

Peter Mühlhäusler

(University of Adelaide & Linacre College Oxford)

The History of writing Pitkern and Norf'k

(talk given at the History Society in 2019)

1. Introduction:

[Note: I have produced an appendix that gives numerous examples of written Pitkern and Norf'k]

The history of literacy and the development of spelling systems in the Pacific at first sight appears to be a particularly boring and unimportant topic, as are other questions that historians concern themselves with. However, when one begins to look more closely, one discovers many absolutely fascinating stories such as:

- The literary revolution that swept through Polynesia in the 1840s and that changed Polynesian societies for good, by transforming them from oral to literate societies;
- The comedies of errors that characterized the development of missionary writing systems in Hawai'i and Fiji;
- The power games played by competing mission societies in Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Vanuatu when deliberately developing mutually incompatible writing systems for Pidgin English;
- The politics of creating an agreed mission alphabet for the Anglican Church in the 1850s and Patteson's decision to adopt his friend Max Müller's, Professor of Philology in the University of Oxford, proposal for the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island;
- Last, but not least, the ongoing debate about how Norf'k should be written, subsequent to the launch of the Laycock-Buffett orthography for the Norf'k language in 1988.

When looking outside the Pacific there are many other fascinating stories:

- The politics of literacy and the emergence of different spelling conventions for the US and Britain;
- The numerous unsuccessful attempts to simplify English spelling since the early sixteenth century. If one googles “Simplified English Spelling” one is offered more than 6 million websites, including, of course Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-language_spelling_reform, which provides a somewhat biased survey.
- Costly and at times violent conflicts in the West Indies, accompanying the development of standard spelling conventions for the local creole languages such as Jamaican Creole English, Haitian Creole French and the Spanish-Portuguese Creole Papiamentu of the Dutch West Indies.
- Long-standing disputes over spelling among the Cornish and Breton language revival movement.
- The farcical and costly German spelling reform of the 1996, which led to massive conflict between different interest groups, disagreement between German States and High Court litigation. The tentative outcome is a compromise between traditionalists and reformers and an increase in officially tolerated spelling variants.
- The political; debates that brought with them four radically different spelling systems for Letzebuergesch, one of the official languages of Luxembourg. Luxembourg is a very rich country and they can afford to get orthography wrong a few times-Norfolk Island by contrast is poor.
- The Adnyamathanha (Flinders Ranges of South Australia) community has quarrelled for decades, which of the three main competing spelling systems should be used in the school and on public signage. This quarrel is somewhat surprising, given that there are only about 50 speakers left. I am supposed to help sort this one out for the Leigh Creek school.

Common to all of the above cases is that the question, of how a language should be written, is not just a technical question, but primarily a social one. Any professional linguist with a grounding in phonetics can whip up an orthography in three weeks or less (as Laycock did with Alice Buffett). The more important question of what orthography a community of speakers can live with without conflict, can take many years to sort out. Speakers usually have strong feelings as to how their language should be written. My own Alemanic, Allemanic, Allaminic, Allemannic language community has decided that it is best to let everyone write any way they want. Almost every book in my large Alemannic library uses a different approach to spelling. I have no difficulty reading them all. The human brain is capable of processing a large variety of spellings as well as it copes with dialectal, social, gender-based and age-based variation in pronunciation.

What I wish to do in this talk is to explore how Pitkern and Norf'k have been written over the years and how the history of writing can help us understand some of the historical events and processes that have contributed to the ongoing confusion and disagreements as to how Norf'k should be written. Because I am speaking to the History Society I will not have to say much about technical matters or the social psychology of writing.

2. Pitkern (P) and Norf'k (N) as oral languages

P and N have been oral languages for most of their history, co-existing with educated English. Importantly, the Pitcairners have been literate in English right from the the days of the mutiny, and English literacy has been highly valued and used in a wide range of domains and functions. Up to the middle of the 20th century written communication among Pitcairners, and by Pitcairners to outsiders was in Standard English. The origins of this practice can be traced back to the mutineer Ned Young who was born in St. Kitts.

The language situation in St Kitts in the late 18th century was roughly as follows: White plantation owners and upper-class British spoke educated English, black slaves spoke St Kitts Creole and African languages. White children and mixed-race children were socialized in Creole for the first few years by black nannies. African languages were rarely passed on to the next generation, and most of the African slave children grew up speaking Creole as their first and only language. Ned Young probably grew up speaking St. Kitts Creole as his first language in the first five to ten years of his life, having an African or mixed-race mother and presumably an African nursemaid and African play mates. However, his educated and affluent white father (probably Sir George Young) saw to it that he was properly educated. The teaching of literacy on St Kitts was in the hands of Protestant missionaries and their principal objective of teaching it was to enable white and some mixed-race children to speak English and to read the Scriptures.

Once Ned Young had received his formal education, presumably first on St Kitts and subsequently in England (details are difficult to obtain), educated English became his dominant language, the language he used as an officer and the only language he wrote in. Ned Young was not necessarily aware that he spoke two languages. Rather, he would have become familiar with the idea that there were High (H) and Low (L) varieties of English (Norfolk Islanders remember the expressions killing the Queen, breaking the King's crown used by mainland teachers to refer to their language, which they regarded as a degenerate form of English), a situation labelled 'diglossia' by linguists. What determined the choice of language variety were factors such as race, age, level of formality topic and medium. Written communication was always in the H

variety. We only have a small number of extracts from Young's diary written on Pitcairn, but this is enough to confirm that he was highly literate in Standard English.

By 1798, the only remaining mutineers were Adams and Young. By this time, Adams had become deeply religious and he got Young to teach him literacy so as to be able to read the Bible, which the mutineers had brought with them to Pitcairn. English literacy thus is one of the many important legacies of Ned Young.

Young died of asthma in 1800 and John Adams tried his best to continue teaching English literacy, though he was barely literate. Again, the perceived function of literacy on Pitcairn was to enable its population to read the Scriptures. By contrast, literacy in England was promoted as a means of enabling workers during the Industrial Revolution, to read written instructions and to acquire workplace skills.

According to his son, Adams found a primer in the house of one of his dead companions from which he taught himself to read. In his diary John Buffett comments that Adams' skills and methods were dubious but apparently effective:

McCoy's son has told me, that they could not believe for some time that Adams understood what he read, but they thought (to use his own words) 'he spoke out of his head.' After Adams taught some of them they taught others, and when I arrived all but two or three of the first generation could read. (Buffett 1846).

John Adams had managed to inspire his pupils, and the Pitcairners were anxious to read as Captain King of the Elizabeth found while visiting the Island in 1820. "I now gave them a whale-boat, in return for their refreshments, some books, razors, combs, and, in short, everything they stood in need of; but nothing pleased them so well as the books; as they wished much to read and write." (King 1820: 385). King and his crew donated more than 200 books for a population of 21 persons over ten years old.

By the early 1820s the young Islanders began to crave some further instruction. John Adams, whose health was failing, applied to Britain for a schoolmaster. As a result, in 1823 Adams' role as teacher was assumed by John Buffett, who also took over church services and began the Pitcairn Island Register. This important "publication" chronicles local events on Pitcairn Island. In 1828 Buffett was joined and subsequently usurped by George Hunn Nobbs who became pastor, surgeon and teacher. Under their regime the Pitcairners achieved a high level of literacy.

Pitcairn Island has the enviable distinction of being the first English-speaking country to introduce universal compulsory education in 1838. This legislation formalized what had been common practice since about 1800. The 1838 'Laws regarding the School' stipulated that "There must be a school kept, to which all parents shall be obliged to send their children, who must previously be able to repeat the alphabet, and be of the age of from six to sixteen." (Brodie: 1851:87).

Over the coming years many books were provided to the Pitcairners by the British and Foreign Bible Society, but books continued to be requested from the captains of passing vessels as well. "We are very much in want of Church prayer books and Watt's psalms and hymns for public worship. Elementary books for the younger classes in the school, and Walkingham's or other books on arithmetic for the more advanced classes" were also requested, (letter from George Nobbs to Captain Hope, 1847). By the 1850s the Pitcairn people were well educated, and fond of reading "but only books of sterling interest, and moral and religious character" (Warren 1855: 168). He was probably hypocrited by the Pitcairn Islanders. While the ability to read the Scriptures was of the highest importance to the Pitcairners, non-religious literature was becoming popular. Shipley (1851:6), who visited the Island in 1848, remarked that "in their library we found a few works of fiction by Scott, Cooper, James, Marryat and Dickens, besides many other popular works of fiction."

After the return of several families to Pitcairn from Norfolk in the 1860s, literacy in English remained official school policy, though the quality of teachers varied and in the first half of the 20th century literacy declined, to improve only once the school had been taken on by the New Zealand education system after World War 2.

3. English literacy on Norfolk Island

After the Pitcairners' relocation to Norfolk Island in 1856 George Hunn Nobbs continued to act as pastor and teacher. Up to the turn of the 20th century, the situation was little different from what it had been Pitcairn. In 1857 the Governor of NSW, Denison (who had authority over Norfolk Island), proclaimed laws and regulations which included:

... all persons will send their children to school when they have attained the age of six years, and from that time will cause them to attend regularly till they have reached the age of fourteen years. (NSW Parliamentary Papers 1863: 450)

Nobbs was followed by Rossiter who had been a master of the Church of England Industrial School in Hertfordshire and, whilst reading, writing, spelling

and other English language-centred activities remained important, he placed greater emphasis on vocational training. A contemporary report by the Reverend C.C. Elcum who visited the island in 1880 (Mercer 2006: 8) gives the earliest detailed description of the children attending school in Norfolk Island.

“... all that was done was well done and the whole tone of the education seemed to me about as different to the hollow superficiality of too many of our schools at home as possible. All read aloud, for one thing, as if they understood and appreciated what they read. There were in “standards”, but, in spite of the absence of boots and stockings, (uncommon articles for people on Norfolk Island) I felt I had to do with the set of children who were really being “educated.”

As was the case with Pitcairn, the quality of English literacy varied with the quality of teachers, but at all times the Norfolk Islanders have been functionally literate in English and a high standard of English literacy is in evidence in both private and official writings.

After the Second World War, as competency in P and N declined and stable diglossia disappeared, we note a transition from a situation where using P and N as oral languages were simply part of living the islands’ culture, to a conscious reflection on the role of P and N in the future of the two societies. Both varieties had become endangered and literacy began to be seen as a means of raising their status and as offering a chance of their survival. At the same time islander identity had become part of the political discourse and literacy was regarded as a means of enhancing the status of P and N vis-à-vis the dominant language of the colonizers, Britain and Australia. On both islands the development of literacy has become a contentious issue, due to the tension between prevailing local practices and the technical solutions introduced by 1 experts from the outside.

4. Writing in Pitkern and Norf’k

4.1 Background

An inspection of early documents written in P and N demonstrates the technical challenges their writers faced:

P and N, whilst historically derived from English, are not dialects of English. The pronunciation of many words inherited from English cannot always be guessed from contemporary English spelling;
Quite a few words are of Polynesian and St. Kitts origin;

P and N have a number of sounds, particularly vowel sounds and diphthongs, which are not found in Standard English;

P and N exhibit considerable variation in pronunciation among different families and individuals.

Visitors and other outsiders attempting to write down P and N produced a large number of ad hoc spellings, thereby adding to the perception, that spelling for these languages is individualistic and idiosyncratic and in dire need of standardization.

However, when one examines the writings of the Islanders themselves a different picture emerges. One can see the gradual emergence of social norms for writing, which by 1970 were widely used. Given that it took British English about 300 years to develop agreed norms, this is quite an achievement.

4.2 Writings by Pitcairn Islanders

Kållgård has commented that:

“Only very seldom do we meet Pitcairnese as a written language: the Islanders sometimes write single words of it in letters, for fun; visitors to the island have written words in Pitcairnese in articles, etc. These occasions are very few, however, and every time someone -- Pitcairner or non-Pitcairner -- tries to write Pitcairnese the question arises: how does one spell the words? The answer is, of course, that nobody knows, that the language practically does not exist as a written language, and, consequently, no conventions on the spelling of the words have been agreed upon “(1993: 70 -80).

The earliest examples of P spelled by an islander are a couple of words in John Buffett’s diary (1846) for concepts which have no English equivalents, e.g. *maro* ‘loincloth worn by men’ and *auti* ‘paper mulberry’. The first examples of connected texts date from the 1940s (examples in Kållgård 1993). Kållgård, who did a lot of linguistic and medical work on Pitcairn tried to convince the Pitcairn Islanders to standardize their spelling but this was not agreed to. In the few publications that have been produced in recent years (mainly by Meralda Warren and her pupils) there is evidence of some informal standard similar to traditional Norfolk spelling: *I luw et up Fletlan cos har side we had myse Birthday. Es goodun fer plyen Rounders un hem udder games.*

4.3 Writing of Pitkern by visitors and outsiders

Representations of P in written form by outsiders are far more numerous, but the language is usually spelled either like Standard English or an aberrant version thereof. An early example of a longer text is a conversation recorded by Captain Raine:

Suppose one man strike me, I no strike again, for the Book says, suppose one strike you on one side, turn the other to him; suppose he bad man strike me, I no strike him, because no good that; suppose he kill me, he can't kill the soul – He no can grasp that, that go to God, much better place than here (Raine 1824 :461).

Shapiro, who conducted fieldwork on Pitcairn Island in 1935, comments that ‘not having special linguistic knowledge, I was unable to record what I heard in the approved phonetic symbols’ (1936: 210). However, he attempts to approximate the sounds of P with spellings such as *lebby* ‘let be’, *leave it alone* and *solen* ‘sole one’. One of the few outsiders who stayed on Pitcairn for an extended period (six months in 1937) was the medical doctor Rufus Southworth (Southworth 2003), who uses spellings such as *ikawa* ‘I do not know’, *larn* ‘to teach, inform’ and *good-un* ‘good’.

The most comprehensive body of data is found in the word lists compiled by a number of long-term residents, particularly the British colonial official Maude (1940) and two school teachers, Moverley and Sanders who taught on Pitcairn Island in the 1950s. Moverley produced a word-list which was examined by the University of Queensland linguist Elwyn Flint who noted that ‘there is some evidence that Moverley consulted the Shapiro list (1936) and was influenced by its spelling.’ Sanders, by contrast, developed his own conventions. Neither of them had access to the Maude list. The following examples illustrate how these observers differ:

Maude (1940)	Moverley (1951)	Sanders (1957)	meaning
yourly	yolly	-	you (pl)
gwen	-	gwan	going
nawe	na:we	naaway	to swim
ka	ka:	k'a	don't know
-	rum9	ruma	torch fishing
-	a:m9ul9	uma ola	clumsy
foot	fu', fut	fut	why?
orkle sullen	-	little sullen	child

4.4 Writings by Norfolk Islanders

The reasons for Norfolk Islanders to write in Norf^ʔk initially were entertainment, joking and signalling a separate identity. The functions and domains covered by spoken Norf^ʔk were also those of written Norf^ʔk. The earliest written document found is the well known poem *Ucklun*, written by headmaster Gustave Quintal around 1900, at a time when resistance against Australian interference was particularly strong.

When Flint visited Norfolk Island in the later 1950s he collected a number of light-hearted documents written by Norfolk Islanders. Occasional words and phrases in N are found in readers' letters to the local newspapers from about 1960. By that time, the Norfolk Islanders had become aware of the decline of their language and writing it down was seen as a way to preserve it. A substantial list of expressions is found in the Norfolk Island Cookery Book, published around 1970. The booklet identifies two reasons for writing Norf^ʔk which have been the dominant ones ever since: to perpetuate the language and to be of interest to tourists. Perpetuation of the language was also a concern of Shirley Harrison's (Moresby Buffett's daughter)'s whose Glossary (at first an attachment to her 1972 thesis on the language of Norfolk Island) was published in 1979. It was written in technical phonetic script and as such not accessible for the average reader. However, in her numerous personal field notes Harrison transcribed her N texts either in phonetic script or in the traditional approach. Subsequent important mile stones in the history of written Norf^ʔk were Ena Ette Christian's poems (1986) and Beryl Nobbs-Palmer's *Glossary* (1986), both featuring a traditional approach to writing.

Buffett and Laycock's (1988) *Speak Norfolk Today*, like Alice Buffett's subsequent poems and translations, uses a new system. When first presented, this system was not universally welcomed, and the Island community has remained divided ever since. An unintended consequence was that the spelling conflict post- 1988 led to a considerable increase in publications in N, in part a sign of the competition between the users of the traditional writing conventions and those suggested by Laycock and Buffett.

Growing tensions between Norfolk Island and Australia from the 1990s created another rationale for writing in N. Writing N symbolically distances Norfolk Islanders from the Australian administration and a number of written documents clearly had this purpose. Recent examples are the poems on the wall of the NIPD office.

Up to the millennium, tourism was closely associated with duty free shopping, but with the steady growth of internet shopping this part of tourism lost its

attraction. Cultural tourism grew in importance and the Norfolk language became part of it. One can witness the creation of a Norfolk 'landscape' intended to enhance the tourist experience. Since the mid- 1990s:

- Public signage in Norfolk has become widespread;
- The Norfolk Museums feature interpretive signage in both permanent and special exhibitions, using both the traditional and the Laycock-Buffett spelling
- Local writers publish poetry, short stories and children's books using both spelling approaches as well as a mix.
- Up to the recolonization of 2015, Norfolk was used on official documents such as departure cards, parliamentary papers, postage stamps and the phone book, again featuring both spelling approaches as well as a mix.
- Norfolk (mostly in traditional spelling) is used widely on the internet.
- A growing range of tourism products such as tea towels, beer can holders, post cards or shopping bags feature Norfolk, the majority of them using the traditional writing approach.

Norfolk has become highly visible but, in most instances, remains complementary to, rather than a substitute for, written English.

4.5. Writing of Norfolk by visitors and outsiders

The earliest examples of words spelled by an outsider are found in Bishop Montgomery's account of a visitation (1896). Among them is the first example of the spelling *sullun* 'people' but some of his other forms are highly idiosyncratic, in particular his use of hyphens as in *wa-oo-loo* 'dropping to pieces'.

Idiosyncratic spellings are also encountered in the numerous reports by headmasters and school inspectors beginning with inspector Ray (1912). They are interesting because of instances of mishearing and misinterpretation of words and because they demonstrate the unreliability of the data found in the accounts of short-term visitors.

Several wordlists have been compiled by outsiders with limited experience of Norfolk, including those by Wiltshire (1939), Rosenthal (1939) and Holland (1946), which offer a number of different solutions to the spelling of Norfolk:

Wiltshire	Rosenthal	Holland	meaning
naaway	narway	narwe	to swim

fut	fwhut	fut	why?
car-wha	kawa	car what	don't know
boo'oo	-	boo-who	lump
yourlya	yorlya	yourl-yer	you (pl)
mussa	moosa	mosses	almost
ucklan	-	uckland	people of N.I.
sem is ways	-	semithway	peculiar
molla	morlla	-	tomorrow
se	sai	se	(copula)

A number of attempts to spell N were also made by professional linguists. Flint supplements detailed phonetic transcriptions of his recordings with a quasi-etymological version to improve legibility and Zettersten (1981) again proposes a more accessible written version for his transcriptions. The two linguists arrive at quite different solutions:

Flint	Zettersten	translation
tatey	tatie	sweet potato
fer	fe	complementizer
pooh-oo	poo-oo	unripe
plun	plahn	banana

Such one-off technical solutions do not provide solid material for the development of a writing system. By contrast, the conventions that developed organically over time in the community deserve to be taken far more seriously.

5. Community writing norms

5.1 The emergence of written norms in Norf'k

Linguists such as Coseriu (1975) distinguish between three manifestations of : system – norm - usage. Adapted to the problem of orthography these terms can be projected onto:

- linguistic writing systems, based on technical principles (system)
- norms that have developed among those who write the language (norm)
- individual practices/variation (usage)

Given the patchy record for P, I shall concentrate on the development of social norms for writing. If we consider the N documents produced prior to the time the first technical spelling system was proposed by Buffett & Laycock (1988), we note a considerable degree of convergence. This is evident in a wordlist compiled by Audrey and Olga Robinson on behalf of Administrator Pinney around 1935 and in George Nobb's version of *Ucklun*, written about the same time.

There were individual deviations and some inconsistencies, but not of an order of magnitude that would have rendered documents difficult to read.

As in other societies, N 'traditional spelling' evolved over a relatively long period from early private correspondence, creative writing, and public signage to the local internet chat room. The traditional spelling norms were reinforced by the appearance around 1970 of the *Sunshine Club Cookery Book*. The words and phrases in its appendix reflected traditional spelling norms and the popularity of this book, together with the fact that it has been reprinted many times, undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation of spelling norms for many words. About 80% of them are identical with the spellings in Beryl Nobbs-Palmer's dictionary (1986), whose importance was described by Williams and Bataille (2006: 30) as follows:

"Beryl Nobbs spent many years providing a foundation stone of her proposed spelling of the Norfolk language in the form of a written dictionary. She did not claim to have found a solution to the spelling void, but her objective was to preserve a historic patois in her own words for which we are proud to claim as part of our heritage. The majority of words are of English origin, although sometimes the meanings and pronunciations are different. The Polynesian influence is distinct in the emphasis on vowels."

Traditional spelling was taught for several years at the Norfolk Island Central School by Faye Bataille, an influential educator and Girl Guides leader, who retired in 1986. Recently discovered pages from her lesson plans illustrate how she taught the traditional spelling.

When examining such documents one notices a gradual narrowing of variation over time. Thus, Gustave Quintal's early spelling *you-all-ye* 'you pl.' or *na'wer* 'never' have given way to a commonly used *yorlye* and *naewa*.

5.2. Current norms

The norms underlying traditional spelling from the 1960s onward can be summarized as follows:

1. Single vowel as in English ‘cut’ is represented by <u> as in *sullun* ‘people’;
2. The vowel in English ‘soon’ is also spelled <oo> as in *moosa* [musa] ‘almost’;
3. The sound found in English ‘cask’ is usually written <ar> as in *mard* ‘mad’;
4. The sound of English words like ‘sore’ is typically signalled by <or> as in *nort* ‘negator’;
5. Both word final <a> and <er> represent the sound in English ‘mum’ as in *yenna* or *yenner* ‘yonder’ or *mudda* or *mudder* ‘a local dish’;
6. Double consonants following a vowel signal shortness, as in *sullun* ‘people’, *denna* ‘dinner’, *hilli* ‘lethargic’, or *ell* ‘can, habitual’.

The spelling conventions for diphthongs are more variable:

7. The sound in English ‘eye’ is spelled variably <i> as in the first person pronoun *I*; <y> as in first person possessive pronoun *myse* or signalled by a word-final <e> as in *mine* ‘to mind’;
8. The vowel sound of English words such as ‘round’ is usually written <ou> as in *doun ar toun* ‘down in Kingston’, though <ow> is also encountered. In words of Tahitian origin, there is a tendency for the letter combination <au> as in *rauti* ‘ti plant’;
9. The offglide [uə] is also often signalled by a word-final <e> as in *goode* or *gude* ‘good’;
10. The off glide after [ɔ:] is at times signalled by an added <u> as in *hoo-um* [hɔ:ʷm] ‘home’.

For consonants, English spelling conventions are generally followed, though words that do not differ in pronunciation or meaning from English are at times spelled in ways that ‘create symbolic difference’.

11. Traditional N orthography uses the symbols <x>, <q> and <c> where they also occur in the English etymon with the same sound value as in English;
12. <w> is used to replace the [v] of the English etyma in most instances as in *weckles* or *wettels* ‘victuals’;
13. Apostrophes are used to signal either possessives or to indicate that a sound of the English etymon is not pronounced;
14. There appears to be uncertainty as to how words of putative Tahitian origin should be written.
15. English names and place names are generally spelled as in English

The vast majority of these normal spelling conventions continue to be dominant to the present, including in electronic communication

5.3 The Laycock-Buffett spelling system of 1988

The evolution of informal spelling norms by users of N would have continued, had it not been for a major disruption. In 1988, Alice Buffett and Don Laycock (of the Australian National University) introduced a radically different spelling proposal. This new ‘system’ was not the outcome of investigating existing practices or community consultations but a top-down expert solution. It was presented as a *fait accompli* to the community, with the claim that it was superior. In the traditionally oriented society of the Norfolk Islanders the reception of a totally new writing system was not received well by many. Some of the hostility may have been a matter of personalities and family politics. There were also economic considerations, as popular books such as Ena Ette’s poetry or Beryl Nobbs-Palmer’s glossary were in danger of becoming obsolete.

Even more than 30 years since its introduction, the acceptance of the Laycock-Buffett system has remained patchy. It would seem worthwhile to explore some

of the technical reasons underlying the lack of acceptance in spite of it having been taught at NICS for most of the intervening years.

The Laycock-Buffett spelling is often referred to by Norfolk Islanders as phonetic. This is strictly speaking not the case, however. Phoneticians aim to represent the physical properties of speech sounds with special phonetic symbols. Unfortunately different phoneticians typically come to very different conclusions and in the case of P and N we have no fewer than eight accounts given by respected highly trained phoneticians. This includes Shirley Harrison, who made a detailed study of the instrumental and articulatory properties of Norfolk sounds and whose glossary is indeed a phonetic representation of N. Her phonetic transcription differs significantly from those of Flint, Zettersten and Laycock and when scrutinizing her arguments for a particular phonetic transcription one comes across many arbitrary decisions.

Laycock and Buffett's spelling system is at best indirectly phonetic. Alice Buffett's Encyclopedia of 1999 offers phonetic transcriptions in brackets. How such transcriptions are converted into graphemes (written symbols) is based mainly on an approach best known to Laycock, the phonemic method. It was developed by Kenneth Pike and other Bible Translators associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics 'to reduce unwritten languages to writings'. The method is a typical example of 1940s American Linguistic Descriptivism, an approach characterized by:

- The belief that there are mechanical methods for converting pronunciation and phonetic units into phonemes (abstract sound units) - the units that determine graphemes (written symbols);
- The exclusion of history from analysis;
- The exclusion of social factors from analysis.

Phonemic symbols and derived graphemes represent abstract structural properties of speech sounds, not physical properties of pronunciations or mental images. Importantly, since no branch of knowledge has mechanical discovery procedures phonemicists have to do their own guesswork and different analysts often arrive at very different phonemic conclusions and different spelling systems.

Phonemic writing systems have another property: It is not possible to change them, without destroying their new system systematicity. For instance, ignoring the apostrophies in the Laycock-Buffett system has massive consequences for the entire system.

5.4 Present-day Norfolk spelling practice

To understand why people disagree about orthography it is important to realize some of the constraints encountered when devising a new orthography or revising an existing one. The principal constraint is that one cannot maximize more than one parameter in any equation. There are no milk-giving, egg-laying wool pigs that provide kosher bacon and clean out their own styes.

The second constraint one has to consider is that writing is not language, but a representation of language. What precisely writing is supposed to represent is by no means obvious. Some writing systems such as Chinese represent ideas, alphabetic script does not. In the case of Norfolk the most important aspects of the language, writing has been used to represent are:

- The history shared with English, Tahitian and St Kitts Creole
- The shared linguistic history of Pitcairn and Norfolk
- An ideal invariant pronunciation
- Variable pronunciations
- Physical speech sounds
- Psychological speech sounds
- Distinctiveness from English
- Traditional norms

As pointed out already, it is impossible to maximize all of these parameters at once, and as a consequence any writing system will have to be a compromise and in need of tweaking from time to time. Importantly, the parameters are not neutral, but sensitive to the audience they are intended for. Beginning learners, fluent speakers, tourists and visitors require a more or less explicit and redundant orthography and fewer or more similarities with English orthography. Teachers, government agencies and computers require a single invariant standard, human brains do not.

None of the issues ever figured in the spelling debate on Norfolk Island and, as a consequence confusion and entrenched positions became common.

An unintended consequence of the appearance of the Laycock-Buffett system was that it introduced meaning into the spelling debate. Islanders now had a choice and this choice was often framed in terms of good and bad. This led to the development of considerable sentimental attachment to the traditional way of representing the language. It is used deliberately to signal disagreement with the Laycock-Buffett spelling. A publication featuring the different Islander families states that the book uses the Laycock-Buffett spelling but that 'departures from that spelling are at the request of individual contributors' (Partridge 2006: 5), which means roughly half the texts.

As regards actual writing practice, one finds a majority of Islanders who continue to write in the traditional way, a small number of writers who are competent in the Laycock-Buffett system and a growing number of others who mix the two approaches. In order to establish the relative importance of these three spelling practices, I examined a number of documents. First, I used two large bodies of post-1988 texts to produce quantitative analyses to answer the question: How do Norfolk Islanders spell their language? The first set of data are the spellings found in the Norfolk Islander, focussing on the ten most frequent words in texts between 2003 and 2006. It emerged that in seven out of ten cases, the most commonly used spelling is the traditional one of Nobbs-Palmer. In three instances the Laycock-Buffett spellings were preferred.

Norfolk Orthography in the Norfolk Islander

Most common usage 2003-2006	Nobbs-Palmer	Laycock-Buffett
yorlye	yorlye	yorli, yorlye
sullun	sullun	salan
ucklun	ucklun	aklan
moosa	moosa	musa
watawieh	whutta-waye	watawieh
hilli	hilly	hili
guud / gude 50/50	gude	guud
Jaero	Jarroo	Jaero
look orn	look-orn	lukorn
lettle	lettle	lekl

A second set of data is concerned with the spellings found in the Norfolk Internet Forum. Its contributors represent the younger generation who had been taught Laycock-Buffett system at NICS. Somewhat unexpectedly:

Of the 100 most frequent Norfolk words, only three are always spelled in the Laycock-Buffett system;

In 15 instances, the Laycock-Buffett system is the most frequent spelling variant;

In 33 instances, no one spells the word in the Laycock-Buffett system;

Traditional spellings remain dominant.

Qualitative observations reinforce the impression that traditional writing conventions continue to prevail in the public domain, for instance:

Qualitative observations reinforce the impression that traditional writing conventions continue to prevail in the public domain, for instance:

- The *Ode to NICS*, the proposed official song of the Norfolk Island Central School written in 2006, features traditional spelling;
- The Bounty Committee invitation to the Bounty Day Celebrations reads: *Cum orn yorlye, es uckluns day!* (2 June 2007)
- A series of stamps issued around 2004 was called ‘*werken dar shep*’;
- The Norfolk Blue Restaurant, opened in 2009, invites its guests with *welcum tu awas world* and Hilli Restaurant features N words in Nobbs-Palmer’s spelling on the pictures on the wall;
- New business names since 2000 include *Big Suff* (‘big surf’), *Car Beat Ett* (‘can’t beat them’ – a car hire firm), *Se Moosa Bus*. (‘almost full to burst’ – a mobile food outlet) and *Orn dar Cleff* (‘on the cliff’ – a venue for fish frying tours);
- The official (until 2016) Norfolk Island Departure Form contains the sentence: *All yorlye kum bak see ucklan soon*’;
- A new street sign for *Bun Pine Alley* was erected in 2019;
- The temporary toilets erected for the passengers of visiting cruise vessels in 2009 feature graffiti written in the traditional way.
- The new passenger transfer vehicles for cruise ships (August 2019) were called Wana, Hihi and Nuffka combining the convention to spell words of Tahitian origin different from those inherited from English and using the traditional approach for spelling words of English origin (*Nuffka* derives from ‘Norfolker’).

As concerns the private domain, the letters, notes, stories and other writings I have seen are again predominantly written in the traditional fashion.

The situation on Norfolk Island is reminiscent of that of other communities who speak English-related contact languages, such as Jamaican Creole where ‘the phonemic orthography, developed by the Jamaican-Canadian linguist Cassidy in 1961 is used almost exclusively by linguists, in spite of occasional attempts to promote its wider use’ (Sebba 1998: 277). Several Jamaican linguists have opposed the phonemic spelling system for reasons such as its failure to account

for the variable nature of Jamaican Creole and the origin of the phonemic approach in colonial Western ideology. Meanwhile, a revised version of Cassidy's proposal continues promoted without strong indications of community acceptance (<http://www.jumieka.com/>). This website also contains a general discussion of the pros and cons of different approaches to writing.

To date, no such examination has taken place for N. Without informed debate and without planning, the Norfolk Islanders will focus on spelling differences to the detriment of the more important issue of how to revive their language.

7. **Conclusions:**

One of the first questions I was asked on my first visit to Norfolk Island in 1997 was: What do you think of Alice's writing system? I have been asked this question many times since. I have also been confused with Laycock and been praised and attacked for having played a major role in its development.

I have never given an answer, because:

- I did not feel it was my role to tell the community how to write their language;
- It takes years of observation to find out whether as a technical solution it can actually be easily used and, more to the point, whether this is how people actually want to write and do write;
- I have carried out a detailed technical analysis of the competing spelling practices, but this is not the topic of my talk. Let me reiterate however, that there can be no solution that satisfies all requirements and makes everyone happy or, to quote Schopenhauer: Don't look for happiness, try to avoid unhappiness.

Unfortunately, the way the Laycock-Buffett system was presented, rather than its actual nature, has caused unhappiness and the energy that has been spent on arguing for or against a particular approach to spelling could have been used better in promoting the revival of the Norfolk language.

What does all this have to do with history?

Some years ago I gave a conference paper on how colonial language descriptions, spelling systems and language policies came into being. I extended the metaphor of sausage manufacture from law to linguistics. The American poet John Godfrey Saxe (Daily Cleveland Herald 29-3-1869) once observed: "Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how

they are made”. I argued that very much the same applies to most colonial language descriptions, writing systems and language policies, equating the processes of describing and policy-making to one with sausage-making and the products, descriptions and policies and writing systems to sausages. The history of spelling Norfolk can also be seen from the perspective of sausage manufacture. However, whatever the dubious ingredients and manufacturing processes, the test of the sausage is in the eating. Do the customers want to buy and eat the product?

My research on the history of writing Norfolk has highlighted another interesting aspect. Like most writing systems for the major European languages English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish etc. the Norfolk Islanders, over a period of 70 years developed a large number of informal norms for writing down their language. These could be standardized for official purposes with a small amount of tweaking, as indeed happened with many big national languages.

My talk also illustrates two principles historians at times appeal to when trying to make sense of history:

- The invisible hand
- Self-regulation

The invisible hand means that rational local actions lead to non-local unintended outcomes: Taking shortcuts across a lawn may result in an ugly muddy path, someone stepping on the brakes to avoid hitting a cow may result in a pile-up, and not nailing down a horseshoe properly to save time may cause the kingdom to be lost. Everybody who wanted to write in Norfolk before 1970 made their own orthographic choices when writing a letter, a poem or a transcript of a conversation. No-one was in the business of devising spelling norms, but this was the outcome.

Let us think of an example of a self-regulating process. There are maybe 20 public toilets on Norfolk Island with a combined population of residents and visitors of about 2,000. If everybody wanted to go at the same time there would be long queues in front of each facility. An obvious regulatory solution is to assign time slots and location to each person resident on the island. In practice, this is not necessary, as we are dealing with a self-regulating process. We live in an age of mini-management and over-regulation and during the last three years Norfolk Island has experienced a flood of new regulations, many of them concerned with processes that were self-regulating previously.

Before interfering with any process it is recommended to find out whether it is self-regulating or whether active interference is required. The emergence of spelling conventions is by-and-large a self-regulating process and top-down interference by politicians, missionaries and experts can lead to all sorts of undesirable and costly outcomes. Understanding how the traditional and the technical approach to writing Norfolk came into being may help resolve some of the ongoing spelling issues. *But/bat daas/dars/dar's f'/ fe/ fer yorle/yorlye/yohle.*

8. References

Bigg, Archie. 2003. Kids and pines and nursery rhymes. Norfolk Island: Archie Bigg.

Buffett, Alice & Donald C. Laycock. 1988. Speak Norfolk today. Norfolk Island: Himii Publishing Company.

Buffett, Alice. 1992. The writing of Norfolk. In Tom Dutton, Malcolm Ross & Darrell Tryon (eds.), *The language game*, 75–80. Canberra: ANU.

Buffett, Alice. 1999. Speak Norfolk today, an Encyclopedia of the Norfolk language. Norfolk Island: Himii Publishing Company

Buffett, John. 1846. A narrative of 20 years' residence on Pitcairn's island. *The Friend* 4. 2–67.

Cassidy, Frederick G. 1978. A revised phonemic orthography for Anglophone Caribbean Creoles. Paper presented at the Conference of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, Cave Hill, Barbados.

Christian, Ena Ette. 1986. *From myse randa: A selection of poems and tales of Norfolk Island*. Norfolk Island: Ena Ette Christian.

Coseriu, Eugenio. 1975. System, Norm und Rede. In Eugenio Coseriu (ed.), *Sprachtheorie und Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft*, 11–101. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.

Harrison, Shirley. 1972. The language of Norfolk Island. Sydney: Macquarie University MA Hons Dissertation.

Holland, H. 1946 'Norfolk Island patois', ABC Weekly 89:23. Reprinted in S.J. Baker, *Australia speaks*, 1953, p. 204-206.

Källgård, Anders. 1993 . 'Present-day Pitcairnese' in *English World-Wide*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, p. 71-114.

King, Henry. 1820. *Journal of Captain Henry King of the Elizabeth*. The *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* 3 (6). 380–388.

Laycock, Donald. 1990. The interpretation of variation in Pitcairn/Norfolk. In Jerold A. Edmondson, Crawford Feagin & Peter Mühlhäusler (eds.), *Development and diversity. Language variation across time and space: a festschrift for Charles-James N. Bailey*, 621–628. Arlington, TX: University of Texas at Arlington, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Laycock, Donald C. & Alice Buffett. 1986. *The writing of Norfolk*. Canberra & Norfolk Island: Unpublished MS.

Maude, H.E. 1964. A history of Pitcairn Island. In Alan S. C. Ross & A. W. Moverley (eds.), *The Pitcairnese language*, 45–101. London: André Deutsch.

Mercer, Brian 2006. *An Island Education -A History of the Norfolk Island Public School 1856 – 2006*, Norfolk Island : Norfolk Island P & C Association

Montgomery, H.H. 1896. *The light of Melanesia*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Mühlhäusler, Peter. 1990. Reducing Pacific languages to writings. In John E. Joseph & Talbot J. Taylor (eds.), *Ideologies of language*. London: Routledge.

Mühlhäusler, Peter. 2002. Some Notes on the ontology of Norfolk. *Language and Communication* 33. 673–679.

Mühlhäusler, Peter & Josh Nash. 2016. Signs of/on power-tourism, linguistic landscapes and onomastics on Norfolk Island. In Guy Puzey and Laura Kostanski (eds.), *People, places, perceptions and power*, 62–80. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Nobbs-Palmer, Beryl 1986 *A Dictionary of Norfolk Words and Usages*. Norfolk Island: Photopress International.

Partridge, Kim. 2006. *Our People: Awas Salan*. Norfolk Island: Community Arts Society of Norfolk Island.

Pike, Kenneth. 1949. *Phonemics: A technique for reducing languages to writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Raine, Thomas. 1824. Narrative of visit to Pitcairn's Island, in the ship *Surrey*, in the year 1821. *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* 268. 425–462.

Rosenthal, Charles 1939 Letter from Sir Charles Rosenthal re language of Norfolk Island, 24 March 1939 (ML DOC 751, State Library of New South Wales)

Sunshine Club (n.d.) *Norfolk Island cookery book: with local words and Phrases*, Norfolk Island : Sunshine Club

Sanders, Roy 1957 *Our island, being a study of Pitcairn community in transition*. University of New Zealand, unpublished M.A. thesis.

Sebba, Mark. 1998. Meaningful choices in creole orthography. In Rainer Schulze (ed.), *Making meaningful choices in English: On dimensions, perspectives, methodology and evidence*, Tübingen: Narr.

Shapiro 1936 Shapiro, H.L. 1936 *The Heritage of the Bounty. The Story of Pitcairn through Six Generations*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Shipley, Conrad. 1851. *Sketches in the Pacific: The South Sea Islands*. London: T. McLean.

Siegel, Jeff. 2005. Literacy in Pidgin and Creole languages. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 6 (2). 143–164.

Southworth, Rufus. 2003. *A doctor's letters from Pitcairn – 1937*. Wenham, Mass.: privately printed.

Warren, Samuel. 1855. Works of Samuel Warren (vol. V). Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Williams, J. & S. L. Bataille. 2006. 1856–2006 sesquicentenary celebration: Norfolk Island. Norfolk Island: Studio Monarch.

Wiltshire, A.R.L. 1939 'The local dialects of Norfolk and Pitcairn Islands' in Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings, 25:331-337.