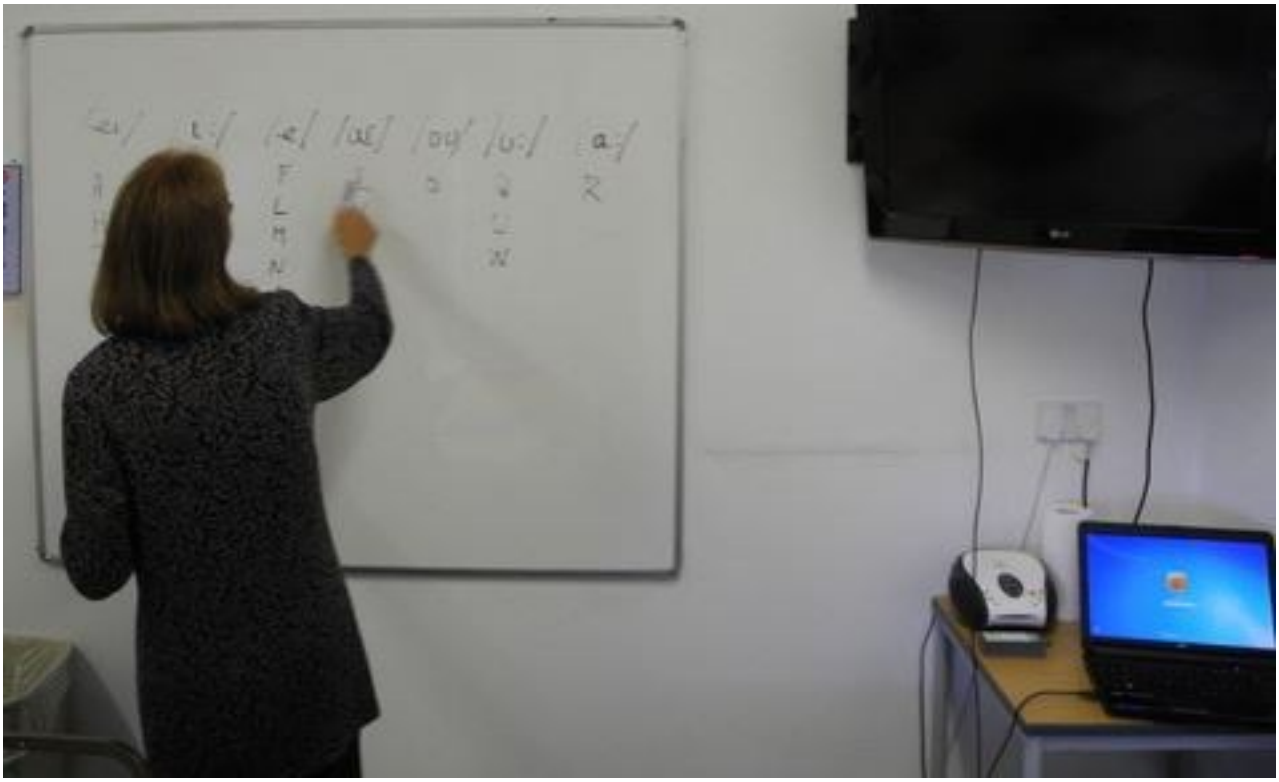
Alphabet ABC http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphabet

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ



An **alphabet** is a standard set of letters (basic written symbols or graphemes) which is used to write one or more languages based on the general principle that the letters represent phonemes (basic significant sounds) of the spoken language. This is in contrast to other types of writing systems, such as syllabaries (in which each character represents a syllable) and logographies (in which each character represents a word, morpheme or semantic unit).

A **true alphabet** has letters for the vowels of a language as well as the consonants. The first "true alphabet" in this sense is believed to be the Greek alphabet,[1][2] which is a modified form of the Phoenician alphabet. In other types of alphabet either the vowels are not indicated at all, as was the case in the Phoenician alphabet (such systems are known as abjads), or else the vowels are shown by diacritics or modification of consonants, as in the devanagari used in India and Nepal (these systems are known as abugidas or alphasyllabaries).

There are dozens of alphabets in use today, the most popular being the Latin alphabet[3] (which was derived from the Greek). Many languages use modified forms of the Latin alphabet, with additional letters formed using diacritical marks. While most alphabets have letters composed of lines (linear writing), there are also exceptions such as the alphabets used in Braille, fingerspelling, and Morse code.

1
2
3

A	*a*	/eɪ/
B	*bee*	/biː/
C	*cee*	/siː/
D	*dee*	/diː/
E	*ee*	/iː/
F	*ef*	/ɛf/
G	*gee*	/d͡ʒiː/
H	*aitch*	/eɪt͡ʃ/
	manchmal *haitch* im Irischen oder Australischen Englisch	/heɪt͡ʃ/
I	*aye*	/aɪ/
J	*jay*	/d͡ʒeɪ/
	jy im Schottischen Englisch	/d͡ʒaɪ/
K	*kay*	/keɪ/
L	*el*	/ɛɫ/
M	*em*	/ɛm/
N	*en*	/ɛn/
O	*o*	/əʊ/
P	*pee*	/piː/
Q	*cue*	/kjuː/
R	*ar*	/ɑː/
S	*ess*	/ɛs/
T	*tee*	/tiː/
U	*u*	/juː/
V	*vee*	/viː/
W	*double-u*	/ˈdʌbljuː/
X	*ex*	/ɛks/
Y	*wy* oder *wye*	/waɪ/
Z	*zed*	/zɛd/
	zee im Amerikanischen Englisch	/ziː/

Alphabets are usually associated with a standard ordering of their letters. This makes them useful for purposes of collation, specifically by allowing words to be sorted in alphabetical order. It also means that their letters can be used as an alternative method of "numbering" ordered items, in such contexts as numbered lists.

Etymology

The English word *alphabet* came into Middle English from the Late Latin word *alphabetum*, which in turn originated in the Greek ἀλφάβητος (*alphabētos*), from *alpha* and *beta*, the first two letters of the Greek alphabet.[4] *Alpha* and *beta* in turn came from the first two letters of the Phoenician alphabet, and originally meant *ox* and *house* respectively.

History

Middle Eastern scripts

The history of the alphabet started in ancient Egypt. By the 27th century BC Egyptian writing had a set of some 24 hieroglyphs which are called uniliterals,[5] to represent syllables that begin with a single consonant of their language, plus a vowel (or no vowel) to be supplied by the native speaker. These glyphs were used as pronunciation guides for logograms, to write grammatical inflections, and, later, to transcribe loan words and foreign names.[6]

In the Middle Bronze Age an apparently "alphabetic" system known as the Proto-Sinaitic script appears in Egyptian turquoise mines in the Sinai peninsula dated to circa the 15th century BC, apparently left by Canaanite workers. In 1999, John and Deborah Darnell discovered an even earlier version of this first alphabet at Wadi el-Hol dated to circa 1800 BC and showing evidence of having been adapted from specific forms of Egyptian hieroglyphs that could be dated to circa 2000 BC, strongly suggesting that the first alphabet had been developed circa that time.[7] Based on letter appearances and names, it is believed to be based on Egyptian hieroglyphs.[8] This script had no characters representing vowels. An alphabetic cuneiform script with 30 signs including three which indicate the following vowel was invented in Ugarit before the 15th century BC. This script was not used after the destruction of Ugarit.[9]

4Encyclopædia Britannica Online – Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary
5
6Daniels and Bright (1996), pp. 74–75
7J. C. Darnell, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Marilyn J. Lundberg, P. Kyle McCarter, and Bruce Zuckermanet, “Two early alphabetic inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hol: new evidence for the origin of the alphabet from the western desert of Egypt.” The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 59 (2005).
8Coulmas (1989), p. 140–141.
9*Ugaritic Writing* online

The Proto-Sinaitic script eventually developed into the Phoenician alphabet, which is conventionally called "Proto-Canaanite" before ca. 1050 BC.[10] The oldest text in Phoenician script is an inscription on the sarcophagus of King Ahiram. This script is the parent script of all western alphabets. By the tenth century two other forms can be distinguished namely Canaanite and Aramaic. The Aramaic gave rise to Hebrew.[11] The South Arabian alphabet, a sister script to the Phoenician alphabet, is the script from which the Ge'ez alphabet (an abugida) is descended. Vowelless alphabets, which are not true alphabets, are called abjads, currently exemplified in scripts including Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac. The omission of vowels was not a satisfactory solution and some "weak" consonants were used to indicate the vowel quality of a syllable (matres lectionis). These had dual function since they were also used as pure consonants.[12]

The Proto-Sinatic or Proto Canaanite script and the Ugaritic script were the first scripts with limited number of signs, in contrast to the other widely used writing systems at the time, Cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Linear B. The Phoenician script was probably the first phonemic script[13][14] and it contained only about two dozen distinct letters, making it a script simple enough for common traders to learn. Another advantage of Phoenician was that it could be used to write down many different languages, since it recorded words phonemically.

The script was spread by the Phoenicians, across the Mediterranean.[15] In Greece, the script was modified to add the vowels, giving rise to the ancestor of all alphabets in the West. The indication of the vowels is the same way as the indication of the consonants, therefore it was the first true alphabet. The Greeks took letters which did not represent sounds that existed in Greek, and changed them to represent the vowels. The vowels are significant in the Greek language, and the syllabical Linear B script which was used by the Mycenaean Greeks from the 16th century BC had 87 symbols including 5 vowels. In its early years, there were many variants of the Greek alphabet, a situation which caused many different alphabets to evolve from it.

European alphabets

The Greek alphabet, in its Euboean form, was carried over by Greek colonists to the Italian peninsula, where it gave rise to a variety of alphabets used to write the Italic languages. One of these became the Latin alphabet, which was spread across Europe as the Romans expanded their empire. Even after the fall of the Roman state, the alphabet survived in intellectual and religious works. It eventually became used for the descendant languages of Latin (the Romance languages) and then for most of the other languages of Europe.

10Daniels and Bright (1996), pp 92-96
11"Coulmas"(1989),p.142
12"Coulmas" (1989) p.147.
13
14
15

Some adaptations of the Latin alphabet are augmented with ligatures, such as æ in Old English and Icelandic and 8 in Algonquian; by borrowings from other alphabets, such as the thorn þ in Old English and Icelandic, which came from the Futhark runes; and by modifying existing letters, such as the eth ð of Old English and Icelandic, which is a modified *d*. Other alphabets only use a subset of the Latin alphabet, such as Hawaiian, and Italian, which uses the letters *j, k, x, y* and *w* only in foreign words.

Another notable script is Elder Futhark, which is believed to have evolved out of one of the Old Italic alphabets. Elder Futhark gave rise to a variety of alphabets known collectively as the Runic alphabets. The Runic alphabets were used for Germanic languages from AD 100 to the late Middle Ages. Its usage is mostly restricted to engravings on stone and jewelry, although inscriptions have also been found on bone and wood. These alphabets have since been replaced with the Latin alphabet, except for decorative usage for which the runes remained in use until the 20th century.

The Old Hungarian script is a contemporary writing system of the Hungarians. It was in use during the entire history of Hungary, albeit not as an official writing system. From the 19th century it once again became more and more popular.

The Glagolitic alphabet was the initial script of the liturgical language Old Church Slavonic and became, together with the Greek uncial script, the basis of the Cyrillic script. Cyrillic is one of the most widely used modern alphabetic scripts, and is notable for its use in Slavic languages and also for other languages within the former Soviet Union. Cyrillic alphabets include the Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Russian alphabets. The Glagolitic alphabet is believed to have been created by Saints Cyril and Methodius, while the Cyrillic alphabet was invented by the Bulgarian scholar Clement of Ohrid, who was their disciple. They feature many letters that appear to have been borrowed from or influenced by the Greek alphabet and the Hebrew alphabet.

Asian alphabets

Beyond the logographic Chinese writing, many phonetic scripts are in existence in Asia. The Arabic alphabet, Hebrew alphabet, Syriac alphabet, and other abjads of the Middle East are developments of the Aramaic alphabet, but because these writing systems are largely consonant-based they are often not considered true alphabets.

Most alphabetic scripts of India and Eastern Asia are descended from the Brahmi script, which is often believed to be a descendant of Aramaic.

In Korea, the Hangul alphabet was created by Sejong the Great[16] Hangul is a unique alphabet: it is a featural alphabet, where many of the letters are designed from a sound's place of articulation (P to look like the widened mouth, L to look like the tongue pulled in, etc.); its design was planned by the government of the day; and it places individual letters in syllable clusters with equal dimensions, in the same way as Chinese characters, to allow for mixed-script writing[citation needed] (one syllable always takes up one type-space no matter how many letters get stacked into building that one sound-block).

Zhuyin (sometimes called *Bopomofo*) is a semi-syllabary used to phonetically transcribe Mandarin Chinese in the Republic of China. After the later establishment of the People's Republic of China and its adoption of Hanyu Pinyin, the use of Zhuyin today is limited, but it's still widely used in Taiwan where the Republic of China still governs. Zhuyin developed out of a form of Chinese shorthand based on Chinese characters in the early 1900s and has elements of both an alphabet and a syllabary. Like an alphabet the phonemes of syllable initials are represented by individual symbols, but like a syllabary the phonemes of the syllable finals are not; rather, each possible final (excluding the medial glide) is represented by its own symbol. For example,

luan is represented as ㄌㄨㄢ (*l-u-an*), where the last symbol ㄢ represents the entire final *-an*. While Zhuyin is not used as a mainstream writing system, it is still often used in ways similar to a romanization system—that is, for aiding in pronunciation and as an input method for Chinese characters on computers and cellphones.

European alphabets, especially Latin and Cyrillic, have been adapted for many languages of Asia. Arabic is also widely used, sometimes as an abjad (as with Urdu and Persian) and sometimes as a complete alphabet (as with Kurdish and Uyghur).

Types

The term "alphabet" is used by linguists and paleographers in both a wide and a narrow sense. In the wider sense, an alphabet is a script that is *segmental* at the phoneme level—that is, it has separate glyphs for individual sounds and not for larger units such as syllables or words. In the narrower sense, some scholars distinguish "true" alphabets from two other types of segmental script, abjads and abugidas. These three differ from each other in the way they treat vowels: abjads have letters for consonants and leave most vowels unexpressed; abugidas are also consonant-based, but indicate vowels with diacritics to or a systematic graphic modification of the consonants. In alphabets in the narrow sense, on the other hand, consonants and vowels are written as independent letters.[17] The earliest known alphabet in the wider

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16"上親制諺文二十八字…是謂訓民正音(His majesty created 28 characters himself... It is Hunminjeongeum (original name for Hangul))", 《세종실록 (The Annals of the Choson Dynasty : Sejong)》 25 년 12 월.

17For critics of the abjad-abugida-alphabet distinction, see Reinhard G. Lehmann: "27-30-22-26. How Many Letters Needs an Alphabet? The Case of Semitic", in: The idea of writing: Writing across borders / edited by Alex de Voogt and Joachim Friedrich Quack, Leiden: Brill 2012, p. 11-52, esp p. 22-27

sense is the Wadi el-Hol script, believed to be an abjad, which through its successor Phoenician is the ancestor of modern alphabets, including Arabic, Greek, Latin (via the Old Italic alphabet), Cyrillic (via the Greek alphabet) and Hebrew (via Aramaic).

Examples of present-day abjads are the Arabic and Hebrew scripts; true alphabets include Latin, Cyrillic, and Korean hangul; and abugidas are used to write Tigrinya, Amharic, Hindi, and Thai. The Canadian Aboriginal syllabics are also an abugida rather than a syllabary as their name would imply, since each glyph stands for a consonant which is modified by rotation to represent the following vowel. (In a true syllabary, each consonant-vowel combination would be represented by a separate glyph.)

All three types may be augmented with syllabic glyphs. Ugaritic, for example, is basically an abjad, but has syllabic letters for /ʔa, ʔi, ʔu/. (These are the only time vowels are indicated.) Cyrillic is basically a true alphabet, but has syllabic letters for /ja, je, ju/ (я, е, ю); Coptic has a letter for /ti/. Devanagari is typically an abugida augmented with dedicated letters for initial vowels, though some traditions use अ as a zero consonant as the graphic base for such vowels.

The boundaries between the three types of segmental scripts are not always clear-cut. For example, Sorani Kurdish is written in the Arabic script, which is normally an abjad. However, in Kurdish, writing the vowels is mandatory, and full letters are used, so the script is a true alphabet. Other languages may use a Semitic abjad with mandatory vowel diacritics, effectively making them abugidas. On the other hand, the Phagspa script of the Mongol Empire was based closely on the Tibetan abugida, but all vowel marks were written after the preceding consonant rather than as diacritic marks. Although short *a* was not written, as in the Indic abugidas, one could argue that the linear arrangement made this a true alphabet. Conversely, the vowel marks of the Tigrinya abugida and the Amharic abugida (ironically, the original source of the term "abugida") have been so completely assimilated into their consonants that the modifications are no longer systematic and have to be learned as a syllabary rather than as a segmental script. Even more extreme, the Pahlavi abjad eventually became logographic. (See below.)

Thus the primary classification of alphabets reflects how they treat vowels. For tonal languages, further classification can be based on their treatment of tone, though names do not yet exist to distinguish the various types. Some alphabets disregard tone entirely, especially when it does not carry a heavy functional load, as in Somali and many other languages of Africa and the Americas. Such scripts are to tone what abjads are to vowels. Most commonly, tones are indicated with diacritics, the way vowels are treated in abugidas. This is the case for Vietnamese (a true alphabet) and Thai (an abugida). In Thai, tone is determined primarily by the choice of consonant, with diacritics for disambiguation. In the Pollard script, an abugida, vowels are indicated by diacritics, but the placement of the diacritic relative to the consonant is modified to indicate the tone. More rarely, a script may have separate letters for tones, as is the case for Hmong and Zhuang. For most of these scripts, regardless of whether letters or diacritics are used, the most common tone is not marked, just as the most common vowel is not marked in Indic abugidas; in Zhuyin not only is one of the tones unmarked, but there is a diacritic to indicate lack of tone, like the virama of Indic.

The number of letters in an alphabet can be quite small. The Book Pahlavi script, an abjad, had only twelve letters at one point, and may have had even fewer later on. Today the Rotokas alphabet has only twelve letters. (The Hawaiian alphabet is sometimes claimed to be as small, but it actually consists of 18 letters, including the ʻokina and five long vowels.) While Rotokas has a small alphabet because it has few phonemes to represent (just eleven), Book Pahlavi was small because many letters had been *conflated*—that is, the graphic distinctions had been lost over time, and diacritics were not developed to compensate for this as they were in Arabic, another script that lost many of its distinct letter shapes. For example, a comma-shaped letter represented *g, d, y, k,* or *j*. However, such apparent simplifications can perversely make a script more complicated. In later Pahlavi papyri, up to half of the remaining graphic distinctions of these twelve letters were lost, and the script could no longer be read as a sequence of letters at all, but instead each word had to be learned as a whole—that is, they had become logograms as in Egyptian Demotic. The alphabet in the Polish language contains 32 letters.

The largest segmental script is probably an abugida, Devanagari. When written in Devanagari, Vedic Sanskrit has an alphabet of 53 letters, including the *visarga* mark for final aspiration and special letters for *kš* and *jñ,* though one of the letters is theoretical and not actually used. The Hindi alphabet must represent both Sanskrit and modern vocabulary, and so has been expanded to 58 with the *khutma* letters (letters with a dot added) to represent sounds from Persian and English. Thai has a total of 59 symbols, consisting of 44 consonants, 13 vowels and 2 syllabics, not including 4 diacritics for tone marks and one for vowel length.

The largest known abjad is Sindhi, with 51 letters. The largest alphabets in the narrow sense include Kabardian and Abkhaz (for Cyrillic), with 58 and 56 letters, respectively, and Slovak (for the Latin script), with 46. However, these scripts either count di- and tri-graphs as separate letters, as Spanish did with *ch* and *ll* until recently, or uses diacritics like Slovak *č*. The largest true alphabet where each letter is graphically independent is probably Georgian, with 41 letters.

Syllabaries typically contain 50 to 400 glyphs, and the glyphs of logographic systems typically number from the many hundreds into the thousands. Thus a simple count of the number of distinct symbols is an important clue to the nature of an unknown script.

Alphabetical order

Alphabets often come to be associated with a standard ordering of their letters, which can then be used for purposes of collation – namely for the listing of words and other items in what is called *alphabetical order*.

The basic ordering of the Latin alphabet (ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ), which is derived from the Northwest Semitic "Abgad" order,[18] is well established, although languages using this alphabet have different conventions for their treatment of modified letters (such as the French *é*, *à*, and *ô*) and of certain combinations of letters (multigraphs). In French, these are not considered to be additional letters for the purposes of collation. However, in Icelandic, the accented letters such as *á*, *í*, and *ö* are considered to be distinct letters of the alphabet. In Spanish, *ñ* is considered a separate letter, but accented vowels such as *á* and *é* are not. The *ll* and *ch* were also considered single letters, but in 1994 the Real Academia Española changed collating order so that *ll* is between *lk* and *lm* in the dictionary and *ch* is between *cg* and *ci*, and in 2010 the tenth congress of the Association of Spanish Language Academies changed it so they were no longer letters at all[19][20]

In German, words starting with *sch-* (constituting the German phoneme /ʃ/) would be intercalated between words with initial *sca-* and *sci-* (all incidentally loanwords) instead of this graphic cluster appearing after the letter *s*, as though it were a single letter—a lexicographical policy which would be de rigueur in a dictionary of Albanian, i.e. *dh-*, *ë-*, *gj-*, *ll-*, *rr-*, *th-*, *xh-* and *zh-* (all representing phonemes and considered separate single letters) would follow the letters *d*, *e*, *g*, *l*, *n*, *r*, *t*, *x* and *z* respectively. Nor is, in a dictionary of English, the lexical section with initial *th-* reserved a place after the letter *t*, but is inserted between *te-* and *ti-*. German words with umlaut would further be alphabetized as if there were no umlaut at all—contrary to Turkish which allegedly adopted the German graphemes **ö** and **ü**, and where a word like *tüfek*, would come after *tuz*, in the dictionary. An exception is the German phonebook where umlauts are sorted like *ä* = *ae* since names as *Jäger* appear also with the spelling *Jaeger*, and there's no telling them apart in the spoken language.

The Danish and Norwegian alphabets end with *æ—ø—å*, whereas the Icelandic, Swedish, Finnish and Estonian ones conventionally put *å—ä—ö* at the end.

It is unknown whether the earliest alphabets had a defined sequence. Some alphabets today, such as the Hanuno'o script, are learned one letter at a time, in no particular order, and are not used for collation where a definite order is required. However, a dozen Ugaritic tablets from the fourteenth century BC preserve the alphabet in two sequences. One, the *ABCDE* order later used in Phoenician, has continued with minor changes in Hebrew, Greek, Armenian, Gothic, Cyrillic, and Latin; the other, *HMḪLQ,* was used in southern Arabia and is preserved today in Ethiopic.[21] Both orders have therefore been stable for at least 3000 years.

18Reinhard G. Lehmann: "27-30-22-26. How Many Letters Needs an Alphabet? The Case of Semitic", in: The idea of writing: Writing across borders / edited by Alex de Voogt and Joachim Friedrich Quack, Leiden: Brill 2012, p. 11-52

19Real Academia Española. "Spanish Pronto!: Spanish Alphabet." Spanish Pronto! 22 April 2007. January 2009 Spanish Pronto: Spanish < > English Medical Translators.

20"La “i griega” se llamará “ye”". Cuba Debate. 2010-11-05. Retrieved 12 December 2010. Cubadebate.cu

21Millard, A.R. "The Infancy of the Alphabet", *World Archaeology* 17, No. 3, Early Writing Systems (February 1986): 390–398. page 395.

The historical order was abandoned in Runic and Arabic, although Arabic retains the traditional abjadi order for numbering.

The Brahmic family of alphabets used in India use a unique order based on phonology: The letters are arranged according to how and where they are produced in the mouth. This organization is used in Southeast Asia, Tibet, Korean hangul, and even Japanese kana, which is not an alphabet.

Names of letters

The Phoenician letter names, in which each letter was associated with a word that begins with that sound, continue to be used to varying degrees in Samaritan, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek and Arabic. The names were abandoned in Latin, which instead referred to the letters by adding a vowel (usually e) before or after the consonant (the exception is zeta, which was retained from Greek). In Cyrillic originally the letters were given names based on Slavic words; this was later abandoned as well in favor of a system similar to that used in Latin.

Orthography and pronunciation

When an alphabet is adopted or developed for use in representing a given language, an orthography generally comes into being, providing rules for the spelling of words in that language. In accordance with the principle on which alphabets are based, these rules will generally map letters of the alphabet to the phonemes (significant sounds) of the spoken language. In a perfectly phonemic orthography there would be a consistent one-to-one correspondence between the letters and the phonemes, so that a writer could predict the spelling of a word given its pronunciation, and a speaker could predict the pronunciation of a word given its spelling. However this ideal is not normally achieved in practice; some languages (such as Spanish and Finnish) come close to it, while others (such as English) deviate from it to a much larger degree.

The pronunciation of a language often evolves independently of its writing system, and writing systems have been borrowed for languages they were not designed for, so the degree to which letters of an alphabet correspond to phonemes of a language varies greatly from one language to another and even within a single language.

Languages may fail to achieve a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds in any of several ways:

•A language may represent a given phoneme with a combination of letters rather than just a single letter. Two-letter combinations are called digraphs and three-letter groups are called trigraphs. German uses the tesseragraphs (four letters) "tsch" for the phoneme [tʃ] and "dsch" for [dʒ], although the latter is rare. Kabardian also uses a tesseragraph for one of its phonemes, namely "кхъу". Two letters representing one sound is widely used in Hungarian as well (where, for instance, *cs* stands for [č], *sz* for [s], *zs* for [ž], *dzs* for [ǰ], etc.).

•A language may represent the same phoneme with two different letters or combinations of letters. An example is modern Greek which may write the phoneme [i] in six different ways: ⟨ι⟩, ⟨η⟩, ⟨υ⟩, ⟨ει⟩, ⟨οι⟩, and ⟨υι⟩ (although the last is rare).

•A language may spell some words with unpronounced letters that exist for historical or other reasons. For example, the spelling of the Thai word for "beer" [เบียร์] retains a letter for the final consonant "r" present in the English word it was borrowed from, but silences it.

•Pronunciation of individual words may change according to the presence of surrounding words in a sentence (sandhi).

•Different dialects of a language may use different phonemes for the same word.

•A language may use different sets of symbols or different rules for distinct sets of vocabulary items, such as the Japanese hiragana and katakana syllabaries, or the various rules in English for spelling words from Latin and Greek, or the original Germanic vocabulary.

National languages generally elect to address the problem of dialects by simply associating the alphabet with the national standard. However, with an international language with wide variations in its dialects, such as English, it would be impossible to represent the language in all its variations with a single phonetic alphabet.

Some national languages like Finnish, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) and Bulgarian have a very regular spelling system with a nearly one-to-one correspondence between letters and phonemes. Strictly speaking, these national languages lack a word corresponding to the verb "to spell" (meaning to split a word into its letters), the closest match being a verb meaning to split a word into its syllables. Similarly, the Italian verb corresponding to 'spell (out)', *compitare*, is unknown to many Italians because the act of spelling itself is rarely needed: Italian spelling is highly phonemic. In standard Spanish, it is possible to tell the pronunciation of a word from its spelling, but not vice versa; this is because certain phonemes can be represented in more than one way, but a given letter is consistently pronounced. French, with its silent letters and its heavy use of nasal vowels and elision, may seem to lack much correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, but its rules on pronunciation, though complex, are actually consistent and predictable with a fair degree of accuracy.

At the other extreme are languages such as English, where the spelling of many words simply has to be memorized as they do not correspond to sounds in a consistent way. For English, this is partly because the Great Vowel Shift occurred after the orthography was established, and because English has acquired a large number of loanwords at different times, retaining their original spelling at varying levels. Even English has general, albeit complex, rules that predict pronunciation from spelling, and these rules are successful most of the time; rules to predict spelling from the pronunciation have a higher failure rate.

Sometimes, countries have the written language undergo a spelling reform to realign the writing with the contemporary spoken language. These can range from simple spelling changes and word forms to switching the entire writing system itself, as when Turkey switched from the Arabic alphabet to a Turkish alphabet of Latin origin.

The sounds of speech of all languages of the world can be written by a rather-small universal phonetic-alphabet. A standard for this is the International Phonetic Alphabet.

External links

•The Origins of abc

•Alphabetic Writing Systems

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphabet

Egyptian	Cretan	Phoenician *aleph*	Semitic	Greek *Alpha*	Etruscan A	Roman/Cyrillic A	Boeotian 800–700 BC	Greek Uncial	Latin 300 AD Uncial
				Αα		A