Handbook of English pronunciation for Hungarian EFL teachers
Part 2: A beginner's guide to Hunglish

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Homophones

Homophones are words with different meaning that are pronounced the same but may be spelt differently (e.g., *know* and *no*, *bear* and *bare*, etc.). There are numerous such examples in English resulting from the peculiarities of English letter-to-sound rules, but they are quite rare in Hungarian due to the predominantly phonemic spelling system of the language. Homophones therefore constitute a potential source of difficulty for the Hungarian learner of English.

I'm on a seafood diet. When I see food, I eat it.

'What is a Christmas gift's favourite type of music?'
'Wrap.'

'What's a cat's favourite button on a DVD remote?'
'Paws.'

Words with the same pronunciation but different meaning are quite frequent in English and they serve as the basis of many puns – the examples above are just three of the hundreds (if not thousands) of similar jokes in English. The words that such puns are based on are referred to as homophones, and they very often have different spellings, too. However, two words do not necessarily have to be spelt differently in order to be called homophones. Consider the following jokes:

'Why did the teacher wear sunglasses?' 'Because the students were so bright.'

'Why did the cat come down from the tree?' 'Because it saw the tree bark.'

In this example, the two meanings of the word *bright* ('sunny' and 'intelligent') and those of *bark* ('to make the short loud sound dogs make' and 'the outer covering of a tree') are spelt the same, not like the word pairs *sea–see*, *wrap–rap* and *paws–pause* in the first three jokes. The two meanings of words like *bright* and *bark* are technically homophones too[1] because

[1] Actually, there is a difference before the two examples because the former exemplifies what is referred to as polysemy (i.e., when two words with the same spelling and pronunciation share the same origin and thus have different but related meanings), and the two meanings of the latter word are called homonyms (i.e., they are

what defines homophones is *pronunciation*. Therefore, the most accurate definition of homophones is that they are words with different meanings that are pronounced the same, and they may or may not be spelt differently. However, we will only be concerned with homophones that have different spellings (i.e., heterographic homophones, to put it more technically) because they are the ones that may be the source of pronunciation difficulties faced by non-native speakers. In the rest of this text, therefore, wherever the word "homophones" is used, it will refer to heterographic homophones.

Why are homophones less frequent in Hungarian than in English?

The spelling system of Hungarian is based on four principles, the most dominant of which is the principle of pronunciation, according to which one letter corresponds to one sound and vice versa. As there are three more principles determining how Hungarian words are spelt, it cannot be stated that Hungarian has a fully phonemic spelling system (which would totally rule out heterographic homophones), but as the majority of Hungarian words are spelt according to the above-mentioned first principle, Hungarian homophones are relatively rare and can only be found when at least one member of the word pair is spelt according to one of two other principles of spelling[2]. These are the following:

- The principle of word analysis: In morphologically complex words (i.e., in compound words and suffixed words), Hungarian spelling tends to reflect the original component morphemes of the words rather than the pronunciation of the words as a whole. E.g., *fűzfa* (which is a compound word consisting of *fűz* 'willow' and *fa* 'tree') and *vasból* 'of iron' (which consists of the root *vas* and the suffix *-ból*) are pronounced "fűszfa" and "vazsból" – the [z] of *fűz* and the [ʃ] of *vas* change in pronunciation into [s] and [ʒ], respectively, but the spelling retains the original forms of the component morphemes. Let us see a few examples of homophones emerging as a result of this spelling principle:
    - *mészbe* 'into whitewash' – *mézbe* 'into honey': The [s] at the end of *mész* changes into [z] in pronunciation to assimilate in voicing to the following [b]. Thus the difference between *mész* and *méz* disappears in pronunciation if the suffix *-be* is attached to them. (This process is called voicing assimilation, and this is what explains the phenomenon we have seen above concerning *fűzfa* and *vasból*.)
    - *fonnyad* ('wilt') – *fonjad* ('plait it'): The root of the second word (*fon*) ends in [n], but when the suffix *-j* (the imperative marker) is attached to it, then [n] and [j] merge into a third sound, namely [ɲ:] (spelt <nny>, as in the first word). *Fonnyad* and *fonjad* are therefore pronounced the same, but the spelling of the latter indicates its morphological structure.
    - *áld* 'bless' – *áldd* 'bless (imperative mood)', *kedvel* 'like somebody' – *kedvvel* 'with good humour': There is a rule in Hungarian phonology according to which a long consonant gets shortened in pronunciation if it comes to stand right before or after another consonant. If the suffix *-vel* is attached to the root *kedv*, the <vv> will be pronounced as a short [v] (as opposed to in *hév+vel*

words that have different origins and unrelated meanings but happen to be spelt and pronounced the same), but we will not be concerned with this distinction here.

[2] The fourth principle (namely the principle of simplification) affects a few very special cases, and it is unable to account for the emergence of homophones. This is the principle that (among other issues) explains why for example [ɲ:] is spelt <nny> as in *fonnyad*, to be mentioned below. The idea here is that short [ɲ] is indicated by the digraph <ny> (as in *nyár* 'summer'), but when [ɲ] is pronounced long, its spelt form is simplified as it is only the first member of the digraph that is doubled, as in *dinnye* 'melon', *könny* 'tear (liquid from the eye)', *mennyi* 'how much/many', etc. This rule does not only affect the letter <ny> but all digraphs (cf. *hosszú* 'long', *meggy* 'sour cherry', *fütty* 'whistle', etc.).

'fervently', in which it is pronounced long as it does not stand next to a consonant on either side), and it will sound the same as *kedvel*. Therefore, one must be careful not to forget when to spell double <v>, which happens to be a very frequent spelling error committed by Hungarians. (It is no wonder that the first few lines of the Hungarian national anthem often appear in spelling exercises. 😊)

The list above was not meant to be exhaustive; our purpose was only to provide a few examples that illustrate how homophones may emerge in Hungarian as a result of the application of the spelling principle of word analysis.

- The principle of traditional spelling: The spelling of some Hungarian words reflect pronunciations that have changed since the spelling conventions in question were laid down. The most famous example is that Hungarian has two spelling variants of the sound [j]: it may either be spelt <j> or <ly>. These spelling alternatives reflect an earlier stage in the development of the Hungarian language: there was a time in the history of Hungarian when <j> and <ly> indicated two different sounds. By today, the sound that used to be denoted by <ly> has disappeared, and it merged with [j]. The original spellings are retained though to this day, which has resulted in a number of homophones like *fojt* 'suffocate' and *folyt* 'it flowed', *foglyuk* ('their prisoner' / 'their partridge' / 'tooth hole') – *fogjuk* ('we are holding it' / 'let us hold it'), etc. (Words spelt according to this principle are such that even native speakers of Hungarian have a hard time learning the spelling of these words – notice that today there is no difference whatsoever between the pronunciation of <j> and <ly>; therefore, when learning to spell, Hungarian schoolchildren need to memorise which word containing [j] is spelt with which option.)

Now that we have seen how homophones may emerge in Hungarian, let us see the case of English.

Why are there so many homophones in English?

The reason why the English spelling system is difficult to learn for speakers of other languages (especially ones whose spelling system is fully or predominantly phonemic) is that English spelling rules contain only traces of the principle of pronunciation. English letter-to-sound rules are dominated by the principle of traditional spelling, so while in Hungarian there are only a few dozen words like *fojt* and *folyt*, where one has to memorise which spelling variant of [j] to use, the spelling of an awful lot of English words reflect pronunciations from hundreds of years ago that have changed since then.

To give an example, the <i> in the word *time* used to be pronounced [i:] until around the 15th century, and the letter <e> at the end of the word was also pronounced. The pronunciation of the word has undergone a number of changes: the stressed vowel has changed, and the word-final vowel has disappeared, making this originally two-syllable word one syllable shorter. Its spelling, however, has not changed since, so what we observe from today's perspective is that the letter <i> has a "strange" sound value, and the word-final letter <e> is silent (in fact, it has gained a different function than indicating a vowel sound – see more on this in our "Letter-to-sound rules" text). So basically what happened was that many English words used to be spelt according to the principle of pronunciation, but no spelling reforms have been introduced since the pronunciation of English changed dramatically; therefore the spellings of English words today follow the principle of traditional spelling to a great extent.

This is what is behind the fact that English has a lot of homophones: there are many word pairs that are pronounced the same today but differ in spelling, which reflects an earlier pronunciation difference, just like in the case of <j> and <ly> in Hungarian. E.g., the words

meet and *meat*, which are homophones today, used to be pronounced differently during Shakespeare's time: *meet* was [miːt] ("mít") and *meat* was [meːt] ("mét").

Let us list a few further examples of cases where it is possible to spell the same English sound in several different ways (all of which are due to historical sound changes that are beyond the scope of our discussion here), and how this is able to create homophones. In order to fully understand the explanations below, you are advised to consult our "Letter-to-sound rules" text beforehand.

- The two R-influenced values of the letter <o> have merged: *for* (its strong form) and *fore* used to have different vowels (just like *car* and *care*, *her* and *here*, etc.), but today they are homophones.
- [ɜː] can be spelt <er>, <ir> or <ur> (as in *term*, *girl* and *burn*). This does not create too many homophones, but we can find a few, such as *fir* and *fur*, *berth* and *birth*, *tern* and *turn*, etc.
- Most vowel digraphs denote the same vowels as single vowel letters do. To list just a few examples, the digraphs <ei>, <oa> and <oo> regularly represent the vowels [eɪ], [əʊ] and [uː] (as in *eight*, *road* and *rood*), respectively, but these three vowels may be spelt with single vowel letters, too, namely with <a>, <o> and <u> (as in *ate*, *rode* and *rude*).
- Multiple digraphs may denote the same vowel: e.g., the digraphs <ee>, <ea> and <ie> are pronounced the same, as in *see – sea*, *peace – piece*, etc.
- The schwa can be spelt with any vowel letter (even by digraphs): e.g., *minor* and *miner* are homophones.

The examples discussed so far are all cases where the spellings of both members of homophone pairs are regular, which means that the pronunciation of the words in question can be easily learnt by intuition – in other words, learners are not likely to have difficulty pronouncing *for* and *fore* or *sea* and *see* the same. (We provide a more detailed explanation of what counts as a "regular" and an "irregular" spelling or pronunciation in our "Letter-to-sound rules" text.)

Where problems occur is when one member of a homophone pair is spelt (or pronounced – this is only a matter of perspective) irregularly. In such cases, if the learners are not aware of the fact that a particular word has an irregular pronunciation, their intuitions will mislead them, and they will wrongly pronounce the word in question as if it was pronounced regularly. E.g., *son* is pronounced the same as *sun*, but many learners are unaware of this – the way they often mispronounce it (rhyming with *Ron*) is how the word would be pronounced if it conformed to the regularities, but this word happens to be an exception to the letter-to-sound rules for English vowels.

Further such problematic examples include *suite* and *sweet*, *pear* and *pair*, *sew* and *so*, etc. – in all of these examples, the second members of the pairs are spelt according to the regularities, and it is the first members that are irregular – this is why many learners are unaware that these words are homophonous to *sweet*, *pair* and *so*, respectively, and they often mispronounce them as "sz(j)út", "pír" and "sz(j)ú". Pointing out the homophone pairs can increase the learners' awareness of the pronunciation of irregular words, so whenever such words come up in the English lesson, it is advisable not only to drill the correct pronunciation of the words (in order to prevent the learners from pronouncing them according to their intuitions and learning incorrectly pronounced forms) but also to highlight what other words the problematic ones are homophonous with.

Homophones that are not really homophones

Let us turn our attention to homophones that only *sound like* homophones but in fact they are not. How is this possible?

When a speaker *learns* a language (and does not *acquire* it as their first or second language as a child), they will perceive the target language through the filter of their mother tongue, i.e., sounds in the target language that do not exist in the learners' mother tongue will be perceived by them as if they were in fact the same sounds as ones that can be found in the learners' first language. In this way, there might be pairs of words in languages that are not pronounced the same, but non-native speakers of the language perceive them as being homophones.

For example, the vowel [æ] (as in *bad*, *cat*, *happy*, etc.) does not exist in Hungarian, and Hungarian learners' ears perceive it as being [e], therefore word pairs like *bad* and *bed*, *pat* and *pet*, *cattle* and *kettle*, etc. will be misperceived (and, as a direct consequence of this, mispronounced) by Hungarians as being homophones. Word pairs like *bad* and *bed* are referred to as minimal pairs, but not because the difference between these two words is "barely noticeable" (which is what a Hungarian learner might perceive) – *bad* and *bed* are called a minimal pair because they differ in only one sound in the same position, but this difference is in fact big and important. It is easier to understand this through the example of Hungarian words, so in the next section we discuss sound contrasts in Hungarian that cause difficulties to non-native speakers of the language.

Pákó and the "ú" állomás – Hungarian minimal pairs

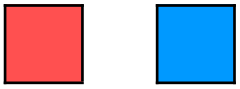
There might not be too many Hungarians who are not familiar with Fekete Pákó, the Nigerian celebrity who has lived in Hungary for a long time now. The most salient feature of his Hungarian pronunciation (for which he often gets mocked) is that he substitutes the vowels "ö/ő" and "ü/ű" with "o/ó" and "u/ú", respectively. Browsing YouTube, we may easily come across videos in which various Hungarian celebrities try to teach Pákó these vowels through words like *tücsök* 'cricket (the animal)' and *űrállomás* 'space station'. Not surprisingly, none of the attempts at teaching him the problematic vowels was successful.

A very important aspect that Pákó's "accent coach wannabes" seem to be totally unaware of is that the reason why he is unable to copy the pronunciation of *tücsök* and *űr* is NOT that he is physically incapable of producing the vowels "ö/ő" and "ü/ű", but because he cannot *perceive* the difference between "ö/ő" and "o/ó" and "ü/ű" and "u/ú". So whenever somebody demonstrates the pronunciation of *tücsök* and *űr* to Pákó and asks him to repeat the words, what Pákó hears is *tucsok* and *úr* and *this* is what he copies.

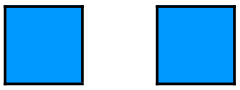
For a native speaker of Hungarian, the difference between *űr* and *úr* is salient (this explains why Hungarians keep making fun of Pákó's Hungarian pronunciation), but it might not be so for speakers of other languages. Whether or not a speaker will perceive the difference between two sounds depends on whether the two sounds in question are responsible for a meaning contrast in the speaker's mother tongue(s) – in other words, whether there exist minimal pairs in that language in which the one difference is the two phonemes in question. Pákó's first language, which is Yoruba, does not have word pairs between which "ö/ő" and "o/ó" or "ü/ű" and "u/ú" would be the only difference (in fact, "ö/ő" and "ü/ű" do not even exist in that language), therefore his perception has not "learnt" to differentiate between word pairs like *kör* 'circle' and *kor* 'age', *űr* 'space' and *úr* 'gentleman', etc. He will therefore misperceive such Hungarian minimal pairs as being homophones, and it is because of the faulty perception that he is unable to pronounce the vowels in question. Therefore, in order to achieve any progress in getting him to acquire these sound contrasts, it is Pákó's perception that needs to be improved first through a series of ear training sessions, and he should only start practising the pronunciation of the problematic vowels *after* he has learnt to differentiate between the vowels confidently when he hears them.

Summary

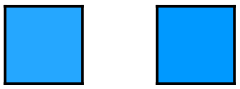
To summarise how the acquisition of non-native sound contrasts works, let us visually support what has been discussed above. At the level of objective reality, any two sounds of a language are distinct from each other, but speakers' perception might be different from the reality. Let us visualise this through the example of *bad* and *bed* (but the explanation would fit any other example, like *űr* and *úr* for Hungarian, etc.). English native speakers will perceive these two words as being different because the contrast is able to account for meaning differences in English. Such pairs of words will sound just as different to native speakers' ears as red and blue look different to the eye:



A Hungarian speaker's perception of the same two words will be different. In the most serious cases (Pákó's seems to belong here), they might perceive the two words as totally the same:

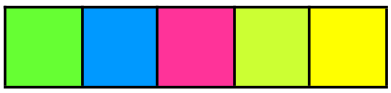


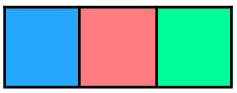
Even if the case is not serious, the two words will sound at least very similar to a Hungarian ear, just like two similar shades of blue:

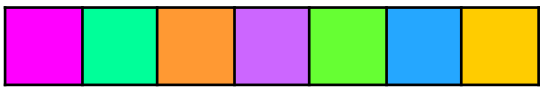


What usually happens is that when the difference is pointed out to the student (e.g., by making them listen to minimal pairs), they notice *some* difference, but it is so small that they are not normally able to copy it. In the two squares above, one might even have a hard time noticing that the two shades are not the same, but if we merge the two boxes, the difference will be more noticeable:

The root of the problem is that students do not encounter a pair of problematic sounds by listening to minimal pairs illustrating the difference. Rather, they will encounter the two sounds independently of each other. The strings of squares below represent three words, each containing one of the two problematic sounds:



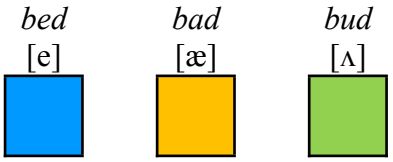




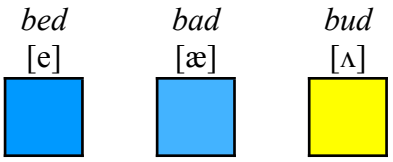
A non-native speaker having difficulty distinguishing the two sounds in question is highly unlikely to ever notice in this way that there are actually two different shades of blue that can be found in these "words" – unless the difference is specifically pointed out to them with the

help of minimal pairs, all they will notice is that the three instances of blue are different from the variety of the other colours they are surrounded by (they are all blue), but the difference between the *shades* of blue will not be noticeable for them.

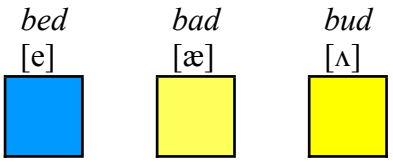
The interesting part of this story is that speakers of different languages will have difficulty perceiving different sound contrasts. Let us compare how an English, a Hungarian and an Italian speaker will perceive the words *bed*, *bad* and *bud*. The objective reality is that the vowels of these words, namely [e], [æ] and [ʌ], are three distinct vowels and each of them is equally different from the other two. On the one hand, the perception of a native speaker of English will be the same as the reality: as *bed*, *bad* and *bud* all mean something different in English, a native speaker will perceive them as being different:



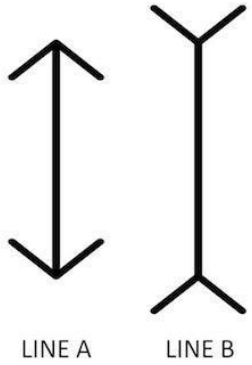
On the other hand, non-native speakers' perception might be totally different if there are no words in their language between which the only difference is that one word has one of these three sounds where another word has one of the other two vowels. Interestingly, speakers of different languages may perceive these three words differently. For example, as we have seen above, Hungarian speakers will perceive the first two of these words as being similar or the same, and the third one as different:



To Italian speakers' ears, however, the second and the third word will sound similar or the same, and the first one will be distinct from them:



This issue is actually very similar to optical illusions, which may be effective tools to further support our explanation because people tend to be more familiar with such examples than foreign accent related issues (or audio illusions in general). A particularly famous optical illusion is the one where two lines with arrows at both ends are to be compared in length:



The question here is: Which line is longer, line A or line B? Of course the answer is that they are equal in length, but this is not what you see – your brain deceives you into perceiving that line B is longer. It is easy to check what the truth is, though: if you pick a ruler and measure the length of each line, you will be convinced that they are indeed equally long. The most important message conveyed by such illusions is that *what you see is not the objective reality*. In this particular case, a simple object like a ruler is able to dispel any doubts about this.

What happens in the case of speech sounds in foreign languages is very similar: *what you hear is not the objective reality*. In order to be able to copy a sound in a foreign language that does not exist in your mother tongue, it is vitally important to be able to first *perceive* the difference between the sound in question and the one from your mother tongue you mix it up with – not until you can confidently hear the difference between *bed* and *bad* is there any point is trying to pronounce *bad* properly. Therefore, some learners' ears need to be trained before they are ready to practise pronouncing the vowel [æ].

There is one more crucial step of acquiring a foreign sound contrast, which in fact needs to take place even before the ear training sessions: students must *believe*, even if they are unable to perceive it, that the difference *exists*, and that the difference is important to make. A learner who fails to accept that two sounds they perceive as being the same are in fact different and the difference matters will not be motivated to train their ears so that they will be able to perceive the contrast, which will significantly hinder their progress.

The good news is that there is a method which is able to support learners' believing that two words are or are not pronounced the same, irrespective of how accurate their perception is. The method is just as simple as using a ruler in the case of optical illusions: learners need to check an IPA transcription of the words in question. They do not even need to be able to read phonetic symbols; all they need to do is compare the two transcriptions: if the same string of symbols is used to transcribe both words, the two words are homophones, and if there is a difference between the two transcriptions (e.g., *bed* [b**e**d] – *bad* [b**æ**d]), it means that the two words are not pronounced the same.

The *-ed* suffix

Pronouncing *kissed* as [kizd], *pushed* as [puzsd], etc. is one of the most salient features of Hungarian-accented English. (The last two consonants of these two examples should be the same as those of the Hungarian words *liszt* 'flour' and *most* 'now', respectively). The *-ed* suffix (used to mark both the past tense and the past participle of regular verbs) may be pronounced in three different ways, and the choice between the forms is primarily based on whether the last sound of the root verb is voiced or voiceless. Out of its three forms, the [t] pronunciation of the suffix may be problematic even for advanced-level Hungarian learners due to the opposite direction of voicing assimilation in English and Hungarian.

The regular past tense and past participle suffix *-ed* has three pronunciation variants: it may be pronounced [d] (e.g., in *killed*), [t] (e.g., in *kissed*) or [ɪd] (e.g., in *cheated*). What determines which one of the three forms is pronounced in a given word is the last sound of the stem the suffix is attached to:

- The [ɪd] form is used if the stem ends in [t] or [d]. Note that the letter <e> in the suffix is only pronounced in this case and not in the other two – a linking vowel [ɪ] is needed as it would be too uncomfortable to pronounce *wanted* as [wɒntd], and two [d]'s one after the other (*mended* [mendd]) is not an option, either.
- The choice between the other two forms depends on whether the stem ends in a voiced or a voiceless sound – i.e., if the stem-final sound is voiced (apart from [d]), the suffix is pronounced [d], and if the stem ends in a voiceless sound (apart from [t]), the [t] form of the suffix is used.

Of the three pronunciations of the suffix, the one with which Hungarian learners will have particular difficulty is the [t] form: in a typical Hunglish accent, words like *ripped*, *laughed*, *kissed*, *pushed*, etc. (in all of which the suffix is pronounced [t] in English) will end in [-bd], [-vd], [-zd], [-ʒd], respectively.

The reason why Hungarians have problems with such examples is that in these cases the phenomenon called voicing assimilation ("zöngésségi hasonulás" as it is called in Hungarian) works in the opposite direction in the two languages. Let us revise how voicing assimilation operates in Hungarian in order to better understand why the English examples cause difficulties for Hungarian learners. Consider the following joke:

Whoever came up with the joke knows (either implicitly or explicitly) that the stem-final [g] sound of the auxiliary *fog* changes into a [k] if the second person singular *-sz* suffix (pronounced [s] in Hungarian) is attached to the word, therefore the word *fogsz* 'you will' is pronounced [foks], and apart from its vowel it sounds the same as the English word *fox*. A similar example is when the second person imperative marker *-d* suffix (used with definite objects) is attached to voiceless-final stems: the definite conjugation of the word *rak* 'put' in imperative mood in the second person (*rakd*) is pronounced [rɒgd]. Note that the former example is a case of devoicing (a voiced sound changes into a voiceless one), and the latter is a case of voicing (a voiceless sound changes into a voiced one) – what is fixed is the *direction* of the assimilation: it is always the second consonant that is "stronger" and influences the one before it, so the first consonant assimilates to the second one in voicing.

Of the two examples presented above, the latter explains the difficulty with the [t] form of the *-ed* suffix in English: according to the rules of voicing assimilation in Hungarian, whenever the Hungarian suffix *-d* is attached to voiceless-final stems, the suffix will be pronounced [d], and it is the stem-final voiceless sound that will become voiced, see Table 1:

[p]	*kapd* [kɒ**bd**]
[f]	*döfd* [dø**vd**]
[s]	*maszd* [ma:**zd**]
[ʃ]	*mosd* [mo**ʒd**]
[tʃ]	*öntsd* [øn**dʒd**]
[k]	*rakd* [rɒ**gd**]

Table 1

Let us now see how English is different from Hungarian in this respect. Table 2 compares two examples from each language:

Hungarian	English
kap+d □ *ka*[**bd**]	*rip(p)+ed* □ *ri*[**pt**]
mász+d □ *má*[**zd**]	*kiss+ed* □ *ki*[**st**]

Table 2

As the table shows, the two languages apply different strategies when the *-d* / *-ed* suffix is attached to roots ending in a voiceless consonant (such as [p] or [s] in the table): in Hungarian, the suffix influences the root-final consonant, which will get voiced. In English, on the other hand, the pronunciation of the stem is kept unchanged, and the stem-final consonant influences the suffix, which will be pronounced [t].

Let us see this in more detail. In order to fully understand the whole phenomenon, one must be familiar with voiced and voiceless sounds, as well as the way in which they form pairs: members of a pair share the same place of articulation ("a képzés helye" in Hungarian) and manner of articulation ("a képzés módja"), and they only differ in that one of them is produced with vocal cord vibration, and the other one is not. Table 3 summarises the voiceless and voiced consonants of English in pairs. Hungarian learners are supposed to be familiar with which consonants are voiceless and which ones are voiced (this is taught in Hungarian grammar lessons in the fifth grade of primary school the latest), so it is only the three "un-Hungarian" consonants of English that need special attention: [θ] (as in *think*), [ð] (as in

this) and [w] (as in *win*) do not exist in Hungarian. The first two constitute a voiceless-voiced pair (just like [p] and [b]), and the last one is voiced and has no voiceless counterpart (just like [j]).

voiceless	[p]	[f]	[θ]	[t]	[s]	[ʃ]	[tʃ]	[k]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	[h]
voiced	[b]	[v]	[ð]	[d]	[z]	[ʒ]	[dʒ]	[g]	[m]	[n]	[ŋ]	[l]	[r]	[w]	[j]	-

Table 3

Let us ignore the [ɪd] form of the suffix for the time being and let us have a closer look at the other two cases. In Table 4, we list all the voiced and voiceless sounds apart from [d] and [t] that may occur at the end of words[3], and we provide an example of each to illustrate the pronunciation of the suffix:

VOICED SOUNDS		**VOICELESS SOUNDS**	
[b]	*robbed* [rɒb**d**]	**[p]**	*ripped* [rɪp**t**]
[v]	*loved* [lʌv**d**]	**[f]**	*laughed* [lɑ:f**t**]
[ð]	*breathed* [bri:ð**d**]	**[θ]**	---[4]
[z]	*closed* [kləʊz**d**]	**[s]**	*kissed* [kɪs**t**]
[ʒ]	---[5]	**[ʃ]**	*pushed* [pʊʃ**t**]
[dʒ]	*changed* [tʃeɪnd**ʒd**]	**[tʃ]**	*stretched* [stretʃ**t**]
[g]	*begged* [beg**d**]	**[k]**	*clicked* [klɪk**t**]
[m]	*seemed* [si:m**d**]		
[n]	*rained* [reɪn**d**]		
[ŋ]	*hanged* [hæŋ**d**]		
[l]	*filled* [fɪl**d**]		
[r][6]	*barred* (GA) [bɑr**d**]		
vowels	*glued* [glu:**d**], *cried* [kraɪ**d**], etc.		

Table 4

Due to the different directions of voicing assimilation in the two languages, Hungarian learners will have difficulty with all examples on the right side of the table: the typical Hunglish pronunciation of a case where the *-ed* suffix is attached to a voiceless-final stem will involve the suffix being pronounced as [d] (based on the spelt form of the suffix), and the stem-final consonant getting voiced. Table 5 summarises this:

[3] The sound /h/ does not occur at the end of words in English (words like *Pooh*, *Noah*, *Allah*, etc. end in a vowel), and as we will analyse words like *cow* and *boy* as ending in complex vowels called diphthongs (/aʊ/ in the former case and /ɔɪ/ in the latter), we will say that /w/ and /j/ do not occur word-finally, either. This is why these three sounds are missing from the table.

[4] As there are only a few, extremely rare verbs ending in /θ/, we ignore this case.

[5] As there are only a few, extremely rare verbs ending in /ʒ/, we ignore this case.

[6] /r/ only occurs at the end of words in certain pronunciation varieties of English, such as the standard American accent called General American (GA).

	English	Hunglish
ripped	[rɪ**pt**]	[ri**bd**]
laughed	[lɑː**ft**]	[laː**vd**]
kissed	[kɪ**st**]	[ki**zd**]
pushed	[pʊ**ʃt**]	[pu**ʃd**]
stretched	[stre**tʃt**]	[stre**dʒd**]
clicked	[klɪ**kt**]	[kli**gd**]

Table 5

The pronunciation of those Hungarian learners who learnt English at school rather than picked it up in a naturalistic setting at a young age is highly likely to display this typical Hunglish feature of pronouncing the *-ed* suffix as [d] after voiceless-final stems and voicing the stem-final consonant. This pronunciation error occurs relatively frequently even in the accent of those Hungarian learners of English who have a good overall accent of English: for some reason, the misleading effect of spelling and the Hungarian direction of assimilation are so strong that learners often do not even notice that *-ed* is sometimes pronounced [t] until this is specifically pointed out to them. Without having explicit knowledge on this, a Hungarian learner might not understand jokes like the one below, the basis of which is that the words *mist* and *missed* are pronounced the same:

"I tried to catch some fog. I mist."

In order to get what the joke is, one needs to be aware of the pronunciation of the words involved in it – if a Hungarian learner associates the form [mɪst] with the word *mist* only, and not with *missed* because they think it is [mizd], they might have a hard time understanding what this joke is about.

At this point the question arises how serious a problem it is if a Hungarian learner makes this pronunciation error. It is not particularly serious in the sense that this pronunciation problem is highly unlikely to cause any intelligibility issues: there are word pairs that may become indistinguishable in a Hunglish accent due to this phenomenon (e.g., *ripped* and *ribbed*, *searched* and *surged*, *tacked* and *tagged*, etc.), but there are not too many examples like this, and even the examples we may find are not too frequent words.

The reason why it might still be worth learning the pronunciation of the *-ed* suffix for Hungarian learners is that this feature is not too difficult either to teach or to learn, especially in comparison to other features. Note that in order to properly pronounce the suffix in words like *ripped*, *laughed*, *kissed*, *pushed*, *stretched* and *clicked*, a Hungarian learner does not need to learn to articulate any un-Hungarian sounds. With the exception of [tʃt], there are Hungarian words ending in these consonant sequences (e.g., *kopt* 'Coptic', *lift* 'lift', *liszt* 'flour', *most* 'now', *akt* 'nude', etc.), therefore no ear-training sessions are necessary before learners should attempt to produce the problematic words, unlike in cases when the learner is to acquire a sound contrast that does not exist in their native language, such as that between [æ] and [e] (cf. the "Read more…" section belonging to the topic of homophones). All that is needed is drawing the learners' attention to the phenomenon, because, as it has already been mentioned, they do not usually notice it until the feature is explicitly pointed out to them, but once the feature is highlighted, there cannot be a problem with learners' perception of the phenomenon. This relative easiness both to teach and to learn this feature justifies its inclusion in the EFL lesson, in addition to the fact that since *-ed* suffixed verbs are quite frequent, this Hunglish feature is a rather salient one, and not making the typical Hunglish error significantly improves the general impression a Hungarian learner's accent of English makes.

What is debatable though is *when* to teach the feature because there are two conflicting factors to consider. On the one hand, it can be understood if a teacher of elementary learners decides against dealing with this issue on the grounds that it is more important for their learners to be able to communicate, and developing this Hunglish feature is not among the problems that should be avoided if possible. However, what needs to be considered is that later, after the learner has memorised dozens (if not hundreds) of verbs in the Hunglish form, it is a lot more difficult to correct this error type than *avoiding* the problem by paying attention to the feature from the point where the learners first encounter past tense verbs.

It is not obvious if prevention is necessarily *better* than cure in this case, but it is certainly *easier* – un-learning incorrectly acquired forms requires weeks or even months of hard work, a significant portion of which must be done in writing in the form of awareness-raising exercises with which the learner can internalise the rule, because the "therapy" is not likely to be successful without the learners' being fully conscious of the regularity. The first step of "un-learning" Hunglish forms is for the student to acquire conscious knowledge with which they can confidently determine how the suffix will be pronounced in any word without having to think about it, and even after the learner has developed the consciousness necessary to "un-learn" the Hunglish pronunciations, it may still take them long to acquire the skill of noticing other Hungarian learners (let alone themselves) making this type of error and finding it irritating in others' speech – only after this has been achieved can the learner slowly and gradually change the incorrectly memorised forms. As this requires excessive exposure to both the target language forms and the Hunglish ones, it may really take months or even up to a year to fully acquire the pronunciation of the suffix, even for highly motivated learners who make conscious effort to do so. This is what can be avoided if a teacher *prevents* the mispronunciations from developing – if attention is paid to the three pronunciations of the suffix from the very start (i.e., when the learners first encounter past tense verb forms), it might be enough to teach the rule indirectly through "listen and repeat" activities and correcting the learners if the Hunglish forms emerge. Whether prevention, cure or ignorance is the best option in the case of a particular group of learners, however, is a decision that is up to each individual teacher to make.

The *-ed* suffix in EFL coursebooks

It needs to be discussed how EFL coursebooks usually teach the pronunciation of the *-ed* suffix, because if a teacher decides to deal with this issue, they might find that the coursebook they use does not provide sufficient support (or worse, it might also happen that what the coursebook offers does more harm than good to their learners).

EFL coursebooks have a tendency to highlight the [ɪd] form of the suffix, e.g., by making the learners circle those examples from a list of *-ed* suffixed verbs in which a linking vowel is pronounced. There are two reasons behind this: one is that speakers of certain native languages have difficulty pronouncing two consonants at the end of words (for some speakers, e.g., Italians, pronouncing even one word-final consonant will be problematic because in their native language all words end in vowels). Such learners may insert vowels in all *-ed* suffixed words, and activities focusing on where a linking vowel is actually pronounced helps them stop pronouncing vowels where they are unnecessary.

The other reason for highlighting the [ɪd] form of the suffix is that irrespective of whether their first language allows multiple consonants at the end of words, elementary learners may find it confusing that a letter <e> is present in the suffix even when there is no vowel pronounced in it: if we look at the spelt forms of words like *opened*, *jumped* and *wanted*, we can understand that an elementary learner may be puzzled by the fact that a letter <e> is spelt in all three types of examples, but it is only pronounced in the last case.

As Hungarians have no problems with the pronunciation of two consonants next to each other, it is only this problem with the confusing spelling that may affect Hungarians: elementary learners' accents display mispronunciations like "ópenid/ópened" or "dzsampid/dzsamped"; however, such errors tend to disappear relatively early in the language learning process. Highlighting the [ɪd] form of the suffix even at higher levels might be needed for those speakers for whom the pronunciation of multiple consonants is the problem, but Hungarian learners usually master by pre-intermediate or at most intermediate level when to pronounce a linking vowel and when not to. For them, therefore, circling the [ɪd] forms at higher levels in a written exercise may even do them more harm than good, because not only would that distract the learners' attention from something they might need to notice (namely, the [t] forms, which they are likely to pronounce wrong unless they acquired or were properly taught the pronunciation of the suffix earlier), but the fact that the task is too easy for non-beginners may make them believe that pronunciation activities are superfluous and useless in general.

It is the teacher's responsibility to know what kind of pronunciation support their learners need – if Hungarian learners no longer have difficulties with the linking vowel, the targeted issue with the suffix should not be the pronunciation of the [ɪd] form, but (if anything) the [t] form. Note that equal attention to the three pronunciations of the suffix is not ideal, either: there is absolutely no need to practice or even highlight the [d] form of the suffix because Hungarian learners will automatically pronounce it correctly – the *-ed* suffix in words like *robbed* will be pronounced similarly to how Hungarian verbs ending in voiced sounds are pronounced if the imperative marker *-d* is attached to the stem (e.g., *dobd* 'throw, 2nd pers. imperative, definite'), i.e., the suffix will be pronounced [d] and the stem-final consonant will not (need to) change. Therefore, if the three pronunciations of the *-ed* suffix are not dealt with at the early stages of language learning, it is crucial that the [t] form is called attention to in the case of higher-level learners.

An extension: The *-s* suffix

It might be worth highlighting that there is another suffix that behaves in the same way as *-ed*: the suffix *-(')s* used to signal the plural or possessive forms of regular nouns as well as the 3rd person singular forms of verbs. As the rules determining the three pronunciations of this suffix are basically the same as in the case of *-ed*, and thus the difficulties Hungarian learners have with the suffix are also of the same nature, we will only mention those aspects of the rule here that are specific to *-s*.

The suffix *-s* may be pronounced [s] (e.g., in *cats*), [z] (e.g., in *dogs*) or [ɪz] (e.g., in *horses*):

- The [ɪz] form is pronounced not only after [s] and [z] (remember why the linking vowel is needed after [t] and [d] in the case of the *-ed* suffix), but after four more sounds: [ʃ] (e.g., in *pushes*), [ʒ] (*garages*), [tʃ] (*churches*) and [dʒ] (*bridges*). What the sounds [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ], [tʃ] and [dʒ] have in common is that they are hissing and hushing sounds that do not like to be next to one another, this is why a linking vowel is pronounced if the *-s* suffix is attached to stems ending in these consonants.
- Just like in the case of *-ed*, the choice between the other two forms depends on whether the stem-final sound is voiced or voiceless. Table 6 summarises all possibilities and provides an example of each case.

VOICED SOUNDS		VOICELESS SOUNDS	
[b]	*jobs* [dʒɒ**bz**]	**[p]**	*groups* [gru:**ps**]
[v]	*loves* [lʌ**vz**]	**[f]**	*laughs* [lɑ:**fs**]

[ð]	*clothes* [kləʊ**ðz**]	**[θ]**	*months* [mʌn**θs**]
[d]	*heads* [he**dz**]	**[t]**	*cats* [kæ**ts**]
[g]	*eggs* [e**gz**]	**[k]**	*books* [bʊ**ks**]
[m]	*drums* [drʌ**mz**]		
[n]	*means* [mi:**nz**]		
[ŋ]	*kings* [kɪ**ŋz**]		
[l]	*feels* [fi:**lz**]		
[r]	*cars* (GA) [kɑ**rz**]		
vowels	*bees* [bi:**z**], *skies* [skɑ**ɪz**], etc.		

Table 6

Two remarks are in order here.

- First, notice that in this case it is the voiced pronunciation of the suffix that will cause the typical Hunglish problem – based on the spelt form of the suffix, Hungarians will pronounce it as [s] in most cases, so it is in the case of stems ending in voiced sounds where the Hunglish mispronunciations will occur, though in this case the stem-final consonant will not change in all example types as not all voiced consonants take part in voicing assimilation – see Table 7 for examples.

	English	**Hunglish**
jobs	[dʒɒ**bz**]	[dʒo**ps**]
loves	[lʌ**vz**]	[la**fs**]
clothes	[kləʊ**ðz**]	[klo:**ts**]
heads	[he**dz**]	[he**ts**]
eggs	[e**gz**]	[e**ks**]
drums	[drʌ**mz**]	[dra**ms**]
means	[mi:**nz**]	[mi:**ns**]
kings	[kɪ**ŋz**]	[kiŋ**ks**][7]
feels	[fi:**lz**]	[fi:**ls**]
cars	(GA) [kɑ**rz**]	[ka**rs**]
bees, *skies*, etc.	[bi:**z**], [skɑ**ɪz**], etc.	[bi:**s**], [ska**js**], etc.

Table 7

- Second, many non-native speakers of English, including Hungarians, have problems pronouncing the TH-sounds [θ] and [ð], and they may want to pronounce a linking vowel before the suffix in words like *clothes* and *months*. This might be because of the mere fact that the articulations of [θ] and [ð] are unfamiliar and therefore difficult for non-native speakers, and they feel it is "easier" to pronounce these sounds in *clothes* and *months* if they insert a vowel between the TH-sound and the suffix. Another reason why a non-native speaker would unnecessarily insert a linking vowel in words like *clothes* and *months* is that in non-native accents of English, [θ] and [ð] may be substituted by consonants that are among the six after which *-s* is pronounced [ɪz] (namely, some speakers pronounce [s] instead of [θ], and [z] instead of [ð] – though

[7] The word *king*, which is pronounced [kɪŋ] (i.e., without a [g] at the end), is pronounced [kiŋg] in Hunglish, because [ŋ] does not occur at the end of words in Hungarian; words like *hang*, *kong*, etc., end in [ŋg], i.e., the [g] is pronounced. Therefore, although [ŋ] does not have a voiceless counterpart, in this case the [g] that Hungarian speakers insert will change into [k].

for Hungarians it is the former that is more likely to be relevant as the typical Hunglish substitution of [ð] is not with [z] but with [d]).

Similarly to how certain *-ed* suffixed forms that are pronounced differently in English may merge in a typical Hunglish accent (recall the examples *ripped* and *ribbed*, *searched* and *surged*, *tacked* and *tagged*, etc.), word pairs like *pigs* [pɪgz] and *picks* [pɪks], *eggs* [egz] and *ex* [eks], etc., may be pronounced the same by Hungarians. The following joke therefore only works in Hunglish:

As for the representation of the *-s* suffix in EFL coursebooks, the case is less problematic than that of *-ed*, because *-s* does not contain a letter <e> that is silent most of the time, therefore the only case a beginner might be puzzled by is when the *stem* has a silent letter <e> at the end that the suffix is attached to: if we compare the spellings of *homes*, *phones* and *times*, etc. to those of *buses*, *dresses* and *kisses*, we may find a reason why it is justified if a pronunciation activity for beginners calls the learners' attention to where a linking vowel is pronounced (especially considering the fact that the regular plurals of nouns are taught earlier than the regular past tense of verbs, so the learners encountering this potential difficulty may have been learning English for a few weeks only). However, if this issue is dealt with at higher levels, it is the [z] form of the suffix that should be highlighted for Hungarians.

Letter-to-sound rules

Dearest *creature* in *creation*,
Studying English pronunciation,
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like *corpse*, *corps*, *horse* and *worse*.
[…]
Finally: which rhymes with "enough",
Though, *through*, *plough*, *cough*, *hough*, or *tough*?
Hiccough has the sound of "cup"…
My advice is – give it up!

These lines are the first and last stanzas of the famous poem "The Chaos", which was written by Gerard Nolst Trenité with the aim of drawing attention to the irregularities of English letter-to-sound correspondences. While such poems are indeed entertaining, there is a danger that they discourage learners as they create the false impression that English spelling is totally idiosyncratic and therefore unlearnable. However, the truth is that the majority of English words ***are*** pronounced according to a set of predictable (and learnable) rules, and the regular examples vastly outnumber the irregular ones that poems like "The Chaos" enjoy pinpointing. So, instead of the message conveyed by the poem above, our advice is: ***don't*** give it up, but rely on your knowledge or intuitions of the regularities, and it is enough to memorise the words that are irregular.

Many will have heard the joke that the English are weird because they spell "Manchester" but pronounce it "livöpúl" (if you are not familiar with the story, you may learn about it *here*). This funny example has been widely cited among teachers and learners of the English language to make a mockery of the apparent idiosyncrasies of English spelling.

On the one hand, it is understandable why English spelling seems illogical and therefore unpredictable to learners – let us list a few aspects that have contributed to this view, focusing on the most significant differences between English and Hungarian spelling.

- While Hungarian letter-to-sound correspondences are dominated by the phonemic principle (according to which one letter corresponds to one sound, and one sound is denoted by one letter), this is not true of English spelling rules. In English, the same sound may be denoted by several different letters: e.g., [f] may be spelt <f>, <ph> or <gh>, as in *half*, *graph* and *laugh*, respectively; *meet*, *meat* and *mete* are all pronounced the same; etc. The reverse is also true: the same letter may represent several different sounds, e.g., <a> is pronounced in four different ways in *cat*, *car*, *came*, and *care*; the letters <ough> may be pronounced in eight different ways; etc. (the latter is a quite famous example; sentences have been compiled that include all eight pronunciations of the letter combination: *A r**ough**-coated, d**ough**-faced, pl**ough**man strode thr**ough** the streets of Scarbor**ough**, c**ough**ing and hicc**ough**ing th**ough**tfully*).
- Hungarian and English use consonant doubling for two totally different purposes. In Hungarian, a double consonant letter signals a long consonant sound – e.g., *halom* 'pile' and *hallom* 'I can hear it' differ in that the former contains a short [l] and the latter contains a long one ([l:]). In English there are no long consonants[8]: the words *diner* and *dinner* both contain a short [n]; what is different is the *vowel sound* before

[8] In fact, they do occur, but only in very limited environments (e.g., on certain types of prefix+root / root+suffix boundaries, such as in *unnatural* and *keenness*).

the [n], so the role of consonant doubling in English is to indicate what the preceding vowel can be.

- English makes an extensive use of silent letters. There is only one letter in the English alphabet that is never silent (<v>); every other letter may occur in words where it is spelt but not pronounced, e.g.: *climb*, *hour*, *knife*, *talk*, *autumn*, *psychology*, *castle*, *write*, etc. Unpronounced letters are much less frequent in Hungarian, and even so they are either dialectal (e.g., some speakers pronounce the [h] in words like *méh* and *düh*, while others do not) or the deletion of a sound happens in a specific case, namely when three consonants would stand next to one another as a result of suffixation or compounding (in such cases one of the three consonants, usually the middle one gets deleted, e.g., the <d> is pronounced in *mond* 'say' and *rend* 'order', but not in *mondta* 'he said it' and *rendtartás* 'keeping of order').

On the other hand, however, the truth is that the majority of English words have a regular pronunciation – the irregularities may seem frightening, especially if they are presented in a collection, but they are not so large in number that it would make the regularities pointless to know/learn.

It is important to point out that a learner of the language does not need to be familiar with all of the regularities because the majority of them can be acquired implicitly – in other words, although it may seem difficult at first, it is perfectly possible to develop the intuitions necessary to guess how English words are pronounced. What is crucial though is that *teachers* should be familiar with the regularities so that they will be able to *anticipate* what irregular words the students are likely to mispronounce, and they should *prevent* the students from memorising such words in an incorrectly pronounced form by drilling the correct pronunciations before the students would make an attempt at pronouncing them based on their intuitions.

With this manual, our purpose is not to present a comprehensive overview of the letter-to-sound rules of English (this is provided by various textbooks – we recommend Chapters 11-12 in *The Pronunciation of English* by Katalin Balogné Bérces and Szilárd Szentgyörgyi, downloadable from *here*). What we will do is pinpoint examples of letter-to-sound rules and exceptions that are either often highlighted in coursebooks and/or that are likely to cause problems for Hungarian learners.

Before we turn to a discussion of concrete examples, it needs to be clarified what exactly makes a letter-to-sound correspondence "regular", because the explanations we will be providing will contain references to "regular" and "irregular" pronunciations. Let us consider the example *live* as a verb [lɪv] and as an adjective [laɪv]. Obviously, as the spelling of the two words is the same, only one pronunciation can be regular. Which one is it and how do we know?

What the regular pronunciation of a given letter (or combination of letters) will be is determined by two factors: (1) frequency and (2) native speaker intuitions.

(1) If we list all the words having the same spelling pattern as *live* (i.e., having a stressed vowel spelt with an <i>, and followed by a consonant letter and a vowel letter), we will find that the ones pronounced with [aɪ] (e.g., *bite*, *file*, *shine*, *time*, etc.) vastly outnumber the ones pronounced with [ɪ] (e.g., *give*), therefore the former is to be considered the regular one.

(2) Native speaker intuitions best manifest themselves in the case of spelling errors, re-spellings (e.g., in graffiti), nonsense words and lesser-known words such as neologisms (including brand names) or proper nouns (especially surnames and geographical names). If a native speaker is asked how they would pronounce non-existent words having the pattern in question (e.g., *hine*, *pibe*, *tive*, etc.), they will certainly say that the vowel of such words is [aɪ].

Consequently, out of the two pronunciations of the word *live*, it is the adjective whose pronunciation is the regular one.

Some issues learners (especially beginners) might be puzzled by

a) Letter-to-sound rules for vowels – Why do *cat*, *car*, *came*, and *care* have different vowels if they are all spelt with an <a>?

Beginner learners of English who are used to more transparent spelling systems (such as Hungarian learners) will encounter confusing issues concerning English spelling already at the very beginning of their language learning. The fact that in English the same letter may denote several different sounds can be illustrated the best by the use of vowel letters, so we will disregard consonants here.

What a Hungarian learner is used to in terms of vowel letters is that wherever they see for example a letter <a> spelt in Hungarian words, it is always pronounced the same (words like *Facebook* and *hashtag* of course do not count). This is absolutely not the case in English, as <a> is pronounced in four different ways in the words *cat*, *car*, *came*, and *care* (which are only the regular pronunciations of the letter, and we have not listed the irregular ones). Although learners tend to develop an intuition about the pronunciation of vowel letters and get over such initially confusing issues relatively quickly, it is still beneficial for teachers to have some conscious knowledge of the spelling regularities in order to be able to aid their students if they have queries about the confusing aspects of English letter-to-sound correspondences.

Let us see the main difference between Hungarian and English in terms of the use of vowel letters in more detail. Hungarian uses 14 different letters (distinguished by the use of diacritical marks) to denote its 14 vowel phonemes, with one letter corresponding to one sound, while English only uses <a>, <e>, <i>[9], <o> and <u> to denote at least[10] 17 vowel sounds[11]. How is this possible without using diacritics on top of the vowel letters? The strategy used by English spelling is that it creates four sound values belonging to each vowel letter based on what letters *follow* the vowel letter in question. The four options are created by combining two binary criteria: (1) whether the consonant letter following the vowel letter is a <r> or any other consonant; (2) whether there is a silent letter <e> at the end of the word. (To keep the explanation simple, we only consider words consisting of a consonant sound, a vowel sound, and another consonant sound in this order.) The table below illustrates this with example words.

	(1) <r>: ❌ silent <e>: ✔️	(2) <r>: ✔️ silent <e>: ✔️	(3) <r>: ❌ silent <e>: ❌	(4) <r>: ✔️ silent <e>: ❌
<a>	*came*	*care*	*cat*	*car*
<e>	*gene*	*here*	*pet*	*her*
<i>	*fine*	*fire*	*sit*	*sir*

[9] <y> is an alternative to <i> (words like *gym*, *my*, *rhyme*, *lyre*, *myrrh*, etc. could be spelt with an <i> too), but we ignore this here for the sake of simplicity.

[10] There are actually more than 17, but we ignore the schwa here (which can be spelt with any of the vowel letters) as well as the few vowels that can only be spelt with a digraph, and the fact that /u/ and /ju:/ (as in *rule* vs. *mute*) can be analysed as two separate vowels.

[11] Here we did not count the use of vowel digraphs such as <ee> in *see* or *keen* – the majority of the digraphs denote the same vowels that can be spelt with single vowel letters, anyway.

<o>	*home*	*core*	*dog*	*nor*
<u>	*mute*	*cure*	*fun*	*fur*

The system is of course more complex than how it is presented here, but this simplified version is suitable for our purposes (which are to shed light on the regularities governing how each vowel letter has multiple regular pronunciations).

b) The "strange" names of vowel letters of the alphabet – Why is the letter <e> pronounced [iː] and <i> as [aɪ]? Why is [iː] not <i>?

The alphabet is among the first things that a beginner learner of English (or in fact any language) will learn in the new language. The English alphabet may be of a surprise to learners, especially in terms of the names of the vowel letters (<a>, <e>, <i>, <o>, <u> = "aye", "ee", "eye", "oh", "you") – in many other languages, "ee" is the name of <i>, but in English, this is the name of the letter <e>. These "strange" names come from the fact that the alphabetical names of the vowel letters of English are the same as the vowels they represent in column (1) in the table above[12]. This is again something that learners tend to get used to fairly soon, but the type of learner who questions everything might want to hear this explanation.

c) Doubling consonants when adding suffixes – Why do we have to double the root-final consonant in *stopped* and *omitted*, but not in *developed* and *vomited*?

When introducing the Present Continuous and Past Simple tenses, coursebooks warn students about some spelling peculiarities concerning the *-ing* and the past tense form of (regular) verbs, such as the fact that in words like *stop*, the word-final letter <p> needs to be doubled if the *-ing* or the *-ed* ending is attached to the root.

There are two problematic issues regarding this. First, as a more accurate presentation of the rule would be too complex for the learners (considering the fact that Present Continuous and Past Simple are both taught at elementary level), coursebooks usually say that consonant doubling needs to be applied in the case of one-syllable verbs whose last two letters are a vowel and a consonant. An elementary learner obviously needs no more information at this level, but for teachers it is worth bearing in mind that this is a simplified version of the rule, because what determines whether the last consonant is to be doubled or not is not the number of syllables the verb consists of, but *stress*: the final consonant is doubled if the last syllable of the verb is stressed. This is why *omitted* (which is stressed on the second syllable) is spelt with <tt>, but *vomited* (stressed on the first syllable) is with <t>.

Second, coursebooks do not tend to point out *why* the doubling is necessary, though this might facilitate the learners' remembering when to double consonants. Teachers are therefore advised to point out when teaching this spelling regularity that *without* doubling the word-final consonants, the vowel of the verbs would be different. E.g., *rapping* spelt with a single <p> happens to be an existing word, so it is easy to explain why a difference needs to be made (there is a HUGE difference between a *rapping* clown and a *raping* clown, isn't there? 😊 – cf. *this story*), but even if the wrongly spelt form of a word does not exist as a separate word, it *would be* pronounced differently, e.g. **stoped* spelt with a single <p> would rhyme with *hoped* (and not *hopped*), **omited* would be pronounced [əˈmaɪtɪd], etc.

<u>Some famous Hunglish pronunciation problems related to letter-to-sound rules</u>

[12] The name of the letter <u> contains a [j], which can be analysed as being part of the vowel of words like *mute* and *cure*.

a) "Vircsuöl rieliti" – The lack of application of R-influence

As we have already seen above, whether a vowel letter is followed by <r> or some other consonant is one of the two factors based on which each vowel letter has four sound values. A letter <r> (even if it is not pronounced in certain pronunciation varieties!) is thus able to change how the preceding vowel is to be pronounced (*cab*, *can*, *cap*, and *cat* will all have the same vowel, but *car* will have a different one). This is called R-influence on vowels.

The application of R-influence is not usually problematic in the case of frequent words – a beginner learner may be initially puzzled by the fact that words like *cat* and *car*, *sit* and *sir*, etc. have different vowels although they are spelt with the same vowel letter, but experience shows that learners quickly get used to this spelling regularity. The problem rather affects words that also exist in Hungarian as loanwords (e.g., *virtual*), proper nouns (e.g., *Mercury* and *Sherlock*), and less frequent words (e.g., *stir*). Hungarian speakers (even higher level learners!) often pronounce such examples as "vircsuöl", "merkjuri", "serlokk" and "sztir", although the stressed vowel of *all* of these words is [ɜː].

b) "Hó máccs iz it?" – The pronunciation of the digraph <ow> (and <ou>)

<ow> (as well as its variant <ou>) is regularly pronounced [aʊ]. This means that words like *round* and *cow* are regular, while *soul* and *know* are irregular. This may be problematic for non-native speakers for at least two reasons: first, some words in which <ou>/<ow> is pronounced irregularly are quite frequent words (such as *know*), therefore it might not be obvious which pronunciation is the regular one, which may lead to the development of faulty intuitions. Second, the presence of a letter <o> as part of the digraph may also influence how a non-native speaker will pronounce a word containing the digraph: they are likely to have the faulty intuition that the regular pronunciation of <ow> is [əʊ], which is one of the regular sound values of the letter <o>.

Notice how native speaker intuitions work completely differently from what Hungarians may falsely deduce about English spelling regularities: native speakers of English who do not know how J. K. Rowling pronounces her surname very often pronounce *Rowling* as [ˈraʊlɪŋ] (instead of [ˈrəʊlɪŋ], which is an irregular pronunciation), as they will rely on their intuitions, according to which <ow> is to be pronounced [aʊ]. In other words, native speakers might mispronounce irregular proper nouns and apply the regular pronunciation, while Hungarians will do the exact opposite: influenced by the letter <o> in the digraph, they are likely to pronounce even regular words irregularly.

c) "Kattints a 'launcs míting'-re", "nyomd meg a 'pauzé'-t" – The pronunciation of the digraph <au> (and <aw>)

Stressed vowels denoted by the digraph <au> (a variant of which is <aw>), such as in *launch* and *pause*, constitute a potential problem for Hungarians, who are likely to falsely think that this digraph denotes two separate vowels. The truth is that <au> and <aw> denote one vowel (namely [ɔː]). Words containing this digraph may thus be pronounced by Hungarians one syllable longer than they actually are. Words also existing in Hungarian (names such as *Laura*, or the prefix *audio*-) have a higher chance of being mispronounced with an extra syllable due to the misleading effect of the pronunciation of the Hungarian equivalents. The Hungarian intuition manifests itself in how certain proper nouns are pronounced in dubbed films – e.g., Jack Dawson from the movie *Titanic*, whose surname is pronounced [ˈdɔːsən], is called "dzsek dauszon" in the dubbed version.