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Ascoltiamo l'Italiano!

Il Quaderno di Sandrino




LISTENING TO YOUR COMPUTER IN ITALIAN WITH MICROSOFT EDGE BY SANDRO CUCCIA

I have discovered an incredibly useful resource for those wishing to have Italian (or any modern language) online articles read to them by their personal computer.



I am talking about **Microsoft Edge**, the *Windows* web browser that has replaced the aging *Internet Explorer*. Recently, *Edge* was introduced for the Apple Mac platform, so I thought I'd give it a try. FYI, I am not a Windows user, but do have access to a "virtual" version of Windows 10 on my Mac.

I noticed that there was audio read-back support based on some tools located at the top of the *Edge* application window. After establishing a few settings and preferences within the *Edge* application, I went to my Italian online newspapers, **il Corriere della Sera** (corriere.it), and **Il Giornale** (ilgiornale.it) and pulled up an article. I then clicked the tiny **Immersive Reader** icon  located on the right side of the website address bar at the top. A drop-down tool bar appears just beneath and click on the READ ALOUD icon located there (details coming)...


...and I almost passed out from the perfection that is the built-in Italian female voice reading the article to me! By the way, her name is Elsa. **IMPORTANT:** Elsa is a computer voice that comes as a file that needs to be downloaded and installed directly from within Edge and/or your Windows PC Settings panel.

KUDOS TO MICROSOFT! I've had a love-hate (mostly hate) relationship with Microsoft since way back in the early 80's when my IT career started at DuPont.

On the Mac, the quality of the Elsa Italian voice blew my socks off! It is orders of magnitude better than what I have heard on the native Apple Mac OS platform, even compared to the high-definition versions of the available voices for Italian. I was listening to Elsa read back an article on the *Corriere* website about how Italians are coping with the COVID-19 virus outbreak. My wife walked in and asked, "Who's that, your cousin Erica in Palermo?" (I think she actually thought I had a woman in my man-cave!) THAT's how good this voice is! I am now convinced that Elsa lives in a tiny condo inside my computer!

If you are running Windows 10 or Mac OS, you need to try this - see if it works for you.

CAVEAT: First of all, the spectacular results I talk about above was on the Mac. In my Windows installation, I was unable to obtain as high a voice quality, although it wasn't terrible. It's probably due to my own "virtual" installation of Windows 10. It may vary for you. Second, the audio read-back doesn't work on every content online. The underlying code of the website you are visiting must allow for the support of audio read-back. By the way, many sites (like **La Repubblica**) have their own built-in audio features for reading back many - but not all - articles. Notwithstanding, the *Edge* feature I am describing here is working fine for me on the **Corriere della Sera** and **Il Giornale** sites.

YOU SHOULD TRY IT! By the way, many other websites that display articles as well as blogs with articles should support read-back, but again, don't expect that every single one does. It's a bit inconsistent so you need to examine the articles you are interested in for the tell-tale signs that speech is supported. If speech is supported you will see a small open-book with speaker icon at the right side of the browser address bar .

I have some screenshots from *Edge* running on my Mac. For the most part, it looks identical to *Edge* on Windows with the exception of how you configure the voice settings. From what I can tell, at this time it doesn't appear that iOS devices support this feature even though the *Edge* app is available.



Continua...





SETTING UP LANGUAGE AND SPEECH IN EDGE.

First of all, you need to download from Microsoft the free Italian voice file (Elsa). Then you need to configure the read-back system to your needs.

MAC OS CONFIGURATION: In *Edge*, go to the the menu bar and select **Microsoft Edge > Settings**. Select LANGUAGES. If you haven't already done so, click on the ADD LANGUAGES button, and select the desired language. Make sure it sits below English in your installed languages list. Don't delete English or you risk running into user interface issues. Continue to step 1.

WINDOWS 10 CONFIGURATION: Go to your Windows 10 Settings panel and select LANGUAGE. In the Language panel on the right, make the necessary adjustments to activate the desired language and voice support. Continue to step 1.

USING VOICE READ-BACK FOR ONLINE ARTICLES:

1. Go to an Italian website such as **ilgiornale.it** or **corriere.it** and select a feature article to open it in its own page (you may need to click on the article's title).
2. If you see the “Enter Immersive Reader” icon  at the right end of the browser's address bar, you're in business! If you do not see the icon, then speech is not supported for that article.
3. Click the “Enter Immersive Reader” icon  and the article will reformat to all text that the voice can deal with. Advertisements and other frills are gone. The article photos will usually remain intact.
4. A drop-down toolbar will appear just below the address bar. You may have to simply hover the mouse cursor in that area or click on the page to force the bar to drop-down.



5. Examine the pop-down toolbar. Here, you will configure your version of *Edge* to support the language voice you choose. See the following steps.

6. With the drop-down bar showing, you will see a **READ ALOUD** button. This is what you have to click to get Elsa started. Click it, and she will begin to read the article to you in her mellifluous voice.

7. Also on the drop-down bar, notice the back-pause-forward buttons in the center. Just like your VCR, but without the flashing 12:00!

8. Not to be ignored, once you have clicked on the **READ ALOUD** button, on the right end of the drop-down bar, you will see a **VOICE OPTIONS** button (or 'person' icon in the Windows version of *Edge*) where you can change the read-back speed (very handy, indeed) and a drop-down menu for

selecting the actual voice.  I use **Jessa** for English, and of course **Elsa** for Italian.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you do not see VOICE OPTIONS, be sure you have first clicked on the READ ALOUD button described in Step 6. Also... once you have installed language support in Settings for two or more languages, *Edge* will automatically sense which language the article content is and will switch the voice language automatically. It's a beautiful thing!

Most likely, this document will change over time. Meanwhile, if you've made it to here and have more information about setting things up for language support - particularly on Windows - please share with me, and I can pass it on.