

Making Sense of 'Irregular' Words

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These words are often categorized as "irregular"

says	gone	they
been	said	what
does	there	move
goes	where	of
done	their	is

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These words are often categorized as "irregular"

says	been	to	the
does	there	too	any
goes	where	two	answer
done	their	of	people
gone	move	is	
said	prove	a	

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Let's start with these:

says
been
does

Why are these considered irregular?

What is actually driving their spelling?

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The spelling of <says>

say
drive
play

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The spelling of <says>

drive + s --> drives
play + s --> plays
say + s --> says

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The spelling of <been>

I will _____.	<i>past participle</i>	I have _____.
take	take/ + en	taken
rise	rise/ + en	risen
fall	fall + en	fallen
eat	eat + en	eaten
drive	drive/ + en	driven
be	be + en	been
		*bin?
		*ben?

Many “irregular” words are complex

do	ing
go	es
	ne

do + ing --> doing go + ing --> going
do + es --> does go + es --> goes
do + ne --> done go + ne --> gone

See Pete Bowers’ work for more on this

Why do we consider these words irregular?

says	does	gone
been	done	goes

Assumption: The purpose of the spelling system is

_____.

Why do we consider these words irregular?

Assumption: The purpose of the spelling system is to represent pronunciation **directly**

speech --> text

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What does the evidence show?

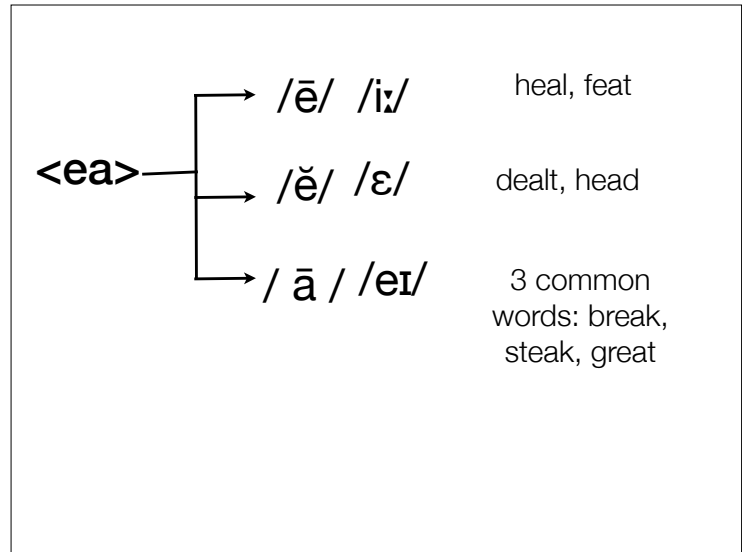
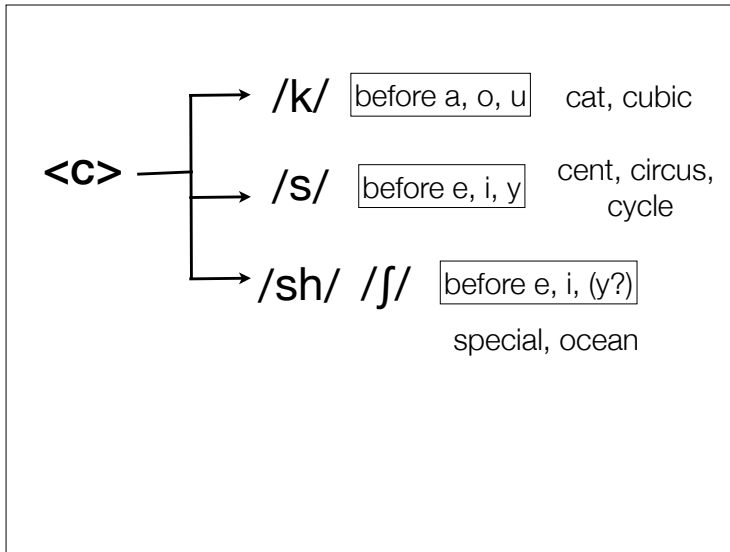
say + s	do + es	go + ne
be + en	do + ne	go + es

Why do we consider these words irregular?

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speech --> text

**We teach frequency of grapheme usage right away;
we teach morphology later**



Why do we consider these words irregular?

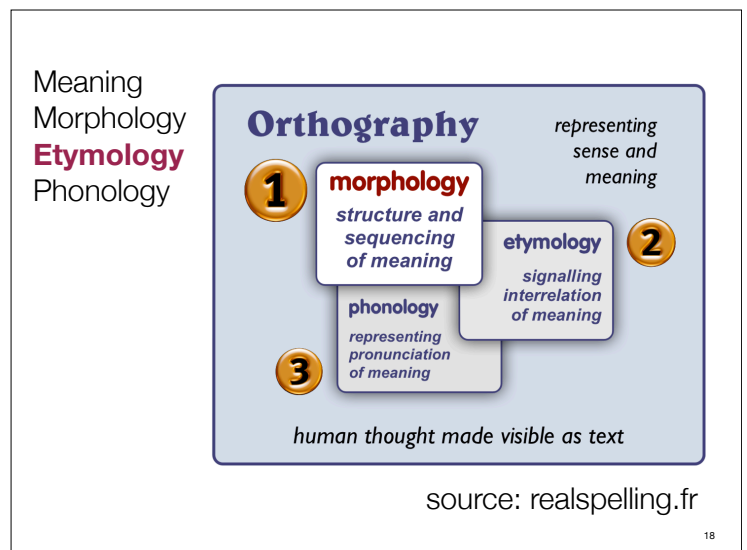
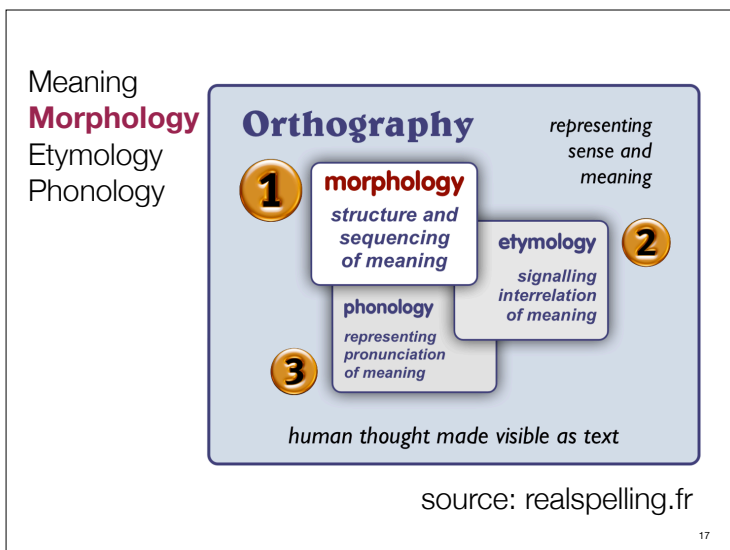
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speech --> text

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“...the simple fact is that the present orthography is not merely a letter-to-sound system riddled with imperfections, but, instead, a more complex and more regular relationship wherein phoneme and morpheme share leading roles.”

Source: Venezky, Richard L. “English Orthography: Its Graphical Structure and Its Relation to Sound” in Reading Research Quarterly, Vol 2, No. 3 (Spring 1967) pp. 75-105



A better way to spell?

- hEr
- here, hear

Homophone Principle

When two or more words in English are pronounced the same but mean different things, whenever possible they will be spelled differently.

Source: Venezky, Richard L.
The American Way of Spelling,
The Guilford Press, 1999

Homophone Principle

or	oar	ore
way	weigh	whey
aisle	I'll	isle
tax	tacks	
guest	guessed	
aloud	allowed	
praise	preys	prays
tease	teas	tees
tense	tents	
I scream	ice cream	
your analysis	urinalysis	

A better way to spell?

- hEr
- here, hear
- Homophones allow for rapid differentiation of meaning - comprehension
- Spelling connects us to meaning through morphemes **and graphemes**

prey	pray	obey
predator		they
		hey
		survey

obey
obedient
***obay**

The etymology of <said>

lay	pay	<ay>	say
lays	pays		says
laid	paid	<ai>	said
			*sed
			*siad
			*sez

The synchronic etymology of <there>

hear	here	their	possessive
heard	there	them	object
herd	where	they	subject

“Buy one word, get lots more free”

We can **make sense of**

“irregular” words

“easily confused words”

When? Then.
Where? There.
Whence? Thence.

Source: Gina Cooke

whence | (h)wens | (also **from whence**)

adverb formal or archaic

from what place or source: *whence does Congress derive this power?*

thence | ðens | (also **from thence**)

adverb formal

from a place or source previously mentioned:
they intended to cycle on into France and thence home via Belgium.

When? Then.
Where? There.
Whence? Thence.
What? That.

Source: Gina Cooke

Clarification questions?

Etymology drives grapheme choice

hear

here

prey

move

Mini Matrix-Maker Results

com de e pro re	mote "move"	ed ness		
		ile	ity	
		ion	al	
		ive	ate	ed ion or
aut	o	or	boat	
			man	
			mouth	
			way	
			cycle	ist
			ed ing	

re + move --> remove
re + mote --> remote

Twin base
from Latin <movere>

im re un	move "move"	able ed s			
		al			
		er			
		ment			
		ie	go	er	s
		ing		ly	

Multiple spellings for /ōō/- /u:z/

<oo> food
<ew> flew
<u> tuba

<u-e> prelude
<ou> you
<ue> clue
<ui> juice
<eu> neutral

<o> do, to, two

remote
remove

We can **make sense of**
"irregular" words
"easily confused words"

IF we study them
in relationship to words that
share structure and meaning.
That is how English spelling
works!

of off

ONLINE ETYMOLOGY DICTIONARY

Search: off OK

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X
Y Z

off (adv.) by c. 1200 as an emphatic form of Old English *of* (see *of*), employed in the adverbial use of that word. The prepositional meaning "away from" and the adjectival sense of "farther" were not firmly fixed in this variant until 17c., but once they were they left the original *of* with the transferred and weakened senses of the word. Meaning "not working" is from 1861. *Off the cuff* (1938) is from the notion of speaking from notes written in haste on one's shirt cuffs. *Off the rack* (adj.) is from 1963; *off the record* is from 1933; *off the wall* "crazy" is 1968, probably from the notion of a lunatic "bouncing off the walls" or else in reference to carom shots in squash, handball, etc.

off (v.) "to kill," 1930, from *off* (adv.). Earlier verbal senses were "to defer" (1640s), "to move off" (1882). Related: *Offed*.

of

off

**function
word**

**lexical
(content)
word**

- Lexical (content) words:
nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs
 - “dictionary” words
 - carry **meaning** in text
 - **stressed** in connected speech
 - “open class” - new words added all the time

- Function words:
articles, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs
 - “grammar” words
 - often **unstressed** in connected speech
 - “closed class” - English has roughly 300

Conventions

- Function words can be written with as few letters as phonology allows, often 2 letters:

<as>, <in>, <on>, <go>, <by>, <l>, <a>

- **Content words must be at least 3 letters:**

<egg>, <odd>, <ebb>, <awe>, <err>, <dye>

- When function and content words are homophones, content word will be longer when possible

Source: realspelling.fr

of

off

function
word

content
word

to

too

in

inn

by

bye

buy

be

bee

do

due

dew

but

butt

Function and content words

“The gift that keeps on giving”

- Gina Cooke, Linguist-Educator Exchange

What about:

is, has

No English function word contains a <z>

Why do we consider these words irregular?

- Assumption: primary purpose of spelling is to represent pronunciation **directly**
- What does the evidence in our writing system show us?

Written English

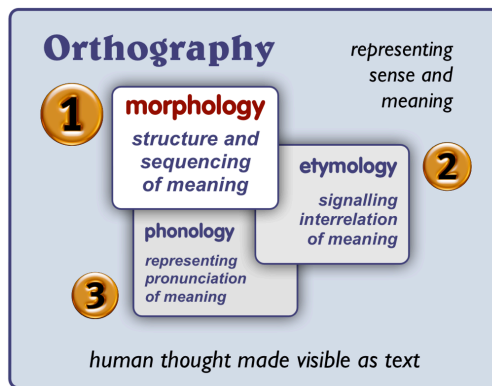
- Is an ordered system that is logical and understandable
- Is **morphophonemic** - phonology essential, and is understood within **morphological** framework

What are the implications for instruction?

- Start with the written form
- Systematic, direct, explicit study and instruction
- Study words with meaningful relationships - expands and deepens comprehension of words along with spelling
- Start with meaning, morphology, etymology and THEN phonology

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Meaning
Morphology
Etymology
Phonology



source: realspelling.fr

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Webinars at ida-umb.org

- Structured Word Inquiry
- Pete Bowers, *Word Works Kingston*
- Insights into 'Sight Words'
- Gina Cooke, *Linguist-Educator Exchange*

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Resources

Websites:

realspelling.fr
wordworkskingston.com
linguisteducatorexchange.com
etymonline.com

Teacher blogs:

Lyn Anderson's Early Years Blog - Beyond the Word <http://wordsinbogor.blogspot.com>
Scot Caldwell's Grade 1 Blog (archived) <https://smallhumanstinkbig.wordpress.com>
Mary Beth Steven's Grade 5 Blog <http://mbsteven.edublogs.org>
Dan Allen's Grade 5 Blog (archived) <http://blogs.zis.ch/dallen/category/language/spelling-word-study/>
Ann Whiting's Grade 7 Blog <https://wordinquiry.wordpress.com>

More info on spelling:

realspellers.org
soundliteracy.com/blog/ - and see Sound Literacy on Facebook

Books/Study Resources

LEX Grapheme cards, linguisteducatorexchange.com
LEX Word Matrices and InSight Word Cards, linguisteducatorexchange.com
Morphology: Henry, Marcia. *Unlocking Literacy: Effective Decoding and Spelling Instruction, Second Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2010.

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Questions?

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