



HAOOO TU PRANOWNSE INGLISH

BY DAVID LOWE

The holidays are approaching and some of you must be preparing vacations in English-speaking countries. You can understand English, but can you pronounce it? This can be quite crucial. Madame de Gaulle was once asked during a dinner at the American Embassy what she was most looking forward to when her husband finally retired from politics. Her answer – “happiness” – sounded to Anglo-Saxon ears more like “a penis”, which was most unfortunate. As simple tourists you could have problems asking where the beach is. “Where is the bitch?” If you are not sure of your accent, never say things like “taking into account” or “you must focus”.

The problem is that English is a rich, multicultural language with many spelling and pronunciation peculiarities, some intentional and some not.

For example:

The **two** boys want **to** play, **too**.

I **knew** it was **new**.

I **write** with my **right** hand.

Have you **seen** the **scene**?

Their things? **They're** there!

The above sentences all contain words that sound the same, but are spelt differently.

What you see is not what you hear in the following: *gnat, gnaw, knee, knife, knickers, should, could, would, wrap, wrinkle, write, wrong*, etc. All these words have silent letters. “Leicester” has three silent letters right in the middle. Remove the “ice” to get “Lester”, then put the stress on the beginning not the end, *Lester* not *Lester*. Square rhymes with air. Leicester Square.

That’s nothing; the town of Cholmondeley in Cheshire is pronounced “Chumly”.

To further complicate things, there are many words that look the same, but are pronounced differently. You can have lots of fun with these.

We must *polish* the *Polish* furniture – (short “o” as in “doll”, then long “o” as in “pole”).

The *dove* *dove* into the bushes – (“dove” as in “love”, then “dove” as in “stove”)

The bandage was *wound* around the *wound* – (“wound” as in “sound”, then “wound” as in “tuned”). There was a *row* (rhymes with “cow”) in the boat about how to *row* (rhymes with “toe”).

You wear a *bow* and you *bow* (same as the previous example but the other way round).

They were too *close* to *close* it – (first “close”, then “cloze”).

I *read* (“red”) it once and will *read* (“reed”) it again.

I often hear *Star Wars* pronounced as if the “ar” of “star” was the same as the “ar” of “war”, but no, it’s *star* as in “car” and *war* as in “paw” (or “door”!).

Break doesn’t rhyme with “freak” but sounds like “brake”.

Horse doesn’t rhyme with “worse” but sounds like “hoarse”.

An “s” makes all the difference between *slaughter* and *laughter*.

Food, blood and *good* are all pronounced differently, despite appearances. If it helps, here are their phonetic spellings: *fu:d, bləd, gʊd*.

Pay rhymes with “say”, but *paid* doesn’t rhyme with “said”. Past and **present** (not passed and present).

There are as many rules as there are exceptions.

So let’s finish with a riddle.

What does *ghoti* spell?

Answer: fish

“gh” as in enough

“o” as in women

“ti” as in nation

Fish.

However, by the same argument, *ghoti* spells nothing at all.

“gh” as in though (silent)

“o” as in people (silent)

“t” as in ballet (silent)

“i” as in business (silent)

Good luck!