

Re: non-phonetic english spelling

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From: John A Rea (j.rea2_at_insightbb.com)

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mb wrote:

>>Very strange. The FL speaker/listener's impression is rather the
>>contrary: That a majority of the final so-called schwas presented in
>>school French are totally absent from speech, according, of course, to
>>position.

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><<Yes, that too is true. Both are happening at the same time. Written
>-e's are often absent, depending on what follows, on speed, on extra
>stress, etc. But words that don't have that written -e, but just a
>final consonant (not r), follow that same pattern, i.e. the shwa
>usually isn't there, but sometimes is. It's there under the same
>circumstances as written final -e.
>Conclusion: French words cannot end in a consonant (except r).>>

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>So any released stops are not consonants? I couldn't even understand
>what you meant before it was pointed out to me.
>Besides, this is mainly if not exclusively about final consonants in
>pausal position (otherwise border phenomena). Apart from the stops,
>which consonants will have a "final vowel"? Perhaps -r (contrary to
>some statements here), that in many people's speech does have an
>obligatory vowel-like sound if pausal.

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>>Possibly then, we are back for the umpteenth time to the old story:
>>Either we have to define the elusive "schwa", or we have to provide a
>>more precise description than an all-purpose word.

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>>I don't see the problem. Just listen to French radio, and it's there.

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>In careful enunciation, of course there are additions, but there are
>rules. The great majority concern the sounding of an e muet. And there
>are a lot of words and situations where it is a definite no-no.

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>The problem is a) that calling something a vowel sound, out of lack of

- > *familiarity or any other reason, does not make it so; b) that saying*
- > *something is a "schwa" doesn't mean anything anymore, it's become just*
- > *a catch-all word.*

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One of the problems is that the term "schwa" is used to refer to different things in a variety of languages. It can refer to a mid central vowel, especially an unstressed one. Note that American linguists use it to refer to the vowel in the word "cut", even if it is stressed. British linguists would use the inverted <v> symbol for their vowel in this word (which is a bit lower than the Americans' pronunciation of "cut") and instead they would use the schwa symbol for their vowel in the r-less word "curt".

In phonology, this term and its symbol are often called "the (note the definite article) reduced vowel. This usage is current for situations in which a language has phonological alternation in which a stressed vowel, such as /a/ is replaced by an unstressed mid central vowel: One thinks of Barcelona Catalan, which does this, whereal in Algherese Catalan in the same circumstance the /a/ is maintained, and in fact also replaces /e/ and /E/ when unstressed (whereas /o/ and /C/, i. e. close and open "o", are both replaced by /u/). In English this "reduced" vowel can be in alternationa with other vowels than just /a/: note the common examples like "photograph" with "schwa" in the second syllable, but "photography" with "open o" in the second syllable but a schwa in the first in American pronunciation, whatever that means.

(It's interisting that Russian appears to contrast with Catalan by replacing unstressed /o/ with /a/, and unstressed /e/ with /i/, thus using raising and lowering the reverse of Catalan!

Paese che vai, usanze che trovi!

Jack