

## Re: homo(phones/graphs/nyms)

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"Peter T. Daniels" <grammatim@worldnet.att.net> wrote in message news:<4199FCB1.1129@worldnet.att.net>...

> *iwantlambert@yahoo.com* wrote:

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> > > *Only linguists distinguish homophones and homographs.*

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> > *and this distinction is of little importance except when talking about languages like English or French with their strange and unsystematic spelling conventions.*

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> *Strange, perhaps (due to the GVS); unsystematic, absolutely not.*

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> *(French strikes me as neither strange nor unsystematic.)*

English spelling uses different conventions depending on the origin of a word (one could call that systematic) but not consistently. As a result of the GVS some vowels merged, most of the time keeping different spellings. I'm prepared to call etymological spelling as systematic, but in that case lots of words in English are misspelled, e.g. [i:] in "deed" and in "read" have the same origin, just as [o:] in "boar" and "more" or [ou] in "loaf" and "stone".

A foreigner learns spelling together with the words, unlike native speakers who starts learning spelling after having learned lots of words already. Most of those speakers are not that much interested in etymology, so to them the system is lost as far as etymology is concerned.

There are other quite irregular spellings in English, e.g. the words containing "ough".

As for French, it was spoiled by the French.

Old-French started out with a spelling that fitted the language of the day quite nicely, but already in medieval times the french introduced all kinds of etymological spellings that were logical only to those who knew Latin. As most of the people able to read and/or write knew

some Latin this was not really a problem at the time. Nowadays these spellings are not always clear to anyone.

They are said to be usefull when distinguishing between homonyms, but the "g" in "doigt" (which gets it's "g" from Latin "digitus" (which is a correct etymology) seems to me quite useless, since the difference between "doigt" (finger/thumb) and "doit" (he/she must/should/ought to) is most of the times clear from context).

Often they got their etymologies wrong, e.g. where does the "d" in "poids" come from? (the word itself stems from Latin "pensum")  
Later on they misread earlier graphs for [ws] < [ls] as /ux/ and then used this digraph in words where it didn't belong. There are more things to say on french spelling, but let me mention just one more:

The grammar of the French Written Language is not the same as the grammar of the French Spoken Language, e.g. in verbal conjugation. An example is the present tense of the regular verb "parler", belonging to the largest conjugation–class:

je parl–e  
tu parl–es  
il parl–e  
nous parl–ons  
vous parl–ez  
ils parl–ent

The endings –e, –es and –ent are silent, so whereas the FWL has five forms, FSL has only three.

French spelling beats English spelling in one respect though: once you read something, you can be quite sure you know how to pronounce it, even if you do not know the word(s), in English, unless you know the word, you can often only guess.

greatings, erik.