

About the *DOP: Dizionario d'Ortografia e di Pronunzia*  
'A Dictionary of (Italian) Spelling & Pronunciation'  
published by the Italian Broadcasting Company: RAI/ERI  
A comment by Luciano Canepari (2019)

*DOP* (1981<sup>2</sup>, 1969<sup>1</sup>) – non-IPA: [i, ì; e, é, e, è; a, à; o, ó, o, ò; u, ù] for /i, i; e, e, e, e; a, 'a; o, 'o, o, 'o; u, 'u/, [m, n, ñ, ñ] for /m, n, n/ and [ŋ], [p, b; t, d; k, g] for /p, b; t, d; k, g/, [z, z; č, č] for /ts, dz; tʃ, dʒ/, [f, v; s, f; š, š] for /f, v; s, z; ʃ, ʒ/, [j, u] for /j, w/, [r] for /r/, [l, l] for /l, l/; uses + for co-gemination and pre-gemination, ie consonant lengthening between words in phrases; unhappily even, [fi, fl, ff, ffi, ffl] phonically absurd, for /fi, fl, ff, ffi, ffl/.

*DOP*<sup>3</sup> (2010<sup>3</sup>) – still with *I* and *J* mixed together, even standing out on the cover of the first of two volumes: 'A-I/J'; still non-IPA. Unfortunately, this new edition, although updated and expanded, remains an example of anachronistic publishing: more 'second-millennium-like'. In fact its criterion and method are not at all updated; even its phonic notation remains 'provincial-like', as it used to be until the first part of 1900, with italic symbols and an endless number of diacritics, as obvious false illusions to facilitate interpretation.

The following 'symbols' are clearly even worsened in comparison with previous editions (although presented as simpler and more intuitive!): [i, ì; e, é, e, è; a, à; o, ó, o, ò; u, ù] for /i, i; e, e, e, e; a, 'a; o, 'o, o, 'o; u, 'u/, [m, n, ñ, ñ] for /m, n, n/ and [ŋ], [p, b; t, d; k, g] for /p, b; t, d; k, g/, [z, z; č, č] for /ts, dz; tʃ, dʒ/, [f, v; s, f; š, š] for /f, v; s, z; ʃ, ʒ/, [j, u] for /j, w/, [r] for /r/, [l, l] for /l, l/; with three different symbol sizes, as shown above; with + for co-gemination and pre-gemination; but, more satisfyingly, [fi, fl, ff, ffi, ffl] (as, though less well, in the main text, but not due to a conscious distinguishing choice).

A further –even more negative– aspect of its updated 'provincialism' consists in providing not only old-fashioned symbols, but also the kind of pronunciation which was peculiar until about 1970 (and somehow imposed till the end of the century). As if professional speakers were still bound to use the old-fashioned 'traditional' kind of pronunciation, instead of of the 'modern' one, by this time, widely –and legitimately– recognized and easy to identify and acquire, simply by listening, even with no particular attention.

Therefore, sadly, it is a dictionary of the *pronunciation of the past century*, not of the present one. Obviously, this is not about denigrating a 'competing' work against our *DiPI*, because the *DOP* has just cut itself out, since its intentions and aims are simply outdated.

There is a website ([www.dizionario.rai.it](http://www.dizionario.rai.it)) with the possibility of listening to some entries, with rigorously traditional realizations. In addition of being little lively, those

realizations also have some problems, like for *Pannain* /pan'nain/ which sounds as \*/panna'in/. The sound files also include passages, but with intonations and segments sometimes too *Tuscan*, thus actually *neither neutral nor traditional*.

Furthermore, they are transcribed in a banal way, in addition to the already criticized symbols, as for instance on p CXXIX: *Siamo i posteri di noi stessi. A forza di ripetere che il futuro è già cominciato, perfino la parola « moderno » ci sembra vecchiotta, tant'è vero che abbiamo coniato il « post-moderno »*, which appears as: *sjàmo i pòsteri di noi stéssi. a ffòrza di ripètere ke il futùro ę ġġà kkomincàto, perfino la paròla « modèrno » či sémbra vekkjòtta, tànt ę vvéro ke abbiàmo koniàto il « pòst modèrno »*.

All this, instead of something more natural and useful, like: [sja'moi'pɔ:steri di nois'tes:si. || affɔ:tsa di'ripɛ:tere ˌkeilfu'tu:rɔ ɛdʒɔʒakkomiŋ'tʃa:toː | perfi'no ˌlapa'rɔ:la ˈmo'dɛ:r.noː | tʃi'sem:bra vek'kjo:tta. | ˌtantɛv've:rɔ ˌkeab,bja'moko'nja:to | ˈil'pɔst mo'dɛ:r.noː].

*In conclusion*, it would have been decidedly better not to produce this 'new' edition. The preceding version should have been left as a mere testimony of the kind of pronunciation used in its time, or 'era'.

Let us notice that the first editions gave *Como* (in northern Italy) as *kòmo*, locally *kómo*, ie /'kɔmo, ˌkomo/; the new edition gives *kòmo*, *kómo*, ie /'kɔmo, ˌkomo/; but, the second variant is simply regional and dialectal, not even mediatic.

For *Chioggia* (in northern Italy: *kjòġġa*, ie /'kjoɟɟa/), the new edition adds the transcription for the ancient variant *Chiozza* (*kjózza*, ie /'kjoɟɟa/), which corresponds to the local regional realization, /'kjoɟɟa/, derived from the dialectal word *Ciosa* /'tʃoza/.

For *Montella* (in southern Italy) the new edition adds to *montèlla*, ie /mon'tella/, the 'variant' *montélla*, ie /mon'tella/, as if it were acceptable Italian, but it is only the local regional and dialectal form; in fact, for the Italian suffix *-ello*, *-ella* /-ello, -ella/, in the dialects of Campania, we find *-illè*, *-ella* /-illə, -ella/.

Also some small places in central Italy (in the provinces of Firenze, Prato, Arezzo, and Frosinone, for instance, can still present, locally, /e/ for an etymological /ɪ/. Let us consider *Antella*, /an'tella/, although deriving from /ɛn'tillɛ(m)/. However, the local pronunciation, with /-ella/, can hardly be passed as neutral, in spite of what the DOP may say.

In fact, analogy and the general structure determine certain exceptions. After all, also these names are like those taken from books, or from register books. Therefore, it is quite logical to adapt them to general and more normal trends (in spite of etymology). For this reason, the Jones' and Wells' dictionaries should certainly teach! The DOP also behaves the same way for *Canvella*, *Corella*, *Faella*, *San Bavello*, *Usella*, in Tuscany, and (*Monte delle*) *Scalelle*, in Latium.

If the local (and regional!) usages should really be considered proposable (as 'neutral'), independently from geolinguistic positions, then, in addition to \**Cómo*, also \**Cerignóla*, should be added, but even \**Bitònto*, &c &c...

Thus, incredibly, such things, which are not neutral, but clearly regional, are presented as usable, while only traditional pronunciation is animatedly said to be accep-

table. Of course, this drawback is due to an absurd and wrong ‘interpretation’ of the phonemes of Italian and of its dialects, when they are mixed up.

In addition, if etymology is substantially the true origin of the pronunciation of Italian, we must not stubbornly apply it in all cases. In fact, many Italian words do not derive directly from Latin, by natural and uninterrupted evolution, but by learned or semilearned Latin words, generally taken from books, so especially /ɛ, ɔ/ prevail on ‘supposed more legitimate and more correct’ /e, o/. For instance: *plebe* /ˈplɛbe/ from *plebem* /ˈple:bɛ(m)/, *devoto* /deˈvɔto/ from *devotum* /dɛˈvɔ:tʊ(m)/. The same is true for *s*, which became /z/, instead of /s/, as in: *chiosa* /ˈkjɔza/ from *glosam* /ˈglo:sɐ(m)/.

Stress patterns are also subject to changes in comparison with Latin stress. In fact, we certainly have *mordere* /ˈmɔrdere/, against Latin /mɔrˈde:rɛ/ (from spoken Latin /ˈmɔrdɛrɛ/), or *cadere* /kaˈdere/, against Latin /ˈkɛdɛrɛ/ (from spoken Latin /kɛˈde:rɛ/).

Let us, now, consider *gratuito* /graˈtuito/ against Latin /grɛtʊˈi:tʊ(m)/, while in Italian /gratuˈito/ is either literary or uncultured! For *persuadere*, we have /persuaˈdere, -swa-/, which is more and more judged to be an intentional choice (ie ↑), since /persuˈadere; perˈswa-/ are more and more used (also by Umberto Eco), of course together with *persuade* /persuˈade; perˈswa-/.

There is at least another good and forcible reason for not relying exclusively on etymology, but rather on the *common use* by good and educated speakers, not dominated by dialectal or regional usages external to the (linguistic) center of Italy. In fact, for *incavo* /inˈkavo/, in spite of its Latin form as /ˈɪnkɛvʊ(m)/, the Italian form /ɪˈɪnkavo/ is not yet acceptable, although it is used by some educated people. The same is true for *devio*, (*m*)*avvio*, &c, in spite of *viam* /ˈwiɛ(m)/, with a short /ɪ/, which would reject the stress. Thus, we certainly have /deˈvio, ɪˈdɛvjo/ and /(m)avˈvio, ɪˈ(m)avvjo/.

Therefore, it is necessary to admit and accept that any language inexorably changes. Thus, it is absolutely inappropriate to try to deny this obvious and natural fact. However, most dictionaries seem not to become aware of it, continuing to keep things unaltered for generations. But when this happens even to pronunciation dictionaries, it is guiltily disarming!

Let us also notice that the way Italian dictionaries (even recent ones) deal with words like those is contrastingly sad. In fact, some dictionaries consider the variants to be absolutely avoided. Others consider them less acceptable. On the contrary, others simply accept both forms, or provide just one, completely omitting any variants. Therefore, there is no real way to conciliate the different, even opposite, indications.

For the pronunciation of English, Jones’ and Wells’ dictionaries, which provide many variants, complement each other, both for variants and entries (but let us not waste time with the useless *Oxford*... later *Routledge*... ones). Of course, a useful pronunciation dictionary (for Italian or any other language) must be rich in variants, also providing indications and judgments about their use.

Furthermore, unfortunately, there are ‘professional’ non-fully-neutral speakers, from northern Italy, who teach courses and write books, but utter things like: *ha visto* ‘[aˈvis-tɔ]’ for [avˈvis:tɔ] /avˈvisto/, and *lezione* ‘[leˈtsjoːone]’ for [letsˈtsjo:ne] /letsˈtsjone/, or

*casa editrice* ‘[ˈkas:ae diˈtritʃɛ]’ for [ˈkazae diˈtritʃɛ. ˈkasae] /ˈkazae diˈtritʃɛ. ˈkasae/.

These observations (and those about etymology) derive from listening to a 2014 interview about the *DOP* (which can still be found on the Net), between an ‘expert’ from Bolzano and a coauthor from Parma.

