
Comments on the paper “Typesetting Catalan texts with T_EX”

The interesting paper by G. Valiente Feruglio and R. Fuster on typesetting Catalan (*TUGboat* 14, no. 3, pp. 252–259) brings forth some spicy information about a language that is not widely known but is a legitimate member of the Latin family.

This paper sets forth another problem that is going to be more and more important as multilanguage facilities become available for more and more T_EX users: we all are attracted to make statements concerning languages for which we do not have sufficient supporting evidence or a specific competence (... starting with myself, since I am not immune from this “weakness”).

Valiente Feruglio and Fuster make two statements concerning italian that are wrong:

a) Note 4 on page 255: “... It differs from Spanish and Italian: in these two languages all combinations of ‘i’ or ‘u’ with another vowel are diphthongs.”

b) First paragraph on page 257: “... For instance, Latin INTELLIGENTIA derives into French *intelligence* and Italian *intelligenza*, while Latin SELLA derives into French *selle* and Italian *sella*. Then these two languages use the same orthography for two different phonemes.”

Statement a) can be easily corrected for what concerns italian by saying that “all combinations of *unstressed* ‘i’ or ‘u’ with another vowel are diphthongs.” T_EX does not know anything about stressing, especially in italian where stress accents are not compulsory, so that the imprecision of statement a) has no consequences for T_EX.

Statement b) is definitely wrong for what concerns italian, and I’d say also for what concerns french, but I leave the french issue to French speakers, since, although I speak fluent french, I am not a French speaker.

Italian orthography is a phonetic one and almost perfectly matches the phonemes of the language; although stress (tonic) accents are not compulsory and phonic accents are optional and very seldom used, although the two variants (voiced and unvoiced) of the letters ‘s’ and ‘z’ are not distinguished with different glyphs or graphemes, I’d say that italian spelling is perfectly adherent to the semantic value of the various phonemes. In other words the two variants of ‘s’ and ‘z’ don’t change the meaning of a word, just reveal the regional origin of the speaker. In any case these points have nothing to do with the “long l” phoneme (|ll|) and the “lateral palatal l” phoneme (|λ|): in italian the former is spelled ‘ll’ and corresponds to the catalan ‘ll’, while the latter is spelled ‘gli’ and corresponds

to the catalan ‘ll’. In conclusion the double ‘l’ in *intelligenza* and *sella* are pronounced exactly the same in italian, and it is not true that the same orthography is used for two different phonemes.

Ironically the typical italian trigraph ‘gli’ is present in Valiente Feruglio’s second family name; I would not be surprised if he discovered some Italian ancestors in his maternal genealogy. I found half a dozen Feruglio entries in the telephone directory of my city!

Of course these remarks do not invalidate the excellent paper by Valiente Feruglio and Fuster, and I warmly thank them for disseminating information on the catalan language that, apparently, received the attention it deserves only in this century.

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Comments on the comments: Typesetting Catalan texts with T_EX

*O Dio, la Chiesa Romana
in mani dei catalani!*
Pietro Bembo (secolo XV-XVI)

We appreciate the remarks by C. Beccari on our paper “Typesetting Catalan Texts with T_EX” (*TUGboat* 14, no. 3, pp. 252–259), and take the opportunity to make the statements therein more precise.

We agree with Beccari’s first statement in that all combinations of unstressed ‘i’ or ‘u’ with another vowel are diphthongs in Spanish and Italian. As a matter of fact, unstressed ‘i’ and ‘u’, in contact with a vowel, are semivowels (or semiconsonants) but they become full vowels when stressed, and therefore there is no diphthong when a stressed ‘i’ or ‘u’ is combined with a vowel.

The second statement made by Beccari, however, needs more clarification. Our statement that Italian uses the same orthography (ll) for two different phonemes (|ll| and |λλ|) is not well posed. It does not refer to the current italian spelling and pronunciation alone but in the context of its relationship to the evolution from Latin to modern languages.

Romantic languages differ in the way they spell and pronounce words derived from Latin, depending on whether the words derive from Classical Latin or from vulgar Latin. The solutions adopted by the