SOUND SPELLING

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Some years ago now, I was interested to realise that there seemed to be many different spellings in English words of the sound ‘SH.’ I began collecting these and soon branched into other sound spellings as well. The linguistic term for a sound unit is the phoneme. Now though I dabble in language curiosities I am no linguist, so I realise that I am entering ‘tiger country’ by presenting this list! Its purpose is more to celebrate the amazing range of phonemic spellings in English — many being obvious borrowings from our parent languages — than to provide any definitive corpus (à la Rex Gooch or Susan Thorpe!).

Any such listing is of course dependent on local pronunciations – which vary widely across the spectrum of world English. It will quickly be evident that the list strongly reflects my antipodean origins. It is offered as a phurther phalanx in the vanguard of Australian logology led in these pages by such as Anil, Joshua Nash and Peter Delin. Accordingly reference was made in the first instance to the Macquarie Dictionary (second and third editions).

Many from both sides of the pale (Atlantic) will doubtless decry particular examples, especially those which are distinctively foreign or which suggest a somewhat ‘less than adequate’ enunciation. Notable of course is the almost total absence in the North American phonulary/phonory of the short O sound, present elsewhere in such words as was, cot and knowledge [see list]. A selection of capitalised words is also included, and while many of these form terms in common usage, some are only used as geographical or personal names. Those readers who would prefer that these not be included in such a presentation may freely expunge them from their collective [un]conscious.

For simplicity, sounds have not been represented by phonetic symbols with the exception of the following:

• The indeterminate vowel called the schwa (from the Hebrew for ‘a sound like a soft vowel’). As can be seen from the list this is the sound with the most spellings (107). It is represented here by the symbol <>.

• <> represents an ‘intrusive’ sound – for which there is no corresponding letter within the word; the antithesis of a silent letter.

Add lsAAC drACHm mADEmoiselle FAHrenheit plAlIt sALmon fAUXbourden CheyEnne revElle merIngue accIAccatura gUAranee
ay Ape grAAI sundAE champAGne dAHlia AId campAIGN strAIght bordelAIIS bordelAISE trAIIT RALph hALFpenny gAOI gAUge sAY bAYEd cIAYEY suEd e yEA CrEAGH LEAHEy passpiED purEE thEGn EH vEIi rEIgN sIEIGH wEIgHeD PompEIi bris-soEIL metEIR demEISne berET valEEd etrenmETS ricochETTeD thEY obEYEd EYOt rendEZvous pince-nEZEd [feng] shuI lingerIE, mouILLe fOEHn epopOEIa communiqUE bouqUEt croqUETEd grYSbk

ah spA bAA bAAEd [ooh &] AAH [oohed &] AAHEd AARdvARk bazAAAREd usquebAE intAglio OmAGH AH hurrAHEd sAHlb tAHRs cALm lARK ARE pARR bizARRE catARRH [objet] d'ART fracAS nougAT AUnt faIEnce hEArt orgEAT sEgEant sofree sangfroID fOE gras memoIRs repertoIRE bourgeoIs mirepoIX [je ne sais] quOI gUArd qUInte UrqUHARt vo*yeur

b BiB eBB loBE BHang elaBORately laBYrinthis gbeJna cuPBoard rasPBErry

cello capriCCio caCCiatore CHild mleCHCHHa niCHE [cartes] blanCHES stanCHIon anClent CSabai CZech conSCIOus riTual iTCH haTCHED righTEous posTHumous questIOn kiTSCHE mark sancTUary NieTZSCHeism

d BDellium DiD quaNDary aDD BuDDHist oDE DHow meDIcine conDUit fillED couLd Tao

e Any AEstival sAId sAYs lEIt hEAd kEElson hEIfer LEICEster lEOpard objET & objETS [d'art] rEYnard frIEnd fOEtid bUry gUEss *nth

e' wAry AArorn AErate fAIry pAIRs AIREd [chargé] d'affAIRES cAREs prAYERs mAYOress mAYORs AYRshire [cattle] AYREs bolERo bEURer yEAH pEARS bEUREd E'ER thEIRs beche-de-MER ERE partERE EYra EYREs HEI-apparent HEIRs HEIREd wHERE

ee karAoke cAESar shillelAGH tAOIseach be sEA ocrEAE BEAUchamp bEE sEEIng vEHicle sEIze LEIGH recEIpt pEOple mESne diocESEs gEWgaw key honEYEd kWI minutIAE chIEf mIHrab torII komIJne [kaas] coutIL canaILLE grenouILLEs deBRIs bruIT [grand] prIX dahabiYeh fJOrd kope fOEtus onomatopOEIa chamOIs (pl.) chamOISEd qUAY qUAYEd dengUE parqUET croqUETEd begUINE grUYere citY gramarYE

er EARn [cordon] blEAU bEURth wERE ERRs ERREd miliEU massEURs chauffEURED messiEURS [pas de] DEUX wHIRled wHIRRs wHIRREd wHORls tIERce fIRS stIRREd mOBIus OEil-de-bOEuf fOEHn OERsted [cri de] cOEUR cOLOnel wORd scOURge fURry gEURdon de rigUEUR liqUEURED sURF bURRS fURREd mYrrhy mYRTle mYRRnong mYRRH
Fat life off gauche comfortable often awfully tough caught calf phosphor phe stomatococcal super fire lieutenant vorspiel

bleak guard go renege egg poggie bogghi ghost cate go r guide vague

exist

He Joba who quirxote threshold

image pretty breaved the sure build norwich myth

naive maestro talpan shangai canaille aisle ay aye Either eight gayser eye rhyme dial insect lie sign high sigh red nilism de stijl iron isle guide buy guyed fly dye

sandwich sandwich graduate grandeur finger edge soldier adjoin procedure gem age suggest legion religious jay has j

cat practically occur cichlid shark modernarine creek acher bark cocolate acquit clear sauce graffito houged high edna

luxury faction sexually

off all basically laboratory tourist travel leafy fossil lu beled refreshing design seldom

dracsm phlegm psalm camed mammal primary limb bomb aper made mother sallon dramatic

C Nemis wednesday suddenly elegance cognac gun cold gene knee mnemonic comptracker none ordinary hand some vingt-ten pirate hung cayenne dishonourably avenue gonon pneumatic

ink puncture handing kerchief long bang ed mah-jongg gig hammer haranguing tongue pay go pay go
hAllo hEllo thrEEpence coiffure wOn dOEs flooOd tOUch Us UGH hUH tWOpence

wOlf gOOd wORsted WORCeStershire cOUtrier wOUlD pUt cWm

slEUth drEW brEWEd rHEUm silHOUette lIEU SIOUX (pl.) SIOUX (sing.) jIUjitsu to shOE manOEUvre tOO wOOEd pOOH OOHeD [and aahed] sOUp mOUE throuGh brOUGHAm cOUP trou-de-lOUPS rendezvOUS rendezvOUSEd ragOUT rOUx tUtU blUE glUHwein sUIt flUOride debUT debUTEd mUUmUU crWth tWO

haLVE hEllo thrEEpence coiffure wOn dOEs flooOd tOUch Us UGH hUH tWOpence

Wel lOve sUIt flUOride debUT debUTEd mUUmUU crWth tWO
Notes:

- `burEAU (= oh) burEAUcrat (',) and burEAUcracy (o)
- `ee` and `u` sounds are made by all of the vowels (and `ee` by `y` too):
  
  - imAge prEtty blt wOmen bUsy hYmn hAllo hEllo coiffure tOn cUp

- The most letters 'contained' in a sound is seven: ENNYWOR = ',', in halfpENNYWORTbrOUGHAm, mleCHCHHa, plOUGHEd, posTPHTHisic, furlOUGHEd and wEIGHEd (with 71% of its letters in one sound) have five each
- The sound with the most spellings is also the commonest sound in English. The schwa comprises 10.8% of all conversation – way ahead of the next most common sounds: ee (8.3%), n (7.6%), t (6.4%) and d (5%)

SOUNDS REPRESENTED BY VOWELS AND VOWEL COMBINATIONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>cAt:</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Ate:</td>
<td>ay</td>
<td>dAre:</td>
<td>e'</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any:</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>karAoke:</td>
<td>ee</td>
<td>imAge:</td>
<td>i</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wAs:</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>bAll:</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>hAllo:</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>deAf:</td>
<td>(silent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>CheyEnne:</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>suEde:</td>
<td>ay</td>
<td>bolEro:</td>
<td>e'</td>
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<td></td>
<td>lEt:</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>Erring:</td>
<td>er</td>
<td>wE:</td>
<td>ee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eye:</td>
<td>ie</td>
<td>Encore:</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>sEw:</td>
<td>oh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thrEw:</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>fEw:</td>
<td>yuu</td>
<td>itEm:</td>
<td>'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>merIngue:</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>soIree:</td>
<td>ah</td>
<td>[feng] shuI:</td>
<td>ay</td>
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<td></td>
<td>skI:</td>
<td>ee</td>
<td>bIlt:</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>Ice:</td>
<td>ie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coiffure:</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>onIOn:</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>pencil:</td>
<td>'</td>
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<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>mObius:</td>
<td>er</td>
<td>wOmen:</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>hOt:</td>
<td>o</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pOrous:</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>tOn:</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>wOlf:</td>
<td>oo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chOir:</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>One:</td>
<td>wu</td>
<td>purpOse:</td>
<td>'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>bUry:</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>fUrry:</td>
<td>er</td>
<td>lieUtenant:</td>
<td>f</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bUy:</td>
<td>ie</td>
<td>sUr:re:</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>cUp:</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rUle:</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>qUass:</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>qUick:</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use:</td>
<td>yuu</td>
<td>circUs:</td>
<td>'</td>
<td>bUild:</td>
<td>(silent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
grYsbok: ay  
mYrhy: er  
Yes: y  
citY: ee  
hYmn: i  
praYer: (silent)

AA  
grAAI: ay  
bAA: ah  
AAron: e'  
CanAA: '

AE  
sundAE: ay  
usquebAE: ah  
AErate: e'  
AEstival: e

cAESar: ee  
mAEstro: ie  
AEsthetic: '

AI  
plAI: a  
AlI: ay  
fAlry: e'  
sAI: _ e

tAIpan: ie  
fountAlIn: ' 

AO  
gAOl: ay  
curacAO: oh  
pharAOnic: o  
ciAO: ow

extrAO: Ordinary: aw

AU  
gAuge: ay  
lAUgh: ah  
lAUrel: o  
tAU: aw

gAUss: ow  
mAUve: oh  
restAUrant: '

AY  
sAY: ay  
sAYs: e  
quAY: ee  
AY: ie

EA  
yEA: ay  
bEArer: e'  
hEA: ah  
hEAd: e

tEA: ee  
brEA: i 
taoisEAc: o  
SEAn: aw

EE  
purEE: ay  
kEElson: e  
bEE: ee  
brEEch: i

ehreepence: u

El  
revElle: a  
rElgn: ay  
theEl: e'  
hEI: e

Elize: ee  
counterfEl: i  
Elther: ie  
forEl: '

EO  
LEOpard: e  
pEOple: ee  
chEOngsam: o  
yEOman: oh

pigEO: ' 

EU  
miliEU: er  
slEUth: uu  
fEUd: yuu  
FrEUd: oi

pastEurize:'

EY  
theY: ay  
rEynard: e  
Eyra: e'  
kEY: ee

Eyrie: i  
gEYser: ie  
cocknEYfy: '

IA  
accI Accatura: a  
marrIAge: i  
dIAL: ie  
parlIAment: '

IE  
lingerIE: ay  
foIE [gras]: ah  
frIEnd: e  
belIEve: ee

sIEve: i  
llIE: ie  
mischIEf: '

Il  
torII: ee
IO  flexIOn:  '
IU  jiUjitsu: uu  BelgIUm:  '
IY  dahabiYeh: ee
OA  OAk:  oh  brOAd:  aw
OE  fOEtid:  e  phOEnix:  ee  OEil-de-boeuf: er  dOEs:  u
shOE:  uu  mOEllier:  o  tOE:  oh  tOEa:  oi
OEdema:  '
OI  [je ne sais] quOI:  ah  chamOI: [p]:ee  fOI:  oi  chOIr: wie
porpOIse:  '
OO  fIOOd:  u  gOOd:  oo  fOOd:  uu  brOOch: oh
pOOrer:  aw
OU  yOUng:  u  cOUgh:  o  cOUrier:  oo  crOUp: uu
ampOUle: yuu  sOUl:  oh  pOURing: aw  lOUd: ow
OUabain: w  joyOUUs:  '
OY  jOY:  oi
UA  gUAranntee: a  gUAr:  a  dUAL: yuu  sUAve: wa
victUal:  '
UE  malagUEna: ay  gUES:  e  dengUE: ee  blUE: uu
cUE:  yuu  sUEde:  way  gUErilla:  '
UEl:  yuu  spUEr:  yuu  sUEl:  wee  biseUIt:  '
UI  quINTe:  a  begUIn: ee  bUIld: i  gUIde: ie
sUIIt:  uu  pursUIIt: yuu  sUIte: wee  biseUIt:  '
UO  flUOride: uu  liqUOrice: 'or silent
UU  mUUmUU: uu  vacUUm: yuu
UY  grUYere: ee  bUY:  ie
YE  gramarYE: ee  dYE:  ie
YU  YUle:  yuu