



Published: 07.06.2006

# 'Simpl spel' campaigners still refuse to 'giv' up

**By Darlene Superville**

*THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

WASHINGTON — When "say," "they" and "weigh" rhyme, but "bomb," "comb" and "tomb" don't, wouldn't it make more sense to spell words the way they sound?

Those in favor of "simplified" spelling say children would learn faster and illiteracy rates would drop. Opponents say a new system would make spelling even more confusing.

Under the new way, the following paragraph would be:

Eether wae, the consept has yet to capcher th publix imajinaeshun. (Either way, the concept has yet to capture the public's imagination.)

It's been 100 years since Andrew Carnegie helped create the Simplified Spelling Board to promote a retooling of written English and President Theodore Roosevelt tried to force the government to use simplified spelling in its publications. But advocates aren't giving up.

They even picket the National Spelling Bee finals, held every year in Washington, costumed as bumblebees and hoisting signs that say "Enuf is enuf but enough is too much" or "I'm thru with through."

They say the bee celebrates the ability of a few students to master a difficult system that stumps many others who could do just as well if spelling were simpler.

"It's a very difficult thing to get something accepted like this," says Alan Mole, president of the American Literacy Council, which favors an end to "illogical spelling." The group says English has 42 sounds spelled in a bewildering 400 ways.

Americans don't always go for what's easy — witness the failure of the metric system to catch on. But proponents of simpler spelling note that a smattering of altered spellings have made the leap into everyday use.

"Doughnut" also is "donut"; "colour," "honour" and "labour" long ago lost the British "u"; and the similarly derived "theatre" and "centre" have been replaced by the easier-to-sound-out "theater" and "center."

"The kinds of progress that we're seeing are that someone will spell night 'nite' and someone will spell through 'thru,'" Mole said. "We try to show where these spellings are used and to show dictionary makers that they are used so they will include them as alternate spellings.

Watch a video demonstrating the confusion of the english spelling system. **23 ways to spell the same sound**

The spoken "oo" sound seems to follow no rules, baffling English learners.

English spelling pronunciation

moon (oo) moon

group (ou) groop

fruit (ui) froot

glue (ue) gloo

drew (ew) droo

two (wo) too

flu (u) floo

canoe (oe) canoo

through (ough) throo

rule (u-e) rool

lieu (ieu) loo

loose (oo-e) loos

English spelling pronunciation

lose (o-e) looz

pooh (ooh) poo

coup (oup) coo

bruise (ui-e) brooz

jiujitsu (iu) joojitsoo

"Great changes have been made in the past. Systems can change," a hopeful Mole said.

Learning English requires rote memory rather than logic, he said.

In languages with phonetically spelled words, such as German or Spanish, children learn to spell in weeks instead of months or years as is sometimes the case with English, Mole said.

But education professor Donald Bear said that to simplify spelling probably would make it more difficult, because words get meaning from their prefixes, suffixes and roots.

"Students come to understand how meaning is preserved in the way words are spelled," said Bear, director of the E.L. Cord Foundation Center for Learning and Literacy at the University of Nevada-Reno.

The nation's largest teachers union, once a supporter, also objects.

Michael Marks, a member of the National Education Association's executive committee, said learning would be disrupted if children had to switch to a different spelling system.

"It may be more trouble than it's worth," said Marks, a debate and theater teacher at Hattiesburg High School in Mississippi.

E-mail and text messages are exerting a similar tug on the language, sharing some elements with the simplified-spelling movement while differing in other ways. Electronic communications stress shortcuts such as "u" more than phonetics. Simplified spelling is not always shorter than regular spelling — "sistem" instead of "system"; "hoep instead of hope."

Carnegie tried to move things along in 1906 when he helped establish and fund the spelling board. He also used simplified spelling in his correspondence and asked anyone who reported to him to do the same.

Carnegie, a philanthropist, became passionate about the issue after speaking with Melvil Dewey, a spelling-change activist and inventor of the Dewey Decimal System. Dewey simplified his first name by dropping "le" from Melville.

Roosevelt tried to get the government to adopt simpler spellings for 300 words, but Congress blocked him. He used simple spellings in all White House memos, pressing forward his effort to "make our spelling a little less foolish and fantastic."

The Chicago Tribune also got into the act, using simpler spellings in the newspaper for about 40 years, ending in 1975. Playwright George Bernard Shaw, who wrote most of his material in shorthand, left money in his will for the development of a new English alphabet.

Carnegie, Dewey, Roosevelt and Shaw's work followed attempts by Benjamin Franklin, Daniel Webster and Mark Twain to advance simpler spelling. Twain lobbied The Associated Press at its 1906 annual meeting to "adopt and use our simplified forms and spread them to the ends of the Earth." The AP declined.

But for all the high-profile and scholarly efforts, the idea of funny-looking but simpler spellings didn't captivate the masses then — or now.

"I think that the average person simply did not see this as a needed change or a necessary change or something that was . . . going to change their lives for the better," said Marilyn Cocchiola Holt, manager of the Pennsylvania department of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

Carnegie, who embraced technology, died in 1919, well before cell phones. Had he lived, he probably would have been pleased to know that millions of people send text and instant messages every day using their own forms of simplified spelling: "Hav a gr8 day!"

silhouette (hou) silooet

buoy (uo) booy

deuce (eu-e) doos

maneuver (eu) manooover

rendezvous (ous) rondevoo

mousse (ou-e) moos

Source: American Literacy Council

### **On the Net**

American Literacy Council:  
[www.americanliteracy.com](http://www.americanliteracy.com)

Simplified Spelling Society:  
[www.spellingsociety.org](http://www.spellingsociety.org)

National Education Association:  
[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

On StarNet Watch a video demonstrating the confusion of the English spelling system at [azstarnet.com/multimedia](http://azstarnet.com/multimedia)

Watch a video demonstrating the confusion of the english spelling system. **23 ways to spell the same sound**  
The spoken "oo" sound seems to follow no rules, baffling English learners.

English spelling pronunciation

moon (oo) moon

group (ou) groop

fruit (ui) froot

glue (ue) gloo

drew (ew) droo

two (wo) too

flu (u) floo

canoe (oe) canoo

through (ough) throo

rule (u-e) rool

lieu (ieu) loo

loose (oo-e) loos

English spelling pronunciation

lose (o-e) looz

pooh (ooh) poo

coup (oup) coo

bruise (ui-e) brooz

jiujitsu (iu) joojitsoo

silhouette (hou) silooet

buoy (uo) booy

deuce (eu-e) doos

maneuver (eu) manooover

rendezvous (ous) rondevoo

mousse (ou-e) moos

Source: American Literacy Council

### **On the Net**

American Literacy Council: [www.americanliteracy.com](http://www.americanliteracy.com)

Simplified Spelling Society: [www.spellingsociety.org](http://www.spellingsociety.org)

National Education Association: [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.