

"causing someone to feel resentful, upset, or annoyed".

In the analysis, the 285 ethnophaulisms selected have been further classified according to three major criteria: (1) inclusion, (2) semantic relevance (ethnicity-related lemmas or senses of lemmas) and (3) offensiveness. In particular, semantic relevance and offensiveness have been assessed on the basis of the lexicographic data contained in effect labels, definitions, usage notes, and word origin, to evaluate whether and how the dictionary signals, and thus warns the user against, the racist power of ethnophaulisms.

4. The language of ethnic conflict in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

Based on the criteria mentioned in the previous section, three main groups of terms have been identified in the analysis of the English language of ethnic conflict in the dictionary. These groups include terms which are (1) included or excluded, (2) semantically relevant or irrelevant and (3) offensive, i.e., ethnophaulisms, or not offensive.

As concerns the first category, namely inclusion, as Figure 1 shows, the dictionary records 227 terms, which represent 80% of the 285 terms selected from Wikipedia's list of ethnic slurs.

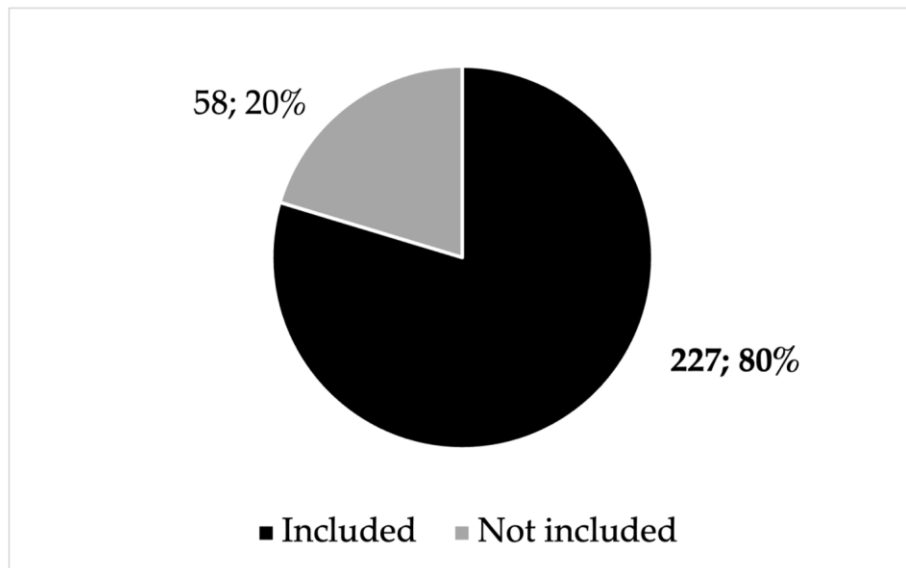


Figure 1: Terms included in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

Figure 1 shows that only 20% of Wikipedia's ethnic slurs (58 terms out of 285) are not recorded in the dictionary. These include, for example, *armo*, "a racial epithet" for "a white person of Armenian descent" (Dalton 2007: 139), *eight ball*, a name for "a dark-skinned black person" (Dalzell 2018: 261), *Leb, Lebo* or *Lebbo*, used derogatorily in Australian English to refer to "a Lebanese person, or any person from an Arabic background" (Dalzell and Victor 2013: 1375), and *nig nog*, used in British English to denote "any non-white person" (Dalzell and Victor 2013: 1580). As to their exclusion, it is possible to speculate that the dictionary does not record these ethnic slurs because they are no longer in use or because they are expressions confined within single varieties of English.

Regarding the second aspect, which is semantic relevance, as shown in Figure 2, only 48 lemmas, that is 21% of the terms included in the dictionary (227), do not present any pertinent ethnicity-related senses.

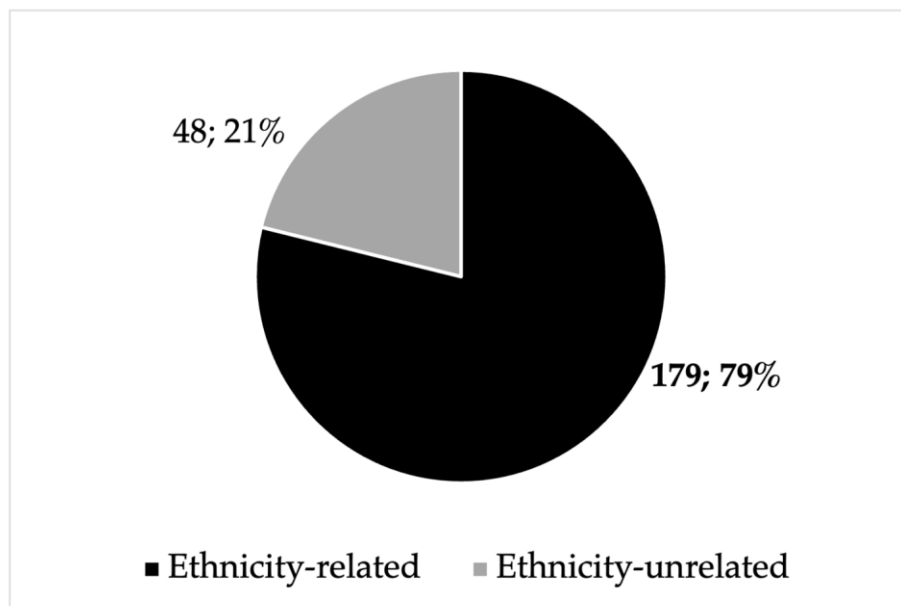


Figure 2: Ethnicity-related lemmas included in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

Semantically irrelevant or ethnicity-unrelated lemmas are mostly common nouns, some of which are polysemic, but the entries for them do not present any senses associated with nationality or ethnicity. Examples include the following lemmas which, according to Wikipedia's list of ethnic slurs (Wikipedia 2023b) target the ethnicity mentioned, although sometimes only in a variety of English: *ape* (US black people), *apple* (NAm native Americans), *banana* (NAm Asian people), *coconut* (US, UK, NZ Hispanics, or Latinos), *pancake* (Asian people), *snow-*

flake (US white people), and *teapot* (black people). Other interesting examples in this group are *goombah* and *shylock*. In the dictionary, **goombah** is not given as a US derogatory name for an Italian–American, as Dalzell (2018: 350) defines it, but only as an informal North American noun denoting "an associate or accomplice, especially a senior member of a criminal gang". Similarly, **shylock**, as an allusion to the Jewish moneylender in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, is only an offensive epithet for "a moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest", but it is not said to be an anti-Semitic slur, as it is often considered and perceived today (Rothman 2014).

As shown in Figure 2, the most important group of terms identified in the analysis includes 179 ethnicity-related lemmas, which represents 79% of the lemmas included in the dictionary. In particular, based on the usage information the dictionary offers about the discriminatory potential of these words or of one of their senses, 146 ethnicity-related entries are treated as ethnophaulisms, as Figure 3 illustrates.

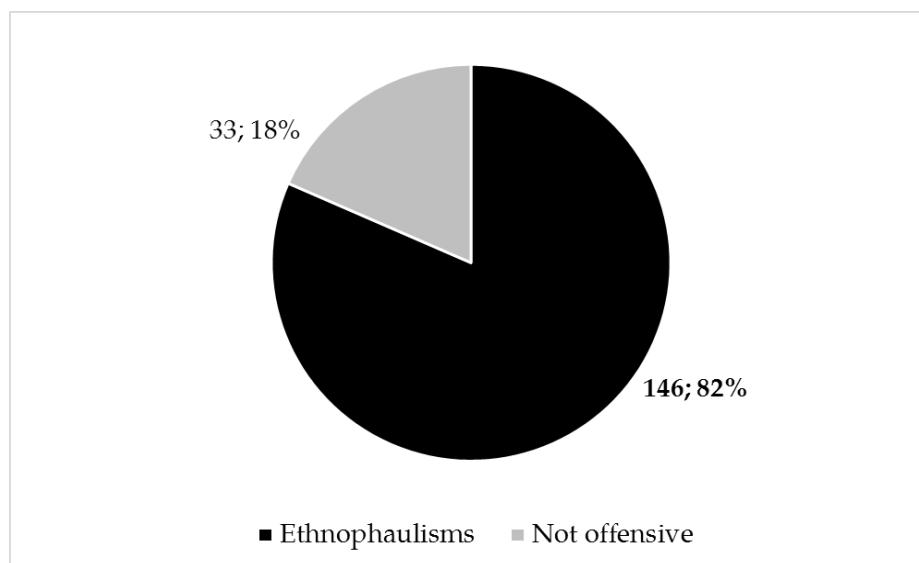


Figure 3: Ethnophaulisms in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

Ethnophaulisms represent 82% of the ethnicity-related lemmas. Thus, only 33 lemmas, the remaining ethnicity-related entries (18%), are not treated as ethnic slurs. Since potential offensiveness is not signaled, there is no indication in the dictionary of them belonging to the language of ethnic conflict. Instances of non-ethnophaulisms encompass terms like **ang moh**, used in Singapore English to refer to "A white person", **Indon**, an informal Australian noun for "A person from Indonesia", **Mr. Charlie**, which in African American usage means "A white

man", and also **rosbif**, an informal and humorous epithet originally used among French speakers to denote "An English person". As the examples show, although the senses of these entries are associated with ethnicity or nationality, since the dictionary does not provide any usage data about their potentially derogatory or offensive nature, users may not interpret them as ethnophaulisms.

To conclude this part of the analysis, before discussing the treatment of ethnophaulisms in more detail, it is worth highlighting that, overall, out of the total number of Wikipedia's ethnic slurs explored (285), the majority are not only included (80%) and with the relevant sense (63%), but more than half of them (51%) are treated as ethnophaulisms.

4.1 The treatment of ethnophaulisms

Concerning the treatment of ethnophaulisms in the dictionary, as Figures 4 and 5 illustrate, effect labels (L) are the major dictionary markers indicating offensiveness, either alone (108, 74%) or in combination with other sections of the entries (25, 17%), thus accounting for a total of 91% (L and L+). The combinations include label and definition (LD, 10%), label and usage note (LN, 5%), label, definition, and usage note (LDN, 1%), and label and word origin (LO, 1%). Moreover, to a limited extent, relevant usage information about offensiveness can also be found in definitions alone (D, 5%) and usage notes alone (N, 4%).

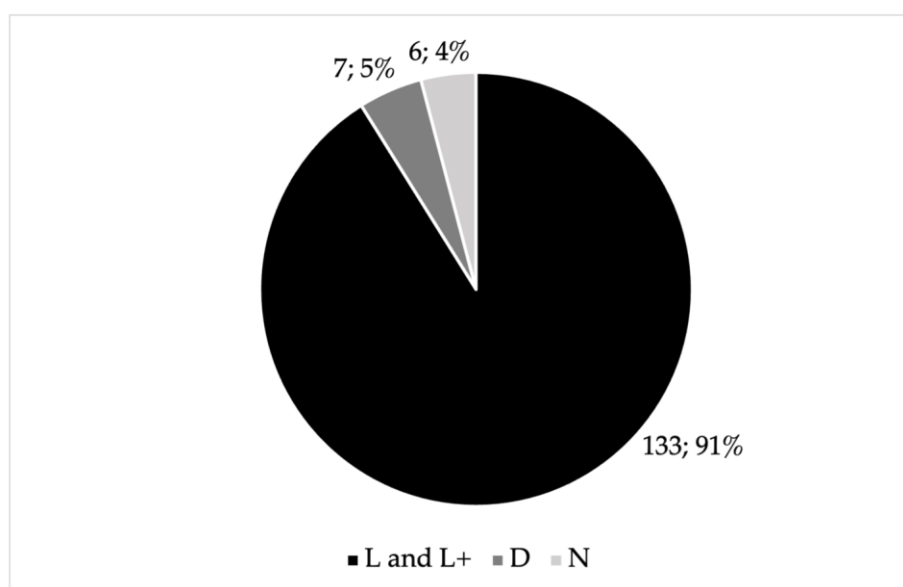


Figure 4: Markers of offensiveness in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

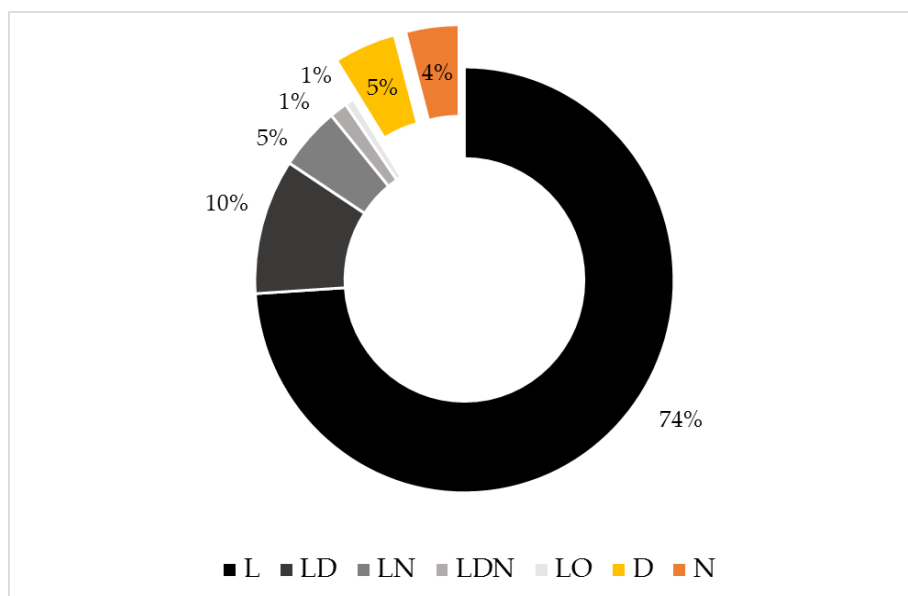


Figure 5: Effect labels and combinations in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

Effect labels are thus the first and most commonly used lexicographic information dictionary users find regarding offensiveness. Like all usage labels, they are highlighted in italics and placed at the beginning of the entry or of the sense they describe, depending on whether the lemma is monosemous or polysemous. Effect labels are assigned to 133 ethnophaulisms in the dictionary, and, as Figure 6 shows, they include 76 terms labeled *offensive* (57%), 50 terms labeled *derogatory* (38%), six presenting both labels (4%), and one labeled *derogatory* and *humorous* (1%). As regards the last-mentioned, the lemma is **gringo**, a noun characterized as derogatory and humorous meaning "(in Spanish-speaking countries and contexts, chiefly in the Americas) a person, especially an American, who is not Hispanic or Latino".

Going back to the two major effect labels, they can both occur with other usage labels, including temporal, stylistic, and geographical ones. Nevertheless, while *offensive* is not further specified, the *derogatory* effect of a term is also a matter of degree and frequency: on closer inspection, indeed, this label can be further qualified as *mainly derogatory* (10 occurrences) or *often derogatory* (8 occurrences), which are minor instances out of the total of 50 occurrences.

To cite some examples, the lemmas labeled *offensive* include **Abo** and **boong**, both meaning "an aboriginal person" in Australian English, **beaner** for "a Mexican or person of Mexican descent" in North American English, **bogtrotter** for "an Irish person", and **spook**, which presents an offensive sense labeled *US* and *dated* and meaning "a black person".

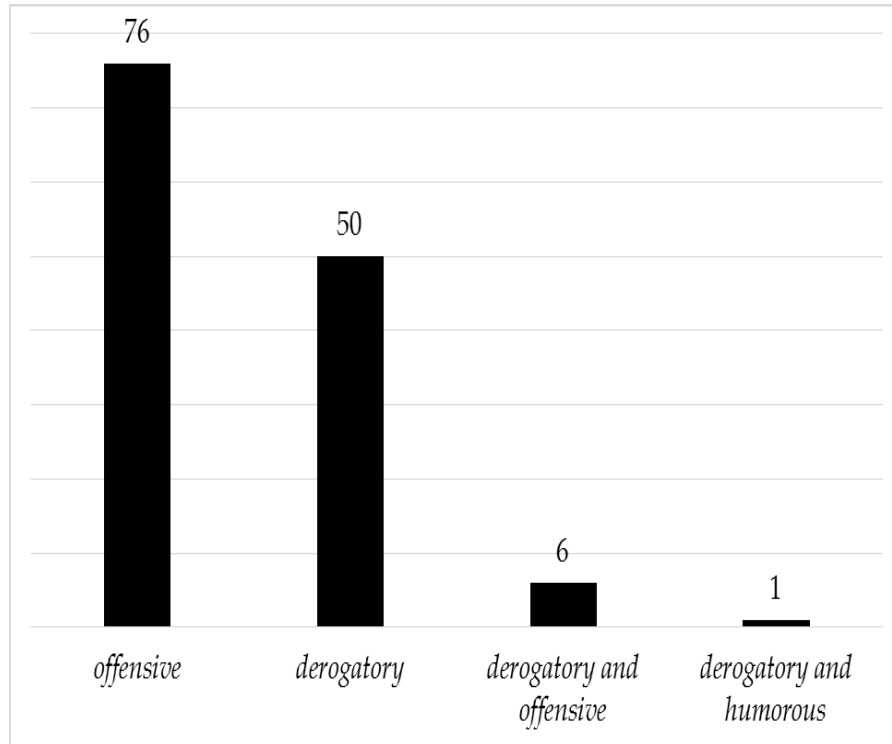


Figure 6: Effect labels in "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com

The lemmas labeled *derogatory* comprise **Argie**, an *informal British* expression for "a person from Argentina; an Argentinian", **goy**, which is used in informal language as "a Jewish name for a non-Jewish person", and **kraut**, an informal epithet for "a German". Moreover, *mainly derogatory* are, for example, **Limey** to name a British person and also **Jock**, **Paddy**, and **Taffy** meaning "a Scotsman", "an Irishman", and "a Welshman" respectively, all representing informal nouns "often used as a form of address". Labeled as *often derogatory* are, for instance, **seppo**, "an American person", and **pocho**, used in informal style for "a US citizen of Mexican origin; a culturally Americanized Mexican".

Another interesting subgroup of lemmas accompanied by effect labels are those defined as being both *derogatory* and *offensive*, including entries like **coonass**, **dothead**, **Jew boy**, **Rastus**, and **Uncle Tomahawk**. However, it must be clarified that in one entry only, i.e., the gendered **Jew bow**, meaning "a (typically young) Jewish male", is the *offensive* label not further associated with a geographical variety, which, in almost all cases, is US English. For example, **dothead** is said to be a slang, derogatory, offensive US term for "a person of South Asian origin or descent", while **coonass** is described as a dialect, derogatory, offensive US term for "a Cajun; a native inhabitant of Louisiana".

As shown in Figures 4 and 5, the second section warning the user against the discriminatory nature of these words in the dictionary entries is the definition, either alone (7 instances, 5%) or with other sections, namely usage labels (15 instances, 10%) or usage labels and usage notes (two, 1%). As to the marking of offensiveness in definitions only, the relevant information is always provided in brackets and corresponds to single labels, as in **frog-eater**, "especially (derogatory) a French person or a person of French descent", or it corresponds to longer usage descriptions as in **slant-eyed**, "(often used as an insult towards people of Japanese or Chinese origin)". When definitions reinforce the information also given in other sections, we can observe the following recurrent pattern in the phrasing of the descriptions: A/an + effect adjective + term for + a/an + ethnic adjective + person. The most frequently used effect adjective is 'contemptuous' in "a contemptuous term for" representing 59% of instances (ten occurrences out of 17), which always co-occurs with the label *offensive*, as in the entries for **Chink** (Chinese person), **coon** and **nigger** (black or dark-skinned person), **Jap** and **Nip** (Japanese person), **kike** and **sheeny** (Jewish person). Other effect adjectives in this phrasing pattern include *derogatory* and *offensive*, as in "A derogatory term for" and "An offensive term for".

The third section of the entry examined is the usage note, which, in the dictionary, is placed in its own box below the definition. This strategy includes instances in which the potential offensiveness is indicated in usage notes only (4%) or in usage notes combined with other sections, that is to say, combined with usage labels (5%) or with usage labels and definitions (1%). The usage notes in the dictionary vary in the quantity and quality of information offered: some focus on current usage only, while other notes, most of them, are more elaborate and also provide information relating to the origin of words.

For example, the note under **gypsy** states that "the word Gypsy is now sometimes considered derogatory or offensive and has been replaced in many official contexts by Romani or Roma, but it remains the most widely used term for members of this community among English speakers". More firmly, the note for **Indian**, examined in the sense "a member of any of the indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America, especially those of North America" and not in the sense "a native or inhabitant of India, or a person of Indian descent", states that this term and *Red Indian* "are today regarded as old-fashioned and inappropriate, recalling, as they do, the stereotypical portraits of the Wild West". In addition, the note claims that, although *American Indian* is well established, if possible, users should refer to specific peoples, and finally it mentions European colonization with Columbus's journeys to the Americas as the origin of this sense of **Indian**.

In other entries, usage notes combine with effect labels or with labels and definitions to warn users against offensiveness. Like the ones mentioned earlier, these usage notes also vary in length and in the quantity and quality of information. An example is the entry for **nigger**, which is labeled *offensive*, defined as "a contemptuous term for a black or dark-skinned person". Accord-

ing to the usage note (original emphasis):

The word **nigger** has been used as a strongly negative term of contempt for a black person since at least the 18th century. Today it remains one of the most racially offensive words in the language. Also referred to as 'the n-word,' **nigger** is sometimes used by black people in reference to other black people in a neutral manner (in somewhat the same way that queer has been adopted by some gay and lesbian people as a term of self-reference, acceptable only when used by those within the community).

Lastly, as Figure 5 shows, the analysis has shown that the dictionary once also signaled offensiveness in the word origin box. More specifically, the lemma **mounseer**, labeled *slang*, *derogatory*, *rare*, and *archaic*, is defined as "a Frenchman". The etymological section reads as follows: "Mid 18th century; earliest use found in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Representing an archaic pronunciation of French *monsieur* which survived as a colloquialism down to the 19th century, and occasionally appears in colloquial speech or in pejorative contexts with reference to English prejudice against foreigners".

5. Conclusions

As Gouws (2018: 215) states, "the era of Internet lexicography confronts lexicographers with challenges and opportunities to enhance the quality of the lexicographic practice and to produce dictionaries that help in satisfying the lexicographic needs" of their users. This is particularly true in users' wider sociocultural contexts, where ethnophaulisms prove to be one of those challenges and opportunities, especially for the "powered by Oxford" dictionary content, whose market-leading position cannot but influence the way Internet users deal with sensitive and taboo language issues in this digital age.

To summarize the main points and findings of this research, it seems reasonable to conclude that, despite the limitations of a pilot case study, the analysis shows that the online edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* hosted on the "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com quite clearly reflects the taboo nature of ethnophaulisms and quite consistently tends to warn the Internet user against the potentially racist and xenophobic power of these words. Indeed, the large majority of Wikipedia's ethnic slurs, that is 80%, is included in the dictionary (227/285), of which 79% are ethnicity-related entries (179/227), of which 82% are treated as ethnophaulisms (146/179).

Relevant and clear usage data tend to appear immediately before the definitions: labels indicate the either *offensive* or *derogatory* effect of the relevant lemmas or of one of their senses in 91% of entries, 57% of which define their use specifically as *offensive*, which means "causing someone to feel resentful, upset, or annoyed", according to the dictionary's own definition. Other important sections of the dictionary entries play a role too, although a minor one, either alone or combined with other sections. Definitions (16%) and usage notes (10%) con-

tribute to what seems to be a quite prescriptive approach of the dictionary to ethnophaulisms and, thus, to racial abuse, which might be interpreted as symptomatic of greater public awareness and sensitivity to possibly offensive racial references, while stressing the taboo nature of ethnophaulisms.

As Cloete suggests (2014: 482), the role of a dictionary, especially a general-purpose monolingual online dictionary, "is to reflect the language and thus the culture in which it exists, even if that culture is racist, sexist or in other ways politically incorrect". Cloete (2014: 848) notes further that "exclusion based on offensiveness is not acceptable", because it "might lead to ignorance and misuse". Moreover, as Cloete (2014: 484) claims, "to omit the racist words from a dictionary does not solve anything. Racist attitudes will not simultaneously be wiped out. By omitting these terms, the lexicographer loses the opportunity to warn the user against their hurtful nature". Based on preliminary findings, the online edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* hosted on the "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com website has not lost this opportunity.

However, to achieve the objective of the wider ongoing research project on the treatment of ethnophaulisms in "powered by Oxford" dictionary content, of which this pilot study is part, further research will be carried out on other "powered by Oxford" platforms, such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing search engines, and Microsoft and Apple preinstalled dictionaries, to compare findings across platforms in terms of dictionary content and user experience. In particular, given the clear and increasing tendency among Internet users to 'google' their language issues in this digital age (Jackson 2017: 540), special attention will have to be paid to the analysis of ethnophaulisms in the "powered by Oxford" Google's English dictionary (Ferrett and Dollinger 2021, Oxford Languages 2023). This study will be also further developed in order to cover the analysis of usage examples. In this regard, although they were excluded from this initial stage of research, it is relevant to mention that some illustrative examples are provided in 58 entries only, of which 30 are treated as ethnophaulisms, meaning that the dictionary does not exemplify the use of ethnic slurs in 80% of instances. This aspect seems to suggest an interesting tendency that deserves special attention, because examples are a fundamental and sometimes controversial lexicographic component of dictionary entries, as far as socioculturally sensitive issues are concerned (see Pettini 2021).

Endnotes

1. All lexicographic data cited and discussed in this pilot study are from the online edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* hosted on "powered by Oxford" Lexico.com (as of August 26, 2022), which is also referred to as simply "the dictionary" where applicable.

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