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(Article begins on next page)

THE TREATMENT OF GRAMMATICAL INFORMATION ON ANGLICISMS IN SOME ITALIAN DICTIONARIES

Virginia Pulcini, *University of Torino* (virginia.pulcini@unito.it)

Cristina Scarpino, *Independent scholar* (cristinascarpino@yahoo.it)

I. Introduction

In language matters, reconciling ‘norm’ or ‘code’ and ‘usage’ is far from simple. Often it is *not* the norm that informs usage, but rather the opposite, namely it is usage that informs the norm.¹ The dichotomy between these two poles is complex and therefore a mismatch may occur between the ‘rules’ given by reference grammars and dictionaries for a specific linguistic aspect, on the one hand, and authentic instances of real usage, on the other. A case in point is the integration of loanwords into a language, which involves the assignment of grammatical categories proper to the borrowing language to imported lexical items.

Narrowing the focus to non-adapted English loanwords – or Anglicisms – in Italian, this study considers the norms presented by Italian reference grammars

and dictionaries, and then compares them to the way in which Anglicisms are treated in authentic instances of Italian language use. The categories considered are the following: a) number inflection (i.e. inv., pl. -s); b) gender attribution (i.e. m., f., m. f.); c) grammatical class given to one-word and multi-word units (i.e. sost., loc. sost., agg., loc. agg., etc.).² The data consists of 1,005 entries (from A to I) of a forthcoming dictionary of Anglicisms. These were searched for in Italian corpora (*la Repubblica Corpus* and *itTenTen*) in order to trace their lexical and grammatical profiles. The Italian grammars considered are [Serianni \(1997\)](#) and [Dardano and Trifone \(1997\)](#). The reference dictionaries include monolingual usage dictionaries ([Zingarelli 2016 \[ZING\]](#), [Devoto and Oli 2016 \[DO\]](#), [Sabatini Coletti 2013 \[SC\]](#), [GDU/GRADIT 2007 \[GDU\]](#)) and bilingual Italian-English dictionaries ([Oxford-Paravia 2010 \[OP\]](#), [Picchi 2016 \[PIC\]](#), [Ragazzini 2016 \[RAG\]](#) and [Oxford Study 2012 \[OS\]](#)).³

The working hypothesis of the present study is that grammatical information recorded in present-day Italian monolingual and bilingual usage dictionaries can be placed halfway between norms (when given by grammars) and usage (retrievable from language corpora). The main reason seems to be that actual usage is far from consistent and therefore dictionaries, in the attempt to record usage, often include information that contradicts the norms given by grammars. Additional reasons may be that hard-and-fast reference norms are limited and that this area of Italian lexis is subject to constant innovation.

2. The grammatical treatment of Anglicisms in Italian grammars and dictionaries

Dictionaries are traditionally considered as tools of linguistic codification together with grammars. Yet, their role appears to be that of ‘linguistic mediators’ between norm and usage.⁴ In fact, as will be shown below, the data emerging from Italian dictionaries offers a rather variable blueprint in the grammatical treatment of English loanwords.

The norms presented by grammars and dictionaries concerning number, gender and orthographic form of Anglicisms will be analysed in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, and then a countercheck will be carried out with the grammatical categories attributed to them in language use, based on a word list of 1,005 non-adapted English loanwords from a forthcoming dictionary of Italian Anglicisms (section 4). To start with, it must be pointed out that whereas the category of number is well-illustrated and codified in Italian grammars and dictionaries (although fluctuation exists among authors), gender is usually dealt with by Italian grammars but not by dictionaries, and word class assignment is dealt with by neither Italian grammars nor dictionaries, with some rare exceptions ([RAG 2016](#)).

2.1. *Number*

Plural formation of foreign substantives is normally well-analysed and codified by Italian grammars. [Serianni \(1997\)](#) states that there is no doubt about older, assimilated loans, which remain invariable.⁵ He adds that the English plural ending -s may be maintained in Italian when neologisms are introduced, or when the speaker wants to 'evoke' the exotic character of certain places or situations. He also points out that, because the -s plural inflection is typical not only of English but also of French, Spanish and Portuguese, it is therefore felt by users as an acceptable way to signal the plural of a foreign word.

A slightly more prescriptive view on this matter is expressed by [Dardano and Trifone \(1997\)](#), who state that foreign loans should generally remain invariable, whereas the ones which are not yet integrated form the plural according to the rules of the respective donor languages. They provide a further specification signalling a 'deviation' from the rule of the invariable plural especially in newspaper discourse. Finally, they propose the following working solution:

Il plurale invariato degli anglicismi entrati in italiano sembra la regola più semplice e più consigliabile, almeno in generale. Tuttavia, una scelta diversa, tendente a riprodurre la forma del plurale inglese, può essere talvolta giustificata dalla specifica situazione comunicativa: è il caso, per esempio, di un testo di carattere decisamente specialistico, nel quale compaiono anglicismi tecnici estranei alla lingua comune. ([Dardano and Trifone 1997: 190](#)).⁶

Variation signalled by grammars is also mentioned by dictionaries, although criteria are not concordant.⁷ Here follow some quotations taken from the introduction of selected dictionaries:

Gli esotismi sono di norma qualificati come invariabili per il numero, tranne quando, anche nell'italiano, si sia diffuso l'uso del plurale della lingua d'origine. (GRADIT, xli).⁸

Per quanto riguarda il plurale, il criterio che abbiamo seguito è quello di fornire, per ogni parola straniera, il plurale della lingua di origine affiancato da esplicite indicazioni sul plurale usato in italiano. I forestierismi sono per la maggior parte usati in italiano come invariabili, ma, soprattutto in parole provenienti da lingue romanze, l'invariabilità può convivere con l'uso del plurale originale. ([Devoto and Oli 2010, Prefazione, vii](#)).⁹

Le parole di origine e struttura non italiana sono generalmente considerate, in contesti italiani, come parole invariabili [...]. Poiché tuttavia può essere necessario od opportuno in casi specifici far uso delle forme flesse in lingua originale, il vocabolario segnala i plurali o i femminili

di quelle parole che possono porre dubbi al lettore. (ZING, Avvertenze: sezione morfologica).¹⁰

Whereas GRADIT does not rule out the possibility that the original plural form may become established in the recipient language, the criteria established by DO and ZING are very much in line with the rules given by grammars. No indication for number is given by SC but examples lead to the same criteria adopted by DO and ZING. The same applies to the Italian-English dictionaries consulted, which provide much the same grammatical information given by Italian monolingual dictionaries (from which they normally derive). However, the number of Anglicisms recorded in bilingual dictionaries is usually more limited because English entries are placed in the English-Italian section and because foreign words “are included when they appear to have gained full acceptance in the Italian language.” (RAG 2016: Guide to the Dictionary). Since a user of a bilingual dictionary is normally interested in finding a translation equivalent, in order to check either the meaning or the currency of an Anglicism in Italian the same user would consult a monolingual Italian dictionary.

To conclude, as far as number is concerned, the criterion adopted by the reference tools of the Italian language, that is, grammars and dictionaries, is to keep the singular form also for the plural. This rule is justified by the fact that the -s plural inflectional marker is alien to Italian, which, in any case, has an invariable plural for several words (e.g. *la città/le città*, *la diagnosi/le diagnosi*, etc.).

2.2. Gender

In contrast to the category of number, the information given about gender assignment to loanwords is dealt with only indirectly by grammars, normally in the paragraphs devoted to gender of Italian words, as shown in the following extracts:

Secondo la terminazione, sono di genere maschile [. . .] i nomi terminanti in consonante, per lo più di origine straniera: lo sport, il bar, il gas, il tram, il film; ma vi sono anche forestierismi terminanti con la consonante e di genere femminile: la gang, la holding. (Dardano and Trifone 1997: 170).¹¹

Sono inoltre quasi tutti maschili i nomi, per lo più di origine straniera, terminanti in consonante: il bar, il rock, lo sport, il tram, ecc. (Serianni 1997: 79).¹²

In sharp contrast with grammars, the guidelines given by dictionaries with respect to gender assignment are the following:

[...] sono indicati la categoria grammaticale e il genere con cui la parola è correntemente usata nell'italiano. (GRADIT, xli).¹³

I *termini stranieri* (tedeschi, spagnoli, arabi, slavi, francesi) accolti nella nostra lingua compaiono come lemma secondo la classificazione grammaticale che ne danno i più aggiornati strumenti lessicografici della lingua di origine; abbiamo poi specificato l'uso che se ne fa in italiano. Troveremo quindi: plot s. ingl., in it. *s.m.*; broker s.ingl., in it. *s.m. e f.* (Devoto and Oli 2010: vi).¹⁴

[...] il vocabolario segnala i plurali o i femminili di quelle parole che possono porre dubbi al lettore. (ZING, Avvertenze: sezione morfologica).¹⁵

All quotations implicitly refer to usage, in spite of differences in the theoretical approach: GRADIT favours the use of the equivalent word in Italian, DO and SC present the English norm and then Italian usage, while ZING only indicates how the word is used in Italian.

2.2.1 Gender and number in *plot*, *broker* and *compilation*. To illustrate differences, the grammatical information given to *plot*, *broker* and *compilation* by the selected Italian monolingual dictionaries is shown (Table 1).

As far as *plot* is concerned, all dictionaries follow the norm given by grammars, that is, loanwords ending in a consonant are masculine. Conversely, in the entry for *broker*, GDU and SC treat it as masculine, whereas DO and ZING also include usage information, that is, mark it as both m. and f. as a word referring to jobs or roles that can be done or acted by both sexes. As for

Table 1. A comparison between the grammatical labels given to *plot*, *broker* and *compilation* by GDU, DO, SC and ZING.

GDU	DO	SC	ZING
plot s.m.inv. ingl.	plot s. ingl. (pl. <i>plots</i>), in it. s.m., invar.	plot s. ingl. (pl. <i>plots</i>); in it. s.m. inv. (o pl. orig.)	plot [vc. ing.] s. m. inv.
broker s.m.inv. ingl. + comm.	broker s. ingl. (pl. <i>brokers</i>), in it. s.m. e f., invar.	broker s. ingl. (pl. <i>brokers</i>); in it. s.m. inv.	broker [vc. ing.] s. m. e f. inv.
compilation s.f. inv. ingl.	compilation s. ingl. (pl. <i>compilations</i>), in it. s.f., invar.	compilation s. ingl. (pl. <i>compilations</i>); in it. s.f. inv. (o pl. orig.)	compilation [vc. ingl.] s. f. inv.

compilation, dictionaries follow their own usage norm, whereby a loanword can be feminine in Italian, especially when it is close to a feminine equivalent in the recipient language (*compilazione, raccolta*).

Also for number attribution we may notice that the four dictionaries follow the grammatical norm, marking all items as invariable. SC is the only one signalling that the original plural may be used for *plot* and *compilation* but not for *broker*. This dictionary, then, proves to be closer to usage than the other three.

In conclusion, regarding grammatical categories DO and SC start from the English norm and then provide information about the use of the lemma in Italian. GDU isolates grammatical tips regarding the English plural in the etymological section. ZING provides etymological information, but only for some lemmas it indicates that the original plural may be adopted (*blue chip* loc. sost. f. inv., pl. ingl. *blue chips*). Since this was not included in previous editions we may conclude that this dictionary is now paying more attention to usage. This applies especially to compounds, albeit inconsistently.

Bilingual dictionaries provide gender assignment in each entry included in the Italian-English sections but the number of Anglicisms is limited. Table 2 shows that *plot* is not included in any of the selected dictionaries, while *broker* is included as only masculine by PIC and as both masculine and feminine by RAG. *Compilation* is given as a feminine noun by all dictionaries except for OS that does not include it.

Fluctuation in gender assignment in grammars and dictionaries probably derives from the fact that English has no grammatical gender – apart from rare exceptions – and gender in Italian is assigned during the borrowing

Table 2. A comparison between grammatical labels given to *plot*, *broker* and *compilation* by PIC, OP, RAG and OS.

PIC	OP	RAG	OS
plot: not included in the It-En section	plot: not included in the It-En section	plot: not included in the It-En section	plot: not included in the It-En section
broker: <i>nm</i> broker	broker: not included in the It-En section	broker (ingl.) m. e f. inv. (Borsa, fin.) broker	broker: not included in the It-En section
compilation <i>nf</i> compilation, (mus, anche) olio, medley	compilation f. inv. (<i>raccolta</i>) compilation	compilation , f. inv. compilation (record)	

process. In most cases dictionaries adhere to the Italian norm, either attributing masculine gender to loanwords ending in a consonant or attributing the same gender as the Italian equivalent. Anglicisms ending in -ion and -ty, for example, are feminine because they correspond to Italian -ione and -tà (e.g. *compilation*, *raccolta*; *devolution*, *devoluzione*; *high society*, *alta società*). Variation also relates to the ‘age’ of the loanword: well-established Anglicisms such as *weekend* are consistently treated as masculine (*il weekend*, m.), causing gender shift in the Italian equivalent itself (*il fine settimana*).

2.3. Grammatical class

So far it has emerged that in lexicographic practice the grammatical treatment of Anglicisms is not homogeneous. This tends to increase when grammatical class is assigned to compounds which can have different orthographic forms, that is, two separate elements (e.g. *baby sitter*), a solid or hyphenated graphic unit (*babysitter*, *baby-sitter*).¹⁶ Needless to say, the orthographic form (hyphenation) of compounds is variable in the English language itself (Bauer 2003) and it often diverges in Italian with respect to the English source word (e.g. It. *all inclusive* vs. Eng. *all-inclusive*).

Italian grammars do not deal with the orthographic forms of compound Anglicisms, which is discussed elsewhere by Pulcini (2002; 2008). In lexicography the orthographic form of a lexical item, although it may seem incidental, is crucial for the lexicographer when the grammatical category is to be assigned, and, even before, when a variant is to be selected as headword: the unbroken and hyphenated variants, as a single unit, will be considered as nouns or substantives; the two-word variant will be considered as ‘locuzione’ (‘phrase’, see Note 2) or compound. The following examples illustrate the divergent treatment of compounds in dictionaries:

DO	SC	ZING
airbag	air bag, airbag	airbag
bebop	bebop o be-bop	be-bop
blue jeans	blue-jeans	blue-jeans
check-point o checkpoint	checkpoint	check-point
fast food	fast-food	fast food
ferryboat	ferryboat	ferry-boat

Thus, the processes of *lexicalization*, by which two grammatically related elements become one and the same unit, and *lemmatization*, that is, the selection of a form as entry-word or lemma, are closely interrelated.

3. The case of *email*

The case of *email*, which epitomises the three categories discussed above, namely number, gender and orthographic form, is worth discussing. Although in English its orthographic form varies,¹⁷ in Italian dictionaries, as shown in Table 3, the hyphenated form is normally the lemmatized one, though ZING registers only the unbroken form. As for number there is consensus on its being invariable, though ZING indicates the English plural *e-mails* for meaning B (*messaggio*). As for gender, GDU indicates feminine gender for both the mass meaning (electronic mail) and the specific meaning (e-mail message); DO indicates feminine and masculine, without any meaning specification; SC indicates masculine for both senses and finally ZING specifies that email is feminine for the meaning of electronic mail and feminine or (rarely) masculine for the meaning of email message. ZING is the most precise dictionary in this respect, as it records morphological fluctuations (feminine and masculine, when feminine and masculine/for which meaning, invariable or plural/for which meaning, noun and adjective).

Table 3. The entries of *email* in GDU, DO, SC and ZING.

GDU	DO	SC	ZING
e-mail s.f.inv. + inform. ... posta elettronica messaggio inviato tramite posta elettronica (accorc. Imail)	e-mail s. ingl., in it. s.f. o m., invar. ~ Posta elettronica Messaggio inviato tramite posta elettronica.	e-mail s. ingl. inv.; in it. s.m. inv. • inform. Servizio di posta elettronica effettuato tramite Internet; messaggio, lettera inviata • a. 1991	email A s. f. inv. • posta elettronica B s. f. o (raro) m. inv. (pl. ingl. <i>e-mails</i>) • messaggio inviato con la posta elettronica SIN. mail C in funzione di agg. inv. • (posposto a un sost.) relativo alla posta elettronica: <i>messaggio e-mail</i> ; <i>ti mando il mio indirizzo email</i>

Concerning the entries of *email* in bilingual dictionaries (Tables 4 and 5) the following observation can be made. According to grammar, *email* should be masculine, invariable and spelt as an unbroken unit (*email*) as it is a well-integrated loanword in Italian. In the opposition between norm and usage, dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, follow grammar only for number but tend to follow usage both for spelling and gender: the hyphenated form is preferred with respect to the solid one (the prevalent English form is recorded as headword only by the OS). As for gender, *email* is generally attributed feminine gender by monolingual dictionaries and by the OS, whereas the other bilingual dictionaries indicate masculine gender as the first option. In particular OP and RAG treat *email* as feminine when it refers to the system (meaning 1) and as masculine or feminine when it refers to the message (meaning 2). The choice made by OS, that of placing *sf* before *sm*, is noteworthy, because it differs from the other bilingual dictionaries but is closer to monolinguals and authentic use. In fact, in our data *email* is far more frequently used as *f.* than *m.*

Table 4. The entries of *email* in PIC and RAG.

PIC		RAG	
Sezione ingl/it	Sezione it/ingl	Sezione ingl/it	Sezione it/ingl
e-mail /i:meil/ <i>n</i>	not	e-mail, email	e-mail f. o m. inv.
1 [U] posta elettronica	included	n. (Internet)	email, e-mail:
• e-mail address		1 [U] posta elettronica; e-mail:	indirizzo e-mail.,
indirizzo di posta elettronica;		e-mail address,	email address:
e-mail message		indirizzo e-mail; 2	Te lo mando
messaggio		[U] (messaggi di)	via e-mail, I'll
di posta elettronica,		posta elettronica;	e-mail
mail (coll)		e-mail (pl.); mail	it to you.
2 [C] messaggio inviato		(pl.)	
per posta elettronica,		3 messaggio di	
e-mail, mail (coll)		posta	
• rich e-mail e-mail		elettronica;	
con messaggio vocale.		e-mail; mail	

Finally, PIC and RAG indicate *mail* as a possible ‘colloquial’ form for *email message*. We may also add that both RAG and OP also include *mail* as an entry word in the Italian/English sections as a synonym of *e-mail* in Italian, although this represents an Italian deviation from the English norm.¹⁸ Since it is a problematic point, RAG inserts a usage box “email o mail?” in which students are reminded that *mail* is an uncountable noun in English and should not be confused with the countable *email* when referring to a message:

Table 5. The entries of *email* in OP and OS.

OP		OS	
Sezione ingl/it	Sezione it/ingl	Sezione ingl/it	Sezione it/ingl
1. e-mail I. n. 1 (<i>medium</i>) posta f. elettronica, e-mail f.; 2 (mail item) messaggio m., e-mail m. e f. II modif. [<i>address, message</i>] di posta elettronica, e-mail	e-mail I f. inv. e-mail; II m. e f. inv. (<i>messaggio</i>) e-mail; III agg. inv. Indirizzo ~ e-mail address	email (<i>anche</i> e-mail) ► <i>sostantivo</i>	email (<i>anche</i> e-mail) ► <i>sf, sm (sistema,</i> <i>messaggio)</i> email

Nota d’uso

mail o e-mail?

In inglese il messaggio di posta elettronica è chiamato unicamente *e-mail* ed è quindi errato usare in questo caso la parola *mail*: *I’ll send you an e-mail*, **ti mando una e-mail** (non *I’ll send you a mail*). **Mail** è un sostantivo non numerabile che denota la posta in generale, fatta di lettere, e-mail, pacchi e simili: *Did we get any mail today?* **abbiamo ricevuto della posta oggi?**

PIC and OS, on the contrary, do not include *mail* in the Italian word-list. We may conclude that RAG and OP are closer to authentic usage than PIC and OS. By adding a usage box, RAG makes the best possible choice, that is, accounting for usage in both languages but also warning the user whenever there is a clash in usage in the two languages. In conclusion, the Zanichelli family of dictionaries (ZING and RAG) appear to be the most detailed as far as grammatical information is concerned.

4. The Data

The data that informs the forthcoming dictionary of Anglicisms consists of a sample of 1,005 entries from A to I. [Figure 1](#) shows the distribution of grammatical classes. The great majority of the entries (86.42%) are substantives (sost. and loc. sost.). The next class is that of adjectives (agg. and loc. agg.). Note that items may belong to more than one class (usually noun and adjective). The class of abbreviations, however small, is worth considering.

[Figure 2](#) shows the distribution of number in nouns and compound nouns. Our data confirms that the great majority of English loanwords is used as invariable (98.85%), in accordance with the above-mentioned rules of Italian

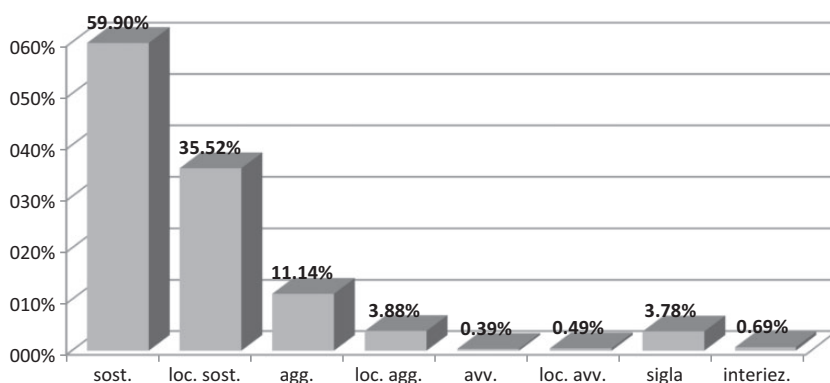


Figure 1. Grammatical classes of entries from A to I.

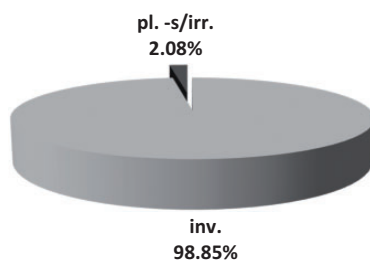


Figure 2. Number of entries from A to I.

grammars and dictionaries. Some countable items are treated both as invariable and as English regular plurals (with -s inflection). However, with reference to number, the small proportion of plurals does not only represent cases of loanwords imported as singular, to which it ‘was necessary’ to add a plural form, but cases which are borrowed directly as plural nouns, such as *commodities*, *assets*, *chips*, *corn flakes*, *comics*, *dreadlocks*, and *hot pants*. In some cases the singular does not even exist for the same meaning, for example, a *chip* (in poker) is different from *chips* (potato chips). In other cases the Anglicism denotes referents that are more frequently used in the plural, for example, *commodities*, although the singular *commodity* is also used. The same can be said for *agreement/agreements*, *fan/fans*, *file/files*. Therefore singular and plural original forms are part of the same borrowing process. Data shows that the -s plural inflection is on the increase in the use of Anglicisms in Italian, perhaps due to the growing competence in English which leads to the application of the source language rule as a form of hypercorrection. If this trend continues, it is an example of a norm emerging from usage, that we could phrase as follows: “If a word refers to a plural referent or entity, the original plural is maintained” (see 2.1 above).

As far as gender is concerned, [Figure 3](#) shows that the majority of Anglicisms take masculine gender. Although the dominant gender is masculine, confirming the norms given by grammars and dictionaries, a good number of Anglicisms (14.61%) take feminine gender. As was explained above (2.2.), no mention of feminine gender is given in grammars and dictionaries; the given norm is that gender assignment should be based on common usage. Looking at the feminine Anglicisms in our word-list, we can see that many correspond to a feminine equivalent in Italian such as *band*, *beauty-farm*, *breakdance*, *business class*, *deadline*, *devolution*, *escalation*, *gang*, and *home page*. When the word is the abbreviation of a compound, the criterion is the same: *chat* is f. because it is short for *chat line* (la linea chat); *flat* f. from ‘la tariffa flat’; *fanzine* is f. ‘una rivista per fan’, although *magazine* is m.; *fiction* is f. perhaps by analogy with ‘la serie televisiva’; *holding* is feminine because it is associated to ‘l’azienda’. The category m.f. contains items that can refer to both men and women such as names of jobs, including also *baby-sitter* and *baby-pusher* to be ‘politically

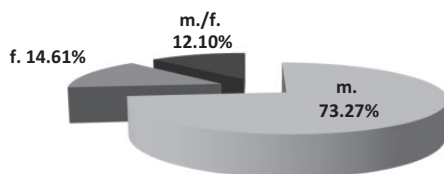


Figure 3. Gender of entries from A to I.

correct', although *baby-sitters* are normally women and *baby-pushers* are normally boys. Another problem that emerges from the data is that acronyms too have gender when they are used as substantives, for example, *il* B2B m. (il mercato, il commercio), *il* CD m. (il disco), *la* CPU f. (l'unità), *il* DNA m. (l'acido), *l'ADSL* f. (la linea), *una* FAQ f. (una domanda) but *il/la* CEO. Yet, gender assignment is not consistent. For instance, AIDS is often treated as m. (possibly associating it with the masculine word *virus* in Italian), but also as f. (la sindrome), although only occasionally. Other cases are totally inconsistent, fluctuating between masculine and feminine, for example, *biotech*, *camcorder*, *camera car*, *cheese cake*, *chill out*, *clip*, *copy*, *cover*, *demo*, *docufiction*, *dream team*, *dual band*, *easy listening*, *email*, *emoticon*, *farm*, *fashion*, *fee*, *golden share*, *graphic novel*, *happy hour*, *headline*, *hi-tech*, *holding*, *intelligence* and *internet*.

As for orthographic forms and the attendant choice of word class, our forthcoming dictionary has adopted the following criterion (see examples below): when different forms for the same lemma occur frequently enough in our corpus data, these will all be recorded in the entry and the headword will be the most frequent one. In this case we can say that it is language use that provides the norm.

after hours, after-hours, after hour

it. [after'awars] loc. sost. m., agg. inv., avv. 1980

airbag, air bag, air-bag

it. [er'bæg] sost. m. inv. 1973

bisex, bi-sex

it. [bi'seks] agg. inv. 1973

black bloc, black block, black-block

it. [blæk'blæk] loc. sost. m. inv. 2001

caddie, caddy

it. ['kaddi, kɛ-] sost. m. f. inv. 1950

call center, call-center, call centre, call-centre

it. [kæl'senter, kol'-] loc. sost. m. inv. sec XX

database, data-base, data base

it. ['deta beis, - 'l-, 'data beis, - 'l-, 'deta beiz, - 'l-, 'data beiz, - 'l-, data 'baze] sost. m. inv. 1979

5. Concluding remarks

This analysis has shown that the grammatical treatment of English borrowings in Italian dictionaries is not homogeneous and that the rules given by grammars are limited. Moreover, this area of lexis is highly dynamic and subject to a good deal of fluctuation, as shown by authentic corpus-based data. Of the grammatical categories considered, only for number can we find a consensus in grammars and dictionaries, and these norms are also confirmed by our

corpus-based data. As for gender assignment, on the other hand, usage norms take the upper hand, as in the case of *email* and *compilation* which are normally treated as feminine nouns, in spite of their supposed prevalent masculine gender. Yet, a lack of reference norms causes uncertainty and fluctuation in many cases, so that many loanwords take both masculine and feminine.

Grammatical class is not governed at all, as in English, especially for compound nouns. As a consequence, since in Italian the distinction between *sost.* (substantive) and *loc. sost.* (noun phrase) is grammatically relevant, lack of consensus on orthographic form is responsible for inconsistency. Present-day monolingual and bilingual dictionaries try to account for usage but, in doing so, they are mere ‘mediators’ between norm and usage.

Although the dilemma between norm and usage is hardly ever solved, especially in languages where such questions are left open to academic debate – which is the case of Italian and English – rather than entrusted to prescriptive decisions of language academies, it should be pointed out that the absence of norms leads to situations of uncertainty and error. This is particularly true for the integration of foreign borrowings and Anglicisms in particular – considering the strong input over the last few decades, the growing competence in English of Italian speakers and the widespread use of English as a *lingua franca* in various domains. One may argue that uncontrolled adherence to usage may be dangerous because it may lead to wrong habits when the speaker is using English. A dictionary should perhaps regain its function as language norm-maker and offer a compromise between norms and usage, especially when two languages are involved. On the one hand, a dictionary should describe authentic usage but, on the other, it should be a reminder of norms for users of both languages.

Notes

1 These theoretical questions have been thoroughly investigated and will not be further discussed in the present study. However, it is important to remember that the codification of this principle can be traced back to Saussure’s dichotomy between ‘*langue*’ and ‘*parole*’ as well as to Chomsky’s distinction between ‘*competence*’ and ‘*performance*’. See also Coseriu’s (1967) theoretical view of the norm as the common, traditional realization of the system in a linguistic community.

2 *sost.* = *sostantivo* (substantive); *loc. sost.* = *locuzione sostantivata* (noun phrase); *agg.* = *aggettivo* (adjective); *loc. agg.* = *locuzione aggettivale* (adjective phrase).

3 The choice of these dictionaries in particular does not question the authoritativeness of many other Italian monolingual and English-Italian bilingual dictionaries available on the market.

4 On this issue see the introductions to *Conciso Treccani* (Simone 1998) and *Sabatini and Coletti* (2012).

5 This subject is dealt with by the same author elsewhere (Serianni 2006), and also by Della Valle and Patota (2000), Pulcini (2002), D’Achille (2003).

6 The use of the invariable plural of Anglicisms integrated into Italian seems to be the simplest and most advisable rule, at least in general. However, a different choice, closer to the English plural form, may sometimes be justified by the specific communicative situation: it is the case, for example, of a text of very specialized nature, containing technical Anglicisms not used in the general language. [Authors' translation]

7 Also the number of Anglicisms recorded varies: DO includes 3.278 Anglicisms, while ZING has 2.737.

8 Exoticisms are normally classified as invariable in number, except when, in Italian, the use of the source language plural has become widespread. [Authors' translation]

9 As for the plural, the policy that we have followed is to provide, for each foreign word, the plural of the source language supported by clear indications on the plural used in Italian. Loanwords are mostly used in Italian as invariable, but, especially in words coming from Romance languages, the invariable form may coexist with the use of the original plural. [Authors' translation]

10 The words of non-Italian origin and structure are generally considered, in Italian contexts, as invariable words [...]. However, as it may be necessary or appropriate in particular cases to use the inflected forms of the source language, the dictionary signals the plural or the feminine forms of those words that can raise doubts in the reader. [Authors' translation]

11 Depending on the ending, nouns ending in a consonant, mostly of foreign origin, are typically of masculine gender: *lo sport, il bar, il gas, il tram, il film*; but there are foreignisms ending in a consonant but of female gender: *la gang, la holding*. [Authors' translation]

12 Nouns ending in a consonant, mostly of foreign origin, are almost all of masculine gender: *il bar, il rock, lo sport, il tram*, etc. [Authors' translation]

13 [...] the grammatical category and the gender with which the word is commonly used in Italian are shown. [Authors' translation]

14 Foreign words (German, Spanish, Arabic, Slavic, French) integrated in our language appear as lemmas according to the grammatical classification given by the latest lexicographic tools of the source language; we have then specified their use in Italian. We will then find: *plot* s. ingl., in It. s.m.; *broker* s.ingl., in It. s.m. e f. [Authors' translation]

15 [...] the dictionary indicates the plural forms or the feminine forms of those words which may raise doubts in the readers. [Authors' translation]

16 Dardano and Trifone (1997) distinguish between 'forme libere' and 'forme non libere', while a construction like *doityourself* is considered as 'conglomerato'.

17 For example, the OED (www.oed.com) has the solid form as entry-word. In actual use, the solid form appears to be more frequent; for example, in the corpus [English Web 2013](#) there are 3,370,905 of *email* against 821,827 of *e-mail*.

18 Furiassi (2010) considers *mail* a false Anglicism, created autonomously in Italian by omitting the first element of the compound *electronic mail* (compound ellipsis) and used with the meaning of *email message*.

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