

# Speech tuh Spellin'

Teaching the “Tricky” and “Scrunched up Words”

or

Turning Student Speech into Correct Spelling using:

- Student Self-Corrected
- non-graded
- Dictated Spelling Exercises

by

**Don McCabe**

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## Dedication

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This book is dedicated to:  
All the members of the AVKO Educational Research Foundation,  
but especially to the memory of one of its first members,

### Mary Clair Scott

without whose work and devotion to the cause of literacy,  
the AVKO Foundation might never have gotten off the ground,

### Betty June Szilagyi

who was my first and by far my most important teacher,

### Devorah Wolf

without whose encouragement and commitment  
to the ideals of AVKO  
this edition would not be possible,

### Ann, Robert, and Linda McCabe

all of whom have sacrificed much of their time and energy  
helping AVKO grow  
as well as all those friends and relatives  
who have been a source of encouragement.

May this book help you to help others improve their abilities to read and write.

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#### **Publisher's Cataloging in Publication Data**

McCabe, Donald J.

1. Handwriting—Miscellanea. 2. Spelling—Miscellanea. 3. Reading—Miscellanea. 4. Curriculum—Miscellanea 5. Literacy and Tutor Reference Tool.

Library of Congress Subject Headings: Spelling, Curriculum

Library of Congress Classification Number: LB1050.2F79

Library of Congress Card Number: To be determined

Dewey Decimal Classification Number 428.4

ISBN: 1-56400-060-5

## Speech tuh Spellin'

We have all seen student papers with sentences such as this: *Thair gonna go thair to git sum stuff fur holloween, an were gonna go thair to help them.*

This sentence, by the way, came from a paper written by a high school student who was carrying a 3.5 grade point average. He had A's in physics in calculus. But he was struggling through my English class. When my Alfred N. turned in his first paper, I wasn't really sure whether he was a genius at abusing our spelling conventions à la Shaw who could spell fish "ghoti"<sup>1</sup> or whether he had been high on drugs when he wrote it and never bothered proofreading. The entire paper was almost impossible for anybody but a teacher to read.

Alfred's problem isn't unique. Large numbers of students in both urban and rural schools suffer from the "Thair gonna go thair" syndrome.

Some students suffer from the swallowed "R" bug and consistently write:

<i>Your funny...</i>	instead of	<i>You are funny (or You're funny).</i>
<i>Were smart...</i>	instead of	<i>We are smart (or We're smart).</i>
<i>Thair dumb...</i>	instead of	<i>They are dumb (or They're dumb).</i>

Others suffer from the swalled "is" bug and consistently write:

<i>He nice...</i>	instead of	<i>He is nice (or He's nice).</i>
<i>That right...</i>	instead of	<i>That is right (or That's right).</i>
<i>What da matter...</i>	instead of	<i>What is the matter (or What's the matter).</i>
<i>Whose dat...</i>	instead of	<i>Who is that (or Who's that)?</i>

Those who have the "of" bug consistently write:

I should of talk to him	instead of	I should have talked to him.
We would of miss...	instead of	We would have missed...
I could of lissen...	instead of	I could have listened...
You might of...	instead of	You might have...

Those with the "don't hear/don't write" bug consistently write:

We talk to them...	instead of	We talked to them...
We use to go...	instead of	We used to go...
He want Sally to...	instead of	He wants Sally to...

The traditional way of correcting such errors is for the teacher to circle in red the errors and sometimes insert the correct spelling. By the time "Were finish" correcting all the other errors, "were exhausted," and the paper looks like a Christmas tree. When "are" respective Alfreds get their papers back, do they profit from "are" laborious corrections? "Whose kid in who?"

They take one look at their grade, resist the urge to vomit, crumple it up, and toss it at (and sometime in) the wastepaper basket.

<sup>1</sup> George Bernard Shaw once claimed that the word *fish* could be spelled *ghoti* (*gh* as in enough, *o* as in women, and *ti* as in nation.)

And really, why shouldn't they? They don't understand our corrections. No one has ever stopped and taken the time to teach them how to translate their spoken dialect into the written "book English." No one has told them that the word *have* when it follows the auxiliary verbs *could, would, might, must, shall, will, and may* is normally pronounced exactly the same as the word *of*. Why? Because it isn't in any of the textbooks or in any of the curricula being used. Almost all textbooks at sometime or another teach the heteronyms *read* and *red* and the homophones *read* and *red, read* and *reed*, but they never teach the heteronyms, *have, have,* and *have*.<sup>2</sup> The authors of our textbooks and our grammars don't bother to tell us that the word *have* in "I *have* a pencil in my hand" is not the same kind of word that it is in "I should *have* (of) known better," or "I will have to (hafta) learn how to tell the difference."

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### **The Goals of the Translation Exercises:**

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Students will be able to recognize the differences and the similarities between spoken English and written English.

Students will learn to appreciate and understand the values of all spoken dialects including their own.

Students will learn to develop personal responsibility for correcting and learning from their mistakes at the time that they make mistakes.

Students will learn that writers often deliberately "misspell" words and phrases for humorous or dramatic effect, and often to indicate that the speaker is poorly educated.

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### **Rules for the Delivery of the Translation Exercises:**

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1. Never enunciate clearly. Read the sentences in normal sloppy speech.
2. Use your own street dialect. Everybody has one! No one enunciates perfectly all the time.
3. Read the sentence.
4. Read the sentence again as the students begin writing it.
5. Read the sentence one more time. Let the students finish writing it.
6. Using the overhead, show the sentence as it should be correctly spelled. If you don't have access to the overhead, you can write the sentence on the board or even have a student do it.
7. Students correct all their errors. Any uncorrected error should result in an E for the exercise. If all errors are corrected, then an A is given. All or nothing!

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**Classroom Motto:**  
Mistakes are opportunities to learn.

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<sup>2</sup> From *The Case of 3 Different Words Spelled H-A-V-E*. McCabe, Don. Clio, MI.: AVKO Foundation, 1995.  
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## Teaching by Mis-direction.

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In any form of composition, we are dictating to ourselves. We always speak to ourselves in our normal speech. We hear in our heads our speech and we write it down automatically. What we “wanna” do is to automatically write “want to” when we are saying “wanna” to ourselves. If an exercise is specifically on spelling “wanna” as *want to*, our students will easily score perfectly, because their minds are focused on it. But then, when it comes to their regular writing, those who habitually spell *want to* as *wanna* will continue to do so.

So, to combat this natural “recidivism,” (or failure to apply book knowledge) we have each set of exercises focusing on a different area of spelling, such as applying the i before e rule. The students will be concentrating on correctly spelling words such as *believe* and *receive* while they are given the opportunity to make a “speech” misspelling of *it’s/its* and *to/too/two* as in a sentence such as “It’s too bad Jack wouldn’t believe you.”

If you don’t want to dictate the sentences, you can always make copies of the pages with “dialect” at the back of the book. Hand out the copies and have the students correct the misspellings. That could be an automatic homework assignment.

Please note that although the sentences are grouped by lessons of ten sentences each, you don’t have to give all ten at one time. When I first developed these, I used only two sentences every day. So I made each lesson last for a week! This way, one sheet could be homework for the entire week! Corrected in class.

## Speech tuh Spellin' Lesson 1

1. Thairz noh such thing **az** uh dum pursun.
2. **Whud** juh say?
3. Ah sed, "thairz noh bud dee hooze dum."
4. Doh'n-t wur ree if yuh may'k sum miss takes.
5. How'd juh lurn how duh waw'k?
6. Did juh lurn how duh waw'k with ow't fawl in dow'n?
7. How'd juh lurn how duh taw'k?
8. Dij juh lurn how duh taw'k with ow't may'k in miss tay'k-ss?
9. In this class yor gaw nuh lurn how duh spell uh lotta wurdz.
10. In this klass, ee vin yor tee chur is gaw nuh lurn sum thin.

## Speech to Spelling Lesson 1

1. There is (There's) no such thing as a dumb person.
2. What did you say?
3. I said, "There is (There's) nobody who is dumb!"
4. Don't worry if you make some mistakes.
5. How did you learn how to walk?
6. Did you learn how to walk without falling down?
7. How did you learn how to talk?
8. Did you learn how to talk without making mistakes?
9. In this class you are (you're) going to learn how to spell a lot of words.
10. In this class, even your teacher is going to learn something.

## Speech tuh Spellin' Lesson 2

1. Whud duh yuh doo in now?
2. Wuud in juh noh, ah'm tayk in uh dum tess't.
3. Duz en nee bud dee noh wut dayz tuh day?
4. Tuh dayz Tooz dee. Ah'r dooz ar doo on Tooz dee.
5. D'yuh noh wut dayz tuh mah roh?
6. Tuh mah rohz Wenz dee. (Dohn't puut the d en e too geth-  
thuh.)
7. Howz Lin duh git tin uh law'ng with hur stud deez?
8. Sheez git in uh long reel gray't. Aw'l hur tee churz luv hur.
9. Whuh soh gray't uh bow't Lin duh?
10. Sheez gah tuh reel nice pur sun nal uh tee.

## Speech to Spelling Lesson 2

1. What are you doing now?
2. Wouldn't you know, I'm taking a dumb test.
3. Does anybody know what day is (day's) today?
4. Today is (Today's) Tuesday. Our dues are due on Tuesday.
5. Do you know what day is (day's) tomorrow?
6. Tomorrow is (Tomorrow's) Wednesday. (Don't put the d and e together.) Wednesday.
7. How is (How's) Linda getting along with her studies?
8. She is getting along real great. All her teachers love her.
9. What is (What's) so great about Linda?
10. She has (She's) got a real nice personality.