GUEST EDITORIAL

Language reform

One of the reasons we have such a rich legacy of work on language to look back on is the desire people have had throughout history to intervene in language and to change it.

Reforming zeal has many causes. One potent motivation for language reform is dissatisfaction with existing spelling systems. This is a constant theme in the history of English, a particularly striking example of a language whose spelling conventions have been left behind by change in the spoken language internationally. The first grammar of English, William Bullokar's 1586 *Pamphlet for Grammar*, was written using what Bullokar called 'tru ortŏgraphy', and proposals for spelling reform have come and gone ever since. Serious spelling reform proposals are not just a feature of earlier centuries, and indeed some of the best known and most vigorously pursued proposals for reforming English were the product of the twentieth century, such as the Shavian Alphabet, devised according to the terms of the will of George Bernard Shaw, Cut Spelng, and NuEnglish. Spelling reform has often been pursued by enthusiastic amateurs (as in the three examples just given), and in the absence of official backing has not achieved widespread acceptance. Exceptions do exist, however, such as the 1911 reform of Portuguese orthography and the 1996 official reform of German spelling. There are persuasive arguments for reforming orthography, principally pedagogical and economic ones, and these will continue to be invoked as new proposals are put forward across a range of languages into the future.

More ambitious reform programmes have been adopted and continue to be adopted across the world. Here I am referring in particular to language planning enterprises. The classical example of a planned language, and one particularly close to my own research heart, is Norwegian, but official and semi-official intervention in the language, how it is taught, what variety is taught, and what varieties and forms are granted official status, is not only widespread, but the study of it has really entered the mainstream of Applied Linguistics. Recent years have seen journals, textbooks, themed conferences and so forth emerging in ever-increasing quantities, sure signs that language policy and planning (LPLP) studies have come of age.

More ambitious still is the proposal of entirely new language systems, and members of the Henry Sweet Society have been particularly active in researching 17th-century attempts to create a new universal language, notably in England and France. As with long-established orthographies, most of us are aware of the challenges faced by natural languages in doing what they are supposed to do, communicating clearly and effectively, and the history of our efforts to make sense of natural languages has been the richer through the efforts of those who have sought to introduce what H. Jacob calls in the title of his 1947 book 'a planned auxiliary language'. In his introduction to that book, Sir Richard Gregory (1864–1952) wrote, "In the interest of international communication and the free expression of ideas, it is to be hoped that academic as well as scientific and commercial organizations will assist in the movement towards an agreed auxiliary language". This has not happened, but the

work of reformers continues to enrich the process of linguistic enquiry, despite the fact that it is an enterprise rather outside the mainstream tradition of linguistics.

Other types of reform have attracted the interest of historiographers of linguistics too. The history of language teaching has been particularly thoroughly charted in recent years, not least thanks to the publications of society-members Tony Howatt and Richard C. Smith. Phonetic transcription, often linked to orthographic reform, is another corner of language to have attracted reformers over the centuries (see Kemp 2006 for a summary).

It is a pleasure to be able to introduce two articles in this issue of the *Henry Sweet Society Bulletin*, which have been invited because they add a different dimension to the current body of work on the history of language reform activity. Martin Findell discusses the angelic language of the Renaissance mathematician John Dee (1527-1609), who claimed to have been in communication with angels and to have received revelation in a previously unknown language. This is a would-be universal language, but not one, Dee claims, created by human beings. Findell discusses Dee's angelic alphabet in some detail in an attempt to understand where it is derived from.

Henry Sweet is a more mainstream figure in the history of linguistics, indeed so mainstream that our society is named in his honour. He is well known for his phonetic work, for his work on Anglo Saxon and as a leading figure in the institutionalisation of language study in Britain in the later nineteenth century. In researching his biography of Sweet, Mike MacMahon has unearthed much about the man and his work that has not before been widely recognised, including his work on a new system of musical notation, presented here.

I hope that we will be including articles on the Dutch language-teaching reform movement and on reform in 19th-century Icelandic in future issues of the *Bulletin*. The history of language reform endeavours is endlessly fascinating, as we witness figures from the past really engaging with language, often with passion and commitment, and sometimes not a little eccentricity. We would certainly welcome further contributions on aspects of language reform in the pages of the *Bulletin*.

Kemp, A. 2006. 'Phonetic transcription: history'. In: *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. 2nd ed. Ed. by Keith Brown. Oxford: Elsevier. 9: 396-410.

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