Frequent Italian lyric diction mistakes
made by classical singers

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Abstract and Opsomming sections.

Abstract

This article examines the most frequent mistakes in Italian lyric diction made by classical singers. Although this is written in a South African context, the information provided may be beneficial to singers and teachers in other countries as well. With this article I hope to provide a tool for assisting with the teaching and learning of Italian lyric diction in various academic institutions. Helpful rules and linguistic principles are discussed as described in various diction sources. I identified and assimilated the most frequent mistakes via qualitative research, based on personal experience, observation, interaction and interviews with experienced authorities on Italian lyric diction.

Key words: diction, pronunciation, South African tertiary education, classical singers, mistakes, vocal coaching.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die mees algemene foute in Italiaanse liriese diksie, soos deur klassieke sangers begaan, ondersoek. Alhoewel die artikel vanuit ,n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks geskryf is, mag die inligting wat verskaf word ook van nut wees vir onderwysers en sangers in ander lande. Ek hoop om met hierdie artikel ,n instrument te verskaf wat die onderrig en leer van Italiaanse liriese diksie in akademiese instellings sal vergemaklik. Nuttige reëls en taalkundige beginsels, soos in verskeie diksie-bronne beskryf, word bespreek. Deur middel van kwalitatiewe navorsing, gebaseer op persoonlike ervaring, waarneming, interaksie en onderhoude met ervare kenners, het ek die mees algemene foute geïdentifiseer en geassimileer.

Introduction

With this article I hope to provide a tool to assist South African classical singers with Italian pronunciation. I focused on some of the more frequent mistakes made by students in our tertiary institutions and on mistakes that I heard performers made on concert and opera stages nationally. However, these mistakes are not only endemic to South Africa and it is possible that many mistakes, which will be discussed in this article, are made by other non-mother-tongue speakers of Italian as well. While specific references may be made to local linguistic issues, vocal coaches and instructors outside South Africa may find this article beneficial in correcting the mistakes shared by our respective singers.

In South Africa alone there is an abundance of regional dialects and accents that affect Italian pronunciation taught to classical singers in diction courses and in voice lessons via various academic institutions or privately. A displacement in the uniformity of diction skills or pronunciation is further exacerbated by the fact that many teachers do not incorporate the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) – a system derived from the Latin alphabet, which has become a standard teaching tool in diction classes internationally – into their teaching. Instead, many teachers convey diction rules and pronunciation via verbal/aural means or in a parrot-like, copying method whereby students imitate sounds. Sometimes positive results are achieved, but many mistakes arise predominantly either because a teacher does not convey the correct diction or a student interprets it incorrectly.

Teachers of Italian lyric diction should be familiarised with the indelible contributions made to the literature by Adams (2008), Wall (1989, 1990), Coffin et al (1982), Sheil (2004), Colorni (1970) and Castel (2000). While there is an abundance of literature on the rules of Italian lyric diction,

not much has been written focusing on mistakes made specifically by singers in a South African context. While performing in a production of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* in Italy during July 2011, I used the opportunity to confer with the Italian pianist and vocal coach, Sabrina De Carlo[1], on the most frequent mistakes made by singers whose first language is not Italian. De Carlo spent a considerable amount of time in the United States and, as a result, could confirm that many mistakes made by South African singers were also very common among their American counterparts.

I also interviewed Associate Professor of Italian Language and Literature at the University of Cape Town, Prof Giona Tuccini. Prof Tuccini teaches Italian lyric diction to students at the Opera School of the University of Cape Town (UCT) and has wide experience working with South African singers from various language and cultural backgrounds. Prof Tuccini and I encountered some consistent phenomena in mispronunciation among singers whose first language is isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana or Sesotho. However, the predominant recurring mistakes in Italian diction occur as a result of South African English and Afrikaans – whether these are a singer's first language or not[2]. Through the qualitative nature of these interviews, I identified the ten mistakes made most frequently by singers, which will be discussed below.

1. Non-differentiation between double and single consonants

1.1 From Act II, Scene 2 of *L'Elisir d'Amore* by Gaetano Donizetti

m'ama, lo vedo

['mama lo 'vedo] [34]

1.2 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

quel cappello leggiero e galante

[kwel kap:'pɛl:lɔ led:'dʒɛro e ga'lantɛ] [5]

One of the most predominant mistakes that many singers make in Italian pronunciation, is overlooking whether a word needs to be pronounced with a double or single consonant. Singers often either clip all their vowels short and every consonant sounds like a double consonant (geminate), or sometimes double consonants are pronounced as if they were single. Skubikowski (1981) mentions that not pronouncing these geminates correctly, will frequently betray one whose pronunciation is otherwise good. Furthermore, once mispronunciation becomes a habit, it is difficult to eradicate it at the later stages of study.

At UCT's Opera School, Prof Tuccini finds that the most frequent mistakes include the incorrect intonation of speech, the mispronunciation of double consonants and incorrect open or closed vowels[6]. In my experience at North West

University, mother-tongue-Sesotho speakers may find it easier to differentiate between single and double consonants, as this phenomenon also occurs in their language. Examples of these words include [mobo'lɛl:lɛ] (tell him/her), ['m:me] (mother) and ['l:la] (cry). It is interesting to note that most of these geminates occur on the letters **m** and **l**.

When a singer mispronounces a single consonant (making it sound like a geminate), this is usually the result of the vowel's length being too short in between consonants and this may result in the singer not achieving the desired legato in the line. When a singer mispronounces either a single consonant or a geminate, this may result in a difference in the meaning of the text.

In the example (1.1) above from Nemorino's famous aria, *Una furtiva lagrima*, the phrase, *m'ama, lo vedo*, means "she loves me, I see it:". If *m'ama* were to be pronounced with a double consonant as in ['mam:ma], it would mean "mother, I see it". In the example (1.2) from Figaro's aria, *Non piu andrai farfallone amoroso*, the phrase, *quel cappello leggiero e galante*, means "that hat so light and dashing". If *cappello* were to be pronounced with a single *p*, the phrase would mean "that hair so light and dashing".

Other alternative meanings derived from mispronunciation, albeit unintentionally at times, include *anni*, meaning years, versus *ani*, meaning anuses, as well as *cane*, meaning dogs, versus *canne,* meaning marijuana.

2. Pronouncing the consonants *t* and *q* as aspirates

2.1 From Act II of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Egli è innocente. Voi sapete … Non so niente

['eʎʎi ɛ in:nɔ'ʧɛntɛ. 'voi sa'pete ... 'non 'sɔ 'njɛntɛ][7]

2.2 From Act I, Scene I of *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi

Questa o quella

['kwesta o 'kwel:la][8]

According to De Carlo, the aspirate [t] and harsh *qu* [kw] sounds do not really occur in the Italian language, while they occur frequently in English. Singers usually make these mistakes in an attempt to be proficient and clear in their diction. The aspirate [t] occurs when the tip of the tongue is too far back against the hard palate and not against the back of the teeth where it should be. The consonants *d* and *n* are pronounced similarly. English speakers usually pronounce *d*, *n* and *t* with the tongue touching the alveolar ridge (Wall 1990). In addition, when making the sound, too much air is released, resulting in what is also known as a wet [t].

This is also the case with the [kw] sound when the singer tries to enunciate the consonant clearly and, instead, releases

an explosion of air resulting in the sound being too harsh. In the examples from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* Act II finale and Verdi's *Rigoletto* above, the [t] should be pronounced dentally with the tip of the tongue behind the upper teeth and both the [t] and [kw] sound should be made without too much air escaping.

At UCT, Prof Tuccini observed that mother-tongue English speakers are more prone to making this mistake than students with another language as their first language. While speakers of other languages may make this mistake as well, it is less prominent.

3. Incorrect formation of the [l] sound

3.1   Amarilli, mia bella (Giulio Caccini)

[ama'ril:li, 'mia 'bɛl:la][9]

3.2   Alma del core, spirto del alma (Antonio Caldara)

['alma dɛl 'kɔre][10]

3.3   From the one- act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, **by Giacomo Puccini**

c'è il taglio della mano e poi l'esilio
[ʧɛ il 'taʎʎɔ 'della 'manɔ e pɔi le'ziljo][11]

The mispronunciation of the *l* is another result of incorrect tongue placement. In English and Afrikaans, *l* is considered as an alveolar consonant, as it is formed with the tip of the tongue near the upper gum ridge (Colorni 1970).

In Italian, it is imperative that the tongue be straight or flat and that the tip of the tongue be placed in between the front upper and lower teeth. In addition, there is an increased relaxation in the rest of the tongue, jaw and throat. In the pronunciation of South African English and Afrikaans, the alveolar *l* may be heard as extra harsh due to excessive curling of the tongue and stiffening of the base of the tongue.

Besides correct diction, this correct tongue placement is quite important for singers, as Colorni also mentions that the dental *l* could release and give impulse to the vowel that follows, enhancing the resonating power of the voice.

In South Africa this problem is further exacerbated when the preceding vowel is also mispronounced. Often, if an *i* vowel precedes the *l* as in the word *il*, the vowel is pronounced as a *schwa* [ə] or as a neutral vowel, as in the first syllable of "approve", whereas the vowel should be pronounced as [i], as in "feet". Similarly, when a closed [e] vowel, as in *nel* (in the) or an open [ɛ], as in *cielo* (sky) is pronounced, many South Africans have a tendency to pronounce the vowel as a diphthong as in the Afrikaans words *melk* (milk) ['mjalk] and *bel* (to phone) ['bjal] or as in the English name "Al".

Pronouncing these vowels in this manner causes the tongue to curl further back and the only way a teacher or coach would be able to correct the forward placement of the *l* would be to address the proper pronunciation of the preceding vowels.

According to De Carlo, the only time in the Italian language that the tongue is further back against the hard palate, is when certain plosive, affricate or fricative consonants follow the *l*, as in *caldo* (warm), *calvo* (bald) or *calzone* (pants).

At UCT, Prof Tuccini finds that this problem is evident among English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and isiZulu speakers and, furthermore, this also results in problems with the pronunciation of the consonant *elya* [ʎ]. Wall (1990) illustrates that, while this sound does not exist in English, a similar sound to the *elya* can be found in the word million ['miljən]. However, to say *elya* [ʎ] as in the word *foglia* ['fɔʎa], only a single tongue action is required.

As seen in the above examples from Caccini's *Amarilli mia bella*, Caldara's *Alma del core* and Schicchi's line from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, attention needs to be paid to the forward tongue placement in the words *amarilli*, *bella*, *alma*, *del*, *il*, *taglio*, *della* and *l'esilio*, as well as to the vowel preceding them.

4. Pronunciation of *i* after the consonants *c* and *g*, particularly if *i* is followed by another vowel

4.1   chi vagheggiar puo mai (Giovanni. Bononcini)

[ki vage'd:ʒar pwɔ 'mai][12]

4.2   come raggio di sol (Antonio. Caldara)

['kome 'rad:ʒo di sol][13]

4.3   From Act I, Scene III of *Così fan tutte* **by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

finchè langoscia mi fa morir
[fiŋ'ke laŋ'gɔʃ:ʃa mi fa mo'rir][14]

It is rudimentary knowledge that the consonants, *c* and *g*, become [tʃ] as in "chair" and [dʒ] as in "judge" respectively after *i* and *e*, unless there is an *h* in between these letters. Such examples include *che* (that), *chiave* (key) and the male name, Gherardo, where they remain [k] and [g]. Before proceeding, it is also important to note that the consonant cluster, *sc* in Italian, is pronounced with the [ʃ] sound when followed by *i* and *e*, as in *conoscete* (do you know) or *lascia* (leave). When an *h* is present in the middle of the *sc* cluster and the vowel following is *i* or *e*, as in *scherzo* (joke) or *schiava* (slave), the word is pronounced with an [sk] sound.

A common mistake that occurs is where another vowel follows *i* – for example in *cielo* (sky), Giovanni (a man's name), *saggio* (wise), *lascia* (leave) or *giachè* (since).

Singers often incorrectly pronounce both *i* and the vowel that follows with equal stress. Essentially they are only required to pronounce the second vowel, as the [tʃ] and [dʒ] of the preceding *c* or *g* consonant is already an indication that *i* is present.

According to De Carlo, both vowels are only stressed when the pronunciation of the word is extremely slowed down during a moment of heightened emotion, such as rage or passion or as a means to be emphatic about that particular word. Another exception, which is important to note, is that the [i] is, in fact, pronounced when it is stressed, as in the words *gìa* ['dʒia] (he was going) and *bugìa* [bu'dʒia] (lie). Colorni (1970:96) provides further examples of words that fall into these various categories.

In the above excerpts from Bonocini's *Per la Gloria* (4.1), Caldara's *Come raggio di sol* (4.2) and Dorabella's aria *Smanie implacabili* (4.3), the words *vagheggiar*, *raggio* and *langoscia* should be pronounced with the singer articulating directly to the second vowel, as illustrated in the IPA transcription.

5. The rules of *Raddoppiamento* (lengthening and prosody in Italian)

5.1 From the one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, by Giacomo Puccini

mi piace, è bello
[mi 'pjatʃɛ ɛ 'b:bel:lɔ][15]

5.2 From Act II of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mirate quanto è bello
[mi'ratɛ 'kwantɔ ɛ 'b:bɛl:lɔ][16]

5.3 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

o caro, o bello, o fortunato nastro
[ɔ 'k:karɔ ɔ 'b:bɛl:lɔ ɔ f:fɔrtu'natɔ 'nastrɔ][17]

5.4 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

simbolo d'onestà, candida vesta
['simbɔlɔ dɔnɛs'ta k:kandida 'vɛsta]

5.5 From Act II of *Cosi fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

per carità, partiamo
[per kaɾi'ta p:par'tjamɔ]

5.6 From Act III of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

qualche bambin trovato
['kwalke b:bam'bin trɔ'vatɔ][18]

5.7 From Act III of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Dove sono, i bei moment
['dove 's:sono i 'bɛi mo'menti][19]

Doris Borelli (2000) states that the linguistic phenomenon, referred to as *Raddoppiamento Sintattico*, is the process of gemination or doubling of a word-initial consonant in specific environments. The most common cases of gemination or doubling of the initial consonant occur after all stressed and some unstressed monosyllabic words, such as *è, a, da, che, se, ma, piu, può, sì, già, giù* and *là*.

In the examples from Lauretta's aria, *O mio babbino caro* (5.1) and Susanna's aria, *Venite inginocchiatevi* (5.2), the initial consonant of *bello* is doubled. Cherubino's recitative right before his first aria (5.3) is also a perfect example of this phenomenon. In practice there is a slight pause or stop that occurs before *bello*, *caro* and *fortunato* are pronounced, so as to indicate the doubled consonant. During the pause the articulators form the consonant and the length of the consonant is doubled.

The occurrence of an initial gemination also occurs after all polysyllabic words where there the stress is on the last syllable (oxytone), like *perché* (why, because), *sarà* (it will be), *perciò* (therefore) and *città* (city). The above examples from Figaro's recitative (5.4) and Alfonso and Despina's line in Act II from Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte* (5.5), constitute examples of this phenomenon – as can be seen in the transcription.

Alternatively, initial consonant doubling also occurs after some polysyllabic words, where there is an accent on the penultimate syllable (paroxytone), such as the words *qualche* (some, a few), *come* (how) and *dove* (where). In the final two examples from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (5.6), Bartolo's recitative and the Countess's famous aria (5.7) constitute examples of this phenomenon.

In the IPA transcriptions available, I have found that initial gemination is not always indicated. However, the volumes of libretti transcriptions, written by Nico Castel, mostly indicate these occurrences. It is best that singers and teachers familiarise themselves with the rules of this phenomenon. Adams (2008:42) provides an extensive list of where syntactic doubling occurs. More importantly, he also provides examples where it does *not* occur. Doubling does not occur after articles or conjunctive pronouns, which are considered to be unstressed. Adams mentions that an easy way to differentiate between a stressed and an unstressed pronoun, is to remember that a stressed pronoun form follows prepositions, for example *a te*, *da me*. The pronoun is unstressed in conjunction with verbs, for example *ti vedo*, *me vede*.

6. Assimilation of the n before some consonants

6.1 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Figaro)   in questo loco … (Susanna) in questa stanza

[ˈiŋ ˈkwestɔ ˈlɔkɔ] [ˈiŋ ˈkwesta ˈstantsa][20]

6.2 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Count)   Son grato, amici

[ˈsoŋ ˈgratɔ aˈmitʃi][21]

6.3 From the one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, by Giacomo Puccini

(Betto) ha lasciato ogni cosa ad un convent

[a laˈʃʃato ˈoɲɲi ˈkɔza ad uŋ kɔɱˈvɛntɔ][22]

6.4 From the one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi,* by Giacomo Puccini

(Zita) Un Donati sposare la figlia d'un villano!

[un dɔˈnati spɔzaɾɛ la ˈfiʎʎa duɱ viˈlːanɔ][23]

6.5 di gioia un labbro infiora (Antonio Caldara)

[di ˈdʒɔja un ˈlabːro iɱˈfjoɾa]

6.6 From Act I of *Cosi fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Sextet) mi da un poco di sospetto

[ˈmi ˈda ˈum ˈpɔko ˈdi sɔsˈpɛtːo][24]

6.7 con un baccio Amor t'apri (Antonio Lotti)

[kon um ˈbatʃo aˈmor taˈpri]

6.8 From Act I of *Cosi fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Alfonso) non mi fate più far trista figura

[ˈnom mi ˈfatɛ ˈpju far ˈtrista fiˈguɾa][25]

6.9 Nel cor più non mi sento (Giovanni Paisello)

[nel kɔr ˈpju nom mi ˈsɛnto]

As mentioned previously, many problems, resulting from an attempt to be precise with diction, could lead to the mispronunciation of Italian. In the above examples, the inexperienced reader may want to enunciate every single *n* in an attempt to be clear. Since Italian is such a fluid language, assimilation occurs when the *n* precedes some other consonants, such as *q* and *g* and becomes a palatal [ŋ]. The examples in (6.1) and (6.2) illustrate this assimilation process.

When *n* precedes *f* or *v*, it becomes a nasalised [ɱ]. Adams (2008) mentions that, when this labiodental sound is made, the tongue does not come into contact with the hard palate, but the sound is replaced by a hum in the position of *f* or *v*. The examples in (6.3), (6.4) and (6.5) illustrate this assimilation process.

When *n* occurs before the consonants *p* and *b*, it assimilates to form [m]. The examples in (6.6) and (6.7) illustrate this assimilation process.

Finally, when *n* precedes *m*, the combination is pronounced as [m]. The final examples in (6.8) and (6.9) illustrate this assimilation process. It has been mentioned that many IPA transcriptions do not include *raddoppiamento* – with the exception of Castel. Similarly, transcriptions – with the exception of those by Castel – do not always include assimilation. Adams further mentions that assimilation occurs much more frequently in *secco* recitative and lyric singing, where the note values are short. This might explain why it is often omitted in many transcriptions.

7. The mispronunciation of *s* and *r*

7.1 From Act I of *Cosi fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Dorabella) Smanie implacabili che m'agitate

[ˈzmanje implaˈkabili ke madʒiˈtatɛ][26]

7.2 From Act I of *Le nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(trio) Ah, già svien la poverina

[a ˈdʒa ˈzvjɛn la poveˈɾina][27]

7.3 From Act I of *Cosi fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Dorabella) Esempio misero, d'amor funesto

[ɛˈzɛmpjo ‹mizeɾo da›mor fu›nɛstɔ][28]

7.4 From Act I of *Le nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Cherubino) Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio

[non so pju ˈkɔza son ˈkɔza ˈfatːʃɔ][29]

7.5 From Act I of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

o caro, o bello, o fortunato nastro

[ɔ ˈkːkaɾɔ ɔ ˈbːbɛlːɔ ɔ fːfɔrtuˈnatɔ ˈnastrɔ][30]

Teachers and students often make the mistake of pronouncing the letter *s* as [s] when it precedes voiced consonants such as *b*, *d*, g, *l*, *m*, *n*, and *v* when, in fact, they should be pronounced as a [z]. When *s* precedes voiceless consonants like *k*, *f*, *p* and *t*, it remains [s]. Examples (7.1) and (7.2) illustrate the [z] sound preceding voiced consonants in the words *smanie* (torments) and *svien* (faints).

Another common mistake occurs when the consonant *s* between two vowels is pronounced as [s] instead of [z]. In examples (7.3) and (7.4), the words *esempio* (example), *misero* (miserable) and *cosa* (what) illustrate this rule. Some exceptions to the rule do exist and this is largely due to regional dialects. Robert J. Hall (1947:426-429) mentions the differences in voicing the [s] in standard Italian, versus

regional differences between northern and southern Italy. Austin (1931:79) also discusses why the frequency of the intervocalic *s* not being pronounced as [z], is quite low.

Another common mistake in Italian is the non-differentiation of a flipped and trilled *r*. Many teachers and students are often unaware of this distinction. Prof Tuccini confirms that, at UCT's Opera School, many English speakers pronounce *r* as the English retroflex, while many Afrikaans speakers tend to trill the *r* excessively – regardless of whether it should be trilled or flipped. North West University recruits many singers from the Kroonstad and Welkom regions in the Free State, as well as from the Gauteng region, and I have observed that many Sesotho speakers tend to pronounce *r* as an uvula [ʀ].

Italians flip the *r* when it occurs between two vowels. This sounds very similar to a single *d* and can be seen in IPA transcriptions as [ɾ]. The trilled [r] is pronounced when

- a word begins with *r* : *rosa* ['rɔza], *rabbia* ['rab:bja]

- when *r* comes after a consonant in the same syllable: *cruda* ['kruda], *prosa* ['proza]

- when *r* occurs after a stressed vowel and before another consonant: *parto* ['parto], *guarda* ['gwarda], *perdono* ['pɛrdono]

- when it is the final letter of a word: *cantar* [kan'tar], *morir* [mo'rir][31]

Example (7.5) further illustrates these differences.

8. The mispronunciation of z

8.1 From the one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, by Giacomo Puccini

(Schicchi) questa matta bizzaria che mi zampilla nella fantasia
['kwesta 'mat:ta bid:dza'ria ke mi t:tsam'pil:la 'nel:la fanta'zia][32]

The single and double **z** consonant can be pronounced in one of two ways, namely either [dz] or [ts]. Because the sound cluster entails two sounds, it is referred to as an "affricate". A mistake that occurs frequently, is when students or teachers pronounce both possibilities as [ts].

Sheil (2004) and Wall (1990) both agree that the pronunciation of this consonant is extremely unpredictable and irregular. Wall provides examples of whether the single or double **z** is pronounced – [ts] or [dz] – and recommends that a dictionary should be used at all times to avoid confusion. Sheil does mention that a single or double **z** is pronounced [ts] when it is followed by the combinations *ia*, *ie* or *io*. These examples include *zio* ['tsio], *grazia* ['gratsia] and *vizio* ['vitsjo]. He also mentions that, when **z** is the initial sound in a word, it is ordinarily pronounced as [dz], except when followed by

the combinations mentioned previously. These examples include ['dzeɾo] and *zona* ['dzona].

Adams (2008:26-28) concurs that a dictionary should be used at all times, but provides the most comprehensive list of differentiating these sounds. A single **z** is pronounced as follows:

- An intervocalic **z**, followed by *I*, is pronounced [ts]: *nazione* [nat'tsjone], *polizia* [polit'tsia]

- An intervocalic **z**, which is not followed by *i*, is pronounced as [dz]: Suzuki [sud'dzuki], Azucena [addzu'ʧena]

- An initial **z** is often pronounced [dz]: See the examples above.

Adams continues to discuss consonant clusters and a double *zz*. When **z** follows *n*, it may be pronounced [ts] or [dz]: *senza* ['sɛntsa], *stanza* ['stantsa] or *pranzo* ['prandzo] and *brondzo* ['brondzo]. He mentions that, in these instances, more words are usually pronounced using [ts] and fewer using [dz]. When **z** follows *l* and *r*, it is also mostly pronounced [ts]. There are, however, a few exceptions to this rule.

Finally he also provides quite a substantive list of examples when a double *zz* is pronounced either [ts] or [dz]. Example (8.1) illustrates the irregularities mentioned by all three authors. [bid:dza'ria] is one of the few exceptions when an intervocalic double *zz* is pronounced [dz] and [t:tsam'pil:la] is a word with an initial **z**, not followed by *i*, but pronounced as [ts].

9. The non-differentiation between open and closed vowels

9.1 From the one-act opera, *Gianni Schicchi*, by Giacomo Puccini

Se il testamento è in mano d'un notajo
[sɛ il tɛstaˌmentɔ ɛ im ˈmano dun nɔˈtajɔ]
Chi lo sa? Forse è un guaio!
[ki lɔ sa? ˌforsɛ ɛ uɲ ˌgwajɔ]
Se però ce l'avesse lasciato in questa stanza,
[sɛ pɛˌrɔ tʃe laˌvesse laʃʃato iɲ ˌkwesta ˌstantsa]
Guaio pei frati, ma per noi: speranza!
[ˌgwajɔ pei ˌfrati ma per noi: spɛˌrantsa]
O Lauretta, amore mio, speriam nel testamento dello zio!
[ɔ lau'ret:ta a'moɾe mio spe'rjam nel tɛsta'mento 'del:lo t:tsio] [33]

The examples above, taken from Nico Castel's transcription of the libretto of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, illustrate some of the rules and exceptions mentioned with regard to open and closed vowels.

In Italian, **e** and **o** can be pronounced as closed or open vowels. When they are closed, the IPA symbols are [e] and [o], and when they are open, the symbols are [ɛ] and [ɔ]. Frequently, singers and teachers do not differentiate between these closed and open vowels and a tendency exists to pronounce all the vowels as closed. In South Africa, many Afrikaans and English-speaking singers and teachers have a tendency to "over-close" these already closed vowels. At UCT, Prof Tuccini concurs that Afrikaans speakers mostly tend to pronounce all these vowels closed. Many times Lotti's song, *Pur dicesti, o bocca bella,* is sung as [u] *bocca, bocca bella* or, in Caldara's *Alma del core, spirt[u] dell' alma* and *sempre costant*[i] *t'adorerò* may be heard.

Sheil (2004) and Adams (2008) provide an extensive list of rules for pronouncing **e** and **o** open or closed. There are, however, many exceptions to all of these rules. While these rules apply to both spoken and sung Italian, Adams also stresses the importance of modifying these vowels for the sake of singing technique.

e is pronounced as a closed [e] under the following circumstances:

In all unstressed syllables: *derivare* [deri'vare], *cattedrale* [katte'drale].

- In the stressed syllable of the word if a single consonant follows the vowel. There are many exceptions, however, such as *sapete* [sa'pete] and *sereno* [se'reno].

- In word endings where **e** is the stressed vowel: **-ei**; **-egno**; **-emmo**; **-esco**;

- **-essa**; **-essi**; **-esti**; **-etta**; **-evole**; **-ezza**; **-mente**: *credei* [kre'dei], *disdegno* [diz'deɲo], *saremmo* [sa'rem:mo], *tedesco* [te'desko], *contessa* [kon'tes:sa], *credeste* [kre'deste], *cabinetto* [kabi'net:to], *notevole* [no'tevole], *allegrezza* [al:le'gret:tsa], *accuramente* [ak:kura'mente].[34]

- In the stressed syllables of certain words that are considered as exceptions, such as *che* [ke], *dello* ['del:lo], *dentro* ['dentro], *freddo* ['fred:do], *nello* ['nel:lo], Verdi ['verdi].

e is pronounced as an open [ɛ] under the following circumstances:

- In many words where the stressed **e** is followed by more than one consonant: *bella* ['bɛl:la], *fratello* [fra 'tɛl:lo], *presto* ['prɛsto].

- In a stressed syllable followed by another vowel: *miei* ['mjɛi], *lei* ['lɛi].

- In a stressed syllable ending in **-ero** if the word has more than two syllables: *severo* [se 'vɛro], *cimitero* [ʧimi 'tɛro].

- In a small group of words where **e** is found in the antepenultimate (third-to-last) syllable, instead of in the penultimate syllable: *medico* ['mɛdiko], *lettera* ['lɛt:tera], *gelida* ['dʒɛlida].[35]

There are also many words that do not adhere to the rules as mentioned above, such as *bene* ['bɛne], *breve* ['brɛve], *prego* ['prɛgo].

o is pronounced as closed [e] under the following circumstances:

- In all unstressed syllables: *capo* ['kapo], *locale* [lo'kale], *dormire* [dor'mire].

- In a stressed syllable, which is followed by a single consonant: *pastore* [pas'tore], *nome* ['nome]. There are, however, many exceptions, which include: *parola* [pa'rɔla], *poco* ['pɔko], *provo* ['prɔvo].

- In the words *coi* ['koi], *noi* ['noi] and *voi* ['voi]. An exception to this is *poi* ['pɔi], which is pronounced with an open [ɔ].

o is pronounced as an open [ɔ] under the following circumstances:

- In stressed syllables followed by more than one consonant: *notte* ['nɔt:te], *forte* ['fɔrte], *donna* ['dɔn:na]. There are, however, many exceptions to this rule, as Sheil points out, where the following words are often heard being mispronounced: *ascolta* [a'scolta], *bocca* ['bok:a], *contro* ['kontro], *giorno* ['dʒorno], *molto* ['molto], *pronto* ['pronto] *sogno* ['soɲo].

- If the stressed **o** is followed by another vowel: *poi* ['pɔi], *eroe* [e'rɔe], *gioia* ['dʒɔja].

- If it is the final letter of a monosyllabic word: *po* [pɔ], *ho* [ɔ]; or if it is the final letter of a polysyllabic word and has a grave accent: *però* [pe'rɔ], *parlò* [par'lɔ]

- If it is followed by one or more consonants and a diphthong: *gloria* ['glɔrja], *vittoria* [vi't:tɔrja].

- In numeric words: otto ['ɔt:to], nono ['nɔno].

- In a small group of words where **o** is found in the antepenultimate syllable instead of in the penultimate syllable: *mobile* ['mɔbile], *opera* ['ɔpera], *povero* ['pɔvero]

Adams also mentions the above circumstances, as well as other instances of what dictates the use of open or closed **e** and **o** vowels.

Sesotho speakers may find it easier to discern between an open and a closed **o** and **e**. Both are present in Sesotho: *setulo* [se'tulɔ] (chair), *motho* ['moto] (a person), *mobolelle*

[mobo'lɛl:lɛ] (tell him/her), *mme* ['m:me] (mother). Caution should be displayed towards students who may over-close the **e**, as this also occurs in Sesotho: *empe* ['impi] (bad).

It is important to note that, in the same way that mispronouncing a single or double consonant could change the word's meaning, so too could mispronouncing an open or closed vowel change its meaning. *Pesca*, when pronounced with a closed [e] means "fish" but, alternatively, it means "peach" when pronounced with an open [ɛ]. Other examples include *colle*, meaning "hill", when pronounced with an open [ɔ] and "with" when pronounced with a closed [o]. Furthermore, *botte* means "hits/smacks" when pronounced with an open [ɔ] and "barrel" when pronounced with a closed [o].[36]

10. Incorrect syllabic stress

10.1 From Act II of *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

> Un impegno nuziale ha costui con me contratto e pretendo che il contratto
> [un im'peɲɲo nut:tsi'alɛ a kos'tui 'kom 'mɛ kɔn'trat:tɔ e prɛ'tɛndo 'ke 'il kon'trat:to]
> deva meca effetuar.
> ['deva 'mekɔ ɛf:fɛtu'ar]

In the Italian language, the penultimate syllable (*parola piana*) is generally accented or stressed. However, there are several exceptions to this rule. Marcellina's line from *Le nozze di Figaro* in the example above illustrates this rule, where almost every polysyllabic word has its stress on the penultimate syllable, with the exception of the last word, *effetuar* "carry out", which has its stress on the last syllable (*parola tronca*). A frequent mistake occurs when singers place the wrong emphasis on the wrong syllable.

Not all IPA transcriptions include diacritical marks that indicate syllabic stress and not all musical settings make these stresses clear. Therefore, teachers and students should familiarise themselves with a few basic rules.

As previously mentioned, most Italian words, comprising two or more syllables, take the stress on the penultimate syllable. Many words also take the stress on the final syllable, indicated by means of a grave accent, as in the words *sarà* (it will be), *perciò* (therefore), *papà* (dad), *però* (but, however), *farò* (I'll do) and *più* (more, plus). If the student did not accent the final syllable, it would change the meaning of the words *sara*, *papa*, *pero*, and *faro* to Sarah (a name), pope, pear tree and lighthouse respectively.

Examples of other words of which the meaning could differ as a result of syllabic stress, include àncora (anchor), *ancòra* (again, more), *règia* (royal): *regìa* (direction of a movie or

a play) and *capitàno* (captain) and *càpitano* (they happen, they occur).

Acute accents also occur on final syllables but only on **e**, indicating whether it is pronounced as an open or closed vowel in addition to the fact that the specific syllable should be stressed. Examples of such words include *perché* (why, because), *poiché* (because) and *benché* (despite).

Adams (2008:13, 14) provides further examples of Italian word stress:

Some words end in a final stressed diphthong where no accents are used. These include words that end in **-ia**, **-ie** and **-io**: *malia* [ma'lia], *cavalleria* [kaval:le'ɾia], *cercai* [ʧer'kai].

- Fewer words take the stress on the antepenultimate (third-to-last) syllable (*parola sdrucciola*): *anima* ['anima], *lagrima* ['lagrima] *gelido* ['ʤɛlido].

- Some recurring word endings also take the stress on the antepenultimate syllable:

    Adjectives ending with **-abile** , **-ibile**, **-evole**, and **-esimo**: *amabile* [a'mabile], *possibile* [po's:sibile], *piacevole* [pja'ʧevole], *ventesimo* [ven'tɛzimo].

    Adjectives or adverbs ending with **-issimo**: *prestissimo* [pres'tis:simo], *felicissimo* [feli'ʧis:simo].

    Nouns ending with **-udine** and **-logo**: *solitudine* [soli'tudine], *catalogo* [ka'talogo].

    Many infinitive verbs ending with **-ere**, as well as some third-person plural forms: *ridere* ['ridere], *parlano* ['parlano].

- In very rare cases the stress may fall on the fourth-to-last syllable (*parola bisdrucciola*) in the third-person plural of **-are** verbs, which have antepenult stress in singular forms[37]: *dimenticano* [di'mentikano], *meritano* ['mɛɾitano].

Frequently, mistakes occur in words such as *mio* (my), *tuo* (your) and *suo* (his/her), where singers often accent the final vowel or even ignore the first vowel and pronounce it as a glide instead of elongating it or placing the stress on the first vowel. This occurs especially if the word falls on a weaker pulse of the measure. It is imperative for the teacher or coach to pay attention to mistakes made with regard to incorrect syllabic stress – especially in *secco* recitatives where students may be prone to make these mistakes more frequently due to the compositional nature of the recitative. With a very dry accompaniment in the continuo, the natural fluidity of the language is more apparent in *secco* recitative and therefore incorrect diction ends up more exposed.

Conclusion

Many teachers and students consider Italian one of the easier languages to learn and study, but very often they fail to take into account the finer nuances of the language or they are not aware of some linguistic principles. There is a plethora of outstanding literature sources on lyric diction, as well as the IPA. These sources vary and some teachers may prefer one over another. Diacritical markings, indicating doubled consonants, vowel length and stressed syllables, differ from source to source and sometimes there is a discrepancy whether **e** and **o** are pronounced open or closed in unstressed syllables. Teachers should find an appropriate source that suits their needs.

While Sheil (2004), Colorni (1970) and Wall et al (2005) provide invaluable information on lyric diction, I have found that Adams provides a more intensive and detailed description of some Italian linguistic principles. He, for example, mentions the concepts of assimilation and *raddoppiamento sintatico*, while many other authors neglect to do so. Leslie De'Ath (2000) writes: "[W]ith the array of excellent texts that already exists in this area, Adams has succeeded in the challenging task of bringing an impressive quantity of new insights and approaches into well-trodden ground". The clarity and simplicity of Sheil and Wall's sources, however, make them an outstanding learning tool for someone who might be overwhelmed by the amount of detail that Adams provides. To compare these various sources in depth, Mahaney (2006) provides a comprehensive analysis of the sources in her doctoral dissertation. She found that 60 percent of the teachers surveyed utilised Wall's book, *Diction for Singers*. Mahaney's annotated bibliography of the various texts provides a useful description of the all the various sources in one publication. Based on her findings, she also provides recommendations for instructors of lyric diction.

In addition to diction textbooks, IPA transcriptions should always be utilised simultaneously. Retzlaff and Montgomery (2012), Coffin et al (1982) and Le Van (1990) provide transcriptions of the art song repertory, but I find the first to be most concise and easy to combine as a supplement to the texts of Wall, Sheil and Adams.

Nico Castel's transcriptions (1994, 1998, 2000) are a "juggernaut" in the transcriptions available for opera, as described by Mary Jane Phillips-Matz (1996) in a review for *Opera News*. His transcriptions are already utilised quite extensively in many universities and opera training programmes in South Africa and abroad, as an integral part of the learning process. Similarly to Adams and unlike other IPA sources, Castel also includes assimilation and initial consonant doubling in his transcriptions.

In South Africa, instructors should be aware of the influence that a student's mother-tongue or accent could have on their diction. Identifying these ten most frequently made mistakes and correcting them by using the tools, information and materials mentioned, would result in a significant improvement in Italian lyric diction.

Endnotes

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2 At North West University, the majority of singers' first language is either Setswana or Sesotho. While this is so, English or Afrikaans is the predominant language of communication with other students or lecturers. I have observed that many singers make mistakes in Italian pronunciation due to the nuances in English or Afrikaans and not always due to their first language.

3 Larsen (2008).

4 The following diacritical marks are used and employed in the following ways:

> ' indicates that the stressed syllable follows the mark

> : indicates a doubled consonant

Please note that, in this article, : does not indicate lengthened vowels, as is seen in some transcriptions.

5 Mozart,Castel (1998:321).

6 Tuccini (2013).

7 Mozart, Castel (1998:354).

8 Larsen (2008).

9 Coffin et al (1982).

10 Coffin et al (1982).

11 Puccini, Castel (1994:309).

12 Coffin et al (1982).

13 Coffin et al (1982).

14 Larsen (2008).

15 Puccini, Castel (1994:292).

16 Mozart, Castel (1998:337).

17 Mozart, Castel (1998:302).

18 Mozart, Castel (1998:390).

19 Mozart, Castel (1998:400).

20 Mozart, Castel (1998:286).

21 Mozart, Castel (1998:317).

22 Puccini, Castel (1994:272).

23 Puccini, Castel (1994:283).

24 Mozart, Castel (1998:161).

25 Mozart, Castel (1998:165).

26 Mozart, Castel (1998:148).

27 Mozart, Castel (1998:311).

28 Mozart, Castel (1998:148).

29 Mozart, Castel (1998:303)

30 Mozart, Castel (1998:302).

31 Wall (1990).

32 Puccini, Castel (1994:300).

33 Puccini, Castel (1994:273).

34 Sheil (2004:24).

35 Sheil (2004:26).

36 S. De Carlo (2011).

37 Adams (2008).

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