

Tracing Political Correctness in Bilingual English-Italian Dictionaries

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to investigate the attitude of three bilingual English-Italian dictionaries towards political correctness. One hundred words labelled as offensive in relation to ethnicity, sexual preference, physical/mental disability, appearance, religion and politics were randomly selected from the latest editions of five English monolingual learner's dictionaries and were examined in different editions of *Hazon*, *Ragazzini*, and *Sansoni*, starting from the first editions published in the 1960s and ending with the editions published in the first decade of the 2000s. The findings show that all together the three dictionaries trace a realistic picture of the evolution of political correctness from the 1960s; taken individually, however, they are not politically correct to the same extent. From a synchronic point of view, *Ragazzini2010* is the most politically correct; from a diachronic point of view, *Hazon1990* plays an important part in diffusing political correctness in the subsequent editions of the other dictionaries.

Keywords: bilingual lexicography, Italian, English, political correctness, offensive language.

*Dictionaries are the most important books that can
be written about language*

Hill (1970: 245)

1. Introduction

Not everyone agrees as to the origins of political correctness. It seems to have first appeared in American campuses during the 1960s-70s, when people started to question whether the USA was as open-minded, equal and free a nation as its Presidents claimed. Those were the years in which women, homosexuals, and African Americans, among many others, started to gain importance in society by demonstrating against the discrimination of 'the other'

and for the acknowledgment of their own civil rights. It has also been stated that political correctness was born in the 1980s, during Reagan's and Thatcher's periods in office, when the Anglo-American liberal Right fought obsessively for the depoliticisation of ideological matters such as morality and sexuality (Crisafulli 2004: 30). It was for many "the 1990s *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age" (Cameron 1995: 116). However, it is worth pointing out that for just as many, it was considered as "a regime to punish dissent and to stigmatize social heresy as the Inquisition punished religious heresy" (Buchanan 2001: 89). Indeed, as this philosophy started to attract the attention of the media, it became an object of criticism giving rise to a counter political correctness movement too¹. Certainly, we can say that the debate has been in full swing since the early 1990s.

As to the characteristics that made political correctness a unique sociolinguistic phenomenon, we can say that:

it [was] not imposed by some recognized authority like the Papacy, the Politburo, or the Crown, but [was] a form of semantic engineering and censorship not derivable from one recognized or definable source, but a variety. There [was] no specific ideology, although it focuse[d] on certain inequalities and disadvantaged people in society and on correcting prejudicial attitudes, more especially on the demeaning words which express them. Politically correct language [was] the product and formulation of a militant minority which remain[ed] mysteriously unlocatable. It [was] not the spontaneous creation of the speech community, least of all any particular deprived sector of it. Disadvantaged groups, such as the deaf, the blind, or the crippled (to use the traditional vocabulary), [did] not speak for themselves, but [were] championed by other influential public voices (Hughes 2010: 7).

Advocates of political correctness thus proposed to intervene on language by observing it from the form as opposed to the meaning (Cameron 1995: 156). Being *politically correct* meant using "the so-called sensitive form" of a word. Consequently, "speakers of American English were advised to use *woman* as opposed to *girl* (see Nuccorini, this volume); *hearing impaired* as opposed to *deaf*; in academic circles, *chair* as opposed to *chairman*; for third-person

¹ This essay is a linguistic analysis centered on analyzing the treatment of political correctness in three bilingual English-Italian dictionaries. The author is not espousing the political correctness movement in one way or the other.

pronominal usage, such forms as *he/she*, *[s]he*, or *they*” (Andrews 1996: 389). In this way, a standard for a new notion of adequacy and politeness in public discourse was created, regarded by many critics as a ‘coded language’ whose full comprehension depended on tacit or mutual understandings, since even the apparently familiar expressions seemed to require at least either a translation or an explanation.

If we are now all aware of what we can or cannot say in English, it is not only owing to the introduction of speech codes, guidelines, and brochures (see Hentoff 1992; Baroncelli 1996), but also to the role lexicography has had in spreading the ideology of political correctness. Even if it is considered descriptive, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) includes labels and explanations regarding the offensive nature of English words (see Brewer 2010), as many other English language dictionaries do, of course (see Card *et al.* 1984; Aman 1988-89; Norri 2000; Pinnavaia 2013; 2014). Yet only a limited amount of research has been carried out on the attitude to political correctness in dictionaries, and particularly in bilingual English dictionaries, where the need to explain the phenomenon is greater given that “an outsider will not grasp all the nuances: hence there is always a possibility of confusion” (Hughes 2010: 19). It is, therefore, the aim of this essay to begin to examine the attitude to political correctness in three English-Italian bilingual dictionaries. More specifically, the lexicographic treatment of one hundred offensive words, retrieved from a series of English monolingual dictionaries, will be observed in the *Hazon*, *Ragazzini*, and *Sanzoni*, starting from the first editions published in the 1960s or 1970s that mark the beginning of political correctness to the editions published in the 2000s, when political correctness was at its height. The investigation will not only attempt to uncover which of the three dictionaries is the most politically correct, but also to evaluate the extent to which the different dictionary editions record the evolution of political correctness in the fifty years from 1960 to 2010.

2. Methodology

One hundred words labelled as taboo/offensive/derogatory were selected from five English monolingual learner’s dictionaries;

² We are aware that the three labels point to various degrees of offence, but they all signpost a negative attitude towards usage (see Norri 2000).

namely, *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (3rd edn), *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (5th edn), *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (4th edn), *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2nd edn), and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (7th edn, hereafter OALD7). These editions were chosen as opposed to more recent ones, because their dates of publication had to coincide with the dates of the editions selected for the three bilingual dictionaries under survey. The English-Italian dictionaries chosen for examination comprise *Hazon* (1961, 1990, 2009), *Ragazzini* (1967, 1984, 1995, 2010) and *Sansoni* (1975, 1981, 1988, 2006) not only because they have been recognized as being “the best in the large group of bilingual dictionaries of comparable size” (Lepschy 1984: 150; Marellò 1989), but also because they were published in Italy. While fully aware that no dictionary is an island, we hypothesized that they might be less influenced by the English monolingual learner's dictionaries than might the bilingual dictionaries published in Britain or the USA, and thus more suitable for the investigation of the lexicographical treatment of English political correctness outside Britain and the USA.

For each dictionary, we chose the three or four editions covering the five decades: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As to *Sansoni*, we chose all four editions; as to *Ragazzini* the first, second, third, and fourth³; whilst for *Hazon*, which underwent enormous change between the first two editions published in the 1960s and the third in the 1990s, we chose the first, third, and seventh, even though we considered the third edition as being more appropriately the second⁴. Not only do these editions represent the lexicographical evolution of each dictionary but they also cover the fifty years –

³ Although this is not the latest edition of *Ragazzini* English-Italian dictionary, we could not examine the more recent editions because they were published outside the temporal scope of this research, which ranges from 1960 to 2010.

⁴ Although there were originally two editions of the *Garzanti Hazon* dictionary published in April 1961 and August 1962 by Mario Hazon, there are no clear distinctions between them. In 1990, under the auspices of Lucia Incerti Caselli, a whole new dictionary was published. For this reason, we have considered this publication as being actually the true second one. Since this edition was followed by a third one in 2003/2004, a fourth in 2005, a fifth in 2006, a sixth in 2007/2008, and a seventh in 2009, all published in the 2000s, we chose to examine the latter only.

from the mid-twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century – in which the attitude to language use in Britain and in the USA changed in a very significant manner.

As far as the selection of words is concerned, we decided not to analyse swear words (e.g. *You bastard!*), blasphemous words that vilify religion (e.g. *Christ!*), or indecent words that refer to intimate parts of the body and the body's functions and products (e.g. *fuck!*, *shit!*). This is not only because they are purely vulgar words and do not strictly-speaking violate political correctness, but also because diachronic variation in their usage is irrelevant since they have always "been prescribed by a particular culture as being off-limits" (Wajnryb 2005: 22). Instead, we decided to examine one hundred words concerning ethnic groups, sexual preference, mental and physical disability, appearance, politics and religion, which have become sensitive areas of discourse over the last six decades. In the light of this fact, we assumed the offensive nature of the words belonging to them would be pointed out in the more recent editions of the bilingual dictionaries as they are in the monolingual ones. We also assumed that the words would be treated differently in the earlier and in the later editions of each lexicographical work.

The words randomly selected from the monolingual dictionaries are subdivided as follows: 50 deal with ethnicity (*abo, black(a) moor, boy, chink, coloured, coolie, coon, dago, darkie, eskimo, foreigner, gook, greaser/greaseball, goy, gypsy, half-breed, half-caste, honky, Indian, injun, jap, kaffir, kike, kraut, Mick, Mr. Charlie, mulatto, native, negress, negro, nigger, oriental, paki, pikey, polack, red indian, redneck, redskin, savage, slit(ty)-eyed, spade, spic, taffy, trailer trash, tribe, uncle Tom, wetback, wop, wog, yellow*); 20 with mental and physical disability (*cretin, cripple, crone, deafmute, dumb, feeble-minded, freak (of nature), funny farm, gaga, geriatric, girl, hag, handicapped, idiot, imbecile, Jessie, retarded, specky, squit, subnormal*); 15 with sexual preference (*bulldyke, butch, dyke, fag, hag, faggot, fruit, gay, homosexual, nancy, pansy, ponce, poof, queen, queer*); 8 with appearance (*baldy, blonde, brunette, fatso, hunchback, lardass, midget, redhead*); and 7 deal with politics and religion (*banana republic, fenian, heathen, Jewess, popish, popery, yid*). While not covering the whole gamut of offensive words within the five semantic areas, they have been deemed a representative sample of words that are now totally stigmatized in British and American

English, proven by the usage labels accompanying them in the English learner's dictionaries listed above.

These words were then looked up in the English-Italian section of each dictionary and edition. We decided to examine this section only because it is the one that Italian learners normally consult for decoding purposes, i.e. the section to which they turn to understand the meaning of English words and therefore the section in which any offensive ones ought to be clearly stated.

3. Results

In this section, the findings of the analysis will be presented. Firstly, focus will be placed upon the lemmas accompanied by labels marking offensiveness in the more recent editions. Secondly, the labels and how they express offensiveness will be considered. Thirdly, the use of such labels, or different labels, in the earlier editions of each dictionary will be accounted for.

3.1. The lemmas

The first findings of the analysis revealed that 4 words out of the 100 looked up do not appear in any of the dictionaries. This is the case of *Mr Charlie* and *pikey* that offend ethnic groups, *bulldyke* that is rude about women's sexual preferences, and *jessie* that offends weak boys. Considering that *Mr Charlie*⁵ and *bulldyke*⁶ occur only once in the over 500-million word corpora of British English (*Collins Wordbanks*)⁷ and of American English (COCA)⁸ and that *jessie*⁹ and

⁵ "a name used by African Americans for a white man: US English, slang offensive" (OALD7 s.v. *Mr Charlie*)

⁶ "a lesbian who is thought to look very male or to act in a typically male way: offensive" (OALD7 s.v. *bulldyke*). However, while *bulldyke* is excluded, *dyke* is included.

⁷ The *Collins Wordbanks Online* corpus covers the British variety of spoken and written English from 1991 to 2005 and contains 550 million words (<https://wordbanks.harpercollins.co.uk/>) (last accessed October 2019).

⁸ The *Contemporary Corpus of American* contains 560 million words and covers the American variety of spoken and written English starting from the 1990s (<https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>) (last accessed October 2019).

⁹ "a man or boy who is weak or who seems to behave too much like a woman: British English, old-fashioned, offensive" (OALD7 s.v. *Jessie*).

pikey¹⁰ are very old-fashioned, it is not surprising that they have been excluded from the three bilingual dictionaries.

Considering the primarily didactic use of bilingual dictionaries which distinguishes them from the more descriptive nature of monolingual dictionaries (see Yong and Peng 2007: 18), we might have expected the exclusion of more lemmas from the former. Instead, it was a pleasant surprise to note that 92 of the 100 lemmas appear in all three bilingual dictionaries¹¹. This consistency across different works seemed already a step in the right direction towards lexicographical reliability.

3.2. The entries

The reliability of any dictionary must nonetheless depend first and foremost on the accuracy of its definitions. Owing to their didactic purpose, it is crucial that entries in bilingual dictionaries “be fully descriptive and furnish guidance in style as well as attitudes of the language community towards particular forms” (Al-Kasimi 1983: 88). In the case of words that belong to sensitive areas of discourse, it is particularly important that the translational equivalents be accompanied by labels too (Benson, Benson, Ilson 1986: 214).

Starting from the last editions chosen – *Hazon2009*, *Ragazzini2010*, *Sansoni2006* – our expectation to find labels expressing the offensive nature of the selected lemmas was satisfied with entries that were congruent in all three editions. Marked as offensive in all three editions are 30 words: 24 words regarding ethnicity (*abo*, *boy*, *chink*, *coon*, *dago*, *darkie*, *gook*, *greaser/greaseball*, *honkie/y*, *injun*, *jap*, *kaffir*, *kraut*, *native*, *negress*, *negro*, *nigger*, *paki*, *polack*, *redskin*, *spade*, *spic*, *wop*, *wog*)¹²; 3 words regarding religion and politics (*popery*,

¹⁰ “a name for a gypsy: British English, informal, offensive” (OALD7 s.v. *pikey*).

¹¹ Besides the 4 lemmas excluded from all three dictionaries, another 4 are excluded from either one or two: *Hazon2009* excludes *lardass*, *Sansoni2006* excludes *funny farm* and *Uncle Tom*, and both exclude *specky*.

¹² Of the 48 words belonging to ethnicity (not 50 because *Mr. Charlie* and *pikey* have been excluded), 10 are labelled as offensive in *Ragazzini2010* and *Sansoni2006* (*eskimo*, *goy*, *half-breed*, *half-caste*, *kike*, *Mick*, *redneck*, *tribe*, *wetback*, *yellow*); 1 in *Hazon2009* and *Ragazzini2010* (*coloured*); 4 in *Hazon2009* only (*trailer trash*, *Indian*, *Red Indian*, *slitty-eyed*); 3 in *Sansoni2006* only (*black(a)moor*, *oriental*, *Taffy*); 2 in *Ragazzini2010* only (*mulatto*, *Uncle Tom*); not offensive in any of the three are *foreigner*, *gypsy*, *coolie*, and *savage*.

popish, *yid*)¹³; 2 words regarding sexual preference (*fag* and *queer*)¹⁴; and one word regarding mental and physical disability (*crone*)¹⁵. As for the category of appearance, none of the words considered was found to be offensive in all three dictionaries¹⁶.

As the words listed above show, the ones that mostly capture the lexicographers' sensitivity concern ethnicity. Indeed, 50% of the lemmas belonging to this category were found in all three dictionaries to have a label warning about their usage.

TABLE I
The entries for *wog*

<i>Hazon (2009)</i> <i>s.v. wog</i>	<i>Ragazzini (2010)</i> <i>s.v. wog</i>	<i>Sansoni (2006)</i> <i>s.v. wog</i>
(fam. volg.) straniero (m.; f. -a); (spreg.) negro (m.; f. -a).	(Slang spreg.) negro, muso nero (spreg.)	(Br. spreg) persona f. di colore; (black) (sporco) negro m. (f. -a); (Arab) (sporco) arabo m. (f. -a); (oriental) giallo m. ; (Indian) (sporco) indiano m. (f. -a).

As we can see from Table 1, *wog* is not only labelled as being familiar or slang, but more importantly as *volgare* or *spregevole*.

¹³ Of the 7 words belonging to religion and politics, *banana republic* is labelled as offensive in *Hazon2009* and *Ragazzini2010*; *jewess* in *Hazon2009* only; *fenian* in *Ragazzini2010* only; *heathen* is not considered as offensive in any of the three.

¹⁴ Of the 14 words belonging to sexual preference (not 15 because *bulldyke* has been excluded), *bag*, *pansy*, *ponce*, *poof* are labelled as offensive in *Hazon2009* and *Ragazzini2010* only; *faggot* and *fruit* in *Ragazzini2010* and *Sansoni2006* only; *dyke*, *nancy*, and *queen* in *Ragazzini2010* only; not offensive in any of the three are *butch*, *gay*, *homosexual*.

¹⁵ Of the 19 words belonging to mental and physical disability (not 20 because *Jessie* has been excluded), there are 10 words that are not labelled as offensive in any of the three editions: *cretin*, *feeble-minded*, *freak (of nature)*, *gaga*, *bag*, *idiot*, *imbecile*, *subnormal*, *squid* and *specky*; instead *crone* is defined as offensive in all three, even though *Sansoni2006* does not use a label but the equivalent offensive translation "vecchiaccia"; *funny farm* and *geriatric* are labelled as offensive in *Hazon2009* and *Ragazzini2010* only; *cripple* in *Ragazzini2010* and *Sansoni2006* only, while *deafmute*, *dumb*, *girl*, *handicapped* and *retarded* in *Ragazzini2010* only.

¹⁶ Of the 8 words that belong to appearance, *baldy* and *lardass* are labelled as offensive in *Sansoni2006* only, while *fatso* in both *Hazon2009* and *Sansoni2006*.

These are the two labels that all three dictionaries normally use to highlight offensive words, notwithstanding the Italian translational equivalents' tone or register.

Indeed, if we turn our attention to the translational equivalents, we cannot but notice the choice to insert stylistically equivalent Italian translations that render the exact meaning of the English. All three dictionaries use the word *negro*, which is incidentally also highlighted as being *spregevole* in Italian too, both by *Hazon* and *Ragazzini*. The inclusion of usage labels for translational equivalents is, however, not common in the passive sections of our dictionaries, where English is the focus of the Italian users' attention. Register labels that qualify the Italian lemmas are instead more usual in the active sections, where they can also edify English mother-tongue speakers and establish what is polite or impolite language in Italian.

TABLE 2
The entries for *queer*

<i>Hazon (2009)</i> <i>s.v. queer</i>	<i>Ragazzini (2010)</i> <i>s.v. queer</i>	<i>Sansoni (2006)</i> <i>s.v. queer</i>
(fam. spreg.) finocchio (m.), frocio (m.)	(spreg) finocchio, frocio, checca (pop)	(colloq. spreg) (homo- sexual) omosessuale

Indeed, in Table 2, we can see how the same editions of *Hazon* and *Ragazzini* choose to translate *queer* with the equally offensive Italian equivalents *finocchio* and *frocio*, without including a label to stress their disrespectful nature. That *finocchio*¹⁷ and *frocio*¹⁸ are offensive terms in Italian is confirmed by the label (*spreg.*) in the active section of all three dictionaries.

While the labelling of Italian equivalents is not really the focus of this essay, it is nonetheless interesting and not to be underestimated when it comes to bilingual lexicography. It may in fact influence the

¹⁷ *Hazon* (2009): *s.v. finocchio*: "(fig. spreg.) (omosessuale maschio) fairy, queer, poof"; *Ragazzini* (2010) *s.v. finocchio*: "(spreg.) queer, fairy, poof, poofter, fag (USA)"; *Sansoni* (2006): *s.v. finocchio* "(spreg.) (omosessuale) queer, fairy, poof".

¹⁸ *Hazon* (2009): *s.v. frocio*: "(volg. region.) queer, pouf, poove, faggot, homo"; *Ragazzini* (2010) *s.v. frocio* "(region. spreg.) fairy, poof (GB), faggot (USA); *Sansoni* (2006): *s.v. frocio* "(region. spreg.) faggot, fairy, queer".

way some English terms are perceived and also explain the rather surprising consistency of the entries for words that are not labelled as offensive across the three dictionaries. This is the case with many lemmas that belong to the categories of mental and physical disability as well as appearance. Indeed, *cretin*, *feeble-minded*, *freak (of nature)*, *gaga*, *bag*, *idiot*, *imbecile*, *subnormal*, belonging to the former, along with *blonde*, *brunette*, *hunchback*, *midget*, and *redhead* belonging to the latter, are not labelled as offensive in any of the three editions.

Ragazzini (2010) s.v. cretin

1. (med, antiq) cretino
2. (slang) cretino; affetto da cretinismo

Sansoni (2006) s.v. cretin

(med. ant. estens.) cretino

Hazon (2009) s.v. cretin

cretino

As the exemplary entry above shows, *cretin* is simply translated with the equivalent *cretino* in *Hazon2009*, whilst in *Ragazzini2010* and *Sansoni2006* it is also qualified with a register label that points out an older and antiquated medical usage. *Ragazzini* also includes a secondary informal meaning. None of them, however, underlines its offensive nature. That *cretin* is not highlighted as being offensive in English may be because it is not qualified as such in Italian: in the Italian-English sections of the bilingual dictionaries, as in Italian monolingual dictionaries, e.g. *Grande dizionario Italiano* and *Treccani*, *cretino* is not labelled as offensive. The same can be said about all the Italian equivalents provided for the lemmas belonging to the categories of mental/physical disability and appearance. On the one hand, this consistent treatment across the active and passive sections of all three editions shows lexicographical reliability. On the other hand, it is symptomatic of a serious shortcoming in the contrastive analyses that should provide the foundations for bilingual lexicography. Unfortunately, it seems to point out that nothing much has changed since Snell-Hornby (1986: 216) claimed that bilingual lexicography “has been manoeuvred into a stereotypical pattern of translation equivalents”, which, as Zgusta (1984: 147) had already pointed out, clashes with the notion that cultures and concepts

must be viewed in their own terms, demanding a heuristic method of discovery procedure. A definitely lower sensitivity to political correctness in the Italian language and culture ought not to determine a similar attitude in English, particularly in bilingual dictionaries with English, which are still the most readily used language tool for foreign learners (Barbe 2001: 66). The failure to acknowledge the full range of offensive language in English seems indeed to throw light on the lack of systematic contrastive lexicological analyses with Italian not only across the three dictionaries, as we have seen so far, but also within each of them.

It is indeed difficult to understand why the three bilingual dictionaries should not all agree as to what is offensive in English. For every category analysed, major differences were in fact found, as footnotes 12 to 16 illustrate. The count of labels discloses that, to the 30 lemmas labelled as offensive in all three dictionaries, *Ragazzini2010* adds another 32, *Sansoni2006* 19, and *Hazon2009* 14. In sum, of the 100 lemmas examined, *Ragazzini2010* labels as offensive 62%, *Sansoni2006* 49%, and *Hazon2009* 44%. It is also striking that in the category of physical and mental ability, in which only one word (*crone*) is labelled as offensive in all three dictionaries, *Ragazzini2010* is the only work to label 8 out of the 20 lemmas in this category as offensive (i.e. *cripple*, *deafmute*, *dumb*, *funny farm*, *geriatric*, *girl*, *handicapped*, *retarded*). In sum, *Ragazzini2010* appears to be the most politically correct of the more recent editions of the three dictionaries. Whether it has always been the most sensitive will be seen in the next section, in which we will examine the inclusion and exclusion of the usage label *spregevole* in the earlier editions of the dictionaries.

3.3. The evolution of political correctness in the bilingual dictionaries

Before attempting to account for the evolution of political correctness in the three dictionaries, it is worthwhile pointing out that the 73 words labelled as offensive in at least one of the twenty-first century editions are subdivided as follows:

44 belong to the category of ethnicity

abo, *black(a)moor*, *boy*, *chink*, *coon*, *coloured*, *dago*, *darkie*, *eskimo*, *gook*,

goy, greaser/greaseball, half-breed, half-caste, honkie/y, Indian, injun, jap, kaffir, kike, kraut, Mick, mulatto, native, negress, negro, nigger, oriental, paki, polack, Red Indian, redneck, redskin, slitty-eyed, spade, spic, Taffy, trailer trash, tribe, Uncle Tom, wetback, wog, wop, yellow.

11 belong to the category of sexual preference

dyke, fag, faggot, fruit, hag, nancy, pansy, ponce, poof, queen, queer.

9 belong to the category of physical and mental disability

cripple, crone, deafmute, dumb, funny farm, geriatric, girl, handicapped, retarded.

6 belong to the category of religion and politics

banana republic, fenian, jewess, popery, popish, yid.

3 belong to the category of appearance

baldy, fatso, lardass.

Considering that only 27 of the 100 words are not labelled as offensive in any of the dictionaries (*blonde, brunette, bulldyke, butch, coolie, cretin, foreigner, feeble, freak (of nature), gaga, gay, gypsy, hag, heathen, homosexual, hunchback, idiot, imbecile, Jessie, midget, Mr. Charlie, pikey, redhead, savage, subnormal, specky, squat*), it is fair to say that even though the three twenty-first century editions may not be politically correct to the same degree, over all they are aware of offensive language.

3.3.1. The words labelled as offensive in the first editions

To check these dictionaries' sensitivity to bad language at the beginning of their existence, the above-mentioned 73 words were looked up in the first editions: *Hazon1961, Ragazzini1967, Sansoni1975*. Only 19 were found to have been labelled as offensive in at least one of the three: none in the categories of sexual preference and appearance, 2 in the category of physical and mental disability (i.e. *crone* and *girl*), 4 in the category of politics and religion (i.e. *banana republic, popery, popish*, and *yid*), and 13 in the category of ethnicity: *blackamoor, chink, coon, dago, darkie, gook, greaseball, jap, Mick, nigger, polack, tribe, wop*. Of the 19 words, *Ragazzini1967* labels 14, i.e. all except *banana republic, blackamoor, gook, greaseball*, and *yid*; *Sansoni1975* labels 13, but not *dago, girl, gook, greaseball, Mick*, and *Polack*, while *Hazon1961* labels 7: *coon, crone, dago, gook,*

greaseball, *popery* and *popish*. Like *Ragazzini2010*, *Ragazzini1967* appears to be more politically correct than the other dictionaries of the same period, although it is fair to say that *Sansoni1975* is not far behind and, moreover, unlike *Ragazzini1967*, it labels as offensive *blackamoor*, *banana republic*, and *yid*. But the first edition of *Sansoni* was, after all, published almost ten years after the first edition of *Ragazzini* and thus had more time to adjust to the trend of political correctness, which having dawned in the early sixties coincided with the publishing of *Hazon*'s first edition, thus explaining its limited record of offensive labels.

3.3.2. The words labelled as offensive in the second editions

It is starting from the second editions that a few more labels appear next to the words under scrutiny but as expected not to the same extent in all the categories. In the category of physical and mental disability there are none: apart from *crone*, labelled as offensive starting from the first edition of all three dictionaries and *girl* from the first edition of *Ragazzini* (the only dictionary in which it has been labelled as offensive since 1967), all the other words are labelled as offensive starting from the twenty-first century editions. The situation is similar in the category of appearance, with *fatso* being the only word labelled as offensive in *Sansoni1981*. In the category of religion and politics, there are only 2 words: *yid* in *Hazon1990* and *Ragazzini1984*, and *banana republic* in *Hazon1990*. In the category of sexual preference, the only 3 words labelled are *pansy*, *poof*, and *queer* in *Hazon1990*.

Within the category of ethnicity, which holds many more words currently considered as being offensive, the number of words that start out as offensive in the second editions is 18 and not surprisingly it is greater than in the other categories. Labelled as offensive starting from all the second editions are the 2 words *honkie* and *wog*. Labelled as offensive starting from either one or two of the second editions are 16 words. Starting with two dictionaries, we can find the words *kraut* in *Ragazzini1984/Sansoni 1981*, *kaffir* and *kike* in *Ragazzini1984/Hazon1990*. Starting with one dictionary only, we can find the words *yellow* in *Sansoni 1981*, *goy*, *injun*, and *spade* in *Ragazzini1984*, and *abo*, *boy*, *coloured*, *negress*, *negro*, *paki*, *redskin*, *slitty-eyed*, *spic* in *Hazon1990*.

From the above counts, we can therefore observe that of the 73 words labelled as offensive in the twenty-first century dictionaries, 24 started off as offensive in the second editions. Particularly interesting is that of those 24, *Hazon1990* labels as offensive more than half (13). Contrary to the situation described in section 3.3.1, where we saw that among the first editions, *Hazon* labels the least number of offensive terms, among the second editions, it labels the largest number. As for the former situation, also in this case the dates of publication play their part: unlike the second editions of *Ragazzini* and *Sansoni*, which were published in the 1980s, the second edition of *Hazon* was published at the beginning of the 1990s, which means that there is a gap of thirty years between the two editions. This may not only explain its heightened sensitivity to political correctness, but possibly its influence – or lack of – upon the third editions of the other dictionaries.

3.3.3. The words labelled as offensive in the third editions

It is obvious that all the words that *Hazon1990* labels as offensive continue as such in the last edition examined. Only one word, *kike*, surprisingly is not labelled as offensive in the 2009 edition. Indeed, in the 1990 edition the entry says:

Kike

(Sl. Amer. spreg.) giudeo, ebreo,

and in the 2009 edition it appears as:

Kike

(Sl. Amer.) giudeo, ebreo.

It is no small mistake that the term *spregevole* has been omitted in the label of the 2009 edition. It is unlikely that it was a conscious act, since *Hazon1990* was probably an important model for the other dictionaries in whose editions, published after 1990, *kike* is labelled as offensive. That *Hazon1990* may indeed have been a model for subsequent editions might be shown by the difference between the third editions of *Ragazzini* and *Sansoni*. Published in 1995, *Ragazzini* starts to label as offensive the same words that *Hazon1990* does, except for *boy*, *coloured*, and *slitty-eyed*. The third edition of

Sansoni, published in 1988, instead does not. *Sansoni* indeed fails to add any labels to *abo*, *boy*, *coloured*, *negress*, *negro*, *paki*, *redskin*, *slitty-eyed*, *spic* until 2006, by which time this fourth edition may have been influenced by both *Ragazzini* 1995 and *Hazon* 1990.

It could thus be argued that the lexicographical discrepancies between the third editions of *Ragazzini* and *Sansoni* depend upon the six-year gap in their publishing dates and upon the influence of *Hazon* 1990. It is important to point out, however, that the impact *Hazon* may have had on the other dictionaries was not determined by a new social and cultural attitude that it alone could register. The words labelled as offensive in *Hazon* 1990 did not become rude in the 1990s. *Coloured*, for instance, started out as being offensive in the 1960s, like all the other words listed above¹⁹:

Coloured was adopted in the United States by emancipated slaves as a term of racial pride after the end of the American Civil War. It was rapidly replaced from the late 1960s as a self-designation by *black* (see note at *black* *adj.* 3a) and later by *African-American*, although it is retained in the name of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In Britain it was the accepted term for black, Asian, or mixed-race people until the 1960s (OED s.v. *coloured*)

The importance of the entirely new *Garzanti-Hazon* published in 1990 is therefore not to be underestimated: it made a point of recording the social and cultural attitude towards offensive words that the other two dictionaries could easily have done earlier but did not.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this essay was to investigate the attitude of three bilingual English-Italian dictionaries towards political correctness. One hundred words – now considered offensive in relation to ethnicity, sexual preference, physical/mental disability, appearance, religion and politics – were examined in different editions of *Hazon*, *Ragazzini*, and *Sansoni*, starting from the first editions published in

¹⁹ Indeed, the words *abo*, *boy*, *coloured*, *negress*, *negro*, *paki*, *redskin*, *slitty-eyed*, *spic* are all described in the OED as being offensive starting from the 1960s or even earlier.

the 1960s and ending with the editions published in the first decade of the 2000s. By counting the usage labels *spregevole* or *volgare* next to the words in question in each edition of the passive English-Italian section of the three dictionaries, we found that all three works have evolved to account for politically correct language. Indeed, compared to the earlier editions, the number of words labelled as offensive in the later editions is much greater. Of the 100 words examined, it was found that 73 words are labelled as offensive in the twenty-first century editions. That is not to say, however, that these words started off as such in the 2000s: on the contrary, the analysis in the editions across the five decades highlighted the fact that 19 are labelled as offensive in the 1960s and 70s, 11 in the 1980s, 14 in the 1990s, and 29 in the 2000s. The overall gradual increase in labels in the span of fifty years of lexicography does indeed seem to reflect the negative attitude to offensive language that has grown in the West, especially in the category of ethnicity.

That words offending the origins of people are not only numerous in the dictionaries, but also marked as offensive starting from the 1960s, emphasizes how lexicography can give us an insight into peoples' social and cultural attitudes. Indeed, of the 44 offensive words regarding ethnicity, 13 are marked as such starting from the 1960s and 70s, 18 from the 1980s and 1990s, and 12 from the 2000s. These findings seem to confirm the hypothesis that it is in relation to ethnicity especially that political correctness came to be triggered at the end of the 1950s, as Capozzi (2018) argues, by a completely reversed sentiment towards colonialism, born out of guilt for the people living in the dominated areas of the world such as China, the Middle East, India, and Pakistan, which began to acquire political independence from the West. The consequent surge of clemency upon non-mainstream political, religious and sexual practices, which had been heavily mistreated before the 1960s, is also mirrored in the increasing number of words that the dictionaries mark as offensive over the decades. All together, the three Italian-English bilingual dictionaries therefore trace a realistic picture of the evolution of political correctness from the 1960s.

Taken individually, however, the findings have shown that they are not politically correct to the same extent. While all three dictionaries are equally extensive²⁰ by including roughly the same one hundred

²⁰ An extensive dictionary includes all the words that "ideally exist in the language" (see Béjoint 2010: 44).

words examined, of the three contemporary editions, *Ragazzini2010* is the most careful, labelling as offensive the words *cripple*, *deafmute*, *dumb*, *funny farm*, *geriatric*, *girl*, *handicapped*, *retarded* that the other dictionaries fail to pinpoint. It is the contemporary English-Italian bilingual dictionary that surely comes the closest to representing the linguistic sensitivity expressed in English monolingual learner's dictionaries. From a diachronic point of view, however, to confirm *Ragazzini* as the most politically correct would be unfair: our investigation brought to light the sensitivity of *Hazon1990*, which surely had an enormous impact upon the introduction of many more labels for offensive words in *Ragazzini1995* at the end of the twentieth century and in *Sansoni2006* at the beginning of the twenty-first. It is unfortunate, though, that in the twenty-first century, *Hazon2009* was overtaken by *Sansoni2006* and by *Ragazzini2010*, whose sensitivity to political correctness increased noticeably, especially towards the words that offend the physical and mental state and appearance of people as these are, after all, the domains that have more recently won protection in Western society. Clearly, the results obtained cannot be considered exhaustive. It is the author's intention to continue this project not only by extending the wordlist but also the investigation to other editions of the three dictionaries and to other English-Italian bilingual dictionaries. In the meantime, however, we would like to suggest that *Hazon*, *Ragazzini*, and *Sansoni* work more in concert so that Italian learners might be fully informed as to which words are offensive in English, regardless of the dictionary they choose to work with.

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