

## La pronuncia italiana

### Vowels (le vocali)

a, i, u → Italian pronunciation is consistent  
e, o → these vowels may be either opened or closed; in addition, regional differences are sometimes a factor (i.e., open e/o in one region, closed in another)

cognates (c.) = words that look similar and have either an identical or related meaning  
false friends = words that look similar but whose meaning is not what one would expect

#### **a → ah!, father**

|         |                    |            |      |           |        |            |
|---------|--------------------|------------|------|-----------|--------|------------|
| amare   | pasta              | sala       | fama | antipasto | banana | casa       |
| to love | c./dough<br>pastry | room, hall | fame | appetizer | c.     | house/home |

#### **closed e → they, late**

|     |        |          |        |        |        |         |
|-----|--------|----------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| e   | vedere | bere     | sete   | mele   | pepe   | leggere |
| and | to see | to drink | thirst | apples | pepper | to read |

#### **open e → met, quest**

|             |       |                             |     |       |        |             |
|-------------|-------|-----------------------------|-----|-------|--------|-------------|
| è           | festa | presto                      | tè  | penna | quello | perché      |
| (he/she) is | party | early/soon<br>quick/quickly | tea | pen   | that   | why/because |

#### **i → machine, marine**

|       |       |       |                    |         |       |           |
|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|---------|-------|-----------|
| libri | vini  | birra | bimbi              | violino | pizza | irlandesi |
| books | wines | beer  | babies<br>children | c.      | c.    | Irish     |

#### **closed o → oh!, cozy**

|      |            |        |                      |                 |                          |          |
|------|------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------|
| nome | posto      | volo   | solo                 | mondo           | ora                      | monotono |
| name | spot/place | flight | alone/only<br>lonely | world/<br>earth | time/now<br>o'clock/hour | c.       |

#### **open o → opera, cost**

|                   |       |      |       |       |    |                              |
|-------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|----|------------------------------|
| moda              | posta | rosa | corda | porta | no | opera                        |
| fashion/<br>style | mail  | r.   | c.    | door  | c. | c./masterwork<br>work/oeuvre |

#### **u → rule, mood**

|      |       |        |          |      |      |       |
|------|-------|--------|----------|------|------|-------|
| luna | uno   | usare  | fungo    | cubo | mulo | lungo |
| moon | one/a | to use | mushroom | c.   | c.   | c.    |

## **Diphthongs (i dittonghi)**

Diphthongs and triphthongs sometimes occur when *i* or *u* are followed by a second vowel. When this happens the two vowels combine to form a single sound:

### **i diphthongs and triphthongs → yet**

|             |                  |              |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| <u>ieri</u> | mangia <u>re</u> | ia <u>to</u> |
| yesterday   | to eat           | hiatus/gap   |

### **u diphthongs and triphthongs → wet**

|                |              |                  |              |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| ling <u>ua</u> | u <u>omo</u> | gua <u>ri</u> re | bu <u>oi</u> |
| language       | man          | to heal          | oxen         |

Each of the following words has a sequence of two diphthongs:

|                 |                   |                    |                     |                |                |                    |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| ghia· <u>ia</u> | ac·qua· <u>io</u> | gio·iel· <u>lo</u> | vec·chia· <u>ia</u> | cuo· <u>io</u> | gio· <u>ia</u> | mi·glia· <u>ia</u> |
| gravel          | sink (arch.)      | jewel              | old age             | leather        | joy            | thousands          |

Nb. Some *i* and *u* vowel sequences do not form diphthongs (eg., *mi·o*, *sci·a·re*, and *bu·i*). To know whether or not a sequence of vowel forms a diphthong you will need to consult a good dictionary.

## **Consonants (le consonanti)**

b, f, m, n, v → Italian and English pronunciation are the same

d, t, p, q, l → There are small, negligible differences between the two languages

### **c followed by a, o, u → king, cat (hard c)**

|       |        |        |      |         |             |
|-------|--------|--------|------|---------|-------------|
| culla | caffè  | colore | cane | curioso | conto       |
| crib  | coffee | c.     | dog  | c.      | bill/cheque |

### **c followed by e, i → chest, church (soft c)**

|        |      |         |       |          |        |
|--------|------|---------|-------|----------|--------|
| cena   | cibo | aceto   | voce  | concerto | cinema |
| dinner | food | vinegar | voice | c.       | c.     |

### **ch (can only be followed by e or i) → king, cat (hard c)**

|        |      |       |          |           |             |
|--------|------|-------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| chiuso | chi  | che   | chitarra | Michele   | chilogrammo |
| closed | who? | what? | guitar   | (Michael) | kilogram    |

### **g followed by a, o, u → go (hard g)**

|         |               |       |          |         |       |
|---------|---------------|-------|----------|---------|-------|
| gondola | gusto         | gonna | lingua   | albergo | gatto |
| c.      | taste/flavour | skirt | language | hotel   | cat   |
|         | enthusiasm    |       |          |         |       |

### **g followed by e, i → gem, jet (soft g)**

|        |       |           |        |        |         |
|--------|-------|-----------|--------|--------|---------|
| pagina | gesso | gita      | angelo | gelato | gennaio |
| page   | chalk | excursion | c.     | c.     | January |

### **gh (can only be followed by e or i) → go (hard g)**

|          |            |         |                              |       |        |
|----------|------------|---------|------------------------------|-------|--------|
| ghiaccio | ghigno     | ghiotto | ghermire                     | laghi | ghetto |
| ice      | grin/sneer | greedy  | to seize/<br>to claw/to grip | lakes | c.     |

**gli → no true English equivalent; sounds like million**

|        |        |        |          |           |        |
|--------|--------|--------|----------|-----------|--------|
| figlio | moglie | meglio | famiglia | bottiglia | foglia |
| son    | wife   | better | family   | bottle    | leaf   |

**gn → no true English equivalent; sounds like canyon**

|         |            |       |         |         |       |
|---------|------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| signora | lavagna    | sogno | lasagna | gnocchi | gnomo |
| Madam   | chalkboard | dream | c.      | c.      | c.    |

**h → always silent**

|         |        |       |          |       |       |
|---------|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| habitat | hockey | hotel | Himalaya | Hindi | humus |
| c.      | c.     | c.    | c.       | c.    | c.    |

**r → always trilled**

|      |      |      |        |          |
|------|------|------|--------|----------|
| ora  | Roma | arte | tenore | baritono |
| hour | c.   | c.   | c.     | c.       |

**sc followed by e, i → fish, shell (soft c)**

|       |       |        |        |            |          |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|------------|----------|
| pesce | scena | uscita | sci    | scendere   | sceriffo |
| fish  | scene | exit   | ski(s) | to descend | sheriff  |

**sch (can only be followed by e or i) → disk (hard c)**

|         |                   |         |           |          |          |
|---------|-------------------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|
| pesche  | dischi            | tasche  | scheletro | tedeschi | maschera |
| peaches | records/<br>disks | pockets | skeletons | Germans  | mask     |

### **Double consonants**

All Italian consonants can be doubled except for *h* and *q*. The doubling always affects pronunciation and ignoring the distinction will result in miscommunication.

|              |                    |                |                  |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| speso/spesso | sera/serra         | camino/cammino | capelli/cappelli |
| spent/often  | evening/greenhouse | chimney/walk   | hair/hats        |

|              |                   |                 |             |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| sete/sette   | nono/nonno        | faro/farro      | pala/palla  |
| thirst/seven | ninth/grandfather | headlight/spelt | shovel/ball |

|                 |                        |                |                |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| dita/ditta      | eco/ecco               | papa/pappa     | pena/penna     |
| fingers/company | echo/here is, there is | pope/baby food | punishment/pen |

|                   |             |                |                  |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|
| copia/coppia      | note/notte  | gramo/grammo   | casa/cassa       |
| copy/pair, couple | notes/night | miserable/gram | house/crate, box |

### Stress (accento tonico)

As a generale rule Italian words are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, however there are plenty of exceptions. For example, words that have a written grave accent (*accento grave*) over the final vowel are always stressed on that vowel:

|                  |             |               |               |             |                |              |
|------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|
| università       | città       | venerdì       | virtù         | tassì       | però           | gioventù     |
| <i>univesity</i> | <i>city</i> | <i>Friday</i> | <i>virtue</i> | <i>taxi</i> | <i>however</i> | <i>youth</i> |

Some words stress the third syllable from last, some others (very few) the fourth last. To indicate stress position most Intoductory Italian textbooks will use a stress dot when a new word with an irregular stress position is first introduced. Since MS Word does not allow stress dots (to the best of my knowledge), in the following examples I've used the underline feature in order to indicate an irregular stress position.

|                 |               |             |                  |           |               |                  |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| <u>u</u> ·ti·le | i·so·la       | fa·ci·le    | dif·fi·ci·le     | tì·mi·do  | Na·po·li      | ot·ti·mo         |
| <i>useful</i>   | <i>island</i> | <i>easy</i> | <i>difficult</i> | <i>c.</i> | <i>Naples</i> | <i>excellent</i> |

Lastly, remember that open *e* and open *o* occur only in stressed syllables:

|                   |                  |              |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| au·to·mo·bi·le    | te·le·fo·no      | no·bi·le     | me·di·co         |
| <i>automobile</i> | <i>telephone</i> | <i>noble</i> | <i>physician</i> |

### Apostrophe (l'apostrofo)

The apostrophe is generally used to indicate the dropping of the final vowel before the next word:

|                     |                |                 |               |                     |                 |                       |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| sull'oceano         | l'uomo         | d'Italia        | anch'io       | c'è                 | dov'è           | un grand'amico        |
| <i>on the ocean</i> | <i>the man</i> | <i>of Italy</i> | <i>me too</i> | <i>there is/are</i> | <i>where is</i> | <i>a great friend</i> |

### Punctuation marks (la punteggiatura / i segni d'interpunzione)

|   |   |     |   |
|---|---|-----|---|
| , | virgola   | !   | punto esclamativo                               |
| . | punto   | ?   | punto di domanda (or punto interrogativo)       |
| ; | punto e virgola   | ... | puntini   |
| : | due punti   | -   | trattino  |
| ' | apostrofo   | ( ) | parentesi (aperta/chiusa = <i>open/closed</i> ) |
| ` | accento grave   | ´   | accento acuto                                   |
| „ | virgolette (note that in Italian quotation marks - or virgolette - look like this: « ») |     |   |

### Capitals (le maiuscole)

Many words that are capitalized in English are not capitalized in Italian. These include: the days of the week, the months of the year, adjectives indicating nationalities, titles such as Dr., Mrs., Prof., (etc). In addition Italians do not capitalize the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun **io** (*I*), but do capitalize the pronouns **Lei** and **Loro** (*you* singular and *you* plural). Lastly, all titles are treated as any other sentence.