt, grubb* and *ledd* for *put, grub* and *led* respectively. On the other hand necessary letters such as the *t* in *fetch* or *scratch* must not be omitted. He allows double consonants only where they belong to separate syllables for example the letter *n* in *(win-ning)* and almost never at the end of a word except in the case of double *l* as in *tall*. Words ending in *ss* he wrote as *sse* (*glass = glasse*, *confess = confesse*) otherwise final –*e* was used regularly to indicate a preceding long vowel, distinguishing *made* from *mad*, *stripe* from *strip* and at the end of words ending in the sound of *v* or *z* (*deceive, love, wise*). An *e* is added to words that end in a lightly pronounced /î/: *daie, mai, trewlie safetie* for *die, my, truly and safety* respectively; but when the letter *i* is sounded ‘loud and sharp’ like /ai/it is spelled with a *y*, as in *deny, cry, defy*. Analogy or as he calls
it “proportion” plays a justly important part or role in his system. According to Mulcaster since we write hear, we should therefore write fear and dear. This principle he admits is subject to exception that must be made in difference to “prerogative” that is the right of the language to continue a common custom as in employing an analogous spelling for where, here and there. He was really more interested in having everyone adopt the same spelling for a given word than he was in phonetic consistency. It is not so much a question of whether one should write where as that one should adopt a single spelling and use it regularly instead of writing where, wher, whear, wheare, were, whair etc.

Mulcaster was no sudden rash and sudden reformer. He began with an allegorical and thoroughly sound argument about the progress of spelling up to his own day and indeed- as things have turned out - up to ours. He had a comprehensive plan on change and reforms in spellings, however he didn’t see any urgent need for it as he felt that learners of the language could cope with the ambiguous nature of the spellings. In his opinion there was no harm in using one and the same symbol to represent several sounds if there was a good reason for doing so and if it could be done without causing undue confusion. He further held that one ought to be contented with the old familiar letters and combinations of letters and objected strongly to the introduction of any new characters into the language. Mulcaster was not entirely opposed to reform, but he thought that the natural method of amending spellings was to clear away old abuses and not to devise a new, wholly untried orthographical system. Mulcaster saw clearly that two important reasons which could be obstacles to drastic reform were firstly pronunciation was not uniform over those areas where the language is spoken and secondly, pronunciation is not static, but is ever changing. Mulcaster therefore recommended no change in the letters or characters, as he called them.

His Positions describes his suggestions for spelling reforms and his views on educational reform. Mulcaster’s work on spelling reforms was important as the spellings he tried in his book had great impact on present English. Each word was given one spelling, used consistently, and this was the one that was passed on to present English (with a few exceptions e.g. u/v, i/j). He recognised the
principle of consistency, but he wished to avoid any violent disruption of the traditional spelling. Hence he made only recommendations and statements of spelling facts. These are important partly because they amount to the first survey of rules of English spelling and partly because many of them were taken up by school masters and more importantly by printers and so became part of our spelling convention. In the latter part of his book *The Elementarie*, he printed a general table giving the recommended spellings for some 7000 of the most common words. Some of the comments he had to make in *The Elementarie* are as follows:

1. It would be better to use the silent e before r in the final position as in letter and rather than as in metre.
2. None of the consonants are to be doubled except where they appear in bi-syllabic words where the second of the doubled consonant begins that syllable as in bud-ding, begin-ning.
3. The letter f should replace Greek ph, e.g., philosophy = filosofie.
4. The letter s should not be used instead of z where the word is pronounced with a z sound.
5. The digraph ch is a foreign ending. Hence words which end with ch should have k instead. For example, stomak not stomach and monark not monarch.
6. The silent b in the word lamb should be dropped.

During the first half of the next century, the tendency towards uniformity increased steadily. The fixation of English spellings is associated with, in most people's minds the name of Dr. Johnson and a statement in the preface of his dictionary published in 1755 might lend colour to the idea. In reality however our spellings in its modern form had been practically established by about 1650. There was a trend towards uniformity towards the late 17th century. However there were many divergent views regarding reforms in spellings. The conservative view was to accept inconsistencies for the sake of stability. The radical view was that spellings should be brought in line with pronunciation. However the proposals of the reformers who proposed radical reforms were not accepted by the conservative British.
Reformers are confronted with several issues regarding reforms in spellings. Some of them are as to whether the Roman alphabet should be continued or whether there should be new characters.

Other questions which need to be addressed are as follows:

- Are diacritics the solution?
- Can a compromise be reached on alphabetic principle to retain, as much as possible or to retain the traditional orthography, should there be a complete breakup with the old system?
- Whose interests should be considered among English speakers, children, foreigners or skilled readers/writers of English who do a great deal of reading/writing etc?

3.2.7 Alexander Gill (1564 – 1635)

Alexander Gill was a notable reformer and schoolmaster of the poet Milton. In the 1621 edition of his book on the Grammar of English *Logonomia Anglica*, he propounded certain reforms and devised a modified alphabetical system. He tried to use a consistent phonemic spelling for the passages quoted in English, adding letters from other alphabets. He also used red ink to change existing letters, as the system required in every copy printed. He adopted a phonetic alphabet to elucidate the pronunciation of English words.

In his second edition, he used digraphs and dieresis for vowel length as he found the earlier system too time consuming. He also criticized the use of silent letters. Though Gill’s system was meant to be phonemic it was quite inconsistent due to etymological spellings, the distinction made between homophones and certain spellings taken from the traditional orthography. He believed that any reform must be based on the Received Standard Language, the common speech of educated men. Gill preferred to pronounce the letter l in *folk* and *fault*. He believed that orthography should follow the sounds of the spoken word, but allowed four considerations to soften the harshness of this rule: They were as follows: derivation, difference of meaning, accepted usage and dialect
Räzing mj hōps on hizl of hij dezjr,  
Thinking tu skäl ëc hēvn of hir hart,  
Mj slender mënz prizvm’d tu hj a part.  
Her thunder of diddair forst mj retjr,  
And thrv mj doun, &c.

Hvg ëc of forōu, and tempestus grīf,  
Whērin mj fībl bark iz triced long,  
Far from de hōped hāvn of relict:  
Whj du ëj krvel bīlōz bēt so strong,  
And ëj moist mountainz ěch on oðer throng.  
Thrēting tu swalōu up mj fērsul līf?  
O du ëj krvel wrath and spītsul wroōg  
At length alai, and stīn ëj stōrmī strīf,  
Which in ëz trubled bouelz raizn and rāgeth rīf.  
For els mj fībl vesel, krāž’d and krākt,  
Kanot endvr, &c.

Figure 3.4. Lines from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* in the alphabet used by Gill in his *Logonomia Anglica* - A passage from the 1st edition (Daniellson 1963:223)

Raizgy my hōps on hizl of hijdezjr,  
Tinkgy tu skāl ëc hēvn of hir hart,  
Mj slender menz prizvm’d tu hj a part.  
Her bunders of diddair forst mj retjr,  
And thrv mj doun, &c.

Hvgse of forōu, and tempestus grīf,  
Werin mj fībl bark iz triced long,  
Far from de hōped hāvn of relict:  
Whj du ëj krvel bīlōz bēt so strong,  
And ëj moist mountainz ěch on oðer throng,  
Thrēging tu swalōu up mj fērsul līf?  
O du ëj krvel wrath and spītsul wroōg  
At length alai, and stīn ëj stōrmī strīf,  
Which in ëz trubled bouelz raizn and rāgeth rīf.  
For els mj fībl vesel, krāž’d and krākt,  
Kanot endvr, &c.

Figure 3.5. The same pasage from the 2nd edition (Daniellson 1963:223)
Gill believed that it was better to retain words of Latin origin rather than words of French origin. Thus he suggests that the words *physique, logique, favour, honour* etc are to be written as *physic, logic, favor, and honor* respectively. He believed that a new method was necessary, one not so much adapted to Latin as to the logic of our ‘own’ tongue.

3.2.8 John Wilkins (1614-1672)

About eight years after the Restoration the next notable treatise on grammar and orthography appeared. This was *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* by Bishop John Wilkins. He tried to develop a logical alternative to English which would do away with all irregularities. It was one of the first attempts at a universal language. He used peculiar symbols to represent ideas (not sounds) in his essay and distinguished between voiced and voiceless sounds. Wilkins complained that the order of the alphabet was unscientific and irrational and confused, the vowels being huddled together without any distinction and that it has both deficiencies and redundancies. He wrote,

> For the ways used by us English for lengthening and abbreviating vowels, viz. By adding *E* quiescent to the end of a word for prolonging a syllable, and doubling the following consonant for the shortening of a vowel as *Ware; Warr*, or else inserting some other vowel for lengthening it as in *Meat, Met; Read, Red* etc. both these are upon this account improper because the sign ought to be where the sound is.

Tucker 1961:48

He also believed that it was improper for the letters *c, s* and *k* to be used alike very often to denote the same sound and the use of the letter *s* for *z*. He criticized the existing orthography because it was irrational especially as some letters of the same name and shape are used sometimes for vowels, and sometimes for consonants; as *j, v, w, y*. He criticized the practice of adding silent *e* to the end of a word for prolonging the syllable and doubling the following consonant for the shortening of a vowel or else inserting some other vowel for the lengthening of it and for the ways used for lengthening and abbreviating vowels. He found all
these features improper because “the sign ought to be where the sign is”. He grumbled because many sounds can be represented in several ways and believed that all these were defects in the orthography and called for reform. At the end however he is forced to confess that “so invincible is custom, that still we retain the same errors and incongruitities in writing which our forefathers taught us.” (Tucker 1961:50)

 Yi bili in God the father allmighty maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only wise Lord, has suffered by the holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, he third day rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, heer he sitteth at the right hand of God the father, from hence he shall come to deth with power and great glory. Yi bili in the beld Ghost, the beld catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and lyst everlasting. Amen.

Figure 3.6. The phonetic alphabet of John Wilkins. From An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language. (Daniellson 1963:216)

3.2.9 Charles Butler (1750-1832)

Charles Butler, a Vicar, published The English Grammar or the Institution of Letters, Syllables, and Words in the English Tong in 1634. He set forth various suggestions for the reform of spelling. He printed his books according to his own scheme. Butler went back to the very beginning of things. He felt that Hebrew for reasons of antiquity must have preference. He believed that English being of such dignity and antiquity deserves to be well written; Butler’s system has been devised for that purpose and that end. It has many points of interest. Butler is particularly keen on the single character, or the ligature, for the existing double or doubled symbols. Thus, he has double e and double o in the form of ligatures for ee and oo as in need and moon respectively. He is completely unphonetic however, and these ligatures are used not only for the long but also for short
sounds; e.g. creple and cripple. He could not free himself from the traditional spelling. He recommends single characters for the combinative symbols ch, gh, ph, sh, th, wh; all these characters consist of a letter or symbol with a short horizontal mark across it. But it is clear that Butler had no strict and phonetic approach. In short Butler’s system had the same shortcomings as that he set out to reform: there is no unambiguous correspondence between sound and symbol. The mute e worried him. He believed that it was necessary because it is used to make the vowels long. But it would help the learners if there were two different characters to show the difference between the silent and the sounded e. He was impatient of other superfluous letters. He felt that c before k as in back and lack was superfluous. They would be better written with k alone as in lak and lik instead of as in lack and lick respectively.

In Butlers’ script q is never followed by u. Sometimes his arguments appeared to be odd and unsound. As an example the letter h is named ‘aitch’. In most words it has a /h/ sound as in hat and heat. He kept the b silent in debt. He did not distinguish between s in unless and sound and z in as and letters. He recommends that for uniformity’s sake there should be no u after g to harden it as in rogue or e after g only to soften it as in age. Butler uses the term diphthong not in the modern technical sense but as the equivalent of a digraph. His own definition of a digraph is “a single sound of two vowels together”. According to him there are eleven diphthongs, ai, au, ea, ei, eo, eu, ie, oa, oi, ou and ui. These combinative spellings he has borrowed from traditional usage; he makes no real attempt to phonetise them in accordance with a system of his own.

He has an interesting and revealing comment on the letters ou. According to him if ou is a diphthong and is used in words like loud, proud etc, it should not be used in words like bloud, floud and scourage. The first two words reveal an interesting aspect of the spelling of the words in the olden days as the doubling of the letter o was substituted by the diphthong ou. According to Butler this is one of the causes of difficulty and uncertainty in the orthography.
(English, orthography, which, though)

Figure 3.7. Specimen words (English, orthographie, which, though) in the extended alphabet used by Charles Butler in his English Grammar. (Daniellson 1963:221)

3.2.10 Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709 – 1784)
Dr. Samuel Johnson was considered to be one of the best writers of his time. One of his most famous publications was The Dictionary of the English Language. He worked on it from 1747 to 1755. He published the dictionary in 1755 and set down the already established spellings of words. He lamented the state that English orthography had got itself into by pointing out the inconsistency of words like deceit and receipt etc. but felt that it would be hopeless to attempt reform concluding in his preface that “to change all would be too much, and to change one is nothing”. In his preface to the Dictionary of the English Language, he wrote,

\[Th 9440\]

In adjusting the orthography, which has to this time been unsettled and fortuitous, I found it necessary to distinguish those irregularities that our inherent in our tongue, and perhaps coeval with it, from others which the ignorance or negligence of the later writers has produced.

Johnson quoted in Greene 1984:308

He published a pronunciation dictionary in 1764 in which he made use of italics and block letter characters in addition to diacritics. In Johnson on Language-An introduction by A.D. Horgan, Johnson’s plan of an English dictionary has been described. According to Johnson, there are two difficulties or rather issues which need to be considered while planning such an activity.
Firstly, common spellings often seem contrary to reason and secondly, writers of authority do not agree with one another. The great orthographical contest has long existed between etymology and pronunciation. His suggestion was that men should write as they speak, but this conformity was attained in very few languages. Johnson believed that, spelling should be either a visual sign of contemporary speech or should continue in a form which reflects an earlier stage of the historical process of development, where the written characters mirror a different pronunciation. Rigid adherence to either principle would be intolerable for if current orthography was to be re-organised upon a purely phonetic principle, then the spelling of many words would depart so greatly from their current form as to make them unrecognisable. This would also be the case if words were spelled according to their (real or supposed) etymology. According to Johnson, when a question of orthography is dubious that practice has in his opinion a claim to preference which preserves the greatest number of radical letters or seems most to comply with the general customs of English. But the chief rule which he proposed to follow was to make no innovation without any reason sufficient to balance the inconveniences of change and such reasons he did not expect to find often.

3.2.11 Sir Isaac Pitman (1813-1897)
Sir Issac Pitman was a teacher, headmaster, educational reformer, businessman and inventor of the Pitman Shorthand System. He was one of the early pioneers of spelling reform. His desire to reform the printed orthography sprang from his experiences as a schoolmaster, and from a deep interest and concern for all matters of social and educational progress. He gave to the world a system of shorthand writing to facilitate rapid transcription of spoken language. It used 38 symbols to represent the sounds of vowels and consonants. It was useful for business correspondence and for journalists for verbatim notes and interviews. Pitman based his system on a careful analysis of spoken English. It was very successful commercially. As a result of all this, interest in spelling reform was stimulated. Pitman used this to advantage to promote shorthand. Through his *Phonographic Journal*, he also promoted a forty-character phonetic alphabet developed in association with the British philologist Alexander Ellis. He
collaborated with the renowned scholar and phonetician Alexander Ellis, as he was aware that a new phonetic based orthography required extensive research. This alphabet was used in various journals, primers, and textbooks and in phonetic versions of such works as *The New Testament, The Pilgrim’s Progress* etc. The two reformers also organized the Phonetic Society which in 1851 numbered nearly 4,000 members. The new alphabet enjoyed great popularity at first but after a time people began to become tired of the many new letters, no less than 16 in number, that had been introduced. In the early 20th century enthusiasm for spellings was becoming quite intense. It disturbed conservative minds. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Pitman was making a very radical departure from traditional orthography and due to the near religious fervor which Pitman displayed in his reform promotions. The Phonetic Society failed to gain broad support for its proposals. His system of phonetic English spellings served as the basis for the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) devised by his grandson Sir James Pitman. He affirmed his belief in an alphabet as close to the Romance as possible. He wrote,

> The progress made in Phonetic printing with the present alphabet, will be so much positive advancement in the cause of truth, equally as though it were accomplished by means of a new alphabet; and the possibility is, that we shall progress far more by using the old letters, than we should by adopting new ones.

Pitman 1843: 133

3.2.12  Alexander Ellis (1814 – 1890)

Alexander Ellis was a phonetician, dialectologist, spelling reformer and author of *The History of English Pronunciation*. He tried to devise a system in which only the ordinary characters of the Roman alphabet were employed and in which combinations rather than separate letters were to a large extent used to denote speech sounds. He devised two systems the *Glosic* and *Dimidium or Haafway Speling*. He invented the *Glosic* a phonetic transcription system to represent fine nuances of accent and their sounds and names in the English dialects. It was used by several writers for *The English Dialect Society* in the 19th century. It soon fell
into disuse but a number of phonetic alphabets, many based on the research carried out by Ellis and Pitman have been used by linguists for similar purposes. The results of the prolonged experimenting and enthusiastic devotion by Ellis to the cause of spelling reform were not very successful. He abandoned his earlier projects and instead tried to devise a system of spelling in which only the ordinary characters of the Roman alphabet were employed and in which combinations rather than separate letters were used to a large extent to denote speech sounds. The result was *Dimidiun or Haafway Speling*. However, the general public was rather indifferent to any proposals of this kind. The following is an excerpt from Ellis’ pamphlet in *Dimidiun or Haafway Speling*:

Revolershun may bi the best solewshun, but ey doo not intend tou wurk in that direcshun eny longger. Mey paast expeeriens, whitch haz been boath grait and painfoul, wornz me tou trey anuther road. Glosic woz mey furst step in the new direcshun, and Dimidiun or Haafway Speling iz mey secund.

Ellis in Wijk 1958:19

The failure to produce a satisfactory new system of orthography to some extent atleas, could be put down to the fact that the science of linguistics was yet only in the early stage of its development. Ellis and his fellow enthusiasts however succeeded in awakening widespread interest in the question. After an international convention held at Philadelphia in 1876 the English and the American spelling reform organisations were organised to deal with the problem.

3.2.13 George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

Among the recent specimens of reform projects the greatest attention not only of linguists but also of the general public was aroused by the phonetic script completely independent of the traditional alphabet which was construed in England on the initiative of G.B. Shaw. George Bernard Shaw was a dramatist, writer, and critic (music, arts, and drama). His knowledge of phonetics and views on literacy led him to demand a rational system of spellings which would follow the sounds of English and reduce time wasted by traditional orthography. He was a strong advocate of English spelling reform. In fact when he died in 1950, he
willed part of his estate for the development of a corporation that would promote changes in English spelling. He had bequeathed a fairly large amount of money for establishing and propagating such an alphabet. Shaw believed that the traditional orthography was a waste of time for writers. He saw no future in rearranging the Roman alphabet since he felt that the results would invariably strike an ordinary reader as the work of an illiterate. He left instructions in his will for the creation of a new alphabet for English strictly on the principle of one letter for one phoneme. He expected both the existing and the new spelling systems to co-exist. His will contained the following points:

- a proposal for a public trustee to seek and publish a new proposed alphabet
- the inauguration of a ‘British Alphabet’ of at least 48 letters
- to employ a phonetic expert to transliterate his play *Androcles and the Lion* into the proposed British alphabet assuming the pronunciation used by King George V described as New English and to publicize the same

In 1958 there was an announcement of the George Bernard Shaw alphabet competition. The terms of reference: to design a new, i.e., non-Roman script for English (proposed British Alphabet). It gave competitors the opportunity to try their hand at this most difficult exercise. The alphabet designed by Kingsley Read was selected to be the Shaw Alphabet. The chosen design (fig. 3.8) had many admirable and practical features and was one-third more economical in space. Some of the features were as following:

1. The total number of letters was 48, four of which also served to denote the four most frequently used words: *the, of, and to*. An estimated 10% of space was saved by this device alone, these four words having very high frequency of occurrence.

2. Words having strong and weak forms regularly were written in their strong form, with the exception of the indefinite articles *a* and *an* whose weak form were written [ə,ən]

3. Ligatures apart, the printed script consists of disjoined letters. The development of cursive forms was discouraged and thus the use of the new
alphabet would promote legibility and greater ease and the saving of time in reading people's handwriting.

4. There was an absence of inverted commas and a minimal display of hyphens and apostrophes.

**The Shaw Alphabet for Writers**

Double lines \( \equiv \) between pairs show the relative height of Talls, Deeps, and Shorts. Wherever possible, finish letters rightwards; those starred * will be written upwards. Also see heading and footnotes overleaf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tall</th>
<th>Deep</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Short</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>peep</td>
<td>l = l</td>
<td>dib</td>
<td>if</td>
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<tr>
<td>toot</td>
<td>l = l</td>
<td>dead</td>
<td>egg</td>
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<td>kick</td>
<td>d = p</td>
<td>gag</td>
<td>ash*</td>
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<td>fce</td>
<td>l = l</td>
<td>vow</td>
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<td>church</td>
<td>z = z</td>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>ah*</td>
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<td>yea</td>
<td>l = l</td>
<td>*woe</td>
<td>are</td>
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<tr>
<td>hung</td>
<td>l = h</td>
<td>ha-ha</td>
<td>air</td>
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<td>Short</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>loll</td>
<td>c = c</td>
<td>roar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mime*</td>
<td>r = w</td>
<td>nun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.8 *The Shaw Alphabet Edition of Androcles and the Lion* (Tauber 1963:199)
The Shaw Alphabet owed much to Pitman’s shorthand and something to Arabic. It was launched in 1962 with the Penguin edition of *Androcles and the Lion* dedicated to Sir James Pitman, Sir Isaac’s grandson. Shaw, however, realized that this alphabet could not be imposed on the public and it could make its way only on merit. He proposed that it is seen and ultimately used alongside the Roman alphabet for an indefinite period until one proved the better and the other fell into disuse. *Androcles and the Lion* was published in the new script in accordance with Shaw’s wishes as expressed in his will. The special edition of *Androcles* (1962) has the Shavian and the current orthographic texts on facing pages so that the reader may notice the difference between both the systems. This was done as Shaw believed that it would prove the feasibility and desirability of reform along these lines by convincing people of the economic advantages resulting from the colossal saving of time, paper, ink, storage, transport and the rest. The possible resultant benefits to the whole English speaking world if the Shaw alphabet is implemented could be far-reaching and incalculable. This effort at spelling reform (in this case a brand new alphabet) was not taken very seriously because of economic non-feasibility and for its complete breach with European cultural and civilizational traditions.

3.2.14 Sir James Pitman (1901 – 1985)
James Pitman was a publisher, educational reformer and grandson of Sir Isaac Pitman the Victorian spelling reformer. He devised and implemented a new orthographical script called the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA). This alphabet devised by Sir James Pitman was taught experimentally in a few British schools. Its purpose was to introduce British children to reading and help people to learn and read English. This system consisted of 44 characters. The existing alphabet of 24 letters (not counting j and w) was augmented by the addition of 20 letters making forty-four in all. All the characters together covered all the distinct sounds of English to eliminate the difficulty of the lack of correspondence between sound and spelling in the existing orthography. The additional 20 letters (new non-Roman symbols) were provided for those phonic values which could not be unambiguously put down by traditional Roman characters so that every English word could be read in one way only. It was not proposed as a reformed
orthography for general use but specifically as a medium for teaching, reading and writing. This experiment was described as exciting and important and gained popularity in several English speaking countries. It looked set to gain widespread acceptance among teachers but despite achieving positive results it fell out of favour and is little used today. This system lasted only for a decade or so. In the ITA, about twenty-one characters were added to the Roman alphabet so as to have enough letters to attain a regular sound-symbol correspondence. Not all of these characters were brand new; several were formed just by linking two ordinary letters like ou to represent /au/ in how. The idea was that children would learn the basic principle of alphabetic reading and writing for the first year or so without being confused by the quirks of the traditional orthography and then they would be led gradually into standard spelling. The ITA changed the size not the shape to indicate capitals. Thus the learner had fewer shapes to learn. Pitman was convinced that this alphabet not only makes initial teaching and learning of reading much easier but that also the children who have been instructed in this way can very easily pass over to reading in traditional orthography.

3.2.15 R. E. Zachrisson's Anglic

Around 1930, Professor R.E. Zachrisson an eminent Swedish Anglicist scholar, writer and spelling reformer published several pamphlets in which he proposed a new system of orthography called Anglic or English in Easy Spelling. He not only surveyed the work that had been done in the field by others but also presented his own proposal in his book titled Anglic, An International Language in 1931. He pointed out that the chance of a spelling reform proposal being accepted would increase if the general outlook of the texts written in the new spelling does not deviate too much from what it was under the old spelling rules. This principle led Zachrisson to keep the old spelling for some very common words unchanged: as, be, by, do, has, he, I, she, the, then, their. Such exceptional spellings, the so-called 'word-signs' and their choice were decided on frequency calculations. Zachrissson thus claimed that Anglic preserved between 60 and 70 per cent of words "essentially unchanged". Zachrisson attempted a synthesis of the structural correspondence on the basic level
(phonemes – graphemes) with the correspondence on the level of spoken and written words. He was very careful when deciding which lexical units were to be selected. Zachrisson believed that,

No orthographic scheme can be adopted which does not admit of easy transition to a reading knowledge of the present conventional spelling.

Zachrisson 1931: 29

Zachrisson believed that the Anglic type of spelling might be profitably used in elementary courses in English. After some twenty lessons his students are said to acquire such a working knowledge of the elements of English that they are able to read English texts also in the traditional spelling. Zachrisson’s project could not escape one basic error which was common to it and the proposals presented by the Simplified Spelling Society: it did not pay due regard to the structural correspondences on the level of morphemes. In his specimens of Anglic (Zachrisson 1931: 62-4) he suggested that the following are to be spelled phonetically:

- the plural ending of nouns (troubles - /ˈtrʌblz/ = trublz, shocks - /ʃəks/ = shoks)
- third person present tense of verbs (comes - /ˈkʌms/ = kumz, points- /ˈpɔɪnts/ = points)
- the suffix of the verbs conceived - (/ˈkʌnˈsiːvd/ = konseevd, passed - /ˈpaːst/ = paast).

Anglic became one more chapter of the long but vain effort at the spelling reform of English, despite great propaganda devoted to it. This was attributed to the lack of functional balance, of blurring the visual image of the morphological structure and consequently depriving the written utterance of the possibility to perform one of its essential functions i.e., to speak quickly and distinctly to the eyes. This maxim led to the assertion of the principle to leave the orthography of a number of frequent words unchanged or only slightly changed so that the optical aspect of the printed context does not frighten away the average English reader. As already mentioned according to Zachrisson Anglic preserved between 60 and 70 percent of words “essentially unchanged”.

108
One important purpose in introducing *Anglic* was to make the orthography of English quite simple and rid it of all its complications. He wished to popularise English throughout the world. His intention was to use it as an instrument for furthering the spread of English as an international auxiliary language.

3.2.16  Axel Wijk’s *Regularized Inglish*

Alex Wijk was a Swedish Anglistic scholar and lecturer of English. His system called *Regularised English* (in his spelling *Regularized Inglish*) was published in 1959. He attempted a more consistent system as compared to other reformers. As revealed by the title the fundamental principle on which Wijk’s proposal was based is the consistent regularization of the existing spelling practice. Wijk set himself the task of discovering all that was regular in the present system. But he did not identify regularity with the highest frequency; in his conception also less frequent features can be classified as regular. Wijk has taken a more pragmatic approach in his *Regularized Inglish*. He prepared a system in which one symbol represented more than one phoneme or one phoneme was represented by more than one symbol so long as this did not cause confusion. He identified regular and frequent patterns in the vocabulary and altered the exceptional to bring them into line. The result was a regular and rule governed sound-spelling correspondence, a system in which the sound-spelling corresponded so that both native speakers and foreign learners could have some confidence in using written English, the former in using their knowledge of the spelling to guide their pronunciation. In contrast to several spelling reforms less than ten per cent of the words in English need to be changed when using *Regularized Inglish*.

Discussing quantity in his book *Regularised English*, Wijk is particularly concerned about the use of double consonants *f, k, l,* and *s* possibly also *z* in the final position. For example, *ebb-web, back-yak, bell-expel, fuss-bus*. He wrote,

While in the medial position consonant symbols are frequently doubled to indicate the short quantity of the preceding vowel, doubling in the final position cannot be said to have any function whatever in this respect

(Wijk 1959:251)
However Wijk does not suggest any major changes in the spelling conventions here with the exception of the words ending in iff or ll preceded by a or o in which cases the vowel is mostly realized as long. His project of a spelling reform of English has so far shown the greatest regard for the results of research in the theory of written language worked out during the last three decades or so. However even Wijk’s project of a spelling reform of English though certainly much more in line with the requirements imposed on the written norm of language as regards its “easy surveyability” leaves something to be desired.

This proposed reform in spelling was based on the preservation of as far as possible and convenient, of all the various sound symbols of the present orthography in their most frequent usage. It implies that the idea of a strictly phonetic spelling should be given up and the representation of certain speech sounds by more than one symbol is allowed when this can be done without causing undue confusion. As Wijk did not identify regularity with the highest frequency one can find in Wijk’s system more digraphs (or polygraphs) for one and the same phonic value; i.e. Wijk’s polygraphs are not monopolistic but most of them can claim to be non-ambiguous. Thus /i:/ can be spelled either ea or ee or even ei; the digraph oo however is pronounced either /u/ or /uː/, th stands for /θ/ which otherwise is written as dh as in udher (other), faadher (father) etc.

The non-monopolistic character of Wijk’s polygraphs might be regarded as a drawback of his system but it proves to be a blessing in disguise because it enables the system to reduce considerably the percentage of words whose new spelling differs from the old: a statistical calculus established only 29% of such words (as opposed to Zachrisson’s 42% and of Ripman-Archer’s New Spelling’s 69%). The basic principle underlying Regularised Spelling is that all irregular spellings in the language should be as far as possible be replaced by regular ones in accordance with the rules and tendencies already inherent in the present orthography.
3.2.16.1 Features of Wijk’s *Regularized Inglish*

i. Wijk adds the final e to the spelling of words like **cool**, **most**, **both**, etc., and conversely, drops it in the spelling of those words in which it cannot be justified in words like **come**, **love**, **have**, **give**, **definite**, **examine**, **handsome**. Besides, the final e is also used in Wijk’s system to differentiate word-pairs like **tens/-tenz/ - tense** /tɛns/, **curs/-kɜːz/ - curse** /kɜːs/, etc.

ii. As regards the structural correspondences at the morphemic level, Wijk systematically respects the morphemic unity of /s/, /z/, and /iz/ in the endings of the plurals of nouns and of the third person singular indicative present of verbs: in both these categories the morpheme is written (e) s. The forms **is** and **was** are spelled with a final z. The letter s was replaced by z where it was so pronounced. The letter s was replaced by the letter z in the medial and final positions (except in inflectional endings, when it represented the voiced sound as in **az**, **iz**, **theze**, **surprize**, **noze**, **raize**, **cauze**, **dezire**, **prezence** etc.

iii. The only symbol of regular usage in the present orthography which he had not thought essential to retain is the digraph **ph**, which stands for the /f/sound.

iv. The symbol **aa** was introduced to denote the long a sound /aː/ as in **staff**, **calf**, **chance** and **demand**.

v. One entirely new symbol **dh** was introduced for the voiced sound of the present **th** in the medial and final position.

vi. The symbols **si** and **s** were replaced by **zi** and **z** in words like **vision**, **occasion**, **enclosure**, **pleasure** etc.

vii. The long a for the symbols **ai** and **ay** was restricted to this sound only as in **maid**, **fail**, **sail**, **main**, **day rain** etc. The exception is in front of the letter r where they should represent the sound in **air**, **fair**, etc. For words like **plaid**, **plait** where there is the short sound of the letter a Wijk has suggested
that these spellings should be changed to **plad** and **plat**, and for the short sound /e/ as in **said** and **says**, the spelling should be **sez** and **sed**, the long e /iː/ as in **quay** becomes **kea** and the long sound of the letter i /ai/ as in **aisle**, **aye** (yes) become **yle**.

viii The sound of ea - /iː/ as in **beat**, **heat**, **speak**, **each**, **mean** etc is to be restricted to this sound only. The letters **ea** are pronounced as /e/ as in **bread**, **health**, **leather**, **meadow**, **breakfast** etc. In all these words it is suggested that **ea** should be replaced by the vowel letter e. Thus **breakfast**, **bred** etc. Where **ea** is pronounced as ay-/ei/ as in **great**, **steak** etc it should be replaced by the letters **ei**.

ix Where the combination **ear** is used to denote this sound as in **clear**, **dear**, **hear** etc this spelling should be retained. But where it represents other sounds it should be replaced by the letters **air** as in **bear = bair**, **wear = wair**, **swear = swair**. In words like **early**, **earn**, **earth**, **heard**, **learn**, **pearl** and **search** it is suggested that **ear** be replaced by **er**. In **heart**, **hearth** and **hearken** where **er** is sounded as /əːr/ **ear** should be replaced by **ar**. Thus, **heart = /haːt/ = hart.**

x The symbol **ie** has two principal pronunciations in ordinary English, the long sound /iː/ as in **belief**, **brief**, **chief** etc and the long sound of /at/ as in **die**, **lie**, **tie**, **dies**, **cries**, **applies** etc. The two pronunciations are always kept strictly apart. The former occurs only within words and the latter at the end of words or in inflected forms. It would be convenient to retain them in **Regularised English**. The two words **sieve** and **friend** would have to be changed to **siv** and **frend**.

xi The symbol **oo** is pronounced in two ways, the short /u/ and the long /uː/. The short /u/ sound is found almost regularly before the letter k but otherwise in a comparatively short number of words as in **book - /buk/**, **cook - /kuk/**, **took - /tuk/**, **good - /gud/**, **wool - /wul/**, etc. There is however no other symbol that can be used to replace this short /u/ sound. The long
/u:/ sound is written as oo as in balloon, boom, fool, shoot, zoo etc. Wijk suggests that this rule be followed in Regularized Inglish too. But the final silent letter e can be added where the long /u:/ sound is followed by a single consonant or by two final consonants in the present orthography. This does occur in the present orthography as in words like goose, loose, groove, noodle, etc. Further u, ou and ou in bullet, woman and should respectively is to be replaced by the letters oo. Words like full and fool will be written as foole and fool in Regularized Inglish.

xii The replacing of the ending ed by d or t in the past tense and past participle of regular verbs except in those which end in silent e and those whose stem ends in d or t. The following passage is an example of Regularized Inglish:

We instinctivly shrink from eny chaine in whot iz familiar and whot can be more familiar than the form ov wurds that we hav seen and written more times than we can possibly estimate.

Mitton 1996:29

3.2.16.2 Plan for carrying out the reform

Wijk had devised a plan for carrying out this reform. He was aware that there was no way of directly or rapidly breaking down the resistance of the older generation to spelling reforms. But it might be possible to circumvent the difficulties and wear down the resistance gradually. Wijk suggests that since it is obvious that the older generation cannot be expected to adopt a new spelling system the idea of trying to make them change their deep rooted habits must be abandoned and efforts must be concentrated on the coming generation instead. Children should be allowed, during a sufficiently long transitional period, to be taught to read and write Regularized Inglish before they pass on to learn to read ordinary traditional English.

Wijk does not expect any difficulty in the learning of this spelling system since 90 to 95 percent of the words of Regularized Inglish agrees with ordinary English and it retains nearly all the principal regular features of traditional English. He
also suggests that the first and second year students be taught *Regularized English* and from the third year onwards children be taught ordinary English so that they can read newspapers, books, magazines etc which would be published in ordinary English for quite some time. He added that they also be taught the difference between both the orthographical systems. It would also be convenient if a proportion of the younger generation learn both systems from the viewpoint of employer-employee relationship. Wijk’s project of a spelling reform has perhaps shown the greatest regard for the results of research in the theory of written language worked out during the last four decades or so. He could be credited with making the idea of spelling reform less repulsive and more realistic than it had been several years ago. As he had remarked in his *Regularized English*,

> Primarily, a suitable new system of orthography must be devised, a system which, on the one hand, will satisfy the demands of philological experts, and which on the other, will stand a reasonable chance of being accepted by the majority of educated people, after some propaganda, or at least by a sufficient number to permit of its being put to the test on a fairly comprehensive scale.

Wijk 1959:23

3.2.17 Ripman – Archer’s *Nue Speling*

Walter Ripman and William Archer both scholars and eminent phoneticians, suggested a spelling reform proposal to the Simplified Spelling Society. It was approved and got published as the Society’s *Proposals for a Simplified Spelling of the English Language* in 1911. The proposal aimed at a systematization of spelling by generalising one of the graphic ways of putting down each phoneme. But this principle was not adhered to consistently and the general public was unresponsive to this proposal, hence it was rejected. Harold Orton, the well-known dialectologist prepared the new edition of the society’s booklet (Ripman-Archer 1911), this time under the title *New Spelling, Being Proposals for Simplifying the Spellings of English without the Introduction of New Letters* (Ripman-Archer 1940). The proposal kept the well-established Modern English
digraphs and added to them a number of new ones (such as dh for the voiced fricative /ð/, zh for the voiced counterpart of sh, ae for the vocalic nucleus of make /meik/ etc.). The advantages claimed by the reformers for Nue Speling as it was called, as compared to other more radical type of reforms are:

i greater continuity with the past and with other languages continuing to use the Roman alphabet.

ii greater ease of learning for those who already know Roman- it can be read at sight and the essentials of the system learnt in a few minutes from information contained on a postcard.

iii less initial psychological and technological difficulties and thus (perhaps) more likelihood of gaining acceptance.

3.2.17.1 Features of Nue Speling

The features of Nue Speling which was introduced and recommended by the Simplified Spelling Society are as follows:

i the replacement of the following vowel letters:

a of (nearly) every long a /eə/ and of every ai, ay, ei, ey, eigh pronounced as long a by the symbol ae.

Thus,
make = maek
name = naem

The letters ae was to be used for /eə/ sound but a alone was to be used before vowels.

Thus,
chaos = kaos
prosaic = prozaic

b of ei, ea, ie and i pronounced as /iː/ by the symbol ee.

However a single e would be placed before vowels and further in the words he, she, we, me, be and dhe (the).
Thus,  
create = kreaet  
beet, beat = beet  
peel, peal = peel  

iii of (nearly) every i, y and igh pronounced as /aɪ/ by the symbol ie.  
Thus,  
idle = iedl  
cry = crie  
island = ieland  

iv of (nearly) every long o /əu/ and oa, ou, ow pronounced by the symbol oe.  
Thus,  
go = goe  
home = hoem  
lode, load = load  

v of every long /uː/ and eu, ew, ui pronounced as long u - /uː/ by the symbol ue, but reduced to u in the word you.  
Thus,  
your = eur  
duty = duety  
new, knew = nue  

vi of every oo,u,ue,ui,ew pronounced as long oo /uː/ by the symbol uu.  
Thus,  
boot = buut  
who = huu  
rude = ruud  

vii of the combinations ar, air, er and ëir pronounced as ‘air’ by aer.  
Thus,  
care = kaer  
air heir = aer  
bare bear = baer  

viii of the combinations er, ear, ir, yr when occurring in stressed symbols with the pronunciation of final or pre-consonantal er, ir, ur by the symbol ur  
Thus,  
learn = lurn  
birth = burth  
occur = okur  
word = wurd
ix of unstressed /u/ and /e/ pronounced as short or consonantal /u/ before a following vowel by the symbol y and the replacement of the vowel letter a by e in the unstressed suffixes -age, -ate, -ace

Thus,
effect = yfect
elegant = ylegent
illegal = yligel
manage = manej
climate = klaimet

x of (nearly) all double consonants by single consonants in the medial and final positions.

Thus,
connect = kunekt
attack = utaek
offend = ufend

xi of c by s and k according to pronunciations; of g by j when it has its soft sound; of s by z when it represents the voiced s; of x by ks or gz according to the pronunciation; of ci, si, ssi, ti, by sh when they represent the voiceless sh and of si and s by zh when they stand for the voiced sh.

Thus,

can = kaen, black = black

can = kaen, black = black

special = speshel

bruis = bruuz

measure = mezhur

box = boks

motion = moshun

gentle = jentel, judge = juj

Other spelling changes, wherever necessary, are to be made in the spelling. In addition to the regular short or long sounds of the five simple vowels there are a number of other vowel sounds in stressed syllables for which the following symbols are suggested:

i aa for the sound of the vowel letter a in father, calm, palm etc except when this sound is followed in the present spelling by the letter r as in car, farther in which the sound will be represented by the symbol ar in the new spelling.
Thus,
calm = kaam
court = klark

ii o for the sound of or, oar and our in for horse, short, ford, port, board,
court, more, story etc.
Thus,
horse, hoarse = hors
bore, boar = bor
for, fore, four = for

iii oi - /ɔi/ for the sound as in boy, coin
Thus,
boy, buoy = boi
royal = roial
poise = poiz

From the above summary it is clear that these spelling proposals would lead to a complete transformation of the language. The exceedingly large number of change in the spelling and the weird looking innovations among them would cause a break in the continuity between the old and the suggested new spellings. This system called New Spelling or Nue Speling strived to maintain a regular correspondence between letter and phonemes. /ð/ (the th of then) is always dh, /et/ (the a of mate) is always ae and so on though it is not completely rigorous about this since it allows variant spellings for unstressed vowels etc. As a consequence only a minority of words remain unchanged. A passage in Nue speling is readable but looks decidedly strange. The following passage is an example of Nue speling:

Forskor seven years agoe our faadherz braut forth on dhis kontinent a nue naeshon, konseevd in liberti and dedikaeted to dhe propozishon dhat aul men are kreeeated eekwal.

Mitton 1996:29
There were several shortcomings or inadequacies in the spelling reform titled *New Spelling* which was approved of by the Simplified Spelling Society:

i. The most striking feature of the proposal for vowels in unstressed positions is that they fail to provide a phonetic spelling for the language. It is seen in the large number of words which end in -and, -ent, -ance, -ence, -an, -en, -on, -al, -ol, -ar, -er and -or in which the vowel symbolises a murmur vowel it is impossible to simplify the spelling. There is no symbol in the English language to represent the murmur vowel exclusively. The authors are not prepared to agree to the only possible solution to this problem: introduce a new letter for this sound. The result is that in a very large number of cases it is impossible to tell from the normal pronunciation of the word whether the vowel sound of an unstressed syllable should be spelt with a, u, e or o.

ii. Only in a few cases do the authors suggest a simplification of the spelling of vowels in unstressed syllables. Thus they think that the endings –o, –s and –our may be replaced by –us and –or as in *relius*, *kulor*, *onor* etc.

iii. The same difficulties occur in initial and medial syllables in vast number of words such as:

Initial syllables: *occasion, calamity, affect, connect, particular, surprise*

Medial syllables: *agony, paradox, geography, energy, sympathy, saturday*

Final syllables: *ballad, album, gallop, purpose, oxford, concert, beggar, murmur*

### 3.2.17.2 Plan for carrying out the reform

The introduction of the new spelling was to be carried out in three stages. During the first it was to be first introduced in all primary schools. After five years, only this spelling would be used in teaching and in examinations in these schools, and the teaching of the old system of spelling would be stopped. At the second stage, comprising the second five-year period, the new spelling would be made compulsory in the titles and texts of all new films and in various public advertisements and announcements. At the third and final stage, to begin with ten years after the first had begun, the new spelling was to be made compulsory in various legal documents, in court records, acts of parliament, stationery office publications, etc. Finally it was to be used in all new literary works, which would not be granted copyright unless printed in the new rational spelling. Soon it was
hoped that newspapers, periodicals and other publications would be compelled to follow suit, and the new spelling would thus come into general use.

The plan showed a complete optimism. Perhaps what went wrong was that in a state with a democratic form of government, it would be difficult to carry out a reform of such far-reaching and revolutionary consequences for the reading and writing habits of every citizen, without first securing the consent and support of very wide circles of population. It was also difficult to expect the older generation to submit to seeing their cherished mother tongue totally transformed and disfigured, as they would think, within so short a time as was foreseen in the Bill the Society had proposed to present in the Parliament. They may also not be willing to put up with the inconveniences, annoying and painful, that would necessarily attend a spelling reform. Ultimately the Bill was presented in parliament but was rejected by a majority of only 87 to 84, which shows that the question had aroused a great deal of interest and that many members were prepared to permit the setting up a committee to study the problem.

3.2.18 Other Reformers

There were several other spelling reformers who contributed very substantially to the movement of spelling reform by suggesting various amendments. 

James Howell (1594-1666) wrote several essays on the need for reforming the English orthography. According to Howell, one of the reasons which makes the English language quite difficult to learn is that we do not pronounce as we write. This adds to the difficulty of the language. He explains that in his works he has not used any redundant, unnecessary letters and he gives the example of the mute e which he has dropped in words such as done, come and some. He has condemned the use of the mute e which he says is superfluous. He writes that the words people, treasure and parliament ought to be spelt as peeple, tresure and parleament. He is concerned with the phonemic principles that govern our pronunciation and believed that one must write as we pronounce.
In his *English Spelling-- To the Intelligent Reader*, Howell wrote,

Amongst other reasons which make the English Language of so small extent, and put strangers out of conceit to learn it, one is, That we do not pronounce as we write, which proceeds from divers superfluous Letters, that occur in many of our words which adds to the difficulty of the Language: Therefore the Author hath taken pains to refrench such redundant, unnecessary Letters in this Work (though the Printer hath not bin so carefull as he should have bin.) as amongst multitudes of other words may appear in these few, done, some, come: Which though wee to whom the speech is connatural, pronounce as monosyllables, yet when strangers come to read them, they are apt to make them disyllables, as do-ne, so-me, co-me; therefore such an e is superfluous.

Tucker 1969:29

William Holder (1616-1698) was another eminent spelling reformer who wrote several essays on the amendment of the orthography of English. He believed that it was difficult to reform spellings, and was quite critical of the grammarians who he felt had to be blamed for the faulty orthographic system. In his *Elements of Speech*, William Holder wrote,

We need a more phonetic spelling: but In the mean time we are apt very unjustly to laugh at the uncouth Spelling in the writings of unlearned persons, who writing as they please, that is, using such Letters, as justly express the power or Sound of their Speech; yet, forsooth, we say write not *true English* or *true French* etc. Whereas the Grammarians themselves, ought rather to be blamed, and derided for accommodating Words so ill with Letters and Letters with so faulty Alphabets, that it requires almost as much pains to learn how to pronounce what is written, and to write what is spoken, as would serve to learn the Language itself, if Characters or Sighns written were exactly accommodated to Speech.

Under the title *Difficulties of Reforming Spelling* he wrote that though the orthography which he described as "needless and unprofitable encumbrance of learning" might wholly be removed, by reform in spellings, it may be difficult to rid man of the habit of the spellings he has learned. He also believed that the books that had been written in the existing orthography would prove to be useless and redundant. It would imply that all books in existence should be destroyed and abolished. Then new books would have to be printed in the new orthography, and people have to take pains to unlearn those habits which had cost them so much labour.

**Simon Daines** was a school master who published a textbook in the year 1640, with the title, *Orthoepia Anglicana: or the First Principall Part of the English Grammar: Teaching the Art of Right Speaking and Pronouncing English, with Certaine Exact Rules of Orthography, and Rules of Spelling or Combining of Syllables, and Directions for Keeping of Stops or Points between Sentence and Sentence.* It was, he said, "methodically composed by industry and observation."

His book sheds some interesting light on the changing pronunciation of the time, of its differences from our own, and of its relationship to spelling. He was concerned with the actual names of the letters. For q he gave the name *qu* or *kuh* and for z, *ezard* or *edsard*. About the consonants he says that the letters b, c, d, g, h, p, q and t are forced to borrow the vowel e to help them out: as *be*, *ce*, *de*, *ge*, *he*, *pe* and *te*. The exceptions are *k* which is said as /kɛi/ and *q* said as /kjuː/.

But f, m, n, l, r, s, x, z, begin their sound with /e/ for example, /ɛf/, /ɛm/ etc.

There are six vowels he said, a, e, i, o, u and y, but of these only a, e, and o are always proper and invariable: the others degenerate into consonants. He defined diphthongs as two vowels put together in one syllable either of them retaining the force in pronunciation. About the vowel letter Simon Baines wrote,

> E tends to develop the ee sound, after the manner of Latin i. But what they (i.e. the Latins) call E, we write ea as in bread, sea etc.

Daines in Vallins 1973:113-117
It is clear from this and from his list of 18 diphthongs which includes the letters eo in jeopardy, ui in quire and qu in quoth that he thinks of a diphthong as a symbol and not as a sound.

Richard Hodges was a schoolmaster and had in his own words faced ‘professional problems’ when teaching spellings to school children. He wrote a book in 1643 called A Special Help to Orthographie or the True Writing of English, ‘Consisting of such Words as are alike in sound, and unlike both in their signification and writing: as also of such Words which are so near alike in sound, that they are sometimes taken one for another’. Some of Hodges’ diverse orthographical observations are worth recording. Like most reformers he is averse to double consonants. So he would have a single consonant in such words as saddle, meddle, cobble and bubble, and for no obvious reason he would write ditty but city and ruddy but study.

The waywardness of vowels bothered him. He dropped the mute final e in feeble, temple and needle. He also felt that the o in people should be left out and the word to be written as peeple. He also argued that nouns which end in y have ies as plural endings, hence all such nouns should end in ie. He stated that verbs which end in y and have y before the letters ng should end in y as in dy, and ly. He did not like the uncertainty of i in wilder and wilderness. He thought that it was necessary to make definite distinctions by means of spellings, to put an e for example at the end of read, the present tense, “to distinguish it from the short sound of read”. Though the long sound has changed, this spelling ambiguity is with us still. He wrote a book The English Primrose (Fig 3.9) in 1644. He devised this ingenious book for the use of his pupils, where the scope of the Roman alphabet was enlarged by the use of diacritics (dots, dashes and other marks placed over or under the letters). The English Primrose (1644) was a spelling book for the use office pupils. He believed that it was necessary to make the definite distinctions by means of spelling – to put an e for e.g. at the end of reade (the present tense) to distinguish it from the short sound of read, the preterimperfect tense.
THE ENGLISH PRIMROSE:

Far surpassing all others of this kind, that ever grew in any English garden: by the ful fight whereof, there will manifestly appear,

The Easiest and Speediest-way, both for the true spelling and reading of English, as also for the True-writing thereof:

that ever was publickly known to this day.

Planted (with no small pains) by Richard Hodges, a School-master, dwelling in Southwark, at the middle-gate within Mountagne-cléfe: for the exceeding great benefit, both of his own Country-men and Strangers.

Approved also by the Learned, and publish'd by Authority.

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? Cor. 14.8

LONDON
Printed for Richard Cotes, 1644.

Figure 3.9. From the title-page of *The English Primrose*, by Richard Hodges London 1644.

Many experiments have been made to take the Roman alphabet as the basis and enlarge its scope by various means. According to Abercrombie (Danielsson) 1963: 209 the current orthography is one of the least successful application of the Roman alphabet. He believed that several consonant sounds are represented by digraphs such as *sh*, *wh*, *ng*. Two distinct though similar sound are both written *th* as in *than* and *thank*. The many vowel sounds are most confusingly dealt by the five vowel letters *a,e,i,o,u* and their combinations.
Thomas Dyche (fl.1719) in his essay *Comments from an Eighteenth-Century Spelling Book*, commented on the features of the English orthography as it existed then. His comments were as follows:

C is stated to be silent in verdict, perfect, perfected, perfection, but sounded in perfection, perfective; ch is soft in stomachic; d is silent in ribband.

If Nouns in e final take s after them, with an apostrophy before it, it stands for his and notes possession. If without an apostrophy, it makes the Plural Number.

If Verbs, that end in e final take s after them, it is abbreviated from -eth.

G is sounded in condign, Hough = hoff

No h sound in herb, Humphrey

I is sounded like ee in oblige, Magazine, Machine....

L is not sounded in almost, Lincoln, Bristol

M is sounded like n in the accompt (account)

N is not heard in kiln, O is transplaced in iron (iorn), O is lost in these words coroner, damosel, Nicolas, carrion, chariot.

Veil, either, key, convey have the same sound

In some words ou has the sound oo as soup, Cowper

Oa is sounded like au in broad, abroad, groat.

K seems to be unnecessary in the End of Words not purely English; as Music, Arithmetic, Logic, Catholic, Fabric.

X should be used instead of ct where it appears to have been in the original; as, Reflexion, connexion, rather than reflection and connection.

Tucker 1961:62-63

In the preface of his *A Dictionary of all the Words Commonly Us’d in the English Tongue* (1723), Dyche wrote that in the process of comparing foreign words with their originals in order to fix the right spelling for them, he discovered that the English language owes a lot to the Ancients, Italian and much more to French which he attributed to the Norman Conquest.
He wrote,

However its plain, tho' this Borrowing from foreign Language is, for the most part, both an Ornament and Enrichment to our own; yet it renders our Spelling the more difficult, inasmuch as many of those Words are now politely sounded after the foreign way, which is very different from that harsh and uncertain method, wherby the English is pronounced

Tucker 1961:64

He proposed that one should not use too many letters in a word when fewer would do. Hence ck need not be together in the end of such borrowed words as concentric, lyric and magnetic, but he would like to retain it in English words for antiquity's sake. He also suggested that e final be dropped in words where they do not lengthen the syllable as in doctrine, humane, handsome etc. He approved of spelling certain words by the ear especially when they are sounded so differently from their letters. For instance gage for gauge, lieutenat for lieutenant, skeptic for sceptic, etc.

David Abercrombie (b.1909) was a phonetician and a language teacher. He argued against the Roman alphabet and called for the introduction of a new orthography. He suggested replacing digraphs by diacritics (dots, dashes, other marks placed above and below letters). Abercrombie believed that most satisfactory results are obtained by the introduction of new letters resulting in an extended alphabet. However he had no doubt that the Roman alphabet is difficult to beat for legibility and beauty and a better solution was to take it as a basis and enlarge its scope by various means. One way, he suggested, could be by means of diacritics (dots, dashes and other marks placed under or over the letters). He observed that,

The most sweeping remedy for the deficiencies of a traditional orthography is to abandon the Roman alphabet altogether and start again on a fresh basis.

Abercrombie 1949: 56
He also believed that the most profitable source of new letters was neither borrowing, nor outright invention, but modification of existing ones. For example a number of tolerable sorts can immediately obtained by inversion. Structural modification was another possibility and new sorts could be obtained by ligaturing existing letters. He had the following remarks to make about consonant and vowels sound in English:

Several consonant sounds are represented by digraphs such as sh, wh, ng. Two distinct though similar sounds are both written th as in then and thank. There is no letter or even digraph in English for the sound of the French /ʒ/ though it is used in measure. Many vowel sounds are most confusingly dealt with the five vowel letters a, e, i, o, u and their combinations. The words look and pull for example contain the same vowel sound which is however different from loop and dull.

Abercrombie 1949: 59

3.3 The Simplified Spelling Society (1908)
The Simplified Spelling Society is an organization founded in 1908 by the distinguished British Anglicists, W.W. Skeat and D.F.J. Furnival (its American counterpart the Simplified Spelling Board had been established two years earlier). The objectives of the society were to recommend simpler spellings of English words than those in use now; to further the use of much simpler spellings by every means in its power, and to co-operate with the Simplified Spelling Board of America founded and incorporated in New York in 1906. The Simplified Spelling Society believed that the existing orthography ought to be replaced by a more or less completely phonetic system, in which the letters of the present Roman alphabet or combination of these letters should be used to represent the various speech sounds. They did not state expressively in what way the new system was to be introduced but the general idea was to start with the text books for the lower classes in the elementary schools. It would then extend gradually to cover wider fields of printed publications. Between 1915 and 1924 they issued reading books in a phonetic orthography.
Several educationists believed that no one could have any doubts about the difficulties of the present system, but a scientific solution could not be found unless the supporters of the spelling reform were able to, as a preliminary decide on an agreed and definite scheme. Several petitions to examine the question of English spelling were signed by about 15,000 people. Several eminent personalities were associated with the association. Daniel Jones phonetician and philologist was chairman of the Society when Pitman was treasurer. Henry Sweet was also an office bearer for quite a long time. The Simplified Spelling society issued several booklets, pamphlets and monographs to popularise the idea of spelling reform. It also invited spelling reform proposals from scholars.

3.3.1 Guiding principles of the Society
The Simplified Spelling Society laid down a few guiding principles on the basis of which it would accept and approve of spelling reform proposals. They were as follows:

i. The new spelling should be systematic so as to reduce the existing chaos to something like order. The aim should be to effect economy of time and labour of the learners.

ii. Supplementation of Roman letters to be by digraphs as it was considered to be the lesser evil in preference to diacritics. Thus, no introduction of new diacritics or of any new characters.

iii. To avoid as far as possible combinations of letters which are not already in use or more or less familiar. The exceptions which the reformers have found to be unavoidable are the digraphs ae, aa, uu, dh, zh.

iv. To make each symbol (letter or digraph) as far as possible self contained so that its significance should not depend on any other letter; as when in the current spelling, a doubled consonant shortens, or a final e (following a consonant) lengthens a preceding vowel.

v. To economize in the use of letters wherever it seems possible without ambiguity or inconsistency.
To depart as little as possible from the current spelling, appropriating, where possible, to each sound the symbol now most commonly used to represent it. This 'principle of least disturbance' is important in two aspects; not only to make the change as easy as possible for a generation which has learnt the old spelling, but to enable the new generations to read old books with the least possible trouble.

To make allowance for existing divergences in pronunciation.

3.3.2 Other reform proposals

Several reform proposals came up to the committee of the society. On 12 January 1931, Professor Zachrisson's *Anglic* proposals for the improvement of English spellings was discussed by the members of the Simplified Spelling Society. Professor Ripman and Professor Daniel Jones approved of the proposals but the rest of the committee did not. The society got the book *Proposals for a Simplified Spelling of the English Language*, by Walter Ripman and William Archer rewritten by Henry Orton and it stood as the handbook of the society. A collection of essays entitled *Views on Spelling Reform*, a pamphlet on the phonetic aspect of spelling reform by Professor Jones was also published. Later the title of the book was changed to *New Spellings* or *Nue Speling*.

*Cut Spelling* (Upward 1992) was another spelling reform proposal which was submitted to the society for approval. The idea was to remove redundant letters for example, *n*, *k*, *o*, and *le* from *hymn, kneel, people, apple* respectively etc on the grounds that these letters cause a lot of trouble and since they perform no useful function they will not be greatly missed. A few substitutes are also made including *d* for *dg* (so *edge* becomes *ej*) and *f* for *gh* in *cough*. About 10% of letters disappear without excessive disruption to the appearance of more than a handful of words. The following is a passage written in cut spelling:

We instinctively shrink from any chanje in wat is familar; and wat can be mor familar than the form of words that we hav seen and ritn mor times than we can posbly estmate.

Mitton 1996:28
The society also came up with a dictionary; *Old Spelling-New Spelling* which comprised of 15,000 to 18,000 words. In the 1980s and 1990s it broadened its interests and worldwide links by holding several international conferences. It also launched the journal of the society. It is however quite clear that all the spelling reform proposals which came up to the society for approval entailed far too much transformation of the language to be at all acceptable and very few people have been apparently convinced of either the necessity or the wisdom of making such sweeping changes in the spelling system.

Many of the proposals were quite interesting, logical and would have certainly made the English orthography much more simpler and easier to learn. As has already been emphasized, the principal obstacles to spelling reform have been on the one hand the lack of a suitable new system of orthography and on the other the conservatism and the inertia of the adult population and their unwillingness to accept any changes whatever in their spelling habits even though it has been proved beyond doubt that a suitable reform would bring immense advantages to all English-speaking people as well as to the non-native speakers all over the world.

Thus spelling reform has exercised some of the finest minds in England for several centuries. The changes attributable to these efforts have generally been few and frequently short-lived. Spelling reform has been quietly going on for centuries in a small but not insignificant way. The tendency continues today. Even so there is still on the face of it a strong case for spelling reform which has to take place on a very large scale. Saussure observes:

> Language is constantly evolving, whereas writing tends to remain stale. The result is that a point is reached where writing no longer corresponds to what it is supposed to record.

Saussure 1959:27
Inspite of so many spelling reform proposals made by various spelling reformers from time to time, nothing much was done to amend the orthography. Due to various reasons discussed in this chapter, the English language has largely remained unchanged in this specific area barring a few changes made by the Americans. English has undergone several changes at the syntactic, semantic, lexical and phonological levels. When so many changes are being made in the English language at various levels, some importance and priority should also be given to the amendment of the orthography. The methodology and various techniques of teaching have changed to make it easier for the learners of English to learn the language more quickly and more effectively. Various proposals are being considered to make it convenient to learn languages. So the time is quite ripe for a definitive conclusion as to the possibility of a spelling reform in English.

This study which consists of the various writings concerned with the attempts at spelling reform has also discussed the linguistic problems connected with it. This study has revealed that it has been exactly the increasing interest of the linguists in the theory of the written norm, especially in the structural and functional aspects of the implied issues, that has contributed to the elucidation of the theoretical questions mentioned. It has also contributed to the problems of the limits within which a concrete spelling reform of English might be feasible and of the criteria that should be considered while attempting it. An analysis of the various spelling reforms suggested by several spelling reformers, grammarians and prominent writers reveals that most of the reforms suggested were useful and could be implemented with a few changes. Thus would go a long way in making the orthography of English acceptable by all the learners of English.