

# ARBITRARY WORDS

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This is a sequel to *Unusual Words* (Word Ways 2008145) which examines words with single like letters having different pronunciations, thus being represented by different phonetic symbols. *Arbitrary Words* looks at words with two like bigrams which have different pronunciations and different phonetic symbols. ARBITRARY is one such word, the first AR being pronounced as the A in bath, the second AR as the AR in arise. Words in which one of the two bigram letters is represented by the same phonetic symbol in both bigrams are not included. Thus the Os in the TO bigrams in TORONTO are represented by different phonetic symbols, but the Ts are both represented by **t**, so Toronto cannot be included. I use the phonetics list of the Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition and the words can be found therein.

## BIGRAMS

### AC

Phonetic symbols: **æk**<sup>1</sup> (as in barrack) **ei**<sup>2</sup> (A, ate) **æk**<sup>3</sup> (aconite) **əs**<sup>4</sup> (arduous)  
ac<sup>1</sup>ac<sup>2</sup>ia      ac<sup>3</sup>urac<sup>4</sup>y

### AG

Phonetic symbols: **æg**<sup>1</sup> (agony) **idʒ**<sup>2</sup> (Egyptian) **ædʒ**<sup>3</sup> (agile) **əg**<sup>4</sup> (ago)  
vag<sup>1</sup>abondag<sup>2</sup>e      nag<sup>3</sup>yag<sup>4</sup>ite

### AH

Phonetic symbols: **ah**<sup>1</sup> (Oklahoma) **a:**<sup>2</sup> (agal)  
tah<sup>1</sup>arah<sup>2</sup>

### AI

Phonetic symbols: **ɛə**<sup>1</sup> (rare) **ei**<sup>2</sup> (A, ate)  
ai<sup>1</sup>rmai<sup>2</sup>l      mai<sup>2</sup>denhai<sup>1</sup>r

### AR

Phonetic symbols: **ɑ:**<sup>1</sup> (bath) **ər**<sup>2</sup> (arise) **ær**<sup>3</sup> (Arab) **ə**<sup>4</sup> (alert) **ɛər**<sup>5</sup> (area)  
**ɔ:**<sup>6</sup> (call) **ɛə**<sup>7</sup> (daring)  
ar<sup>1</sup>bitrar<sup>2</sup>y      ar<sup>3</sup>istar<sup>1</sup>ch      bar<sup>1</sup>bar<sup>4</sup>ous      bar<sup>1</sup>bar<sup>5</sup>ian  
lambar<sup>4</sup>dar<sup>1</sup>      tar<sup>1</sup>tar<sup>3</sup>ic      war<sup>6</sup>far<sup>7</sup>e      war<sup>6</sup>far<sup>2</sup>in

### AS

Phonetic symbols: **as**<sup>1</sup> (glacé) **ɑ**<sup>2</sup> (haut-pas) **əs**<sup>3</sup> (arduous) **eis**<sup>4</sup> (acer) **æs**<sup>5</sup> (acid)  
**eiz**<sup>6</sup> (lazy) **æz**<sup>7</sup> (Aztec) **ɑ:s**<sup>8</sup> (cast)  
chas<sup>1</sup>selas<sup>2</sup>      dias<sup>3</sup>tas<sup>4</sup>e      elas<sup>5</sup>tas<sup>4</sup>e      gymnas<sup>6</sup>ias<sup>5</sup>t  
phantas<sup>7</sup>mas<sup>3</sup>cope      plas<sup>7</sup>moblas<sup>8</sup>t

## AU

Phonetic symbols: **ɒ**<sup>1</sup> (odd)      **ɔ:**<sup>2</sup> (call)  
pa<sup>1</sup>hau<sup>2</sup>gen

## AW

Phonetic symbols: **ɑ:w**<sup>1</sup> (Malawi)      **ɔ:**<sup>2</sup> (call)  
pa<sup>1</sup>aw<sup>2</sup>

## CE

Phonetic symbols: **si:**<sup>1</sup> (C, see)      **s**<sup>2</sup> (sag)      **sə**<sup>3</sup> (subject)  
pre<sup>1</sup>ce<sup>2</sup>den<sup>2</sup>ce<sup>2</sup>      lice<sup>3</sup>nce<sup>2</sup>

## CH

Phonetic symbols: **x**<sup>1</sup> (ouch)      **ç**<sup>2</sup> (gemütlich)  
Sach<sup>1</sup>lich<sup>2</sup>keit

## CI

Phonetic symbols: **si**<sup>1</sup> (cedilla)      **ʃ**<sup>2</sup> (shop)      **ki**<sup>3</sup> (kid)      **sai**<sup>4</sup> (sigh)  
Ci<sup>1</sup>ster<sup>2</sup>ci<sup>2</sup>an      mollusci<sup>3</sup>ci<sup>4</sup>de      ci<sup>1</sup>catri<sup>2</sup>ci<sup>2</sup>al

## EA

Phonetic symbols: **iə**<sup>1</sup> (hysteria)      **ɛ**<sup>2</sup> (pet)      **ɛə**<sup>3</sup> (daring)      **ɑ:**<sup>4</sup> (bath)      **i:**<sup>5</sup> (E, see)  
drea<sup>1</sup>ri<sup>2</sup>hea<sup>2</sup>d  
pea<sup>5</sup>cea<sup>6</sup>ble      hea<sup>2</sup>dwea<sup>3</sup>r      hea<sup>4</sup>tsea<sup>5</sup>se      lea<sup>2</sup>dbea<sup>5</sup>ter

## EI

Phonetic symbols: **ei**<sup>1</sup> (A, ate)      **ɛai**<sup>2</sup> (voltaite)  
tei<sup>1</sup>nei<sup>2</sup>te

## ER

Phonetic symbols: **ir**<sup>1</sup> (bereft)      **ə**<sup>2</sup> (alert)      **ɜ:**<sup>3</sup> (ergot)      **ər**<sup>4</sup> (error)  
er<sup>1</sup>aser<sup>2</sup>      er<sup>3</sup>goster<sup>4</sup>ol

## EU

Phonetic symbols: **ju:**<sup>1</sup> (use)      **uə**<sup>2</sup> (assure)  
eu<sup>1</sup>dipleu<sup>2</sup>ral

## EY

Phonetic symbols: **ai**<sup>1</sup> (l, eye)      **i**<sup>2</sup> (pit)      **ei**<sup>3</sup> (A, ate)  
ey<sup>1</sup>ey<sup>2</sup>      whey<sup>3</sup>ey<sup>2</sup>

## GE

Phonetic symbols: **gə**<sup>1</sup> (gazelle)    **dʒ**<sup>2</sup> (giant)  
 bugger<sup>1</sup>age<sup>2</sup>

## GY

Phonetic symbols: **gai**<sup>1</sup> (guy)    **dʒi**<sup>2</sup> (jib)  
 gy<sup>1</sup>naecology<sup>2</sup>

## IA

Phonetic symbols: **aɪə**<sup>1</sup> (iambic)    **iə**<sup>2</sup> (hysteria)    **aɪə**<sup>3</sup> (lowan)    **ə**<sup>4</sup> (aalert)    **ɪə**<sup>5</sup> (genethialogy)  
**aɪə**<sup>6</sup> (tiara)    **ja**<sup>7</sup> (yap)    **a**<sup>8</sup> (ballet)  
 bia<sup>1</sup>xia<sup>2</sup>l    dia<sup>3</sup>gnosticia<sup>4</sup>n    dia<sup>3</sup>noia<sup>5</sup>logy    dia<sup>6</sup>ria<sup>2</sup>l  
 paedia<sup>2</sup>tricia<sup>4</sup>n    Pia<sup>7</sup>straccia<sup>8</sup>

## IE

Phonetic symbols: **jɛ**<sup>1</sup> (yes)    **i**<sup>2</sup> (brasserie)    **iə**<sup>3</sup> (hysteria)    **i**<sup>4</sup> (pit)    **i:**<sup>5</sup> (E, bijou)  
 espie<sup>1</sup>glerie<sup>2</sup>    kie<sup>3</sup>rie<sup>4</sup>    kie<sup>5</sup>wie<sup>4</sup>t

## IO

Phonetic symbols: **iəʊ**<sup>1</sup> (audio)    **aɪə**<sup>2</sup> (ion)    **ə**<sup>3</sup> (aalert)  
 radio<sup>1</sup>io<sup>2</sup>dine    radio<sup>1</sup>visio<sup>3</sup>n

## IS

Phonetic symbols: **ɪs**<sup>1</sup> (iris)    **aɪz**<sup>2</sup> (adviser)  
 dis<sup>1</sup>advise<sup>2</sup>e

## NG

Phonetic symbols: **ndʒ**<sup>1</sup> (angel)    **ɪŋ**<sup>2</sup> (sing)    **ŋg**<sup>3</sup> (engulf)  
 rang<sup>1</sup>ing<sup>2</sup>    eng<sup>3</sup>aging<sup>2</sup>

## OA

Phonetic symbols: **əʊ**<sup>1</sup> (so)    **ɔə**<sup>2</sup> (orient)  
 coa<sup>1</sup>lboa<sup>2</sup>rd

## OE

Phonetic symbols: **ʊ**<sup>1</sup> (fully)    **u:**<sup>2</sup> (truce)  
 soe<sup>1</sup>tkoe<sup>2</sup>kie

## OI

Phonetic symbols: **ə**<sup>1</sup> (aalert)    **ɔɪ**<sup>2</sup> (alloy)  
 avoi<sup>1</sup>rdupoi<sup>2</sup>s

## OS

Phonetic symbols: **oz**<sup>1</sup> (nozzle)      **ous**<sup>2</sup> (boast)  
os<sup>1</sup>mos<sup>2</sup>is

## OU

Phonetic symbols: **au**<sup>1</sup> (out)      **ə**<sup>2</sup> (alert)      **u**<sup>3</sup> (fully)      **u:**<sup>4</sup> (abstruse)      **ɔə**<sup>5</sup> (ford)  
**ʌ**<sup>6</sup> (hump)      **uə**<sup>7</sup> (assure)  
mou<sup>1</sup>ntainou<sup>2</sup>s      caou<sup>3</sup>tchou<sup>4</sup>cin      crou<sup>4</sup>pou<sup>2</sup>s      ou<sup>1</sup>tpou<sup>5</sup>r  
rou<sup>6</sup>ghou<sup>1</sup>t      tou<sup>6</sup>chou<sup>2</sup>s      trou<sup>4</sup>badou<sup>5 or 7</sup>r

## OW

Phonetic symbols: **au**<sup>1</sup> (out)      **əu**<sup>2</sup> (sou)  
dow<sup>1</sup>nthrow<sup>2</sup>      know<sup>2</sup>how<sup>1</sup>

## PS

Phonetic symbols: **s**<sup>1</sup> (sag)      **ps**<sup>2</sup> (psalm)  
ps<sup>1</sup>eudocarps<sup>2</sup>

## SE

Phonetic symbols: **s**<sup>1</sup> (sag)      **z**<sup>2</sup> (lens)      **si**<sup>3</sup> (Sid)      **se**<sup>4</sup> (sedge)  
else<sup>1</sup>wise<sup>2</sup>      se<sup>3</sup>cluse<sup>2</sup>      Se<sup>4</sup>negalese<sup>2</sup>

## SI

Phonetic symbols: **zai**<sup>1</sup> (preside)      **si**<sup>2</sup> (Sid)      **zi**<sup>3</sup> (basil)      **sai**<sup>4</sup> (sigh)      **ʃ**<sup>5</sup> (shop)  
babesi<sup>1</sup>asi<sup>2</sup>s      phthisi<sup>3</sup>ogenesi<sup>2</sup>s      Si<sup>4</sup>lesi<sup>5</sup>an

## SO

Phonetic symbols: **z(ə)**<sup>1</sup> (prison)      **sʌ**<sup>2</sup> (insult)  
poiso<sup>1</sup>nso<sup>2</sup>me

## SU

Phonetic symbols: **sʌ**<sup>1</sup> (insult)      **ʒə**<sup>2</sup> (freesia)  
su<sup>1</sup>btreasu<sup>2</sup>rer

## TI

Phonetic symbols: **ti**<sup>1</sup> (tip)      **ʃ**<sup>2</sup> (shop)  
eti<sup>1</sup>olati<sup>2</sup>on      intersti<sup>1</sup>ti<sup>2</sup>al

## UE

Phonetic symbols: **wε**<sup>1</sup> (web)      **ju:ε**<sup>2</sup> (minet)      the second UE in each word is silent<sup>3</sup>  
sque<sup>1</sup>teague<sup>3</sup>      statue<sup>2</sup>sque<sup>3</sup>

## XE

Phonetic symbols: **zɛ**<sup>1</sup> (damsel)    **ziə**<sup>2</sup> (zero)    **ks**<sup>3</sup> (six)  
xe<sup>1 or 2</sup>roxe<sup>3</sup>d

## ZE

Phonetic symbols: **ziə**<sup>1</sup> (zero)    **z**<sup>2</sup> (lens)    **sə**<sup>3</sup> (subject)    **z**<sup>4</sup> (lens)  
ze<sup>1</sup>roze<sup>2</sup>    polze<sup>3</sup>rze<sup>4</sup>d

*Unusual Words* revealed that **ə** appears to top the list of phonetic symbols with regard to the number of different single letters of the alphabet that it can represent, namely A, E, I, O, U, Y and R. Examples are given for each of these letters, along with the word polymerosomatous in which the letters O, E and A are all represented by **ə**, as also is the bigram OU.

*Arbitrary Words* has now shown that there are bigrams other than OU that are represented by the symbol **ə**. These can be found above in words listed under AR, EA, ER, IA, IO and OI. This brings the (running?) total of **ə** representations to 14: 7 single letters and 7 bigrams.

## A CHRISTMAS WISH

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