UNUSUAL WORDS

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GIGANTIC is a word familiar to readers of Word Ways in having two letters G with strikingly different pronunciations. Other words which have two like letters with obviously different pronunciations include JACKAL, ACETIC, EGRET, GORGE, INSIDE, JERONIMO, BASES, UNUSED, XEROX and YELLOWY. There are thousands of other words with 2 like letters which have different pronunciations. Many of these differences are more subtle than those in the above examples, sometimes only being able to be confirmed by reference to a phonetics list. I use the Phonetics List of the Oxford English Dictionary. The phonetic symbols are here used solely in reference to single letters, as distinct from bigrams etc. References to the phonetic symbols are given in superscript.

1. THREE LIKE LETTERS WITH DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS

The words I am seeking currently have 3, rather than 2, like letters which all have different pronunciations represented by different phonetic symbols. UNUSUAL is an example (see U below).

LETTER A

Phonetic symbols used: \( \alpha^1 \) (as in pat) \( \alpha^2 \) (bath) \( i^3 \) (damage) \( e^4 \) (alert) \( e^5 \) (ate)
\( \epsilon^6 \) (daring) \( a^7 \) (ballet) \( o^8 \) (call) \( \theta^9 \) (wash)

\( a^1dva^2nta^3ge \)
\( ba^8ls\tilde{a}^4ma^5tion \)

LETTER E

Phonetic symbols used: \( e^1 \) (pét) \( i^2 \) (begif) \( e^3 \) (mergingue) \( i^4 \) (deified) \( e^5 \) (hysteria)
\( e^6 \) (ve) \( nne^2ss \)

\( e^1le^2me^3nt \)

LETTER I

Phonetic symbols used: \( ai^1 \) (bite) \( i^2 \) (pit) \( e^3 \) (rifled) \( aie^4 \) (Biro) \( i^5 \) (bijou) \( j^6 \) (onion)
\( i^1anth^2ni^3te \)
\( i^4ri^2di^1te \)

LETTER O

Phonetic symbols used: \( ou^1 \) (so) \( o^2 \) (odd) \( e^3 \) (collate) \( \Lambda^4 \) (govern)
\( aero^1 litho^2lo^3gy \)
\( zo^1o^2lo^3gy \)

LETTER U

Phonetic symbols used: \( \Lambda^1 \) (hump) \( ju:^2 \) (use) \( u^3 \) (abstruse) \( e^4 \) (upon) \( w^5 \) (quell)
\( ju^6 \) (emulate) \( jceu^7 \) (cycle) \( j^8 \) (rupin) \( u^9 \) (fully)
\( u^1nu^2su^3al \)
\( biu^1ngu^5icu^6late \)
\( crepu^1scu^2lu^4m \)
\( qu^5antu^6lu^4m \)

\( u^1nsu^4ccessfu^9l \)
2. FOUR LIKE LETTERS WITH DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS

These words are rare.
deˈcre²me³te⁴r  e¹ (pet)  i² (begift)  i³ (deified)  e⁴ (meringue)
eˈle²ctrome⁴te⁴r  i¹ (deified)  e² (pet)  i³ (begift)  e⁴ (meringue)
uˈniu²ngu⁵icu⁴late  juː¹ (use)  Λ² (hump)  w⁵ (quell)  ju⁴ (emulate)

3. TWO PAIRS OF LIKE LETTERS WITH DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS

A and C  c³yc⁴la⁴ma²te  e¹ (alert)  e² (ate)
A and E  a³bbre³via²te⁴d  a¹ (alert)  e² (ate)
A and G  g³ig⁴a⁴nte⁴n  æ¹ (pat)  e² (alert)
A and I  a³di⁴ba²ti⁵c  ei¹ (ate)  e² (alert)  æ³ (pat)
A and O  mo⁵no⁴maⁱnia²  ei¹ (ate)  æ² (alert)
A and S  S³a⁴ta⁴nis⁴m  ei¹ (ate)  æ² (alert)
A and U  a³gricu⁴ltu⁴ra²l  æ¹ (pat)  æ² (alert)

C and E  c³e²re⁴bric²  s¹ (cease)  k² (cat)
C and G  c³is-g⁴ang⁴etic²  s¹ (cease)  k² (cat)
C and I  i³c¹c²le  s¹ (cease)  k² (cat)
C and O  c³irc⁴umro⁴tato⁴ry  s¹ (cease)  k² (cat)
C and S  ac³ros³tic²is⁴m  k¹ (cat)  s² (cease)
C and U  c³irc⁴u³mfu⁴se  s¹ (cease)  k² (cat)

E and G  g³e⁴og⁴raphe²r  iː¹ (deified)  æ² (meringue)
E and I  deˈpoetici⁴zi⁴  iː¹ (deified)  æ² (as in pet)
E and O  ne⁴o³gise⁴s  iː¹ (deified)  i² (begift)
E and S  me⁴ns⁵e²s⁴  e¹ (pet)  iː² (deified)
E and U  ce⁴ru³le⁴u⁴m  i¹ (begift)  iː² (deified)

G and I  g¹i³g²anti⁴c  dʒ¹ (giant)  g² (go)
G and O  g¹ig²o³lo⁴  ʒ¹ (genre)  g² (go)
G and S  dis⁴g⁴org⁴es⁴  g¹ (go)  dʒ² (giant)
G and U  see 4 below

I and O  bro⁴nvchi⁴o²li²tis  i¹ (pit)  a² (bite)
I and S  Chiˈrs⁴ti²ani⁵se⁵  i¹ (pit)  j² (onion)  a³ (bite)
I and U  di¹su³lphu⁴ri²c  a¹ (bite)  i² (pit)

G³ (odd)  æo⁴ (so)
S⁴ (sag)  z⁵ (leng)
Λ³ (hump)  jœ⁴ (cure)
O and S  apo'sto licis'm  a' (collate)  d' (odd)  s' (sag)  z' (lens)
O and U  mo'nocu'tu're  d' (odd)  a'u' (so)  A' (hump)  jua' (cure)
S and U  s'u'ffu's'e  s' (sag)  z' (lens)  e' (upon)  ju' (muse)

4. THREE PAIRS OF LIKE LETTERS WITH DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS

2A + 2G + 2I

g'5g'4a'nti'cayly  a' (pat)  e' (alert)  d'3 (giant)  g' (go)  a' (bite)  i' (pi)

2A + 2G + 2U

u'5nla'ng'u'a'g'ed  a' (pat)  i' (damage)  g' (go)  d'3 (giant)  A' (hump)  w' (quell)

This word has 3 of the letter E:

2A + 2C + 3E

a'c'c'e'e'ra'c'd  a' (pat)  e' (ate)  k (craw)  s' (cease)  e' (pet)  e' (margue)  i' (bifit)

5. THE MOST WIDELY REPRESENTED PHONETIC SYMBOL?

During the above exploration, I discovered that e appears to top the list of phonetic symbols with regard to the number of different single letters of the alphabet that it can represent. I found 7 such different letters and there may be more. 6 of the letters, perhaps predictably, are A, E, I, O, U and Y. Examples for I, U and Y are not common. The 7th letter is R, a true rarity!

LETTER I

burr v.-- to emit a whirring noise (when used as a noun, birr has a different pronunciation)

LETTER U

upon

LETTER Y

martyr  zephyr

LETTER R

vrbaite - the sulphide Tl4HgSb2As8S20

LETTERS A, E and O

The next, and final, 2 words each have an A, an E and an O with the same pronunciation, represented by e. Incidentally, the bigram OU in the second word is also represented by e.

abandonment  polymersomatous