

# The English Spelling Reform in the Light of the Works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is an approach to the works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart, who can be considered as the best representatives of the English Renaissance spelling debate. Since the controversy over the adequacy or inadequacy of English orthography is still alive, a comparison between present and past reform proposals is suggested.

The starting point of the discussion is the assumption that many of the so-called “modern” linguistic disciplines can be traced back to the Renaissance, as is the case with Language Planning. In fact, the English Renaissance meant the emergence of an intensive Language Planning activity entailing both standardization and normalization processes. Thus, using Haugen’s 1984 terms, both Corpus and Status Planning were developed at this stage of the history of the English language. However, the extent to which past and present activities can be compared has to do with the prescriptive character of the former as opposed to the more “social” character of the latter (cf. Fernández Pérez, 1994). In the case of Spelling Reform the difference is assumed to lie in the interdisciplinary approach of modern script reformers in contrast with the more unidirectional proposals made in the past.

## 2. THE RENAISSANCE SPELLING DEBATE

### 2.1. THE EMERGENCE OF SPELLING REFORM

By the middle of the 16thc the inconsistency perceived in the English Orthography gives rise to the first spelling reform treatises based on phonological principles. The English reform movement is vinctulated to the French orthographic reform, carried out by Meigret<sup>1</sup> and to the controversy over the pronunciation of Classical Greek confronting Sir John Cheke and Sir Thomas Smith on the one hand, and Bishop Gardiner on the other. Furthermore, it cannot be forgotten that in the 13th century, a canon called Orm had already written a homily using a phonetic system of his own invention for the purpose of improving predication. During the 16th and the 17th century numerous proposals are made: Smith, *De Recta et Emendata Linguae Anglicae Scriptione Dialogus, etc* (1568); Hart, *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of Our Inglish Toung* (1551); *An Orthographie* (1569); *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* (1570); Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582); Gill, *Logonomia Anglica* (1621); Butler, *The English Grammar or the Institution of Letters* (1668); Wilkins, *An Essay Towards A Real Character and A Philosophical Language* (1668). Nevertheless, the 18th century concern with

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<sup>1</sup> He was the author of *Traité Touchant Le Commun Usage de L'Écriture* (1545) and *Le Menteur de Lucien* (1548), a translation of a Classical work in his own spelling system and which includes a preface advocating Spelling Reform (cf. Hausman, 1980).

rules will temporarily vanish almost all reform efforts until the 19thc, when sound spelling will gain new force.

## 2.2. JOHN HART

### 2.1.1. LIFE, WORKS, AND EARLY INFLUENCES

John Hart (?-1574), best known as Chester Herald, designed the first truly phonological scheme of the 16th century. Jespersen (1907), whose research into Hart's works has revived interest in the author, holds that "the system is purely phonetic<sup>1</sup> which is more than we can say of any other system of the period" (1907, 19). For this author, Bullokar only deserves the adjective "muddle-headed" (op. cit.), and though Gil's scheme was certainly superior to the former, it is still unphonetic (1907, 22). Dobson (1969, 62) states that "John Hart deserves to rank with the greatest phoneticians and authorities". In fact, Hart throws a valuable light on early Elizabethan phonology. His phonetic descriptions are sometimes tinged with humorous realism, as when talking about the vowel [e], he says: "[it is made by] thrusting softlye the inner part of the tongue to the inner and upper great teeth (or gummess for want of teeth)" (Vallins, 1965, 96).

Hart's ideas on the subject of Spelling Reform owe much to Meigret<sup>2</sup> and Smith<sup>3</sup>. First, both Smith and Hart design an "augmented alphabet". Second, both use the comparison with painting in order to express the idea that writing should imitate speech. Thus, Smith said "ut pictura, ortographia" (Foster Jones 1966: 145) and Hart says that we should imitate the voice in writing "even as the Painter, ought to chaunge the variable quantities and accidents, in the images of man" (Hart, 1959, 26r).

Hart is the author of three works on English orthography: *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of Our English Toung* (1551), an unpublished manuscript defending the case for Spelling Reform; *An Orthography* (1569), where he uses the same arguments and devises a new system of representation; and *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* 1570, a primer of reading according to his new system.

### 2.1.2. THE ARGUMENTS FOR SPELLING REFORM

An analysis of the state of contemporary orthography and an exposition of the arguments for reform appear in both the Manuscript and the *Orthography*. The latter is a four-fold scheme written for (1) "commoditie for the unlearned", (2) "for strangers and rude countrie Englishmen", (3) for "cost and time saved<sup>4</sup> and (4) for foreign language learning (Danielsson 1955, 53-54). Hart sees the chaotic orthography of his time as "a kinde of ciphring". Spelling is abused because of four vices: diminution, superfluity, usurpation of letters and misplacing of letters (Hart, 1569, 146 & ff). On his opinion, some of these vices have been maintained "with some lykelihood of reason" (Hart, 1569, 11a), but he undertakes the task of removing/futing them in them in Chapter nine. These are his arguments:

- (i) "But their strongest defence is use..." (op. cit. p. 11b)

Reason must rule the reform of spelling removing the vices originated by Custom.

<sup>1</sup> Dobson (1955, 71) has called our attention upon Hart's abandoning of phonetic consistency for showing derivation or due to the influence of conventional spelling). However, this must not rest merit to the book, which on the whole is consistently phonetic. He refuses to use capitals, which, on Jespersen's opinion, makes him "more consistently phonetic than some phoneticians of the 20th century..." (Jespersen, 1909, 22).

<sup>2</sup> "... whose reasons and arguments I do here before partly use as he did Quintilians" (Hart, 1569, 53r)

<sup>3</sup> "... sir Thomas Smith knight, hath written his minde ... in hys booke of late set forth in Latin entituled, *De Recta et emendata linguae Anglicae Scriptione*. Whereof and of this my treatise, the summe, effect, and ende is one. Which is, to vse as many letters in our writing, as we doe voyces or breathes in speaking, and no more..." (Hart, 1569: Preface).

<sup>4</sup> However, in 1551 he had already seen the necessity of a gradual change due to the cost that new punches would involve (cf. Danielsson, 1955, 51).

Tongues haue often chaunged ... then if occasion in the fancies of men, haue had power to chaunge tongues, much more Reason should correct the vicious writing of the speech, wherein ... use shoulde none otherwise take place...and the contrarie to be taken for abuse or misuse (op. cit., p. 13b).

(ii) Against showing the derivation of words

It was generally argued that Traditional orthography had the merit of indicating the origin of words. In his book, Hart remarks that, although this is considered as a kind of duty by his contemporaries there is no natural law nor human agreement that may “oblige” languages to keep special marks for loanwords. In fact, he says, “we derive from the Saxons and do not write like them” (Hart, 1569, 18b). Hart compares neologisms with that person, who living in a foreign country should be obliged to wear a special costume to indicate his origin: “why shoulde he not be framed in every condicion as we ... and leave all his colours or markes of straungenesse” (op. cit. p. 16a-b).

(iii) Against showing difference

With a Reformed Orthography homophones would no longer be distinguished. Hart argues that if such a distinction is not kept in speaking, there is no reason for maintaining it in writing:

So as they say, it is necessary to write different letters, that the reader should not understande amisse, so say I, that is needfull for the reader, to pronounce the same difference of letters written, least the audience for want of hearing thereof, should fal into the same doubt, which they say the reader should do by sight, if they were not written. (op. cit. p. 24a)

Besides, he states that the common practice in this matter is inconsistent, since it does not serve to distinguish all homophones:

And many other equivoces, where we make no difference in speech, therefore ought to make none in writing: though they be of use of diverse significations, if now they could show me their reason why they use their fantasie in some, and not in these foresayde and many more, I would be glad to heare them... (op. cit. p. 26b)

(iv) Against showing time

Traditional Orthography used consonant doubling and final mute <-e> to indicate length “partly upon a reasonable cause ... which I confess we are forced to doe, and is necessary...” (op. cit. p.15). In 1569 Hart devises a diacritic mark to show time, but later, he will also allow for the use of double consonants to indicate shortness of a preceding vowel. In any case, he advocates the abolition of mute <-e> for indicating length.

In *The Methode* (1570) the educational and social aspects of reform are stressed. On the one hand, Hart makes up a new method for teaching orthography through the use of pictures for letters. On the other hand, the social argument present in the manual implies a criticism to the learned: They, he argues, “have no regard to the multitude, living, not to come” (Danielsson, 1955, 236) and oppose reform “for feare it [a new orthography] should be to easie for the Reader” (op.cit.).

### 2.1.3. HIS SYSTEM

Table 1 (see appendix) shows the evolution of his system from 1551 to 1570. In spite of the simplifications introduced in 1570, Hart’s system was severely censured by his fellow countrymen so, in 1573 he wrote:

For that the newe letters of myne orthographye and method are of many harde to acquainte them selves with them. I shall by godes grace frame to correcte the many abuses or our englishe writinge ... withoute any newe letters, other then iij ligatures of sh: th: and dh: ... (Hart, 1573; quoted by Danielsson, 1955, 58)

### 2.1.4. COMMENTS ON HART’S SPELLING REFORM

The validity of Hart's proposal is proved by the fact that his arguments are still valid today (cf. Danielsson, 1955, 50). His concern for literacy and his social criticism evidences a concern for the less favoured that makes his proposal even more "modern" in the light of present schemes. He was no rash reformer, since he conceived reform as a gradual process. He was aware of certain implementation problems, such as the lack of literature in the new system. Therefore, he suggested printing The Psalter and The New Testament in his own spelling.

Nevertheless, the key to his failure did not rest so much with technical or economic problem<sup>1</sup> as with the problem of acceptance. In the *Orthographie*, Hart reports having been persuaded against going on with his plans since

the power of soundes and of some letters have bene over long double for nowe to be recyved single, whatsoever they were aunciently: for that which use by little and little and with long continuance bringeth into any peoples maner of doing is never spoken against without great offence to the multitude ... (Hart, 1569, 11b)

This sociolinguistic problem (which modern reformers have not yet been able to cope with<sup>2</sup> had delayed the publication of the *Orthographie* and lead him to change his system in 1573 (vide supra). Even though from a 20th century perspective, Spelling Reform would have been a more feasible task in the Renaissance, we should not forget the special sociocultural conditions of the period: The Elizabethan man already saw in the language a symbol of the recently conquered national identity, especially at a time when a rich literature was flourishing. As Hart pointed out in *An Orthographie*, there was a general feeling that English had been "of late brought to such a perfection as never the lyke was before" (Hart, 1569, 11). Furthermore, Hart, unlike Mulcaster, did not receive any official support and, under such poor conditions, Spelling Reform was inevitably unattainable.

## 2.2. RICHARD MULCASTER

Richard Mulcaster (ca.1530-1611) was the first headmaster of the Merchant Taylor's School, and High Master of St. Pauls between 1608 and 1611. He is the author of two books: *Positions...for the Training up of children* (1581), which deals with general educational issues, and *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582), which was intended to be the first of a series of books on vernacular literacy. His interest in Spelling Reform arises from his being a pedagogue and this justifies his position against phonetic Spelling Reform, since, as a schoolmaster, he had to teach the established spelling.

### 2.2.1. MOTIVATION AND PURPOSE OF *THE ELEMENTARIE*

At the beginning of the book, Mulcaster makes clear he is writing out of educational and patriotic interests:

besides som friendship to secretaries for the pen and to correctors for the print, to direct such peple as teach children read and write English ... to direct the Reader, I will thouroughli rip up the hole certaintie of our English writing ... bycause it is a thing profitable to my cuntry. (Mulcaster, 1582, 53)

In view of this, it is not surprising that Mulcaster's position regarding English orthography might be a middle one "judging it most well appointed, tho in particulars to be helpt" (op. cit, p. xii).

### 2.2.2. THE CASE AGAINST SPELLING REFORM

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<sup>1</sup> Money was indeed one of the problems he had to face. Danielsson (1955, 54) states that "in 1551 he hoped that the costs for the necessary new punches would be borne by the King, but when he presents his new orthography in 1569 ... it has been printed at his own expense".

<sup>2</sup> 20th century reformers have also encountered the opposition of those who disparage their proposals on purely "aesthetic grounds", i.e. they do look illiterate.

In Chapter 12, Mulcaster explicitly assumes the task of defending the case against Spelling Reform: “to answer all those objections, which charge our writing with either insufficiency or confusion.” (op. cit. p. 62). Mulcaster does not completely censure past reformer.<sup>1</sup> He recognizes the good intentions of those, “who bearing a good affection to their naturall tongue ... devised a new mean ... to bring the thing about” (op. cit. p. 78). He thinks they failed because their proposals went “against common practice and use” (op. cit. p. 78). He foresees the failure of future schemes and realizes the difficulties for implementation: “From what a day is the act of reformation to take full place? It is a strange point of physik, when the remedie itself is more dangerous than the disease.” (op. cit. p. 97)

His argumentation against Spelling Reform can be summarized in the following points:

(i) Conventional character of writing<sup>2</sup>

Mulcaster does not deny the alphabetic principle, but insists that “the letters being thus found out to serve a needful turn took the force of expressing everie sound in voice, not by themselves or anie vertew in their form ... but by consent of those men which first invented them”.<sup>3</sup> (op. cit., p. 65)

(ii) “Use is the mistress herein...” (op. cit., p.90).

Reformers think Custom is corrupted but Mulcaster holds that “[not] everie our custom is plaine corruption” (op. cit., p.86) and that the Reformers’ “misnamed custom is error” (op. cit.). He thinks that custom cannot be altered: if the existent letters were sufficient for those who invented them it is a matter of respect to leave them unaltered.

(iii) Philosophical argument: natural vs. artificial things

Mulcaster reminds us that, according to philosophers, while natural things have been made to serve only one end, artificial ones “maie serve to sundrie ends and uses” (op. cit. p. 92), as is the case with letters. Besides, if words may have different meanings in order to refer to the infinite number of things, “will letters kepe a countenance and stand so aloof, as to sound still but one, where their great grandfathers euen the words themselues, ar forced to be manifold?” (op. cit. p. 93)

(iv) Other languages use the same symbols so why are they not enough for ours?

Disregarding the fact that different languages use different phonological systems, he states:

This paucitie and pouertie of letters, hath contented and discharged the best, and brauest tungs, that either be, haue bene, shalbe, or can be...The peple that now vse them, and theie that haue vsed them, haue naturallie the same instruments of voice and the same deliverie in sound...that the English men haue (op. cit. p. 89)

(v) Against introducing new letters

Mulcaster argues that it is as bad to overcharge letters with many uses (as it had been the custom) as to diversify the system by introducing new ones.

(vi) Ease of writing

<sup>1</sup> Danielsson (1955, 35) thinks his arguments are directed against Hart (cf. op. cit., p. 35).

<sup>2</sup> This is an attack to the main argument of reformers, i.e. that writing should be an image of speech. According to Foster Jones (1966, 149), “There is no better example of the absurd degree to which the peculiar idea of a “letter’s nature” was carried out than Hart’s refusal to use capital letters on the ground that, though different in form from small letters, they represent the same sounds. In place of that, he advocated putting a slanting line before the word”.

<sup>3</sup> This is a very “modern” idea, very similar to the theories about written language developed by the Prague school of linguists (especially by Vachek, 1962-1989). Mulcaster even mentions the functional difference that holds between written and spoken language: “For the tung conueing speche no further then to those, which were within hearing, and the necessitie of conveiance oftymes falling out betwene som persons that were further then to those, which were within hearing ... a device was made to serue the eie afar of, by the mean of letters...” (Mulcaster, 1582, 65).

In devising new letters or altering the form of the existent ones one must consider ease of writing since “a form which is fair to the eye in print and cumbersome to the hand in penning, is not to pass in writing” (op. cit.). However, some of Mulcaster’s remarks on this respect sound naïve and irrational to a modern reader. When talking about final <-ie> for [i], for instance, he claims that “the verie pen, will rather end in the e than in naked i” (op. cit. p. 114). And he advocates the use of <-ew> instead of <-u> to “avoid the nakedness of small u in the end” (op. cit. p. 116).

(vii) If the reader understands what the writer says, there is no need to alter common use.

This really misses the point the reformers were trying to make, as the problem lay, not in mutual understanding, but in ease of learning, especially for the less favoured with no knowledge of the standard or the foreign terms recently introduced in the language (cf. Hart, 1570).

### 2.2.3. MULCASTER’S SYSTEM OF SPELLING

Even though Mulcaster opposed the works of previous reformers, he was for stabilization. His system, designed to improve the teaching of reading, was ruled by five precepts: *General rule* (describing “the propertie and use of ech letter”), *Proportion* (or analogy), *Composition* (“which teaches how to write a word made of mo”), *Derivation* (“which examineth the ofspring of euerie originall”), *Distinction* (“which bewraiethe the difference of sound and force of letters by som written figure or accent”), *Enfranchisement* (“which directeth the right writing of all incorporat foren words”) and *Prerogative* (or the precedence of use”) (op. cit. p. 54). The system that results from the application of each precept is represented in Table 2 in the appendix.

Some of his recommendations, such as the use of silent <-e> and consonant doubling, were successful and some others were not, as is the case with final <-ie>, the use of <i/y> and <u/v> and final <-ck>. In any case, Mulcaster played an important role in the standardization of spelling, even though his spelling was probably “modern” in his own day, and even though many of the changes he advocated were not made effective until the following century.

### 2.2.4. COMMENTS ON MULCASTER’S SPELLING REFORM

Mulcaster places himself in a middle position. First, he tries to balance the interests of the learner and the already learned. He is for example against the etymological argument arguing that although keeping the original form may be a “shew of learning” neologisms must be reduced to the “enfranchiser’s laws”. This he claims out of concern for the unlearned:

Neither must anie learned man think it strange to write foren terms after an English ear, tho it be contrarie to his acquaintance, seing it is not contrarie to the custom of his cuntrie. Neither it is anie ambassing to learning, to lend the common man the vse of his, tho to kepe the substance: neither yet both to se, suffer the learneddest terms that he hath, to com vnder an English hand, seing there is no dishonor ment them. (Mulcaster, 1582, 157)

However, Mulcaster also makes concessions to Custom when he declares himself strongly against reducing the exceptions to rules. His words are those of the proud Elizabethan man: “I take this period of our English tung to be the verie height thereof, bycause, I find it so excellentlie well fined...” (op. cit. p. 159)

As a language planner, Mulcaster deserves the merit of having understood the problems of implementation and evaluation posed by Spelling Reform: He saw clearly that language resists private innovation, that change cannot be forced (cf. Foster Jones, 1966: 166). The reason for his success must lie in the fact that his reform was supported by Elizabeth I, as it was based on tradition. This fact was of great importance for a country still looking for its national identity. As Howatt (1984, 92) remarks, “The Tudor Monarchy represents the nearest that England came to a system of centralized power and, had Elizabeth I decided that orthographic reform was necessary for the health of the realm she might just have succeeded in imposing it” (Howatt, 1984, 92).

## 3. SPELLING REFORM TODAY

During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century Spelling Reform was subject to a debate as vivid as that of the Renaissance, and numerous societies for the simplification of spelling were founded. Nowadays, although the debate is not so vivid, reform is not a dead issue: The Simplified Spelling Society in Britain<sup>1</sup> and the American Literacy Council<sup>2</sup> still advocate the simplification of English Spelling for the attainment of general literacy. However, while the voices claiming for Spelling Reform can be heard only in reduced circles, there is widespread concern for the falling standards of literacy. The fact is that the number of functional illiterate<sup>3</sup> is too big in both Britain and the USA (around six million and forty million respectively.<sup>4</sup> As late as 1989, for instance, the British Department of Education and Science reported that although:

by the end of compulsory schooling pupils should be able to spell confidently most of the words they are likely to need to use frequently in their writing ... The aim cannot be the correct unaided spelling of any English word -there are too many words in English that can catch out even the best spellers... (Department of Education and Science, 1989; quoted by Upward, 1992, 19)

### 3.1. THE SYSTEMS

So numerous have been the schemes devised since the 19th century, that a complete revision of them escapes the purpose of this study. However, table 3 (see appendix) gives an overview of them using Brown's 1992 typology (cf. Brown, 1992, 4-5). As can be seen, there has been a general tendency towards the rejection of purely phonetic schemes in search of regular patterns. Diacritics are now quite old-fashioned and the devising of a completely new alphabet such as Shaw's (cf. Shaw, 1962) seems completely out of place. Present reformers are aware that full phonemicity is "an impractical idea" (Yule, 1982, 12), since a reform design must be not only linguistically perfect, but also, and principally, socially acceptable. That's why phonetic consistency tends to be sacrificed to the principle of "minimum disturbance" with Traditional Orthography (cf. Simplified Spelling Board, 1920, 17; Ripman and Archer, 1940, 13; Yule, 1982, 12 and ff.; Upward, 1992a).

### 3.2. THE ARGUMENTS

#### 3.2.1. OBJECTIONS TO TRADITIONAL ORTHOGRAPHY AND ARGUMENTS FOR SPELLING REFORM

(i) Traditional Orthography is an assault on the alphabetic principle as it does not show the relationship between letters and sounds (cf. Upward, 1992a and 1992c).

(ii) It is the cause of literacy problems: It renders the learning of reading and writing very difficult, which implies an unnecessary waste of time.

(iii) Traditional Orthography also means wasting money and paper, for the number of redundant or unnecessary letters existing in Traditional Orthography. A Reformed Orthography, being shorter, would be more economical (cf. especially, Tauber, 1963, 102-3 and 125; Upward, 1992a).

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<sup>1</sup> The latest scheme supported by the Society is *Cut Spelling* (1992), by C. Upward.

<sup>2</sup> This society has recently published *The Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling* (1986), edited by E. Rondthaler and E. Lias.

<sup>3</sup> Functional literacy can be defined as "the contextual measure of literacy needed to function in society" (Brown, *Personal Views*, 1:7).

<sup>4</sup> As regards The USA, the authors of *The Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling* estimate that they "number between 25 and 55 million. One in every seven of us, perhaps, one in every four. From the very limited statistics available it is estimated that more than 40 nations have a higher percentage of literacy than the US" (Rondthaler and Lias, 1985:4). Bob Brown, Secretary of the British Simplified Spelling Society, holds that "there could be more than 6,000, people in this category in Britain, in addition to another 4,000,000 with definite literacy problems" (in *Personal View* 1: 2).

(iv) A new orthography would be more legible and easy to write. Shaw's alphabet, for instance, removes capitals and linked handwritten characters. Upward (1992a) does also remove capitals but there is no general agreement on this point and some reformers think capitals may contribute to legibility (Cf. Ripman and Archer, 1940, 86).

(v) The International Argument: Traditional Orthography is a great obstacle to the universality of our language and its general use among learners (Simplified Spelling Board, 1920, 23).

(vi) A Reformed Orthography would preserve language from change (cf. Zachrisson: 1933). This opinion, philologically questionable, is not however shared by other reformers who think that even if a better spelling implies a better speech, change is inevitable (cf., for instance, Simplified Spelling Board, 1920).

(vii) A Reformed Orthography would align English with other European languages who have updated their orthographies (Spain, Holland, the Scandinavian countries...) (cf. Upward, 1992, 25-27).

### 3.3.2. OBJECTIONS TO REFORM AND ANSWER OF THE REFORMISTS

As in the Renaissance, Spelling Reform today encounters resistance on the part of the conservatives. The arguments against reform are more or less the same as in past centuries (etymological argument, homonymical objection, lexical objection... cf. Simplified Spelling Board, 1920; Wijk, 1959, 10-11; Follick, 1965, 11; Lindgren, 1969, 11). Nevertheless, three new arguments are used by 20th century opponents to Spelling Reform:

#### (i) The Economical Objection:

Opponents to reform claim that with a Reformed Orthography the old books would be wasted and printing them again would mean spending a lot of money in punches, paper, etc. But reformists argue that: (1) The change would only come gradually, so the old books will still be readable; (2) Types are always changing and the advance of learning requires continual reeditions of books. (cf. Follick, 1965, 225; Ripman & Archer, 1940, 93; Upward, 1992a, 24-5, etc).

#### (ii) The aesthetic argument: "in a RO the words will have a strange appearance and look ugly".

This argument, though apparently irrational, has important sociolinguistic connotations and it refers to a problem very difficult to overcome. Most reformers claim that all these difficulties will disappear when the new spellings are no longer new. On the other hand, it was this argument that led Shaw to depart from the Roman alphabet, since he thought that a Reformed Orthography would always look illiterate:

For this very reason, however, the reform cannot be effected by a shortened spelling which is indistinguishable from ordinary wrong spelling. If any man writes me a letter in which through is spelt thru, and above abuv, I shall at once put him down as an illiterate and inconsequent plebeian, no matter what Board or what potentate sanctions his orthography. (Tauber, 1965, 37)

A basic difference between past and present reformers is the fact that illiteracy is considered as a more serious problem today and social criticism in present authors is even fiercer than in Hart. Thus Lindgren (1969), with his typical energy, protests that,

there is a great deal of ignorance, indifference, egotism and snobbery among those sections of community who have themselves acquired the arts of reading and writing without much difficulty and who are not aware of the extent of semi-literacy and backwardness in reading among English-speaking school children. (op. cit. p. 15)

And Yule (1982) states:

Behind these assertions, and behind the name-calling of reform as scholarly, uncouth, etc, may lurk the unmentionable argument that present spelling is a shibboleth, a barrier separating the elect from the common herd who cannot even spell and who mispronounce uncommon words... (op. cit. p. 11)

Another difference between present and past reformers has to do with the 20th century concern with the international status of English that remained unexplored until the last century. Special care must be also given to the new approach to the spelling problem from an interdisciplinary perspective.

### 3.3. THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The recent developments in Psychology, Sociology and other disciplines close to Linguistics have further contributed to the study of written language and of the problems of devising new spelling systems in specific social and political contexts.

#### 3.3.1. FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS FROM 20TH-CENTURY LINGUISTICS

In the 20th century, “it is possible to trace the development of a school of thought which is not so much antireformist as fearful of too radical or precipitous a change” (Scragg, 1974: 114). The basic assumption held by Bradley (1913-14) and the functionalist Vachek (1989) is that spoken and written language are mutually independent, which implies that “writing should not be blamed for being inaccurate in recording the phonic-make-up of spoken utterances -it lies outside the scope of its function to do this” (Vachek, 1945-1945, 90; quoted by Tauli, 1977, 21). From a generativist perspective, Chomsky and Halle (1968) claim that the English orthography is close to optimal in keeping the similarity existing between related words, while other linguists, like Albrow (1972) or Venezky (1970) have assumed the existence of patterns of regularity in Traditional Orthography which partially deny its supposed chaotic nature. All these comments, some of them quite reasonable, have exerted a big influence on the conservatist views.

### 3.3.2. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

Psycholinguistic evidence has led to establish two fundamental distinctions:

(i) Reading and writing are different psycholinguistic processes both from an anatomical and a functional point of view. Frith (1980, 496) has suggested that “it is most natural for users of an alphabetic script to ‘write by ear’ ...but to read ‘by eye’.

(ii) Skilled Adults are different from learners as far as their reading strategies are concerned. The “dual route of reading” implies that while a graphemic-phonemic strategy (or indirect route) is used by children when learning to read, more skilled readers use a direct or lexical strategy.

These two distinctions imply that any Spelling Reform has to balance the interests of the reader and the writer on the one hand and those of the learner and the skilled adult on the other. While a phonemic system would always help the writer and the young or foreign learner, a more ideographic system stressing word distinctiveness would on the contrary benefit the reader and the skilled adult.

### 3.3.3. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The contribution of Sociolinguistics has been decisive for determining which non-linguistical factors should be borne in mind by reformers: (1) It does not matter how rigorous a system may be; if speakers do not like it, it is a waste of time; (2) Any writing system is embedded in a powerful social network (comprising users’ attitudes, publishing trades, international communication, technology...) which may exert enormous inertia against change; (3) Spelling is considered, in highly literate societies, as a social function difficult to achieve and, for that reason, difficult to renounce to (cf. Stubbs, 1989, 71 & ff.).

### 3.3.4. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

Language Planning is the receptor of all these interdisciplinary contributions. It is the task of Language Planners to channel all the initiatives into the appropriate implementation activities bearing in mind all these factors and accounting for the interests of the majority. Since its early beginnings as a consolidated discipline in the 1950’s, Language Planning has been especially concerned with the problems of providing those languages with no previous written tradition with appropriate writing systems. However, since the problem of Spelling Reform is still unresolved and, since the role of writing in modern societies is so important, many authors are presently claiming that more research should be undertaken concerning the orthography planning of languages such as English or French (cf. Tauli, 1970).

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study has tried to demonstrate that the Renaissance was an especially rich period as far as linguistic production is concerned. The Spelling Reform activities undertaken at this time set out the lines along which modern Phonetics and Corpus Planning would develop. As regards Mulcaster and Hart, 20th-century authors have acknowledged their influence and their merits. Thus, Axel Wijk reminds us that Mulcaster was able to perceive “that the natural way of amending the spelling was to clear away old abuses and not to devise a wholly new and untried spelling system” (Wijk, 1959, 18). And, Upward (1992b, 21) recognizes that the concept that guides his own plan (i.e., “teaching literacy first, Traditional Orthography second”) had been already advanced by Hart in his *Method* in 157.<sup>1</sup>

Two conclusions can be drawn from our analysis: on the one hand, in the light of present Spelling Reforms, the work of past authors does not look so old-fashioned: Mulcaster and Hart’s

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, Upward (1992, 21) says: “An early, graphic statement of the psychological rationale of the ‘literacy first, spelling second’ approach was made by Hart”. Then he quotes Hart’s words on the traditional way of teaching reading: “VViiich I finde as reasonable, as if a nurse shoulde take in hand to teach a child, to go first vpon high patterns or stiles, or vpon a coarde, or on the hands, before he should be taughte as the naturall and reasonable order is...” (Hart, 1570; quoted by Pitman and St John, 1969, 77; op. cit.).

arguments are, for the most part, still valid, differences in this respect having to do with the new status of English and with technological changes. On the other hand, the work of past reformers also throws light on the future development of orthography planning. In view of the disappointing failure of the schemes so far designed, most sensible reformers are now aware that the future lies with interdisciplinary research, bearing in mind Upward's words that "like a garden, a writing system cannot be left neglected for ages" (Upward, 1992b: 33).

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## APPENDIX

TABLE 1. EVOLUTION OF HART'S SYSTEM OF SPELLING

	<i>Manuscript</i>	<i>Orthography</i>	<i>Method</i>
	-Differentiation of <i/j> and <u/v> <sup>1</sup> - <e> is not valid for representing [i: ] - <oo> stands for [o: ] and <u> for [u: ] - <ea, ai, ay, ei, ey, ee, ie, eo> disappear		- <uu> for [w]
Vowels and Diphthongs	<w> is used for [u] <y>=[wi]	rejection of <w> and <y>	
Consonants	- <th> to be substituted for or <th> and <dh> respectively - <c> is used instead of <ch>	- devising of new symbols: - a new symbol for ch - new symbol for syllabic [l] - <gh> for <h> - <th>=[t <sup>h</sup> ]	
	- <sh> as in ModE <i>shame</i> - ph is always <f> - <g> is only [g] - <j> with ModE value - <k> for [k] so <q> disappears - <z>, <s> for [z], [s]		

<sup>1</sup> Dobson (1955, 69) believes this is "the earliest record in English of this proposal" (op. cit. 69) and Scragg (1974, 66) remarks on the fact that consistent use of them as separate letters was already being made by scribes at the beginning of the 15th century.

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Use of diacritics	- acute and weak accents for strong and weak stress and a circumflex for length but he also allows for consonant and vowel doubling - abolition of mute <-e>	- subscript dot for long vowels - acute accent for short vowels (in doubtful cases)	- No special sign for [i] - No acute accent
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TABLE 2. MULCASTER'S SYSTEM OF SPELLING (1589)

<b>GENERAL RULE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use of mute -e to indicate length of preceding vowel ("qualifying e") or to alter the quality of a preceding consonant &lt;c, g, s&gt; ("mere silent") (never if the preceding vowel is short)</li> <li>- &lt;-ie&gt; to be written finally for /i/</li> <li>- &lt;-y&gt; is used for /ai/ finally</li> <li>- &lt;-y&gt;+&lt;-ing&gt;=&lt;-ying&gt;; &lt;-y&gt;+&lt;-ed&gt;=&lt;-ied&gt; or &lt;-yed&gt;</li> <li>- &lt;-ew&gt; instead of &lt;-u&gt; in <i>trew</i>, <i>virtwe</i></li> <li>- &lt;i&gt; vowelish vs. "consonantish"</li> <li>- u/v are variants of the same letter</li> <li>- Consonant doubling only if belonging to different syllables (except for &lt;ss&gt; and &lt;ll&gt;; no doubling after mute &lt;-e&gt;)</li> <li>- &lt;-ick&gt; in <i>traffick</i></li> <li>- &lt;ph&gt; disappears</li> <li>- &lt;-ss&gt; =&lt;-sse&gt;</li> </ul>
<b>PROPORTION</b>	- application of the principle of analogy: i.e. <i>hear, fear, dear, gear, wear</i> (exceptions due to prerogative, i.e. <i>where, here, or enfranchisement, i.e. mere</i> )
<b>DISTINCTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ' , for time (with discretion)</li> <li>- ' sharp accent for sharp and quick vowels</li> <li>- 'flat accent for flat and quick vowels</li> <li>- ' straight accent for showing double force of letters</li> </ul>
<b>ENFRANCHISEMENT</b>	- Neologisms should not imitate the original
<b>PREROGATIVE</b>	- Exceptions must not be reduced to rules

TABLE 3. TYPOLOGY OF ENGLISH SPELLING REFORM — ADAPTED FROM BROWN (1992)

INTENT NATURE	PERMANENT	TRANSITIONAL		
		TO RO	TEACHING TO	
			L1	L2
DIGRAPHIC	<i>New Spelling</i> (SSS, 1910 on) <i>Anglic</i> (Zachrisson, 1932) Follick, 1965 Rondthaler and Lias, 1985			
DIACRITIC	<i>Phonetic B</i> (Lindgren, 1969)			
MIXED (DIG/DIAC)	Hodges, 1644 <i>Phonetic A</i> (Lindgren, 1969) Hart, 1551-1570			
AUGMENTED ALPHABET	Smith, 1568 Bullockar, 1580 Hart, 1551-1570		<i>ita</i> , Pitman 1958	
NEW ALPHABET	Wilkins, 1668 Shaw/Read, 1962			
CUT REDUNDANCY	<i>DUE</i> (Citron, 1983) <i>Cut Spelling</i> , (Upward, 1992) <i>Clipd Spelling</i> (Yule, 1981)			
CONSISTENT RULES	<i>Regularized English</i> (Wijk, 1959, 1977) Mulcaster, 1582	<i>SR1</i> (Lindgren 1969)		
PARTIAL RECTIFICATION	Webster, 1789-1829 American Reforms, 1906			

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READING AID	Hodges, 1644 <i>Writing to Read</i> (Martin and Rondthaler, 1986)			<i>English Teaching Alphabet</i> (Hofmann, 1988)
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