

## The Making of a Dictionary of False Anglicisms in Italian

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### Abstract

This article describes both macrostructural and microstructural features of a *Dictionary of False Anglicisms (DFA)* in Italian which is already in preparation. Starting from a definition of false anglicisms, the analysis focuses on the lexicographic and corpus-based criteria adopted for their inclusion in the dictionary. Particular attention is paid to the audience to which the dictionary is addressed. A product of this kind locates in the lexicographic scenario as a useful reference and pedagogical tool for linguists, translators, and learners.

### 1 DFA Users

The need for a lexicographic reference tool on false anglicisms was mentioned in 1974 by Chiarioni (1974: 85), who stated that: 'Sarebbe istruttivo [...] un vocabolario italie-inglese [...]'.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of research on the phenomenon of false anglicisms in Italian recently carried out by Furiassi (2003, 2005, 2006), a *Dictionary of False Anglicisms (DFA)* is now being prepared.

A dictionary focusing exclusively on such a limited area of Italian lexis will meet the scholarly interests of linguists. The *DFA* will also be useful to Italian speakers, Italian EFL learners and teachers, translators, interpreters, professionals, and native speakers of English.

Italian speakers will benefit from the use of this dictionary in that it will extend the lexical knowledge of the linguistic milieu in which they live, clarify this phenomenon of interference between Italian and English, and understand the ambiguities created by the use of false anglicisms in Italian. In particular, Italian EFL learners and teachers will find the *DFA* particularly helpful in verifying the identity of words which apparently look and sound English and which may sound awkward or even embarrassing if used in a native English environment. The dictionary also includes English equivalents of false anglicisms.

The *DFA* may also assist translators and interpreters in explaining meaning and uses of false anglicisms, especially English/Italian homographs, and help English native speakers understand the meaning of words 'adopted' from their language and creatively 'adapted' by a different language and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Lit. 'A little italie-inglese dictionary [...] would perhaps be instructive [...]'].

## 2 The linguistic Status of False Anglicisms

According to Furiassi (2003: 123), '[f]alse anglicisms are either formally or semantically different from the original English words from which they are supposed to derive, so that both an English native speaker, proficient in Italian, and an Italian native speaker, proficient in English, would recognize them in spoken and written registers'.

There are three fundamental types of false anglicisms which may be classified according to the linguistic processes from which they originate: autonomous compounds, compound ellipses, and semantic shifts. Autonomous compounds are non-English compounds with two elements that can be found separately in English, whose composite form, however, is a genuine Italian product. Such compounds are not used in native varieties of English (e.g. *record-man* < *record* + *man*). The ellipsis of an English compound can be formally found in English, though with a different meaning. After becoming lexical units independent of the English compounds from which they derive, such elliptical forms may hinder the full comprehension of the word. Even though the ellipsis of compounds is quite a common word-formation process in both English and Italian, some compound ellipses of English words are characteristic of the Italian language (e.g. *basket* < *basketball*). A false anglicism derived from a semantic shift is a word that may be encountered in English but that takes on a new meaning in Italian. The meaning given to such items strikes the ordinary English speaker as counterfeit (e.g. *mister* vs. *coach* or *trainer*).

## 3 Selection Criteria

In order to include false anglicisms in the *DFA*, several lexicographic and corpus-based criteria have been devised. The three lexicographic criteria are: A. A false anglicism must not be found as an entry or sub-entry in monolingual English dictionaries such as *CDAE*, *LDCE*, *Merriam-Webster*, *NODE*, *NSOED*, *OED*, and *WNW*. B. If an item is found as an entry or sub-entry in monolingual English dictionaries, it must have a different meaning in Italian. C. In order to qualify as a false anglicism, an item must also be found either in an Italian dictionary such as *Devoto-Oli*, *DISC*, *GDU*, and *Zingarelli* or in collections of neologisms and foreign words such as the *DEA*.

The three corpus linguistic criteria used to select false anglicisms are: D. A false anglicism should not be encountered in large-scale English corpora such as *BNC* or *BNC Web*, *BoE*, *ICAME*, and *ICE*. E. If an item is found in English corpora, it must have a different meaning in Italian. F. An item must also be found either in Italian newspaper corpora such as *La Repubblica* and *HF* or in Web resources such as *WebCONC*, *WebCorp*, and *Word Spy*.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas parameters A, B, D, and E must all be true at the same time, C and F can be applied alternatively, i.e. a false anglicism must be attested somewhere, whether it appears in

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<sup>2</sup> Although Sinclair (1991: 18) maintains that '[...] the language of newspapers is just one variety [...] and not a reliable sample of the language [...]', Italian newspaper corpora are felt to be most suitable to study false anglicisms since newspaper language is representative of a wide range of registers and is highly receptive and open towards linguistic creativity in general.

dictionaries or corpora.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, A and D apply to autonomous compounds which obviously do not formally exist in English (e.g. *recordman* vs. *record holder*). Finally, B and E concern compound ellipses (e.g. *water* < *water closet*) and semantic shifts (e.g. *box*).

The procedures followed in compiling the *DFA* word list are manifold and complex. Although the reliability of the list is based on the selection criteria, the final decision about the inclusion or exclusion of certain items depends to a certain extent on the lexicographer's intuition. Finally, since more elaborate computational tools and techniques may be developed, updated lexicographic resources may come into the market, and new corpora may be created, the number of items included in the final list may vary and/or increase.

#### 4 The *DFA* Word List

In the present state, the *DFA* contains a word list of 200 entries, listed in Table 1 below.

adventure man	day after	lift	script monitoring
after	doomwriter	lifting	sexy bar
after dark	doomwriting	living	sexy party
afterhour	dread	longseller	sexyshop
All Star <sup>®</sup>	duty	look maker	skiman
antidoping	eros center	Lamapark <sup>®</sup>	skin
autocaravan	Eurocity <sup>®</sup>	mail	ski stopper
autogol	eurogol	matwork	slip
Autogrill <sup>®</sup>	Euromight <sup>®</sup>	masise cooler	Slow Food <sup>®</sup>
autostop	far west	minibar	slowfox
babydoll	fitboxe	minibasket	smart bar
baby killer	fit dance	minivolley	smart shop
baby parking	fit yoga	miss	suite
baby pusher	flipper	myster	smoking
barwoman	fly and drive	montgomery	soft core
basket	flying junior	naziskin	soft title
bench	food valley	net shop	Soft White <sup>®</sup>
beach basket	fooling	new jersey	spacecake
beach tennis	forcing	night	speaker
beach volley	free climber	no global	Spider <sup>®</sup>
beauty	free shop	notes	splash football
beauty case	full	nude look	spot
beauty farm	full optional	open space	stage
beauty hostess	gadget	opinion maker	starter
bermuda	garden	optional	steady seller
blob	gin fizz	paralyzing	step
black note	ginger	peeling	stick
body	gin lemon	personal	stockhouse
bomber	gin tonic	personal cooler	stop and go
book	girl	pick up	strip
box	global	pile	stripman
boxer	go go girl	playout	stripwoman

<sup>3</sup> The reason for using corpora in lexicography is clearly stated by Sinclair (2003: 167): '[a] dictionary describes the vocabulary of a language or a coherent subset of a language. For each language or subset a set of texts can be assembled which provide evidence of the choices and combinations of choices that are made by the users of the language. Such a set of texts is called a corpus [...]']

boxer	go go girl	playout	stripwoman
camera car	gulf	pocket	stunt girl
camping	happy end	poker	talkman
Career Book <sup>6</sup>	hard discount	pole	taxi girl
carter	heliski	pony	telefilm
casting	hit	power drink	telexquiz
catch	hot club	power yoga	testimonial
city bike	hotline	pull	ticket
Citymatic <sup>6</sup>	infopoint	pullman	Ticket Restaurant <sup>6</sup>
clergyman	instant book	push up	tight
cocktail	instant movie	reality	tilt
compact	instant seller	recordman	toast
concept store	internet point	recordwoman	top
crack	jet society	residence	topless
crash film	jolly	Rimmel <sup>6</sup>	trench
crash movie	jumbo	Rollerblade <sup>6</sup>	under
cross	K-Way <sup>6</sup>	roll-on	volley
dancing	liberty	Scotch <sup>6</sup>	waker
dark lady	life combat	script girl	windsurf

Table 1. The *DFA* Word List

## 5 Macrostructure

Macrostructure has been described by Béjoint (2000: 11,12) as '[...] the result of the selection of 'words' through the use of various criteria [...]'. According to the principles recognized by Hartmann (1983: 7), a dictionary of false anglicisms in Italian may be considered as a 'segmental dictionary' since it deals with a 'restricted' area of the lexicon and is the result of a 'deliberate selection' made by the compiler.<sup>4</sup>

The *DFA* is descriptive since it records instances of false anglicisms found in dictionaries and in the press without any normative implication.<sup>5</sup> The dictionary has a synchronic approach in the sense that it does not have explicit etymological aims. However, some information about the origin of false anglicisms and about the formation processes involved in their coinage is included.<sup>6</sup>

Another essential feature, which is closely related to the audience to which the dictionary is addressed, is what Marellò (1989: 18) calls 'bidirezionalità', i.e. bidirectionality. The *DFA* will contain information typical of bilingual dictionaries, such as phonetic transcription and

<sup>4</sup> A range of synonyms for 'segmental dictionaries' has been put forward by Svensén (1993: 32), who uses the term 'restricted dictionary', and also by Landau (1984: 22), who uses the term 'special-purpose dictionary'. As Landau (1984: 22-25) argues, '[s]pecial-purpose dictionaries [...] may deal with etymology, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, usage, synonymy, offensive and taboo words, slang, dialect, neologisms, and many other subjects. [...] Collections of new words (neologisms) vary from flippant newspaper glossaries to extensive dictionaries with illustrative quotations documenting each new term'.

<sup>5</sup> Landau (1984: 32) maintains that '[a]ll dictionaries based on usage – and all competently done dictionaries must be based on usage – are descriptive'.

<sup>6</sup> According to Landau (1984: 101), '[t]he importance of etymology for historical dictionaries is beyond dispute. [...] Synchronic dictionaries, on the other hand, need not deal with etymology at all'.

translation. Finally, false anglicisms, at least the majority of them, are authentic Italian creations, which prevents lexicographers from classifying a dictionary of this kind as a collection of foreign words in the strict sense.

## 6 Microstructure

The *DFA* microstructure, i.e. the structure of each entry, includes 12 features: 1. spelling variants; 2. pronunciation in IPA transcription; 3. grammatical information; 4. usage labels related to semantic fields, 5. typology; 6. definitions; 7. mediating languages, if any; 8. date of first attestation; 9. typical collocations, if any; 10. real examples taken from newspaper corpora, if any; 11. English translation equivalents; 12. Italian synonyms, if any.

Special acronyms, abbreviations, and symbols are used to mark the characteristics of each entry feature. Acronyms are excluded from the dictionary, deserving separate treatment (e.g. SMS). Although eponyms were originally capitalized, the false anglicisms derived from them are listed in small letters, having become generic nouns (e.g. *carter*). Conversely, false anglicisms that the author has reason to believe constitute trademarks have been capitalized and identified by the label '@' (e.g. *Scotch@*).<sup>7</sup> In addition, false anglicisms which may be considered very recent neological formations in English are marked by an asterisk '\*' (e.g. *longseller\**).

A sample entry for the false anglicism *jolly* is shown below in Table 2.

**jolly** I Adzallu' E Adzallu' @ m EN SP TE CE -jolly joker- a. 'ciascuna delle due particolari carte da gioco presenti in alcuni mazzi e alle quali è possibile attribuire un valore particolare' 1918 *giocare il jolly* b. 'colpo di fortuna' 1923 *pescare il jolly* c. 'persona capace di svolgere funzioni diverse o di coprire più ruoli a seconda delle necessità' 1949 *fare da jolly* d. 'persona particolarmente socievole e allegra che anima feste di vario tipo' 1988 *essere il jolly, fare il jolly* e. 'tipo particolare di ricerca informatica che può essere effettuata digitando il simbolo dell'asterisco' 1990 *cameriere jolly* ex a. 'Trascorre le giornate a sbucciare le mele o a giocare a carte, con una cornacchia appollaiata sulla spalla; l'uccello dispettoso ogni tanto gli ruba il jolly. LR 1985 b. Questa volta, però, aveva pescato il jolly, il calciatore capace di fare la differenza. LR 1989 c. Un jolly da tirar fuori in tornei brevi come un Mondiale, in gare importantissime' CS 2003 d. È in piena forma l'onorevole Longo quando fa il jolly sodomazo e parla del suo partitino come di una compagnia di cialtroni-burloni. LR 1988 e. ?

<sup>7</sup> Neither the presence nor the absence of the label '@' should be regarded as affecting the legal status of any trademark or any company owner of a trademark included in the *DFA* word list.

Tr a. *joker, wild card* b. *lucky break, lucky strike* c. *all-purpose person, all-round substitute, all-rounder, factotum, jack-of-all-trades, multi-purpose person, swing man, utility man, witty player* d. *buffoon, clown, comic, fool, humorist, jester, joker, practical joker, prankster, trickster, wag* e. *wild card search*  
Syn a. *manca* b. *colpo di fortuna, combinazione fortunata, carta vincente, asso nella manica* c. *factotum, persona polivalente* d. *allegro, buffone, buontempone, burlone, celiene, giullare, mattacchione, pagliaccio, tipo ameno* e. ?

Table 2. A DFA Sample Entry

## 7 Conclusion

The work concerning the compilation and updating of the *DFA* is constantly in progress since new false anglicisms are being found and methodological improvements for the retrieval of new ones may be devised. In addition, stricter policies on the inclusion of entries may also be implemented, since some items in the word list have a very low overall frequency in the corpora examined.

It is hoped that the compilation of a dictionary of false anglicisms will make a significant contribution to the improvement in the use of English on the part of Italian speakers and learners. Although it accounts for a rather circumscribed area of the lexical contact between English and Italian, readers will hopefully be attracted by the complex phenomenon of false anglicisms which further confirms the influence of English on the Italian language and culture.

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© 1991-2004, Collins COBUILD  
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*WebCorp (WebCorp)*

© 1999-2003, Research and Development Unit for English Studies, University of Liverpool <http://www.webcorp.org.uk/>

*Word Spy (Word Spy)*

© 1995-2003, Logophilia Limited, McFedries, P. (ed.)  
<http://www.wordspy.com/>