



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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Pronunciation of English Letters

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Introduction

Communication plays a very important role in human life. Man has developed language as a system to communicate with one another. Language has a very important social purpose, because it is mainly used for linguistic communication. A language can be used in two ways for the purpose of communication. It can be spoken or written. Language is a wellorganized system of communication consisting of utterances. The utterance can be explained as a word or sequence of words. Word is transmitted through one or more sounds. The language is a system of sound structure which is represented by some given symbols. English has been in use in India for more than 150 years and has acquired the status of an official language, besides its being the second largest spoken language in the world. When pronunciation and spelling part comes in, we are not comfortable. English has a complex sound system and English spelling is a mixture of consistency and inconsistency. The irregularities and inconsistencies give rise to many difficulties to all speakers of English both in identifying a word from its written form and in selecting the appropriate spelling for a word. One has to depend on the context and one's lexical and syntactic knowledge to identify them correctly. In Indian languages there is one to one relationship (correspondence) between alphabet and the sound it produces, which English does not have. If the English system were regular each individual sound (vowel or consonant) would have been spelt the same way every time and thus there would be one to one correspondence between sounds and letters. All in all, the mastery of English spelling presents a greater challenge than learning to read and most people are able to read more words than they can spell accurately. In other languages the letters of a script are learned in a fixed order and each letter usually represents a sound. The alphabetical principle which underlies the spelling system of English states that the letters in the spelling should represent the phonemes in the pronunciation. Ideally, the correspondence would be one to one, as in phonemic transcription. While the correspondence in some languages is close to one-to-one, in English it is many-to-one and one-to-many. Written and spoken forms of the same language can be compared by studying the fit between the writing system and spoken language. In many kinds of writing system each letter used stands for a sound in the spoken language. In English one letter of the alphabet stands for more than one sound and, conversely, the same sound is represented by different letters of the alphabet. This means that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and sounds they represent.

Sl. No.	English Letters	Pronunciation
1.	a	e
2.	b	b+i
3.	c	c+i
4.	d	d+i
5.	e	i
6.	f	e+f
7.	g	g+i
8.	h	+h e
9.	i	a:i
10.	j	j+e

11.	k	k+e
12.	l	e+l
13.	m	e+m
14.	n	e+n
15.	o	o
16.	p	p+i
<hr/>		
17.	q	k+y+u:
18.	r	a:+r
19.	s	e+s
20.	t	t+i
21.	u	y+u:
22.	v	v+i
23.	w	d+b+l+y+u:
24.	x	e+k+s
25.	y	v+a:+y+i
26.	z	z+e+d

The present English vocabulary consists of more than 1 million words, including slang and dialect expressions and scientific and technical terms after the middle of the 20th c. English vocabulary is more extensive than any other language in the world. English has been like a magnet attracting words from numerous other languages. Its constant borrowing from every major language especially from Latin, Greek, French and the Scandinavian languages and numerous minor languages accounts for the great number of words in the English vocabulary. Other languages (Indian) have a spelling system that more faithfully conforms to how the language is spoken. English does in fact have a very poor phonemic orthography, or correspondence between how the words are written and how they are spoken. If there was one to one correspondence between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes) to produce accurate spelling would be simple. However in English there is no direct one to one mapping of sounds to letters. English has much more sounds than letters and these sounds may change according to context and may influence each other. There are graphemes that have no corresponding sound in certain context, as for example the ‘g’ in (sign, though, signature) some of them only transport a signal, not a sound, as for example double consonant letters that usually shorten the preceding vowel. In English one letter may stand for a number of sounds and one sound may be represented by many letters. For instance: Letter ‘a’ may produce /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɒ/, /ə/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/, /eɪ/ sounds in different contexts. Alternatively, a single sound /i/ may be produced by the letters **i**, **ii**, **e**, **ee**, **ei**, etc. And so it is with many other sounds and letters. English spelling is so eccentric in its use of letters to represent sounds that to label the sounds by a letter, or a group of letters, is confusing. Hence it is essential to have some way of making it clear that one is talking about the letters written or the sounds spoken. English spells many identical sounds differently when they occur in different positions in a word, for example, the /ʃ/ sound is spelt as in shop, station, vicious and session, the long /eɪ/ sound as in plate and play, the long /aɪ/ sound as in mine and dry.

For example, the letter **c** represents a certain sound in the word scale and the same letter represents a different sound in cease. The letter **g** is pronounced differently in ‘give’ and ‘gin’. The letter **j** is pronounced like the letter **g** in ‘gin’. The letters **gh** are pronounced differently in ghost and cough. The same two letters **gh** aren’t pronounced at all in a word like cough; **gh** in ‘cough’, **f** in ‘fun’, **ff** in ‘coffee’ and **ph** in ‘physics’ are pronounced exactly alike. The letter **l** in ‘film’ is pronounced whereas it is not pronounced at all in ‘palm’ and ‘calm’. The letters **ee** in ‘see’, **ea** in ‘sea’, **i** in machine and police are pronounced alike. Key and quay are pronounced alike. How many unnecessary letters are there in the English word ‘queue’. In spite of the fact that English users generally resist changes to spelling, some change has occurred in the past couple of centuries. There are the well-known examples of American English Spelling “-our” words with “-or” and “-re” with “-er”. Americans also usually write “-ize” of course, and there are a few other changes like “draft” and “plow”. So, at least one sizeable group of English speakers accepted changes, as long as these changes were not too much. One of Noah Webster’s dictionaries came out in 1806, and another was published in 1828. The earlier version had spellings such as “hart”, “munth”, “reezon”, and “rug”. But there was resistance to those, and ones like them, so Webster “restored” these to “heart”, etc. in the 1820s dictionary (which is the main one that people usually refer to). So, people would accept some changes, but not others. That English script has not undergone a change towards its pronunciation for over 1000 years. Spelling and

pronunciation problem has lead to this amount of discrepancy of sound-to-spelling correspondence and the problems therein. Attempts to change or regularize English spelling have been made. There is a history about spelling reform efforts in US and Britain since the mid 1870s. The first known attempt in history was made by the British monk Orrmin in 1180 A.D. Many other exponents best known in England like Isaac Pitman, James Pitman and George Bernard Shaw, and in the U.S. Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster, Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie made efforts across the centuries but failed.

In 1879, the British Spelling Reform Association was founded. Poet, Lord Alfred Tennyson and Charles Darwin gave support to this spelling reform association. In 1886, the Philological Association came out with a list of 3500 spellings. In 1898, the (American) National Education Association began promoting a list of spellings and continued to do so until 1921. In 1906, the Simplified Spelling Board was found in U.S. and celebrated philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, was one of the founding members Mark Twain and Theodore Roosevelt voiced support for Simplified Spelling Board. In 1908, In U.K. as a “sister” organization the Simplified Spelling Society was formed with the aim of updating English spelling. The society promotes the use of phonetic writing systems, and advocates elimination of difficult words form English language. George Bernard Shaw, English playwright of international renown, had expressed support for changing English spelling. He willed part of his estate to fund the creation of a new alphabet. A new phonetic alphabet named “Shavian alphabet” having, 48 characters was designed by Kingsley Read.

English spelling reform is necessary to make it simpler and more rationally consistent. The opinion of Simplified Spelling Society was that “the only spelling that can be described as correct is phonetic spelling, is spelling those records the spoken word”. Although phonetic spelling was the answer, the simplified spellers thought that it would be too radical to be generally accepted so they try to come up with easier spells. They supported American spelling updated by Webster. Later they had some new spelling but though the Society has existed for a century, no one has yet come up with a truly workable solution. In human language, a phoneme is the theoretical representation of a sound. It is a sound of a language as represented (or imagined) without reference to its position in a word or a phrase. A phoneme therefore, is the conception of a sound in the most neutral form possible. A phoneme is the smallest contrastive unit in the sound system of a language; phonologists have differing views of the phoneme. The simplest explanation is that a phoneme is an abstract concept used to represent a group of sounds or sound combinations that are similar enough to each other to be perceived as performing the same function in a speech chain. The idea of the phoneme is mainly based upon the fact that we can establish distinction of meaning between words by replacing certain sounds by one another.

It becomes necessary that an individual should have the phonemic awareness that is awareness that sound corresponds to individual letter and vice versa. To help learn correct pronunciation it is necessary to know the graphemes occurrences in words and also the pronunciation of the graphemes in the three levels of occurrences, that is, initial, medial and final stages. As learning English spelling and pronunciation takes much time and effort, updating a spelling system can make it easier to learn. One should develop a new writing system so that the graphemes match the phonemes. An ideal spelling system for English could be expected to create a one-to-one correspondence of graphemes and phonemes. If many of the difficult spellings were made simple by following basic English spelling rules, English spelling would become easier to learn and easier to teach. More people would become confident about writing. Learning to spell English also takes a long time and is never quite conquered by millions of learners. The pronunciation of words changes over time and languages have to update their spelling systems or they become divorced from pronunciation and very difficult to learn. English spelling has been simplified a little over the centuries, but it is in need of similar further improvements.

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