

## PRONUNCIATION

All teachers know that pronunciation is one of the most difficult aspects of learning – and teaching – English. In fact, it is often impossible to guess how a particular letter or group of letters in an unfamiliar word should be pronounced. This is because in English there is no correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. There are 26 letters in the alphabet and more than 45 different sounds. There are also sounds that do not exist in other languages. For example, in Italian the following sounds are absent: /θ/, /ð/, /ʌ/, /æ/, /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /ə/. Some letters are not pronounced at all, such as **k** in **knight**, **l** in **half** and **g** in **high**. They are “silent letters”.

Received Pronunciation (RP), i.e. “the pronunciation of that variety of British English widely considered to be least regional, being originally that used by educated speakers in southern England” (OED), is taken as a neutral standard.

In this dictionary, pronunciation is shown in the *International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)*, immediately after the headword between diagonal lines. The IPA symbols are included in a table in the introductory pages of the dictionary. When the standard American pronunciation significantly differs from the British, this is clearly indicated by the abbreviations BE and AE, as for:

- ▷ **advertisement** /əd'vɜ:trɪsmənt, AE ,ædvər'taɪzmənt/
- ▷ **dynasty** /'dɪnəstri, AE 'daɪ-/
- ▶ **1.schedule** /'ʃedju:l, AE 'skedʒʊl/

As far as American English is concerned, the dictionary follows the features of General American (GA), i.e. “a form of U.S. speech without marked dialectal or regional characteristics” (OUP). All headwords, including compounds, derivatives and English irregular forms, are accompanied by their phonetic transcription. The only exceptions are English acronyms and abbreviations, as well as variants and forms whose transcription can be found after another headword with the same pronunciation. In the Italian-English section, the transcription also shows the feminine and the plural forms of words, when there is a notable difference in pronunciation.

- ▶ **amico**, pl. -ci, -che /a' miko, tʃi, ke/
- biologo**, m.pl. -gi, f.pl. -ghe /bi'ɔlogo, dʒi, ge/

The position of the **stress** accent is the key to the pronunciation of many English words containing more than one syllable. If one knows which syllable the stress falls on, it is often possible to infer the pronunciation of the vowels. This is largely because the vowels of unstressed syllables in English are subject to reduction in length and sometimes complete elision (compare for example **human** /'hju:mən/, **humanely** /hju:'meɪnlɪ/ and **humanity** /hju:'mænɪtɪ/).

The **schwa** (ə) is a very common vowel sound that occurs in parts of words that are not stressed, like the “a” in **about** /ə'baʊt/ or the “e” in **minstrel** /'mɪnstrəl/.

In the dictionary, main stress is indicated by the mark ' before the stressed syllable, and secondary stress by the mark ,. The stress of a word can change depending on its position in the sentence. Of course, these possible changes cannot be recorded in the dictionary. Also, the dictionary does not account for regular phonetic features, such as stress shift in adjectives or modifiers.