

Strengths and weaknesses of english orthography



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Strengths and weaknesses of English orthography The method of spelling words in the English language or English orthography has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. This mainly comes through because of the many inconsistencies between the spelling and pronunciation of words. Underlined below are a few significant points to highlight both strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths of English orthography

Structured occurrence: One of the main highlights of English orthography is that its pattern is highly structured. The patterning can be stated as highly impressive, considering that it is derived from only twenty-six alphabets and approximately fifty sounds. Finally the experienced reader in English is served well with the language.

Homophones: Differentiation between homophones or similar sounding words is achieved successfully by English orthography. For example, the words hour and our though pronounced similarly are distinguished by the usage of h in the first word. This can help to remove any ambiguity when a reader reads the written language.

Etymological relationships between words: Usually an abstract underlying representation or morphophonemic form is seen to be represented for English words. For example, dipped, loomed and looted have different pronunciations of the usage of -ed, which is pronounced as (t), (d) and (ld) not represented to the reader. The abstract representation of words is also a relative strength as it indicates the etymological relationship between words. Thus while writing English becomes a little difficult, it makes learning English a relatively easy process (Chomsky 1970: 294, Rollins 2004: 17).

Creativity: The inconsistency in English spelling can also be considered

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advantageous as it gives way to creativity and allows people to pronounce words in their own personal way. Slogans in creative communications are witness to the fact, which is an activity that can not be taken up for other languages (Venezky, Children of the code interview, undated).

Weaknesses of English orthography

English orthography represents various difficulties, not only for foreign language learners but also for native speakers. These weaknesses are underlined here.

Spelling and pronunciation inconsistency: As per Laubach, " English is the world's worst spelt language'. For example, the words 'know' and 'no' are both pronounced in the same manner. Words ending with an 'ough' are also often pronounced differently as in 'rough' and 'thorough'. This makes learning by rote a necessity for English language learners. This aspect also came through strongly from a study by Ken Spencer of Hull University, who demonstrated in a study of 150 schoolchildren, that schoolchildren who learn English as their native language have more difficulty than children who learn other languages.

High complication: English orthography rules are extremely complicated as compared to other languages like German and Italian. Thus single letters like 'x' can have different pronunciations depending upon the usage of the letter. Many agree that this has been caused due to inconsistencies in the traditional orthography model of the 1700s when English was written by Latin scribes. While most other countries have undergone spelling reforms for their languages, the same also needs to be done for English so that it suits today's times.

Graphemic options: English orthography gives too many graphemic options.

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Thus a word that is 41 letters long can be pronounced in 10, 000 different ways of which only one is orthographically correct. The letter combination of 'in' can be pronounced in over 400 different ways. As compared to English in most other languages a four letter word has only method of being written and thus being pronounced. 'Over 25% words have irregular spellings while 10% of the words do not follow any logical pattern (Hanna, 1971).

Bibliography

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