Phonetic Transcriptions for the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms

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This paper describes the work that has been done concerning the phonetic transcriptions for the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms directed by Prof. Pulcini (University of Turin): the dictionary contains both transcriptions of how Italians pronounce anglicisms and of how the corresponding English words are pronounced by native speakers of English. We shall explain how different pronunciation variants were selected for inclusion in the dictionary and how the transcriptions of anglicisms had to be adapted to the phonology and phonetics of Italian. A discussion will follow about the effects caused by the juxtaposition of English and Italian transcriptions. In fact, because of the intereference of the two phonetic and phonological systems, traditional conventions were in some cases abandoned in favour of more accurate phonetic transcriptions: this has been done with the aim of illustrating the most remarkable differences between the pronunciation of the words by Italian and English speakers.

1. Introduction

The New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms, is a corpus-based lexicographic enterprise directed by Prof. Pulcini (University of Turin). The principles underlying the making of the dictionary have been described in Pulcini (2006 and 2008) and will not be repeated here; we shall only mention that the dictionary (which is still being written) is corpus-based and aims at collecting Italian anglicisms and at showing their real usage. This contribution is concerned exclusively with the work on phonetic transcriptions within the dictionary. We believe that their treatment deserves special attention on its own as it presents peculiar differences from most other dictionaries.

Firstly, while in some lexicographic enterprises phonetic transcriptions are considered of secondary importance, as if they were an additional piece of information, in this case they are central as the pronunciation is no doubt one of the areas that distinguishes the usage of Italians from English natives. Secondly, most dictionaries (be they bilingual or monolingual) include transcriptions that pertain to only one phonetic and phonological system (that of the language in question) at a time; for example, a monolingual English dictionary should only have phonetic transcriptions of English, while a bilingual English-Italian dictionary normally has only phonetic transcription of Italian in the Italian-English section and of English in the English-Italian section. Yet, in this case, for each entry it has been decided to insert not only the phonetic transcriptions illustrating how Italians pronounce anglicisms, but also the phonetic transcriptions of how natives pronounce the corresponding English word. Though it may not be apparent, the choice of juxtaposing transcriptions pertaining to different phonetic and phonological systems has had some consequences and has raised many problems that will be discussed below. General problems concerning phonetic transcriptions in dictionaries will not be treated in this paper.

2. Pronunciation variants

As has been said, it was decided that the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms should include the pronunciation of how Italians pronounce anglicisms: this is obviously an intrinsically problematic task due to the fact that the pronunciation of foreign words is often not standardized (except for the most widely and commonly used ones) and this is certainly reflected by the extremely high number of ways in which anglicisms are actually pronounced by different speakers. Of course, much depends on the speaker's education (in particular, though not exclusively, on his/her competence of English as a foreign language), but also on

the context and the setting (the same speaker may use different pronunciation variants for the same word at home and at work).

Consequently, it is necessary to make a selection of the pronunciations that should be included in the dictionary. This obviously has to be done by establishing strict and uniform criteria, which should be consistent with the general structure of the dictionary. One possible solution would be to suggest one pronunciation considered to be the most widely used and/or the most widely accepted and/or the one that best resembles the native pronunciation of the corresponding English word. However, as the general setting and the criteria underlying the dictionary refer to a descriptive – rather than a prescriptive – framework (see Pulcini, 2006 and 2008), it has been decided that broadly used pronunciation variants for the same word should be registered in the dictionary. Variants that are rare, confined to specific regional areas or heavily stigmatized by the majority of Italian speakers should instead be excluded.

So, the problem consisted in selecting the pronunciations that should be included in the dictionary while excluding the others. In order to do this, we of course wanted to avoid giving judgments on the basis of personal opinions and impressions, so it has been decided to ground our choices on data. At the Laboratory of Experimental Phonetics of Turin we have been recording a number of (presumably standard[1]) native speakers of Italian while reading anglicisms whose pronunciation might be regarded as problematic: speakers read sentences prepared by us, each sentence containing one or more anglicisms. Some of the sentences have been taken from the examples of the dictionary (which are all found in newspapers and/or corpora of Italian, see Pulcini, 2006 and 2008), whereas others have been specifically built for the experiment. Here is an example:

> Domenica prossima, smaltiti i bagordi del Capodanno, sono chiamati a raccolta tutti gli appassionati di bird-watching per il «Feni day», una vera spedizione alla ricerca degli eleganti pennuti, divenuti ormai testimonial della fauna mediterranea.
> (*Corriere della Sera*, 29th December 2004)

We are aware that this approach (working on read and partially constructed sentences) may be regarded as highly artificial and as such is far from capturing the immediacy of spontaneous conversation. Yet, existing corpora of spontaneous spoken Italian are presently inadequate for our purposes and certainly do not cover all the anglicisms included in the dictionary (it has to be repeated that we need to be able to check the pronunciation by several speakers for each problematic anglicism).

It should be pointed out that the recordings are meant to serve as a general indication and for this reason no real statistical approach will be adopted. However, the results should help us to establish which pronunciation variants have to be included and which can be left out. Still, the choice of adopting a descriptive approach involves including also some pronunciations that are common among naïf Italian speakers and, at the same time, heavily stigmatized by learned

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[1] The concept of *Standard Italian* is widely debated (among many others, see Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005, for a phonetic and phonological description of Standard Italian and the regional varieties of Florence, Milan and Rome; see Marazzini (1994) for a discussion on Standard Italian and its history; see Berruto (1987) for a sociolinguistic analysis of the situation in Italy and for the emergence of the so-called *Italiano neo-standard*). For the purpose of our work, we simply recruited people who have lived most of their lives in Florence and who were judged not to have a strong regional accent. The possibility of recording people coming from other regions is currently under consideration.

speakers (such as [maˈnadʒment] for <management> and [ɔl ˈiŋkluziv] for <all-inclusive>[2]). This does have some risks as of course the dictionary is also intended to be a reference. The solution to this dilemma is still being discussed, and we are evaluating the possibility of adopting a set of symbols to visually mark pronunciations that have negative or special connotations[3].

3. The pronunciation of anglicisms by Italians

It goes without saying that Italian speakers pronounce anglicisms in an Italian style, that is to say that they adapt the words within the phonetic and phonological framework of Standard Italian. So, a rather obvious problem concerns how to transcribe these adapted pronunciations. Again, this has to be done according to strict and uniform criteria, so we built a table of correspondences between English and Italian phonemes to be used as a reference (it is reproduced in Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 1, English consonants tend to have direct equivalents in Italian, while vowels and diphthongs can be realized in several different ways and therefore need more attention. The question marks in correspondence with English /ə/ and /ɜː/ indicate that these two phonemes can be realized in many different ways by Italian speakers.

	Vowels											
English	iː	ɪ	e	æ	ɑː	ɒ	ɔː	ʊ	uː	ə	ɜː	ʌ
Italian	i	i	e, ɛ	ɛ, a	a	o, ɔ	o, ɔ	u	u	?	?	A
	Diphthongs											
English	eɪ		aɪ		ɔɪ		əʊ	aʊ		ɪə(ɹ)	eə(ɹ)	ʊə(ɹ)
Italian	ei, ɛi		ai		oi, ɔi		o, ɔ, ou, ɔu	au		ir, iar	er, ɛr, ear, ɛar	ur, uar
	Consonants – plosives, affricates and fricatives																
English	p	b	t	d	k	g	tʃ	dʒ	f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
Italian	p	b	t	d	k	g	tʃ	dʒ	f	v	t	d	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
	Consonants – nasals, approximants and syllabic consonants											
English	m	n	ŋ		m̩	n̩	l		l̩		h	ɹ	j	w
Italian	m	n	n(g), ŋ		em	en	l		el, ol		(h)	r	j	w

Table 1. English phonemes and Italian correspondent realizations (the most relevant allophones are included also). This list is not intended to be exhaustive, it only presents the most common cases.

Of course, one-to-one correspondences are unproblematic (e.g. /b/, /f/, /g/ are equivalent in both languages), whereas correspondences between one Italian phoneme and more than one English phoneme result in the neutralization of original phonological oppositions. For instance, the word <thriller> is pronounced [ˈtriller] by Italians, just as they would pronounce

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[2] According to internationally established conventions, square brackets are used to indicate phonetic transcriptions, slashes to indicate phonological transcriptions and angle brackets to indicate orthographical transcriptions.

[3] This idea is certainly not new and similar conventions have been adopted in several pronunciation dictionaries, such as LPD and DiPI. Should we embrace this solution, we might have to conduct some tests asking people to rate different pronunciations of anglicims on a scale of preference, similarly to what has been done for some pronouncing dictionaries (e.g. LPD).

the surname <Triller>, while standard English speakers distinguish between [ˈθɹɪlə] and [ˈt̺ɹɪlə][4].

Yet, as far as the dictionary is concerned, the real problem comes when one phoneme in English corresponds to two or more in Italian: for instance, English /æ/ corresponds to both Italian /a/ and /ɛ/. In such cases, it is of course necessary to establish which of the two phonemes Italian speakers choose for each word. For the most common anglicisms, there can be no doubt (e.g. <brandy> and <dance> are universally pronounced [ˈbrɛndi] and [ˈdɛns], while <caravan> is universally pronounced [ˈkaravan]), but for some words there might be a certain degree of uncertainty. Several doubts can be at least partially dissipated by checking the recordings discussed in the preceding paragraph. Even though we are still recording some speakers, general preferences have already emerged: for example, [ˈgɛng] and [ˈbɛnd] tend to be preferred over [ˈgang] and [ˈband] for <gang> and <band>, whereas [ˈkast] tends to be preferred over [ˈkɛst] for <cast>.

Finally, it should be remarked that we have also introduced three xenophones[5] in Italian transcriptions. Two of them ([ʒ] and [h]) can be seen in Table 1. The third xenophone is [ø][6] and has been used to describe some realizations corresponding to English [ɜː] and [ʌ]. Examples are given below (note that [h] is always within brackets because it is only used by some cultivated speakers):

> GIRL: it. [gørl, gɛrl] eng. [gɜː(ɹ)l]
> CLUB: it. [klab, klɛb, kløb, klub][7] eng. [klʌb]
> HALL: it. [(h)ɔl, (h)ol] eng. [hɔːl]

Finally, it should be mentioned that some other adaptations had to be managed, mainly regarding lexical stress (which is often shifted on the penultimate position[8]) and consonant lengthening. As is well-known, consonant length is not phonological in English, while Italian has many minimal pairs that contrast short and long (or double, or geminate) consonants. Since consonantal gemination in Italian is reflected by the orthography, speakers tend to pronounce long consonants when anglicisms are spelled with a double consonant:

> KILLER: it. [ˈkiller] eng. [ˈkɪlə(ɹ)]

Moreover, Italian /ʃ/ is said to be intrinsically geminate in intervocalic position, that is to say that it is always pronounced long by Standard speakers when it is between two vowels:

> BRAINWASHING: it. [breinˈwɔʃʃin(g)] eng. [ˈbɹeɪnwɒʃɪŋ]

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[4] See 5.1 for an explanation of why the traditional [r] symbol was not used in English transcriptions.

[5] A xenophone is a sound that is not part of the phonetic inventory of a certain language, but which is used by speakers when pronouncing foreign words that have entered the language.

[6] The same symbol is used in DiPI.

[7] As already hinted at, in this case it might be necessary to included special marks to warn the user about the different connotations of these pronunciations.

[8] Some cases of hypercorrection have been noticed, such as the already mentioned [ɔl ˈiŋkluziv] for <all-inclusive>.

4. British, American or International?

It was decided that the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms should also contain phonetic transcriptions reflecting how the entries are pronounced by native speakers of English (except for false anglicisms). However, we soon realized that this was no simple task. Many transcription notations are available for English, some of which have a long tradition. So, we decided to refer to the authoritative conventions used in LPD, which has the following advantages: a) it is based on a well-established tradition; b) it uses the same set of symbols as most English dictionaries – including EFL dictionaries with which readers may already be familiar with, such as LDOCE; c) it introduces a refined notation in relation to certain details.

But we also had to choose whether we wanted to refer to British English (RP, Received Pronunciation) or to American English (GA, General American). Although LPD is based on the solid British tradition, it includes both RP and GA transcriptions (as well as most other dictionaries – particularly pronouncing dictionaries). Since the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms already has transcriptions of how Italian speakers pronounce each entry, it could be regarded as an exaggeration to also include transcriptions of British and American variants for each word (also considering that it is not a pronouncing dictionary). So, we decided to devise a few special conventions to transcribe International English: we used the British traditional symbol set (apart from the exceptions discussed in 5 – but those have completely different reasons) and we confined the discussion of pronunciation differences between American and British in the preface (e.g. explaining that /ɒ/ is pronounced as [ɑː] in GA). As far as rhoticity is concerned, we marked post-vocal r sounds within brackets to indicate that speakers may or may not pronounce them, e.g. bar [bɑː(ɹ)] and computer [kəmˈpjuːtə(ɹ)]. Moreover, most pronunciation variants are presented as such without specifying whether they are mainly British or American.

5. Juxtaposing transcriptions

As already said, the New Dictionary of Italian Anglicisms presents both phonetic transcriptions of how Italian pronounce anglicisms and of how natives pronounce the corresponding English words. The juxtaposition of these transcriptions sometimes resulted in weird effects. The most interesting cases are discussed in detail below.

5.1. Italian [r] vs. English [ɹ]
The case of the Italian and English r sounds is probably the most emblematic example. LDOCE, LPD and most other dictionaries that include transcriptions of English use the symbol [r] to indicate a voiced alveolar approximant (and its allophones), which should be marked as [ɹ] in IPA notation. The problem is that the symbol [r] is also traditionally used in Italian transcriptions, where it indicates a voiced alveolar trill. So, if we stuck to these conventions, this would be the outcome:

COPYRIGHT: it. [kopiˈrait] eng. [ˈkɒpiraɪt]

And it would imply that native and Italian speakers pronounce this word with the same r sound, since the same symbol would be used in both cases. Yet, the difference between the Italian and the British r is so well-known and so perceptively salient that some readers might indeed be surprised at noticing that the same symbol is provided for both. As already stated, the IPA symbol [r] stands for a voiced alveolar trill and seems therefore to be more

appropriate for Italian, while the Standard British English r sound could be transcribed by the IPA symbol [ɹ]. So, it was decided that <copyright> was better transcribed as

COPYRIGHT: it. [kopiˈrait] eng. [ˈkɒpiɹait]

Of course, the same thing applies to all other words containing /r/ (racing, rafting, raid, etc.).

5.2. [n] vs. [ŋ]
We shall now present the case of the velar nasal [ŋ]. As is well-known, this sound has a phonemic status in English (minimal pairs exists, e.g. sin vs. sing). Instead, in Standard Italian it only exists as an allophonic realization of /n/ when followed by a velar consonant (/k/ or /g/, e.g. i[ŋ]chiesta) and is therefore not used in conventional transcriptions (see DiPI). However, in English this sound also occurs as a realization of /n/ when followed by a velar consonant (e.g. thi[ŋ]k), like in Italian, and since the sound [ŋ] has a phonemic status in English it is usually marked as such (see LPD). But transcribing

BANK: it. [bɛnk, bank] eng. [bæŋk]

would imply that the n sounds in the Italian pronunciations of this word somehow differ from the native English pronunciation, and that is incorrect. The following solution might therefore better suit our needs, even though it introduces a non-phonemic symbol in Italian transcriptions:

BANK: it. [bɛŋk, baŋk] eng. [bæŋk]

It can thus be seen that this case is exactly the opposite than before: instead of the same symbol used for two different sounds, we now had two different symbols for the same sound. If they were not corrected, both of them would break the principle of biunivocal correspondence advocated by the IPA.

5.3. [e] vs. [ɛ]
Possibly the most complex study case presented here concerns the mid-open and mid-closed vowels [e] vs. [ɛ]. First of all, we should remark that these two sounds have a phonemic status in Standard Italian, though their phonological opposition is not extremely productive: in fact, it is neutralized in unstressed position to the archiphoneme |E|, which is usually realized with a vowel roughly half-way between the two, seemingly [ẹ] (see for instance Canepari 2005, who however uses his own phonetic alphabet and transcription conventions); unstressed /e/ and /ɛ/ are usually marked as [e] in most dictionaries (e.g. DiPI). Furthermore, this opposition is absent in Northern and many Southern varieties of Italian[9]. Yet, some minimal pairs do exist in Standard Italian in stressed position, for example p[ɛ]sca (Eng. peach) vs. p[e]sca (Eng. fishing).

As far as Standard British English is concerned, it only has one e vowel, which is traditionally transcribed as [e] (for example in LPD and LDOCE), but which is normally realized as [ɛ]. Much has been written about this, and many (see Schmitt, 2007) have suggested that [ɛ] had better be used in EFL dictionaries on the grounds that it is phonetically more accurate and that

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[9] In many non-standard varieties of Italian, the alternation between [e] and [ɛ] is allophonic, while in some other varieties it is phonemic but with a different distribution from Standard Italian (see Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005).

it is not ambiguous for speakers/learners whose native language has a real /e/ (e.g. German); on the other hand, supporters of [e] argue that it is part of a widespread, well-established and agreed-upon tradition, which is preferably preserved in general works not directed to phoneticians (see Windsor Lewis, 2003).

So, in our dictionary we have to cope with three different e sounds: Italian /e/, Italian /ɛ/ and English /e/, the last being actually pronounced more or less halfway between the two Italian ones, similar to the Italian unstressed e. The most straightforward solution would be to use three different symbols corresponding to the real phonetic values of the three sounds, respectively [e], [ɛ] and [ɛ̞], but this would introduce diacritics and is therefore better avoided. The opposite solution would be to use just one symbol, seemingly [e], for the three sounds, on the grounds that in English (and in many non-standard Italian varieties) there is no phonological opposition between any of these sounds and therefore the pronunciation of one or the other in anglicisms cannot raise ambiguity[10].

Instead, we went for a third solution. We maintained [e] and [ɛ] for Italian transcriptions and [e] for the English ones. This certainly has the clear disadvantage of leveling the difference between Italian and English /e/, but explanations will be given in the preface to the dictionary; on the other hand, it has the advantage of preserving both the convention found in most EFL dictionaries and the phonemic distinction between the two Standard Italian e sounds. Of course, this choice involves investigating which of the two sounds Standard Italian speakers choose for each anglicism: in other words, do Italians say [stres] or [strɛs] and [senter] or [sɛnter] for <stress> and <centre> respectively? Again, the recordings of standard Italian speakers help solve these doubts:

> STRESS: it. [strɛs] eng. [stɹes]
> CENTRE: it. [ˈsɛnter] eng. [ˈsentə(ɹ)]

Finally, it has to be remarked that similar considerations apply to English [ɒ], which can be realized in Italian either as [o] or as [ɔ], as well as to the English diphthongs [eɪ] (with Italian equivalents [ei] and [ɛi]), [eə(ɹ)] (with Italian equivalents [ea(r)], [ɛa(r)], [e(r)] and [ɛ(r)]) and [ɔɪ] (with Italian equivalents [oi] and [ɔi]).

5.4. Other cases

The juxtaposition of Italian and English transcriptions also raised a problem every time an English phoneme has a slightly different Italian counterpart. For instance, /p/, /t/ and /k/ are pronounced as aspirated in English (but not in Italian) when occurring in stressed position if they are not preceded by an /s/, e.g. cottage, target and country – respectively [ˈkʰɒtɪdʒ], [ˈtʰɑːgɪt] and [ˈkʰʌntɹi]. However, such details were not taken into account: as a rule, it was decided not to annotate phonetic differences between English and Italian pronunciations if they require the use of diacritics as that would make transcriptions accurate but too technical.
A partial exception is however being discussed and concerns the /tr/ cluster, which is pronounced as affricated by natives speakers of English. This characteristic is perceptively very salient and many Italian learners try to imitate it, so we are currently considering the possibility of transcribing the cluster as [t͡ʃɹ][11], for example in

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[10] However, a problem could emerge if an anglicism were incidentally homophone of an Italian native word but for an [e] or an [ɛ]: this would of course create a minimal pair. Yet, this is a purely hypothetical conjecture and no such case has been found in our data.

[11] It has to be noted that the choice of [t͡ʃɹ] represents a simplification of the more accurate [tɹ̝̊].

COUNTRY: it. [kauntri] eng. [ˈkʌntʃɹi].

The cases presented and the examples shown clearly motivate the use of square brackets for the transcriptions of our dictionary, which include various phonetic details.

Finally, it has to be repeated that these considerations certainly do not mean that the conventions adopted in LPD and most other English dictionaries are inadequate, but simply that they do not entirely fulfill the requirements of our dictionary: in effect, they are conceived for dictionaries whose readers are familiar with English (either as natives or as learners), and not to be used for a comparison of the pronunciation of native and foreign speakers.

6. Conclusion

Choices pertaining to the phonetic transcriptions have to be consistent throughout and must be in compliance with the general guidelines of the dictionary. Transcriptions of how Italians pronounce anglicisms have to be evaluated case by case by means of an enquiry among standard speakers, while transcriptions of how the same words are pronounced by native speakers of English should illustrate the most remarkable differences in the pronunciation: the juxtaposition of transcriptions based on two different phonetic and phonological systems make it sometimes inappropriate to use the conventions traditionally used in the most common monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of English and Italian.

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