

Phonetic writing for the english language

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Abstract

1 Introduction

Every word an author writes takes the character of the way in which it is written. This is a principle of art, and the calligrapher, the writer, and the poet all know it well. So does the common person. Writing a language in one alphabet over another can be a symbol of change, solidarity, or rebellion. Writing is at the core of all we do as people, and as much as writing is a part of our culture, our culture is in writing.

English has been the product of a thousand years of cultural war and evolution. We write english with the language of Britain's first empire: the roman empire, who along with their military and culture brought their letters, language, and writing; The spelling of english is mostly from the french tradition, as french speakers of Normandy were the rulers of the country since after 1066; English has since been evolved and influenced by european languages, especially latin and greek, all through its history. It has taken its letter sounds, spellings, words, and literary tradition from all these foreign sources too.

From this chaotic evolution, english has become a melting pot of cultures, spellings, and lexicon, and as a result, its spelling and pronunciation are famously disconnected in ways most written languages are not.

There are several famous examples, from poems designed to trip up your pronunciation, obscure surnames with rare pronunciations and origins, and the joy of learning to pronounce english place names like Worchestershire and Marylebone. On any page from any author in english, hundreds of ambiguities and confusions are written down which are disambiguated only by learning from a young age how to pronounce words that just don't fit into the rules and patterns of the rest of the language.

In continental Europe, most countries introduced councils to regulate spelling and pronunciation of the national language to keep writing in line with the sound changes that happen to any language over time. Most recently in english is the change of pronunciation of words like *ńAsiaż* and *ńnewż*: *ńAsiaż* used to be pronounced as it is spelled, with a clearly pronounced S and I sound; *ńnewż* used to be pronounced as an N sound followed by *ńyouż*, as it still is by many british english speakers. But, even british speakers often pronounce words like Newfoundland and New York as exceptions in their own accents, and use north american pronunciations instead.

English spelling is in fact so bad that english cannot even be used to write how to *actually* pronounce words without a specialized way of doing so. The common way is to try to use english phonetics, telling somebody that preface is pronounced PREH-fus, but expecting that a reader can pronounce "preh" and "fus" the way they should be expected to. [1]

Linguists and dictionaries nearly all use the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) to show pronunciation now, but non-linguists struggle to read IPA symbols without extra training, and hence many dictionaries are yet to adopt the IPA.

In some languages, the very idea of asking "how do you spell that" feels like a question with an obvious answer: you spell it how it sounds. There are also writing systems where there may be spelling ambiguities that come from historical spellings, but these may be rare or generally not a problem, as in spanish and korean.

English, however, is somewhere much farther down this spectrum of ease, perhaps around as hard to spell as french, but harder to pronounce with ease. English is by no means the worst offending language in breaking the alphabetic principle. Languages like tibetan and chinese have such long literary traditions that spellings reflect long dead pronunciations, and are even harder to learn as a modern speaker.

Looking at tibetan, or even french, is like looking at a warning sign for what happens when a language goes too long without updating its writing system. Most european languages updates their spellings after or since the second world war. English is the notable outlier.