

English Spelling and Sound

Sound is not constant

deny

many

rat

ratio

line
linear

friend

fiend

though
rough

trial
trivial

assume
pressure

bracelet
chalet

bovine
machine

fuzzy
pizza

doom

rude

who

shift

sugar

assure

rational

red
said
bread

Two pronunciations

lead

lead

wind

wind

read

read

bow

bow

Same pronunciation

meat

meet

four

for

pier

peer

not

knot

road

rode

night

knight

crews

cruise

sight

site

cite

new

gnu

knew

to

too

two

there

their

they're

Too many letters

threat

short

chum

photograph

seem

boat

goose

psychiatry

crumb

guarantee

vanilla (cf: Manila)

saddle (cf: ladle)

witty (cf: pity)

scarred (cf: card)

carry (cf: very)

till (cf: until)

...and more rarely, too few

box
music

Variation

caught

cot

bawl

ball

aunt

ant

route

rout

merry

marry

Mary

Letter Forms and Sounds

Letter forms do not betray their
phonetic values

Similar-looking letters, very
different sounds:

P, R

O, Q

E, F

I, J

Similar sounds, very different-
looking letters:

R, L

C, K, Q

D, T

I, Y

F, V

Similar-looking letters, similar sounds

B, P

C, G

V, W

S, Z

One Measure: Strokes

One: C I J O S U

Two: D, G, L, P, Q, T, V, X

Three: A B F H K N R Y Z

Four: E M W

Another: Verticals

B D E F H I J K L M N P R T Y

One more? Rounded Stroke

B C D G J O P Q R S U

English Spelling

Sources of Inconstancy

Inconstancies

1. Use of the Roman Alphabet to represent a very foreign language
2. Changes in the English sound system
3. French scribal practice
4. Different word origins
 - a. Germanic (Anglo-Saxon-Jute)
 - b. Romance (French/Latin)
 - c. Greek learned terms
 - d. Other traditions; borrowed words
5. (Somewhat) consistent representation of morphemes
6. Prescription and standardization (printing); dialects
7. Flat-out etymological errors
8. Spelling pronunciations
9. Handwriting legibility

A Brief Summary

- The Roman alphabet was in general use among the (limited) literate population of Europe and England.

A Brief Summary

- The Roman alphabet was, with a couple of exceptions (<q>, <x>), ideally suited to represent the phonemes of Latin.

A Brief Summary Latin Consonants

p, b		t, d		k, g	
	f	s			h
m		n			
		r, l			

A Brief Summary Old English Consonants

p, b		t, d		k, g	
f	θ	s	ʃ	χ	h
m		n	ƿ, ƿ̄		
		r, l	ƿ, ƿ̄		

A Brief Summary

ME English Consonants

p, b		t, d		k, g	
f, v	θ, ð	s, z	ʃ, ʒ		h
m		n		ŋ	
			tʃ, dʒ		
	j	r, l	w		

A Brief Summary Latin Vowels

i, i:

u, u:

e, e:

o, o:

a, a:

A Brief Summary OE Vowels

i, i:, y, y:

u, u:

e, e:

o, o:

œ, œ:

a, a:

The French Normans

After the invasion of England in 1066, the Normans imported their own cronies to rule the land. Among these, were the people who could read and write. They spoke French and Latin, and not English.

The French Normans

They made use of the writing system they knew best--the Roman alphabet as it represented Latin and French.

They made limited or no use of the old English spelling system, partly because all/most of what they wrote was not in English.

The French Normans

- The spelling system of the French was employed to represent the pronunciation of English at the time.
- Some sounds were spelled differently
- Some sounds were unfamiliar, and had to be spelled inventively in the Roman alphabet

French Scribal Practice

- 1. OE <cw-> /kw/ became <qu>

French Scribal Practice

- 2. "Velar softening"
- <c> for /s/ before <i,e>
- <g> for / ʒ / before <i.e> (no /gi-, ge-/ in OE)

French Scribal Practice

- 3. Vowel spellings
- <ie> for /i:/ sound, as in 'thief', 'fiend' (but not consistently: 'deed' 'heel')
- <ou> for /u:/ 'sound', 'pouch', 'loud'
- <ui> or <u> for /y/ 'bruise', 'build'
- <u> for /U/ (short u sound)
- <a> or <ea> for /œ/
- <oa> for short /o/

French Scribal Practice

- 4. Use of <h>
- <h> (no /h/ in French), spelled usually where it would appear in Latin
- <gh> for /X/: 'light' 'through' (OE /θurX/) OE <h>
- <sh> for /ʃ/: shine, shoes, ship OE <sc>
- <th> for /θ, ð / OE 'thorn' and 'eth'
- <ch> for / tʃ / OE <c> by front vowel
- <dg> for / ʒ / (OE <gg>)

French Scribal Practice

- 5. <u> after <g> for hard-g sound
- guise, guess, vogue, guide, plague, guile...
- (vs. genuine, gestation, germinate, gist, gin, suggest...)

French Scribal Practice

- 6. <o> for <u> (idea from Latin)
- esp. before <n,m,v,w>
- (son/sun; some/sum; love, move, prove)
- glow vs. how; gown vs. own;
- 'row' (2 pronunciations)

The French Normans

- It was not until after the 100-Years War 1337-1453 that English as a language was identified as THE language of "England".
- This is "right before" the introduction of printing.

Printing (Late 1400's Onward)

- Presented a need for standardization in the face of spoken linguistic variation
- Printers selected one English dialect to represent a word "as it sounds"
- **Reminder:** there were no dictionaries at the time--they were a few centuries away yet

Three Main Layers of Vocabulary

- Basic Germanic

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- French and Latin

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- Basic Germanic
- French and Latin
- Greek

3 Main Layers

- woman, feminine, gynecologist
- time, temporal, chronic
- water, aquatic, hydrate
- round, circle, sphere
- eye, ocular, optics
- horse, cavalry/equestrian, hippodrome
- feel, sense, sympathy

1600's (or so...)

Since then, there has been a strong tendency in English spelling, to spell borrowed words as they would be spelled in the language the word is borrowed from.

Most prominent are Greek words.

Spelling Greeks words

- <ph> for /f/ 'emphasis', 'elephant', 'telephone'
- <ch> for /k/ 'choir', 'chorus', 'synchronic'
- <y> for /i/: 'myth', 'antonym', 'chrysalis', 'rhyme'

Greek words

- <ps> for Greek /ps/ (/s/ in English):
psychiatry, pseudonym, psoriasis
- <pn> for Greek /pn/ (/n/ in English):
pneumonia
- <nm> /nəm/ in English: nomic
- <-e> for /i:/: epitome, catastrophe, acme

"Recent" French Loanwords

- chamois, chaparon, chiffon, chevron,
- rouge, garage, chauffeur
- quiche, consommé, fiancée, beau
- genre, faux pas

Italian

- pizza, spaghetti, bocci, duet, violin, volcano