

# Short Hungarian Pronunciation Guide for Singers

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VOWELS			
written	pronunciation	example	resembles
a	ɒ	hat	very open Italian [ɔ]
á	aː	vár	bright German [aː]
e	ɛ	ez	German [ɛ]
é	eː	él	German [eː]
i	i	visz	German [i] but short
í	iː	víz	German [iː]
o	o	ok	German [o] but short
ó	oː	tó	German [oː]
ö	ø	öl	German [ø] but short
ő	øː	lő	German [øː]
u	u	ujj	German [u] but short
ú	uː	út	German [uː]
ü	y	üt	German [y] but short
ű	yː	tűz	German [yː]

CONSONANTS			
written	pronunciation	example	resembles
b	b	bot, képzés	German [b]
c	ts̃	cél, edzhet	German [ts] as in “Zorn”
cs	tʃ̃	csak, bridzstól, segítség	German [tʃ] as in “platsch”
d	d	dob, hétből	German [d]
dz	dʒ̃	madzag, ketrecben	
dzs	dʒ̃z̃	dzsessz, ácsból	like in English “jazz”
f	f	fa, szívtam	German [f]
g	g	gép, zsákból	German [g]
h	h	hó	German [h] as in “hoch”
j, ly	j	jó, lyuk	German [j] as in “Jause”
gy	ʝ̃	gyár, pintyből, adja	German [dj] in “Adjektiv”
k	k	kép, fogtam	German [k]

l	l	ló	German [l]
m	m	ma, színpad	German [m]
n	n	nem	German [n]
ny	ɲ	nyár, pinty	Spanish [ɲ] as in mañana
nk	ŋk	munka	German [ŋk] sank
ng	ŋg	hang	German [ŋg] as in Ungar
p	p	pipa, dobtam	German [p]
r	r	ró, balra	Flipped or rolled [r]
sz	s	szó, méztől	German [s]
s	ʃ	só, rúztól, község	German [ʃ]
t	t	toll, adhat	German [t], not aspirated
ty	c	tyúk, ágytól, látja, átnyúlik	German [tj] as in “Adjektiv”
v	v	vág, széfben	German [v]
z	z	zöld, mészből	German [z]
zs	ʒ	zseb, hasba	French [ʒ] as in “journal”

PRODUCTION OF THE HUNGARIAN CONSONANTS							
	bilabial	labio-dental	alveolar	post-alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
<b>plosive</b>	p [p], b [p]		t [t], d [d]		ty [j], gy [c]	k[k], g [g]	
<b>nasal</b>	m [m]		n [n]		ny [ɲ]		
<b>trillar</b>			r [r]				
<b>fricative</b>		f [f], v [v]	sz [s], z [z]	s [ʃ], zs [ʒ]			h [h]
<b>affricative</b>			c[ $\widehat{t}s$ ], dz [ $\widehat{d}z$ ]	cs [ $\widehat{t}ʃ$ ], dzs [ $\widehat{d}ʒ$ ]			
<b>approximant</b>					j/ly [j]		
<b>lateral approximant</b>					ly [j]		

## I. PRONUNCIATION RULES

### 1. STRESS (TONIC ACCENT)

That's easy! Hungarian words are always stressed on the first syllable. No exceptions, no but's ☺

### 2. VOWELS: LENGTH

Hungarian has no diphthongs, and most of the vowels are closed. All Hungarian vowels have a short and a long version. The length is signalled in writing with an accent above the vowel (or two accents above those with an "Umlaut".) Mind thus that these accents do not signal the stress!

*a – á, e – é, ü – ű, etc*

### 3. VOWELS: GLOTTAL STOP

Similarly to German, words that begin with a vowel have a light glottal stop at the onset. So, it's going to be German legato rather than Italian, I hope you don't mind...

### 4. CONSONANTS

#### a. Short and long

Hungarian consonants can be short or long, just like in Italian.

Long consonants are doubled in writing. In consonants consisting of two letters, in writing only the first consonant is doubled.

*ás (he digs) – áss! (dig!)*

*had (army) – hadd! (let!)*

*megy (he goes) – megygy (sour cherry)*

#### b. Partial assimilation

Partial assimilation occurs when a voiced consonant follows an unvoiced consonant or vice versa. It is not signalled in writing, it only affects the pronunciation, so you have to know when it occurs.

We call assimilation *partial* when a consonant becomes voiced or unvoiced according to the following consonant. Hungarian assimilation is regressive, which means the first of the two consonants involved will change.

*népdal ['ne:bdɒl]*

*azt ['ɒst]*

#### c. Total assimilation

We call assimilation *total* when the first of the two consonants will be pronounced like the second one.

Total assimilation can be signalled in writing; in that case you don't even need to know anything has been assimilated (one of the numerous suffixes the Hungarian language is rich in).

This would be an example of signalled total assimilation (although rather special as it is not regressive): *lélek (soul) + vel (with) = lélekkel [le:lɛk·ɛl] (with the soul)*. You don't need to worry about it as long as you don't want to learn Hungarian. You pronounce what

you see: [k·]

But then, unfortunately, total assimilation is often not signalled in writing, meaning you have to know it or ask me ☺

*elaludtam* [ˈɛlɒlut·ɒm]

#### d. Fusion

We call fusion when two written consonants are pronounced together as a third consonant. And, no, it is not signalled in writing. Sorry ... You might need a coach for that too, especially because fusion does not automatically occur, especially not in singing. But for the brave amongst you, here are the most important rules:

t+j	→	[c·]	<i>megújítja</i> [ˈmɛgu:ji:c·ɒ]
n+j	→	[ɲ·]	<i>menj</i> [mɛɲ·]
d+j	→	[ɟ·]	<i>adj</i> [ɒɟ·]
t+sz	→	[t͡s·]	<i>látasz</i> [la:t͡s·]
d+sz	→	[d͡s·]	<i>maradsz</i> [ˈmɒrɒd͡s·]
gy+sz	→	[t͡s·]	<i>egyszer</i> [ˈɛt͡s·ɛr]
t+s	→	[t͡ʃ]	<i>költség</i> [kølt͡ʃe:g]
d+s	→	[d͡ʃ·]	<i>vadság</i> [vɒd͡ʃ·a:g]

## II Examples

<b>Kodály: Túrót eszik a cigány (folk song)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>(translation S.G.)</b>
Túrót eszik a cigány, duba, <i>[tu:ro:t  ɛsik p ʈsiga:n duba]</i>	The gypsy is eating cheese,
Veszekedik azután, leba. <i>[vesɛkɛdik  pʌta:n lɛba]</i>	After that he becomes quarrelsome.
Még azt mondja pofonvág, duba, <i>[me:g pʌst moŋɟp pofonva:g duba]</i>	He even says he will slap my face,
Vágja biz' a nagyapját, leba. <i>[va:gja biz  p naɟapja:t leba]</i>	He should slap his grandfather (sooner than he will slap me)!
Csipkefa fa bimbója <i>[ʈʃipkefa bimbo:ja]</i>	The buds of the rose bush,
Kihajlott az útra, <i>[kihajlot·  pʌ u:trɔ]</i>	Hung over the road.
Rida-rida bom-bom-bom, <i>[rida rida bom bom bom]</i>	Rida rida bom bom bom,
Kihajlott az útra. <i>[kihajlot·  pʌ u:trɔ]</i>	Hung over the road.
Arra ment Jánoska, <i>[pʌr·p mɛnt ja:noska]</i>	Little Janos went that way,
Szakajt egyet róla. <i>[sɔkajt  ɛɟ·ɛt ro:lɔ]</i>	He picks one of them.
Rida-rida, bom-bom-bom, <i>[rida rida bom bom bom]</i>	Rida rida bom bom bom,
Szakajt egyet róla. <i>[sɔkajt  ɛɟ·ɛt ro:lɔ]</i>	He picks one of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, two folk songs...



## III Exercises

## III.1. Esti dal

Arany János <sup>2</sup> : Esti dal	Evening Song (Translation S.G.)
Erdő mellett estvé <sup>3</sup> dtem, Subám <sup>4</sup> fejem alá tettem. Összetettem két kezemet, Úgy kértem jó Istenémet:	Nightfall caught me next to a forest I put my coat under my head I folded my hands and asked my dear God:
Én Isteném, adjál szállást, Már meguntam a járkálást, A járkálást, a bújdosást, Az idegën földön lakást.	My God, give me a lodging I had have enough of wandering of wandering and exile of living in a foreign country.
Adjon Isten jó éjszakát, Küldje hozzánk szent angyalát, Bátorítsa szívünk álmát, Adjon Isten jó éjszakát.	May God give us a good night May he send us his holy angel May he encourage our heart's dream May God give us a good night

1. Read the poem and exaggerate the tonic accent on the first syllable.
2. Write the glottal stops in the text.
3. Underline the long consonants in the first verse.
4. Underline the long vowels in the second verse.
5. Can you find
  - a. total assimilation: 1x in verse 1
  - b. fusion: 1x in verse 2 and 4 in verse 4.

<sup>2</sup> János Arany: 1817—1882, was a Hungarian writer, poet, and translator. He's amongst the 5 most important Hungarian poets.

<sup>3</sup> In Hungary there are many dialects that use a so-called closed form of the [ɛ], here written as *ë*. In some dialects it is pronounced as [ø] while in others the open version (written *e*) is pronounced similar to an [a] while the closed one (written *ë*) remains [ɛ]. Kodály wanted to preserve this characteristic of the language, but most singers can't do it anymore, as the high / literary / theatre / Budapest / tv Hungarian doesn't make this difference. Feel free to ignore it...



<sup>4</sup> This is a "suba" ...

**III.2. Ne menj el**

Let's IPA this, I know you will like it ☺

Ne menj el (Folk song)	Don't go (Translation S.G.)
<p>Ne menj el, el ne menj, [nɛ mɛŋ·ɛl.....]</p> <p>Ne hagyjál itt engem! [nɛ 'hɔj·a:l.....]</p> <p>Mert ha itt hagysz engem, [.....]</p> <p>Bánatos lesz lelkem. [.....]</p>	<p>Don't go, don't go away,</p> <p>Don't leave me here!</p> <p>Because if you leave me here,</p> <p>My soul will turn sorrowful.</p>
<p>Bánatos lélekkel, [.....]</p> <p>Szomorodott szívvel, [.....]</p> <p>Egyedül hogy legyek, [.....]</p> <p>Nálad nélkül éljek? [.....'e:j·ɛk]</p>	<p>With a sorrowful soul,</p> <p>With a saddened heart,</p> <p>Alone how shall I be,</p> <p>Live without you?</p>
<p>Világon míg élek, [.....]</p> <p>Soha nem felejtlek, [.....]</p> <p>Visszajössz, vissza még, [.....]</p> <p>S velem maradsz mindég. [.....mɔrɔts̃.....]</p>	<p>Till I live on this world,</p> <p>I will never forget you,</p> <p>You will come back once</p> <p>And stay with me forever.</p>

### III.3 Ligeti

Read loud the following poems Can you feel the rhythm of the texts?

<b>Magos kősziklának (Folk song)</b>	<b>From a High Mountain Rock</b> (Translation Laurice Anna McGowan)
Magos kősziklának oldalából nyílik A szerelem orvosság.  Ki az én szívemet, gyenge termetemet mindenkor megújítja.  Aki a szerelmet soha nem próbálta, Csak álomnak alítja.	Deep in the crevice up on the high cliffs, blooms all-healing Love.  It is this blossom that ever freshens my weak heart and body.  He who has never tasted of love, calls it a mere dream.

<b>Bujdosó (Folk song)</b>	<b>The Fugitive</b> (translation S.G.)
Fölkelt már a csillag Lengyelország felé Magam is elmegyek, babám, arrafelé. Megvetették nekem a megfogó hálót, Megfogtak engemet mint egy utonállót  Lám, megmondtam, rózsám, ne szeress engemet mert Somogy vármegye <sup>5</sup> hajszoltat engemet A tömlőc feneke az én vetett ágyam annak a teteje takaró vánkosom.	The star has risen already and points to Poland, I am leaving as well that way, my sweetheart. They have thrown a net to catch me, And then caught me like a bandit.  Oh, my rose, I have told you not love me, because the whole county of Somogy is chasing me. My bed is made up in the depth of the prison, its ceiling is my blanket.

<b>Ligeti: Magány / Weöres Sándor<sup>6</sup>: Sej, elaludtam</b>	<b>Oh, I fell asleep</b> Translation S.G.
Sej, elaludtam, sej, elaludtam, állóvíz partján, állóvíz partján.  Füvön fektemben, ottan álomban nőtt liliomszál, nőtt liliomszál.  Le kéne tépni, mellemre tűzni, az én rózsámat kéne csókolni.  Sej, ellankadok, lassan bágyadok, holnap meghalok.	Oh, I fell asleep Oh, I fell asleep At the shore of a still water, At the shore of a still water.  While I was lying on the grass, there in my dream grew a lily grew a lily.  I should pick it, pin it on my busom, I should kiss my rose.  Oh, I am swooning, slowly languishing, dying tomorrow.



<sup>5</sup> Somogy county in Hungary.

<sup>6</sup> Weöres Sándor: 1913 – 1989, well known and much loved Hungarian poet, writer and translator. Kodály, Ligeti and Eötvös all set poems by Weöres. Many of his poems are set on music for children brilliantly by Kalácska.

### III.3 Ady Endre<sup>7</sup>: Fölszállott a páva (1907)

Look at the following poem. What is the rhyme scheme? Why do you think the first and the last verses are between quotation marks? Ady is called a symbolist. Find symbols in the text! What do you know about the political situation in Hungary in 1907? And now? Do you think Ady's poem has any topicality today?

Ady Endre: Fölszállott a páva	A peacock takes its perch (English by Sir Maurice Bowra)
<p>„Fölszállott a páva a vármegye-házra, Sok szegény legénynek szabadulására.”</p> <p>Kényes, büszke pávák, Nap-szédítő tollak, Hírrel hirdessétek: másképpen lesz holnap.</p> <p>Másképpen lesz holnap, másképpen lesz végre, Új arcok, új szemek kacagnak az égre.</p> <p>Új szelek nyögetik az ős, magyar fákat, Várjuk már, várjuk az új magyar csodákat.</p> <p>Vagy bolondok vagyunk s elveszünk egy szálig, Vagy ez a mi hitünk valóságra válik.</p> <p>[Új lángok, új hitek, új kohók, új szentek, Vagy vagytok, vagy ismét semmi ködbe mentek.]</p> <p>Vagy láng csap az ódon, vad vármegye-házra, Vagy itt ül a lelkünk tovább leigázva.</p> <p>Vagy lesz új értelmük a magyar igéknek, Vagy marad régiben a bús, magyar élet.</p> <p>„Fölszállott a páva a vármegye-házra, Sok szegény legénynek szabadulására.”</p>	<p>„A peacock takes its perch upon the county hall – A sign that freedom comes to many folk in thrall.”</p> <p>Let the proud, frail peacock, whose feathers daze the sun, Proclaim that to-morrow here all will be undone.</p> <p>To-morrow all will change, be changed at last. New eyes in new battles will turn with laughter to the skies.</p> <p>New winds will make laments in the old Magyar trees, While we await, await new Magyar mysteries.</p> <p>Either we all are fools, and to a man shall die, Or else this faith of ours will prove it does not lie.</p> <p>New forges and new fires, new faiths, new holy men, Either you'll come to life, or be nothing again.</p> <p>Either the ancient hall will fall from the flame's stroke, Or our souls will sit here, bound in the ancient yoke.</p> <p>Either in Magyar words new meanings will unfold, Or the sad Magyar life will linger as of old.</p> <p>„A peacock takes its perch upon the county hall – A sign that freedom comes to many folk in thrall.”</p>



<sup>7</sup> Ady, Endre: 1877 – 1919, Hungarian symbolist poet. From a Calvinist noble family from today's Romania, then Austria-Hungary. Journalist and poet. First publications in 1899. 1903-1912 relationship with Léda a rich, married Jewish woman. He visits Paris many times, later settles in Budapest. "Nyugat". He was a fervent critic of the backward state of affairs in Hungary and conservative nationalism.